

"Tracey Takes On..." Season 4 Episode Guide, Review and Commentary

Part 1: Episodes 1 through 6

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This is a detailed episode guide to, review of, and commentary on episodes 1 through 6 of the fourth season of TRACEY TAKES ON ..., the award-winning HBO series starring Tracey Ullman. Sprinkled throughout the guide are my commentaries and reviews of the various episodes, sketches and bits.

OTHER EPISODE GUIDES

Episode guides to other seasons can be found at <http://www.rreini.com/tracey>, as can a concise episode guide for all seasons (no commentary, one-line descriptions of sketches).

Episodes are listed in the order of their original airdate on HBO.

1. Dating (Jan 13 1999)

OPENING: Tracey talks about her dating experience -- how she'd never bring dates home for fear of being embarrassed by her family (bring out the baby photos, make her dance in front of the mirror, etc.). She didn't have that many dates, anyway; she was more of the "funny friend."

COMMENT: If I were in a similar situation, I think I'd be embarrassed too.

SHORT BITS:

Janie describes her idea of the perfect date -- to be picked up in an enormous limo (embassy license plates preferred), have martinis at the Carlyle and dinner at a restaurant that's impossible to get into, then back to his landmark apartment where, under the influence of good lighting and lots of brandy, she'll take off her clothes and he'll put her on his knee and beat the bleep out of her.

COMMENT: Recall the Secrets episode if you want to know more about the spanking. Many would share her idea of the perfect date, except for that bit at the end.

Kay talks about post-dating checks, how people will postdate checks in the expectation that people will hold onto them until that time. Yes, she knows she's supposed to talk about romantic dating, but this is the only dating she's familiar with, unfortunately.

COMMENT: Good ol' Kay -- dear ol' Kay.

LONG SKETCH:

Sydney is a new client at the dating agency "A Perfect Match," and she's come down for her video session. And she wants to do it NOW, while she still looks great and before she starts to sweat. The woman in charge (Jo Ann Harris?) wonders why the rush. After all, she hasn't completed the personality profile. Sydney questions the profile's value (to put it mildly); she's not looking to get married. The partners at her firm observed that she was a little irritable with she was without a partner, so they got her a gift certificate from the agency. They think she just needs to get laid, she says, and she tends to agree. So the video session begins. The manager tells Sydney to be herself. And--action! She introduces herself, says you might recognize her, and then asks "Does this turn you on?" She then proceeds to swivel from side to side on her chair, opening her legs wide open while doing so. The manager stops the taping. She won't show such a thing to her clients. Sydney insists that it be shown or else she wants her money back. The agency doesn't give refunds, says the manager. Sydney uses her forceful personality, along with the threat of ugly legal action, to persuade her to change her mind. This is a rare failure for an agency that's found dates for O.J. Simpson -- recently! After the manager leaves, Sydney entices the cameraman into going with her -- with the help of the \$800 refund (but only \$500 if he talks).

COMMENTS: This was a hilarious sketch. Who in their right minds would want to date Sydney? For that matter, who of unsound mind would want her?

SHORT BITS:

We see a vigorous fight between a man and a woman who at first glance appears to be Linda Granger. Then we hear "Cut!" It's actually Rayleen wearing a long black wig, and she's just finished a fight scene. Her partner in the fight scene asks her out for a drink, and she accepts. She's always fancied him....

Ruby describes what she did when she learned that daughter Desiree was dating a "blackro-American" She thought it was just to spite her. She then denigrates his appearance ("he's no Denzel Washington" is the least of what she says). She decided to use reverse psychology by saying that it was no big deal to her. And now she feels it's too late for Desiree to get a white man now. Heck, she could have had anyone from Bonanza -- she could have been Mrs. Hoss. But you can't live your kids' lives for them....

COMMENTS: Sometimes we see the good side of Ruby; sometimes we see the bad. Today, we saw the bad. It's at times like these when you wonder if there'll ever be any hope for her.

LONG SKETCH:

Erin is hungry, so she asks Dusty to bring her some food. But Dusty (Mo Gaffney) can't do that, for she's going on a date with a great guy. How can she go on a date, wonders Erin, for isn't she married? She was, says Dusty, but her husband died 9 years ago from leukemia. Yes, she told Erin, but she probably didn't listen 'cause it wasn't about her. Erin asks her to cancel her date and fix the mixing board. Dusty gets very upset, and Erin relents. She just hopes he's not using Dusty to get to her....

COMMENTS: I wonder if we'll ever see a flashback with Erin in her prime?

Trevor describes the problems he had when, before he'd met Barry, he was dating. He'd never be sure how to present himself -- should he use the limp-wristed approach or go for something more butch? He'd end up doing a bit of both, sending mixed signals and confusing anyone who might be interested. If he hadn't learned to do the hustle, the '70s would have been a complete waste for him. And we see him do the hustle....

COMMENT: OK...

Madame Nadja describes how she began to "date" when she became 12. She was a woman now, said her father, so it was time for her to "date" for the good of the family. The men in her village were hairy and smelly. They were also successful businessmen, so they rewarded her with gifts, such as berries preserved in alcohol. Papa was happy. Then he died in the purge of '52, so she stopped dating. Now, she makes dates for her girls in the village of Beverly Hills. But they don't get paid in berries -- it's cash only. Papa would be proud of her -- the SOB!

COMMENTS: This is the first time out for Nadja, who's of eastern European origin. It seems like she's following in her father's footsteps.

Chic describes his idea of the perfect date: bedding a woman in the back seat of his cab, and the seat has one of those beaded covers. And it's even better if she lets him leave the meter running....

COMMENT: Leaving the meter running? That verges on prostitution. Then again, he does have a touch of scoundrel in him.

LONG SKETCH:

Linda Granger gets into her limo. Outside, it is pouring rain. She begins to tell Frank the limo driver about the gala for testicular cancer she's just left. But Frank isn't the driver; he had to go home to sandbag his property. Linda slides up to the front seat to see who the driver is -- and she recognizes him: Jack Dayton (Corbin Bernsen). Flashback to the '70s and the game show "Celebrity Date Me." In a format very similar to "The Dating Game," Linda is a contestant and Jack is Bachelor Number 2. After asking one question of him, she dispenses with the rest of the questions and selects him. Back to the present: whatever happened to Jack? Thanks to his hooking up with Linda's agent, he got a starring role on TV. Unfortunately, he got hooked on painkillers and fell on hard times. He lost his series and hasn't worked since. But the limo driver position is giving him some contacts; he's up for a disinfectant ad, in fact. The car stops; the road's flooded out. Since they're not going anywhere, Linda persuades Jack to resume their relationship. She drags him into the back, and seconds later, they're all over each other.

All of a sudden, BAM! The car's been hit by a truck carrying lettuce -- iceberg lettuce! The car is knocked into the water and begins to sink. Jack tells Linda to dial 911, but her nails prevent her from doing so. The limo's sinking, and there's nothing they can do. Jack tells Linda to climb out through the sunroof, which she does and jumps into the water. As the limo sinks, there's no sign of Jack. Suddenly, he resurfaces. He's safe. They find a door that's floating, and he puts her on it. But there's only room for one, so he'll stay in the water. Shivering, he tells Linda to never let go ("the water can't be that cold, this is California" she says). Never let go -- never let go. Then he's hit by a floating barricade and sinks. "I let go -- I let go," wails Linda as she realizes she's lost her love. The rescue helicopter arrives. "I'm over here and I'm Still Here,"

cries Linda, while observing that the spotlight from the helicopter could be a bit pinker. Cut to the disinfectant ad, which Linda is doing in memory of Jack.

COMMENTS: A remake of Titanic that takes less than 10 minutes! Wow! Another good sketch.

LOST SKETCH: Fern goes on a date for the first time in 30+ years -- with an ex-mobster.

OVERALL COMMENTS: This was a pretty good episode to kick off the season. Once again, the debut episodes of each season seem to form a pattern: Romance -- Sex -- Marriage -- Dating. Seems like Dating should have come first. Either that, or there should have been a Divorce episode.

2. Drugs (Jan 13 1999)

OPENING: Tracey describes a typical situation where one's looking to hire an actor rumored to be on drugs, and the agent says "trust me, he's not on drugs; he just got back from an ashram, he's into yoga," and so on. Then you hire them, only to find that on the set, he won't come out of his trailer, he's out of it. And what will she say to the kids? "Just say 'No, thank you.'"

COMMENT: As Johnnie Cochran might put it, "To avoid the pain, you must refrain -- courteously."

SHORT BIT:

Ruby takes some painkillers with light beer. The pain is due to a botched hip replacement performed by an Indian doctor. Not an American Indian, an India Indian. She chose the economy model hip, but he put it in backwards. So in order to move around, she has to move in ever-increasing circles.

COMMENTS: Even while in pain, she has uncomplimentary things to say about Indians, American and Indian. Sigh....

LONG SKETCH:

Erin is talking to her long-standing dope dealer, Todd (Howard Hesseman). He's been doing this for 30 years, never getting into the hard stuff. And he looked enviously at the coke dealers and the money they had. So he's giving up dope and getting into a new line. He now sells protein shakes. Erin reminds him that he was backstage at Monterey and Woodstock, sustaining the gods of rock. "You fertilized the seeds of their genius," she tells him, and this impresses him. You were Dylan, you were the Stones, she goes on. OK, he'll give her a lid. And he'll see her next Friday.

COMMENTS: I don't know what to say.

SHORT BIT:

Chic says that the drug laws in his homeland are very strict. A cousin of his tried to smuggle some hashish into the country but had to swallow his stash to avoid detection. Big mistake: he's now a vegetable, sitting in the corner of his (Chic's) uncle's tent. But he has three wives, and he has fathered 17 children. Even when you're a vegetable, it's still good to be a man in his

country.

COMMENT: It's just like Chic to think about that....

LONG SKETCH:

Sheneesha is frantic. She is desperately searching for her medication. Nothing will stop her, not even a call for a body search. She just sends them along. When Hellura (Adele Givens) sees this, she knows something's wrong, for Sheneesha never passes up a body search. What's wrong is this: she can't find her blood pressure medication, and if she doesn't take her next dose soon, her doctor says she's going to explode. They ask Ida, one of the other guards, if she could spare a pill, but she refuses. She only has one herself, and she swallows it then and there. Then Hellura has an idea: perhaps one of the passengers will have some medication in their bags. So when the next passengers come through, Hellura is doing the body search (a rather lengthy one) while Sheneesha searches the bags. Paydirt! She finds the medication (presumably the right one) and "borrows" a pill. She's out of danger.

COMMENT: I must commend them for their ingenuity in finding some medication. But raiding the passengers' bags under the cover of a legitimate search troubles me. Regardless, this was a hilarious sketch.

LONG SKETCH:

Chris and Midge are in their hotel room. Chris is alone in bed, for Midge (Julie Kavner) is in the bathroom. Chris is concerned, goes into the bathroom and finds Midge shaving -- her face! She's upset by this, so she tells Chris to get out before she (Midge) cuts herself. "That's what my father always used to say to me," says Chris. The next day, they're out on the course. Midge is doing well, and Chris is in the gallery, constantly praying for her to do well. It's a close contest, so she's a bit tense. But some of the other girlfriends in the gallery aren't tense at all (more on this later). The contest comes down to the final hole, and Midge sinks the putt. She's the winner! They celebrate in their customary manner, but it's cut short when a tournament official insists that Midge provide a urine sample for a drug test. It's a new rule on the tour this year, and Midge has a problem. You see, she's been taking steroids, which explains the facial hair. She'll certainly fail the test be stripped of her title, so she asks Chris to provide the urine sample. She's reluctant to do this at first, but after Midge promises to quit the steroids, she gives in. Back at the hotel, they prepare to resume their celebration. Chris lights up a cigarette -- but it's not a cigarette at all. It's a joint, which she got from one of the other girlfriends in the gallery. Now Midge is furious, for the marijuana's going to show up in the drug test, and she'll still lose her title and be suspended. She calls Chris "dummy", and an argument ensues. "My stepfather called me dummy, and that's why I left Barstow and became a lesbian," says Chris as she walks out. But before long, Midge has caught up with her and apologizes. She was the stupid one, not Chris. Besides, using steroids means a full-year suspension, while using marijuana only merits a six-month suspension. So maybe the right person took the test after all. They hug and make up and begin to plan for the next six months, where they'll need jobs....

COMMENT: All the Midge & Chris sketches have had at their heart a threat to their relationship. In the first season, their relationship was tested by Midge's reluctance to publicly acknowledge her love for Chris; in the second, a pact with the devil threatened to tear them apart; in the third, the machinations of Birdie and Brother Sidney threatened to destroy their

relationship; and this season, drugs come close to splitting them apart for good. But each time, true love prevailed. In a welcome development, they are scheduled to appear in the Road Rage episode this season, marking the first time we've seen them more than once a season.

SHORT BIT:

Madame Nadja does not want her girls to do drugs. A little bit is OK, say if the client insists. But only in moderation. If they go to far, they'll get skinny, sweaty, they'll lick their teeth a lot, etc. If they abuse drugs, they're out. But morphine is OK....

COMMENT: She seems like an astute businesswoman, even if her business is rather dubious.

LONG SKETCH:

One of Kay's co-workers, Denise, is late for work -- again. Boss Darnetta has noticed, and she suspects drugs. She's considering firing her, but Kay asks if she could talk with her first. At first glance, Denise bears all the signs of a woman with a drug problem -- little energy, telltale circles under her eyes, attention difficulties. What is it, asks Kay -- horse, Mary Jane, crap? It's "crack", not "crap", corrects Denise. And it's not crack, either; it's swing, as in swing music and swing dancing. Kay explains this to Darnetta, but she's not buying the argument. So Kay will go to the swing club with Denise to check out her story. The club requires period dress from the '40s, so Kay takes an outfit from Mother's closet. It's what she wore the last time she went out, in fact. Once inside, Denise finds a partner and starts cutting the rug, while Kay stations herself at the bar and has a ginger ale while checking out the scene. Later, a sailor comes along and asks her to dance. She demurs, saying she's terribly out of practice, but Sailor Boy won't take no for an answer and sweeps her off her chair and onto the dance floor. It takes her a while to get started, but once she does, there's no stopping her! The next morning, both Kay and Denise arrive for work bleary-eyed and out of sorts. Darnetta fears the worst: Denise has hooked Kay on drugs, too! But we know better....

COMMENT: Once again, we see Kay take another step out of her shell and truly come alive, even if it's only for a short time. She deserves better than what life has given her, and it's heart-warming when she is able to break out. When she says she's "a helpless, hopeless hardcore swing-a-holic" and that "I'm alive when I jive, daddy-o", you're celebrating with her.

SHORT BIT:

In a recording studio control room, Linda says she's 100% drug-free and proceeds to list all of the drugs she's been addicted to. But there's too many to fit in a 15-second spot, so she sings the list. And don't forget the amyl nitrate....

COMMENT: Once again, we are reminded why you can compare Linda to a Timex watch -- they both take a lickin' yet keep on tickin'. Let's hope she remains 100% drug-free.

LOST SKETCHES: Fern talks about the over-availability of drugs; Birdie consults the Bible; Sydney hates downers.

OVERALL COMMENTS: This was a wonderful episode, possibly one of the best of the series to date. Kay's thing with swing is a strong candidate for the "best-of" special, while the Sheneesha and the Midge & Chris sketches might have a chance.

3. Scandal (Jan 20 1999)

OPENING: Tracey talks about the time an old boyfriend of hers sold his story to the News of the World tabloid in London, promising "the real Tracey Ullman story." The serialized story was lousy and boring; the paper pulled it after three weeks. Where is he now, and where is she now? Her final comment: a raspberry.

COMMENT: That's telling him!

LONG SKETCH:

Fern is at the dentist's office. Dr. Lindsay (Sam McMurray) is finishing her root canal. But you wouldn't know that by looking at Fern, for she is under the influence of the anesthetic and appears to be enjoying the experience. In fact, she's eager to make her follow-up appointment and not too eager to leave the dentist's chair. When we see her with Jobie (Julie Kavner) and Belle later, she's still enjoying her experience -- she's very satisfied, she says. That dentist must have used too much nitrous oxide on you, Jobie observes. No, Fern retorts, it's just Novocaine. One day, Jobie and some of her friends are by the pool. One is reading the paper, and she notices that Dr. Lindsay is appearing in a golf tournament. She's surprised by this, for she's heard from her friends that he had to leave Houston suddenly after being accused of slipping a sex drug into the Novocaine and fondling them. Suddenly, Jobie realizes that Fern's at the dentist's office right now! Cut to the office, where we see him taking advantage of a doped-up Fern. There's a disturbance -- it's Jobie to the rescue! But Fern's not so sure she wants to be rescued. She pushes Jobie away, but she persists and is able to liberate Fern. Later, after Jobie explains what's been happening, Fern is mortified. He even touched her in places her late husband Harry knew not to touch, she says. But what's she going to do about that crown?

COMMENT: Ordinarily, Fern doesn't really care for sex. But her encounters did her a world of good, it seems (I'm referring to the release of tension, not to the manner in which it was released). It's unfortunate for her that she wouldn't consider more sexual activity of some sort for herself, to make the most out of a bad situation. It's her choice. Meanwhile -- it was great to see Sam working with Tracey again.

SHORT BIT:

Hope discusses the recent campus scandal about history tests being sold by two seniors, how this practice has gone on for a long time, etc. until it was exposed in the school paper and the students were expelled. She was the one who wrote that article, which earned her the scorn of the entire student body. Roommates won't talk to her, others squirt-gun her, etc. -- it's tough defending journalistic integrity!

COMMENT: And so Hope joins the fraternity of journalists who have been persecuted for practicing their profession -- although in her case, the stakes are a lot lower. She wasn't facing imprisonment or execution, as too many journalists have. Even one journalist facing a death sentence for pursuing the truth is one too many... oops, time to get off of the soapbox now.

LONG SKETCH:

Sydney is enjoying a vacation in Hawaii. After checking in with the office, she decides to take a LONG nap. She pulls down the bed covers, only to see something terribly shocking and

disgusting. She calls the front office to complain. When the manager (Joe Malone) arrives, she points out the problem to him: there is a pubic hair -- someone else's -- in her bed! She accuses everyone who comes into the room -- even a mother and son -- of being the guilty party. Right now, Sydney is a woman scorned, and she's looking for blood! Finally, the counsel for the hotel arrives and inspects the offending hair. He asks her if she's considered that the hair might actually be hers. She rejects that suggestion, as the only way that could be true is if she had hairs growing out of her rear. She drops her drawers to prove her point, only to hear snickering. Could it be? She backs into the bathroom, where we hear her scream as she discovers the awful truth. When she comes out, she's all nice and conciliatory and drops the threat of legal action. All she wants now is a place that'll remove embarrassing hairs....

COMMENT: Typical Sydney, through and through.

SHORT BIT:

Madame Nadja recalls the time in Paris where she helped out a prince who was being blackmailed just before his wedding. She contacts the chief of police, who happened to be a customer of hers, reminded him of that relationship, etc.... Soon after, the blackmailers have been arrested and deported to a nasty African country. She sums it up by saying it's not so much who you know as what you know about who you know.

COMMENT: She makes a very good point. Nadja strikes me as an extremely practical and pragmatic woman. I get the impression you would not want to be her enemy.

LONG SKETCH:

Janie complains to daughter Olivia (Mabel McKeown) about the pizza she's about to eat in the kitchen. But she's not alone; she's brought a boy friend home from school, Damian (Tim Os). His parents are out of town, and Olivia would like him to spend the night (in the spare bedroom, of course). Janie's reluctant to allow this, as Olivia's only 12. But Damian's only 14, points out Olivia, and he would be in the spare bedroom. So everything's set. That night, when Janie checks on Damian, he asks her to tuck him in and give him a hug. She rarely hugs her own family, but he convinces her to give him a hug. Then he starts putting the moves on her. She's somewhat confused by this, but she eventually pulls free and tucks him in nice and secure. Still, she's not unaffected. She discusses this over lunch with her friend Paige (Natalija Nogulich), who points out that this situation is like the one in Washington state, where that schoolteacher had a relationship with a young teenager. Later, we see Janie at school to pick up Olivia and Damian and take them for ice cream. It's clear that something's going on, and it become even clearer when she has Olivia dropped off at home and accompanies Damian back to his house. He sends the housekeeper away, and sparks almost fly, but Janie composes herself. This would be a scandal if word got out, and it could damage her career. It's best not to pursue this, she says, and she leaves. Not more than five seconds later, she's back, and they're engaged in the throes of passion. On the counter -- on the couch -- on the floor, until the phone rings. It's Olivia, checking up on her mother. Janie comes to her senses and leaves. Later, we see her again at school to pick up Olivia. She's over Damian now -- or is she?

COMMENT: This sketch could only have been done as an older woman/younger boy situation. If it had been reversed -- an older man/young girl -- it would never have been made. It would never have been seen as comedic at all and would have been regarded in the poorest of taste. But

played this way, the comedic possibilities are endless.

SHORT BIT:

Linda is meeting with Loni Anderson and Ann-Margret to launch a campaign against abusive celebrity journalists, or "scandal vandals" as she calls them. She doesn't want them to show up at the Ivy at 1 PM (that's the Ivy on Robertson, not PCH) or at the Bistro Gardens at 4 for "tea and privacy" (that's the Bistro Gardens in Beverly Hills, not the Valley).

COMMENT: Talk about giving off mixed signals!

4. Hair (Jan 20 1999)

OPENING: Tracey describes her theory on why Elton John's hair always looks the way it does. Before a concert or an appearance, some of his people go out, find a young gay man with freshly blow-dried hair who's on his way to the disco or something like that, kill him, scalp him, clean up the scalp, then bring it back to him. Hair vampires, you could say.... And let's be clear: Elton's not the killer, it's his people.

COMMENT: This really cracked me up! Obviously, this is very much tongue-in-cheek.

SHORT BIT:

At the urging of co-workers, Kay decided to try a different hair style. She wanted a Jennifer Anniston look, but that appeared to be out of the question, so she considered a sexier Madeline Albright look. But in the end, she decided to stick with the tried and true method: do it yourself, with a bowl on top of the head. You can't beat the price!

COMMENT: That's certainly true.

LONG SKETCH:

Linda arrives at her agent's office. Candy Casino (Seymour Cassel) has good news for her: she's got a part! It's not quite what she's hoping for, though (a role in a Tarantino film); it's a part in a production of "Hair". Broadway? No, Cerritos, with an option for Modesto. The role typically calls for nudity, but she won't be required to be nude. In fact, that's the way the producers want it. She does have a special body stocking that simulates nudity which she's used successfully in the past (ask the Arabs at the Texaco station), but it won't be necessary. During rehearsals, the director (Joe Malone) explains to Linda how she'll be faded into the background while the other actors come to the foreground. But does Linda want to be relegated to the background? At last, it's opening night. She tells Candy that she might plan a surprise for tonight, and he tries to dissuade her. Later, we see and hear Linda singing "Aquarius". Everything is going well; even Candy, who's munching from a bag of popcorn, seems pleased. The dancers begin to remove their clothes as they wrap Linda in the parachute and fade her into the background. But she has other plans; she removes her clothes and pushes her way to the front of the stage, where we see her wearing her nude suit, complete with an extremely tacky pubic hair appliance. She removes her headband and flings it into the audience. Speaking of the audience, they are stunned....

COMMENT: Once again, Linda demonstrates that she's still here, whether you like it or not!

Her body stocking has to be seen to be believed. This was one of the most hilarious sketches to feature Linda.

SHORT BIT:

Ruby talks about the four hair colors and the characteristics associated with each. Blondes had more fun, wore powder blue, and dated princes from Monaco. Redheads had pale skin, smelled good, and looked like Deborah Kerr. Brunettes were ethnic types, rather fiery and moved to Spain, like Ava Gardner. Brownettes were mousy librarian types who wore glasses but who got the guy in the end by removing them and letting her hair down. She's been each of the four colors, but her experiences were different. While blonde, she dated a key grip who gave her a rash; while a redhead, she smelled good, but who could tell, because she was dating a tuna fisherman; while a brunette, she didn't move to Spain but to San Bernadino, and while a brownette, she took off her glasses but couldn't see, tripped over her makeup case and broke her leg. Nowadays, she prefers blonde. For one thing, it helps hide the gray, which is the only reason you should color your hair anyway.

COMMENT: Interesting observations. I wonder what her natural hair color is?

LONG SKETCH:

Trevor remembers when he got a Beatle haircut as a youth in the '60s. Flash back to 1966 and northern England, where we see young Trevor entering a barber shop -- only it's not a barber shop anymore. It's a hair salon, and it's the epitome of the swinging '60s scene. The stylist (Gary Oldman) asks Trevor what he'd like. He wants a Beatle haircut, and that's what he'll get, though he wonders why he's having his hair washed again -- after all, he'd just washed it last night.. Back home, we see Trevor's mum (Judy Geeson) in the kitchen, and we can hear him singing "Help!" We then see him with a Beatle haircut (more like Paul). Father is not going to be pleased, and sure enough, he isn't. He complains about the haircut and the music. He fears being the laughingstock of the community for having a son with a haircut like THAT. And will the church choir be willing to take Trevor now, he worries. An upset Trevor retorts by saying that he likes the Beatles and his haircut, and that one day, after he leaves home, he's going to fly. "Oh my God, he's going to be an air steward," comments Father. At the church, Trevor's singing his heart out -- and so are the other boys, all of whom have Beatle haircuts. The vicar delivers his sermon, which draws its inspiration from Lennon and McCartney: "All the lonely people/Where do they all come from? All the lonely people/Where do they all belong?" He, too, has a Beatle haircut. And Trevor saw that it was good.

COMMENT: The times, they were a-changing. Score one for the youth of the world.

SHORT BIT:

Madame Nadja insists that her girls keep their pubic hairs nicely trimmed. Some do it in the shape of a heart; some go for the Mohawk look ("landing strip"), and some take it all off ("shaven maven"). They're \$100 extra.

COMMENT: It speaks for itself.

LONG SKETCHES:

Fern arrives at her hair salon for her regular appointment with Mr. Jakes. But there's a problem with M. Jacques (as the proprietor, M. Andre, refers to him). He tells Fern that M. Jacques was killed several days ago by some crazed teenagers. He gives the sketchy details, which aren't all

that sketchy, to be honest. Fern is shocked, as you can imagine, but she's still concerned about her appointment. Mr. Jakes (she knew him in Canarsie, and that was his name there) was the only hairdresser whom she'd let touch her hair. The last time someone else did her hair, she ended up with a dye job reminiscent of Lucille Ball in her later years. M. Andre will handle her personally, plus it'll be on the house. Fern has no problem with that. By the way, what part of France is M. Andre from? Beirut.

COMMENT: This is typical Fern -- what more needs to be said?

Erin is sitting in her garden, working on a song. Her manager/caretaker Dusty (Mo Gaffney) tells her she's leaving for the weekend and gives some last-minute instructions. Erin stands up, unaware that a cactus is hanging nearby. Suddenly, she notices that her hair's gotten stuck in the cactus. She can't get free! She calls to Dusty for help, but it's too late; Rusty has already left. So Erin is forced to stand in her yard for the entire weekend. Time passes -- she hears the call of nature, but what do you do when you're stuck? You do what you gotta do. Time passes -- the paper boy delivers the Sunday paper. Then the sprinkler starts -- and it's going to run for 20 minutes. Eventually, Dusty returns and frees Erin from her predicament. She can't leave Erin alone for a minute without her getting into trouble, she complains. But it wasn't a total loss; Erin now knows what it feels like to be a tree, wrote half a song, and got an idea for an album called "Songs In The Tree Of Life." Dusty goes inside to make some tea, and Erin sits down. Unfortunately, she is not watching where she's placing her arm. Suddenly, another cactus has become entangled in her armpit hair! Call for Dusty!

COMMENT: This was one of the most hilarious sketches of the series!

LOST SKETCHES: Chic makes a discovery; Birdie has an "enlightening"; Sheneesha arrives at work with a "too tight" 'do (info from the HBO Website)

OVERALL COMMENTS: Each episode was great by itself, but the combination was fantastic. This is a case where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Tracey has said she considers this season to be the best ever to date, and after viewing the first four episodes, I'm inclined to agree.

Here's an interesting fact: three of Tracey's co-stars on her Fox series were guest stars tonight: Julie Kavner, Sam McMurray and Joe Malone. Only Dan Castellaneta was missing in action.

5. Lies (Jan 27 1999)

OPENING: Tracey complains about people who lie about having had cosmetic surgery, actors whose publicity photos are obviously 20+ years old, etc. But she's told some fibs in Internet chat rooms. For example, she's impersonated a teenage girl from Tennessee who's contemplating breast reduction surgery, and she gets a kick from all the boys who say "No! Don't do it!"

COMMENT: She won't be picking up any points with the community of plastic surgeons....

SHORT BIT:

Hope lists some of the things she "knew" to be true when she was growing up, such as the green M&M's can really turn you on, if you swallow watermelon seeds they'll grow inside of you until you burst, women shouldn't lift heavy things because their wombs will fall out, etc. Now that

she's an adult now, she knows none of that stuff is true -- well, none of it except the watermelon seeds.

COMMENT: You mean green M&M's **aren't** an aphrodisiac? <g>

LONG SKETCHES:

Fern and her friend Phyllis (Liz Torres) are talking about their neighbor Mr. Kettleman, who's been having a fling with his day-care nurse. Due to his physical condition, the fling involved his tossing grapefruit pits down the nurse's cleavage. Harry was horny but not kindy, observes Fern. He would never have cheated on her; he was under outside influence when he ran off with the housekeeper. Phyllis says that her husband Murray was an absolute pillar of fidelity. Fern indicates that that's not quite true. When pressed, she tells the story of how Murray had broken his vows. Flash back fifteen years to Long Island.... We see Fern arriving at a restaurant with some friends, and we see Harry (Michael Tucker) and Murray. Soon, a woman joins them -- but it's not Murray's wife who's there, it's an attractive young blond named Vivian, who used to work at one of Harry's drugstores. Harry says that it's true, Murray and Vivian are together. Fern doesn't care for this development, and later, Harry promises to talk to Murray about it. Back to the future -- Fern explains to Phyllis that she's kept this a secret for all these years to avoid hurting her. Then Phyllis says she's known all along, that Murray told her that very night. Except it wasn't Murray who was seeing Vivian, it was Harry. Flashback fifteen years -- we see Harry and Murray getting ready to pick up Vivian. They're in a car across the street, and Harry is admiring Vivian from afar. At the restaurant, the three of them are together, when Murray spots Fern entering. Harry says that Vivian is actually there with Murray. Back to the future -- Fern isn't taking this development well. Now she's learned Harry had been unfaithful to her before. But this is all history now, and it won't ruin her friendship with Phyllis. Cut to Heaven, where we see Murray and Harry. Murray's been watching the "Family Channel," and he tells Harry that the girls had the conversation they wished they'd never have. He also admits that after taking Vivian home, he'd had sex with her. Harry is disappointed....

COMMENT: Oh what tangled webs we weave! This was a very inventive sketch, I felt. It used the classic technique of telling the same story through the different points of view of the main characters, by which we would learn the truth. Having the scene shift to Heaven was a very nice touch. This could allow for the future participation of Michael Tucker as Harry, as could additional flashbacks.

Sheneesha's co-worker Hellura (Adele Givens) asks her for advice about a man problem. She suspects her husband is having an affair with her cousin Perliqua. She asks Sheneesha what she would do if she found her husband in bed with her (Hellura's) cousin. According to Sheneesha, when a man stops lying, he's thinking about flying -- ending the relationship. If he does lie, he still wants to keep it going. As she sees it, men can't help themselves. If she caught her husband in bed with another woman, she'd want him to lie. So Hellura should do nothing, right?

Wrong! Take it out on Perliqua, says Sheneesha -- and she can practice on the guy who's now in the Body Search -- make that the Cavity Search zone.

COMMENT: I'm not sure if I agree with Sheneesha's argument. But I am sure of this: I would not want to be that man who's become Perliqua-by-proxy. There's another reason not to fly out of LAX <g>.

SHORT BIT:

Madame Nadja complains that the police are the worst bunch of liars. Why, they have the audacity to suggest that she's running a house of prostitution! Anyone can see that the girls who come over all the time are here to help her out -- Meals on Wheels, provide batteries for her hearing aids, that sort of thing. However, we hear her parrot say "Have a good time in Vegas, slut!"

COMMENT: Personally, I think I believe the parrot, whose favorite word seems to be "slut."

LONG SKETCH:

Chic has been pulled over for speeding, and he's upset. So he quickly concocts a story that he was heading to the hospital to meet his wife, who's about to give birth. That, plus some flattery of the police, lets him off the hook. The officer knows what it's like to be a new father. He offers to escort Chic to County Hospital. Chic demurs, but Officer Dan insists; he's going there anyway to visit his girlfriend. So Chic goes along. They arrive and go their separate ways. Chic visits the maternity area briefly before finding a way to get back downstairs. But on his way out, he passes Officer Dan again. So it's back up to maternity. Just when it looks like he's going to get caught, we see a woman in labor being rushed to the delivery room. Chic sees his chance and pretends that she's his wife. As they roll to the delivery room, the doctors consider him to be the father. After all, how would they know? But the woman is wondering "who the [bleep] is this?" Later, we see the delivery in progress. Chic is in surgical scrubs. Suddenly, the real husband arrives and challenges Chic, who's only too happy to leave. He heads for the lobby again, still in scrubs. But Officer Dan is still there, so he's still stuck. Suddenly, paramedics arrive with a gunshot victim. They assume Chic is a physician, and he's told to assist. We see him get squirted with blood. He's had enough; he leaves. He pulls out of the hospital and resumes his route. Unfortunately, he heads the wrong way down a one-way street, so he's caught by the police again. Some time later, we see him in traffic school. He starts to hit on a young woman, who is initially receptive. Then we see who the instructor is: it's Officer Dan! He remembers him and starts asking about the wife, the baby, etc. The young woman loses all interest. Guess this isn't Chic's day....

COMMENT: The sketch gets funnier and funnier as Chic's predicament builds. How can he gracefully extract himself from the hospital without arousing too much suspicion? In the end, he can't; he leaves the hospital, only to be pulled over for another traffic infraction. And then we see him in traffic school, trying to hit on the young lady, only to have his efforts sabotaged by his earlier lies. This sketch may be a candidate for the best-of special.

SHORT BITS:

Sydney says she never lies. But nobody believes her -- "What? WHAT?"

COMMENT: Why do I get the feeling that after the camera faded out, her unseen companion would have broken out in hysterical laughter?

Ruby calls up Desiree on the phone and tells her about the story in the paper: that Liberace, far from being a gay fop, was actually a secret operative for the CIA -- one of their top agents, in fact. And boy, was he a ladies' man! And let's not talk about Sonny Bono being kept alive in a 9 ft. tall jar....

COMMENT: This bit had me cracking up. Just the concept of Liberace as a spy had me in stitches!

Trevor recalls how he enjoyed "Pinocchio" as a young boy, how he was impressed by Jiminy Cricket. As an adult, he saw a gay porn version of "Pinocchio", and it wasn't his nose that grew when he told lies. And the gang bang inside the whale really disturbed him....

COMMENT: I'll take his word for it about the gay porn version.

Linda sings "When I was seventeen, I was really twenty-two..."

COMMENT: At last, the truth is out <g>! What a hilarious way to cap off the episode.

LOST SKETCH: Rayleen finesses for more pay (from HBO's Website)

OVERALL COMMENTS: After four very good episodes, I had a feeling this one would not be as good. Fortunately, I was mistaken. This episode is as hilarious as any this season. All of them have had excellent sketches. It's going to be difficult deciding which to include in the season-ending best-of special. How about a six-hour long special -- i.e., the entire season?

6. Erotica (Feb 03 1999)

OPENING: Tracey says she enjoys erotic literature, Anais Nin in particular. She recalls picking up a paperback of hers at the airport, not expecting that it would be so provocative. She also describes the time she was inspired to re-create the famous Vanity Fair cover with a nude, pregnant Demi Moore....

COMMENT: Ver-r-y interesting! And I better not say any more <g>!

SHORT BITS:

Madame Nadja points out that the sexiest part of a woman is above the neck --the brain -- but the pussy is a very strong second!

COMMENT: There is definitely truth in what she says. And the combination can be magnificent!

Hope explains why she chose to study Spanish: Mexican wrestlers. Yes, she knows the sport is violent and exploitive, but the wrestlers really turn her on! When she sees them in action, she gets all hot and excited and would really like one of those "mucho macho muchachos" to throw her on the bed and make love to her in a "rough and multicultural way." This never happened when she was studying German!

COMMENT: I have only one comment: where do you go to become a Mexican wrestler <g>? Whoa! This might be a candidate for the best-of special.

LONG SKETCH:

The scene is an art gallery, where Janie and her friend Paige (Natalija Nogulich) are reviewing the sculptures. One in particular has caught their attention. It has the unassuming title "Silicone and Acrylic", but it is very distinctive. It appears to be a wildly distorted nude female, with a

vagina where one would normally find an ear. Paige finds it disturbing. Suddenly, a protester starts yelling "Filth! Pornography", takes out a packet of red dye and prepares to throw it at the sculpture. Janie intercedes, shielding the sculpture with her own body. The sculpture's safe but her outfit's ruined. As the protester is led away, the artist, Adrian Rudge, thanks her. He asks her back to his place. She demurs, but ... she changes her mind and accepts. His place actually belongs to Carre Otis. We learn (in case we hadn't figured it out from his accent) that he's from north London. He'd really like to give her one -- a sculpture? No, a bonking! Once again, she demurs, but ... there's something about that sculpture, for she changes her mind and will indulge in a quickie. The next day, over lunch, she tells Paige what happened and how it was so unlike her to sleep with strangers. She doesn't even sleep with husband Gregor! He's in Ecuador, by the way, working out a midlife crisis by bungee jumping, so he won't know what has happened. When Janie returns to her office, the sculpture is there, and we hear the sounds of lovemaking. It's her assistant Lindsay doin' it with a messenger (even though she's engaged). Might the sculpture have something to do with it? That night, we see Janie asleep. Her sleep becomes more and more restless, as though she's dreaming about making love. When she awakens, she goes out to the kitchen (and the sculpture), where she discovers her mother admiring the sculpture. It's disturbed her sleep, too, as she's having erotic dreams involving Morley Safer and a flock of geese. That sculpture is giving out subliminal suggestions of an erotic nature, Janie concludes. It's too much to handle, so the next day we see her taking the sculpture back to Adrian's/Carre's apartment. Adrian has gone back to London, but Carre (herself) is there and accepts the sculpture from Janie. The building superintendent comes by to inspect the fire escape. It's not a good time, says Carre ... but then again, maybe it is a good time....

COMMENT: That was one ugly sculpture! But if there were a sculpture that acted as a powerful aphrodisiac, it would be a very prized item. I'd want the merchandising rights on it <g>! Another hilarious sketch, and a possible contender for the best-of special.

SHORT BIT:

Fern talks about an oriental sculpture that Harry had acquired several years ago. She didn't think much of it until Jobie told her what those carved Oriental figures were really doing. She took a closer look at it with her good glasses, and she was shocked to see that the characters in the sculpture were all engaged in some form of sex -- various positions, props, serpents, you name it! And to think that she'd allowed it to be a paperweight in her daughter's bedroom! She hides it behind a representation of the Ten Commandments.

COMMENT: Some would consider Fern to be a bit of a prude. Not that there's anything wrong with that.... in fact, society might be better off if we acted a bit more modestly and morally. But I digress.... Sex has never been that high on Fern's list of priorities.

LONG SKETCHES:

Chic arrives back at the dispatch center and asks Yuri, another cab driver, if he'd like to see a tape. This tape is different from the ones he's had before. You see, Chic explains, he concealed a tiny video camera in the front of the cab and pointed it at the passengers in back. One couple was going at it hotly and heavily. As we see the various passengers, we hear Chic asking the women to show their tits. He explains to Yuri that he's got hours and hours of this stuff, and he's going to take it and sell the idea to a cable network for late-night viewing. It's a winning idea.

Unfortunately, Yuri says, HBO beat him to it with their "Taxicab Confessions" series. He watches it with his kids, Yuri explains. Chic is disgusted -- "Everybody steals from Chic!" **COMMENT:** This was a clever way to do a parody of the "Taxicab Confessions" series while keeping within the TTO format.

Linda is excited about receiving an invitation from the sultan of Abizi to attend their national festival. Her agent, Candy Casino (Seymour Cassel) is happy for her, as it's the biggest thing she's been offered in some time. First class airfare -- staying at the palace with the sultan and princes -- this is really big! Later, as Linda gets onto the plane. She sits next to someone who looks familiar, who's trying not to be seen. It's actually Victoria Principal (herself), and she's been invited to Abizi, too. Perhaps they're co-hosting the telecast of the national festival. When they arrive, they are welcomed by some of the sultan's aides, who show them to their "limo" -- actually, it looks more like a paddy wagon. Linda's taking this in stride, but Victoria's a bit concerned. She has reason to be, for we next see them and the other women from the wagon being herded roughly into their rooms at the palace. Budi ("boo-di") the eunuch stops by Linda's room with her outfit, a purple negligee. She'll be performing for the sultan and the princes, all right; in fact, they're behind a one-way mirror right now, just waiting for her to take off her clothes so they can gratify themselves ("and I thought Hollywood was a weird place", Linda comments). Later, after Linda has changed, she's doing a number for her invisible audience. Victoria (who's also wearing a negligee) comes to see her. Something is definitely wrong here, and we need to get out of here, warns Victoria. Then Budi arrives bearing a chest of jewels. These can be yours, and you can leave the country with them, he says, if you two make love to each other. And if they don't, then they're not going anywhere. Victoria is shocked by this demand, but Linda keeps looking at those jewels.... Cut to LAX and a returning flight. Linda and Victoria have made it out of Abizi safe and sound -- and bearing jewels. Yes, it seems they did the deed. It appears that Victoria wants to put it all behind her, but Linda is another story.... **COMMENT:** Linda is definitely a trouper. Even when her dignity, reputation and possibly her life are at stake, she can still give her all. She had an interesting line early in the sketch, observing that "there's so much comfort in celebrity companionship; it's something you just don't find in the real world." Even though this isn't one of my favorite sketches, I think it might have a chance of making the best-of special. And this might grow on me as time goes by.

SHORT BITS

Ruby doesn't really have erotic dreams -- except when she falls asleep to reruns of *Mannix*....

COMMENT: OK....

Trevor talks about couples who decide they want to join the Mile High Club -- i.e., do it in flight in the lavatory. It can be a bit annoying, especially when somebody accidentally hits the flight attendant button and they have to check on them. And when they're done, that whole section of the plane smells like sex (beats airline lasagna). At least he's glad he's working for a British airline; he knows a guy on Alitalia who hasn't been able to use the lavatory in flight since 1983!

COMMENT: Interesting observations....

LOST SKETCH: Kay becomes flustered when looking for a gift

COMMENT: It's too bad this didn't make the cut. I think I would have liked it.

OVERALL COMMENTS: This episode was a slight letdown after the absolutely wonderful first five episodes of the season. Still, it had some wonderful moments, such as Janie's mother's comments involving Morley Safer, Linda's comment on celebrity companionship, and Hope's admiration for Mexican wrestlers. And somehow, I have a feeling that it might improve with age.

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