



# The Drink Tank

# **The Drink Tank 419**

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*of Earl Kemp.*



I can't remember the circumstances under which I first watched *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. I believe it was still new to Amazon Prime, and reviews from people whom I trust indicated that they greatly enjoyed it. I binged the first season before turning my roommate on it. I talked about it at work as well. When the second season came out, I binged it as best as I could . . . I was heading out to visit Chris and Vanessa, and I only had a few more episodes to finish. For Vanessa's birthday, we started the first season, because she and Chris hadn't seen any of it yet. Of course, they enjoyed it! The show's funny, emotional, and everyone relates to some aspect of it. If you haven't found the chance to watch, we're now up to three seasons with a fourth in the works. I'd not seen Rachel Brosnahan, who plays Miriam "Midge" Maisel, in anything, having not seen *House of Cards*. She's FAB! Captivating and powerful, yet charming and vulnerable . . . and her standup timing is on point. Especially lovely is the friendship between her and her manager, Susie Myerson, played by Alex Borstein. The performance of each actress brings it all together with such synchronicity. Finally, Luke Kirby as the notorious comedian Lenny Bruce! Seriously! I can't say enough good about it. Thank you to all those involved with bringing it to us!



# Editorial

# Alissa McKersie



# FADE IN: by Chris Garcia

The first episode of a series is the episode that sets the tone. Very rarely is there a show that turns hard away from the set-up, and it's always difficult when they do. *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* does something amazing in its initial script, which appears to be about 95% of what made it to the screen; it hits notes without being note-y.

I shall explain.

When I tried writing for TV, I took a TON of courses. Guess what? I was never any good. I got the theory, I got the form, I didn't have the brain for it. Go figure. What I did have was the ability to read scripts. And I read scripts.

I have read most of the great scripts, from *Casablanca* to *Twin Peaks*, and several things that aren't produced, like the amazing *Sputnik Monroe* biopic! I know how a script can give itself away, and how sometimes they are not at all subtle in their movements. If you read a script like *Natural Born Killers*, you see how some movement doesn't equal progress, but enables interpretation.

And that is 100% what even the first seven pages of the pilot script

The fascinating thing is the rhythm. Typically, you lose the rhythm of the delivery in the script, so you have to read it out-loud, but in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* it's obvious, it's essential. We are listening to Midge deliver a toast at her own wedding, and she's nailing it in a way that so few can. In the script, they also bounce off time-line wise. They go back to show, quickly, the path of her relationship with her husband. It's not something they much of in the series. They're much more likely to flash-side than flashback, but here, it plays with the rhythm. There's a rapidity to the dialogue that is incredible, not in its speed, but in its playback. I mean, yeah, it's fast, like 2.3 Sorkin fast, but it's also giving air to the statements that need to land to land, which is a difficult line to walk. Then, at the end of the jumping and the speech, she drops a bomb.

It's a brilliant bomb. A bomb that makes us funny aware of the world we are dealing with. It's a hilarious moment, and it's set up lightly, but it's turned into a great moment of jarring from one path to another, and that's something that *Maisel* plays with so well. That tone switch turns Midge from an amateur comedienne into a somewhat 'Go-Fuck-Yourself' clueless bride type.

It's such a good connection between Midge and Lenny Bruce, who pops up in the flashback, as well as later in the episode.

It reads fast, which is to be expected, but it does a LOT of work. It's a montage that makes its way through the important aspects of the *Maisel* marriage, which happens quite smoothly, but at the same time, it winds up sliding the focus onto the relationship, to the point where I figured it was a story of a family, but it decidedly isn't; it's the story of Midge becoming a stand-up, and the family only hangs off it. It's Midge's story, flat-out, and while the family dynamic and club-scene intrigue is great, it's about the force that is Midge, and she's perfectly encapsulated in that first segment.

Oh, but the best thing about the entire series, a single scene, follows.

You see, Midge goes to the butcher, and she's talking with her friend, and with the butcher, and with another random shopper, and then her husband after the scene transfers back to her home. It's a great scene,

snappier than anything, but it's not just the staccato rhythm, it's the hammer of the delivery without giving things away. The entire way through, no one has more or less status than anyone else EXCEPT by what they do for others. Instead of presenting Midge as the dominant force because of her will -- she gives, she takes, she ignores, and she assumes -- and each of those things indicate her belief in where she sits in the pecking order of her life. She buys another shopper pork chops, partly because Midge made her day harder, but really because she needed to throw a crust to a peon. The way she interacts with her husband on the phone, with the butcher, it's all about establishing how she sees herself, and thus we know the thrust of the series, or at least those of us who have read scripts know. The series is really going to begin with the crumbling of that idea that Midge holds, and her rebuilding of her idea of her place in the hierarchy. It's a neat trick, and one which plays out even among those around her.

And, ultimately, they've established the whole series in those two short frames. It didn't even feature every character, and yet, if that was all you saw, you could render the most important elements of the series from these two things alone. That is the ultimate sign of the quality of writing for a series. The reflection of the macro in the micro. Here it's brilliant, and the entire series, as it moves along, hits these notes again and again.



C N L R X M Y C L V B N D M A A M P U P Y  
 A I P F A X H L D D G K T V R N M K S D J  
 T W I R B T M O I S H E M A I S E L R O D  
 S D U I E S I G S W H V Y W G L J E O N B  
 K L B B W E G A S L I G H T C A F E T E N  
 I A E L E C N G V L J P F N K Q V J L B M  
 L B Y T I S R E V I N U A I B M U L O C I  
 L Y F P S F P I Z I Z A O B D D L E C K D  
 S H E V S I H N J K Y Y J S A A R Z N R G  
 E S T Z M R L A N L A F B N B L O E T O E  
 C J H Q A R M C N T H M E S M P T H M Y M  
 U O A C N O N N E L E I H P O S W M W W A  
 R E N B K N E S T H E R M A I S E L A E I  
 B L M V U F P I H X V Y V X C B P L V N S  
 Y M A R H T S H I R L E Y M A I S E L X E  
 N A I G R E B N E T T E N I M A J N E B L  
 N I S I N A M S S I E W E S O R Q N A K C  
 E S E V U D L O M S N M R L Z K C C S U D  
 L E L M K O B H S Y V J G T T R Z O O A D  
 R L C V D N S T A N D U P C O M E D Y D H  
 L M Y E N O S R E Y M E I S U S L P Q F B

ABE WEISSMAN  
 B ALTMAN  
 BELL LABS  
 BENJAMIN ETTEBERG  
 CATSKILLS  
 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
 ESTHER MAISEL

ETHAN MAISEL  
 GASLIGHT CAFE  
 JOEL MAISEL  
 LENNY BRUCE  
 MIDGE MAISEL  
 MOISHE MAISEL  
 NEW YORK

ROSE WEISSMAN  
 SHIRLEY MAISEL  
 SHY BALDWIN  
 SOPHIE LENNON  
 STAND UP COMEDY  
 SUSIE MYERSON

A man in a dark suit and tie stands on a stage in a dimly lit cafe, gesturing with his hands as if performing. A vintage microphone on a stand is positioned in front of him. The background is filled with an audience seated at tables, some looking towards the stage. The lighting is dramatic, with spotlights illuminating the performer and the audience.

## **Where You Could Hear - The Gaslight Cafe & the hungry i by Christopher J Garcia**

It is impossible to watch a show like *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (or even *Mad Men*) and not be struck by how thoroughly the setting affects the acceptance of the characters. You can buy into Midge as a comic of the late 1950s and early 1960s, because they were so meticulous with the setting where she took up performing. We saw her step on to the stage at the Gaslight, a setting which feels incredibly real, and she ends up breaking through.

This felt real. Why? Because we KNOW that this happens, and not only did it happen in late 1950s New York, it happened in The Gaslight Café in New York City at that time.

The setting for the birth of Midge's comedy career is a recreation of this legendary nightclub in Greenwich Village. It was the site of so many important folk happenings, from early performances by Bob Dylan and Dave van Ronk (who I understand was a friend of Lee Hoffman) to the Baezses (and WHY didn't I know did I not know when I was a kid and could have asked them?), many of which were recorded, including an amazing Bob Dylan live recording, which is strange because I HATE Dylan most of the time.

But really, it was the role of the Gaslight as a "basket house" that is really its most important legacy.

At a basket house, you could get a time on stage, much like they show on *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and then you could play your guitar, do some comedy, or read your Beat poetry, which is what makes The Gaslight Café something to think about as a historical marker. A dude named Alan Ginsberg read there A LOT, and afterwards, as most performers did, he would pass around a basket to collect payment for the sets. The Gaslight was a big part of how the Beats got their first recognition as a New York institution. While the San Remo Café, where the Beats mixed it up with the legends of abstract expressionism, The Gaslight gave many poets and stand-ups a chance to work on their craft, just like they show on the Netflix series.

The Gaslight Café was not alone in this capacity.

Around the country, there were many sites like the Gaslight that had an impact on comedy, folk, and poetry scenes. In Portland, Reed College was a big deal, and in Chicago, the Playboy Club and UIC were important locations. Outside of New York, the most important city was San Francisco. Not only was it an

important part of the development of Beat poetry, but also a HUGE impact on comedy. While you can say that City Lights Bookshop was the most important location for the Beats, for comedy, it was all about the hungry i.

The hungry i, with its e.e cummings-like spelling convention that freaks out my auto-correct every time, was a club which helped define what stand-up was going to become over the 1950s and 60s. The names that played the hungry i were a litany of super-stars, including Jonathan Winters, Bill Cosby (before he became a terrible rapist, presumably), Mort Sahl (who was an SF radio announcer at the time), Woody Allen (also before he became the King of the Problematic Directors), and Joan Rivers. It was also an important site for music as well. The Kingston Trio, Vince Guaraldi, and The Journeymen all played there. But to me, there is nothing as important as the fact that Tom Lehrer recorded *That Was the Year That Was* at the hungry i.

And, yes, Lenny Bruce, played the hungry i.

While Mort Sahl is often noted as being one of the most important elements of the historical importance of the hungry i, it was Lenny Bruce who really set the world on fire at the i. He is said to have honed his tone at the club, more so than he did in his NYC days. He was more of a standard comic in New York, but in SF, he was able to go into new directions. Some have pointed to Bruce before and after the hungry i as the difference between a great comic, and a game-changing comic. If you've never heard Lenny at his peak, give a listen to his material at <https://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/exhibits/LennyBruce/>. It's worth your time.

The hungry i is very much the Gaslight Café of San Francisco, and if Midge had toured on her own, she'd have played the i without question. She'd have been perfect, and probably would have gotten herself arrested, just like Lenny.

Which she's pretty darn good at.





I got  
the basket.

# Midge & Lenny by Chuck Serface



The first episode of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* contains the greatest television scene I've witnessed to date. Until reaching that magic moment, viewers receive introductory material about Miriam "Midge" Maisel, a well-to-do resident of the Upper West Side in New York during the late 1950s. Her husband's a professional, her father's a mathematician at Columbia, and, best of all, the Rabbi's coming for Yom Kippur dinner. "We've got the Rabbi," exclaim Midge and her mother as they leave the butcher shop, perfect brisket in hand. We've also got period costuming, New York settings reminiscent of those in *Mad Men*, and creator/writer Amy Sherman-Palladino's sublimely laser quick dialogue, much like that which made *Gilmore Girls* an eternal hit.

The perfect life, right? Not quite. Midge's husband, Joel, fancies himself a standup comedian, but he's not, really. Midge supports his desires, but soon discovers he's stealing material from Bob Newhart. Even worse, Joel's been cheating with his secretary. So much for that Rabbi-and-brisket infused bliss. On Yom Kippur no less, Joel announces he leaving Midge for his secretary . . . and here comes that scene.

Joel packs and leaves, inspiring Midge to inebriate herself on kosher wine. Her parents blame her for her marital demise, her orderly world is crumbling, and so why not storm out of the house without bothering to change out of her negligee and robe, sheets to the wind, and take a cab straight to the Village club where her husband regularly befouls Bob Newhart's best work? She storms on to the stage, snatches the microphone, and breaks into an impromptu but inspired spritz about the massive shit the Universe has taken on her life. It's foul, it's funny, even if her pain's blindingly evident, and she ends by exposing her breasts to the audience to show what Joe's giving up. Enter New York's finest who arrest Midge for public indecency. Out of the club she goes, right into a waiting police car . . . where she encounters Lenny Bruce.

Almighty Zeus. I couldn't breathe at this point.

I said to myself, "She gets drunk on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, delivers a bawdy standup routine that rocks a dingy, subversive Village club, gets arrested for public indecency, and takes a perp ride to jail with none other than Lenny Bruce, the high-father of sick comedy who's obscenity trials changed comedy and how we think about free speech."

None other than Lenny Bruce could illustrate what's revealed in that moment, the hypocrisy of not only Midge's life but that of 1950s America altogether. So Sherman-Palladino and company brilliantly set the tone for her show.

Originally, Sherman-Palladino had intended Lenny Bruce to appear only in the first episode for the purpose I describe above and to inspire Midge toward a standup career of her own. But the chemistry between Rachel Brosnahan's Midge and Luke Kirby's Lenny captured viewers' hearts so mightily she couldn't not have the pair interact more regularly. Along the way, fans began shipping the duo, hoping for romantic developments. Christine Laskodi of *Tell-Tale TV* summarizes the moment when it almost did:

Midge Maisel and Lenny Bruce are a powder keg of intense romantic desire that is clearly on the edge of sheer explosion. Their will-they-won't-they dance has become one of the most fascinating and heartbreaking parts of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

Fascinating, because we can't look away. We're waiting with bated breath for them to reunite and smooch their faces together triumphantly, and finally take it to that bedroom for what we can only imagine would be an intense and passionate moment.

But heartbreaking, all the same, because of that last thing Lenny says, "Before I'm dead."

A Midge and Lenny romance may feel written in the stars, but unfortunately, those stars will inevitably end in despair. They have to. Lenny Bruce died in 1966.

Younger fans may not appreciate the foreshadowing of "before I'm dead." This runs more deeply than just the fact that Bruce would die six years from when this scene takes place, because in 1960 Bruce's lifestyle began catching up to him hideously. We remember the obscenity trials, the freedom of speech issues, the iconoclast who inspired Carlin, Pryor, Hicks, Rock, Murphy, truckloads of comedians who challenge us to think while we laugh. But Lenny was deeply flawed, a drug addict who by the time he met Midge had been living wildly and irresponsibly for years. What a toll this started taking on him legally, physically, and psychologically. If their shared perp ride constituted a rebirth for Midge -- a first step away from her romanticized life in the Upper West Side into a reality her rabbi wouldn't touch on any day, much less Yom Kippur -- then any further contact with Lenny during future seasons will only open her eyes wider.



Luke Kirby's portrays a charming, witty Bruce, handsome and dangerously attractive. He's even better looking than Bruce ever was. Biographers offer a different image of Bruce, however. Albert Goldman, author of *Ladies and Gentlemen, Lenny Bruce!*, dedicates nearly 700 pages to describing Bruce's doings. Real-world Lenny's attitude toward friends and women wasn't pretty. The following comes from a portion dedicated to February 1960, about when Lenny and Midge nearly have sex:

When Lenny Bruce comes into a hotel, the switchboard lights up like a Luftwaffe raid over London. Every junkie, hooker, shadow-comic, shingle-man and jazz musician in the city is trying to get through. All the dope fiends want to lay a taste on Lenny so they can hang out together. You know, "Let's get Lenny high and dig his crazy head!"

Almost as bad as the junkies are the broads who crash his quarters. Every painted up, garter-belt whore wants to crawl in the sack with him. Give him some free trim, just like the heads. Lenny can't stand these freebie chicks. He's got his mind on business these days. Chicks don't mean a damn to him. He could go a month without getting laid. Or he could jump the broad who comes through the next door. Really doesn't matter. What counts now is writing material and playing dates and getting on the road. Chicks are the preoccupation of the unemployed.

And about drugs:

Lenny continues to fish out stock from his portable drugstore, handing each item to Terry [Lane] who lines everything up on the table. Finally, the inventory:

1 bottle Dilaudid, 200 pills

1 box no. 26 3/4-inch Luer-lock needles

2 no. 30 needles

2 no. 15 transfer needles

2 2-cc. hypodermic syringes

1 3-cc. hypodermic syringes

100 Hypak disposable syringes

1 bottle Tuinal sleeping tablets

1 bottle Biphedamine spansules

1 bottle Phisoderm antiseptic soap

1 bottle PhisoHex antiseptic solution

1 box cotton batting

2 white plastic baby bottles with black caps for carrying moonshine Methadrine made my mixing powdered drug ("crystal") with distilled water

1 cooking spoon

1 box kitchen matches

1 elastic belt

With Scotch tape from a big roll, Lenny starts to stash the goodies in his favorite hiding places. Some go on the ledge above and behind the closet door. Other pieces are taped to the tops of drawers inside the dresser. Nothing goes inside the medicine cabinet except the sleeping pills, the baby bottles and the antiseptic solution.

Earlier in 1951, Lenny had imitated a priest to defraud individuals thinking they were donating to a leper colony in New Guinea. And his terrible on-and-off marriage to Honey Harlow, and years later how he attacked Pearl Bailey during her Las Vegas show, blasting her with a fire extinguisher, and then when he ordered Faye Dunaway to pick up his laundry and later refused to take it from her . . . the list continues.



Had Midge decided to sleep with Lenny she would have noticed the track marks, knotted veins, and bruises lining his arms collected from long-term methamphetamine and heroin abuse. He later faced drug charges in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, the latter arrest occurring outside a hobby shop owned by Jackie Coogan's brother. Finally, in 1966, Bruce was found dead at his Hollywood Hills home, the cause an overdose of morphine. Any relationship outside the mentor-mentee bond that validates Midge's comedic aspirations? No, thank you.

Kelly Wynne of *Newsweek* summarizes Rachel Brosnihan and Amy Sherman-Palladino's opinions about whether or not Midge and Lenny will fall in

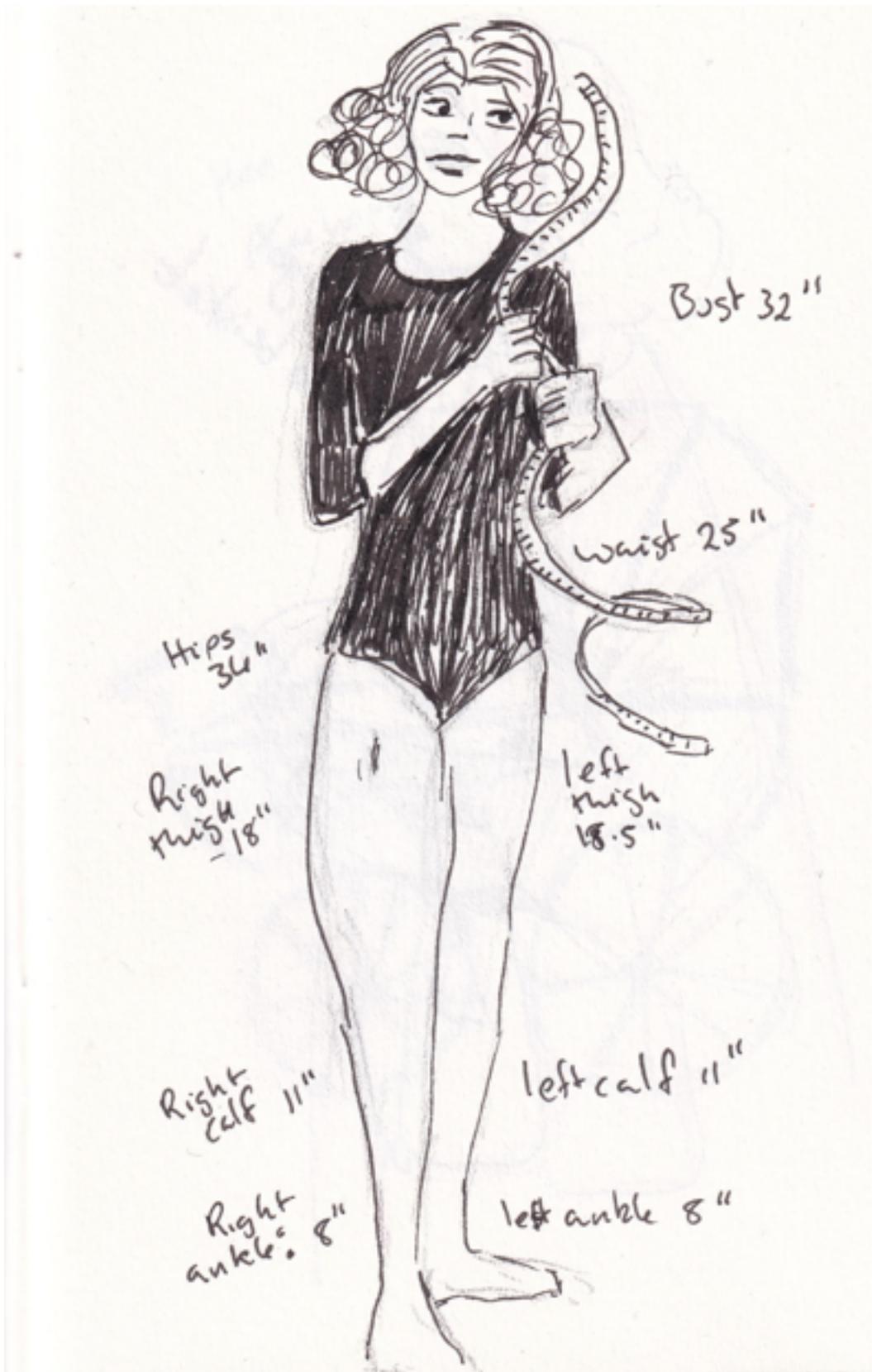
love. Sorry, Midge-Lenny shippers. Both say no. Wynne quotes Brosnihan from *The Hollywood Reporter*:

"It's an intimate friendship, unlike a lot of the ones I've seen between men and women on television," she said of Midge and Lenny. "They like each other because they admire each other; they admire each other's talent and they admire each other's drive. And that is allowed to be all that it is, you know?"

Palladino-Sherman agrees: "The fact that she was there for him last year when he was feeling low and in the season finale, and she shows up for him... [A] lot of time it translates into, 'Well, eventually they're going to have sex.' But it's not necessarily the way it's going to go."

My prediction? Eventually the truth about Lenny's lifestyle will come to light, which will once again dunk Midge into freezing reality. They'll not connect romantically (again, sorry, shippers!), but they'll remain bonded. His experiences may prove educational for the growing comedienne who's taken slaps already from entertainment professionals Sophie Lennon and Shy Baldwin after blending them unflatteringly into her act. "It's a long way to the top," Bon Scott tells us, and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* involves not only Midge's coming of age, but America's as well, from the romanticized 1950s with its dark underbelly and possibly into the 1960s when society questioned that façade forcefully. Lenny Bruce was instrumental to that process, even with his lurid foibles. He stayed unafraid regardless, and so should Midge.





Bust 32"

Waist 25"

Hips 34"

Right thigh 18"

Left thigh 18.5"

Right calf 11"

Left calf 11"

Right ankle 8"

Left ankle 8"



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