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**DOUBLE DATE**  
by J. Holtham

## **Cast of Characters**

NICK, 30s

IRENE, 30s

PENNIE, 20s

## **Setting**

A nice, but cheap restaurant in Hell's Kitchen, New York City

## **Acknowledgements**

*Double Date* was originally produced (as part of *Isle of Joy*) on July 18, 2001 by DAP Ensemble at the Vital Theatre, 424 W. 42<sup>nd</sup> St., New York, New York. It was directed by Codie K. Fitch. The cast was as follows:

NICK ..... Ethan Aronoff  
IRENE ..... Caitlin Irena Barton  
PENNIE ..... Cherita Armstrong

# DOUBLE DATE

by J. Holtham

*(A restaurant. NICK is sitting alone at a table. He looks around. IRENE enters. She is tall and striking and wears tight, all-black clothes. She sits heavily.)*

**IRENE.** I don't know why you wanted to meet over here. At least you're early.

**NICK.** It's a nice place.

**IRENE.** Honey, it's a billion miles from everything. It took me twenty minutes to get here. This is the last time you pick the place.

**NICK.** I like it.

**IRENE.** I know you do.

**NICK.** We can go somewhere else.

**IRENE.** We're here now. Did you order yet?

**NICK.** Not yet.

**IRENE.** Don't order food. We're meeting Diane and James later for dinner.

**NICK.** Okay.

**IRENE.** And don't let me drink too much. I have to go back to the office. I don't want to talk about it.

**NICK.** Rough—

**IRENE.** I don't want to talk about it. The fabric that was supposed to be in L.A. yesterday is still in the warehouse in Milan. The shop hasn't even gotten the patterns yet, because the designer had a vision of stripes and purple and now everything has to be re-designed for a shoot on Tuesday. I spent the entire morning on conference call with the stylist, the designer, and the factory in Milan.

**NICK.** Sounds pretty—

**IRENE.** Horrid, that's what it was. Horrid. And then I went to the salon, just to calm my nerves, but Leon had a customer, so I get

some new Asian girl. Or maybe Latin. I don't know. All I know is that she had maybe seven words of English. And I'm sitting there, trying to get her to understand, "Just follow the line. Follow the haircut that's already there. Follow. The. Haircut." And she's looking at me with these big, blank, brown eyes. Then her hands start shaking, and she stabs my ear. And I scream, "OW!" and she nearly drops the scissors and starts crying. All the other stylists are busy, so no one can rescue me. I look at her and I say, "Okay, honey. Calm down and just cut straight lines, okay? Now you gotta trim that side a little bit more. See, it's not straight over there. Straight." I had to walk her through the whole thing. Jesus. It was, like, the most traumatic thing that ever happened to me.

**NICK.** Wow. My day was—

**IRENE.** If the guy comes by, order me a diet coke. Two lemons.

*(She goes. NICK sits alone for a second. He looks around. There's a light change. PENNIE enters. She is nothing like IRENE. She wears a floral print dress, and carries a large overstuffed bag. She drops the bag in and sits.)*

**PENNIE.** I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

**NICK.** It's okay.

**PENNIE.** I'm 25 minutes late. I'm sorry.

**NICK.** You're five minutes late. Stop apologizing.

**PENNIE.** I'm sorry.

**NICK.** Just stop, Pen, okay?

**PENNIE.** Okay.

*(She sits and looks at him.)*

So. How did it go?

**NICK.** It was...all right. It's just the first day. You know how it goes. They all seem nice. Good people.

**PENNIE.** Good, good.

**NICK.** It is a really decent firm.

**PENNIE.** You said.

**NICK.** It's just a stepping stone.

**PENNIE.** I know.

**NICK.** To better things.

**PENNIE.** I know.

**NICK.** Then stop looking at me like I club baby seals.

**PENNIE.** Did they ask you to do that already? On the first day?

**NICK.** A lot of people would kill for this position. Why can't you just be happy for me?

**PENNIE.** I'm sorry. I am. Happy. I guess. I just don't know why you couldn't just—

**NICK.** Couldn't what?

**PENNIE.** Just...write.

**NICK.** Well. The bills have to get paid, you know?

**PENNIE.** I...gotta go to the bathroom. I'll be right back.

*(She leaves. NICK closes his eyes and shakes his head. Light change. IRENE returns, talking on a cell phone.)*

**IRENE.** Yes! Yes, yes, yes! Marvelous, just marvelous.

*(As she talks, she motions to NICK, looking for her drink. NICK motions back that the waiter hasn't come. IRENE shakes her head impatiently and walks off to find the bar. Light change. PENNIE returns and sits.)*

**PENNIE.** I like this place.

**NICK.** It's kind of out of the way, Pennie.

**PENNIE.** So? I like it.

**NICK.** I know.

**PENNIE.** I just want you to be happy.

**NICK.** I am. Okay? How was work?

**PENNIE.** (*Looking at the menu:*) What are you going to have? I don't know what I want.

**NICK.** What do you always have? Every time.

**PENNIE.** Maybe I want something different this time.

**NICK.** That'll be the day.

**PENNIE.** Well, what are you having?

**NICK.** I'm not hungry.

**PENNIE.** Well, if you were hungry, what would you have?

**NICK.** Why does it matter what I'm having?

**PENNIE.** I want to know. It helps me.

**NICK.** Why do we have to do this? Every time we go out, we do this. Just make up your own mind.

**PENNIE.** Fine, then. I'll have the grilled cheese.

**NICK.** Really, what a surprise.

**PENNIE.** It's a very good grilled cheese.

**NICK.** Yeah, okay. So. What happened at work?

**PENNIE.** Stuff.

**NICK.** What kind of—

**PENNIE.** I gotta go. Back to the bathroom. Order for me?

*(She hurries away. NICK watches her. Light change. IRENE comes back with two drinks.)*

**IRENE.** This is the last time. The last time we come here.

**NICK.** I thought you weren't—

**IRENE.** I need one. Just one. I can't believe that you would bring me to a place like this.

**NICK.** It's nice.

**IRENE.** The service is abysmal, the décor is pathetic, and—

*(She sips her drink.)*

The drinks suck. Last time, Nicholas.

**NICK.** Sorry, Irene.

**IRENE.** Don't pout.

**NICK.** I'm not pouting.

**IRENE.** You look silly when you pout.

**NICK.** I'm up for a promotion.

**IRENE.** I thought we talked about this.

**NICK.** It's a big promotion.

**IRENE.** You'll be the vice president of flyspecks or something. Really, Nicholas. We talked about this. I know someone at—

**NICK.** I don't want to—

**IRENE.** It's the logical thing. You've been at this level for, what, a year? A year and a half? It's a lovely, little firm, full of lovely, little people. It's a stepping stone, right?

**NICK.** ...Right.

**IRENE.** So. Step. I'm going to introduce you to—

**NICK.** I'm going to take the promotion.

**IRENE.** What?

**NICK.** I'm going to take it. I said I'd take it.

**IRENE.** Without consulting—

**NICK.** It's my job.

**IRENE.** I've spent weeks trying to line up these introductions, building you up, working for you, and you're just going to—

**NICK.** I like where I am. I just want to stay where I am. No, it's not the best—

**IRENE.** When I tell people where you are, they ask me if you just got out of school. When I tell them you've been there for over a

year, they ask me if you're looking for something else. If I tell them no, they're going to start asking me if you're retarded.

**NICK.** And what will you tell them?

**IRENE.** I don't know, Nicholas.

*(Her phone rings. She answers it.)*

Hello? Oh, hi. Nothing at all.

*(She gets up and walks away. Light change. PENNIE enters.)*

**PENNIE.** I forgot. I got you something.

*(She opens her bag and starts going through it, taking out an assortment of things, including tapes, combs, and a remote control. NICK picks up the remote.)*

**NICK.** I've been looking for this for a week.

**PENNIE.** I don't know how it got in— Here!

*(She takes out a small gift-wrapped box and hands it to NICK.)*

Open it, open it.

*(He does. It's a fancy pen. He holds it.)*

You know, for all that important stuff you'll have to—

**NICK.** I know what to do with a pen.

**PENNIE.** Okay.

**NICK.** Thanks. It's nice.

**PENNIE.** I was walking around, just looking at stuff, and I saw it and it was just...you. It reminded me of you. And I thought, "Nick will need a good pen." You don't have a good pen. To use at work. And...you could also use it to—

**NICK.** Did you buy it today?

**PENNIE.** It wasn't very much. I know I shouldn't tell you that, but it's not a big—

**NICK.** You were just walking around? Before you went to work? Or after?

**PENNIE.** But, see, it writes really, really well. You know, smooth.

**NICK.** Pennie, did you go to work?

**PENNIE.** You could use it to write stories and things—

**NICK.** Pennie. You didn't.

**PENNIE.** Or anything you want.

**NICK.** Why? Why do you do this?

**PENNIE.** I just...couldn't. I just couldn't. All the customers, they always yell at me. I get so nervous, and I get all the orders mixed up. And then they never tip you or they just walk out. Then Tom yells at me, too, and I—

**NICK.** How could you?

**PENNIE.** It's okay. I'll just—

**NICK.** Get another job? I'm out of friends to hire you.

**PENNIE.** I just couldn't—

**NICK.** Couldn't? What? Did your arms fall off? Legs broken?

**PENNIE.** Stop it.

**NICK.** Pennie, I can't keep saving you.

**PENNIE.** I'll get another—

**NICK.** Stop kidding yourself.

**PENNIE.** I got you a pen.

**NICK.** Great. I'll just use it to write all the rent checks, and all the bill checks and—

**PENNIE.** Well, then, I'm sorry I got it—

*(She runs out again. NICK puts her stuff back in her bag. He holds the pen. Light change. IRENE re-enters. She sits.)*

**IRENE.** If you didn't want my help, you should have said so.

**NICK.** It's not like you asked me. You just assumed—

**IRENE.** That you wanted to do something with yourself?

**NICK.** I am doing something.

**IRENE.** You could do more. I know a lot of people—

**NICK.** Maybe I don't want to know those people. Maybe I don't want to move further along like that.

**IRENE.** Then what do you want to do? Maybe?

**NICK.** Maybe I don't know.

**IRENE.** "I don't know" might have worked five years ago for you, Nicholas, but you're too old. And I'm too old. I don't want to be around anyone who doesn't know.

**NICK.** Don't we get a chance to figure it out?

**IRENE.** What do you need to figure out?

**NICK.** I don't know.

*(Light change. PENNIE enters and stands next to the table. She and IRENE don't react to each other. NICK responds to both of them.)*

**PENNIE.** I'm sorry.

**NICK.** *(To PENNIE:)* Would you stop apologizing?

**IRENE.** I don't understand how I'm supposed to help you—

**NICK.** *(To IRENE:)* I don't want your help.

**PENNIE.** I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry—

**NICK.** *(To PENNIE:)* STOP. Okay.

**IRENE.** So I'm just supposed to suffer because you have no—

**NICK.** *(To IRENE:)* You're not suffering.

**PENNIE.** I just don't know what you want from me anymore.

**IRENE.** Oh, it's just a barrel of monkeys with you.

**PENNIE.** I— We— I cry all the time now. I try and I try—

**IRENE.** Just stay where you are, don't try to move up, don't try to get anywhere—

**PENNIE.** —But I just keep getting it all wrong—

**IRENE.** Whee! Look at the fun I'm having!

**PENNIE.** Why can't things stay good? Stay the way they were?

**IRENE.** Can't you see how much fun this is?

**PENNIE.** I want to do what makes you happy.

**IRENE.** Think about me for a change.

**PENNIE.** But whatever I do doesn't.

**IRENE.** Think about what I want.

**PENNIE.** I'm running out of things to do.

**IRENE.** I can't keep trying to save you, Nick.

**NICK.** Things can't stay this way. I'm sorry.

**IRENE.** Don't apologize.

**PENNIE.** What are you sorry for?

**NICK.** We don't want the same things.

**IRENE.** Hello! News flash!

**PENNIE.** Then tell me what you want?

**NICK.** I need someone who wants the same things I want.

**PENNIE.** Tell me what they are. Just tell me.

**IRENE.** And do you know what you want, Nicholas? Do you really?

**NICK.** I want...

**PENNIE.** Tell me.

**IRENE.** Well, enlighten us! Enlighten us all!

**PENNIE and IRENE.** *(In unison:)* What do you want?

**NICK.** I want... There is this space, this place where you and I used to be, just the two of us. Like this secret room that we could lock ourselves in. But we can't do that. Not anymore. I want to go back there, too, and shut the door, lock it forever. But we can't. We walked out of it and now we can't get back to it. No matter how

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**FORWARD MOTION**  
by Jonathan Elliott

## **Cast of Characters**

IZZY

JAMES

# FORWARD MOTION

by Jonathan Elliott

*(Pitch Black. Fireflies float into view.)*

*(We hear laughter. The lights rise to reveal a field.)*

*(The middle of the night. JAMES and IZZY look idly at the stars.)*

*(One particular star bathes the pair in its light, as the crickets chirp their approval of the evening.\_*

*(IZZY is propped against JAMES' tummy, using it as a makeshift pillow.)*

**IZZY.** Salacious.

**JAMES.** Mm. Salacious. Ess-Ay-Ell-Ay-See-Eye-Oh-Yoo-Ess. Salacious.

**IZZY.** Easy one.

**JAMES.** Verisimilitude.

**IZZY.** Cake.

**JAMES.** Oh?

**IZZY.** Cake.

**JAMES.** Right.

**IZZY.** Verisimilitude. Vee-Eee-Are-Eye-Ess-Eye-Em-Eye-Ell-Eye-Tee-Yoo-Dee-Eee. Verisimilitude.

**JAMES.** Bueno.

**IZZY.** You know it.

**JAMES.** Hit me.

**IZZY.** Resipiscence—

**JAMES.** *(Cutting her off:)* That's archaic.

**IZZY.** It's legitimate. It's still used. Not a lot, but it's fair game.

**JAMES.** Bull.

**IZZY.** It so is.

**JAMES.** Full of it—

**IZZY.** Resipiscence-noun. Complete and unexpected change of heart.

**JAMES.** Cute.

**IZZY.** Yes.

**JAMES.** All those sibilant s-es—

**IZZY.** Spell it.

**JAMES.** Oh, but if I stall, perhaps you'll have... a resipiscence, and give me a new word.

**IZZY.** No dice.

**JAMES.** Fine.

*(Beat.)*

Resipiscence. Are...Eee...Ess...Eye...Pee...Eye...

**IZZY.** James?

**JAMES.** Yes?

**IZZY.** You owe me another six letters.

**JAMES.** I'll get to them.

*(Pause.)*

**IZZY.** Are you going to tell them before you leave for school?

**JAMES.** What?

**IZZY.** Your parents. Are you going to—

**JAMES.** No.

**IZZY.** Oh.

*(Pause.)*

Why?

**JAMES.** My parents are brilliant people.

**IZZY.** Yes.

**JAMES.** However, not yet fluent in Faggish.

**IZZY.** Give them some credit.

**JAMES.** I'll send them a postcard around Christmas.

**IZZY.** Charming.

**JAMES.** "Dear Mummy and Daddy: Having a wonderful time. College is lots of fun. Having much illicit man-sex. Send ointment. Have a merry. Your loving son, James."

**IZZY.** They'd have a stroke.

**JAMES.** Together? Is that possible?

**IZZY.** A collective stroke.

**JAMES.** Don't exaggerate.

**IZZY.** I'm not. Their heads would explode.

**JAMES.** This is why I'm never going to tell them.

**IZZY.** You'll have to.

**JAMES.** When I'm dead. It'll be a footnote in my eulogy. Near the bottom. Very small print.

**IZZY.** Wiseass.

**JAMES.** Seriously. I'm never going to tell them. They'd kill me. Well, probably not. My mother would say it's a phase and my father would cry a bit and then go nuts and cut my head out of all the family pictures.

**IZZY.** They have to know by now...they've had eighteen years to catch on.

**JAMES.** No they don't. I threw them off the trail. Football helped. Wrestling helped. For some reason, my father thinks that men who roll around the floor together in singlets are largely heterosexual.

**IZZY.** Largely, they are.

**JAMES.** You'd be surprised, Izzy.

**IZZY.** Well, Ben's straight.

**JAMES.** In all likelihood, yes.

**IZZY.** He's straight. I'm pretty certain about this one.

**JAMES.** Everyone can swing a little.

**IZZY.** Straight. Rigid, even. Turgid. Tee-Yoo-Are-Gee-Eye-Dee.

**JAMES.** That was descriptive.

**IZZY.** Don't you think your parents have noticed the lack of females around the house? That's a huge tip off.

**JAMES.** Thought of that. There's this girl I'm always around and they're very fond of her...

**IZZY.** Oh?

**JAMES.** She's a shitty speller, though.

**IZZY.** You're never going to let me live that down.

**JAMES.** You misspelled Salmon!

**IZZY.** It was Seventh Grade!

**JAMES.** You misspelled Salmon!

**IZZY.** Get over yourself.

**JAMES.** "Salmon. Ess-Ay-Em-Em-Oh-En. Salmon."

**IZZY.** And so you won the spelling bee, and I got first runner up. Congratulations.

**JAMES.** That's not where it ends. Come on, stroke my ego.

**IZZY.** ...and you went on to the county spelling bee, and then the state bee, and then the nationals. Thanks for reminding me. My ego has been successfully deflated.

**JAMES.** Hey, losing builds character.

**IZZY.** You're a pretentious dick.

**JAMES.** Whom you dated for three years.

**IZZY.** Whom your parents think I'm still dating.

**JAMES.** You're the perfect beard.

**IZZY.** Excuse me?

**JAMES.** Beard. When a gay man dates or marries a woman to disguise his sexuality, she's called a beard.

**IZZY.** I'm not as good with the whole homosexual glossary as I should be.

**JAMES.** Well now you know.

**IZZY.** And knowing is half the battle.

**JAMES.** For what it's worth, Mom told me that I have elegant taste in women.

**IZZY.** I'll second that. Your taste in men outright blows, though.

**JAMES.** That's not fair.

**IZZY.** You told me you had a crush on Al Borland.

**JAMES.** Richard Karn.

**IZZY.** Whatever. The fat guy from Home Improvement.

**JAMES.** He isn't fat. He's cuddly. And, as far as I'm concerned...wait. No. Sorry. I'm initiating a topic change.

**IZZY.** Deal.

*(Slight pause.)*

**JAMES.** So. Ben. How are things?

**IZZY.** *(Launching it out, preprogrammed:)* Nebulous and terrifying. Totally satisfying, but scary. A little. You know how it goes.

**JAMES.** Have I delved into an off-limits zone, or...

**IZZY.** No, no. Not yet you haven't, anyway. If that happens, I'll just knee you in the crotch and walk away. That's how you'll know.

**JAMES.** Three cheers for feminine subtlety.

**IZZY.** Ben's a really great guy.

**JAMES.** I never said he wasn't. Ben. Good, strong, one-syllable name. Short and to the point, yet stylish. Classic. Have you noticed there's this weird American trend towards action-oriented, odd names? Parents naming kids after places, or objects. Like, in my history class, there was this girl named Dakota.

**IZZY.** I knew a guy named Stone.

**JAMES.** Exactly. No class, no tradition. Yes, it sounds phonetically pleasing, I suppose, but it's missing that extra...oomph.

**IZZY.** "Oomph..." Is that your expert analysis, Sherlock?

**JAMES.** Fuck you, Watson.

**IZZY.** Get in line.

*(Pause.)*

**JAMES.** You're shitting me.

**IZZY.** I shit you not.

**JAMES.** You're *fucking* Ben McKay?

**IZZY.** Fucking's a strong word...

**JAMES.** It's a strong action.

**IZZY.** In that case, yes, there is fucking going on.

**JAMES.** Wow.

**IZZY.** Don't sound so surprised.

**JAMES.** You work fast.

**IZZY.** Thank you.

**JAMES.** He's very handsome.

**IZZY.** I know.

**JAMES.** Lean.

**IZZY.** Yes.

**JAMES.** Nice, tight ass.

**IZZY.** Down, James. Sit. Heel. Stay.

**JAMES.** I know...I can look, but don't touch.

**IZZY.** Attaboy.

**JAMES.** I bet he's very good.

**IZZY.** You would win that bet.

**JAMES.** But I'm a better conversationalist.

**IZZY.** That's arguable.

**JAMES.** Can you tell me— with a straight face— that you can talk to him for more than five minutes without losing him?

**IZZY.** Stop it. You and I both know there's more to it than that...yes, he's simple. No, bad word choice. Uncluttered. That's better. Uncomplicated. This is a good thing. I complicate things enough all by myself. I don't lose him. He's there.

**JAMES.** He doesn't get all of it...

**IZZY.** No. But he gets the gist. That's good enough. It feels new, I like that.

**JAMES.** Honeymoon phase, it'll wear off.

**IZZY.** You're an asshole.

**JAMES.** Call it like I see it—

**IZZY.** Same here. Asshole. It's...I love this part. I love it. When you're just really getting to know someone, and figuring out how they work, and think, and taste—it's the best part, there's stuff to discover. That's the whole point. Figuring someone out, gaining momentum toward them. Progress into another person.

**JAMES.** Ok.

**IZZY.** Forward motion, the places it takes you, where you go.

**JAMES.** And when you figure out everything there is to know—

**IZZY.** I don't think that'll ever happen with anyone.

**JAMES.** You haven't figured me out yet.

**IZZY.** That's just wrong. Like the back of my hand.

*(He looks at the back of her hand, and notices an imaginary spot.)*

**JAMES.** Oh, where'd that come from?

**IZZY.** Funny. If I get bored, I always have other options.

**JAMES.** You could always run away with me.

**IZZY.** There's an idea.

**JAMES.** The sex would be fantastic.

**IZZY.** In a totally nonexistent sort of way.

**JAMES.** We could try.

**IZZY.** No. The man of my dreams must be able to cook really good pancakes and make me come. Possibly at the same time. In a pinch, I'll settle for the pancakes.

**JAMES.** I can cook pancakes.

**IZZY.** I've seen you burn Jell-o.

**JAMES.** That was a fluke. I'm an excellent cook.

**IZZY.** You prevaricate. Pee-Are-Eee-Vee-Aye-Are-Eye-See-Aye-Tee-Eee. Prevaricate. Liar, liar, pants on fire. And I'm still waiting on resipiscence.

**JAMES.** It's a work in progress. So why is Benji "nebulous" and "terrifying?"

**IZZY.** It's Ben. Benji is a small dog. I don't have a real grasp on it...It's...well, I think he sees this as long-term.

**JAMES.** Yikes.

**IZZY.** It's not that bad. Maybe I'm over-reacting. He just seems a little attached.

**JAMES.** You'd better watch out. This could get ugly.

**IZZY.** He talks about doing the long-distance thing...and marriage...and kids...

**JAMES.** Have you ever seen "Single White Female?"

**IZZY.** It's on my to-rent list.

**JAMES.** You should. It'd be a nice tutorial.

**IZZY.** Shut up. The scary thing is, I'm starting to buy into the whole thing.

**JAMES.** You're kidding.

**IZZY.** No I'm not.

**JAMES.** I didn't think you were the marrying type.

**IZZY.** One day.

**JAMES.** You want to get married?

**IZZY.** I want to get married.

**JAMES.** You want to dedicate your life to the pseudo-fascistic pursuit of "matrimonial bliss" in the arms of a man who will coerce your body to pop out little monsters that will invariably add stress to your life, stretch marks to your nigh-perfect body, and a giant, vacuous drain on both your creative and monetary reserves?

**IZZY.** Yes.

**JAMES.** It's nice to want things.

**IZZY.** So I've heard.

*(Pause.)*

**JAMES.** When did you know?

**IZZY.** About?

**JAMES.** Me.

**IZZY.** Oh. Pretty early on.

**JAMES.** Shut up.

**IZZY.** I did.

**JAMES.** I don't believe that for a second. I'm completely stealth.

**IZZY.** I guess I caught on...three months in.

**JAMES.** No way.

**IZZY.** I did.

**JAMES.** And you just kept on going for three years without—

**IZZY.** I figured it would come up sooner or later. And I was in denial. But I think I've always suspected.

**JAMES.** Wow.

*(Pause.)*

You didn't know.

**IZZY.** I knew.

**JAMES.** No, you didn't. I'm totally undetectable—

**IZZY.** James.

**JAMES.** I don't have a lisp—

**IZZY.** James.

**JAMES.** I don't own a single piece of sequined clothing—

**IZZY.** James.

**JAMES.** I'm totally worthless as a dancer—

**IZZY.** James, you couldn't be any gayer if your name was Gaylord Gayeslofski.

*(Pause.)*

**JAMES.** That's pretty gay.

**IZZY.** Mm hm.

**JAMES.** I always thought it happened when we hooked up.

**IZZY.** The Sophomore Formal.

**JAMES.** That's the one.

**IZZY.** Eleven months without hitting first base.

**JAMES.** Hell, I barely even got up to bat.

**IZZY.** I figured you were just really shy. That, or a Mormon.

**JAMES.** I knew that, sooner or later, one of us was had to make a move. I was terrified.

**PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.  
THE PLAY CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE.**

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**HELL AND BACK**  
by Sheri Wilner

## **Cast of Characters**

ROBERT SR.: Frankie's grandfather. A veteran of World War II.

ROBERT JR.: Frankie's father. A veteran of the Vietnam War.

FRANKIE: A veteran of the Iraq War.

*Offstage voices:*

SYLVIE: Frankie's grandmother

PEG: Frankie's mother

JODI: Frankie's wife

## **Acknowledgments**

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

*Hell and Back* was commissioned by New Georges and presented as part of New Georges MANFEST.

# HELL AND BACK

by Sheri Wilner

*(ROBERT SR. and FRANKIE are seated at a table. ROBERT JR. enters holding three cans of beer.)*

**ROBERT JR.** It's gonna be at least another half hour. They gave us these to stop our complaining.

**ROBERT SR.** We got smart women in this family.

*(ROBERT JR. lifts up his can to make a toast.)*

**ROBERT JR.** I'd like to make a toast. To Frankie—.

*(But simultaneously with his father's toast FRANKIE has popped open his can and gulps down the beer. He then stands and starts to exit.)*

**ROBERT JR.** Where are you going?

**FRANKIE.** Get another.

**ROBERT JR.** There aren't any left.

**FRANKIE.** Yeah there is.

**ROBERT JR.** Just these three. You already had the others.

**FRANKIE.** I didn't have any others.

**ROBERT SR.** You did, Frank.

**FRANKIE.** No I didn't.

**ROBERT JR.** The empty cans are still in the kitchen.

*(FRANKIE looks confused, ROBERT SR. laughs. FRANKIE thinks long and hard until he remembers drinking the other beers.)*

**ROBERT JR.** That ever happen before, Frankie?

**FRANKIE.** What?

**ROBERT JR.** Forgetting things like that?

**FRANKIE.** Gee, I can't remember.

**ROBERT SR.** Doesn't matter how many you've had, only where the next ones are coming from. Isn't that right, Frankie?

**FRANKIE.** Yeah.

**ROBERT JR.** After dinner the three of us will go to Paddy's.

**ROBERT SR.** Where they give you the next before you've finished the one you got.

**ROBERT JR.** The gang asked us to bring you 'round soon as you got home.

**ROBERT SR.** They didn't ask. It was an order.

**ROBERT JR.** If you're not up to it though—

**ROBERT SR.** Not up to it? Our Frankie? Remember how you could make them all laugh? You had them falling out of their seats even before they were drunk.

*(FRANKIE retrieves his shoes.)*

**ROBERT JR.** What are you doing?

**FRANKIE.** I'm going to the store.

**ROBERT JR.** Dinner's in fifteen minutes.

**FRANKIE.** You just said half an hour.

*(He ties the first shoe.)*

**ROBERT JR.** I meant half an hour *tops*.

*(He ties the second shoe.)*

**ROBERT JR.** It will probably be before.

**FRANKIE.** It's just on the corner.

**ROBERT JR.** Your mother's been daydreaming about marching in here with Jodi and Grandma like they're in some kind of fancy parade. Presenting you with all your favorite dishes... If she comes in here and you're gone—

**ROBERT SR.** *(Holding up his can:)* Have mine.

**ROBERT JR.** Dad.

*(FRANKIE walks to his grandfather.)*

**ROBERT JR.** We're going to Paddy's later.

*(FRANKIE takes the can from ROBERT SR.'s hand and gulps down the beer.)*

**ROBERT JR.** Enough now. The women have been planning this—.

**ROBERT SR.** Nothing in their plans says the boy can't drink some beer.

*(ROBERT JR. shoots ROBERT SR. an angry look.)*

**ROBERT SR.** What? He's been deprived. You're making up for lost time, aren't you Frankie?

**FRANKIE.** Trying to.

**ROBERT SR.** You see there? Give him yours Bobby.

**ROBERT JR.** No.

**ROBERT SR.** Don't be so greedy. How many beers did you drink while he was away?

**ROBERT JR.** He's already had four—.

*(While his father's head is turned away, FRANKIE swipes his beer.)*

**ROBERT JR.** Frankie!

*(Too late. FRANKIE gulps it down. Belches.)*

**ROBERT JR.** *(Takes the can back and puts it at his place setting:)* Anyone asks we all drank our own.

**FRANKIE.** No one's gonna ask.

*(The three men sit in a long silence.)*

**ROBERT SR.** What kind of cars they drive over there?

**ROBERT JR.** What?

**ROBERT SR.** I'm asking him a question. What do they drive over there? American? Jap? What?

**ROBERT JR.** Why?

**ROBERT SR.** Because I want to know. I heard they got a lot of those Korean wind-up toys. What are they called? Kias. You see a lot of them Kias?

**FRANKIE.** I mostly saw army vehicles.

**ROBERT SR.** Well, when you didn't. When it was just some civilians taking a drive.

**ROBERT JR.** Why the hell do you care about their cars?

**ROBERT SR.** It interests me. Is that all right with you? He worked at a checkpoint, that means he saw a lot of cars. Right, Frankie?

**ROBERT JR.** I don't think he wants to talk about cars.

**ROBERT SR.** I didn't ask him to talk about them. I asked him what kind they had.

**ROBERT JR.** You know, I can think of maybe five hundred more important things to ask him about before that.

**ROBERT SR.** Who's stopping you?

**ROBERT JR.** No one is stopping me.

*(ROBERT JR. looks at FRANKIE, who stares back at him. An awkward pause passes between father and son.)*

**ROBERT JR.** Maybe he doesn't want to talk about it tonight.

**ROBERT SR.** Course he does. He's gotta lot of bragging to do. Have you ever met anyone with scars like his who didn't want to tell his story?

*(FRANKIE crushes the beer can in his hands.)*

**ROBERT JR.** Careful!

**FRANKIE.** I think I can handle it.

**ROBERT JR.** I mean...try to control yourself.

*(Silence.)*

*(ROBERT JR. switches his can with FRANKIE's can so it looks like he was the one who crushed it.)*

**FRANKIE.** What d'you that for?

**ROBERT JR.** *(Shrugs his shoulders:)* I just did.

**FRANKIE.** Well no one's gonna believe it.

*(He switches back the cans.)*

*(Silence.)*

*(ROBERT JR. crushes his can too.)*

*(With the back of his hand and arm, FRANKIE swipes both cans off the table.)*

**ROBERT JR.** Frankie. Your mother.

*(He gets up and moves in the direction of the kitchen to determine whether the women have heard.)*

**PEG.** *(Offstage:)* What happened in there?

**ROBERT JR.** It's OK, Peg. I just knocked my can off the table.

**PEG.** *(Offstage:)* Did you spill anything? Robert? Did you—?

**ROBERT JR.** I DIDN'T SPILL ANYTHING!

*(He takes a deep breath to compose himself:)*

**ROBERT JR.** Hey you got some hungry soldiers out here. Food almost ready?

*(No answer.)*

Peg?

**SYLVIE.** *(Offstage:)* It'll be about fifteen more minutes, Robert.

**ROBERT SR.** *(Calling out:)* Hey, Sylvie!

**SYLVIE.** *(Offstage:)* What?

**ROBERT SR.** Don't forget the bread!

**SYLVIE.** *(Offstage:)* When have I ever forgotten your goddamn bread?

**ROBERT SR.** November 15, 1982. Frankie's christening dinner.

**SYLVIE.** (*Offstage:*) Once in twenty-two years is a pretty good track record.

**ROBERT SR.** Well make sure you keep it that way!

**SYLVIE.** (*Offstage:*) You want bread? I'll give you some bread!

*(A roll comes flying through the kitchen.)*

*(FRANKIE flinches as if it were a grenade.)*

**ROBERT JR.** You OK? Frankie?

**FRANKIE.** I'm fine.

*(From the kitchen, the women burst out laughing. FRANKIE turns towards their direction.)*

**ROBERT SR.** I bet you kids had yourselves a mighty fine reunion. (*Laughs.*) First thing me and your grandma did when I got home was peel off our duds and go belly to belly.

**ROBERT JR.** All right, Dad. That's great. Thanks for the memories.

**ROBERT SR.** You gonna try to tell me that wasn't the first thing you did when you got home?

**ROBERT JR.** I'm not gonna tell my father or son anything about it.

**ROBERT SR.** (*Laughing:*) Hell, that homecoming *almost* made going to war worth it. Come on, give your old grandpa a thrill. Jodi show you a good time?

**FRANKIE.** Yeah, she showed me a good time.

**ROBERT SR.** Heh, heh. I bet she did.

**FRANKIE.** But was it worth going to war? I don't know...I mean, Jodi's a good fuck, but not that good. Maybe if fewer of my buddies died and she had bigger tits.

**ROBERT SR.** I said *almost* worth it. No need for disrespect.

**FRANKIE.** Oh, *almost* worth it. Well then heck yeah, it was almost worth it. Course it was kind of a mood kill when I wrapped my fingers around her neck.

**ROBERT JR.** Frankie.

**FRANKIE.** That ever happen to you? Either of you? Middle of making love to your wife you forget who she is?

**ROBERT JR.** Did that really happen?

**FRANKIE.** Ask her. Ask Jodi how special my homecoming was.

**ROBERT JR.** Did you hurt her?

**FRANKIE.** No, she liked it. What do you think?

**ROBERT JR.** Frankie—.

**FRANKIE.** Of course it hurt her.

**ROBERT JR.** I mean on the outside.

**FRANKIE.** She's here, isn't she?

**ROBERT SR.** Now, Frankie, these things happen when you first come home.

**ROBERT JR.** No they don't.

**ROBERT SR.** You gotta give yourself some time to adjust.

**ROBERT JR.** That's bullshit.

**ROBERT SR.** It's normal. Why are you making him feel like he's got a problem? He's only been back three days. You remember what you were like when you first came home? *(To FRANKIE:)* It's gonna take you some time, but you can't let it slow you down. You gotta jump into the water even when you don't feel like getting wet.

**ROBERT JR.** Dad, Don't.

**ROBERT SR.** Don't what?

**ROBERT JR.** Don't say the rest of what you're about to say.

**ROBERT SR.** You can read minds? You know what I'm going to say?

**ROBERT JR.** I have a pretty good idea, yeah. It didn't help me forty years ago, and it won't help Frankie today.

**FRANKIE.** Just forget I said anything, all right?

**ROBERT JR.**

**ROBERT SR.**

I can't forget it.

Consider it forgotten.

**ROBERT JR.** We're not going to "consider it forgotten." Didn't you hear what he said? *(To FRANKIE:)* You gotta talk about this.

**FRANKIE.** I just did.

**ROBERT JR.** I mean to someone who can help you—.

**FRANKIE.** Back off. All right? Back off.

**ROBERT SR.** *(To ROBERT JR.:)* The boy's right. Tonight isn't for talking. It's for celebrating. *(To FRANKIE:)* You'll feel a whole lot better when you see what those women have cooked up for you.

**ROBERT JR.** Oh for *Chrissakes*, does it look like food is gonna help him?

**ROBERT SR.** Yes. Yes it does. There are very few things in life a good meal can't fix.

**ROBERT JR.** And this is one of them!

*(Silence.)*

**ROBERT SR.** Hey Frankie, what side do they drive on over there? Left or right?

**ROBERT JR.** Will you please forget about their goddamn cars?!

**ROBERT SR.** *(Ignoring him:)* It just occurred to me that I don't know.

**ROBERT JR.** *(To FRANKIE:)* Ignore him. Tonight is for you. Tell us what you want to talk about...or don't want to talk about. You can tell us whatever's on your mind.

*(Silence.)*

**FRANKIE.** They drive on the left side.

**ROBERT JR.** You don't have to do that. You can talk to us. We're not the guys in your squad, we're your family.

**FRANKIE.** No. You're my family, not the guys in my squad.

**ROBERT JR.** You still need to honor whatever emotions you're feeling right now.

**ROBERT SR.** Oh brother.

**ROBERT JR.** Don't "oh brother" me. He's just been through hell and back.

**ROBERT SR.** We *all* have. That's why we're having this celebration. Because all three of us went to hell and all three of us made it back.

**FRANKIE.** Wish I didn't.

**ROBERT JR.** You don't mean that.

**FRANKIE.** Don't I? There isn't a part of my body that works the way it did before I left. Everything hurts. And I see things. All the time.

*(He squeezes his eyes shut and his hands to his temples.)*

**ROBERT SR.** Frankie, hush now. The women could walk in here any time.

**FRANKIE.** I don't give a fuck. Why shouldn't they know what we know?

**ROBERT JR.** They know enough.

**FRANKIE.** They don't know shit.

**ROBERT SR.** Your grandmother. Please. Don't tell her anything. Please.

**FRANKIE.** You never told her what you saw?

**ROBERT SR.** No.

**FRANKIE.** Did you tell Mom?

**ROBERT JR.** Some. I edited out quite a bit.

*(FRANKIE sits and puts his head in his hands. He squeezes his temples.)*

**ROBERT JR.** You can tell me though. Anything you need to, even the worst of it, you can tell me anything you need to get out. Give it to me. Give it all to me.

**ROBERT SR.** If I could just say something—

**ROBERT JR.** Dad—.

**ROBERT SR.** I just want to say, Frankie, that you might want to try not talking about it.

**ROBERT JR.** Jesus.

**ROBERT SR.** You'd be surprised. Our minds have miraculous ways of healing themselves.

**ROBERT JR.** Our minds do not heal themselves!

**ROBERT SR.** Of course they do! Mine did. You saying I don't know my own mind?

**JODI.** *(Offstage:)* What are you all fighting about in there?

**ROBERT JR.** *(Calling out to women:)* Nothing, Jodi. Cars.

**FRANKIE.** *(Yelling a bit too loudly and angrily:)* We're not fighting. We're yelling!

**JODI.** *(Offstage:)* It sounds like fighting from here.

**FRANKIE.** *(To the men:)* It's so fucking stupid to call this fighting.

**JODI.** *(Offstage:)* Dinner's almost ready so don't kill each other.

*(FRANKIE slams his fist down on the table.)*

**FRANKIE.** WE'RE NOT GONNA FUCKING KILL EACH OTHER!  
DON'T SAY WE'RE GONNA KILL EACH OTHER!

*(Silence. Both in this room and from the kitchen. FRANKIE is breathing hard.)*

**ROBERT JR.** You gotta try to take it easy on her. She doesn't understand.

**PEG.** *(Offstage:)* Robert? Is everything all right in there?

**FRANKIE.** *(Head in hands:)* Tell her it is. Don't let her come in here.

*(ROBERT JR. hurries to the kitchen door.)*

**ROBERT JR.** We're fine, Peg. Just...keep doing what you're doing. We're fine.

**PEG.** *(Offstage:)* Frankie too? Frankie's all right?

**ROBERT JR.** I'd tell you if he wasn't.

**PEG.** (*Offstage:*) I want to hear it from him. Frankie?

**FRANKIE.** (*Putting on an act for her:*) I'm just hungry, Ma.

**PEG.** (*Offstage:*) We're rounding third. I promise, just one more minute.

*(Pause.)*

**ROBERT JR.** The first day I was in country I got off a plane and hitchhiked to my unit. I was picked up by a truckload of marines with two company grade officers. They were First Lieutenants. We drove...I don't know...must have been three, four miles until we come up to these kids just playing on the side of the road. There were six. Six boys. Young—seven, eight years old maybe. As we drove by they gave us the finger. These little kids. They picked it up from the GIs I guess. I laughed. To me it was cute, you know, they didn't know what it meant. It was just something they'd seen us do. The truck slowed down a bit...and the guys got up...including the lieutenants...and just...blew all the kids away. One two three four five six. Just like that.

**ROBERT SR.** Bobby.

**ROBERT JR.** One minute six kids, the next, six little bodies. Then the truck just continued on. My first day.

**ROBERT SR.** What are you doing?

**ROBERT JR.** That wasn't the worst thing I saw though. The worst thing I saw was a guy in my company...holding his guts to keep them from falling out.

**ROBERT SR.** You've lost your fucking mind.

**ROBERT JR.** That was the same day I got hit. Everyone got hit. We were surrounded. Over a hundred snipers hid in the trees up above, blasting us with automatics. Everyone...just started dropping. At least twenty in the first couple of seconds.

**ROBERT SR.** Come on Frankie, we're going to the store.

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**A HOLMES FAMILY  
CHRISTMAS**

**by Judy GeBauer**

**Cast of Characters**

SHERLOCK HOLMES, a detective

DR. WATSON, his associate

THE WOMAN, a mysterious client

**Time**

The 1880s, Christmas Eve

**Place**

221B Baker Street, London

# A HOLMES FAMILY CHRISTMAS

by Judy GeBauer

*(Two doors burst open: WATSON from the corridor; HOLMES, dressed as Santa Claus, from a closet.)*

**WATSON.** My dear fellow!

**HOLMES.** My staunch right hand!

**WATSON.** But this outrageous attire!

**HOLMES.** The element of surprise is the unperceived disguise.

**WATSON.** Your monograph on “The Unperceived Disguise”?

**HOLMES.** On “The Element of Surprise,” actually.

**WATSON.** I would have thought, under the circumstances—

**HOLMES.** Ah, but there, you see. The circumstances.

**WATSON.** You have a case afoot.

**HOLMES.** The most ticklish affair of my career. How is the weather? Messy?

**WATSON.** Well, old boy, it is December 24<sup>th</sup> in one of Europe’s filthiest metropoliseseses...

**HOLMES.** An English Christmas Eve. And you didn’t forget to bring it.

**WATSON.** Good God, Holmes, in all our years together, have I ever forgotten—

**HOLMES.** Indeed you have not. But with your recent marriage, the return to your medical practice, the number of upset stomachs you treat at this time of year...

*(WATSON produces a Christmas gift.)*

**WATSON.** Mary wrapped it.

**HOLMES.** Did she pick it out?

**WATSON.** I hope you like it. She thinks the world of you, old chap.

**HOLMES.** And she added these little elves into the wrapping. Sweet touch.

**WATSON.** Shall I set it under your tree?

*(Distant doorbell.)*

**HOLMES.** Ah. Mrs. Hudson is instructed to show this party up directly.

**WATSON.** Would you prefer I withdraw?

**HOLMES.** By no means, Watson. Remain. Stand near the tree, if you understand me.

*(A cautious knock at the door.)*

*(HOLMES hides in closet.)*

*(WATSON sits near tree and reads paper.)*

*(WOMAN enters.)*

**WATSON.** My God. Ernestina.

**WOMAN.** John. You.

**WATSON.** I was expecting my wife.

**WOMAN.** I was expecting to be your wife, if you recall. Where is Mr. Sherlock Holmes and what on earth are you doing here?

*(HOLMES enters in Santa suit.)*

**HOLMES.** I see, madam, that you have never been in this part of London before today. I see that you are thirty years old, that you have poor eyesight, that you have not finished your Christmas shopping, and that you have a previous and intimate acquaintance with my associate.

**WOMAN.** The last is obvious and regrettable. The rest is remarkable and not altogether accurate. You're down the chimney rather early this year.

**HOLMES.** Bearing sugar plums and other assorted goodies. Have you been a good little girl this year?

**WOMAN.** Don't be disgusting.

**HOLMES.** Most people would have sat on my lap.

**WOMAN.** You are, I presume, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?

**HOLMES.** The woman is astounding.

**WOMAN.** You received my note and you have acted upon my commission?

**HOLMES.** Watson, produce the package. The lady is in a hurry. The shops close at six. Madam, I have carried out your wishes to the letter.

**WATSON.** The...the package...?

**HOLMES.** Yes. The package. You know, elves and what-not.

**WATSON.** But that's your Christmas gift, dear fellow.

**HOLMES.** Nice try, Watson, but I fear the beautiful Victoria Moriarty won't fall for that one.

**WATSON.** She's nothing of the sort.

**WOMAN.** I am still quite beautiful, you ungallant wretch.

**WATSON.** I mean that you're Ernestina Blythedale. Not Victoria Moriarty.

**WOMAN.** Mr. Holmes, I have tried for the past few moments to ignore it, but we cannot proceed any further in this unfortunate business until you have answered me fully and candidly as to how you think you know all these facts about me. Which, may I say, are total fabrications.

**WATSON.** She's Ernestina Blythedale, I tell you. Why do you call her Victoria Moriarty?

**HOLMES.** She will hold to the notion that she is the daughter of the criminal mastermind, the one and only Dr. Moriarty.

**WOMAN.** Tell me why you imagine I am thirty years old.

**HOLMES.** You are closer to 34, but I am in a charitable frame of mind due to the holiday season.

**WOMAN.** John, tell him, if you please, my real age.

**HOLMES.** Produce the package, Watson.

**WATSON.** Holmes, it's a gift from Mary and me. I don't know what you—

*(WOMAN pulls out a small pistol.)*

Ernestina, my darling girl! I know you were desolate when we parted, but this, a pistol—

**WOMAN.** Please don't drivel. I always loathed your driveling. Hand over the package.

**WATSON.** What package? Which package?

**WOMAN.** And your blithering! I detested your blithering! What! Which! Where! Who! Why! When!

**HOLMES.** She wants the package I expressly told you to bring, and which not ten minutes ago you carried into this room.

**WATSON.** Told me!

**HOLMES.** Expressly.

**WATSON.** Told me when?

**WOMAN.** Incessant blithering!

**HOLMES.** In my telegram, old man. The one I sent and you received.

**WOMAN.** Mr. Holmes, do you see what I am holding in my hand?

**HOLMES.** A derringer of very small calibre. French manufacture. Not an accurate weapon. I generally recommend the Navy Colt to habitual criminals.

**WOMAN.** Accurate enough to shoot you dead. Now you will tell me, on peril of your very soul, sir, how a gentleman can presume to suggest that I am 30 years old. Let along 34. Your life depends upon your reply.

**HOLMES.** Watson, my dear fellow, I sent the telegram to your surgery this very afternoon.

**WOMAN.** Mr. Holmes!

**WATSON.** Dear boy, Mary gave me a Christmas list as long as my... Well, one dislikes to boast. Suffice it to say I was shopping all afternoon and I never received your cable. I know of no telegram.

*(WOMAN fires the pistol.)*

**HOLMES.** Madam, a quality in women I most dislike is a tendency to tantrum. You may well have damaged my Stradivarius, or worse, my cocaine hookah.

**WOMAN.** Unless you attend to me at once, I will damage Dr. Watson's...Christmas list.

**HOLMES.** Whatever you choose to damage, madam, I will sue you in a court of law, which would be unpleasant for both of us. But mostly for you. Control your temper.

**WOMAN.** Since I have been in this room, you have ignored my demand to reveal your knowledge of my age and circumstances, you have diverted yourself with nonsensical conversation, and have treated me with the condescension of which only a confirmed and bachelorly curmudgeon is capable.

**HOLMES.** Madam, I am merely straightening out a misunderstanding between my friend—

**WOMAN.** Your ridiculous attire—

**HOLMES.** You consulted me about your missing fortune, which I may say without, I hope, insulting you, was stolen by Dr. Moriarty himself. You also ask me to look into the affair of your uncle's missing wife, whom you know full well was also stolen by your errant parent. So, madam, you must be nimble and you must be quick.

**WATSON.** Ernestina, you an heiress to a misbegotten fortune!

**HOLMES.** You, madam, are your uncle's wife posing as your own niece. For you are indeed that disappointed Miss Blythedale who, spurned by her medical student lover, turned to the feckless brother of the master criminal. You have known all along where the stolen bonds were, because you and Dr. Moriarty stole them yourselves and placed them in a particular drawer under a stack of particular garments. And in this package is the proof.

**WATSON.** Holmes, my dear fellow, in that package is—

**WOMAN.** Before we proceed, what about the rest of your observations?

**HOLMES.** Vanity, thy name is Ernestina Blythedale Moriarty. Very well. I know you were never in this part of the city before because you stepped out of the omnibus at the corner of Baker Street and Marlyebone Road, pulled out a card with an address on it, squinted at it, walked up and down both sides of the street twice before you stopped at 221-B. This I observed from my closet window. Your weak eyesight is apparent from the fact you couldn't read the addresses on the doors, let alone the one written on the card, and that you continue to hold the pistol on the Christmas tree rather than on Watson and myself. You have an agitated look about you and seem to want to be on your way. Many people on the street on Christmas Eve wear this very same haunted look of desperation. It bespeaks procrastination.

**WOMAN.** It could bespeak any number of things.

**HOLMES.** But in your case my suppositions are confirmed by the large wad of unspent bank notes protruding from your reticule.

**WOMAN.** And as to my being 30 years old...

**HOLMES.** Eight years ago, when I believed I had finished Moriarty off at the Falls, he had a daughter of 12.

**WOMAN.** Then I am but 20.

**HOLMES.** Victoria Moriarty is. But Victoria's aunt, Ernestina Blythedale, is 34. This I proved for myself when I looked up the record of your marriage to the hapless younger Moriarty. And Dr. Watson can confirm your true age, as he knows your body better than—

**WOMAN.** Mr. Holmes, I am running out of time, and I long ago ran out of patience. I am authorized by my confederate to pay you a certain sum, but of course I can take the package by force if necessary.

**WATSON.** Ernestina.

**WOMAN.** John, I'm sorry. Mr. Holmes is correct. I am the lover of Dr. Moriarty, and I still have stocking stuffers to buy.

**HOLMES.** The wayward wife of a master criminal's brother. You did well to marry for money and not for love, Watson.

**WOMAN.** You managed to find the parcel. You are indeed a great detective.

**HOLMES.** Elementary. You knew all along it wasn't missing. You were afraid to fetch it yourself because your distraught husband might catch you withdrawing it from the drawer containing your satin undergarments. So you sent me to withdraw it from your satin undergarments. I went as Father Christmas collecting for the orphans.

**WATSON.** What's in the package, Ernestina?

**WOMAN.** I have a train to catch. And gum drops to buy.

**HOLMES.** Deeds. Bonds. Titles. A ruby from Rangoon worth a ransom. A bauble from Bangkok worth an empire. Moriarty's trove of trinkets. Pilfered from honest hands. Extorted from guilty ones. It would take you many a gall bladder extraction, my dear Watson, to earn the sum amassed in this box.

**WOMAN.** Mr. Holmes, your money.

**HOLMES.** Mrs. Moriarty, your treasure.

*(She pays him from the bank notes. He hands her the Christmas box.)*

One stipulation, madam. Do Not Open Before Christmas.

**WOMAN.** One final thing, Mr. Holmes.

**HOLMES.** I am at your service.

**WOMAN.** How did you know which drawer to look in?

**HOLMES.** Madam, I may be a bachelor, and I may be a curmudgeon, but I am a fool for satin.

**WOMAN.** I can trust you not to follow me?

**HOLMES.** My dear woman, I leave the arrests and convictions to Scotland Yard and the penal system. Go with my best wishes for a happy holiday season.

**WOMAN.** Happy Christmas, Mr. Holmes. John, season's greetings. The elves are a sweet touch.

*(She exits.)*

*(Silence.)*

**WATSON.** What will happen when Dr. Moriarty opens the package?

**HOLMES.** He will accuse her of betraying him and colluding with me. She will deny it. They will quarrel. The result of their quarrel will force one of them to leave the country quickly.

**WATSON.** Then you never meant—

**HOLMES.** My dear fellow, I never sent.

**WATSON.** There was no cable? You lied to me?

**HOLMES.** We do not deal in lies, Watson. We deal in imagination. Are we dining out? The Savoy boasts a brace of quail that cannot be surpassed. Shall we include Mycroft? Poor genius of a brother of mine, no where to go on Christmas Eve. Not a friend to his name. He can quote the entire "Iliad", though. Which he might. If we press him. I believe after a bottle of Beaujolais or two—

**WATSON.** Holmes, may I say you touch me deeply. You sacrificed your own Christmas present in the name of justice. Well, a kind of justice. A jolly good lesson to that scoundrel Moriarty. But to offer up your Christmas for it, that's quite in the spirit of the season. I'm genuinely humbled.

**HOLMES.** That's because I know what's in your gift, dear boy.

**WATSON.** You know!

**HOLMES.** You know my methods.

**WATSON.** But Mary picked this out herself.

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**LIGHTS OUT**  
by Doug Rand

## **Cast of Characters**

JEREMY, 20s-30s

KATE, 20s-30s

GINNY, 15-22

*(can be switched to JIMMY if only a male actor is available)*

# LIGHTS OUT

## by Doug Rand

*(JEREMY and KATE are running around a kitchen full of non-kitchen items: beakers, graduated cylinders, large plastic jugs. Lots of appliances are running: a microwave, a stovetop, a stereo playing something catchy. KATE is blending something in a bowl using an electric eggbeater, and JEREMY is poking through a spice rack.)*

**JEREMY.** Don't you like cloves?

**KATE.** No time for cloves.

**JEREMY.** Could add a nice touch.

**KATE.** Too late—and anyway, cloves don't go with jojoba.

**JEREMY.** True.

**KATE.** Something to think of for next time, how about?

**JEREMY.** You think we'll get a next time?

**KATE.** Jeremy.

**JEREMY.** Seriously.

**KATE.** I think if we make this buyer's deadline, then yes, there's a chance they'll come back for more.

**JEREMY.** Hey Ginny, when's pickup?

*(GINNY enters from another room.)*

**GINNY.** What?

**JEREMY.** When's pickup?

**GINNY.** Which one?

**JEREMY.** The latest one.

**GINNY.** FedEx comes by at six, but sometimes they're early.

**JEREMY.** We're not going to make it, are we?

**KATE.** Less talking, more chopping!

*(JEREMY dutifully chops and blends various plant parts.)*

**GINNY.** Is there anything I can do?

**KATE.** Not at the moment, no.

**JEREMY.** Have you made out the packing slip yet?

**GINNY.** No.

**JEREMY.** Do that, then.

**GINNY.** Do you have an extra pen?

**KATE.** Don't use a pen; print it out.

**GINNY.** I don't have the computer set up for that yet.

**KATE.** So get it set up now—you have over an hour.

**GINNY.** Why can't I just write it down? It's the same information either way.

**KATE.** Because this is a professional operation!

**JEREMY.** This is two friends and an intern selling beauty products out of a home kitchen.

**KATE.** Nobody else has to know that!

*(Suddenly the power dies—the mixer stops mixing, the microwave stops miking, the stereo goes silent.)*

**JEREMY.** Shoot—did we do that?

**GINNY.** I'm using a pen.

*(GINNY exits.)*

**KATE.** Turn off the oven—let me check the circuitbreaker.

**JEREMY.** I'm sorry—I should have known not to plug all these things in at once.

*(KATE flips the circuitbreaker back and forth. Nothing happens.)*

**KATE.** Huh.

**JEREMY.** You think it's not just us?

**KATE.** You call Don, see if his power's on; I'll call Pat.

**JEREMY.** Phone doesn't work—cordless.

**KATE.** My cell's out.

**KATE / JEREMY.** Ginny!

*(GINNY enters.)*

**JEREMY.** Go outside and find out what's going on at the other houses.

**GINNY.** Okay.

*(GINNY exits.)*

**JEREMY.** I'm sure we'll get the power back in a few minutes.

**KATE.** What do we work on now?

**JEREMY.** Our hands are still operational, you know.

*(They start mixing and chopping.)*

**KATE.** This is why we should have started earlier—this batch is too important to screw up!

**JEREMY.** We *did* get an early start; we've been working nonstop for days.

**KATE.** You think you're getting a jump on things, being responsible, then the gods say Wham! Back up! You'll never get anything done on time in your life!

**JEREMY.** They're cruel, those gods.

**KATE.** It's like the universe rearranges itself to keep us from being punctual.

**JEREMY.** Don't you think the universe has bigger things to worry about?

*(GINNY enters.)*

**GINNY.** Looks like the whole neighborhood's down.

**KATE.** Super.

**JEREMY.** Any idea when we'll get our power back?

**GINNY.** Your guess is as good as mine.

**KATE.** This radio doesn't have any batteries.

**JEREMY.** Go outside and find out when they're saying we'll be back online.

**GINNY.** Okay.

*(GINNY exits.)*

**JEREMY.** How's the extract coming?

**KATE.** Very, very slowly.

**JEREMY.** I could use a beer right about now.

**KATE.** Don't touch that fridge!

**JEREMY.** Can't we be an unprofessional operation now and then?

**KATE.** I meant don't open the fridge—we don't know when the power's coming back.

**JEREMY.** So?

**KATE.** So everything will spoil if we don't keep the door closed.

**JEREMY.** Hey, say that again.

**KATE.** Everything will spoil if we don't keep the door closed?

**JEREMY.** Our entire friendship policy in one little fridge metaphor.

**KATE.** And a sensible policy it is.

**JEREMY.** I'm not touching the door, am I?

*(GINNY enters.)*

**GINNY.** Looks like it's not just the block—it's the whole state.

**JEREMY.** Really?

**GINNY.** Some people are saying the whole Eastern Seaboard is down—maybe more.

**KATE.** Oh, God.

**JEREMY.** You don't think this is terrorists, is it?

**GINNY.** I don't know.

**JEREMY.** Go outside and find out if it's terrorists.

**GINNY.** Okay.

*(GINNY exits.)*

**JEREMY.** Should we be assuming the worst?

**KATE.** We should fill up the bathtub with water or something.

**JEREMY.** Why?

**KATE.** For long-term drinking water.

**JEREMY.** The tub is already filled with Kate and Jeremy's Home-made Organic Jojoba Lotion.

**KATE.** Let's get it in the jugs for delivery, and then fill the bathtub with water.

**JEREMY.** I don't think FedEx is coming if the whole continent is blacked out.

**KATE.** What if it's just temporary, though? You want to just throw out the whole batch?

**JEREMY.** Let's hedge our bets and fill the jugs with the water.

**KATE.** Fair enough.

**JEREMY.** At least we're not the only ones losing our shirts tonight, right?

**KATE.** You're not being helpful.

*(GINNY enters.)*

**GINNY.** It's not terrorists.

**KATE.** Thank God.

**JEREMY.** How do you know?

**GINNY.** That's what people are saying.

**KATE.** So what are they saying is going on?

**GINNY.** Nothing convincing. Equipment failure, maybe? Your guess is as good as mine.

**JEREMY.** Huh.

**KATE.** Let me see if I can scare up some candles.

*(Throughout the following, they set up candles, fill up jugs, etc.)*

**GINNY.** Everyone's got their car radios on, and everyone's car radio is playing the emergency broadcast system, which just says over and over that the causes are being investigated, stay tuned for updates, don't panic, and all that stuff. The guy's voice sounds like it was recorded in the '70s or something.

**KATE.** You weren't even born in the '70s.

**GINNY.** I know what they sound like.

**JEREMY.** What do the regular radio stations say?

**GINNY.** Nothing.

**JEREMY.** What, it's just Nonstop Golden Oldies?

**GINNY.** No, there's nothing else on the radio. All the stations must be down, too.

**KATE.** Is that normal?

**JEREMY.** Must be, right?

**KATE.** Wouldn't a radio station have a generator?

**JEREMY.** Who knows?

**GINNY.** I'll bet this is all because of deregulation.

**JEREMY.** I'll bet it's all because of El Niño.

**GINNY.** No, I've got it: sun spots.

**JEREMY.** The Trilateral Commission!

**GINNY.** Freemasons!

**KATE.** Maybe you're right about sun spots.

**GINNY.** I was kidding.

**KATE.** But sun spots cause solar flares, right? And don't solar flares actually cause blackouts?

**GINNY.** I've never heard of that before.

**KATE.** It was in the paper a while ago—these huge plumes of gas vomit out of the sun, and hurtle toward Earth at nearly the speed of light, and mess up our cell phones.

**JEREMY.** That's a bit of an anticlimax, isn't it.

**GINNY.** We don't get fried or anything?

**KATE.** That's just the little flares. The article said that a really big flare can flood the power lines, take down a whole grid.

**JEREMY.** How does that happen?

**KATE.** I don't know. But it does.

**GINNY.** Where?

**KATE.** I don't remember—Canada, or somewhere like that. This big flare took down the whole country. A bigger flare could take down the whole world.

**JEREMY.** You really think that's what's happening?

**GINNY.** Hey, maybe this is just Phase One!

**JEREMY.** Phase Two being what?

**GINNY.** The sun explodes.

**JEREMY.** Dang Freemasons.

**GINNY.** Hey, it could happen! Big flare, harbinger of doom, last gasp of a dying star.

**JEREMY.** The sun is clearly still alive.

**KATE.** We don't know that.

**JEREMY.** Look outside!

**KATE.** That sunlight is eight minutes old. It takes eight minutes to get to us. The sun could be gone right now, or exploding, and we wouldn't know yet.

**GINNY.** Cool.

**JEREMY.** Isn't the sun supposed to live another 5 billion years or something?

**KATE.** How do they know for sure?

**JEREMY.** I don't know—equations, modeling?

**KATE.** They can't even model their way to a power grid that doesn't break down. Why should I trust them on the inner workings of a star that's 93 million miles away?

**GINNY.** Couldn't a satellite warn us ahead of time?

**KATE.** No, it couldn't—you can't send a signal faster than the speed of light.

**JEREMY.** Come on, they've probably got some kind of warning system set up—

**KATE.** You can't send a signal faster than the speed of light!

**GINNY.** Wait, I've got it: Even if the sun *looks* normal now, we'd already know it exploded because its gravity would be all out of whack.

**JEREMY.** Good point!

**KATE.** I don't know.

**GINNY.** We must be okay, because we're still okay!

**KATE.** I'm still not sure. Go outside and find out how fast gravity travels.

**GINNY.** Okay...

*(GINNY exits.)*

**JEREMY.** You really think the neighbors will be able to tell her—

**KATE.** I know the answer already: Gravity can't go faster than the speed of light, either. I just wanted to get rid of her.

**JEREMY.** Kate, the sun's not—

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**LISTENERS**  
by Jane Martin

## **Cast of Characters**

ELEANOR

RALPH

WALTER

VOICES FROM PHONE COLLAGE

## **Setting**

Somewhere.



# LISTENERS

by Jane Martin

*(A home, represented by a single contemporary sofa and doorframe. Elsewhere, outside the “home” are three metal tables and chairs where men in dark blue suits and red presidential ties sit with large earphones, listening intently. In the blackout, we hear overlapping snatches of inane phone conversations.)*

**WOMAN.** Grandma, it’s Lilian, I just wanted to wish you...

**MAN.** ...was the corporate secretary in charge organizing the board meetings and...

**CHILD.** I miss you, Daddy, will you bring me a...

**2<sup>ND</sup> WOMAN.** You think I care? I don’t care. All that talk is just...

**2<sup>ND</sup> MAN.** ...have no idea what the article means by “insurgent,” so tell Jack...

**WOMAN.** ...something called “left weave” jeans and I’m guessing the Gap, but I...

**3<sup>RD</sup> MAN.** Yeah, well if you could meet us in Aruba, I know Ellen would be pleased as...

**CHILD.** ...but you’ll miss my birthday, and I want...

**2<sup>ND</sup> WOMAN.** ...a small bag of sand from the Bay of Pigs, but who’s going to...

**MAN.** No, not Hamas, Hamas is...

**3<sup>RD</sup> WOMAN.** ...completely volcanic...

**WOMAN.** So love and kisses, Grandma...

**MAN.** ...as far as I know, but you know me and what I know, well, hell, what anybody knows...are you still there?

*(End of phone collage.)*

*(Lights up on ELEANOR LEFTWICH, a neatly dressed woman in her late 30s. She is on the phone.)*

**ELEANOR.** And afterwards you fold in the beaten egg, one quarter cup of chopped chives, a touch of Tabasco, bake at low heat and...

*(Two men also in dark blue suits and red ties appear at ELEANOR's door. The smaller, WALTER, incongruously wears a porkpie hat. They knock.)*

**ELEANOR.** Oh...uhmm, sorry, Mom. You just stay right there for two shakes of a lamb's tail. *(Opens door:)* Hello.

**RALPH.** *(Naturally pronounced "RAFE.")* Hello.

**ELEANOR.** I—

**RALPH.** We—

**ELEANOR.** Are—?

**RALPH.** Actually—

**ELEANOR.** Could—?

**RALPH.** Absolutely—

**WALTER.** *(Bugs Bunny:)* What's up, Doc?

**RALPH.** Oh, let me guess. You are Eleanor Leftwich?

**ELEANOR.** I am.

**RALPH.** *(Delighted:)* Fantastic. I'm Rafe...

**WALTER.** Ralph.

**RALPH.** Rafe Aural, and allow me to say, Eleanor, I'm an admirer.

**ELEANOR.** An admirer?

**RALPH.** Your cries, murmurs and, might I say, exhortations during anal and oral sex are a treasured part of my day.

**ELEANOR.** I beg your pardon.

**WALTER.** *(Bogart:)* That's out of our hands, sweetheart.

**RALPH.** *(Gives WALTER a little hit:)* Silly. *(Brushes past ELEANOR into the room.)* Oh, this is lovely! Isn't this lovely, Walter? I could tell from your extensive vocabulary that you would have exquisite taste.

**ELEANOR.** But how...

**WALTER.** “But how...”

**RALPH.** Yes, we have our little ways. ( *Holding up phone:* ) Forgotten something?

**ELEANOR.** Oh, I’m on the phone.

**RALPH.** ( *Holding it away from her:* ) Well, if we know anything, we know that, don’t we, Walter? Walter opines, by the way, that Ta-basco really overpowers the recipe in an unhelpful way. ( *Speaks into phone:* ) Something’s come up, dear, but she’ll be back to you...

**RALPH / WALTER.** ...In two shakes of a little lamb’s tail.

( *WALTER snaps cell phone shut.* )

**ELEANOR.** You cut off my call.

**RALPH.** I did, didn’t I? That was naughty, wasn’t it, Walter?

**WALTER.** Very naughty, Ralph.

**RALPH.** Rafe.

**WALTER.** Ralph.

**ELEANOR.** Excuse me, I haven’t a clue who you are?

**RALPH.** ( *To WALTER:* ) She hasn’t a clue. Leftwich, you’re a stitch. Honeybabydarlin’pet, you simply have to keep up here! All the little clicks, the little whirrs and

**RALPH / WALTER.** faint beeps?

**RALPH.** The nice man the city sent to check your walls for killer mold?

**WALTER.** ( *It was he.* ) Ta-da!

**RALPH.** Land sakes alive, we’re your Listeners, girl.

**ELEANOR.** Listeners?

**RALPH.** ( *Shaking a warning finger:* ) Oh, there are some saucy citizens simply slathering for a good listening to!

**ELEANOR.** I—

**RALPH.** Just teasing.

**WALTER.** (*John Wayne:*) Just teasing, citizen.

**ELEANOR.** I'm afraid you'll have to leave.

**RALPH.** Ah, I see...but really we mustn't, we can't, we've been assigned.

**WALTER.** Assigned!

**RALPH.** Assigned. Think of it this way, Eleanor Leftwich, consider us an instrument of increased intimacy.

**RALPH / WALTER.** It's a lonely life, (*Cont. for RALPH only:*) Eleanor.

**RALPH.** Who really, really listens to us? Who truly wants to hear us, know us, take us seriously,

**RALPH / WALTER.** hang on our words—

**RALPH.** —regard our emotionally chaotic and badly researched opinions as having heft, value, even profundity? Family, lovers, co-workers—they don't really hear us, do they? They are locked in the hell of self, Eleanor. Sadly, only your government cares.

**ELEANOR.** You heard me having sex?

**RALPH.** (*Reassuring:*) Really, it was almost as good as being there.

**ELEANOR.** But isn't that illegal?

*(RALPH and WALTER laugh merrily.)*

**RALPH.** Time for the survey.

*(WALTER flips open a folder and clears his throat.)*

**RALPH.** Go it, Walter.

**WALTER.** Father, Shem Leftwich?

*(The survey section is done quick tempo.)*

**ELEANOR.** Slaughtered in Viet Nam on behalf of the domino theory.

**WALTER.** Uncle, Lowell Leftwich?

**ELEANOR.** Butchered in Panama, lest they should invade us.

**WALTER.** Auntie Crystal Leftwich, battlefield nurse?

**ELEANOR.** Cut down in Grenada insuring hegemony.

**WALTER.** Brother, Lefty Leftwich?

**ELEANOR.** Blown to smithereens, Desert Storm, guaranteeing full misogyny for all Kuwaitis.

**WALTER.** Brother Al?

**RALPH.** Lovely vocal register, brother Al.

**WALTER.** Lovely.

**RALPH.** Lovely.

**ELEANOR.** Friendly fire, Afghanistan.

**WALTER.** Brother Joe?

**ELEANOR.** Beheaded, castrated, dismembered in Iraq, insuring democracy and lollipops for all Islamic peoples.

**RALPH.** (*Thrilled:*) Good show, Eleanor, well done. Kudos for clarity. Haven't you just come through in the clutch?!

**WALTER.** Dabba dabba do.

**RALPH.** Soooooooo...

**WALTER.** Soooooooo...

**RALPH.** Our technologies have sensibly identified you, Eleanor, as a valued citizen who just might be a little cranky. And technologically speaking...

**WALTER.** You're a big fuckin' winner.

**ELEANOR.** I am?

**RALPH.** You are. Your mother, your friends, that sweet State Farm agent, whose untrammelled id has given Walter and me so much erotic pleasure, have elicited only idle interest, a little credit card browsing, the odd security check. But you, my intriguing Eleanor, if I may call you so, have hit the big time, a veritable coup, your own

personal Listeners...us! Take our luggage to the guest room, Walter, down the hall, second left I believe.

**ELEANOR.** You hear everything I say here?

**RALPH.** We hear everything anyone says, Ms. Leftwich, anyone of the slightest interest.

**ELEANOR.** And someone hears you?

**RALPH.** Oh, Walter hears me, don't you, Walter?

**WALTER.** You wascally wabbit.

**ELEANOR.** And someone hears Walter?

**RALPH.** Agent Arthur in Bangor, Maine.

**ELEANOR.** And Arthur?

**WALTER.** Ziggy in New Rochelle.

**ELEANOR.** And Ziggy?

**RALPH.** Darlene in Cuttlefish, Kansas.

**ELEANOR.** And Darlene?

**RALPH.** Ryan in Tucumcari.

**ELEANOR.** And Ryan?

**RALPH.** Heard in Burbank.

**WALTER.** Who's heard in Baltimore.

**RALPH.** Who's heard in Bethesda.

**WALTER.** Who's heard at the C. I. of A.

**RALPH.** Who's heard in the war room.

**RALPH / WALTER.** Who's heard by...

**RALPH.** (*Stops. Speaks coyly:*) Oh, I don't know...

**WALTER.** He doesn't know.

**RALPH.** —heard perhaps by he who—

**RALPH / WALTER.** let us say—

**RALPH.** —hears all.

**ELEANOR.** (*Amazed:*) He listens?

**RALPH.** In the limitless soaring freedoms of democratic process, it is the bounden duty of he who serves only at our pleasure to attend to the fall of a sparrow or the infinitesimal vibration of the Monarch's wing, dear Eleanor.

**ELEANOR.** (*Enthralled:*) So it's not inconceivable I could speak to him?

**RALPH.** Not inconceivable.

**WALTER.** The off-chance.

**ELEANOR.** So I'm not powerless? I could speak my heart, even here in the sanctuary of my home, and he who hears all might hear me?

**RALPH.** He might.

**WALTER.** He will.

**RALPH.** He cares.

(*ELEANOR looks up.*)

**RALPH.** Oh. Oh my. Do I espy upon your ivory cheek the silver tracery of a tear? Have you an unspoken sentiment, Eleanor?

**ELEANOR.** I can truly be heard? I never dreamed I could be heard?

**RALPH.** (*Shocked:*) Good heavens, Eleanor, you're not a tattooed tribeswoman of some dusky people's Banana Republic. You are the admired citizen of the most advanced society in the history of the world! Let freedom ring! Go it, Walter.

**WALTER.** (*Putting on earphones that have been around his neck:*) 5, 4, 3, 2, 1... (*Gives her the go signal.*)

**ELEANOR.** Now?

(*WALTER again signals "go."*)

**ELEANOR.** How should I address him?

**WALTER.** You swingin' dick.

**RALPH.** Walter! No honorifics necessary.

**ELEANOR.** (*Looking up:*) Sir? It's me, Citizen Leftwich.

*(A red light goes on at the desk of a Listener.)*

I mean, I'm nobody in particular, just a dental technician, sidelining in a little discreet hair removal, but I guess if...well, if you're really listening...

*(Another red light goes on.)*

I guess I'd really like to say...

*(RALPH gestures encouragingly.)*

Well, I'm kind of getting the feeling...

*(He gestures again.)*

...that you've fucked us all.

*(An alarm goes off in the distance. A curtain opens, and we see a man on a pedestal, suited as the others, in silhouette.)*

You've butchered our youth for dreams of empire, squandered our children's patrimony, enriched at untold social cost the inconceivably rich, battered our economy, ballooned our deficit, fractured our safety nets, demeaned the values that gave us pride in a national identity, fattened our cynicism...

*(A big red light.)*

...endangered our public education, made quislings of our librarians, dismantled our privacy, manipulated our fears, detained and tortured and bombed and killed men and women and children, appalled the world...

*(The silhouette figure drops his arm as a signal, and a red ring lights up on RALPH's hand.)*

...and all, all, all out of some blind, groping, self-serving, economic, geopolitical, theocratic impulse, untouched by real thought or empathy, at the behest of the entitled and corporate...

*(RALPH signals WALTER, who moves behind her. ELEANOR isn't focused on them. RALPH takes out and prepares a hypodermic.)*

...that can only end in the poisoning, beyond imagination, of our humanity and our poor earth, you stupid, boorish, vulgar, avaricious, heartless, shallow, incomprehensible, smug, smarmy, illiterate prick!!

*(WALTER grabs her from behind, covering her mouth. RALPH speaks admiringly while he administers the injection. She struggles but, by the end of RALPH's speech, goes limp.)*

**RALPH.** Well, by heaven, I'd have to say that's damned good listening! Shapely, passionate, indelible rhetoric, nicely phrased in its indictments. I stamp that "superior" in anyone's blue-book, Eleanor. Downright thrilling and absorbing and a by-God testament to why I got into the business.

*(WALTER releases the body, and it crumples to the floor.)*

**RALPH.** Good heavens, what a nasty fall.

**WALTER.** Kaput.

**RALPH.** No! You don't imagine a woman so vital and incisive with lovely breasts and a social conscience has taken her own life?

**WALTER.** Could be.

*(Scatters pills beside her and drops the bottle.)*

**RALPH.** Despair is a dangerous thing. But she wasn't boring. I enjoyed our repartee.

**WALTER.** Yeah, she had a mouth on her.

**RALPH.** Sometimes an assignment is just far too brief, Walter.

**WALTER.** Too brief. *(Goes for the luggage.)*

**RALPH.** The problem is, of course, it all ends in paperwork. *(A eulogy:)* You are, or rather were, Eleanor Leftwich, living proof that a nation's purpose can only truly be defined by an articulate and loyal opposition.

*(WALTER returns.)*

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**OH, THE HUMANITY**  
by Will Eno

## **Dramatis Personae**

MAN

WOMAN

STRANGER

## **Setting**

Two chairs, stage

## **Stage Properties**

A bottle of water

Lipstick

# OH, THE HUMANITY

by Will Eno

*(MAN and WOMAN are seated in two chairs, facing the audience. The chairs are arranged as if to be the front seat of a car. There are no other major props and nothing other than stage directions and the actors' gestures to indicate the existence of a car or any of its parts [such as a rearview mirror] onstage. WOMAN is putting on lipstick in the rearview mirror. MAN puts the key into the ignition, turns the key. WOMAN makes the sound of an engine cranking but not starting. MAN turns key again, same. MAN gets out, goes around to the front, then the back, of the car.)*

**WOMAN.** *(Checking her lipstick, arranging her hair:)* Is it the battery?

**MAN.** No.

**WOMAN.** What is it? Are we stuck?

**MAN.** It's just chairs.

**WOMAN.** What, hon?

**MAN.** It's just two chairs.

**WOMAN.** *(Laughing, still arranging her hair, touching up her lipstick:)* You're kidding. Just two regular chairs?

**MAN.** Yeah.

**WOMAN.** So, how do we get to the church? What time's the christening?

**MAN.** I thought it was a funeral.

**WOMAN.** Well, whichever. It was definitely a church. Now we're going to be late.

**MAN.** *(Softly, almost to himself:)* I thought it was a funeral.

**WOMAN.** Darling, let's not fight.

**MAN.** I'm not fighting. At all. Not at all.

**WOMAN.** No, of course you're not, I know. *(Brief pause.)* And even if you were: it's over, thank God. Now, what were you saying?

**MAN.** I thought my dad died and we were going to bury him.

**WOMAN.** Well, that may well be. It's a busy time.

**MAN.** What does that mean?

**WOMAN.** It means: well, just think. Of all the things. All the life beyond our immediate surroundings. Inaugurations, assassinations, suicides—maybe all in one amazing event. School dances, bankruptcies, overdoses. Great moments in sports, drunk-driving arrests, celebrity-drownings, grandmothers being wheeled into nursing homes, never to see natural light again. Air shows, boat shows, refugees swarming over borders, quintuplets being born, lovers losing the feeling, floods in unpronounceable countries, a small plane flying into a fog bank somewhere. God. Busy world, busy time. *(She drinks from a bottle of water. Brief pause.)* Linen sales, car trouble, company picnics. Medical breakthroughs, personal setbacks, secret meetings of religious extremists. Millions of things. *(Brief pause.)* Boat shows. I already said that.

*(General pause. MAN is staring off, perhaps in mourning.)*

**MAN.** He was just mowing the lawn.

**WOMAN.** *(She continues on, in the same rhythm as before:)* Deathbed confessions. Small-town parades. Whales washing up on empty beaches, board meetings, home-pregnancy-test kits being thrown through windows, massive lay-offs, people waiting in the rain, animals sleeping in the sun, simple pain in everyday settings, parades. I don't know, anniversaries, coronations. I'm done. Oh, and, my niece. And don't forget your father, clutching his heart, bewildered, scared to death, going to a knee, his glasses sideways on his face.

**MAN.** Yeah. *(Brief pause.)* I'm going to check the trunk. *(He goes around to the back of the car.)*

**WOMAN.** *(Turning and leaning an arm on the backs of the chairs:)* Anything?

**MAN.** Again... *(He gestures toward the chairs.)*

**WOMAN.** Ah, yes. Our predicament. Our pre-dicky-ment. Our sitch-yee-ation.

**MAN.** No funny pronunciations.

**WOMAN.** Agreed. So what do we do?

*(STRANGER enters. Stands quietly to the side. MAN and WOMAN notice him, but are entirely unconcerned with his presence, his arrival. They return to whatever attitudes and postures they maintained prior to his arrival.)*

**MAN.** *(Lost in thought. Sadly:)* My father. His glasses sideways on his face. You think?

**WOMAN.** Maybe.

**MAN.** And your niece?

**WOMAN.** Smiling, crying, reaching at things. Saliva bubbling out of her mouth. Or that's your dad. It's quite a world out there.

**MAN.** And we're here, where exactly?, missing it. Late for it. Stuck with nothing. And I'm really trying. To be— I don't know— actual, or something, truthful somehow, sitting here in my chair, with you, and that other chair. I'm going to miss him. I'm starting to—. This is—. I'm really trying here. Here, in our little—. *(Brief pause.)* The eagle does not try. The mouse does not try. But is the eagle not in fact the mouse?

**WOMAN.** No.

**MAN.** But you get my point.

**WOMAN.** No.

**MAN.** Well, it didn't come out right. But, do you see a larger mystery?

**WOMAN.** Do I see stranger relations— between things, *not* between things, do I sense a wider deeper sense of wonder and mayhem? Do I feel a whole set of simple established facts missing, the rug disintegrating thread-by-thread, gone before it can even be pulled out from underneath us?

**MAN.** Yes.

**WOMAN.** No.

**MAN.** Because I'm starting to wonder.

**WOMAN.** *(To STRANGER:)* Who are you?

**STRANGER.** The magic of theatre. Though I don't possess any secret knowledge. I don't know where we are or where we're going. *(Brief pause.)* That's an uncomfortable thought.

*(MAN and WOMAN return their attentions to each other, again, unconcerned with STRANGER.)*

**MAN.** *(To WOMAN:)* Because I'm starting to wonder. To wonder, and, struggle a little, here. In our little world within the larger world. In which so much is happening, reportedly.

**WOMAN.** *(Checking her watch:)* We should almost be there.

**MAN.** Where?

**WOMAN.** The burial.

**MAN.** I thought somebody got born.

**WOMAN.** I'm sure somebody did. They always do. *(Checking her watch:)* Now, we're late.

**MAN.** I don't know where we're going. I don't know where we were, or still are. And I'm trying. I am, so hard. To know. To make the best of this. To not fall apart, to not just start shouting. To not hate you just because I'm afraid and don't understand. Or fall apart. Or cry. I'm trying, Vanessa.

*(Pause. He is almost crying, though managing to cover it, to control himself. He is stately in his grief and anxiety.)*

But, these are chairs. And I don't know what we're supposed to be doing. And I want my father. I miss my dad. There's some stranger standing here. And these are chairs. And I don't know who I am.

**WOMAN.** There there. *(Brief pause.)* Isn't that awful? How far can you push a person away, with just two words? "There there."

**MAN.** *(Brief pause.)* That's it?

**WOMAN.** People expect people to be so loving in these situations.

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**PASSIVE BELLIGERENCE**  
by **Stephen Belber**

## **Cast of Characters**

DAN

GAIL

JEFF

# PASSIVE BELLIGERENCE

by Stephen Belber

*(A well-dressed young woman, GAIL, sits behind a desk. Exasperated, she draws an "X" through the piece of paper she has just finished looking over, then stands, goes to the door, opens it and speaks.)*

**GAIL.** You can both come in.

*(GAIL returns to her desk. A moment later, two young men, DAN and JEFF, enter the room. Both are carrying folders. Both have made attempts to be well dressed. There is one available chair in front of the desk; they both start to sit, then both make an attempt to be polite—)*

**DAN.** Take the chair—

**JEFF.** No—

**DAN.** Please—

**JEFF.** I don't want it—

**DAN.** Take it—

**JEFF.** No—

**DAN.** Take it—

**JEFF.** No—

**DAN.** Take it—

**JEFF.** Fine—

**DAN.** Good—

**JEFF.** Fine—

**DAN.** Good.

*(They both remain standing.)*

**GAIL.** Gentlemen, there's another chair behind you.

*(Indeed there is. DAN brings the second chair next to the first; he and JEFF sit. Beat. GAIL now stands, holds out her hand and introduces herself.)*

**GAIL.** Hi, Gail.

*(DAN and JEFF stand, all introducing themselves.)*

**DAN.** Hi, Dan.

**GAIL.** Hi, Gail.

**JEFF.** Hi, Jeff.

**GAIL.** Hi, Gail.

*(They all sit; beat.)*

**GAIL.** In the interest of time, I'm going to interview you simultaneously. It's been a long day, I hope you don't mind.

*(Both men murmur their consent.)*

**GAIL.** Good. *(Beat.)* Did you bring résumés?

*(Both men produce résumés from their folders and hand them to GAIL. She quickly glances at both of them, then puts one down and more closely studies the second. After a moment, she speaks to DAN.)*

**GAIL.** It says at the top here that you're a pacifist.

**DAN.** Yes.

**GAIL.** Is that a job description?

**DAN.** I'm not sure I understand what you mean.

**GAIL.** Have you been hired as a pacifist in the past?

**DAN.** I'm a pacifist.

**GAIL.** Are you paid for it?

**DAN.** That's not the point.

**GAIL.** I'm just asking if it's your livelihood.

**DAN.** I'm not going to answer that, Gail.

*(GAIL regards him; beat; GAIL further scans the résumé.)*

**GAIL.** You dodged the draft for the Persian Gulf War?

**DAN.** I did.

**GAIL.** *Was there a draft for the Persian Gulf War?*

**DAN.** There need not be wind in the air for one to be blown away.  
Gail.

**GAIL.** I see. *(She reads on:)* You chained yourself to the gates of the White House?

**DAN.** If that's what it says, then that's what I did.

**GAIL.** That's what it says.

**DAN.** That's what I did.

**GAIL.** Do you feel like you were successful?

**DAN.** In ending the war?

**GAIL.** Yes.

**DAN.** I like to think it made a difference.

**GAIL.** *(Pause.)* What part of your body did you chain?

**DAN.** That's irrelevant.

**GAIL.** I'm just curious.

**DAN.** *(Beat; skeptical:)* My ankle.

*(GAIL carefully writes this information down on a separate piece of paper; she then continues to look at the résumé.)*

**GAIL.** I see you were arrested while protesting NATO's bombing of the Serbs back in '95.

**DAN.** I don't believe that the use of force is ever justified.

**GAIL.** I see.

**DAN.** There are always other ways to effect change.

**GAIL.** Of course.

**DAN.** No, not of course. Change is never just a matter of course. One has to actively, continually fight the system.

**GAIL.** Of course.

*(She again peruses the résumé, then stops.)*

**GAIL.** What was jail like?

**DAN.** *(Again skeptical:)* It was fine.

**GAIL.** Scary?

**DAN.** No.

**GAIL.** Intense?

**DAN.** It was fine.

*(Somewhat disappointed, GAIL jots this down.)*

**GAIL.** And I suppose you don't eat hamburgers?

**DAN.** *(Beat.)* No.

**GAIL.** Good. *(Throwaway:)* Save the cows. *(Again looks at résumé:)* You don't seem to have done much since '95.

**DAN.** Things have been a little slow.

**GAIL.** It says here you conscientiously objected to a Garth Brooks concert last summer.

**DAN.** Yes.

**GAIL.** Any particular reason for that?

**DAN.** If you have to ask, you shouldn't know.

**GAIL.** And what are you doing now?

**DAN.** I'm sitting here.

**GAIL.** Are you currently engaged as a pacifist?

**DAN.** Pacifists don't engage, Gail.

**GAIL.** Oh.

**JEFF.** I doubt the guy does anything. Probably just collects unemployment.

**GAIL.** Excuse me, it's not your turn.

**JEFF.** Sorry.

**GAIL.** *(Beat; to DAN:)* If pacifists don't engage, Dan, what do they do?

**DAN.** *(Anger rising:)* We strive to eliminate all violence from both our professional and personal lives. And when an outside force attempts to impose its will upon us in a potentially violent way, we resist. We disengage. But always, always passively!

**GAIL.** *(Beat.)* I didn't mean to make you mad.

**DAN.** That's what most people say.

**GAIL.** This is a job interview. I just wanted to know a little about you.

**DAN.** I understand.

**GAIL.** It's nothing personal.

**DAN.** I'm sorry. I just believe very strongly in my ideals.

**GAIL.** I appreciate that. And I like your résumé.

**DAN.** Thank you.

**GAIL.** *(Beat.)* So you would definitely describe yourself as passive?

**DAN.** Definitely.

**GAIL.** Meaning you're always on the passive side of things?

**DAN.** Yes.

*(GAIL writes this down. DAN looks at her worrisomely, but she reassures him.)*

**GAIL.** Don't worry, it's good.

*(She writes for several moments as the two men wait. She then looks up at JEFF, smiles, then picks up his résumé and looks down at it. Several moments.)*

**GAIL.** It says here you're a "belligerent fuck."

**JEFF.** Yeah. *(Pause.)* In an ideal world.

**GAIL.** What does that mean, exactly?

**JEFF.** It just means that I have a little bit of a rough side.

**GAIL.** A rough side?

**JEFF.** Yeah. I tend to be... I just tend to be a little rough.

**GAIL.** In general?

**JEFF.** Yeah.

**GAIL.** And that's what you do for a living?

**JEFF.** Well, it's funny. I guess you could say that the jobs I end up getting always seem to have a sort of...a sort of rough quality about them.

**GAIL.** Rough or... *(Re: résumé:)* ...belligerent.

**JEFF.** Yeah. Rough or belligerent. It's confusing.

**GAIL.** I see.

**JEFF.** Call it what you will.

**GAIL.** Right. *(Starts to read, looks up:)* Would you describe yourself as violent?

**JEFF.** I mean, I've certainly done violent things. My old boss used to say I had a violent streak. But it's not like I've ever hit a woman. Or a kid. *(Pause.)* But I guess you could say that I have a lot of aggression.

**GAIL.** Against anybody in particular?

**JEFF.** Not really. I mean, my mother, but... And my dad. But I've never hit either one of them. Except my dad.

**GAIL.** I see.

**JEFF.** Yeah.

**GAIL.** But you would definitely describe yourself as rough.

**JEFF.** Yeah, definitely. Rough.

*(GAIL writes down the word "rough" on her piece of paper, then looks up; beat.)*

**GAIL.** Would you ever consider hitting a woman?

**JEFF.** No way.

**GAIL.** What if she asked you to?

**JEFF.** To be hit?

**GAIL.** Hit, or even just a friendly little slap.

**JEFF.** *(Pause.)* I guess if they asked for a friendly little slap, I'd consider it.

*(GAIL writes this down.)*

**GAIL.** *(To DAN:)* How do you spell slap?

**DAN.** S-L—

**GAIL.** I'm just kidding.

*(She finishes writing, then proceeds to look at Jeff's résumé. A moment later:)*

**GAIL.** I see you've played a lot of football.

**JEFF.** Yeah.

**GAIL.** ...Had work as a psychotic on a soap opera.

**JEFF.** Yeah. Oh, actually that wasn't for the soap opera. That's a mistake.

**GAIL.** You didn't work for a soap opera?

**JEFF.** No, I did, but just not as a psychotic. The psychotic thing was different.

**GAIL.** What was it for?

**JEFF.** It was just psychotic. I was... I was psychotic.

**GAIL.** I see. *(Beat.)* How was that?

**JEFF.** It was good. Good.

**GAIL.** And how was the soap opera?

**JEFF.** Oh that was really good. Very cool.

**GAIL.** Good. *(Scans résumé:)* Oh, I see you were a jail guard!

**JEFF.** Yeah.

**GAIL.** How was that?

**JEFF.** That was great.

**GAIL.** (*Jokingly:*) Did you know Dan here?

**JEFF.** No.

**GAIL.** Good, good. (*Putting résumé down, addressing them both:*) Well as I said, I'm a little pressed for time today. I told myself that I would hire someone by— (*Looking at watch*) —five o'clock, and here it is, five o'clock, I think I've interviewed sixty people already and I still can't seem to find someone I like. But you're both pleasant surprises and both very qualified so I feel like I'm almost there. So, thanks for that.

As you can probably imagine, when I asked myself what the qualities were that I was looking for in a full-time lover, a number of variables presented themselves to me. To begin with, availability. My husband and I have only been married a year but he's already begun avoiding his corporeal responsibility to me. Maybe he's got someone else, power to him if he does, all I know is that he's putting in 65-hour weeks down there at Paine Webber which really doesn't leave him with the time and energy required to properly service his wife. And the fact is, this little car needs more than the occasional tune-up.

Secondly, I need imagination. For all of the indubitably imaginative financial flourishes that Jim whips out as he climbs the corporate ladder, the man has nary whipped out a ball of twine thus far with his wife, to say nothing of ankle chains or the occasional prison warden routine. And so I seek creativity. And let us not forget adventurism, foresight and, of course, foreplay, although I'm not one of these women who get carried away with the conceit. My philosophy since the eighth grade has been: put the sausage in the oven while the coal's still hot, and stoke, for God's sake, stoke, stoke!

And yet, thirdly, I need someone who challenges me, not just sexually—although mostly sexually—but also emotionally and intellectually. Jim's good with numbers but the man couldn't write a poem

to save his life, much less recite *The Wasteland* while mounting me from behind. You can both take note of that.

So I think that essentially what I'm looking for is a well-endowed man—and please don't interpret that in a merely juvenile way, for I mean well-endowed in every sense of the phrase, most notably in terms of integrity. (*To DAN:*) I like a man who can sit here and tell me that he's into passivity; (*To JEFF:*) or a man who's not afraid to admit that he has a violent streak, especially when he has no idea that it's a perfect qualification for the job he's just applied for. So that's nice, but I still have one very important question I'd like to put forth to you gentlemen: Why do you think you should have this job?

**JEFF.** (*Pause.*) Is it well paid?

**GAIL.** Well, I'm glad you ask—because, yes, it's *quite* well paid. I've had to do some budget-shuffling in order to make that possible, but I feel that what I'm asking for deserves fair and just compensation. (*Pause.*) I could probably have gotten someone for free but then I wouldn't get to choose the poems.

**JEFF.** I think I'm good for the job because I make love very well. People have always told me that I make love well and I've never had cause to doubt them. Men and women alike have told me that I'm *simply the best*, and the reason they always give me is that they like the fact that I'm kind of rough. They like my rough side. Now whether you want that is your own personal choice and I would never attempt to force it on you, but the fact is, I have psychotic tendencies and a lot of people like that.

**GAIL.** (*Beat.*) Dan?

**DAN.** I refuse to answer your question.

**GAIL.** Why is that?

**DAN.** I find it offensive. Why should I have to prove myself to you? I happen to need this job so if you want me, hire me, but I refuse to participate in the age-old tradition of employee–employer exploitation. The worker has for too long been enslaved by big business profiteers who sell war in order to further subjugate the masses. So if some sad banker's wife wants to hire me in order to exorcise her

repressed sexual demons, sure, I'll take the job in order to tide me over until the imminent great rebellion, but don't expect me to show up for work each day with a smile on my face and an erection the size of utopia. Like all good capitalists, you'll get what you pay for, an adequately-oiled hard-on and a rear receptacle into which you can pour out all your angst.

**GAIL.** *(Turned off:)* OK, great, thanks for coming in, Dan, and I'll be calling you if I decide to use your services. Jeff, if you can stay for a minute to fill out some forms.

**JEFF.** Does that mean I got it?

*(GAIL nods discreetly to him.)*

**DAN.** I'm not going anywhere.

**GAIL.** Excuse me, yes you are.

**DAN.** These are unfair hiring techniques.

**GAIL.** What are you talking about, I interviewed you both fairly.

**DAN.** But you were predisposed to liking him because he's rough.

**GAIL.** No I wasn't—

**DAN.** You were.

**GAIL.** Listen to me, if you don't leave this instant I'm calling the police.

**DAN.** Call 'em all you want, I love the police—fucking pigs.

**JEFF.** Listen, the lady said for you to leave, so leave.

**DAN.** Shut up, you belligerent fuck.

**JEFF.** *(Pleased:)* Hey.

**GAIL.** Please, Dan, don't make this difficult.

**DAN.** I refuse to move.

**JEFF.** You better move or else I'm gonna be moving you myself.

**GAIL.** *(Sweetly:)* Oh, Jeff...

**JEFF.** You know you want it, baby...

**DAN.** *(To GAIL:)* The man is a psychotic sexist.

**GAIL.** *(In love:)* I know.

**JEFF.** I'm telling you for the last time, punk, get outta here—

*(JEFF starts to grab DAN and yank him up but the moment DAN is touched his body immediately goes limp, sliding to the floor in an exaggerated gesture of passivity.)*

**JEFF.** Oh Jesus, I should kick this guy's little ass—

**GAIL.** *(Stepping in:)* Wait a minute, Jeff!

*(He stops.)*

**GAIL.** I want to see something.

*(Something about DAN's action has intrigued GAIL. She kneels on the floor next to his prone body, as if examining its very inertness. Then, carefully, yet assuredly, she softly kisses his limp lips.)*

**GAIL.** Nice.

*(She kisses him again. DAN doesn't move or respond in any way, which overwhelms GAIL with a feeling of deep strength and power.)*

**GAIL.** Come here, Jeffrey.

*(JEFF steps towards her. As he does, she slaps him across the face. Without thinking, JEFF slaps her back. Immediately, she slaps him back, and then he slaps her once again.)*

*(GAIL now returns to the well of passivity that is DAN's mouth.)*

**JEFF.** Hey—

**GAIL.** Shut up, Jeffrey.

*(JEFF shuts up, as GAIL shoves her tongue down DAN's inert throat. But after a moment, she comes up for air and, almost without having to open her eyes, slaps JEFF once again. He automatically slaps her back.)*

**GAIL.** My ass, Jeff!

*(JEFF immediately obeys, slapping her ass. She then slaps his ass twice as hard. He slaps her ass.)*

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**PHOTOGRAPHS FROM S-21**  
**by Catherine Filloux**

*To Davin K. Hun*

**Cast of Characters**

YOUNG WOMAN: A young Cambodian woman who wears black pajamas and an ID tag

YOUNG MAN: A young Cambodian man with the same pajamas and tag

**Place**

A modern museum

**Time**

August, 1997

**Program Note**

A show entitled “Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979” was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the summer of 1997.

**Acknowledgements**

*Photographs from S-21* was first produced in HB Playwrights Short Play Festival 1998, “The Museum Plays” (William Carden, Artistic Director), at HB Playwrights Theatre in New York City (opening night June 10, 1998), with the following cast and staff:

YOUNG WOMAN..... Dawn Akemi Saito  
YOUNG MAN..... Andrew Pang

Directors..... Eva Saks and William Carden  
Scenic Design..... Andy Warfel  
Lighting Design..... Chris Dallos  
Costume Design..... Amela Baksic  
Sound Design..... Robert Auld  
Stage Manager..... Kimberly I. Kefgen

# PHOTOGRAPHS FROM S-21

by Catherine Filloux

*(A young woman and a young man pose, frozen, in the huge life-size frames of their black and white photos, facing each other. They both wear black pajamas and ID tags. The young woman's ID is a long number, with some Cambodian handwriting and a date. The young man's is simply a tag with the number three. They both stare at the camera the moment after blindfolds were taken from their eyes. There is a light shining at the bottom of the woman's frame.)*

*(The woman lets out a soft wail.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I can't go on.

**YOUNG MAN.** ...What did you say?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I don't know where I am.

**YOUNG MAN.** Me neither...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Who are you? All day long I listen to voices. I understand nothing, but I understand you.

**YOUNG MAN.** I am across from you. On the wall. Look, can you see me?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** No, my eyes are weak. They blindfolded me for a long time. Then suddenly they took off the blindfold and took my photo.

**YOUNG MAN.** Yes, the same with me. But I can see you.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Who are you?

**YOUNG MAN.** A photograph, on the wall, like you.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** It is unbearable. During the day the people pass. They stare into my eyes. At night, there is no air. Like the inside of a cushion.

*(A beat.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Would you like to move from where you are and meet me at the center of the room? There is a bench. Then you could see *me*.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I can't move.

**YOUNG MAN.** Try and I will try.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I don't know who you are.

**YOUNG MAN.** I speak your language.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** They spoke my language.

**YOUNG MAN.** Who?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** The Khmer Rouge.

**YOUNG MAN.** I'm not Khmer Rouge.

*(He breaks out of the photo to show her.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Look, no red scarf. That's why I'm here. I ran away.

*(A beat.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Would you like me to describe you? So that you know I can see you.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** No... I am ashamed.

**YOUNG MAN.** Why?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** My black pajamas.

**YOUNG MAN.** I wear the same.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** The number they pinned on me.

**YOUNG MAN.** I am Number Three.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** My number is much longer.

**YOUNG MAN.** Yes. There is also a date on your identification... It says, "Seventeen, Five, Seventy-eight."

**YOUNG WOMAN.** You must have very good eyesight.

**YOUNG MAN.** Thank you. I have been staring at you for a long time. You are always there, except when the crowds become big

and block you, or the guard turns off the light... I see so many things in you, now... Fear, determination, beauty, surprise... Your eyes are like water in a lake that reflects the passing seasons... I have begun to see you like that...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** The date on my identification is May 17, 1978.

*(He moves towards her.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** There is something strange at the bottom of your picture. It is blurred... I cannot make it out...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** *No.*

**YOUNG MAN.** ...I see it. Something just inside the frame, moving skyward...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** No, there is nothing. *(A beat.)* My husband *cried* when they killed his mother.

**YOUNG MAN.** They killed you if you cried.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I know. In the labor camp. They cracked her skull with a shovel because she was too slow working. We could not even bury her. So now she is *kmauit*—a restless ghost...

*(The YOUNG MAN moves to the bench.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** I always envy the visitors who sit here. Sometimes they sit in groups. Families. They read the books that are here. They write in a book too.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Sometimes the people come like a parade. They walk in and out. Like a stream, staring into my eyes. Their eyes are all different colors. Blue. Green. Yellow. Like lights.

**YOUNG MAN.** It's nice to find someone who speaks the same language.

*(He stretches out on the bench.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Are you sure you don't want to stretch your legs...? You know we aren't the only ones on the wall. There are twenty-two of us. Cambodians. Or at least that's what I think I see. All being posed for photos at "S-21."

**YOUNG WOMAN.** S-21 used to have another name... “Tuol Sleng.”

*(He looks through the guest book on the table and reads.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Someone’s written something here in our language! Listen. “*Do not forget.* Signed, Sovindara Hun. New York City.” *(A beat.)* We’re in America...

*(The woman moves from her photograph very stiffly.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Hey, you did it... ! Please, come sit down. This is comfortable.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** No, let me stand for a moment. I’m dizzy.

**YOUNG MAN.** You want me to coin you?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** No, no, no.

**YOUNG MAN.** I have a coin!

*(He rolls up the cuff of his pajama pants and feels in the lining.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** I sewed this little pocket, when I returned from the labor camp to my grandmother’s. I’d heard she was dying and they gave me permission to go see her. I asked her for a needle and thread and I made a secret pocket. I hid some gold she gave me and some coins. My lighter. A lot of good it did me.

*(He takes out the coin.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Come on, sit down. Here, give me your arm. I’m sorry, I don’t have any oil...

*(She sits and he starts to rub her arm forcefully with the coin.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** How does it feel?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** *(In awe:)* I do not believe it.

**YOUNG MAN.** What do you mean?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I am in a dream.

**YOUNG MAN.** No, you’re in America...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** America?

**YOUNG MAN.** You know, rich people, lots of cars. Willie Nelson.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Oh, yes... Is that why they sent you to S-21? Because they found the gold?

**YOUNG MAN.** No, they never got the gold!

*(He quickly takes a piece of gold out of the secret pocket and shows her, delighted.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Look, it's right here. I tricked them!

*(He puts it back in his pocket.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Here give me your other arm.

*(He touches one of her hands, which is always clenched in a fist. She pulls away.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** You're shaking.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I'm always cold. Shaking with fright.

**YOUNG MAN.** They're not here.

*(She looks at her uniform and ID tag.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** They can't be far away...

*(He puts his arm around her.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Here, let me warm you, darling.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Why do you call me that?

**YOUNG MAN.** I called my sister that... We're dead, so you don't have to be scared... I mean, that is the truth... I wish we had something to eat... What kind of food do you wish for, if you could have anything?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** But we are *here*, Number Three.

**YOUNG MAN.** Don't call me that. I have a name.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Who knows it now?

**YOUNG MAN.** You.

*(He puts his palms together and bows.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** “Vuthy.”

*(She puts her palm and fist together, bowing back.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Tuol Sleng was a school, Vuthy. As a girl I went there to learn to read and write. That’s where they took me on May 17, 1978. I walked in and remembered forming my letters so carefully, reading the words... *They* killed you if you could read and write...

**YOUNG MAN.** I know. *(He points to the frame.)* It’s strange to be here now.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** America.

**YOUNG MAN.** I don’t know if we’re really here.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** We feel real.

*(He resumes his position in the frame.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Maybe it’s because we’re in the photographs. And people pass by. And every time their eyes touch ours we’re back there again.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** They look at me so strange. Like they are asking me a question.

**YOUNG MAN.** Yes.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** I can never turn away.

**YOUNG MAN.** Caught.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Who are they, who look?

**YOUNG MAN.** Ghosts, maybe... Ghosts of the Khmer Rouge.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** But they do not look the same.

**YOUNG MAN.** Why else would they come back again and again to see us? To check on us?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Perhaps, you are right, Vuthy. Perhaps they are the enemy, disguised...

*(The YOUNG MAN moves away.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** (*Urgently:*) Where are you going? Please don't leave me here. You don't know what can happen.

**YOUNG MAN.** I just want to see what is nearby. The people always seem to be passing through on their way to something called "Picasso."

*(He exits and she follows, but stops.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Vuthy, come back... !

*(She stands alone. She reenters her frame and starts to take her position.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** No, no, no, no. (*She leans down.*) No, no, no...

*(The YOUNG MAN hurries back in.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Darling, what's happened? What's wrong?

*(The YOUNG WOMAN stares into space, totally lost.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Darling, tell me what happened. Please tell me what happened to you.

*(She says nothing at all.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** There, there.

*(He takes out the gold.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Why don't you take this piece of gold?

*(She takes it, absently.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Isn't it beautiful? Hold it to the light.

*(She doesn't.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Well, I'll tell you what I saw, next door. More photographs. Of horses, or flowers, of bananas, just bananas. A boy swimming, a girl dancing, cars—we're in America—dirt, there were photos of dirt, yes. Hills. Houses, square houses with windows, airplanes, old people with lots of wrinkles, a little girl with a short dress, a bicycle, a woman with a hat—smoking a cigarette, a city with many lights. Walls and walls of this, I stopped when I heard your screaming, but it went on and on... I want to show you. It's

easy. Just follow me. We'll go past the photographs, find a door... Or perhaps we don't need doors, since we're ghosts...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** How can I be dead and feel like this?

*(The YOUNG MAN has no answer.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** What happened to you?

**YOUNG MAN.** Shocked me with an electric current, starved me, shackled me to the other men, made me sleep in my own...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** Why did they send you to S-21?

**YOUNG MAN.** I ran away from the camp. I ate insects and rats, slept underwater... You want to know my real crime? I stayed alive.

**YOUNG WOMAN.** And after they took off the blindfold?

**YOUNG MAN.** ...My blood joined the blood of others on the floor...

*(A beat.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** ...Vuthy?

**YOUNG MAN.** Yes?

**YOUNG WOMAN.** You saw right.

*(He looks at her, waiting.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** There was something at the bottom of my photo... A child's hand...

**YOUNG MAN.** *(Softly:)* Oh, yes, I looked at it for so long...

**YOUNG WOMAN.** *(Reliving it:)* They took off the blindfold. My daughter reached up to me. *I did not move.* *(Softly.)* Did not move... They shot her first... I did not protect her.

*(She reaches down to take the hand of the imaginary child.)*

**YOUNG WOMAN.** She reached up her hand...

*(He takes her hand.)*

**PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.  
THE PLAY CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE.**

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**TEMPTATION**  
by David Kosh

## **Cast of Characters**

CYBELE (*si-bi-LEE*): Dreamer. Goddess. Temp.

LEON: Office drone with the soul of a raging...something or other.

MR. PUDLIK: Put-upon manager in the middle.

## **Time**

Morning.

## **Setting**

Collating room in the offices of Scan, Collate, Copy, Inc.

## **Author's Note**

This is a satirical play about a soulless workplace. It's important to remember that Cybele, as crazy as she may appear to be, is actually the sane one.

## **Acknowledgments**

*Temptation*, directed by Ann Bowen, premiered Off-Off-Broadway, July 2002, in The Third Annual Midtown International Theatre Festival, where it was chosen 'Best of the Fest' as part of *I Love New York—What's Your Excuse?*, an evening of short plays by the author. The actors were: Winden Rose as Cybele, Josh Cohen as Leon, and Barry Pomerantz as Mr. Pudlik. Katie Plybon was the invaluable stage manager.

# TEMPTATION

by David Kosh

*(A long table sits center stage. Neat stacks of paper form rows on each side of the table. A couple of staplers and maybe a box or bin rest on either end.*

*At rise, LEON is in the middle of counting each stack of paper.)*

**LEON.** Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, oh, I hope it's not a—

*(MR. PUDLIK strides onstage.)*

**MR. PUDLIK.** Rush. You bet it is. Twenty-three pages, twenty-five hundred copies, all collated, stapled and stacked. By five.

**LEON.** Five?

**MR. PUDLIK.** Client picks up at five.

**LEON.** P.M.?

**MR. PUDLIK.** Do you really need me to answer that, Leon?

**LEON.** Well...

**MR. PUDLIK.** In my day, I'd have that job done before lunch. Of course, that's why I've shot up the ladder like a comet. Collator to comet, orbiting gloriously around the company sun. Could be you, too.

**LEON.** Is that five P.M. today?

**MR. PUDLIK.** Yes, Leon. Yes, yes, yes, Leon.

**LEON.** Maybe if I don't take any bathroom breaks.

**MR. PUDLIK.** There are forty-two operating guidelines the company has set down for employees seeking superlativity, and not one of them mentions peeing in your pants.

**LEON.** Number thirty-six.

**MR. PUDLIK.** No.

**LEON.** Seventeen?

**MR. PUDLIK.** Uh-uh.

**LEON.** Are you sure? Because I—

**MR. PUDLIK.** I wrote seventeen. I'm sure!

*(CYBELE enters behind MR. PUDLIK. She's something of a bombshell. Both men try not to stare. She only has eyes for LEON, however. Something about him piques her interest as soon as she sees him.)*

**CYBELE.** Mr. Pudlik...?

*(Handing him a piece of paper:)*

...HR sent me. I'm the temp.

**LEON.** A temp?

**MR. PUDLIK.** Yes, yes. A temp.

**LEON.** I never had a temp before.

**MR. PUDLIK.** Are you going to finish the job by five?

**LEON.** I don't know.

**MR. PUDLIK.** Answers like that make it clear you are superlatively challenged. Hence, the temp, whose name is... *(Reading from the paper:)* ...Kibble.

**CYBELE.** It's Cybele. Soft "C," accent on the last "E." I've heard your name before, Mr. Pudlik, P-U-D-L-I-K, is that the spelling?

**MR. PUDLIK.** Yes, P-U-D-L-I-K, but—

**CYBELE.** *(Remembering:)* It means poodle in Czech.

**MR. PUDLIK.** Huh?

**CYBELE.** In the Czech Republic it means poodle. Names are really fascinating, don't you think? Contra Shakespeare, I believe a name is the essence of identity. Call a rose a dill pickle, and I'm sorry, it's going to start smelling like vinegar.

**MR. PUDLIK.** It's short for Pudlikian. I'm Armenian.

**LEON.** They're very smart.

**CYBELE.** I had a professor once, from Yerevan. Mind like a quasar.

**LEON.** I meant poodles.

**MR. PUDLIK.** Armenians aren't smart, Leon?

**LEON.** Oh, no, no—

**CYBELE.** Leon? That's your name?

*(CYBELE eyes LEON with even more interest.)*

**LEON.** This isn't going to affect my performance review, is it?

**MR. PUDLIK.** Do you really need me to answer that?

**LEON.** Oh, but—

**MR. PUDLIK.** In the meantime, you have a rush job to get to. Explain everything to Kibble.

**CYBELE.** Cybele. Soft "C," accent on the—

**MR. PUDLIK.** Explain it to her!

*(MR. PUDLIK storms offstage.)*

**LEON.** You called him a poodle and I'm the one who got in trouble.

**CYBELE.** There are worse things to be called, and I didn't really say he was a poodle, I just stated a linguistic fact. Maybe you wanted to get in trouble. Leon.

**LEON.** Why would I want to do that?

**CYBELE.** There's reasons for everything. Meaning lurks in every cranny and nook.

**LEON.** I don't like getting in trouble.

**CYBELE.** So what's the gig?

**LEON.** Gig? The job... *(Checking watch:)* ...It's almost ten o'clock. Here, come here.

*(He waves her toward the table.)*

This has to be done by five. The client's coming at five. Collated, stapled and stacked. I'll show you... (*Aligning himself with the first stack:*) ...Watch me.

**CYBELE.** I think I can figure—

**LEON.** You don't know how easy it is to miss a page or get them out of order. And paper cuts. Paper cuts... (*Shivering at the thought.*) ...You have to watch me.

**CYBELE.** (*Smiling:*) Okay.

**LEON.** Do you know how much paper cuts hurt? This is serious. There was a collator once, working with eighty-pound stock. Sliced his pinky to the bone, okay?

**CYBELE.** I'm sorry, Leon.

**LEON.** Right to the bone.

**CYBELE.** I'm sorry.

**LEON.** And on his way home from the hospital he was run over by an SUV. He's dead.

**CYBELE.** That's terrible.

**LEON.** Isn't it? So you take your first page. Then you take the second and slide it under the first. Gently. We don't want any crumples or wrinkles.

**CYBELE.** But crumples and wrinkles make life interesting. If everything in the world was smooth and shiny—

**LEON.** People have to read this, Cybele.

**CYBELE.** You pronounced it perfectly.

**LEON.** Soft "C," accent on the last "E." You take the third page and—

**CYBELE.** Cybele was an ancient nature goddess. Asia Minor. Great Mother and all that. Earth, moon, fertility. Worshipped on mountain tops. Bloody, orgiastic ceremonies. Pretty intense.

**LEON.** You take the third page and—

**CYBELE.** You're pretty intense too, Leon.

**LEON.** You take the third page—

**CYBELE.** Oh, forget it... *(As she zips through the stacks:)* ...First page, second page, third page, fourth, fifth, sixth, etcetera, etcetera, all collated... *(Stapling the sheets:)* ...Stapled... *(Tossing them in the box or bin:)* ...And stacked.

**LEON.** Wow. You're good. You're just a temp, right?

**CYBELE.** I'm not "just" anything, Leon. There's a long list. Human being, woman, right-wing militia leader.

**LEON.** Really?

**CYBELE.** I'm kidding.

**LEON.** About which one?

*(This stops CYBELE. She peers at LEON, sees that he, too, is kidding. She likes it.)*

**CYBELE.** You made a joke.

**LEON.** I know another one.

**CYBELE.** Okay.

**LEON.** Why did the Eskimo see a psychiatrist?

**CYBELE.** Can I give you a note?

**LEON.** Huh?

**CYBELE.** They're Inuits. Use Inuit.

**LEON.** All right. Why did the Inuit see a psychiatrist?

**CYBELE.** I don't know. Why?

**LEON.** His parents were cold.

*(The joke is good enough to make CYBELE chuckle.)*

You don't want my job, do you?

**CYBELE.** No, Leon, I don't.

**LEON.** Okay. Good.

**CYBELE.** I don't want your job.

**LEON.** Great.

**CYBELE.** Not your job.

**LEON.** Great. Let's start, okay?

**CYBELE.** I dreamt about lions this morning.

**LEON.** What?

**CYBELE.** Lions. Leon.

**LEON.** I'm gonna get fired if we don't finish this.

**CYBELE.** What did you dream about?

**LEON.** The Matterhorn. I was on the Matterhorn. With Shirley Temple.

**CYBELE.** Temple on a mountaintop.

**LEON.** Covered in red.

**CYBELE.** Blood.

**LEON.** "Heidi" is my favorite movie.

**CYBELE.** Mine, too.

**LEON.** The Shirley Temple version? With Jean Hersholt as Grandfather?

**CYBELE.** I love Jean Hersholt. He was such a humanitarian.

**LEON.** Colorized or black and white?

**CYBELE.** Black and white. Colorized is a crime against all that's good and decent.

**LEON.** Do you like pizza?

**CYBELE.** Green pepper anchovy.

*(It's clear by LEON's expression that CYBELE's choice of topping is also his. An indefinable something flashes between them, and he leans toward her. She leans toward him, but this breaks the spell and he hurries to the first stack.)*

**LEON.** I'm gonna get fired.

*(LEON goes to work, focusing intently on each stack.)*

**CYBELE.** Okay.

*(CYBELE trudges over, resigned to collating hell. She picks up the first page, peers at the text. Whatever it says astonishes her.)*

Have you read this? Have you read any of this?

**LEON.** Are there typos?

**CYBELE.** I knew it.

**LEON.** The proofreaders here are the worst.

**CYBELE.** There was something about the air this morning. The way it made my skin tingle when I stepped outside.

**LEON.** They drink vodka and pretend it's water.

**CYBELE.** I could smell it, too. And taste it. Today is a *day*.

**LEON.** And they're mean.

**CYBELE.** Leon...

**LEON.** Really mean.

**CYBELE.** Leon...

**LEON.** Drunk and mean.

**CYBELE.** Hey...! Look.

*(She thrusts the first page at him. He reads.)*

**LEON.** "Bert Lahr: A Munchkin Remembers."

*(CYBELE grins at LEON, expecting him to understand the import of the words he's just read. No such luck.)*

**CYBELE.** Bert Lahr...the Lion...

*(Still no response.)*

...Wizard of Oz. Bert Lahr was the Lion. The Lion.

*(CYBELE sidles around the table, stands in front of LEON.)*

There's meaning everywhere, isn't that what I said? Even in a hell hole like this.

**LEON.** Hell hole? I don't think—

**CYBELE.** Close your eyes.

**LEON.** What?

**CYBELE.** Close your eyes!

*(He slams them shut.)*

Now see. See what you're seeing. Feel what you're feeling.

**LEON.** I—I...

**CYBELE.** You can do this, Leon.

**LEON.** I see...I see...

**CYBELE.** Yes? Yes?

**LEON.** I see grass. Lots of grass. It's everywhere. And I see animals—zebras, giraffes. They're running. Running from me.

**CYBELE.** How does that make you feel?

**LEON.** I feel...

*(A tiny growl bubbles up from somewhere in LEON's throat.)*

...I feel...

*(Another growl—a little louder.)*

**CYBELE.** You feel leonine...

*(As LEON's eyes shoot open:)*

...L-E-O-N-I-N-E. Of, relating to, suggestive of, or resembling—

**LEON.** Bert Lahr!

**CYBELE.** No. Try again.

*(LEON concentrates.)*

**LEON.** A lion. A real lion.

**CYBELE.** Yes.

**LEON.** With really big teeth.

**CYBELE.** And sharp claws and a ferocious heart. A wild beast. Cybele was goddess of wild beasts. And lions were her sacred animals. Are you my sacred animal, Leon?

**LEON.** Roar.

**CYBELE.** Are you my wild beast?

**LEON.** *Roar!*

**CYBELE.** Are you my wild, sacred beast?

*(LEON lets out with a truly leonine roar—100% beast. CYBELE grabs a piece of paper from one of the stacks and slices it across her palm.)*

**CYBELE.** *(Holding her palm out to LEON:)* Then drink the blood of Cybele!

**LEON.** A paper cut. Oh my God.

**CYBELE.** Drink it.

**LEON.** Oh my God.

**CYBELE.** Drink it!

**LEON.** Oh my Goddess!

*(He lunges at her palm, licking, slurping, biting.)*

**CYBELE.** I am the Moon and the Earth and you are the Beast. Divinity manifests through our union and the power of the universe explodes in our loins, oh take me, take me, Sacred Beast.

*(Another savage roar from LEON, this one bigger than the first.)*

Take me now!

*(One more roar and LEON pounces on the stacks of paper, shoving them on the floor, clearing a space for him and his goddess. He finishes and whirls around, panting, ready for her.)*

**CYBELE.** Purrrr...

*(As LEON sweeps her off her feet)*

...Oh.

*(He swings her toward the table, and just as he's about to lower her, MR. PUDLIK bursts onstage.)*

**MR. PUDLIK.** What in pluperfect horror is going on here?

*(LEON freezes.)*

What did you do, Leon, what did you do?

*(LEON turns, still holding CYBELE.)*

**LEON.** Uh, uh, uh...

*(Suddenly, CYBELE is very heavy.)*

**MR. PUDLIK.** Why is she in your arms? Put her down.

**CYBELE.** I am the Moon and you are the Beast.

**MR. PUDLIK.** What? What did she say?

**CYBELE.** The universe explodes in our loins.

**MR. PUDLIK.** What? Put the temp down, Leon!

*(LEON dumps CYBELE so quickly she almost falls.)*

**CYBELE.** Leon!

**LEON.** I, I...

**MR. PUDLIK.** I want cause, I want motive, right now.

**CYBELE.** Roar, Beast, roar.

**LEON.** I, I, I...

**MR. PUDLIK.** Leon.

**CYBELE.** *(To MR. PUDLIK:)* Grrrr.

**MR. PUDLIK.** Leon!

*(CYBELE grabs LEON's hand, wields it at PUDLIK as if it were a lion's paw.)*

**CYBELE.** Grrrr!

**MR. PUDLIK.** Stop doing that!

(LEON *looks so torn, so lost. CYBELE urges him on.*)

**CYBELE.** *Leon.*

(*But it's too much for him. He's starting to shrivel like an earthworm on a hot sidewalk.*)

**MR. PUDLIK.** All right, mister, you are in clear violation of Operating Guideline Number Twelve, "Speak When Spoken To," therefore I am terminating your employment effective now. Report to Security for a strip search before you leave the building.

**LEON.** Oh, but, but, but...

**CYBELE.** He didn't do anything.

**MR. PUDLIK.** What?

**CYBELE.** It was me. I snapped. I listen to Rap music. I surf the Internet. It was bound to happen. Leon tried to restrain me. He was brave and valiant, ferociously protecting every piece of innocent paper from the crumples and wrinkles I was so maniacally inflicting upon them.

(*MR. PUDLIK eyes CYBELE as if she were of extraterrestrial origin. He quickly shifts focus to LEON.*)

**MR. PUDLIK.** Your version, Leon.

(*LEON glances at CYBELE. Her eyes bore into him.*)

**LEON.** Um, um, uh...

**MR. PUDLIK.** Did you protect the papers as she said?

(*LEON has to turn away from CYBELE.*)

**LEON.** Yes. Yes, I did.

**MR. PUDLIK.** Ferociously?

**LEON.** Yes. Yes, I did.

**MR. PUDLIK.** Like a lion, Leon?

**LEON.** Yes. Yes, I did.

**MR. PUDLIK.** I knew you had it in you. I knew it. Say it with me, Leon. Operating Guideline Number One...

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