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**SAID AND MEANT**  
**TEN SHORT PLAYS ABOUT**  
**LANGUAGE AND MISUNDERSTANDING**

**by Randy Wyatt**

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## Author's Note

*Said And Meant* had its debut at the FronteraFest Long Fringe in Austin, Texas in January 2003. It had a second mounting at the Fishladder Performance Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan in July of that same year. I directed the second production and was involved with the first, and so I was able to make some observations about how the show works, and picked up a few tricks along the way.

The show—all ten plays—are meant to be done by a cast of nine, though it is possible to do it with six. I actually had a full cast of fourteen in the Grand Rapids production, and all of them were cast in at least three.

In the past, I had said that the sexes don't matter in the plays, but the productions I've seen have proven me wrong. *Marriage* needs to be done traditionally to preserve the farce of the relationship, and though dressing men in drag for *Enabling* has shock value, it tends to detract from the slow guile of the text. *Bob*, however, works very well with a mix of men and women as his lovers.

The order of the show is really up to the producing company, though the order in which I have assembled them is my suggested order. I do think that *A Tutorial* works best towards the end, as so many of the plays rely on wordplay, and the simple actions with simple words work best as a 'capper'.

*The Darryl*: The idea of having Athena "leave in a spout of fire" is to encourage creativity, especially within small budgets. If you have flame to spare, fantastic. The Austin production had her sort of dance offstage with red streamers on batons, and a horrendously fake "circle of flame" (*orange fabric on a hula hoop*) was used in Grand Rapids to hilarious effect. It's supposed to be a very B-movie effect. The cheesier, the better. We simply wrapped sheets as togas around our characters, giving the Darryl a striped one.

*Sweet Sounds*: This play has a deliberately different feel to it, and the temptation to speed or "camp" it up should be avoided. Whereas the other plays of *Said And Meant* have an almost frenetic pace to them, *Sounds* works in its own uni-

verse, one which is unafraid of pauses and silences. I think casting the daughter in her teens serves the play best—the abuse of the mother should be borne as a common burden, stemming not from a random cruelty, but an almost desperate desire to see her family come into “perfection” as she sees it. Almost as if she were to say “We are so close, except for *you* screwing it up.” In contrast to the defeatist father figure, the mother is a hyper-optimist, and I think needs to be played that way.

*Tutorial:* All of the objects can come from a table in front of the Doctor, who can hand them to C when he/she needs them. It makes things a lot easier and smoother.

I’ve written an optional additional line for the Tom Cruise monologue in *Bob I Want You*, considering his very public behavior since I originally wrote the piece. After the line “Take me straight into the Danger Zone.” you may add “Jump up and down on the couch when you think of me.” Then the rest of the piece should flow as-is. I stress this is an optional line to be added or ignored at the director’s discretion.

Good luck with them.

—Randy Wyatt

## **Acknowledgements**

*Said and Meant* was produced by Lost in the Cove Productions at the Fishladder Performance Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan in July 2003. It was directed by the playwright with the following ensemble cast:

Anisa Clark, Rachel Finan, Matthew Flickinger, Josh Fremer, Isauro Gomez, Jennifer Hunter, Dan Kersey, Amy McFadden, Sandy Navis, Mary-Beth Quillin, Amber Smith, Jason Stamp, Dann Sytsma, and Christopher Weaver.

Caroline Cahoon was the stage manager.

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# **WORDS WON'T HELP YOU HERE**

## **Cast of Characters**

RUEBEN

CLERK

JANINE

# WORDS WON'T HELP YOU HERE

*(Inside a gas station. The CLERK is reading a paper, bored. He never looks up from it if he can help it. There is a sign that reads WORDS WON'T HELP YOU HERE by his register. A man enters.)*

**RUEBEN.** *(Referring to the sign:)* That's cute. *(Plunking his selections on the counter:)* There we go.

**CLERK.** Where?

**RUEBEN.** What? Oh. Um. Ha ha ha. I mean, this is all I need.

**CLERK.** On earth?

**RUEBEN.** Let me start over.

**CLERK.** I'm game.

**RUEBEN.** The candy bar, a pack of Gettysburg Ultralights and ten dollars on pump six.

**CLERK.** A cement mixer, a blow torch and 28 buckets of dead fish.

**RUEBEN.** I'm sorry?

**CLERK.** Weren't we being declarative?

**RUEBEN.** Declarative?

**CLERK.** I thought we were declaring random nouns to the universe.

**RUEBEN.** Uh, well, no. I was giving you my—

**CLERK.** No you weren't. You listed a bunch of objects.

**RUEBEN.** Yes, but the implication was that you would ring me up.

**CLERK.** I can't rely on implications. What if I'm wrong?

**RUEBEN.** How could you be—

**CLERK.** I was just now.

**RUEBEN.** All right. Let's try this again.

**CLERK.** I'm game.

**RUEBEN.** I would like this candy bar, a pack of Gettysburg Ultralights and ten dollars on pump six.

**CLERK.** We vend those.

**RUEBEN.** Sorry?

**CLERK.** We vend those. You could buy them here. Just tossing that out as a solution.

**RUEBEN.** I...uh...

**CLERK.** I mean, how do you think we stay open? Takes more than just the music to entice quality personnel like me to work in a dump like this.

*(A silence.)*

**RUEBEN.** You're going to be difficult, aren't you?

**CLERK.** How have I been so far?

*(A silence.)*

**RUEBEN.** I would like to purchase these items that you so fortuitously have for sale. Please.

**CLERK.** Would you now? Would that please you? Would that tickle your girlish fancy?

**RUEBEN.** Now hang on.

**CLERK.** To what?

**RUEBEN.** See here!

*(The CLERK looks up at him. Then he returns to reading. RUEBEN's wife JANINE enters.)*

**JANINE.** Honey, it's hot in that car.

**RUEBEN.** I know.

**JANINE.** What's taking so long?

**RUEBEN.** Honey, go back to the car. I'll be there in a minute.

**JANINE.** Don't forget my smokes.

**RUEBEN.** Yup. Fine.

*(She exits.)*

**RUEBEN.** Look. I don't mean to be a problem.

**CLERK.** You don't?

**RUEBEN.** No, I don't!

**CLERK.** So it's unintentional then.

**RUEBEN.** What's your problem?

**CLERK.** I don't feel like we've gotten to that stage of vulnerability in our relationship yet.

**RUEBEN.** This is incredible.

**CLERK.** Oh?

**RUEBEN.** To be perfectly honest, you are starting to annoy me.

**CLERK.** To be *perfectly* honest?

**RUEBEN.** You have no intention of selling me these things, do you?

**CLERK.** Of course I do. It's my job. How could I not do my job? It would contradict my entire reason for being here.

*(He flips a page. JANINE enters again.)*

**JANINE.** Just curious, honey, when did buying cigarettes gain so many levels of complexity?

**RUEBEN.** This *isn't easy*, Janine!

**JANINE.** You're no further along than when I left you.

**RUEBEN.** YOU try it.

**JANINE.** The kids are getting really fidgety...

**RUEBEN.** I'LL BE THERE IN A MINUTE.

*(She exits.)*

**CLERK.** Charming wife you've got there.

**RUEBEN.** Don't get smart.

**CLERK.** Remain stupid then?

**RUEBEN.** Damn it!

**CLERK.** I freely damn it. Damn it, I do. Damned it is, I deem it damned.

**RUEBEN.** Listen you. I intend to complete this transaction.

**CLERK.** Will I be a part of it?

**RUEBEN.** I can't see how you can avoid it.

**CLERK.** Watch and learn.

**RUEBEN.** I've got money right here.

**CLERK.** Ah, money. This changes everything. I am now vendor, you the vendee. Our whole relationship has transformed. I see you through new eyes. We have a common ground—money. Hallelujah.

*(He flips the page.)*

**RUEBEN.** God damn it!

**CLERK.** Oh, I wasn't good enough to damn it, you had to drag God into it now?

**RUEBEN.** Be quiet!

**CLERK.** I'm hurt. How could you do this to our newfound trust?

**RUEBEN.** Shut up!

**CLERK.** I don't see how I can recover from this staggering emotional blow.

**RUEBEN.** SELL ME THESE ITEMS.

**CLERK.** Right now, in the midst of my despondency? I can barely look at you, much less conduct a transaction.

*(He flips a page. JANINE enters again.)*

**JANINE.** What the *hell* is taking so long?

**RUEBEN.** *(Staring furiously at the CLERK:)* He's not going to win.

**JANINE.** Win what?

**RUEBEN.** Just...just hold on.

**JANINE.** For God's sake.

*(JANINE storms up to the counter, takes some bills out of her purse, snatches the items for sale and slams some money down on the counter. Wordlessly and without looking up, the CLERK rings her up and gives her her change. She takes the change, snatches up the items, and starts to work past her startled husband.)*

**JANINE.** Now come *out* to the car. Honestly.

*(She leaves. RUEBEN is dumbfounded. He slams his fist onto the counter.)*

**RUEBEN.** Hey. *Hey.*

**CLERK.** Welcome to the 24<sup>th</sup> Street Pump N Munch. May I help you?

**RUEBEN.** Aw forget it.

*(He starts to leave.)*

**CLERK.** All righty then. Have a good one.

**RUEBEN.** Yeah, well, I'll try.

**CLERK.** That's all you can do.

**RUEBEN.** Yeah, nothing more you can do.

**CLERK.** That's what they say.

**RUEBEN.** *(Unwilling to let the CLERK get in the last word:)* Yeah. Right. Well, take it easy.

**CLERK.** Hey, I do it every day.

**RUEBEN.** *(Lamely:)* Well...that's good for you.

**CLERK.** What's good for me is good for you.

**RUEBEN.** Yeah, um, right. Well, good bye.

*(He tries to dash out the door before CLERK can say something, but fails.)*

**CLERK.** Come and see us again, sir.

**RUEBEN.** Well, I just may do that.

**CLERK.** Looking forward to it.

**RUEBEN.** So take care.

**CLERK.** Rightbackatcha.

**RUEBEN.** *(Exploding:)* DAMN it!

**JANINE.** *(Entering back into the store, irritated:)* COME to the CAR.

**RUEBEN.** I'M NOT LEAVING WITHOUT THE LAST WORD!

**JANINE.** Have you LOST your MIND? *(Pushing him out the door, to CLERK:)* Thanks a lot!

**CLERK.** Have a great day!

*(RUEBEN screams in frustration offstage. The CLERK, without looking up, marks off a notch on a chalkboard which already has a lot of notches on it. He contentedly reads. Blackout.)*

# **THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF MARRIAGE**

## **Cast of Characters**

SCOTT

FRAN

GEORGE

# THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF MARRIAGE

*(An office somewhere. A conservatively dressed couple comes in for marriage counseling. SCOTT is upbeat, excitable, talks at a good clip. FRAN is quiet, likes to be helpful, a little childlike. GEORGE is the pastor.)*

**GEORGE.** Ah, Scott, Fran, sit down. Now. You're here about marriage counseling, are you not?

**FRAN.** Yes, we—

**SCOTT.** Honey. *(She is quiet.)* Yes, we are.

**GEORGE.** Excellent. If more people like you cared what the church had to say about your decisions, the world would be in much better straits.

**SCOTT.** I wholeheartedly agree.

**GEORGE.** Now then. Tell me how you came to this decision.

**SCOTT.** Well, as you can probably tell, both Fran and myself are getting on in years, and our options for mating were becoming increasingly...oh er...um...well, what would you say honey?

**FRAN.** Limited?

**SCOTT.** *(A rush of words, as if he should have known that:)* Yes, yes, limited, of course—it was right there—tip of my tongue—isn't she wonderful-anyway. Once we realized that it was possible to date, we did so immediately, of course.

**GEORGE.** You didn't stop to think anything through, did you? No "alone time?"

**FRAN.** No, we didn't think it was wise. You see, Scott was just coming off a four year relationship and a broken engagement with someone who never really liked him in the first place...

**SCOTT.** And Fran, whose marriage had been arranged by her Amish parents, was the sole survivor of an oxen stampede which

killed her family, fiancé and everyone she had ever met since she was six, which amounts to roughly what dear? Four? Five people? Anyway.

**GEORGE.** So you thought, with that kind of trauma, you ought to rush in—

**SCOTT.** It's a lot like water skiing, the way I look at it. You just keep going, you don't get a chance to drown. And we're water skiing kind of people, aren't we honey?

**FRAN.** Oh yes. I—

**SCOTT.** Never much good at treading water, eh? Ha ha ha ha ha!

**GEORGE.** Sounds like a healthy start to me. All right then. Continue.

**SCOTT.** Well, you know, we felt it best if we pushed the saying “I love you” as far into the start of the relationship as possible, because gee whillikers, it feels so good to hear it. I mean, that's how you know it's forever.

**FRAN.** I like saying it, too.

**SCOTT.** Oh yes. Saying it and hearing it. My two favorite things. I could say and hear it all day.

**FRAN.** I especially like to say it in front of single people. It's vindicating somehow, don't you think?

**SCOTT.** Oh yes, ha ha ha-very “vindicating”—what a good word—you're so clever honey—anyway. The other good thing about getting “I love you” out of the way early on is that intimacy is almost an immediate imperative, I mean, it's a more efficient use of everyone's time this way, don't you think?

**GEORGE.** I quite agree. I believe in family values in any form, and I have to say, this certainly qualifies.

**SCOTT.** When we announced the marriage, my parents were so elated. “Grandchildren!” they cried, like greedy breadless beggars in the street.

**FRAN.** They were giving up hope, and I couldn't stand to disappoint them.

**GEORGE.** And I certainly don't want that either. Now, when were you expecting to get married?

**SCOTT.** Ah...that, right. Well, um, I dunno honey, are you free this week?

**FRAN.** Completely.

**SCOTT.** That's nice for you, isn't it dear? Ha ha ha ha ha. Well, Friday looks good if I can just move lunch around, say 12:30? I could squeeze in 12:30. We're not looking for anything fancy, preach, just the basic wash for us, no wax. Ha ha ha ha ha.

**FRAN.** We can always plan an elaborate reception later when we have the time and money, lots of it. I think the pageantry is so important.

**GEORGE.** Of course. It will be your only point of reference with other married couples, after all. Well, we're just clipping right along here, aren't we? Now then—

**FRAN.** Excuse me?

**GEORGE.** Yes, Fran?

**SCOTT.** (*Irritated.*) Yes? Yes my sweet, what is it? I love you.

**FRAN.** I love you. I was just thinking, you know, I mean, marriage is supposed to be kind of a big deal, right?

**GEORGE.** Well, I don't know. I mean, yes, you know, of course it is, but it's like any other contractual agreement that you're likely to make through the course of your life, I suppose. So yes, yes, it's a big deal, yes.

**FRAN.** Well, um, I dunno how to say this really, but...

**GEORGE.** (*Panic in his eyes.*) You're not having....you're not having doubts, are you, Fran?

**FRAN.** Well, no, not doubts really. Maybe just a doubt, but not doubts, not lots of them. Just a couple of small ones, I'd say, I guess. Is—is that alright?

**GEORGE.** My dear, it most certainly is not. Great heavens!

**SCOTT.** (*Embarrassed:*) I'm very sorry, George, I had no idea. God, Fran!

**FRAN.** I'm sorry, I really shouldn't have—

**GEORGE.** (*Wiping his forehead with a kerchief, to SCOTT:*) It's not a problem, Scott, just give us a minute. Be ready for when I need you. (*To FRAN:*) Fran? Fran, can you hear me?

**FRAN.** Yes.

**GEORGE.** It's alright, Fran. *I'm not going to hurt you.* Say it back to me.

**FRAN.** You're not going to hurt me.

**GEORGE.** That's good, very good, Fran. Now. You remember why we're here?

**FRAN.** Yes. Marriage counseling.

**GEORGE.** That's right. And it would be pretty silly to have marriage counseling if you weren't going to get married, wouldn't it?

**FRAN.** Yeah, pretty silly.

**GEORGE.** Yes, it would be. Fran, you want a house, and babies, and a husband, don't you?

**FRAN.** Well, yes, I do, but...

**GEORGE.** All right, Scott, now.

**SCOTT.** I love you.

**GEORGE.** Again, Scott.

**SCOTT.** (*Annoyed, but dutiful:*) I love you.

**GEORGE.** You see, Fran? It's all there, all the essential components for marriage. Scott is saying those words to you. Can you say them back?

**FRAN.** I love you.

**GEORGE.** Excellent, Fran. Do it again.

**FRAN.** I love you.

**GEORGE.** Now let's all inhale *(They do)* hold it one two three exhale. *(They do)* All right. *(Sighing out of relief, to SCOTT:)* I think it's passed.

**SCOTT.** It better have. Honestly, Fran! Go ahead, George.

**GEORGE.** That's about it, actually. I made a certificate for you, gold sticker on it and everything.

**SCOTT.** *(Taking it:)* Aw, gee, George, that's really great. Look at this, honey, a gold sticker!

**GEORGE.** We'll set you up for Friday, 12:30 then.

**SCOTT.** *(Rising:)* I appreciate it, George. Thanks a lot.

**GEORGE.** Not a problem. And Scott, if she relapses, you know what to do, right?

**SCOTT.** I love you, I love you, I love you, got it, right. No sweat.

**GEORGE.** Atta boy. You two have a great life together now.

**FRAN.** Thank you, George. Sorry for the trouble.

**GEORGE.** What trouble? No trouble! Bye now.

**SCOTT & FRAN.** Bye

*(They exit. GEORGE sighs. The phone rings, he picks it up.)*

**GEORGE.** Hello? Yes. Yes dear, yes. No, on the table. I put them there this morning. Well, the sooner you sign them, the sooner the divorce goes through. Yes, I'll be home for dinner. Kiss kiss.

*(He hangs up. Blackout.)*



# **BOB I WANT YOU**

## **Cast of Characters**

KLEENEX

OXYGEN

POLICE

SCIENTIST

LATE NIGHT

MOTHER

CRACKER JACK

DRAPERIES

PLAY-DOUGH

TOM CRUISE

COMPUTER

APOCALYPSE

PERSON

BOB

# BOB I WANT YOU

*(BOB sits in a chair in the center of the stage. Three to five actors or actresses cycle in, one immediately after the other, portraying different loves in BOB's life. Minor costume accents denote differing personas—aka a scarf, glasses, an ascot, etc. The actor exits immediately once the monologue is done, flowing almost immediately into the next one. The first line "Bob I want you" is always played straight.)*

**KLEENEX.** Bob, I want you. I want you the way I want a handkerchief. So I can blow my inconvenience all over you and wipe it away, so I am cleaner for the experience, freer. Ah, look I can breathe now. You were JUST what I needed. Thank God you were available! And look— *(Tosses it away)* what could be more convenient?

**OXYGEN.** Bob, I want you. I want you like I want oxygen, flowing through my body, down through my trachea, into my lungs, deep inside me, where I will take what I need from you to survive, and exhale the rest. I cannot live without you, and if you try to escape, I will gasp for your return, panting like a dying fish, I will follow you, breathe you in, or I WILL DIE. I NEED you, Bob. Don't leave me...I will implode...I will *(Wheeze)* my God I... *(Wheeze. She collapses.)*

**POLICE.** Bob, I want you. I want you like I want the police. Be there, provide me safety and preserve the common welfare, but don't FUCKING get in my way, you PIG. \*snort snort\* BACON! FRYING BACON! Don't you DARE call me on any infraction of mine, or I will SPIT ON YOUR CAR, YOU NAZI PIECE OF PORK. I FUCKING HATE YOU! YOU ARE OUT TO GET ME! WHERE ARE YOU WHEN I NEED YOU?! PROTECT ME, GET AWAY FROM ME, LEAVE ME ALONE, handcuff me big boy, GET THE FUCK AWAY! POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

**SCIENTIST.** Bob, I want you. I want you like I want a bug from Venus. I want to investigate you, peer at you through my cage of glass, I want to prod you and see how you react, oh! Feisty little guy. What happens if I leave my gum on your nose? *(She does.)* Amazing. *(She takes a note.)* What happens if I take a sample of your hair for my scrapbook? *(She snips off a lock.)* Amazing. *(She makes an-*

*other note.*) What happens if I don't call you for three weeks? (*She walks off stage.*) Amazing.

**LATE NIGHT.** Bob, I want you. I want you like I want THE TONIGHT SHOW WITH JAAAAAY LENO! (*Uproarious laughter.*) God, you are so entertaining! I love your monologues and your one-liners and the witty way you look at life, just like me, the way you find funny things in newspapers, just like me, the way you make me see that horrible world events aren't really that bad, and how you think that TV personalities shape our history—just like me! Make me laugh, Bob! Back yourself up with a band! And be done in an hour and a half, alright? I want to take just enough of you with me to chat around the water cooler tomorrow. That chin! WAH ha ha!

**MOTHER.** Bob, I want you. I want you like I want children. I want you to grow inside me, gestate within my womb. If you kick, I want to feel it. I want to be forever bonded to you, pretend I know what you're thinking, because even that is mine. I want to parade you at the park, at the mall, down the sidewalk by my jealous neighbors. Hello, Helen! Yes, he's mine, isn't he adorable? Oh, don't worry honey, someday it'll happen to you, just keep believing, Bob, for God's sake, straighten your tie, you're in public. What was that, Helen? Oh, six months, yes. Isn't he cute for six months? I've got pictures...

**CRACKER JACK.** Bob, I want you. I want you like a box of Cracker Jack. Tasty. Ooo. (*She begins to molest BOB, untying his tie, pants, shirt, everything. BOB's not resisting much at all.*) Sticky sweet. Mmmm. Crunchy but not too hard. Oooh. Classic but oh so timeless, such a guilty pleasure. Mmmmyummy. Caramelalicious fantasticality. Uhhmm. Dig deeper, deeper, and you find even more of the same. Salty sticky yummy goodness gracious me oh my. Mmmmm. Deeper, baby, deeper. I'll smear it over my face, let it explode all over my tongue, oh God, and then...then...surprise! (*She walks away.*)

**DRAPERIES.** Bob, I want you. I want you the way I want THESE DRAPES. (*Thrown from offstage.*) My God, wouldn't you just look FABULOUS in my living room? When my parents come over, they will be so impressed, and all through dinner, they will be like

“Honey, wherever did you find him? He even matches the sofa. He will look so good in our family album, at our cookouts, at our gratuitous business functions, in our family’s cemetery plot. He’s perfect. Just don’t change a thing, because he won’t go so well with anything else. Stay this way and you two will be just fine.”

**PLAY-DOUGH.** Bob, I want you. I want you the way I want play-dough! Mushy gushy fun! I’ll move you around, mold you just the way I want you, there. God, you’re so soft! Try this. And this. How therapeutic it is to be with you, Bob, move your arm! It’s so comfortable to be with you, oh honey, not that CD, it’s not the eighties anymore, and you need a bigger apartment. Did you MEAN to wear that today, or was there a sale at the *mission*? Don’t use that expression, for God’s sake, it drives me crazy. Are you...are you resisting? What good are you if you stop being flexible?

**TOM CRUISE.** Bob, I want you. I want you the way I want TOM CRUISE. Melt me with that boyish grin. Take your pants off and dance across the floor. Hang in through the ceiling but don’t touch anything. Run from the bad guys and then BLOW THOSE FUCKERS AWAY. Save me in the nick of time, you floppy haired ragamuffin. Take me straight into the Danger Zone. Then whisper to me how I complete you. Just like him. Don’t screw it up. I’m WAITING.

**COMPUTER.** Bob, I want you. I want you the way I want a Pentium 8 computer system with 132 gigabytes of RAM and compatible software. We can interface smoothly, quickly and efficiently, between appointments. I can time your appointed maintenance to perfectly coincide with mine. We can chat, send mail, scan each other and print out our feelings at sixteen pages a minute. Just don’t break down on me. I’d hate to have to upgrade before its time.

**APOCALYPSE.** Bob, I want you. I want you the way I want the end of the world. (*She pulls out a huge protest sign that reads BOB 3:16.*) PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, LISTEN! BOB IS HERE AND THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO! DESPAIR, DESPAIR! You are my emergency, my calling, my soapbox, my cause. I can fix you, I cannot fix you. O! The pain! The anguish you cause! I believe in you, everything about you, everything I made up last week that will give me

that next dramatic pause, that moment. You are my moment, Bob. My everlasting tragedy two weeks from now.

*(BOB is slightly paranoid at this point. A completely different actor/actress [the stage manager? approaches BOB, and delivers her line very seriously.]*

**PERSON.** Bob, I want you.

*(A moment.)*

**BOB.** How?

# **DEPART MENTAL**

## **Cast of Characters**

COUNTERWOMAN

FEMALE CUSTOMER

WOMAN

MANAGER

DEAR

# DEPART MENTAL

*(A department store make-up counter. The key to this piece is the inverting of text and subtext, using vocal inflection that would match a more typical retail encounter. [For instance, the first line is delivered as if the COUNTER WOMAN has said "Hello! How can I help you today?" ])*

**COUNTER WOMAN.** Oh you. Do I have to help you?

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** Absolutely. I need to buy some sort of industrial-strength concealer to turn my natural imperfections into a glaring garish testament to my lack of self-esteem.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** I'm not terribly surprised.

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** And could you half-heartedly show me overpriced products made from the sperm of endangered animals while kowtowing to me in an obviously fake but servile manner? You see, it makes me feel better about myself.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** Or so the researchers say!

*(Both giggle together.)*

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** *(Before the giggling is completely over:)* You're taking too long.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** It's not like I give a damn.

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** I'm afraid it's too late. I've been inconvenienced, and now must trumpet the fact to anyone who will listen.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** In the short time we've known each other, I already know I don't get paid enough to deal with you. Please God please, ask me to get the manager.

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** In an attempt to intimidate you, I will now request to see the manager!

**COUNTER WOMAN.** Thank God! I'll just see if he's not busy lording his meaningless title over other wretched peons in another part of the store. Just one moment!

*(COUNTER WOMAN disappears.)*

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** *(A little too loudly, as if to other customers:)* Have I made it quite clear to everyone that I have been inconvenienced?!

*(A WOMAN walks by.)*

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** *(Continuing:)* I shall complain loudly to you, random passerby, in an attempt to form a bond with another person, which I'm already anticipating will fail.

**WOMAN.** You are completely correct. I'm embarrassed to even be addressed by you.

*(The WOMAN walks off as the MANAGER and COUNTER WOMAN appear.)*

**MANAGER.** Hello madam. How may I placate you today?

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** This employee has failed to match up to my astronomical expectations of someone who earns minimum wage.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** I couldn't care less!

**MANAGER.** *(To COUNTER WOMAN:)* Here I will make some sort of double-edged statement that makes the customer think I am a friend of hers by maligning your work ethic and making you seem like an idiot.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** Here I will stammer some pathetic apology purely as a matter of habit, since I know your vague yet impotent threats of termination won't ever actually emancipate me from this mindsucking hole of a job which treats me like cattle.

**MANAGER.** *(To FEMALE CUSTOMER:)* Now I will turn my attention to you. God, you could use some concealer. No wonder you are at the make-up counter. It's unpleasant to even look at you.

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** Well I would tell you how sorry I am to be making such a fuss, but we both know that's a big lie. I adore the attention and will probably do something to gain more if you do not cater to my outrageous whims to my satisfaction.

**MANAGER.** I know your type. You see, I've been through a badly-taught "training school" for wanna-be managers. In it, we learned

almost nothing that you couldn't learn watching OPRAH faithfully, but one of the things we did learn was how to unfairly judge and label customers under classifications far too ambiguous to have any real meaning. I have done so to you at the first moment I met you, so any attempt to communicate with me will be met with pre-rehearsed responses filled with rhetoric that makes you think I care about what you say.

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** Though I am both stupid and vain enough to fall for your little song-and-dance, I feel that I could shame you further for my own secret amusement. I shall call upon my husband, who I can cast in the role of knight in shining armor only in instances such as these. Oh Dear?

*(DEAR appears.)*

**DEAR.** Yes, trophy wife?

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** Dear, I am having difficulty in fully shaming these lowly department store employees. Perhaps you could offer some assistance?

**DEAR.** What seems to be the trouble, my rash and unfortunate marital decision?

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** I am trying to weasel an unfair and undeserved discount from these hapless people in a pathetic attempt to conquer the powerlessness that being married to you affords me.

**DEAR.** I'll do my best to appear both interested and intimidating! *(Adopts serious tone of voice:)* I now will adopt a serious tone of voice—one that I mistakenly think gives me an extra boost of credibility and hopefully hides the fact that I find transvestites strangely enticing. Hopefully, this tone of voice will force you to acquiesce to whatever it was my wife asked for, the details of which I don't even remember even though they were discussed seconds ago.

**MANAGER.** Ah, a male! A tactical blunder on the part of the customer. We can find what my uninspiring and ill-informed instructors called "a common language."

**DEAR.** Better make it fast, before I do something like adopt some sort of pseudo-macho posturing, and this becomes a battle of tes-

tosterone, which I am not completely sure I'll win, since I am wearing white frilly undergarments even as we speak.

**MANAGER.** *(With emphasis:)* Sports reference!

**DEAR.** Sports reference?

**MANAGER.** Sports reference!

**MANAGER & DEAR.** *(In unison:)* Sports reference, sports reference, sports reference!!

*(They HIGH-FIVE, laughing.)*

**DEAR.** Wow. I feel absurdly bonded with you, now that we've exchanged meaningless statistics of a game neither one of us had a prayer of ever actually playing.

**MANAGER.** Sure beats trying to have a real conversation with me, doesn't it?

**DEAR.** It sure does!

*(They laugh heartily.)*

**DEAR.** *(Continuing:)* So can we have our underserved discount?

**MANAGER.** Of course not. I'm a slave to my superiors. However, I will give you this tiny bag of worthless merchandise that we give out to all customers, but I'll somehow make it seem like I am doing you a real favor.

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** I am oddly satisfied!

**DEAR.** As am I. Well, back to the lingerie section I go! Don't bother me anymore, honey!

*(DEAR exits.)*

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** I can't think of a reason why I would! Besides, a moment alone with the manager is a refreshing change of pace. I feel a flush of sexual desire for the first time in years.

**MANAGER.** My, you're creepy.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** And how!

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** Here's a feeble attempt at flirtation that underscores what a social disaster I am!

**MANAGER.** Revolting. I will now excuse myself and go back to making others miserable for my own sick pleasures.

*(MANAGER exits.)*

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** Feeling an odd mix of manipulative power and sexual frustration, I will slink off in search of my disappointment of a husband, who is no doubt getting in trouble with dressing room security for unspeakably embarrassing reasons.

**COUNTER WOMAN.** Sweet Heaven above, please make sure I never wind up like her!

*(THEY giggle together, like the first time.)*

**FEMALE CUSTOMER.** Leaving noises!

**COUNTER WOMAN.** Leaving noises.

*(COUNTER WOMAN exits. Lights down.)*



# **THE ENABLING CLUB**

## **Cast of Characters**

ALISHA

CLARA

BERNICE

WAITPERSON 1 & 2

POLICEMAN

# THE ENABLING CLUB

*(Three women chat over the remnants of a meal in a restaurant.)*

**ALISHA.** And that is why I can no longer watch that show ever again. I just won't do it.

**CLARA.** Well, of course I agree with you.

**BERNICE.** Of course we do, dear.

**ALISHA.** I don't see how anyone can in good conscience. All that violence and mayhem...and sex. It's intolerable. I won't stand for it anymore. I just won't.

**BERNICE.** I really don't see why you should. TV is such a waste of time anyway.

**CLARA.** So true, so true. How's that peach iced tea of yours, Bernice?

**BERNICE.** Oh, just fine, just fine.

**ALISHA.** Mine too!

**CLARA.** Mine too!

*(They laugh merrily.)*

**ALISHA.** Well, anyway, Clara, I've rattled on about myself for long enough. Tell us about you. Tell us about Clara. How is Clara doing today?

**CLARA.** *(A little nervous:)* Oh my. My heavens. My my. Well, I'd have to say Clara, I mean, I'm, well, since you asked, I'd have to say—me—I'm...

*(She hesitates, looks at the other two who are looking at her with expectation.)*

**CLARA.** *(Continuing:)* I'm doing fine, well, of course, ha ha ha! I'm doing just fine.

*(They laugh merrily. A WAITPERSON comes out to clear off an adjoining table.)*

**ALISHA.** Oh that's marvelous!

**BERNICE.** It certainly is! For a minute I thought you were going to say something else.

**CLARA.** (*Quickly:*) Oh no, no no no no no, oh no Bernice, no. I was just thinking of telling a little story, but I don't want to—

**ALISHA.** Well, go on, tell us! That's what we're here for!

**CLARA.** Well. Yesterday Danny came home from school, and after we chained him up, you know, in his cubbyhole under the stairs, just like usual you know, nothing different, I mean, a perfectly normal day, he starts complaining that the manacles are too tight.

**ALISHA.** (*Shaking her head:*) Oh dear.

*(The WAITPERSON is now listening, but still clearing the table, not looking at the ladies.)*

**CLARA.** And I told him "Listen here, young man, now I know you are growing up, but you are still under my roof, and as long as you remain under my roof, you will have to abide by the rules that your father and I lay out for you."

**BERNICE.** Well, good for you, Clara.

**CLARA.** He tried to tell me something about the wounds on his wrists scabbing over and I just went back upstairs, I mean, I didn't know what else to say.

**ALISHA.** You did the right thing, Clara.

**BERNICE.** Yes, you did. You handled it just fine.

**CLARA.** I just don't like scolding him though. You know how I am with conflict.

**BERNICE.** Listen to me, Clara. You have to lay down the law at that age. I mean, how old is Danny now? Sixteen, seventeen?

**CLARA.** Eight.

**BERNICE.** It still applies. You have to be the one who says "no" sometimes. You're the parent, not his buddy.

**CLARA.** Oh Bernice. You're so good for me. Whenever I've doubted some little decision I've made, and it starts to bother me, I just come talk to you, and somehow everything's OK again. How do you do it?

**BERNICE.** Practice, honey. Lots and lots of practice.

*(They laugh merrily. The WAITPERSON leaves, horrified.)*

**CLARA.** Well, anyway, that was my day yesterday. Bernice? Your turn.

**BERNICE.** Oh, nothing's really going on in my life. Nothing going on but the rent, as they say.

*(They laugh merrily.)*

**ALISHA.** Oh, Bernice, there must be something.

**BERNICE.** Well...I wasn't going to mention it, but then you mentioned that bit about your kid, and so—

*(They scoot their chairs a little closer to listen. Another WAITPERSON comes in with a rag, followed by the first. The first whispers in the ear of the second and indicates the ladies' table. They both start wiping down the empty table, listening to the conversation.)*

**BERNICE.** *(Continuing:)* Yesterday, I'm doing a demonstration on Merry Woman Cookware for the neighborhood club, you know, and it's in my living room of course. And I've worked so hard to make sure it's a success, something that they'll all be talking about for weeks, right? I've made napkin rings and place settings, and those delicious chocolate pear squares from the recipe you gave me, Alisha, they were scrumptious, thank you.

*(ALISHA nods her head at her, smiling.)*

**BERNICE.** *(Continuing:)* Well, I'm just about to get into the whole presentation, everybody's sitting down and conversations are wrapping up and the attention is almost completely on me, so I clear my throat to start into my speech that I've practiced for three weeks now—and suddenly, I hear this scratching noise.

**CLARA.** Oh my!

**BERNICE.** I'm thinking "What on earth?" and I can't ignore it because everyone else in the room has definitely heard it too. It seems to be coming from the door to the basement, and of course, that's when I know—it's Carly.

**ALISHA.** Oh no.

**BERNICE.** I open the door, and say "Yes, pumpkin?" and she says "Mommy, I don't want to freebase anymore."

*(The other women groan.)*

**BERNICE.** *(Continuing:)* That's right.

**ALISHA.** After she begged and begged you for all that expensive equipment.

**BERNICE.** That's right.

**CLARA.** And after you went and just about risked your life getting her that instructor from downtown.

**BERNICE.** And after the three of us talked it out for weeks, I know, I know. So I tell her "I'm sorry, Carly, but you are going to have to stay in there and do at least ten more minutes of freebasing" and she starts crying. She says it makes her "feel funny."

**CLARA.** Oh no. In front of all those people?

**ALISHA.** I hope you didn't stand for that, Bernice.

**BERNICE.** You would've been so proud of me. I looked her in the eyes and said firmly "I'm sorry, but you made your choice, and we went through a lot of trouble to make sure you were happy with it. Now you get back in there and freebase and leave Mommy's get-together alone." And what do you know? She did.

**ALISHA.** Good for you, Bernice! You're helping her to establish habits she'll hang onto her whole life long.

**CLARA.** Wow. I don't know if I could've had the presence of mind to say all that!

**BERNICE.** Well, I could never have done it without hearing the two of you in my mind cheering me on. I did the right thing, right?

**CLARA.** Bernice! Of COURSE you did the right thing!

**ALISHA.** You can't let them see any doubt, Bernice, especially in a case like that, in front of all your friends. They can smell doubt a mile away.

**BERNICE.** Yeah, you're right, of course you guys are right. I'm so glad I have you guys supporting me!

**ALISHA.** We gotta stay strong, sister!

*(They laugh merrily. The SECOND WAITSTAFF person is also horrified, and pulls out a cellular as he and the first one walk out.)*

**ALISHA.** *(Continuing:)* I know what you mean about hearing you girls in my head during crisis times. Right before I came over here, I had a fight with Brad.

*(The other women make sympathetic noises.)*

**ALISHA.** *(Continuing:)* He said I listen to you guys too much. I said "Brad, you don't know what its like, having to make decisions on your own every day. I mean, you have me. Who do I have?"

**BERNICE.** That's right.

**ALISHA.** It's like I told him. Sometimes you just need friends to tell you whether or not what you're doing is right. You need a sounding board, and that's what you two are for me.

**CLARA.** And you two do that for me.

**BERNICE.** And for me.

**ALISHA.** Well, I guess we're all good for each other then. He started to say something else which sounded negative, and I said "Look, Brad, see? That's why I don't talk to you about anything. Negativity. I never get anything negative from Bernice or Clara. Never. And I don't have to listen to it from you either."

**CLARA.** You really said all that to him?

**ALISHA.** Yes. Then I bashed his head in with the breadmaker, and dragged his lifeless body into the attic.

*(They laugh merrily.)*

**BERNICE.** I was wondering why your hair was a little out of place this morning! It's not like you!

**ALISHA.** Yes, I don't normally get a workout like that so early in the morning! But girls—

*(They stop and listen.)*

**ALISHA.** *(Continuing:)* Do you think it was the right thing to do?

**CLARA.** Oh, without a doubt.

**BERNICE.** It gave us a good laugh, anyway!

*(They laugh merrily. The WAITSTAFF come back. They have a POLICEMAN with them. They confer.)*

**ALISHA.** *(Grasping the hands of the other women:)* And if it made my dearest truth-telling friends laugh, it must be the right thing to do!

**CLARA.** Why, it must be!

**BERNICE.** Yes. Yes, it must be.

*(The POLICEMAN starts over to their table as the LADIES laugh merrily. Lights down.)*

# **THE DARRYL**

## **Cast of Characters**

CHORUS

DARRYL

PAMELA

SHAWN

ATHENA

# THE DARRYL

*(NOTE: Crashes of thunder could be replaced by CHORUS' crashing of cymbals.)*

*(Scene: Outside the house of DARRYL.)*

**CHORUS.** Woe, woe, woe to the house of Darryl, woe!  
Or rather, woe to those who pass it by. For Darryl's  
speech is more feared than siren's song,  
more loathed than gorgon's face, more annoying  
than a busy signal that will not stop.  
Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.  
Maddening, isn't it? Such are the words of Darryl,  
they kill laughter, maul joy, crush conversation.  
His stories bland, his narrative long, his voice of one tone only.  
Friendless, tactless, endless, pointless, he speaks anon and anon.  
He speaks and mortals cry.  
But lo! He appears. Try and appear interested.  
Waka waka waka.

**DARRYL.** I hear the voice of the gods, like the rushing breeze of  
spring.  
Their secrets are mine, I understand.  
I accept my fate, to mouthpiece the gods  
and share the elixirs of knowledge with all I encounter.  
Look! The skies clouden darkly. My lessers approach.

*(PAMELA and SHAWN enter.)*

**PAMELA.** By the Gods. It's Darryl.

**SHAWN.** Hasten your walking afore he marks us.

**DARRYL.** Pamela! Shawn!

**SHAWN.** By the river Styx, it is too late.

**DARRYL.** Friends! Where do you travel thus?

**PAMELA.** Tell an untruth, noble Shawn. I like his visage not, and  
his diatribes do grow tiresome upon but their initial utterance.

**SHAWN.** Verily, his very appearance makes my faith in goodness falter. (*To DARRYL:*) Darryl, I hope this day finds you well.

**DARRYL.** It does indeed, good Shawn. My question, however, remains unanswered.

**SHAWN.** Verily, we intend to visit the place of the washing of garments.

**DARRYL.** You intend to wash your garments?

**PAMELA.** Indeed. They are filthy and require the sweet waters of renewal.

**DARRYL.** I understand how time does ravage the once newness of clothing. Once I was cavorting in a contest of endurance and agility—a contest which, as you can truly see, I am only too well suited—

**PAMELA.** (*To SHAWN:*) Dear Gods! Spare us from the blistering o'er-inflated winds of his self-regard!

**SHAWN.** Verily, our lot is cast. His story is begun, not even the wolves of hell can halt it now.

**DARRYL.** And in the moment of reckoning, I rose to the occasion—

**SHAWN.** Most excellent, Darryl. Please release us from your company now, for our clothes require our attentions.

**DARRYL.** My narrative remains unfinished.

**PAMELA.** (*Aside:*) This recounting perhaps.

**SHAWN.** We must part company, Darryl. Our tasks are pressing.

**DARRYL.** I have the solution, as if that were ever doubted. You may use my machine for your filth-purging needs. In truth, it kicks the ass of those machines that reside downtown.

**PAMELA.** Should all the bilious rivers of the underworld overflow and befoul us, still shall I not allow this o'erweening blowhard one moment of my company.

**SHAWN.** We thank thee, gentle Darryl, but we must decline. Our paths are pre-ordained.

**DARRYL.** How can you think of employing the washing machines downtown when mine are obviously so much more superior? Forgive me for saying, publican, but your logic has flaws. Allow my thinking to supercede yours. Now, to return to my discourse...

**PAMELA.** We cannot leave, we cannot stay. Wretched are we!

**SHAWN.** Is there no benevolent God in all the heavens who will deliver us?

*(A crash of thunder.)*

**CHORUS.** O! O! O! Athena comes, comes Athena, does she. In her robes of wisdom, her owl attendeth she, Athena, Athena, ha ha wheeeeeee.

**ATHENA.** *(Entering:)* I am Athena. Who calls?

*(PAMELA and SHAWN fall on the ground.)*

**SHAWN.** O! Athena!

**PAMELA.** Deliver us from this dry and fruitless discourse!

**ATHENA.** Suppliants, I hear thy wailing. I shall favor you. With a mighty cry of war, I shall strike down thy enemy and peace shall once again—

**DARRYL.** Athena. You're looking well.

**ATHENA.** *(Shocked:)* Darryl!

**PAMELA.** Why does she look upon his face with post-coital familiarity?

**DARRYL.** It hath been...what? Two, three revolutions of the planets since we did last cross paths?

**ATHENA.** I...uh, Darryl. Time has been cruel to you, er, us.

**DARRYL.** Why do you not answer my prayers as speedily as these?

**ATHENA.** My time has been short, Darryl, and I have, uh, had much on my mind...

**CHORUS.** She lies, she lies, she lies to be kind.

**DARRYL.** It hath been too long, my sweet, since you split my head with a hammer, allowing several children to spring forth from my blood. Remember?

**ATHENA.** *(Still lying:)* Fondly. That was a night for poets of ages to recount. I regret, however, that I must depart, and quickly. I have many other suppliants who require my—

**DARRYL.** When I saw you last, I was telling you about how you could make your time work for thee more efficiently...

**ATHENA.** NO! By the Gods, not another word! I must depart now, now, by Zeus, NOW.

*(She leaves in a spout of fire.)*

**DARRYL.** Gone again. How very like a woman! This reminds me, once I was near the Caspian waters, when a blonde nymphet walked up to me and thusly said...

**SHAWN.** *(Falling to his knees:)* O! Pity poor Shawn, whose tasks shall remain forever undone, fettered to Darryl's steely conversational grip!

**PAMELA.** *(Falling to her knees:)* O! Pity poor Pamela, whose ears bleed at the eternal sound of Darryl's damned voice!

**CHORUS.** *(Falling to his/her/their knees:)* O! Pity the Chorus, whose involvement in this play is peripheral at best.

**SHAWN, PAMELA & CHORUS.** O! O! O!

*(They lament.)*

**DARRYL.** How they worship my speeches! I grace them with my knowledge and they prostrate themselves to show their meager thanks. This only serves to cement in my mind what I have always known—I am right in all things under Apollo's fires. Brilliant am I, and correct, so correct.

**SHAWN.** We shall never know happiness again! Our own thoughts lost in the mire of Darryl's untested opinions.

**PAMELA.** Freedom, discourse, independent thought! See how they flee from us, like children from a stinking swamp! O woe, woe, woe!

**SHAWN.** Cursed are we, and lost. O!

*(He rends his clothing, sobbing.)*

**PAMELA.** There is no redemption. There is only Darryl. O!

*(She rends her clothing, sobbing.)*

**CHORUS.** By Neptune's sea, an idea has struck. Shawn, Pamela, play along. *(Loudly:)* Superior Darryl. Why you do not hold discourse with the gods themselves is truly a mystery, a sphinx's riddle. Tiddly, tiddly, tiddly-pom.

**DARRYL.** *(Looking perplexed:)* It is indeed. One would think that a scintillating intellect such as mine would only be of use to Olympus. Verily, I do not see how they have come so far without me.

**CHORUS.** There is but one gate to Olympus for mortals. The forbidding gates of the underworld.

**DARRYL.** The underworld?

**CHORUS.** *(Quickly:)* SURELY you know this, O Darryl of the dizzying mind.

**DARRYL.** SURELY I do. Verily, surely, yes indeedy.

**SHAWN.** *(Catching on, offering DARRYL a flask:)* If you but drink this hemlock, your speedy arrival to the gods will be assured.

**PAMELA.** *(To SHAWN:)* Does it not seem a contrivance, gentle Shawn, for you to have such a handy object with you at such a time of our needing it?

**SHAWN.** Silence, strumpet. I wrote not this play.

**DARRYL.** Yes. YES! I shall partake of this commoner's flask, my key to the gates of the underworld! Here I come, gods! I arrive to enlighten you!

*(He drinks. He dies horribly.)*

**PAMELA.** Is it done?

**SHAWN.** Verily, we are set free! Chorus, you RULE!

*(They high five. There is a crash of thunder.)*

**SHAWN.** What, ho?

**PAMELA.** I shudder to guess.

*(DARRYL awakens.)*

**DARRYL.** The gods send with me a message. “Nice try.”

**SHAWN & PAMELA.** O!

*(They fall on the floor, wailing. DARRYL strikes a pose.)*

**CHORUS.** Thus did Darryl live on and on, surpassing the patience of all who knew him.

The misery of those who live near the house of Darryl is greater than mortal heart can bear.

Thus the torments of hell are introduced to the living through the hellish rakish tongue of the Darryl.

Woe, woe, woe, woe, woe.

*(Lights down.)*

**EDNA DISCOVERS THAT ONE THING  
ABOUT HERSELF THAT  
MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE**

## **Cast of Characters**

WOMAN

MAN

# EDNA DISCOVERS THAT ONE THING ABOUT HERSELF THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

*(A MAN and a WOMAN eat breakfast.)*

**WOMAN.** I'm about ready for this to be over.

**MAN.** What? Breakfast?

**WOMAN.** No. This...uh, this...uh...

**MAN.** Relationship?

**WOMAN.** Exactly. This relationship. I'm pretty much done with it. I mean, why are we doing this?

**MAN.** A marriage needs a relationship. Somebody said so.

**WOMAN.** Who?

**MAN.** A bachelor, I bet.

**WOMAN.** A marriage, indeed. Why on earth did we ever get married?

**MAN.** It was your idea.

**WOMAN.** It was not. You proposed.

**MAN.** I was bored.

**WOMAN.** You're always bored.

**MAN.** Yes, I am. It conserves energy.

**WOMAN.** Maybe I'm bored too.

**MAN.** So take off. Pass the butter.

**WOMAN.** *(Passing the butter:)* Are you throwing me out of the house?

**MAN.** All I'm saying is...

**WOMAN.** Are you throwing me out of the house?!

**MAN.** (*Wearily, deadpan:*) Yes, I am. You and all your belongings. Pack. You have five minutes.

**WOMAN.** I can't believe you're saying this to me. I can't believe it's come to this. I can't believe it. It's unbelievable.

**MAN.** I only keep you around because the vacuum cleaner looks so idle at the breakfast table.

**WOMAN.** I...I am so...I don't know what I'm...going to do...

**MAN.** I do. You'll call Carolyn.

**WOMAN.** I am so sick of you telling me what I am going to do.

*(MAN hands her the cordless, which she dials without skipping a beat.)*

**WOMAN.** (*Continuing:*) You can't possibly know what I am going to do next. I am not your puppet. I am not predictable. One of these days I will...Carolyn? It's me. Well, he threw me out of the house. Yes, just now.

**MAN.** Ask her if she wants to come over.

**WOMAN.** Well, I guess I'll just have to learn how to make it on my own, I suppose, not that that will be easy for a woman of my age. Uh-huh. Yes, I know, it's tragic.

**MAN.** Salt.

**WOMAN.** (*Passing the salt:*) It's atrocious, the way he treats me. Now he wants to know if you want to come over. No, Carolyn, not really. He's being ironic.

**MAN.** I am not. Ask her if she wants breakfast.

**WOMAN.** My God, he's making passes at you while I sit here, upon my life and soul. Well, he just said he wants you to come over for breakfast.

**MAN.** Yep, might as well marry her. She likes breakfast, I like breakfast, it's destiny.

**WOMAN.** I am speechless. Do you know what he just...yes, Carolyn, I know you like breakfast—How. Dare. You.

**MAN.** Is she taking me up on it?

**WOMAN.** Carolyn, it is...DISGUSTING...shameful...you picking up my man the instant he dumps me. What sort of friend are you?

**MAN.** Come off it, Edna, she's just hungry.

**WOMAN.** You know what this makes us? You know what this makes—I'll tell you what this makes us, Carolyn. Rivals. That's what that makes us.

**MAN.** Oh, good for you, dear, what you've always wanted. Here's the salt back.

**WOMAN.** *(Taking the salt:)* I am sure that you find this amusing, Carolyn, but I am not the type of woman who takes affronts such as these lying down. I may be a suburban housewife with a meek and humble nature, but I swear as God as my witness, you shall pay for your backstabbing lusts—both of you.

**MAN.** I bet she knows how to make an omelet. What the hell is this anyway?

**WOMAN.** Abuse. Abuse on the phone, abuse in my house. I'm trapped. Trapped like a hamster in a cage.

**MAN.** You're not supposed to cook it until it crunches. Spaghetti, brownies, omelets, none of it should be crunchy.

**WOMAN.** I'll tell you what I'm going to "do about it" Carolyn, I'm going to go over there right now and...and...

**MAN.** *(Helping her:)* Bust your ass up.

**WOMAN.** And bust your ass up! No, you heard me! I am not to be trifled with! I am a cauldron of boiling rage! I will be over there in fifteen minutes to bust your ass up as properly as I can muster! As soon as I am done with breakfast, mark my words.

**MAN.** Well done, dear. Very urban.

**WOMAN.** Are you...are you LAUGHING at me? You are an.....  
*(Shouting into the phone:)* ASS!

*(She hangs up violently.)*

**WOMAN.** *(Continuing:)* What a woman.

**MAN.** Pepper.

*(She hands the pepper out to him, but she is thoughtful, and does not let go of the pepper shaker when he reaches for it. This forces him to look at her.)*

**WOMAN.** *(An epiphany:)* People don't take me seriously, do they?

*(He looks at her with surprise. Lights down.)*

# **THE SWEET SOUNDS OF SHUTTING UP**

## **Cast of Characters**

FATHER

MOTHER

DAUGHTER

# THE SWEET SOUNDS OF SHUTTING UP

*(A family at breakfast. MOTHER places a plate of toast on the table and seats herself. The FATHER picks up a piece of toast. He holds it up to the light. He examines it carefully. He listens to it. He smells it—this is pleasing. He pulls out a pocket memo pad and makes a notation. By now, MOTHER and DAUGHTER are watching. FATHER rips off a bit of the crust and tastes it very carefully, as if it could be acid. He chews gingerly at first, then with more confidence and enthusiasm. He takes a hearty bite. He holds the toast aloft.)*

**FATHER.** I SHALL NAME YOU “TOAST.”

**DAUGHTER.** *(To audience:)* Family time.

**MOTHER.** So what do you have planned for your day, Father? Share with your loving family, who cares deeply about the minutiae of your life.

**FATHER.** TOAST. SUSTAIN ME, MYSTICAL TOAST. GRANT ME LIFE AND ENERGY.

**MOTHER.** Father.

**FATHER.** *(Disappointed, as if pulled out of a dream:)* I’m sorry. Did you say something, dear?

**MOTHER.** Your day. How do you anticipate it going? We ask because we care.

**FATHER.** *(Caressing the toast as he speaks, like a newborn:)* Oh, fine, very fine indeed. I’m certain that I will sell many nachos and pizza snacks to many hungry roller-skaters.

**MOTHER.** *(Rising from the chair:)* That’s nice. Excuse me, Father.

*(MOTHER crosses around the table to DAUGHTER. MOTHER knocks DAUGHTER out of her chair onto the floor.)*

**DAUGHTER.** What the—?

**MOTHER.** WE ask because WE care, don’t WE?

**DAUGHTER.** Wha...I guess so...

**MOTHER.** I don't feel like you are pulling your weight when it comes to CARING.

**DAUGHTER.** I....care, I care.

**MOTHER.** CARE.

**DAUGHTER.** I DO!

*(MOTHER glares at DAUGHTER, then walks back to her chair, satisfied. DAUGHTER pulls herself back into her chair.)*

**MOTHER.** I'm sorry, dear, go on. You were saying?

**FATHER.** BLESSED TOAST!

**MOTHER.** No, no, we heard that. Your day.

**FATHER.** Oh. Well, I anticipate a price hike on the popcorn, both buttered and air-popped.

**MOTHER.** Ooooo!

*(MOTHER glares at DAUGHTER, who catches on.)*

**DAUGHTER.** Ooooo!

**FATHER.** In a couple years, I'm hoping I can get assistant manager. Of course, that depends on the rink owner, ultimately. I know him, you know. He says hello to me when I come in to work sometimes.

**MOTHER.** Oh, Father, how wonderful! What it must be like to know people!

*(A moment.)*

**FATHER.** *(Holding the toast aloft again:)* HOLY, SPECIAL TOAST! RAIN YOUR NUTITIONAL BLESSINGS DOWN ON ME!

*(MOTHER gets up from the table. DAUGHTER rises nervously. FATHER still adulates his toast.)*

**DAUGHTER.** What, what?

**MOTHER.** Damn it, damn it, dammit dammit DAMMIT. The function of a family—the entire reason we allowed you to enter into it in the first place—is to respect, love and nurture us. That is what re-

production is fuckin' FOR. Earn your meals and LOVE us, damn it all to hell and back in a brisket!

*(MOTHER storms back to her seat. DAUGHTER sinks down.)*

**DAUGHTER.** Isn't just being part of the family enough? I didn't think I...

**MOTHER.** Ah. The sweet sounds of you shutting up. Listen.

*(Silence. FATHER is entranced with the possibility of spreading butter on his toast.)*

**FATHER.** *(To the toast:)* Shall butter be thy undoing?

**MOTHER.** So, you were telling us about the exciting prospects of our future, which naturally involves all of us.

*(A moment.)*

Dear?

**FATHER.** Oh. Yes, well, I could very well wind up in a better position in a year or three. Best to hang in there and see what develops, you know. Nothing comes from moving too quickly. Even in a roller rink.

*(FATHER laughs uproariously. MOTHER laughs too, though it is obviously fake. MOTHER throws a spoon at DAUGHTER, who manages a half-hearted laugh.)*

**MOTHER.** Oh, Father, how your very presence delights us. I am so glad there is nothing dysfunctional about OUR family whatsoever. You know, you read about those other families in Redbook and The New Yorker, or I overhear people talk about them as I buy our nightly pork chops at the supermarket, and I think "Thank God we are no such failure." Just look at us. Breathe in the sweet smells of success.

**DAUGHTER.** I think...

*(MOTHER picks up the table and hurls it offstage. FATHER is holding his toast, and doesn't notice. DAUGHTER is silent.)*

**MOTHER.** There now. Everything is perfect.

*(Lights down.)*



# **A TUTORIAL**

## **Cast of Characters**

DOCTOR

COUPLE A+B

COUPLE C+D

# A TUTORIAL

*(A person in a lab coat, DOCTOR, enters. He is followed by two couples, one SR [A and B] and one SL [C and D]. Each couple faces each other. DOCTOR clears his throat.)*

**DOCTOR.** A quick primer on the inherent violence of language.

*(He clears his throat again. He moves SR of A+B.)*

**DOCTOR.** *(Clinically, matter-of-fact statement:)* You've got a great personality. Sincere.

**A.** *(To B, warmly:)* You've got a great personality.

*(B reacts. C smiles, leans forward and kisses D on the nose. D smiles.)*

**DOCTOR.** Same, insincere.

**A.** *(To B, as if rebuffing a suitor:)* You've got a great personality.

*(B reacts. C produces a whoopee cushion, which she deflates quickly in D's face. The DOCTOR flips a page on his clipboard.)*

**DOCTOR.** *(Clinically:)* No, that's alright. I'll do it myself. As spoken by friend.

**A.** *(To B, politely:)* No, that's alright. I'll do it myself.

*(B reacts mildly. C pats D on the head like a puppy. D smiles.)*

**DOCTOR.** Same, as spoken by mother.

**A.** *(To B, self-pityingly:)* No, that's alright. I'll do it myself.

*(B reacts. C sighs melodramatically, mimes slicing her wrists, then spins around and falls backward into D's arms. D struggles under the weight to stand her. This goes on a moment, then they resume their positions.)*

**DOCTOR.** *(Clinically:)* That's a great idea. Sincere.

**A.** *(To B, brightly:)* That's a great idea!

*(B reacts. C beams and shakes D's hand.)*

**DOCTOR.** Same, by jerk.

**A.** *(To B, heavy sarcasm:)* That's a great idea.

*(B reacts. C slaps D "upside the head" and slaps a LOSER sign on his chest.)*

**DOCTOR.** *(Clinical:)* You're just what I needed, by desirable.

**A.** *(To B, seductively:)* You're just what I needed.

*(B reacts. C caresses D's face and ruffles his hair.)*

**DOCTOR.** Same, by co-dependent.

**A.** *(To B, desperately:)* You're just what I needed!

*(B reacts. C handcuffs herself to D, then falls on the floor, almost taking D with her. D tries to move away and can't.)*

**A.** *(Clinically:)* We've found someone else, by police in murder trial.

**A.** *(To B, officially:)* We've found someone else.

*(B registers relief. C gets up happily and undoes the handcuffs. She throws confetti and dances around D. She places a party hat on his head.)*

**DOCTOR.** Same, by employer.

**A.** *(To B, breaking bad news:)* We've found someone else.

*(B reacts. C belts D in the stomach, who doubles over. She elbows him in the back, sending him to the floor. She slaps her hands together in a "that's over" sort of way. During this last exchange, D slowly gets up.)*

**DOCTOR.** You won't have to be here much longer. By mechanic.

**A.** *(To B, as mechanic:)* You won't have to be here much longer.

*(B reacts with skepticism. C hands a clearly marked bag of GARBAGE to D, who can barely take it.)*

**DOCTOR.** Same, by doctor in hospital.

**A.** *(To B, professional happiness:)* You won't have to be here much longer!

*(B reacts with skepticism. C hands another clearly marked bag of GARBAGE to D.)*

**DOCTOR.** Same, by wife.

**A.** *(To B, with acidity:)* You won't have to be here much longer.

*(B reacts. C whips out a gun and shoots D, who falls dead.)*

**DOCTOR.** Respectfully submitted. Thank you.

*(DOCTOR, A, B and C bow and leave single file. D is tugged off-stage by stage manager.)*



# **THIRTY-TWO AWKWARD SILENCES**

## **Cast of Characters**

ARBITOR

BENNY

ALICE

CANDY

DENNIS

STAGE MANAGER

# THIRTY-TWO AWKWARD SILENCES

*(The ARBITOR sits far downstage to the side in a lightweight chair. He stares at the audience. He coughs. It is awkward. The BELL rings. Suddenly, he smiles and stands up to address the audience.)*

**ARBITOR.** Ah, the awkward silence. Punctuator of our lives. And yet, so little research has been done into this strange mainstay of modern communication.

*(The other actors file onstage, looking radiant.)*

**ARBITOR.** Tonight, these fine craftsmen of the theatrical arts will attempt to produce thirty-two awkward silences in under ten minutes. Perhaps then and only then will we have a better understanding into this social phenomenon. Beginning now.

*(Actors scurry everywhere. They form “moments” at different points on the stage throughout the play. BENNY and ALICE stay onstage while the other two exit. BENNY opens an automatic umbrella and stands beneath it, moving slowly.)*

**BENNY.** *(To ALICE:)* Here! Share mine!

**ALICE.** *(Taking refuge from the “rain”:)* Oh, thank you very much.

**BENNY.** No problem.

**ALICE.** This storm came out of nowhere.

**BENNY.** You have far to go?

**ALICE.** No, my car’s in the parking lot across from the car wash.

**BENNY.** *(In a helpful tone:)* I’m not wearing underwear!

*(ALICE reacts. The scene freezes. The BELL rings. The ARIBITOR is there, extending a pointer, and points at her face.)*

**ARBITOR.** Note: the birth of an awkward moment. Quick relationship established, jarring, out-of-place comment made, a moment of silence while initial perceptions are re-adjusted. This moment can only be followed by a complete change in relationship status. Also note.

*(BENNY and ALICE get back into the initial scene position.)*

**BENNY.** Here! Share mine!

**ALICE.** Thank you very much!

*(She takes the umbrella from him and exits. BENNY is dumbfounded. Action freezes.)*

**ARBITOR.** Note that this is not an awkward moment—it is merely a “burn.” A moment of true awkwardness must be SHARED. Awkward moments shared only with oneself are considered “neuroses” and will be covered in another chapter. *(Clears throat:)* Onward.

*(BENNY unfreezes and exits.)*

**ARBITOR.** Another delicate thing to notice about the singularity of the awkward moment is the fine line between discomfort and outrage.

*(CANDY and DENNIS appear on stage. DENNIS has a ballcap on. He’s playing a little boy, though he is woefully miscast.)*

**ARBITOR.** Note this example.

**DENNIS.** *(As little boy:)* Can I go out and play ball?

**CANDY.** *(As mother:)* No, it’s almost suppertime.

**DENNIS.** *(Pouting:)* Daddy said you’d be in a bitchy mood.

*(CANDY reacts. The action freezes.)*

**ARBITOR.** This is no good. The reaction after this will be one of unimaginable verbal violence, not the uneasy moment of disquiet which we are after.

*(DENNIS pulls off his hat and steps toward the ARBITOR. CANDY breaks her freeze, too, looking puzzled at DENNIS.)*

**ARBITOR.** Any other reaction other than discomfort and shocked silence simply will not do.

**DENNIS.** Shut up.

**ARBITOR.** *(Shocked:)* I’m sorry?

**DENNIS.** We're never going to get all of these in by the end of ten minutes if you don't quit prattling to the audience.

**ARBITOR.** But I just...all right, fine. Fine. I will try to keep my interruptions to a minimum.

*(A moment.)*

**ARBITOR.** Will that make you happy?

*(The BELL rings. DENNIS turns to the audience. The other actors enter, forming a graduation ceremony. They all wear mortarboards.)*

**DENNIS.** And now, 29 more scenes about awkward silences.

*(He walks into the scene, placing a mortarboard on his head as BENNY starts speaking immediately. The following scenes are done as quickly as possible without sacrificing the moments.)*

**BENNY.** And now a message for our graduating class from our valedictorian.

*(Applause. ALICE faces the others serenely.)*

**ALICE.** Well, Dad. You owe me ten bucks. You CAN plagiarize your way through medical school!

*(The BELL rings. Actors toss their mortarboards so that they land offstage. BENNY falls to one knee and turns to CANDY.)*

**BENNY.** Candace, will you marry me?

*(CANDY bursts out laughing.)*

**CANDY.** Good one.

*(BENNY, stunned, produces a ring. CANDY stops laughing.)*

**CANDY.** Oh you were...you were serious? Oh.

*(A moment. The BELL rings. BENNY turns to face the other way and freezes. DENNIS wearing glasses meets ALICE downstage.)*

**DENNIS.** *(Removing the glasses, because that's what doctors do:)* I'm afraid it's cancer, Mrs. Gelatin.

**ALICE.** Oh my God!

**DENNIS.** And before I go any further, we accept MasterCard, Visa and Discover. No personal checks.

*(She looks at him. The BELL rings. ALICE walks over to BENNY who is proposing.)*

**BENNY.** Candace, will you marry me?

**ALICE.** I'm not Candace. I'm Alice.

*(The BELL rings. ALICE exits. DENNIS walks on, BENNY walks up to him.)*

**DENNIS.** Can I help you?

**BENNY.** *(Catching it as they get thrown to him from offstage:)* Yes, I'd like to return these panties. They're too small.

**DENNIS.** Your wife made you take them back?

**BENNY.** My wife?

*(The two men look at each other. The BELL rings. BENNY drops to his knee again, facing the other direction, just in time for CANDY to get there.)*

**BENNY.** Candace, will you—

**CANDY.** Do you think I'm BLIND? I saw you propose to Alice two scenes ago!

*(The BELL rings. ALICE walks on stage. Everyone else jumps into the air, throws confetti that they dig out of their pockets and yell "SURPRISE! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" ALICE looks perplexed.)*

**ALICE.** It's not my birthday.

*(They all look at each other. The BELL rings. BENNY drops to his knees again.)*

**BENNY.** Candace, will you marry me?

**ALICE.** What did you call me?

**BENNY.** I mean—Alice—whatever. Like it *matters*.

*(The BELL rings. BENNY exits as DENNIS enters and walks up to ALICE.)*

**DENNIS.** Cancer? Really! Marvelous!

*(He hugs her. She does not hug back. He breaks the embrace.)*

**DENNIS.** Wait. That's bad, isn't it?

*(The BELL rings. DENNIS is on the phone. CANDY comes on stage. It's obviously a phone sex chat line.)*

**DENNIS.** Oh yeah. Yeah, baby. You do it how I like. Mmmm.

**ALICE.** You like that, huh?

**DENNIS.** Oh yeah! Talk to daddy!

**ALICE.** Let me ask you a question.

**DENNIS.** Anything baby anything.

**ALICE.** How's your walk with God?

*(Dead silence. The BELL rings. BENNY and CANDY enter.)*

**CANDY.** Can I help you?

**BENNY.** Yes, I'd like to return these panties. They're too small.

**CANDY.** Wait. Didn't we already do this one?

*(They stop and look apologetically at the audience. The BELL rings.)*

**ARBITOR.** Note that poor theatercraft is a major contributor to the science of awkward silences.

*(ALICE walks up to the ARBITOR and clears her throat.)*

**ARBITOR.** The next couple of scenes illustrate—*what?*

**ALICE.** We don't have *time* for this.

**ARBITOR.** I'M IN THIS PLAY TOO!

*(Everybody stops, feeling—well, you know. The BELL rings. The ARBITOR stomps back over to his chair and sits in it. DENNIS exits. CANDY and ALICE are laughing, not seeing BENNY walk by.)*

**ALICE.** Then he called me Candace and asked ME to marry him!

*(They both laugh uproariously, which dies out when they see BENNY walk past. Guess what happens? The BELL rings. ALICE, CANDY and BENNY reach into their pockets and throw confetti into the air yelling "SURPRISE!" when DENNIS enters, not happy.)*

**DENNIS.** Yeah, thanks. Find parking on your OWN lawns. Fuckers.

*(DENNIS exits, along with BENNY. ALICE turns to face CANDY.)*

**ALICE.** Can I help you?

**CANDY.** *(Getting thrown the item from offstage:)* Yes, I'd like to return this spatula. It's plastic and I wasn't expecting that.

**ALICE.** Awww. How far along are you?

*(CANDY looks at ALICE.)*

**ALICE.** Oh. You're not...? You're not, are you? Oh.

*(The BELL rings. DENNIS [holding a box] comes out to the still sulking ARBITOR.)*

**DENNIS.** Dude, I need your chair.

**ARBITOR.** I'm sitting in it.

**DENNIS.** I need it for this next scene.

**ARBITOR.** I'm sitting in....oh hell.

*(ARBITOR throws the chair into the middle of the stage. All the actors look at him. The BELL rings. The actors snap right back into performing. DENNIS gets up on the chair and starts throwing packing peanuts from it into the air. We hear sleigh bells jingling offstage.)*

**CANDY.** Ooo, honey, look. It's snowing.

**BENNY.** No, it isn't. It's Dennis on a chair throwing packing peanuts into the air.

*(The person offstage drops the sleighbells. CANDY looks closer.)*

**CANDY.** Oh yeah, you're right.

*(CANDY and BENNY look at DENNIS as if expecting an explanation.)*

**DENNIS.** *(Spluttering to them and the audience:)* No, you see...it's a theatrical convention...suspension of disbelief...oh God.

*(The BELL rings. The sleighbells start up again and DENNIS starts throwing packing peanuts again.)*

**CANDY.** Ooo, honey, look. It's snowing.

**BENNY.** Perfect. It will cover my tracks.

*(CANDY looks at him. Sleighbells stop.)*

**BENNY.** ...should that...ever be...a concern.

*(He smiles a big toothy grin, hoping she bought it. The BELL rings. The sleighbells start up again, DENNIS keeps the snow going.)*

**CANDY.** Ooo, honey, look. It's snowing.

**BENNY.** Uh. Candy. We were only supposed to do two of these.

**CANDY.** *(Through her teeth:)* Three.

**BENNY.** No, two.

**CANDY.** Three is funny.

**BENNY.** Well, I don't remember my line then.

**CANDY.** *Cover.*

**BENNY.** *(After a beat:)* I can't. I'm no good at improv.

*(They look at each other, then look at the audience and smile apologetically. The BELL rings. Everybody hustles to where they are going next, speaking these next few lines in a rush, almost on top of each other. The STAGE MANAGER comes through with a sweeper-mop to run all the peanuts and confetti off the stage.)*

**CANDY.** TIME?

**ALICE.** You don't wanna know.

**DENNIS.** God.

**BENNY.** How many left to go?

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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