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**The Best**  
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**of 2006**

edited by D. L. Lepidus

MONOLOGUE AUDITION SERIES

**A SMITH AND KRAUS BOOK**

Published by Smith and Kraus, Inc.  
177 Lyme Road, Hanover, NH 03755  
www.SmithandKraus.com

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First Edition: November 2006  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover illustration: *Wardrobe* by Lisa Goldfinger  
Cover and text design and production by Julia Hill Gignoux

The Monologue Audition Series  
ISSN 1067-134X  
ISBN 1-57525-554-5

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# FOREWORD

In these pages, you will find terrific new monologues from contemporary plays, almost all of which have been, or soon will be, published (see Rights and Permissions pages in the rear of this book). Some of the playwrights whose work has been included herein may be familiar to you, such as Theresa Rebeck, Don Nigro, Terrence McNally, and Athol Fugard. Most pieces are by up-and-comers, though — such as Jonathan Dorf, Sheila Callaghan, Josh Fox, and Michael Puzzo.

In a generally favorable review of last year's books, I was castigated for not including enough comic pieces. A point well taken, so this year I have made an effort to include more monologues with laughs. It was quite a concerted effort, believe me. Most, if not all, of the play excerpts I have chosen for this book were produced by professional theaters, where out-and-out comedy is, it seems, most unwelcome — obsessed, as most of them are, with being oh-so-cutting-edge, dark, and all-too-often impenetrably obscure. So, I think you'll find a few more funny pieces in this year's book. If for some reason you aren't able to find the comic monologue that's perfect for you, though, I recommend another book published by Smith and Kraus, *The Ultimate Monologue Books Vol. IV: 222 Comedy Monologues 2 Minutes and Under*, which contains a fine selection of comedy pieces, both contemporary and classical.

I hope you will find this book useful — both in class and for auditions.

— D. L. Lepidus, Editor  
Brooklyn, New York



# ACT A LADY

Jordan Harrison

Comic

Casper, twenties

*Casper is walking down the street talking to a picture of Mary Pickford.*

CASPER: Miss Pickford, pretty Miss Pickford, wealthy Miss Pickford with the stars in your eyes. Gonna put you under my pillow tonight so you can sneak into my sleep and tell me how to want you. How to *be* with you. The words for liking you don't even sit right in my mouth: "How 'bout those gams." "Look at those stems." Don't sound like any kind of sense.

I saw you in *Winds of Intrigue* and *The Cavalier Cavalier*, and *Let the Bodice Beware* was my favorite but the movies always cut out before they tell you anything useful. The hero takes you in his arms and presses his face into yours, and everything goes dark. The music takes over from there.

True says if I stare at you long enough my imagination will figure it out. But all I can think about is how to *light* you. A flat hard light straight on, to be kind to your nose — or else a soft light from behind for casting you a halo. There's things a photograph does that nothing else can do. It can put a wanting onto something that isn't really there.

Star-watching movie lady, wish us a good show tonight. And grant me the wish of wanting in the right way. Thanks, Miss Pickford . . .

# ACT A LADY

Jordan Harrison

Comic

True, thirties

*True is part of a group of guys involved in putting on a play, in which they will play all the roles, including the female ones.*

TRUE: We don't get a lot of strangers in Wattleburg. You wouldn't come here 'less you were born here — or else you were hoping to get born again. That's how I came, ten years back.

I used to know what it was to be strange to a place. Used to travel all over in the marines, places where I hardly knew the words for saying hello. When you're in a place like this too long, you forget. You figure yer the one who makes sense. But these days I got ten pounds of taffeta between me and sense. So when I see that boy with the strange hat and the strange talk, I think maybe I know what a stranger feels like again.

Like I went in the shop the other day?

My partner Knox says, *Why you doin' all this, True?* And I say, *Why what.*

And he says, *Got blisters on yer feet. Got cuts on yer legs from shaving like some sidewalk susie. Yer a week's work behind. Why you doin' this all for some lady show?*

And I say because that Lorna told me how to get pretty.

So when I do it, it's like I'm doin' it for her.

*Do you get pretty for somebody?* I say, and Knox don't say nothing.

And I say, *You should try it some time.*

And Knox looks at me like I'm a stranger.

# ACT A LADY

Jordan Harrison

Comic

True, thirties

*True is part of a group of guys involved in putting on a play, in which they will play all the roles, including the female ones.*

TRUE: Back in the merchant marines, I remember a fella who put two coconuts on his chest and called that a lady. Entered himself in the cadet talent show, strummed on a banjo missing a string and sang “*Under the mango tree . . .*”

He didn’t look pretty, no, far from, with a big mouth drawn on like the south sea natives, it weren’t half pretty. But I remember everybody leaned forward in their chairs, like they watched it sorta *different* because of how he looked. Guess it had the interest of something uncommon. Like a magnet — it’s hard to explain. He put on those two coconuts and suddenly everyone with their eyes bigger than if he were a hunderd-percent lady swishing in that grass skirt.

I got no problem wearing a dress, ’less it pinches. I just don’t know if I call it *art*. I know: what right I got to judge? I tan I’m a tanner I tan things I tan.

But one time my partner Knox and I stuffed two otters right outta the Stick River and mounted them like you couldn’t hardly tell they weren’t alive. Like we put the life back in them ’cause of how we posed them. Nobody could say that wasn’t something big, something you never seen before.

This: just a bunch o’ foolin, but maybe it’ll make them lean forward. And it’s better than watching paint dry, and that blue-eyed Lorna sure knows a thing or two or three about pretty.

# AFTER MATH

Jonathan Dorf

Comic

Shaking Student, teens

*A student describes the mysterious disappearance of a classmate during math class. But is this what really happened, or is the Truth just a matter of perspective?*

SHAKING STUDENT: Mrs. Parks has this thing about tests. Well, she has this thing about everything, but when it comes to tests . . . If she's giving a test, you don't knock on the door, you don't stand by the door, you don't call the room, you don't even look in the window. And not just the students — the other teachers, even Mr. Bobell, the principal.

*(Beat.)*

One time, he knocks and comes in during a quiz — not even a test — a quiz on solving simple equations. You know, like  $x$  squared equals nine, or three  $x$  plus  $x$  equals eight. That's algebra. You should see how she looks at him. Her eyes get all narrow, and I'm not crazy so I know I'm not really seeing it, but I swear there's these flames shooting from her eyes. Or maybe it's lasers. I think it's flames, though, 'cause if I didn't know better, I'd say there's smoke comin' from her ears. And Mr. Bobell starts to say something, only nothing comes out. His jaw flaps in slow-mo, then flaps again. He takes one step back, two steps back — and he's gone.

*(Beat.)*

But today, we're in the middle of a major test — not just some quiz. This is an all-out unit test. Points, lines, slopes — we're graphing 'til we can't graph no more.

*(Like a rapper:)*

Graph those lines in the air — graph 'em like you just don't care.

*(Beat.)*

Anyway, this man in a dark gray suit walks in, and there's a

woman — also wearing a dark gray suit — at the door, and I watch Mrs. Park’s eyes start to ignite, only the man doesn’t flinch — and her eyes, they sink back into her head, like they’re in retreat.

*(Beat.)*

He says something to her real quiet, and her eyes . . . her eyes totally wash out, and her face wipes blank. “Emmett,” she says, “bring your books.” And Emmett packs his books into his backpack and goes with the suits — the man inside and the woman at the door.

*(Beat.)*

And when the door closes and Emmett is gone and the suits are gone, it’s “Back to your tests. Ten minutes.” But I don’t believe her. Yeah, I believe we’ve got ten minutes of class. I can see the clock, but I don’t believe Mrs. Parks cares if we finish, and as she picks up Emmett’s test, her hands — I’m not crazy, so I know my head’s just making it up — I swear her hands are shaking.

# AFTER MATH

Jonathan Dorf

Comic

Artsy-looking Student, teens

*A student blames the mysterious disappearance of a classmate during math class on the statement the missing student made on a mural. But is this what really happened, or is the Truth just a matter of perspective?*

ARTSY-LOOKING STUDENT: Check out this mural. Yeah — take a second.

*(Beat.)*

It's called the Unity Mural. You know, like peace and love, flowers in your hair, lighters in the air — you know.

*(Points at a specific spot, center.)*

So here you got a bunch of jocks — the guys in the football uniforms with the exaggerated biceps sitting around this dorky-looking kid with a pocket protector. And then over here,

*(Points to a slightly different spot.)*

you got a Goth hugging a prep. Look — the Goth is giving the prep the black shirt off his back.

*(Beat.)*

Of course, my favorite is this part here,

*(Points again somewhere else.)*

with the principal and his oversized arms reaching around the entire student body and lifting them. But if you don't count the parts of the mural I did — my favorite part is this one over here.

*(Points far right.)*

Emmett did this part. It looks all shiny happy people like the rest of the mural. The student polishing the apple for the teacher, a study group in the library that's one of those Disney movies: white kid, black —

*(Correcting himself.)*

*African-American* — kid, Latino kid, Asian kid — two boys, two

girls. It's trippy how he does it, 'cause he's got four different study groups — there's hardly any books in the library there's so many study groups — it's like what's the point of it being in the library? And each study group is a different combination. Black guy, white guy, Asian girl, Latin girl. Black girl, white girl, Asian guy, Latin guy. You get the idea. Disney.

*(Beat.)*

But if you look really close —

*(Points at something very small in the mural.)*

and it's not just way small, it's *upside down* — if you know what you're looking for, it's there. The principal going through a student's locker. A cloud of smoke in the bathroom filled with unflushed toilets. Books covered in cobwebs 'cause they're older than the teachers. A kid being shoved into a garbage can for being — just for being.

*(Beat.)*

It's like those animators who slip that one frame into the G-rated movie, or *I Am the Walrus* played backward. Emmett was the Walrus. I don't think the school liked that. He's lucky he's not John Lennon, 'cause I don't think they liked it at all.

# ANDRÉ'S MOTHER

Terrence McNally

Dramatic

Cal, twenties to thirties

*At the funeral of his dead lover (from AIDS), Cal meets the deceased man's mother for the first time.*

CAL: I wish I knew what you were thinking. I think it would help me. You know almost nothing about me and I only know what André told me about you. I'd always had it in my mind that one day we would be friends, you and me. But if you didn't know about André and me . . . If this hadn't happened, I wonder if he would have ever told you. When he was so sick, if I asked him once I asked him a thousand times, tell her. She's your mother. She won't mind. But he was so afraid of hurting you and of your disapproval. I don't know which was worse. *(No response. No sighs.)* God, how many of us live in this city because we don't want to hurt our mothers and live in mortal terror of their disapproval. We lose ourselves here. Our lives aren't furtive, just our feelings towards people like you are! A city of fugitives from our parents' scorn or heartbreak. Sometimes he'd seem a little down and I'd say, "What's the matter, babe!" And this funny sweet, sad smile would cross his face and he'd say, "Just a little homesick, Cal, just a little bit." I always accused him of being a country boy just playing at being a hot-shot, sophisticated New Yorker. *(He sighs.)* It's bullshit. It's all bullshit. *(Still no response.)* Do you remember the comic strip *Little Lulu*? Her mother had no name, she was so remote, so formidable to all the children. She was just Lulu's mother. "Hello, Lulu's mother," Lulu's friends would say. She was almost anonymous in her remoteness. You remind me of her. André's mother. Let me answer the questions you can't ask and then I'll leave you alone and you won't ever have to see me again. André died of AIDS. I don't know how he got it. I tested negative. He died bravely. You would

have been proud of him. The only thing that frightened him was you. I'll have everything that was his sent to you. I'll pay for it. There isn't much. You should have come up the summer he played *Hamlet*. He was magnificent. Yes, I'm bitter. I'm bitter I've lost him. I'm bitter what's happening. I'm bitter even now, after all this, I can't reach you. I'm beginning to feel your disapproval and it's making me ill. (*He looks at his balloon.*) Sorry, old friend. I blew it. (*He lets go of the balloon.*) Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! (*Beat.*) Good-bye, André's mother.

# ANNOYANCE

Sam Bobrick

Comic

Ethan, thirties to forties, but could be younger

*Ethan is talking to a therapist. Ethan is a very problematic patient.*

ETHAN: You are not accusing me of being gay are you, Sidney? I may be a lot of things, Sidney, but I am not gay. . . .

No? Well, it sure as hell sounded like that to me. Boy, if there's one thing that agitates the hell out of me it's to have someone question my sexuality. . . .

OK, I'll admit I have had a few male-oriented encounters but I'm by no means gay. You do your best to adjust to the times. I mean, God, nowadays you go to a movie by yourself and the next thing you know some guy is sitting next to you and holding your dick in his hand. Does that make you gay? I don't think so. Nor to my mind does an occasional bugging in a public rest room. You know what's the worst place? Central Park at two in the morning. You either get sucked or fucked. I hardly go there anymore. Damn it, Sidney, do you get some kind of arousal discussing these sexual perversions? . . .

Really? Well, something must be wrong with you, Sidney old pal, because I get hotter than hell talking about it. You know what else turns me on? Dirty words written on walls. Once on the side of the 42nd Street public library somebody wrote, "Fuck George Bush" and I got a woody the size of a small city. I didn't even vote for him.

# BAPTIZED TO THE BONE

Dave Johnson

Dramatic

Preacher

*A Baptist preacher is giving a sermon to his congregation. His wife, mentioned in his sermon, is not at all pleased about her husband's calling.*

PREACHER: On this first Sunday night in September, the day before Labor Day, the day before the last day of this summer, you know Lord all of my inadequacies even before I confess them. But I'm coming to you tonight to ask that you make me a better servant for you, Lord Jesus, and that I might lead your people here in the Mount Olive Baptist community in a way that would give all the glory to you. And I come to you asking for healing for all the sick and downtrodden. I pray for Dave Gibson, Lord, release him from all those demon spirits in a bottle. I pray for Miss Alva Jenkins. Let her lay down any ill-gotten gains. And I pray for Gladys Miles, my poor sick wife, you know, Lord, with those migraines she is not in her right head. Her brain has left her body. And most of all, dear Lord, I come to you asking that if there is one unsaved soul under the sound of my voice, that you will break their hearts so they might be open to your call. Amen Lord Jesus. Amen. (*Opens eyes.*) If you walk out of here tonight without responding to the Lord's soft sweet voice calling you home, it could be for everlasting too late. I pray with all my being that it's not. But friends, you never know. You never know when your last opportunity will be to answer the call. You could go out on the road tonight and your life could be snuffed out. Just like that! I'm going to ask you a question. And I'm not taking names. But the Lord knows and that's good enough for me. I want you to search your hearts. If you went out of this world tonight, would you be sure? And I don't mean would you think, and I don't mean your mother would, or your

father would, or any member of your family, but I'm talking to you tonight and you are the only one who can answer this, for you. If your life was suddenly snuffed out where would you spend an everlasting eternity? Would you be sure of your salvation? Have some assurance. Jesus is mine. And he can be yours. I can't do it for you. No one here can do it for you. As the old song says, "Time after time he has waited before, and now he is waiting again." Won't you come? If there is something that is standing between you and Jesus, you lay it down at the foot of the lamb. Tonight's the night to make it right. Just one more verse. Brother Carl will you lead us?

# BLINK OF AN EYE

Debbie Lamedman

Dramatic

KC, teens

*KC is telling us about his car.*

KC: I'm fixing up *this* car now. Who knows when I'll be able to afford getting the other one out of the impound. Plus, my buddy is helping me pay for costs so it's worth it. This car is gonna be way better than the other one when I get done with it. And then we can *take it to the highway!* Gotta be careful though, 'cause there's been a lot of cops around lately — lots of activity on the highway these days — more and more rookies who don't know what the hell they're doing and they're making it bad for the rest of us. Now everybody thinks they can street race. Buncha rich kids with some fast set of wheels and they think it's like some amusement park ride or somethin'. It's gotten trendy. Pisses me off. I'm the real deal. And my cars are performance pieces. They been tryin' to get us off the street and onto a track, but that's just bullshit. If you know what you're doing, you won't make a mistake and there won't be any accidents. Look — about that — I *am* sorry for what happened. I really am. I feel bad for that kid and his mother. But that just proves my point. Don't do it unless you know what you're *doin'!*

# BLINK OF AN EYE

Debbie Lamedman

Dramatic

Jeremy, teens

*Jeremy tells us about how his mom was killed.*

JEREMY: When I get outta here — first thing I'm gonna do is go visit Mom. And I'll bring her some roses. She loved roses. She loved all kinds of flowers. That's why she was taking that class out at the college. Horticulture or some damn thing. I said, "Mom, we're gonna be in college together." She liked that idea. I forgot she took the highway home when her class got out. Dad always told her to take the long way home — he thought the highway was too dangerous at night. Too many sleepy truckers. Too many crazy kids racing up and down those two lanes. She used to laugh at him for being so worried. "It cuts off a good fifteen minutes if I take that road." That's what she'd always say. I never saw her car merging on from the right lane. I never saw it. I was too excited that I had pulled in front of that know-it-all jerk. I didn't even know my car had that kind of guts. It was an amazing feeling going that fast. It felt like there was no one else in the world but me. Flying into the night. When I saw her, it was too late — my foot was scraping concrete trying to brake that car. Pulled up the emergency brake and everything. SLAM! And I walked away from it. Not a single scratch. And then I saw her. I saw who was in that car. There she was. My mom. Head thrown back — blood everywhere.

Gone. Instantly gone. And she never knew what hit her. She never knew it was me that hit her. She was driving home from her horticulture class loaded with new tips on how to grow great roses. She was heading home to my dad and to Jonathan and to me. And she never knew.

# BOURBON AT THE BORDER

Pearl Cleage

Dramatic

Charlie, forties

*Charlie is talking to his wife, May.*

CHARLIE: I've only got a couple of choices. I can sit here and let you take care of me because I'm too crazy to be moving around out in the world, or I can get off my black, insane ass and figure out how to take care of my wife like a man is supposed to do. . . .

I gotta get a job, May. I can't let you talk me out of it for my own good. . . .

The doctor said I'm no crazier than most of the folks walking around out here and they're doing fine. Plus, I've got lots of new medication. I've got pills for when I get up in the morning and pills for when I go to bed at night. I've got pills that can chase the blues and pills to soothe the savage beast. Stop worrying. . . .

Listen, May. Three weeks ago, they put me in with a new doctor. I'm not making much progress but they think maybe I'll do better with this guy than I'm doing with the other one. So I'm sitting in the office, talking to him and he's an Indian, an India Indian, not a Native-American brother, and he was asking me questions and scribbling down notes when I answered, I mean lots of notes, like everything I said was critical to him understanding my problem, whatever they had told him my problem was. And I'm thinking to myself, this guy is really taking this serious. Maybe he can help me figure this stuff out, even if he is an Indian. I mean. I'm damn near fifty years old. Time should be on my side, right? And I been in a lot of shrinks' offices and I don't remember one of them writing down a single word. Then the guy got an emergency phone call and practically broke his neck running out to take it, but he left that pad, so I went over and picked it up to see what he'd been writing about me and it said: "My

darling, please forgive me for what I've done. I love only you and always will. Please, my angel, can't we start again?" He wasn't writing about me at all. He wasn't even thinking about me. He was trying to beg some woman for his forgiveness and that was more important than anything I had to say. And you know what? It didn't even make me mad. It was like a sign or something. A sign to me about what's really important. About love and how easy you can fuck it up by being too selfish or too mean or too crazy to see the cure is standing right beside you.

# BOY

Julia Jordan

Dramatic

Boy, seventeen

*The boy is talking to Terry, a psychiatrist.*

BOY: So Quease'd drive us over the river into Illinois. There was this old vet there. With lots of dogs. Could do this thing with his mouth, sounded like choppers and shit. You know — (*He makes the sound of choppers and radio static.*) "Incoming, VC Charlie company." All that shit. Dogs barking their heads off locked up in the kitchen. He was an old guy but cool. We called him The Vet. 'Cause that's what he was. He always had the sweetest shit. We'd get as much pot as we had cash. Or on special occasions an eightball or acid. Swanny loved acid. Quease was partial to mushrooms, 'cause they were more natural he said. But The Vet said he hated that vegan shit. He said, "If God didn't want us to have better drugs he wouldn't have give us the brains to build labs." You shoulda seen his eyes when Lacey showed him the vaporizer. Oh shit . . . You shoulda seen him light the fuck up over the technological advance. And then cry a few weeks later, when we told him the sad tale of artistry falling prey to economics. Tears, man. Fuckin' tears. We shoulda made a video of him sobbing and sent it to the vapor man. He was lettin' down his country when he gave up manufacturing the mahogany artifact of happiness. The Vet deserved to have one. He fought for the US of A and watched his brothers die and shit . . . (. . .)

We'd be so high drivin' back 'cross the river. Everything that was beautiful on the way there was more beautiful on the way back. You know, like fields and sky and kids playing and garage sales and shit. We'd eat and head out to our field and smoke some more. You know, people that live, like, within a hundred miles of a city shouldn't be allowed to mention stars. And you'd think a bunch of stoned idiots lying in a field shouldn't be allowed to mention 'em either. 'Cause

you look at 'em fucked out of your mind enough nights and you do stop seein' 'em. But they were prettier than anything when you noticed. And that's what happened. I think. Not like all of a sudden. It was always there. Us. Lyin' around high. Summertime. Part-time jobs we could quit anytime. We noticed. . . .

That it was never gonna be any better than this. This time. This summer. This sky. After this it's gonna be a shitty job with an ass of a boss that gives you shit for being high. And gettin' fat and feeling guilty 'bout coming home to your wife and kids all high. So you go to your shitty job with the ass of a boss and go home to your wife and kids screamin' NOT high. And Christ . . . All the sweet things, like driving to The Vet's on Sunday morning with your friends and dropping acid and skinny-dipping at night and just doing fuck-all in a field, well . . . (. . .)

It was just a thought. We noticed it hangin' around. Don't know who said it out loud first. Maybe no one did really. But. It was just a thought. They weren't s'posed to actually do it. I thought they knew that. I thought that . . . (. . .)

That it was just a version of what could happen. You know, I mean like probably but maybe not. Maybe our wives would get high with us. Or they'd be really hot! I don't know. Doing the same every day and The Vet's on Sunday . . . It wasn't like, gripping. This was more of a thing. Like an event. Real important shit. Like, life or death. Not just lying around high waiting for it to end. But I swear to God, I thought it was just for the charge. Swan and Quease did too. But we didn't ask them, 'cause if we had then we'd . . . Just be five stoned freaks lying in a field 'cause they couldn't get a date. I knew I wasn't gonna do it but I told them I was. I did. I said that to them. I mean, I . . . But I just thought that we wouldn't. And when we started counting down I laughed, I think. I mean, I meant to . . . (. . .)

We didn't say anything. We just stayed. Quease fell asleep. I remember watching him sleep. I guess he cried himself to sleep but I don't really remember hearing the sound. Swan and I just stood. I looked at my shoes. I guess all night. 'Cause I realized it was morning when I started to make out that my left one was untied. . . .

I want to get high. (*Beat.*) You think I could ask a girl out?

# BUG

Tracey Letts

Dramatic

Peter, twenties to thirties

*Peter is coming clean to Agnes, a woman whom he has only recently met, about who he is and why he acts so strange. Now, Agnes has to decide if any of this is true.*

PETER: I got in some trouble . . . with the Army. I was stationed at Sakaka . . . the Syrian Desert, during the war. The doctors came in and really worked us over, with shots and pills, ostensibly for inoculation, but . . . there was something else going on, too. A lot of the guys got sick, vomiting and diarrhea, migraines, blackouts. One guy had an epileptic seizure; he'd never had one before. A couple of guys went AWOL. I never found out what really happened to them. I started having weird thoughts, too, and feeling . . . sick. They shipped me home, put me in a hospital at Groom Lake. They started running these tests. They had every kind of doctor you could imagine, probing at me, jabbing me, asking me all kinds of weird questions, feeding me more pills. They wouldn't let me go. They kept me there — years, I don't know, four years? Those fucking doctors were experimenting on me.

I went AWOL. I was a lifer, too. I didn't have anywhere to go. They don't respond too well to some drugged-up guinea pig just taking off. I don't know that I'm not carrying some disease with me, some contagion. Jesus, you know that's how they start, typhoid, Legionnaires' disease, some government screw-up, AIDS with those fucking monkeys in Africa. They're after me. These people don't fuck around, Agnes.

I shouldn't have told you that. But I needed to tell somebody. And I do trust you. I don't think you're just some simpleton I can take advantage of. I know we haven't known each other very long, but . . . I like you, Agnes. I don't want to go . . . I don't want to go . . .

# BURNING THE OLD MAN

Kelly McAllister

Dramatic

Marty, early thirties

*Marty tells his younger brother Bobby the truth about an altercation he was in during his visit to their father in Alaska a few years before.*

MARTY: Will you shut the fuck up? I'm not like Dad, I'm not like anybody! And I am certainly nothing like the guy you think I'm supposed to be. I'm just me, OK? You treat me like a stupid freak, like I have some great life I should be leading, that I'm not living up to my potential. Well, fuck you. Yeah, I fucked her. So what? You know when the last time before tonight I was with a woman was? Alaska! . . .

Not the woman with the husband. A hooker. OK? . . .

Because Dad told me to! . . .

Because it wasn't the husband who pissed himself when Dad pulled the gun on him, it was me! All right? I was terrified, and I lost it! I mean, Dad had his shotgun pointed at the dude's balls, for Christ's sake. I thought for sure Dad was going to kill this guy, and that it was all my fault. Have you ever seen someone pull a gun on someone else? It's scary shit. And when it's your father doing the pointing — shit! It made me piss my pants. I didn't even know I'd done it until the girl started laughing at me. She just pointed at my crotch and laughed. Dad didn't do anything, but I knew he knew. I stank. We drove in silence for hours, to some shack in the middle of nowhere. When we got there, Dad gave me a hundred bucks and told me to go fuck it out of my system. So I did. I figured I had disappointed him enough that day, so I went inside and fucked some fat whore whose name I never heard. That was the last time I had sex before tonight.

# BURNING THE OLD MAN

Kelly McAllister

Dramatic

Earth, late twenties

*Earth is a New Age hippie type, telling Bobby — who is staying at the same middle-of-nowhere motel — about who he used to be and who he is now.*

EARTH: I remember the guy I used to be — this funny dude who got high all the time and watched a lot of the Discovery Channel. Those were the halcyon days, my friend. High times, good weed, and Candy. I had it all figured out, man. Then one day, the phone rang. Candy was on the line. Crying. A lot. She had gone to the doctor that day. And the doctor told her she was sick. Very. And, just like that, the guy I used to be vanished into thin air, never to be seen again. Poof. Sometimes, late at night, listening to her breathe while I memorize the ceiling pattern for the millionth time, I wish I could be him again, you know? I try — I really try. But the fact of the matter is, I can't. That's the thing, I think, about life. The great bitch of it all. Just when it gets to be worth living, it changes into a long, sad trip, with no certainty but death. So I look for that guy I used to be, hoping I can convince him to trade places with me. And while I'm sure there are good times waiting for me in the future, until I let go of the good times in the past, I'm fucked. And the thing is, I think the past is holding onto me just as strongly as I'm holding onto it. You know what I mean?

# BURNING THE OLD MAN

Kelly McAllister

Dramatic

Marty, early thirties

*Marty is talking to his brother Bobby.*

MARTY: Oh, wake up already! We have too many skeletons in our closet to get off so easy. Once you open that closet door and see all those skeletons huddled together like stowaways in a ship's hull, you're fucked. Because they don't leave. You'd think they would, but they don't. No, they don't leave — they start to dance — a wild jig like they're at a bacchanalian orgy or something. And if you stare at them long enough, they start to stare back at you. They pull you into the closet with them and shut the door, and rip you into pieces, until you're another skeleton, dancing with the rest of them. A family secret. A family disgrace. And you try, desperately, to look like a normal person when you go to work or dinner or whatever, but you can't shake the feeling that you're wearing a coat that's far too big for your tiny little body. A dusty, stiff coat stinking of mothballs, made from stretched-out, dried-up skin, covering nothing more than creaky gray bones, acrid dust, and a skull wearing a stupid grin that you can't wipe off, no matter how hard you try. No, the fact, the cold hard fact of the matter, is that I'm just a sideshow freak in a very long line of sideshow freaks. Maybe you're not, but I am. So let's not kid each other anymore about me and my prospects. We can go to the festival. We can burn Dad's journal. We can do all that shit you think we should. But I don't — it won't change a God damned thing.

# COMMODITY

Steve Moulds

Dramatic

Lakota, could be any age

*In a dive bar in a crappy part of town, Lakota sounds off to another barfly.*

LAKOTA: Ultimately, this is what you have to consider — money isn't worth all that much. I was thinking about this the other day. I saw one of those billboards on the street for some credit union, or bank & trust company, something like that, and it's this huge picture of George Washington. You've probably seen it — the one dollar bill, right there, blown up really big so you can see all the little grains in the paper? And I had the thought, "They're not actually selling me the idea of money. Sure, they put a dollar bill up there on the side of a building, but wealth isn't the message. What they're selling me is George Washington. They're putting our Founding Father on a sign and asking me to trust him." — Do you know what I mean? Give them my money, my fifty-hour-a-week wages because George is going to watch over it personally. But what am I going to see at the end of the day? I mean, if the point of that billboard was for me to invest and make loads of money, it would've been Ben Franklin up there, not George Washington. The one dollar bill is the currency of the common man; consequently, it ain't worth all that much. And that's my biggest point. The world is full of these ways to move money around that don't get you anything but a few service fees if you might actually require speaking to a human being. You're paying the bank to hold *your* money. *You're* taking the risks on the stock market so that our economy can stay healthy. The good of the corporate giant over the good of you is what it boils down to. The question I guess I'm posing is, Does money in the hand actually translate into greater riches when the world's designed to make you spend it anyway? . . .

Now when I say money in the hand I'm talking about *forms of*

*currency* — bills and coins, the hard stuff, what we call cash, as if it's real and the rest of it isn't — and when I say it ain't really worth all that we think it is, I mean that on a deeper level than just saying that it's easy to part with money when there's so many ways to spend it. Actually, what I really mean to say is that currency is worth what we decide it is. Eeh? We're all partners in a grand conspiracy to give money value. Because it's paper, right? At its most basic level, the stuff is paper. The dollar is a construction. We've actually evolved, as a species, from one kind of economy, where the value of a thing could easily be set by the people involved in the transaction, to a system where men stand around a meat market talking about value and worth as if the numbers themselves were the important things. "Global Systems Networking International just went up two points." And the concept of two points means a few hundred thousand dollars to someone in a room somewhere holding onto the right pieces of paper, but to me, sitting here with you right now? I have no idea what it means. I don't even know what that company does for a living. It's the number two with a plus sign on a stock ticker while I sit here with my drink, which cost me five dollars, and five dollars is fifteen minutes of my time, when I'm getting paid anyway, and so I think, "My fifteen minutes equals this beer." But if the price of beer goes up for some reason, and there's a lot of reasons why such a thing might happen, my fifteen minutes are suddenly worth less than they used to be. But the amount of work I do, and the amount of time it takes me, hasn't changed. So it makes you wonder about a setup where the rules are changing all the time. Tell me I'm wrong if you think so, but there are times when I wonder if we wouldn't be better off trading things, bartering. Money just seems crass half of the time, especially when nothing's being bought, it's just the exchange of funds. You know what I mean?

# THE DEAR BOY

Dan O'Brien

Seriocomic

Flanagan, fifties to sixties

*Flanagan, a teacher, is talking to Elise, a younger teacher, about his views of our sex-obsessed culture.*

FLANAGAN: — It's a question of taste, my girl! — *Morality* is a question of *taste!* . . . And so I simply do not care to speak lightly of that sort of thing. — It's simply an *opinion* of mine: I think we all might be a great deal better off were we all a bit more repressed. Shame is a wonderful tool — for good. And I'm talking about the world here: think of all we might be avoiding, right now, as a culture: — and I know it's not very popular these days, or for the past twenty-, thirty-odd years — *but* there'd be no AIDS, yes?, fewer undesired pregnancies, divorces, molestations. What I'm saying is simply how I feel: "repression" has got a bad rap since Freud. And that's one *very* big reason why I won't read anything written after the First World War.

— My God, we're obsessed with deviance! — a Godless culture running around with its head and pants cut off. The papers, on TV: you see a new story every day — about *priests* —. Did you know, last month, the priest from my parish was accused of molesting a young man — a boy, really, seminary, *years* ago; and this kindly old man walked down to the river — just last month this all came out, in the press, you can read it — and he threw himself into the water — .

— Right into the *filthy* waves . . . !

And that boy today who came into my office — he'd been abused. — I'm sure of it now . . . (. . .)

— And I'm not saying people should never have sex — they *should*. And it does not have to be a dreary affair; it can be quite beautiful, Elise . . . — Because a little repression goes a long way in making it that much more rewarding when one finally *does give in* — .

# THE DEAR BOY

Dan O'Brien

Seriocomic

Richard, thirties to fifties

*During a faculty party, Richard addresses the other celebrants. He is looped and says a bunch of things he probably shouldn't be saying.*

RICHARD: — Everyone! (*Clapping hands.*) — Everyone, listen up: Dick Purdy here in the Anguish Department. Mr. Flanagan and I would like to make a brief announcement. — Actually, I'm the one making the announcement, as you can see, because it's *about* our dear old Mr. Flanagan: he has a few problems with me. Always has. There are certain things he does not *like* about me, does not *approve* of entirely — and I think it's time we get this prejudice out in the open before the shit really hits the fan which it will once I sue. Which I will most certainly do. Once James — sorry, "the Board," gives the Chair of the department to our colleague here, Charles. — You've got something on your nose, Chuck — there, it's gone: — Mr. Charles Komisky, ladies and gentlemen!, our new Chair of the English Department . . . Instead of me . . . Though I have been here twice as long, and I care *deeply* about our students, their minds — and literature — not to mention *Idée Fixe* — thank you, thank you — And why will Charles get the Chair? For no reason other than he is straight and *I am most emphatically not*. As you all know. As some of you disapprove of. Or fear. Or *claim not to "understand"* . . . Which is all very hypocritical given how many of our greatest writers have been gay, straight and all flavors in between: consider *Moby-Dick*. — But we must protect the children! says Mr. Flanagan, our patron saint of innocence. — We must *save* the children! — from *confusion!* They are not to understand the dark dank world of men; — whereas I dissent. And this is how I will teach them next year when Mr. Flanagan is gone, even though I will not be the Chair and I don't care if it gets

me fired — there but for the grace of tenure go I — *I will teach the children everything there is to know about life!* Because they need to know. Whether they want to know or not. I will let them see for themselves that I, for example, am a homosexual, as they've *long* known. And I will let them know what it's like to *be* a homosexual, in this day and age, to be prejudiced against, to watch your friends and your loved ones die of AIDS —

And Charles here the Chair will let them know what it's like to be addicted to a controlled substance. Namely cocaine. And married to a shrewish megalomaniac with disconcertingly boyish features. For example. — And Fritz, Fritz DeLong, wherever you are, and if that is your real name, you can tell them what it was like to be an underwear model during the halcyon days of the early- to mid-1980s. — And Liz here will clue us all in on how it feels to be racially ambiguous. Right, Liz?

And Mr. Flanagan . . .

What can our dear old Mr. Flanagan teach us all about life? I know he's leaving — right now — with Ms. Sanger — do y'all know Ms. Sanger? — say hello, Elise; now say good-bye. — But were he to stay on another year: what does Mr. Flanagan know about life? What has he *learned* from his sixty-five years on this earth?

# THE DIRTY TALK

Michael Puzzo

Seriocomic

Mitch, thirties

*After pouring on the macho bluster about his hunting prowess and his close relationship with his father, the sight of a dusty deer head mounted on the wall triggers Mitch to break down and reveal the sad truth about the bagging of his first buck.*

MITCH: That day . . . *(Pause.)* I'm sitting way up in this dead tree in the freezing fucking cold. I remember praying that all the deer had gotten on a bus to Vegas or something. 'Cuz I knew if one came along, I'd have to kill it. Be a man. I sat there for hours, freezing and praying. Then as if to prove that there was no God, or if there was, He sure wasn't listening to me, alooooooong he came, Bambi's father. This dumb motherfucker comes right to me! I mean, how could he not have seen me? There's not a fucking leaf in my tree and I'm dressed in day-glow orange, for Chrissake! You would think the word would have gotten around Deer Central, "Stay away from the Orange Guys!" But no, he starts grazing right beneath me. And at this point, I can feel my dad's eyes burning into me. So, I lift my rifle and take aim. But I'm . . . I'm crying. Because . . . I don't want to kill this . . . this beautiful . . . But I also don't want my dad to see me crying, so I twist around a bit, to hide my face and there's this crack . . . the fucking branch broke . . . And I . . . I fall. Outta the tree. Right on top of the deer. SMASH. Broke his back. Broke my arm . . . shit . . . So, I look up and my dad he's looking down at me with such . . . I'll never forget, my uncle said, "Well, he got him!" And they laughed . . . (. . .)

The deer was screaming — They had to shoot him . . . put him out of his misery. *(Pause.)* I wish someone would have done the same for me.

# EXITS AND ENTRANCES

Athol Fugard

Dramatic

Playwright, twenties

*The playwright is at the start of his career. André is a washed up actor nearing the end.*

PLAYWRIGHT: (*Angry and defensive.*) You know André, that phrase you used . . . “our people” . . . If you don’t mind me saying so, that is exactly what is wrong with our theater — with this whole damned country for that matter. Because as far as I’m concerned the people of the slums are also “my people.” I can’t pretend they don’t exist. They’re out there and as much a part of my world as you, or my wife or the unborn child she is carrying, or my dying father. I rub shoulders with them every day of my life — in my home when old Maria comes to clean up our mess, the beggars on the pavements. They’re not invisible, you know. In some ways their world is even more real for me than the white one I live in. (*Pause.*) I would have stayed on in London and kept knocking on doors if it hadn’t been for a front-page picture in the *Evening Standard*. It’s pasted into my notebook. If you look very carefully you can count twelve bodies in it, though of course there were sixty-nine all told. Sharpeville. Just lying there on the ground, all of them face down in the dirt. They were running away when the police opened fire on a peaceful protest against the tyranny of those Dom Books. That did it! There’s no way I could stay on in London after that.

# THE EXPENSE OF SPIRIT

Josh Fox

Seriocomic

Bernie, thirties

*Bernie is a film buff who has come into a video store to see about getting his VCR fixed.*

BERNIE: I like that movie — *Platoon*. That gets me every time. That's a beautiful thing. It makes me cry. When the guy — the Willem Dafoe guy — he's running from Charlie 'cause the Tom Berenger screwed him over and left him to die? Elias — That's the guy — Elias is running from Charlie and you see him from the chopper and that music comes in you know da da da da da and he's running in slow motion and his body is riddled with bullets and he throws his arms up in the air like this . . . that is so pretty 'cause he didn't have to die see? And it's terrible and beautiful at the same time. That's like poetry, you know?

Yeah. That *Platoon*. I think that's my favorite movie. Some days it's *When Harry Met Sally* but I love that movie for different reasons, you know.

Of course, that's all a thing of the past. The men, with the honor dying on the battlefield. I'm hungry. I got a *Hot Pocket*. You don't need to nuke 'em, you can eat 'em right outta the box. Most people don't know that.

*(Bernie starts eating a Hot Pocket.)*

I mean, How many died in Vietnam?

The Americans. About what . . . ? Fitty thousand. And now — what, a couple twelve or eight hundred. It's a *Lean Pocket* actually. Because now the technology is just amazing. I mean, you got planes that you can't see or hear before they are on top of you. I do a lot of reading about this stuff. The surgical bombing, the tactical weapons. Microwaves! They got these huge microwave cannons that can

basically cook a person from long range because you target it from outer space. OH! And the MOAB, you know the one they dropped on Florida, to test it. Knocked out about five square miles of the Everglades. The MOAB?, the largest conventional bomb ever made, This thing, it is amazing. It's bright orange which is for *danger*. And the thing about it is — it is so huge and powerful that it has to go into a plane and they load it onto a pallet that has a parachute on it. So they drop it and the parachute is drifting gently downwards and then a guy in Texas somewhere sees that it's going on his satellite hookup and he then targets it via computer — and it rockets off the pallet and the thing is, most conventional bombs they they . . . well, 90 percent of the impact of the bomb goes into the ground. You lose most of your bang into the ground when the thing hits. But the amazing thing about the MOAB is that it has a thirty-foot-long pole on the end of it — so it is drifting gently downwards and when it gets to where it's going it hits the ground with the pole end, and the pole shoots into the MOAB like a pitchfork and it explodes OUTWARD IN EVERY DIRECTION and basically FRIES everything in its path. And you are fucked. You are completely fucked. One minute you're standing there and the next you're *microwaved* like the Paul Newman popcorn when you cook it too long and it's all black and gooey and *stuck to the bag!* So these guys are incredibly smart. And this thing of the men with honor dying on the battlefield like the Willem Dafoe, that's all history.

You want a Hot Pocket? I got two.

# FUGITIVE PIECES

Caridad Svich

Dramatic

Troubled John, late twenties

*Troubled John has been cast out of several hundred foster homes and now lives on the road, wherever he can. Here, he dreams of another life, lived both in the here and now and on a movie screen.*

TROUBLED JOHN:

I think sometimes I'll come to a place that's not even a bit of itself,  
But a whole combination of places put together,  
Like a town made up of all the towns in the world.  
No. Just a place that's become, through time,  
a place where all the bits of the world have come together.  
A stack of Irish hay next to a New York building,  
a burst of Chinese poppies in the middle of a Kentucky minefield . . .  
Arabian horses running next to German cars,  
Italian ships resting on the hills of Montana,  
The sound of French phonographs playing 78 rpm.  
While a Hollywood screen twenty-feet-tall  
moves back and forth through the gravity field of the frontier,  
illuminating the holes of the earth  
with huge, flaming stars in black, white, and color,  
who to measure themselves against the world,  
burst through the screen with their painted ivory teeth  
and irradiate the frontier with a ferocious kiss.  
And in this place, there'd be a child.  
A child with a Brownie camera in his hand  
given to him by a man he once called "father."  
A child who takes pictures of a solar eclipse  
with his small, eager eyes looking straight at the sun.  
And nothing happens to him. Nothing.

Except his eyes grow large,  
and the small of his camera un-spools plates of hieroglyphs.  
Hard rock pictures: part Egyptian, part Indian, part no one knows.  
The French songs fade.  
The child stops staring at the sun.  
And all the bits of the world  
that have come together in this place  
made up of scraps of places  
Stir in silence against the mist.  
There is a scream.  
The child can't hear anything.  
He's lost his hearing. Like sometimes happens in dreams.  
He can only see flames  
turn into smoke the color of silver  
like when the projector dies and the screen goes dark.  
The child lets the camera fall from his hands.  
He sits with the Brownie camera, broken, in front of him,  
and glides his hand over the plates of hieroglyphs.  
"I was born in Missouri," he says,  
"I was born in New York, I was . . ."  
His hand stops on a half-formed hieroglyph.  
He kisses it with his unpracticed lips,  
and the half-formed shape burns itself into his skin,  
and he is left with a mark that runs down his tongue  
and rests on his chin.  
And so he will always be known  
as the child marked by the sun, by its very eclipse,  
who is from a place made up of other places,  
who walks around  
with a trace of twenty-foot Hollywood silver in his veins,  
and the eye of a broken-down Brownie camera in his heart.

# HAZARD COUNTY

Allison Moore

Dramatic

Tim, forties

*Tim is a fan of* The Dukes of Hazzard.

TIM: It's escapism, pure and simple. Don't get me wrong. There's a time and place for serious discussions, but after a long day, I'll take a couple of car chases and the sight of Catherine Bach poured into those itty-bitty shorts anytime. I mean, sure, it's formulaic. You know the bad guys are always going to get caught, the Dukes are going to be exonerated of whatever ridiculous charge Roscoe's trumped up. And Cooter will always be able to fix the General. But there's also. Well, now I'm going to get philosophical, but. You know, there's an ethic to the show. If you really watch it. Basic stuff. Family comes first. Respect your elders. If something breaks, you fix it. If someone needs help, you help them. It's not all that far off from *Little House on the Prairie*, you know? It's really not. But you don't see Laura Ingalls still in prime-time syndication now, do you? No sir. She's on in the middle of the day. But twenty years later, *The Dukes of Hazzard* are still there. And you know why? Because underneath everything that happens, there is always an acknowledgment that the law is never on the common man's side. The law is there to protect the Boss Hogs of the world, keep the fat man fat and the common man down. Maybe they are just a couple of rednecks with a hot car. But at least they know the score and they aren't afraid to say it. Any day now, I'm gonna be staring at a pink slip, trying to figure out how to pay for my COBRA insurance, while by boss' boss reports to the shareholders that through "aggressive cost-cutting measures" they're all gonna be a million dollars richer than they were last quarter. It's nice to turn on the TV and see someone out there fighting the system like two modern-day Robin Hoods. So sue me if for one hour each week I want a little piece of that.

# HOUSE OF CARDS

Richard Keller

Dramatic

Jack, late twenties to early thirties

*Jack is at a poker party.*

JACK: Yeah. *(Pause.)* Wink Martindale's "Deck of Cards." *(Shuffles some more and some more.)* When I was growing up, my parents would host Bible study in our home. Once a month maybe. Nothing too . . . zealous. I wasn't into it. I was sort of embarrassed by it. But that song. I just thought that song was so cool 'cause this guy was finding the meaning of God or life somewhere other than the usual places. Like he could read meaning into the numbers on the cards. *(Long pause, places the deck down.)* I don't know how to play poker. *(Pause.)* We're creating new actuary tables at the office. Determining a set of risk factors depending on where people work. Calculating life expectancies. What ifs . . . What if you work in an office tower. What if the office tower is over twenty stories. What if the office tower is over fifty stories. What if a famous person works in the building. What if you open the mail of the famous person that works in the tower over fifty stories. What if you open the mail of the famous person that works in the twenty-story office tower. How famous can a person be if they only work in a twenty-story office tower. How will it impact the insurance rates. What kind of premiums will be paid out. *(Pause.)* I just moved here a couple of months ago. I don't know anyone. If something happened to me right now, nobody would know to look for me. Or no, a few would, if they cared to. If I didn't show up for work. *(Pause.)* I wanted to be the jack of hearts. The lover. The soldier of fortune. I wanted to wear an eye patch.

# JASPER LAKE

John Kuntz

Seriocomic

Drake, thirty

*Drake is a drifter. He has just met a woman named Liz at a truck stop and had sex with her. Now, he's driving her in her car, headed toward Jasper Lake.*

DRAKE: I mean, I wasn't even her assistant. You know? I was her assistant's assistant. So, the person who helped her pick her nose and scratch her ass? Well, I was the person who helped her help HER to pick her nose and scratch her ass. So I'm at the bottom of the totem pole, you know? I'm not even ON the fucking totem pole. I'm like fucking wood shavings. But, it was a job, and I got to travel around and it was cool being part of this big major concert tour whatever, even if it was her. THE BITCH, that's what we all called her. THE BITCH. I mean, we didn't even call her by her name at all, because you're not supposed to talk to her, it's like in her contract, and if she *does* talk to you, you're not supposed to look her in the face and just nod to show that you heard her. I mean, what the fuck is THAT? All right? I mean she is just a fucking . . . Jesus. Anyway. And there's a lot of dancing in the show, and she wears these spangley whore outfits and she's not even really singing, you know, it's totally bogus, I mean that was apparent my first night on the job. But this is the best part of all. About halfway thru the show there's this big SERIOUS MOMENT, right? All the lights go low and blue. Graphics gone. Dancers in the wings. Single spot on her. THE BITCH. And she sits down at this big black grand piano and sings her newest single, "Child of Glass," which is this slow, teary number about having everything you could ever want but still not being happy. Which I guess is supposed to be her life story. She's baring her soul, you know? Like, Boo Hoo. So, anyway, we're in between shows in Texas and I'm helping with the sound check

in this, like, huge auditorium. And the show's completely sold out, by the way, I mean she packs them in, she's like this machine, you know? So, I'm with Steve, the sound guy, and we're up by the grand piano on stage, you know, the one she's supposed to be fucking PLAYING during this big, like SERIOUS moment. And we're up there and Steve is checking on something, and I come up to see what he's doing because, you know, I'm interested in that sort of thing. And he opens up the top of the piano, you know, and I peer over his shoulder and it's EMPTY. I mean, It's not even a fucking piano, it's just this BOX. So, she not only lip-synchs ALL her songs, but she's not even playing a fucking instrument, either. I mean, what is she? She's just this sixteen-year-old money-making mass entertainment monster. She's just not really an ARTIST, you know? When you get right down to it. And that's when I knew I had to get off the tour. It was just killing my SPIRIT, you know? And I believe art should FEED your spirit, not destroy it. So, that's why I was looking for a ride. I just don't want you to think I'm some sort of loser, you know? I mean, I was employed and stuff. *(Pause.)* You aren't much of a talker, are you? That's cool. Do you mind if I talk? Because talking really helps me stay awake. Sometimes I just pop off, you know? I mean BAM! I'm asleep, you know? It's not really narcolepsy. Well, maybe it is. I just go to sleep. Instantly. POW! It's almost VIOLENT, you know, how I fall asleep. It's like this assault, you know? Like, here I am, and the next thing you know, you're in some dream that you didn't even have time to warm up to. That's kind of why I left the tour. You know, before it happened again and they fired me. I'm always getting fired. That, and I got mad at Steve and pissed in his soy milk that he makes his Chai tea out of. Not that he would ever know, that stuff is so nasty. I worked at this bakery once and I fell asleep and the place burned to the ground. Swear to god. Nothing but ashes left. Ashes, and the donuts all melted. They melt, donuts. Did you know that? Like candle wax. Man, I am never eating a fucking donut again, not after that. The alarm woke me up and I stumbled out in the smoke and just kept walking. I mean, it wasn't MY bakery, you know? Then I got the roadie job and now, here I am. Did you just say something?

# KATE CRACKERNUTS

Sheila Callaghan

Dramatic

Paul, twenties, could be younger

*Paul is telling a woman named Kate about his sick mother. Paul is a young, sickly looking man. He is pale and transparent.*

PAUL: OK. The story goes like this. Her name was Mother and she was mine. She spent most of her days shrouded in a shrivel of herself which grew tighter and tighter by the day, and I watched it happen. She was sick, you see, sick on a stick in that stylish chronic way people like to talk about from their throats instead of their mouths. I held her hand when she couldn't walk, then held her cane when she couldn't stand, then pushed her around when she grew wheels. Father was also shriveled, from sorrow not sickness, and couldn't help. Brother was a coin flipping itself, no help either. It was me and me. But Mother was so radiant and weightless, wrapped in her affliction like cotton candy, and her pretty sickness was forever aglow.

And one day I looked at her and the candy had melted and she was a sticky lump of Mother in a bed and the sheets were damp and clung to her like they were searching for something beneath her flesh and she cried out Paul I'm sick and I said I know and she said no it's different this time and I knew but pretended I didn't.

She kept a black felt tip pen by her bedside for me to keep track of her medicines and at this moment she started shouting out words, words that made no sense, random snatches of sentences she could not form or colors she could not pronounce and I reached for the pen on the dresser and couldn't find any paper so I began writing her words on the skin of my arms and when I ran out of arms I took my shirt off and wrote them on my chest and when I ran out of chest I dropped my trousers and wrote them on my legs and then she ran out of words and her lips turned blue.

So I leapt into the bed and held her, she was moist from the struggle of trying to make sense and I was moist with tears, and I stuck to her and to myself and when they pried me from her we were both covered in swirls of black ink and not one word she uttered survived our separation.

I haven't been able to feel my skin since then, Kate. Do you know that feeling?

# MAN FROM NEBRASKA

Tracey Letts

Dramatic

Harry, British, thirty-three

*Harry reveals to his flatmate, Tamyra, that they are in deep trouble due to a double-whammy: past due rent and a huge rent increase coming up because of their landlord's gambling addiction.*

HARRY: I have loads of bad news and a spot of good news. . . .

I busted the key in the lock of the front door to our building. Rather, the key crumbled in my hand as if it were made of gingerbread. I smashed the window to reach my hand through and open the door, and in the process, severed a tendon and had to go to hospital where they sewed ten black stitches into my wanking hand. Upon my return to the flat, I discovered our landlord's haggard wifey weeping on the sidewalk in front of the building. I assured her I intend to pay the two months back rent owed her husband, as well as a reimbursement for the smashed window, although I would appreciate if he would consider at least splitting the locksmith's fee for the busted key, as I felt it was not my fault the key was made of gingerbread. At that point, she confessed that her husband, Jim, our landlord, actually expired some thirteen weeks ago. I offered that this certainly shed some light on his noticeable absence from the building and his in attendance to our affairs, particularly the faint yet menacing odor of natural gas emanating from the stub of rusting pipe inexplicably jutting from the center of my bedroom floorboards, a situation I have been willing to overlook given our tardiness with the rent payment. She then told me that the reason we have been heretofore uninformed of his demise is purely at his request. According to her, he croaked these final words: "Don't tell anyone I'm dead." She has been reeling from this instruction, unsure of at least two things: just how many people he actually intended by the word *anyone*, and for just *how long*

she was expected to keep this secret to herself. Apparently, my time to be kept in the dark amounted to approximately thirteen weeks. I was disheartened to learn, however, that within that thirteen-week period, our good landlord's crippling and clandestine gambling addiction was posthumously discovered, and as a result, our new landlady has been made aware by her accountant that due to tremendous debts incurred by said husband, the need has arisen for her to raise all rents by a shocking 16 percent, the maximum allowed by our rental agreement. Her accountant has also encouraged her, as accountants will do when given the opportunity, to collect all outstanding debts in short order, and that if overdue payments are not indemnified, to take steps to rectify the situation. This means, in short, dear Tamyra, that you and I are currently responsible for rent payments of six hundred and forty pounds. And in twelve days' time, we will owe, not including any overdue utility invoices that mayhaps slipped their magnetic shackles and drifted ignominiously between the fridgie and Formica, a grand total of one thousand and ten pounds sterling. . . .

The good news is I scored.

# MONKEY SOUP

Don Nigro

Comic

Fartwhistle, could be any age. Think Groucho Marx.

*In this parody of the sort of movie the Marx Brothers used to make, Dr. Fartwhistle, supposedly a renowned theatrical director, but in fact a dentist named Hassenfusser in whose chair Fartwhistle has died, has been summoned to New York at the last minute to try and rescue the over-the-hill actress Lillian P. Quackenfurter's comeback play, a dreadful piece of schlock. He has just been introduced to the cast, and he is presently mystifying Mrs. Quackenfurter with a non-stop monologue designed to conceal the fact that he has no idea what he's doing.*

FARTWHISTLE: It's a lucky thing you caught me. I was out on safari in Dusseldorf. Nobody goes on safari in Africa any more, there's no challenge in it. Just try finding a rhinoceros in Dusseldorf. But small game is my game. I've spent many blissful weekends, creeping up the Ganges, hunting mice with a blow gun. The bald-headed ones are the hardest to flush. Some of my happiest moments have been spent chasing beaver in the bush. I once shot an elephant in my pyjamas. I didn't want to, but there was hardly room for me in those pyjamas, so one of us had to go, and I had the gun. If I'm going to share my pyjamas with somebody, I don't want them bringing along a trunk. Maybe a small attaché case. And I don't like peanuts in bed. Is that bacon grease on your lip, or are you still using that mustache wax? No thanks, I'll have the soy sauce. What a saucy little wench you are. Let's you and me step into the closet and put sauce on a wench. On second thought, you go in the closet and wait for me. I'll be along as soon as I learn Sanskrit. You can amuse yourself by polishing the door knob. Just don't try opening an umbrella in there, it's bad luck. Don't you have something to drink around here? I'm not working until

I get some liquor in me. I'd like two fingers of bourbon, and hold the fingers. Or just give me a bottle of rotgut and a head start. By the time you catch me, I won't care what you look like. Maybe I'll talk to the cast while we're waiting for the hooch. Boys and girls, I love the theater. The theater is my life. Why, I was born in a trunk outside the Roxy Theatre in Hoboken. I still have the trunk. I don't know how Mother ever managed to stuff herself in there. She was a rather large woman. We often referred to her buttocks as Vermont and New Hampshire. She gave birth in a trunk because if it was good enough for the cat, it was good enough for her. That's just the kind of woman my mother was. Ran off with a Turkish pickle salesman when I was in diapers. This was last week. What this show needs is a little singing and dancing. As little as possible. And we could use some more naked women. What good is theater if we can't have naked women? Does anybody here have a dime? I want to call the playwright and ask him what this stinking piece of horse pucky is all about. I'm calling in somebody to rewrite the second act. Or, we could make the second act the first act and do the first act backwards. I love script development. Let's get that guy Shakespeare. I wanted to ask him what the hell a fardel is. Can't you at least bare your fardel? No, on second thought, keep it covered, I've got a weak stomach. Now here's a girl I'd like to see with a bare fardel. But only in my capacity as director. As a woman, she doesn't interest me at all. Of course, I'm not a woman, am I? Wait, let me check.

*(He looks down his pants.)*

Woops. HEL-LO. Now let me check you.

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FARTWHISTLE: Greetings, ladies and gentlemen, I'm Dr. Cornelius P. Fartwhistle — no, Cornelius G. Fartwhistle — Cornelius T. Fartwhistle — well, pick one and call me in the morning — and I want to welcome you to the gala New York opening of Mrs. Lillian P. Quackenfurter's breathtaking new masterpiece of American drama, *Lady Furtwinger's Lover*. We're just tickled silly that you folks actually showed up here tonight when you might just as easily have gone bowling. I'm telling you people, hold your fedoras, this play is going to curl your toenails. It's got romance, it's got intrigue, it's got dancing girls, wild animals, car chases, community singing, shuffleboard, octopus yodelling, and a chorus of dead wolverines. Yes sir, this play will change your life, it'll change your oil, it'll change your pants. You know, some people say the theater is dead. Well, if it wasn't before, we should finish it off tonight without any problem. So I say, why not mambo at the funeral? All we need is lunch meat, some cheese balls, and a corn cob, and I'll be as happy as a pig in slop. Oh, I see the critic from the *Times* is here. Congratulations on getting your high school diploma in prison. I guess they must have repealed that law

about fornicating with farm animals. Or is that your wife? Listen, if you need help reading the program, just ask that lip-diddler behind you. And so, without further ado —

*(Looking offstage.)*

Are we all right now? I ran out of material half way through the first act. Great. And so, without further ado, and I'm not adoing this any further — I give you *Lady Quackenfurter's Furtwinger*. *Lady Quickfinger's Fartenworter*. Whatever. And remember, if you get bored, just French kiss the person sitting on your right. If you're sitting on the aisle, you'll have to French kiss yourself or else go to France. And in case of fire, try peeing on it. I should be over the Mexican border by then — I'm wanted at a cockfight. I'm also wanted in eleven states, but not very much, and that's another story. So, without further ado, I give you, *Lady Lovequacker's Fingerfarter*.

# MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS

Ron Hutchinson

Seriocomic

Selznick, forties

*Film producer David O. Selznick is about to start production of a new film, but he has no shooting script. Here, he is talking to his director and a script doctor he has brought in to come up with a viable shooting script. The director? Victor Fleming. The script doctor? Ben Hecht. The film? Gone With the Wind.*

SELZNICK: I need this guys. I need it. You have no idea how badly I need it. My father-in-law's just waiting for me to fall on my ass. He told Irene, "Keep away from that schnook. He'll be a bum, just like his old man." (*He's naked, desperate* —) Give me a hit, fellas. A *hit*. You know what it's like when a million people go see your movie? When a million people say *Yes?* . . . Ever been on a lot Monday morning when the studio's had a smash that weekend? Even the cop on the gate is standing a little taller. There's an extra snap in the way the waiter in the commissary opens your napkin. *Yes, sir*. Suddenly you're a genius. The fact that every previous release for the past three years has been a dog doesn't matter any more — you out of all the people in Hollywood know exactly what those Joe Blows and Jane Does want to plunk their fifty cents on; other people have hits, sure, but that's dumb luck — *you*, you genius bastard, made it happen on sheer talent and you're going to keep on doing it, week after week, movie after movie from now on, everything you touch is going to turn to gold — But it's not just the money. It's knowing that you *know*. You know what I mean — *you know?* . . .

What's a movie? Specks of light stuck to a strip of celluloid. Did you ever think of it like that? A goddamn authentic miracle. A series of moments frozen in time by the only time machine ever invented.

So what do we want our specks of light to be? This time? When we're sitting in a movie palace and the lights go down — And the theater disappears and the magic starts to happen? . . . Say we hear an overture — I don't know — something like — *da da da da dah dab-dah da da* — and the curtains open — *da da da dah* — (*He opens the curtains fully* — ) And on the screen we see a sky in flames, a sky that looks as if it's the end of the world — (*He holds his hand up, as if he can almost touch the image* — ) Shapes, silhouettes, backs bent in toil — *da da da da da da da da* — an image of back-breaking labor, endless struggle — . . .

It's Tara . . .

*Tara* — you can smell the red, ripe, rotting earth, Ben — it's as red as the sky, red as the blood that beats in the hearts of a people who know their way of life is doomed but who'll spill every ounce in defense of their hopeless cause —

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SELZNICK: In the beginning was The Deal. You don't get to write the words — You don't get to shout action — until somebody puts the money together. Now *that's* an art form. You want to talk about being creative? — Take a look at the studio's books. That's real imagination. You're disappointed in me, Ben? It's a free country, anybody can make the movie they want. You want to make *your* *Gone With the Wind* — go ahead — as long as you can raise a million dollars and control the rights. You have a million dollars? You have the rights? No? Then maybe you're here to help me make the *Gone With the Wind* I want to make. I pay you to write it the way I want it written and somebody like Fleming to direct it the way I see it. That's called collaboration. . . .

Movies get made because somebody like me, who everybody thinks is the asshole who just happens to own the studio, picks up a book and, sure, yes, I think it's going to be another moonlight-and-magnolias but a couple pages in the same thing happens to me as happened to Margaret Mitchell. Scarlett O'Hara grabbed me by the nuts and never let go. I think Mitchell started out to write just another bodice ripper but Scarlett took the book over. You don't make judgments about the little brat. You go with her. A million and a half

readers did. As sure as I know there's a God of the movies, I know that tens of millions of moviegoers will — . . .

Somebody has to have the vision and willpower to make it all happen. That's just how it is. . . .

Hitler couldn't take the pressure of running a studio, Mussolini wouldn't have the patience, and Stalin's too nice —

Those guys don't have Mayer breathing down their necks — I've been carrying this movie in my gut for three years. I *know* Scarlett O'Hara. I *know* Melanie. I *know* Ashley and Rhett Butler and Tara and I care about them more than any hired hand, which at the end of the day are what you two are — (*At Fleming.*) — and while we're talking about compromises the shape of the ice cubes does matter, OK, *everything* matters — one mistake and the whole illusion's lost, it's just a bunch of actors standing in front of wood and canvas — (*Beseeching.*) I can taste this movie but I need your help to get it on the screen — . . . I raise the money — Fleming figures where the camera goes and how the actor says the line — Isn't there something you should be doing? You stop blubbing like a girl about your eye — (You stop dreaming of making Hollywood what it can never be — Put your butt into that chair and give me Prissy's big scene —

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Selznick, forties

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SELZNICK: What power do I have, Ben? I can't make you finish the screenplay, I can't make people go see my movies. I can't fix the rocks in those guys' heads and I'm not about to waste my time trying. You want to talk about power? You know who has the power in the end? The real power? . . .

*(Selznick points to the photo of the crowd outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre on his wall. He jabs a thumb at an anonymous face in the crowd.)* This guy here — *(Jabs it at another face.)* Her — *(Another one.)* I have to keep this guy happy — *(Another one.)* This one — *(Another one.)* This son of a bitch here — *(Another one.)* This jerk — *(Another one.)* That asshole — *(Another one.)* Fatso, here — *(Another one.)* Baldy — *(Another one.)* The gimp — *(Another one.)* Her with the big tits — *(Another one.)* Him with the boil on his nose — *(More faces.)* This Irishman, that Polak, Giovanni, Mike, Hans, Mr. and Mrs. Wong, the Dutchman, the wop — *(Even more.)* All those Joe Blows and Jane Does, the guy with the lunch pail, the broad in the elevator, all those little people who have nothing in common except they go to the movies three or four times a week and every time they go they buy a ticket and every ticket is a vote for my movie or a vote against it. They're the people who hand out the ulcers, pal, they're the ones who run this town, the world, they have the power, the real

power. Mayer? Me? Hedda Hopper? Gable? We don't amount to anything if they give us the thumbs-down. Princes of Hollywood? America's royalty? We are down on our knees sucking the collective dick of the Great Unwashed.

# NATURAL SELECTION

Eric Coble

Dramatic

Zhao, twenties to thirties

*This comedy takes place in a future time when pretty much everything has gone to Hell in a handbasket. Zhao is talking to Henry, who works for a vast theme park that preserves a little of what's left. Henry has captured Zhao in the remote mountains of New Mexico, as his employers needed an authentic Native American. Well, at last Zhao is part Navaho, though he knows virtually nothing about his "Indian heritage." By the end of the play, though, he's learned quite a bit, and as a Deluge rolls in to rival the one that sent Noah sailing, he tells Henry what he's learned.*

ZHAO: The Dineh — us Navajos — didn't even begin to look like this, like humans, until the fourth world. Our little dead dust bodies were nothin' 'til the Wind blew into us, brought us to life through our fingers, left its kiss in the trails of our skin. . . .

And we've been movin' ever since, from world to world to world, lookin' for a home. . . .

And back in the Fourth World, First Man and First Woman started gettin' the tribe together, started workin' out farming, how to live with each other. And then one day — WHOOOSH — the sky stoops down, and ROARRR — the earth rose up to meet it. And in that place where they touched, right there, Coyote was born. And he didn't howl, he didn't play. He ran right over to the Dineh. He was to always be with them. To help them. His only job. What he did in his off-hours was his business. He had a temporary pass to the whole park. But that was until First Man and First Woman got into an argument with Tieholtzodie, a water spirit, and ended up pissin' the spirit off pretty bad. But the tribe keeps on like nothin's wrong, like they got all the time in the world. And then the animals start show-

in' up. From all over, everywhere, terrified, they start gatherin' round the Dineh. Because the water's comin'. First day they see the flood risin' from the East. The second day the North. The third day the West and the fourth day the South. Their world was gettin' smaller and smaller, they couldn't breathe. They were trapped. Until Coyote gets this idea — he plants a reed in the ground and it grows — and grows and grows into the sky, this huge hollow reed with a hole in the bottom of the east side. The whole tribe climbs in, they take the animals, the soil from the Sacred Mountains, and they climb. They climb for their lives. As fast as the water rises, the reed grows, climbing, climbing, until Crack! Smooth and hard. They hit the sky. And Coyote grabs Locust and Badger and they dig, man, they dig like fire, like claws, like God himself, 'til they break through. To here.

*(Gestures around.)*

The Fifth World.

*(Beat.)*

We been here a long time and had a lot of adventures. But the water's risin' again. It's time to go.

# NEVER TELL

James Christy

Comic

Hoover, early thirties during most of the play, but in this monologue he's fourteen

*This can be played as a reminiscence by an adult or as a recent memory of a dream of a fourteen-year-old. In it, Hoover tells about how he happened to meet Bob Marley.*

HOOVER: So I'm in this office, this really cool office. And I realize it's like a record company office, with gold records and shit all around. And I'm a big-shot record executive. And it's like I can do anything I want. Anything. I can call famous musicians or hook up with girls, whatever I want. So I'm sitting there deciding what I want to do, and Bob Marley walks in. Bob Marley. Now my dad played me Bob Marley records ever since I was like a baby so I know how big this is. But before I can think of anything to say he starts yelling at me and saying how I screwed him out of all this money in some record deal. And I'm trying to tell him no, you know, it isn't me, this isn't really my office, I'm just sitting here. But I can't get it out, I can't even talk. And he just keeps coming closer, behind the desk to where I'm sitting and right in front of me and I'm so scared. But at the same time, you know, I can't stop thinking how cool it is that he's talking to me. I also kind of knew in the back of my mind that he's dead, but that just made it that much cooler. So just as I'm starting to get scared that he's really going to fuck me up, I look down and I realize that I have this huge boner. And it freaks me out because I know you're not supposed to get boners in front of guys and it might make him even madder, but it's just happening and I can't do anything about it. So he looks down and he sees my boner, and he sort of smiles and stops being mad. Like he realizes he has the wrong guy. So then he just turns around and walks out.

So that was it, that was my first time. Bob Marley.

# NICKEL AND DIMED

Joan Holden

Dramatic

Howard, at least thirties, but could be older

*Howard is a manager for a store such as Wal-Mart. In this direct address to the audience, he talks about the pressures he is under to produce.*

HOWARD: You two: Go and punch out, then come back and finish these returns. (*They exit.*) Now you're thinking, "How can he do that? How can he make them work without pay?" It's not me. And it's not my manager. It's not even his manager — it's the numbers . . . The numbers make the decisions. Takes the personal element out of it. That's what's great about how corporations work.

We don't have quotas, but we do have targets. For the company, each division, each store, each department within each store. And if our store's not hitting its target, there's two things we can do. We can increase sales, which we work very hard at with specials and promotions. And we can cut costs. Now our building costs and shipping costs are fixed. Price of inventory, we don't control. Only one cost is flexible: labor.

Now, when I ask my Associates for a little bit more, it's way, way less than I give. I work sixty or seventy hours, and my paycheck says I worked forty. An Associate doesn't show up, the Department Manager covers their job. Who covers her job, along with his own? Where the buck stops: the Assistant Manager. But my work pays off, in my profit share. Associates could get a share, too, if they stayed. But out of fifty-six I had last year, I had to replace forty-four. Because these people steal. They take drugs. They file false claims for workman's comp. Mainly, they just disappear.

I believe in the market. The market pays everyone exactly what they're worth. I'm gonna prove it. I saw you at Intermission: pretty

upscale crowd — I'm guessing not many of you shop at Mall-mart. Some of you probably support "living wage" laws. OK — are you ready to wash your own car? Pay a third more on your restaurant bill? Pay hardware store prices at Home Depot? No way, right? See how it works? It's not you, it's not me. The numbers decide.

# ORSON'S SHADOW

Austin Pendleton

Seriocomic

Ken, late thirties to early forties

*Ken is the British theater critic Kenneth Tynan. He has hopes of joining Laurence Olivier in creating a National Theatre. He also hopes to rescue the career of one of his idols — Orson Welles. This is a direct address to the audience.*

KEN: I didn't want to turn that nice young man into a receptacle for exposition. However willing he might be. I mean, this could have turned into one of those dreadful scenes in which he asks me questions and I answer them, until, with clumsy spontaneity, we have told the audience the entire forty-five years of Orson's life to date. Like the maid who answers the telephone at the beginning of the play. (*He mimes a phone and imitates a maid.*) "Hello? Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Welles has stepped out — well, you see, he's walking on the moors — well, I don't know how long, you see he's brooding — Why is he brooding? — Because they tore up 'is contract at RKO in 1941 — How many years ago was that? — Well, nineteen years, wasn't it, because you know what year it is now — You don't? — It's 1960! — Oh, it's been nineteen long and bitter years 'ere, yes, they tore up that contract after 'e made *Citizen Kane*, took away 'is right to final cut they did, and 'im having lost his mum to the jaundice when he was nine, poor little tyke — what's final cut? — well, Mr. Zanuck, final cut is where nobody can touch the filum after Mr. Welles cuts it the way 'e likes it, and they took it way after *Citizen Kane*, they did — What's *Citizen Kane*? — why, just today the gardener says to me, 'Bessie, it revolutionized the art of the motion picture! I particularly admire his use of deep focus.'" (*Back to his own voice.*) Well, you see what I mean. The plays were like that. Oh, I fought it. With every breath in my body, which is not saying a great deal because I really

do smoke too much, but of course no one took really seriously a word I wrote. You see, I am a critic. What is a critic? A critic is no one. A critic is a man who cowers in a train compartment before a woman whose baleful eyes are saying, "I'm sure I have no idea why you were so unkind to poor Vivien Leigh." I tell you, I came to cherish the idea that there was more to life than this. And so I decided to approach Sir Laurence Olivier — my hero, really, in case you're interested — to ask if I might work with him to create the National Theatre of Great Britain which he is soon to form, to, well, advise him. I realized that if I'm to get him to hire me I must present him with an idea that will appall him so much he will always remember it was not his. Well, he needs a director for a play he's doing, and I'm proposing Orson. I'm using Orson. I'm using my best friend. I'm using the man I wish had been my father. My real father was not, you see, married to my mother. I am illegitimate. This is an advantage for a critic, actually, as when you write harshly of someone and they call you a bastard, you can receive it as a simple statement of fact. What is the point of what I'm saying? Oh, yes. No, I'm not using Orson, I am trying to help him. All those films he made since *Citizen Kane*, since they took away his right to final cut, all those marvelous films butchered by the studios, I feel grief, raw grief when I think about it, mitigated only slightly by the fact that it was his own fucking fault. Or much of it. Or not much of it at all, really. I don't know. Do you have friends like this? Never mind.

# ORSON'S SHADOW

Austin Pendleton

Comic

Orson, forties

*"Orson" is the director Orson Welles. At the urging of critic Kenneth Tynan, he has been hired to direct a production of Ionesco's Rhinoceros for Britain's nascent National Theatre. Here, he is directing his balky leading actor, Larry, who is also his boss. Larry is, of course, Laurence Olivier.*

ORSON: Don't get superior, Larry. Don't get ethical! You obviously don't think much of it either, or you wouldn't be maneuvering your brilliant, tough-minded fiancée into trying to love this girl. No, you don't like it. I don't like it, but we're smart men, Larry, we can make it work. And if we're going to do that we have to reach a decision about who's directing it, and I think — Sean, give me the script, let me just look — it says here I am the director! All right. All right, then. What shall I say? Oh, yes. I think your character's an idiot. I think your character's a loser. And if you have to love him love him, or can you only fall in love with kings who break the hearts of their best friends and narcissistic vaudevillians who imitate American blues singers when they hear their sons have died? I'm sure that's not true, I'm completely sure, because you're an actor, a great actor, and an actor loves everybody, isn't that right? Even characters who disappear! And, Larry, this man disappears. And let me tell you something else. We've got to create some suspense in this production, I mean, there's no suspense whatsoever in this stupid play because it's clear from the beginning that everyone in town is going to turn into a rhino and only our brave little loser here is going to stand alone. And if you can tell me how to build suspense with that, if you can tell me how to keep an audience emotionally and intellectually interested in that, I promise you, Larry, I'll go down on you. So where is the suspense? How do we keep

them in suspense? I'll tell you. We keep them wondering all evening if Larry Olivier is going to have the guts to disappear. Larry Olivier, who has been fucking audiences for twenty years now with his new-found confidence from World War Two, is he really going to play this man who no one notices. This is what people are like now, Larry, these are the dreary lives we're living now, this is what the audience is looking for these days, and this is what everybody's wondering, is Larry Olivier finally ready to disappear and join the modern age? Show us that you can, Larry, I promise you, there won't be a dry seat in the house!

# POODLE WITH GUITAR AND DARK GLASSES

Liz Duffy Adams

Dramatic

Gray, twenties

*Gray is a sorrowful, embittered young man in his twenties. He is talking to his silent new neighbor, Jerry.*

GRAY: I have a secret sorrow. (*Slight pause.*) What time is it? We really only have until about four A.M. That's when Rescue the Android opens up downstairs. The after-hours club. And the music starts. Around four. It's very loud. I really can't complain. That's why this place is so cheap. It's supposed to be a studio. Commercial. I'm not supposed to live here. Well, I don't exactly live here. I sleep here. I keep my stuff in a box here. All my stuff. I don't have any stuff anywhere else. So I guess this is home. Home is where your stuff is. The super told me you're setting up a darkroom. I guess you're a photographer then. (*He doesn't seem to expect a response.*) I guess he's the super. Or something. We pay the rent to him. Maybe he's the landlord. Probably he's nobody and it's some kind of a racket and we're all trespassing and could be thrown out anytime right into the street. I teach English as a Second Language. Does that sound interesting? It's not. After a day in there, everywhere I go these horrible sentences are running through my mind. Where are you from? Are you from Russia? Are you in America now? What is your name? And over and over again I hear "my name Galina." Or "I from Russia." They don't have the "to be" verb in Russian. That's what I'm told. I don't actually speak Russian. But do you believe that? I don't understand it. I guess they've got some kind of a way of thinking about it, but no direct equivalent. It drives them nuts. They say, "English *stupid* language." Which, oddly enough, infuriates me. I mean, it's kind of ludicrous. What do I care? So, the secret. I don't know. Why should I tell you? I don't really know

you. I don't know you at all. There's no reason to think you'd be interested. Why should you be interested? Who the hell are you anyway? Some low-life photographer. Renting a darkroom on Avenue B, you're probably some pornographer or something. Not that I'd object to that. I like the idea of pornography. It means people care about something, somebody cares about something somewhere, even if it's just sex or money. Which is pornography? Sex or money? Who knows, right? I think I used to care about sex and money, stuff like that, but now all I care about is getting a bunch of stupid fucking Russians to say I am. You are. He fucking is.

# THE POSITION

Kevin Doyle

Dramatic

The Sixth Man, late twenties to early thirties

*The setting is a waiting room within the confines of a major American corporation. Six anonymous men wait to be interviewed for a job opening at the company. One by one, the men are called into the next room by a strange secretary, but they never reemerge. The Sixth Man is convinced something strange and sinister is transpiring in the next room. He tries unsuccessfully to convince the other five men. This monologue is excerpted from the closing moments of the play. The Sixth Man is alone in the waiting room and is talking to himself; engaged in a dialogue with himself to decide whether he should flee the waiting room — or stay to see his suspicions through to the end. In this section, he is nearly crushed between two opposing weights — his need for a real job to attain a decent standard of living — and his fears of what terrors might lay behind the door.*

THE SIXTH MAN: I need the money. I really need the money. I need to work so I can get the money I need the money so I can have the home I need the home where I can keep my bed I need the bed so I can sleep. Why does each one have to be so dependent upon the other? Why can't I just skip the work skip the money skip all the way to the end to the bed to the sleep to the thinking? I'm scared. I am so scared. We know. I can't say it enough. I'm scared all the time. You're being ridiculous. There's another exit. There's another exit somewhere. But the secretary. She's not the same she couldn't be the same she just looks the same — or no — not the same — similar. Similar. I'm being very unreasonable unrealistic unfair unhappy — I'm so unhappy. I can't do it. No, you can. No, no it's too late. It's never too late. No, it is. My life is over. What are you talking about? You're still so young. I'm

so stupid. I need to get a job. They wouldn't be calling me every week — if they didn't think I was the guy — the right guy for the job. Christ. If I don't get a real job — with decent salary with decent benefits. Do they still exist? Benefits? For whose benefit? Theirs? Mine? Stop asking questions. I must earn a decent salary. I must maintain a certain standard of living. For my wife my kids. I'm not married. I don't have any kids. I may want to. I may want to have them one day someday over the rainbow. A wife. A house. A kid. Two kids. Or three. Yes. Three kids. I want that life. Do you really?

I don't know. I don't know, but I want to have the option I want to have the option someday because that's what people do that's what everyone does they keep their options open we live to maintain options we exist to keep our options open people don't get married they don't have kids they keep their options open to maintain the options that's what people do they maintain keep your options open never commit always have a way out maintain an escape route keep moving keep busy keep preoccupied fill your mind fill your time with jobs tasks chores dates —

No. You have to stop. You have to pause. Don't think about anything. Just take it all in. Pause. For a moment. Take it all in. A place. A place to pause. Relax. Relax. That's it. Relax.

# PULLING THE LEVER

Rising Theatre Collective.

Lead writers: Sanji De Silva and Deepa U. Purohit

Dramatic

Sterling White, African-American, thirty-four

*Sterling, an actor, is talking to the audience.*

STERLING: You ever hear of the movie called *Mean Streets*? With DeNiro?

It's his first collaboration with Martin Scorsese, and what he was doing, what DeNiro was doing . . . It was just absolute magic, you know and it was actually reall — I mean he'd been in some other movies but it was really the first time that a lot of people saw him and realized that this is the next Marlon Brando. And it's funny 'cause I read an article on Denzel Washington and he said I've watched *Mean Streets* three thousand times and it was — when I saw um DeNiro in *Mean Streets* I had the same visceral reaction that I had to seeing Denzel on stage in 1980. And right after I saw it, I was like, like all right . . . I've gotta do this. You know, I grew up in Riverdale in the Bronx. I went to Horace Mann High School — Horace Mann actually K–12, uh I'm a “Negro,” uhm and I went to Cornell for industrial labor relations, on the five-year plan came out and um took a job — a low-level job in finance, but after I saw *Mean Streets* . . . well, like I said. That was it.

# PULLING THE LEVER

Rising Theatre Collective.

Lead writers: Sanji De Silva and Deepa U. Purohit

Dramatic

Missionary, twenties

*A Mormon missionary talks to us about his religion.*

MISSIONARY: This is a Godless country. God created us to . . . he creates us to live and obey his Commandments, so we would be blessed and be beautiful like the Garden of Eden, but because we disobeyed God, if you will, we have a very messy climate. There's no justice. There's no laws. Everyone does what they want. You see what's happening on Wall Street. All the CEOs . . . all the high-powered executives who have been stealing from the "blue-collar worker" for all these years. People that are striving to make a dollar. The greed that's consumed this country has ruined it. In the Bible, God says "You forsake Me, I forsake you." And there's no love, no peace. And I think it's a disgrace that they oppress the poor. Umm, there's so many homeless. There's no food. It's like we have a famine goin' on, while we have CEOs stealing billions of dollars worth of blue-collar workers', umm, 401K, their retirement money, their mutual funds. Umm, I think that we're really a mess. And we have leaders . . . more importantly, we have leaders that are Godless. And because they're Godless, everyone's doing what they want. The Bible says He's our rock. He is our rock . . . He formed us. When we left the rock . . . a house built on sand is gonna fall. What you have here, in this country, are people who are totally following false gods and so that's why things like the World Trade Center. Because that was everyone's idol. I mean, the World Trade Center that was built, with the World Financial Building . . . out of all the money . . . it's like one big golden calf. And that's what people want. People want money. And they don't want God. This is Sodom and Gomorrah right now, what you see

happening. This is totally Sodom and Gomorrah. I mean, everything . . . people just doing whatever they want . . . there's no rules. There's no . . . no one cares. And that's really because . . . 'cause there's no leadership . . . we don't have a leadership that's a role model that practices what God . . . that preaches what God . . . the rules and the laws that God set up for us. 'Cause let me tell you something. Anything that's against love, slash, for war, is not God. God is peace. Period. Bush and Kerry are both Godless. In the New Testament . . . not only does God say that a kingdom that's divided is gonna fall, and built on sand gonna fall, but a kingdom based on Satan versus Satan will have its end. So that's what you have now in this administration . . . you have two parties that are both Satan, and they're going . . . this country is going to see its end. So, John Kerry is not going to be the president. Neither will President Bush. God's going to be the president. And let me tell you something, that peace that bypasses all understanding, that comes from only knowing God, it would change everyone's heart to be a beautiful loving country, really. We can be a beautiful, loving country 'cause, you know what? . . . God did bless America . . . only America doesn't know.

# THE RECKLESS RUTHLESS BRUTAL CHARGE OF IT, OR THE TRAIN PLAY

Liz Duffy Adams

Dramatic

Paul, thirties to forties

*Paul is a handsome, bitter, unhappy travel writer in his thirties or forties. He is making notes for a book.*

PAUL: Pulling out of station, scenery uninspiring, locals dim, young woman on train attractive but inarticulate, possibly quite stupid, no real obstacle to flirtation of course but why waste my time, this is a short leg on my journey, will be changing trains in only a few hours. (*Looking out window.*) Scenery definitely uninspiring, underlined, caps. Banal, dreary, pointless, quasi-industrial, semi-ex-pastoral, end-of-the-world grim, grimy, bedraggled. Might appeal to an arty black-and-white photographer. (*Sound of rock hitting train; everyone flinches.*) Usual hostile urchins chucking stones at train: trapped in this landscape, they no doubt churn with envy. The impulse to attack large moving objects typical of primitive — (*He stops. Rapidly, in a somewhat different tone of voice:*) Hate this, hate this, another fucking travel book, need the money; what, what else, what else can I . . . ? Too late to write the novel, too lazy, no talent, too old to starve in a garret; anyway, anyway, need the money, bills, child support, poor kid, fuck that, but I, I need, I need the, I need the money, so stop, stop thinking: only see, and make notes, that's all, perceive, report, translate, compose, transpose, comment, describe, descry, discern, notate, annotate, adjust for style and cash the checks. Later, later, sometime will it? can I? will it be different? Maybe, maybe, but fat chance: I'm stuck with it; grow up. (*Resuming note taking:*) The sun is lowering over the oppressive wasteland of mangy plains, crumbling mountains, fetid

swamps and turgidly seething seas, casting a lurid orange glow over Forsaken County, U.S.A. The natives are retreating into their tacky hovels or sitting forlornly round pitiful twig-fires, performing artless little rites of hope and continuity that nearly have the power to touch my heart but fall short, due of course to the very, very small-and-hardness of my heart. I am far from home. I am far from home. Facing a long night on this comfortless train, I am in my medium, I am where I belong, I am far from home, I am far, far, far . . .

# REFLEX ACTION

Douglas Craven

Seriocomic

Knee, could be any age or any sex

*Itchy and Knee are generic characters in a self-reflexive play. In this monologue, Knee bemoans the given circumstances of his life . . . the pain that causes him to emote, to EMOTE!!*

KNEE: Long ago, I was small. It's funny, isn't it, how we start out small and then we grow bigger? So many important things happen when you are small. So many things happen for the first time not long after you are born. Well, I lived in Northern Ontario, where I could hear the sounds of the loons (*Waits for the sound effect.*) and the wind amongst the pines. (*Waits for wind sound effect.*) I used to live in an old-fashioned place, where you would often hear the sound of an old fiddle player adding atmosphere. (*Fiddle music.*) The place was called Woodpecker Plateau. Do you know, I used to wonder why they called it that. So, I asked my brother. "Why?" I asked him. "Why is this place called Woodpecker Plateau?" He did not know. I asked my father and my mother. When I was small, they were very big, I felt sure that they would know. "Why is this town, this small town in Ontario, with the rustic ambiance, called Woodpecker Plateau?" Their answer seems to echo in my mind, even as I say it. (*Man and woman's voices echo his lines as he speaks.*) "We do not know, Knee," they said. "It's just called that. It's just called that!" To this day, it plagues me. It jumps on my brain when I least expect, causing me to emote, to *emote!* Woodpecker Plateau! Woodpecker Plateau! Even as I enunciate its consonants clearly, it torments me. Wuuh. Ppppppuh. Wwoodddd Pppeckkkerrr. When I eat. When I sleep. When I make love to a woman. Woodpecker Plateau! Plateau! Woodpecker — ! But there was not a plateau, Itchy. And there was not! a single! woodpecker!! Ever! Not a single one. Do you see now? Do you see? (*He appeals to his friend Itchy, who has fallen asleep.*) Look at him. I listen to his character revelation, but when it's my turn, he falls asleep.

# SALESGIRL

Stephen Levi

Seriocomic

Marvin, probably twenties, but could be any age

*Marvin is proposing to Cindy, with whom he works in the toy department of Marshall Field's.*

MARVIN: You didn't say you weren't in love, or that you didn't love me. You said you were too tired to even imagine, which means — now follow me here — which means . . . that in the deep recesses of your pretty toy-seller mind you're ready to make a sale — you to me — satisfaction guaranteed for eternity. No discount. No refund. No more Murphy bed. The sale is final. Say you'll marry me, Cindy McPherson. Sip an ice cream soda with me. The war is over. The world is at peace. I came home alive, ready to love you. The holiday season is upon us. It could be the honeymoon season. It's the eve of a wonderful life for us. With the sales temps still on hand for another week or two, I can arrange for us to get away for a seven-day trip west. And the diamond on your finger is yours to keep — the Marshall Field's diamond in the gold setting — even if you find out the tiger in me is nothing more than a meek little kitten with illusions of grandeur. A kitten soft and warm and as tender as all get out. I'm nothing special. But if you love me back, we'll both be special. Make us special, Cindy. Make us the two most special people in Marshall Field's history, as tired and as full of muscle aches and heartaches as we are. We deserve a holiday. We deserve each other. *(On knees.)* Marry me.

# THE SCENE

Theresa Rebeck

Comic

Charlie, thirties

*Charlie, an out-of-work actor, has just done lunch with an old friend who's a TV producer, who has a new pilot. Actually, Charlie despises the producer, but he has cajoled a lunch with him because he's desperate. He barges in on his best friend Lewis and launches into this tirade, unaware that Lewis is in the midst of trying to get it on with Clea, a sexy young woman they both have met recently at a party.*

CHARLIE: That fuckhead. I said, did I not say, he is a fuckhead? I told her that this would be a waste of my fucking time. I told everyone. Did I not? Did I not? What is this, vodka?

*(He picks bottle up and uncorks it, then proceeds to drink from the bottle as he rants.)*

Because he is a fuck. You know this to be true. I mean, in high school he was a fuck, and in college, he was a fuck, and time is not a friend to people like that. I mean, it's not like they mellow. It's not like they ripen, like a good bottle of wine! No no no, Nick is still Nick, only more so. And now someone has actually told him that they are going to make his fucking pilot, which was just what Nick needed to really put the final touches on his complete lack of character! Give him a shred of power over hopeless and desperate people, that'll really make him shine! Not that I even believe it. I don't give a shit how many people say it. I do not believe that they are going to make his fucking pilot! Which by the way, he gave to me, to read, so on the sidewalk, outside the restaurant, after our cappuccinos, he took off and I opened it up and I read it, and I'm sure you'll be stunned to hear that it is utter mindless, soulless, uninspired, unoriginal, bereft, soul-sucking crap. Which is the only thing that makes me think he might actually be telling the truth. The fact that

his fucking pilot is so irredeemably awful, such a complete expression of the bankruptcy of the American character, that alone argues for the shred of a possibility that he is flirting with the truth for once in his life, with his assertion that they are going to make his astonishingly shitty pilot. It is so bad, there actually is a possibility that they're going to make it. Against all my better judgement, I truly have to concede that. . . .

Oh you have no idea. This is the tip of the iceberg. This day was, I actually had lunch with that asshole at a place called "Mix." "Mix." Next thing you know they're going to be calling restaurants things like "Hot" "Wet" "Fuck me," someday we are all going to be forced to have lunch with assholes at some restaurant called "Fuck me." Nick of course is on his cell phone for a full five minutes before he can even say hello. Five minutes of the finger in the air, twitching —

*(He sticks his finger in the air, twitches it.)*

While I sit there grinning, like a SCHMUCK, it's OK, man, I know you got to hang on this endless phone call 'cause you're so fucking important, you're a completely essential piece of the whole mind-numbing motor that keeps capitalism itself running, you're the guy, you're the guy, and I'm just some stupid SHITHEAD who needs to lick your ass — . . .

C'mon I'm not making this up! I'm not even exaggerating! It was like a scene out of some bad nineteenth-century novel, or a good one, even, *War and Peace*, he's Prince Somebody and I'm the bastard son of Somebody Else, who remembers, except for the licking of the ass part. Except if we were in Russia, in the Nineteenth Century, there would be a form for it all, a ritual, a way to keep your dignity while you said, please your highness, save my fucking worthless piece of shit self. Give me some money. I'm fucking broke, I'm not a man, GIVE ME SOME MONEY. And if you do, I will go to Siberia for you, I will face Bonaparte with my bare hands, I will fling myself into the abyss, just give me some fucking money so that I don't have to — Plus he's thin! Did I tell you this? You remember Nick, he was just like a normal guy, right? Aside from being a fuck? He's lost like forty pounds. And I mean, he was normal, before, it's not like he

was fat, he was just normal so now he's like — it's like his face is just sitting right on his skull. You're like talking to a really skinny skull version of who Nick used to be.

And he's dressed all in black, this bizarre black suit with a black silk T-shirt under it, so he actually does look like one of those freaks from a vampire movie, do they honestly think that looks good, in Hollywood? They must! I don't know. I don't know. So then he orders like a huge slab of red meat, because that's all he can eat, apparently. That's how he got so thin, by eating only raw meat. I swear to you, I am not making ONE WORD of this up. And I'm completely, I am just trying to stay focused on the sucking-up end of the conversation, trying not to say anything truthful, just stay in the conversation, let him know that I'm a total failure of a human being, but I also know and appreciate that fact that he is not. . . .

Oh, stop it, don't even, that is completely what those conversations are about! That is what they are about! And I'm doing it, I am absolutely humiliating myself so that I can get Nick to give me an audition for a teeny tiny part in a pilot I don't even believe exists, when he looks at my plate and says, "I could never eat that. That is just too rich." I mean, he's got a slab of red meat the size of Nebraska sitting on his plate, and I've got a plate of mushroom puree, sitting in front of me. Mushroom puree, with about five or six itty-bitty scallops on top of it, I got so fucking self-conscious about how fucking thin he was, that I ordered a completely girly meal, scallops in mushroom puree, just so I wouldn't have to think about that crap while I castrated myself for this — this — skull-person — and then he — he —

*(He stops himself. Sits. Takes a big hit off the vodka bottle.)*

Sorry. Forget about it. I don't even know what I'm saying.

# THE SCENE

Theresa Rebeck

Comic

Charlie, thirties

*Charlie is ranting to his friend, Lewis, about a meeting he has just come from with Nick, a TV producer with a new pilot. He has barged in on Lewis, who has been making progress in his attempt to get it on with Clea, a sexy young woman both have met recently at a party.*

CHARLIE: Look, forget it, would you? We all say shitty things about people we don't know. It's the only true pleasure left in the world, trashing other people. Especially when they have something you want: Money. Or power. Or just, coherence — . . .

Not that I think Nick is coherent in any way, any larger cosmic truth has evaded Nick altogether — . . .

But he's still the object of desire, isn't he? Him and that fucking pilot. He could be shooting kiddie porn as far as anyone's concerned and I still have to suck up, don't I, that's how degraded this whole fucking planet has gotten, SUCK UP to assholes like Nick because they have something you must want even though you don't, you don't want it, everyone just thinks, God, it's like we don't even know how to have a real DESIRE anymore! It's all the opposite of enlightenment, remember when that was a goal? Nowadays if someone said to you, what you want out of life? And you said, I don't know, enlightenment, what do you think would happen? WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN? These are the fucking end times. The entire fucking culture has devolved to such a point that what we WANT, what we DESIRE isn't love or passion or sex or money, it's MEANINGLESSNESS. And that's what I'm supposed to sell myself for. Time to sell it, my heart, my soul, my common sense, my hope, my dreams, my pride, anything that means anything at all to

my little preconscious, subconscious self, all of it goes on the auction block for what? That's what I want to know. What am I supposed to get? To give up everything? What do I get?

*(Beat.)*

I have a feeling we're gonna need more vodka. You got another bottle back there?

# THE SCENE

Theresa Rebeck

Comic

Charlie, thirties

*Charlie, an out-of-work actor, has fallen in lust with Clea, a sexy, amoral young woman. He has left his wife and moved in with Clea, spending most of his time getting drunk and feeling sorry for himself. At this point, Clea has had enough of this loser, and is going out in her sexiest dress, probably to find someone else whose life she can ruin. Charlie is too drunk to see what is happening. Needless to say, this is the end of his fling with Clea.*

CHARLIE: So cheating on me with that shithead NICK is all right, but YELLING IS OFF THE TABLE. (*Furious, yelling.*) All right then, as long as we're arguing semantics, why don't we just call it lying? Is that OK? Lying to my face while you go off to fuck my total nemesis? . . . MEN ACTUALLY DO CARE ABOUT THAT SHIT, Clea!

. . . You don't care about anybody! Do you? It's fantastic! You look like that, you screw like a bunny, and you have no soul! Maybe that's why I wanted you so bad, you're the sea that I swim in. Everything I used to think that I wanted, art, meaning, some connection to the divine spirit of creativity, and it just, turned into nothing! Because why — because the ego — which was never the dream to begin with — just collapsed under the contempt — because that's what it is — contempt for the self, in this — this narcissism — this collapse. Is it? . . .

. . . You're the end product! You're what we are. You never had a dream. You don't know what you want. You just want to be part of the scene. That's all I want. Now. Remembering that party. What it felt like to be hot shit. Of being inside the void.

# SIX YEARS

Sharr White

Dramatic

Phil, forties

*Six Years follows the story of Phil and Meredith from 1947 into the mid-1970s. Here Phil, once a shell-shocked mess, is now a successful businessman. It is just after the Kennedy inauguration in 1961. Phil is on a business trip and is having a few in the lounge of a hotel. He is talking to a woman sitting at the bar, who he may or may not be trying to pick up.*

PHIL: (*Ecstatic.*) Ask not what your country can do for you? You know? I mean . . . I mean. About time! Right? About time! But not with this . . . paranoid . . . witch hunt . . . zealotry that we've had for the last . . . what. Eight? Ten? *Years*? You know? You can't . . . stand up with a bullhorn and a club and demand that the believers rip the non-believers limb from limb like we've been doing. Neighbor turning neighbors in! And if you so much as have a wayward thought? You know? But we've said enough is enough, haven't we, and here we are! And all of a sudden? Today? Tonight? I want . . . I want to buy it! I want to bite into it and chew it and swallow it, like everybody else! By God it's like he said, the torch has been passed! It has! Born in this century. Tempered by war. Disciplined by a . . . a hard and bitter peace? Boy, wouldn't it be great if we all . . . could just . . . believe in that again.

# SIX YEARS

Sharr White

Dramatic

Phil, forties

*Six Years follows the story of Phil and Meredith from 1947 into the mid-1970s. Here Phil, once a shell-shocked mess, is now a successful businessman. It is just after the Kennedy inauguration in 1961. Phil is on a business trip and is having a few in the lounge of a hotel. He is talking to a woman sitting at the bar, who he may or may not be trying to pick up.*

PHIL: I was in the lounge. At the airport today. And I see a guy. A guy I used to know. Robert Kilner. By God if that's not Bobbie Kilner. And . . . and I go over to him. And I call out . . . Bobby. And he doesn't look at me. And I get closer, and I get this big dumb grin on my face and I spread my arms out and I shout Bobbie. Bobbie Kilner! And this fellow . . . he looks at me. Like I'm some crazy man. Right? And he says to me that he thinks I have the wrong guy, but I won't let it go. I say no. You're Bobby Kilner, First Division, 16th Infantry regiment, etc., etc. you old so-and-so, you can't pretend you don't know me and . . . and . . . the guy . . . the guy who I thought was Bobby. He gets this look in his eyes. His eyes sort of soften up on me. And he says real softly. Well. Sure. OK, Mac. I'm Bobby. And he gets up and he . . . shakes my hand and we . . . catch up. He tells me where he's been and what he's been going, and I sort of tell him the same. And there's this announcement made and he . . . he shakes my hand again and says . . . says . . . real genuine . . . says it's . . . it's really good to see you again, Phil. Real good. I'm real glad you said hello. And I turn around and I'm walking back to the lounge and . . . and damned if I don't stop dead in my tracks. Because this guy . . . he can't be Robert Kilner. Because Bobby Kilner . . . His face. His face . . . came off. Of his head. At Aachen. He looked around a

corner and there was a boom and he . . . looked back at me. Before he dropped. And there wasn't anything under his helmet. The damndest thing. And so this guy . . . he couldn't have been Bobby Kilner, could he, because they can't do things like that. And I . . . Dotty, I . . . I went into the men's room and I . . . well I . . . I wept. For a bit. I locked myself in and I . . . wept. I'm not afraid to say it. I did.

And when I get out of the bathroom. There's this . . . shine. To the lights. And everything seems to be in this . . . focus. Like I've put on eyeglasses. And I . . . well I decide against having another drink. And I . . . I walk out on the tarmac and get on the plane. And like I say . . . it was overcast and we take off and climb up past the cloud layer. And I . . . and we outrun the clouds so that I can see the fields down below and the roads, and . . . and this voice. Comes to me. And it sounds like my voice. And I realize that I'm talking to myself. I can hear myself saying. I am Phil Granger. It's 1961. I live in a large house outside of St. Louis. I have a beautiful wife and a son who both love me. And uh . . . and I'm alive. I'm alive. I'm alive and I'm here and I . . . I lived.

# STREET TALK

Terrence McNally

Seriocomic

Eubie Blades, could be any age, any race, but played originally by  
Laurence Fishburne

*Eubie is something of a street-corner philosopher.*

EUBIE: I'm telling these nice people about confrontational theater. The old days. When actors would roam the aisles. When you went to the theater at your own peril. Anything could happen. A play could be about Vietnam and they'd throw pig's blood at you! Or civil rights and somebody would try to sign you up to join a protest march or register voters down South! Or gay stuff and you'd see two men, buck naked, a-hugging and a-kissing like it was the most natural thing in the world. But then all of a sudden it stopped. The war ended, the audience decided they had had enough of civil rights and they didn't care who was kissing who as long as they stayed on the stage and kept their clothes on. Some people, cynics I guess you'd have to call them, will tell you that it wasn't the audience that changed but the people that wrote the plays. What are they called? Playwrights. Nice word. That these playwrights stopped believing that theater could end a war or get people of different races to live like brothers or get anyone to be a whole lot less uptight about who is sleeping with who. That these playwrights decided somewhere along the line that plays ought to go back to being more playful. The audience was delighted at this turn in events: they'd had their guts in a knot every time they took their seat in a theater for the better part of a decade. The producers said great and raised the price of tickets. "We promise no one's ever gonna sit in your lap again and ask what you did to end a war but that'll be \$37.50." So far it's working out fine. The audience is happy, the playwrights are sort of happy. This place looks pretty full. I've got my tickets for *Phantom of the Opera* sometime in '92. God's in his Heaven. All's right with the world. *Still!*

# ST. SCARLET

Julia Jordan

Dramatic

Vinnie, thirty

*Vinnie is a “Kerouwackian” character from New York. Three sisters in Minnesota have a recently deceased mother. Vinnie barges in, claiming to be in love with one of them, who says she has never laid eyes on him.*

VINNIE: Who are you? Luke fuckin’ Skywalker or some shit? I drove all the way here from New York in a fuckin’ snowstorm and you wanna play games? Let the games begin. But I’m not playin’ rapist guy. I know you chicks dig that shit, but for us gentlemen . . .

Let’s play lone traveler in the night and there’s just a lot of snow outside. I mean it is ridiculous! I’m drivin’ and slippin’ and shit . . . SNOW! Right? Like drifts. Snow drifts! And everyone’s out there . . . HELLO? It’s COLD, it’s SNOWING! Three days drivin’ without sleep. Girlies sure are pretty out here. One at the 7-11, all cute with her name tag and whatnot, told me you have the most Miss America’s after Texas. And Texas is bigger. So by capita, and capita is everything in my book, by capita Minn chicks win hands down. And I’m not just sayin’ that. ’Cause I do not like Minnesota. I’m sayin’ it to pave the way for the hospitality which I intend to engender. That is my way as lone traveler in the night. I’m good with the girls. That’s what they say. Vinnie Silverstein is good with the girls. The ladies love me. It’s my cross to bear. Nice cross, huh? So, you ladies and I are gonna get along like a house on fire because I have noticed — taken in — registered, that this establishment is filled with two specimens of the female take. Or persuasion or what you will. Women. There, I said it. Not afraid of the word. Now let’s see which one I end up with. *(He winks at Rose.)* First I need some coffee. *(Stunned silence.)* This is where you two kick in with the feminine hospitality routine . . .

Nobody out here knows coffee. Not to be a smart-ass but coffee. Starting to sound familiar? I need an espresso. I asked for espresso. I went to one of those Seattle thing-a-lings and I ask for an ES-presso and the guy, the BOY, THE COUNTERBOY, goes, "EXPRESSO." I left. I walked out. I took my ES-presso and I did not pay. That'll teach them how to pronounce Italian. That's how you get through to these assholes with no respect for food and drink.

Through their pocketbooks. Fast-food coffee establishment. Seattle can fuck itself. ES-presso isn't supposed to be fast. If it *was* — they would have called it EX-PRESSO. But they didn't, did they? No. They called it ES-presso because, and I'm half Italian so I know whereof I speak, they knew that ES-presso is supposed to be served in a proper cafe in BROOKLYN with a WAITRESS who wears a cute little outfit and comes to your table and smiles and says, "Would you like a GODDAMN ES-PRESSO?" and I say, "YES, I FUCKING WOULD!" Now don't get me wrong. I'm half Italian. But proper Italian. From Brooklyn. Not one of those greasy European bastards. So you got nothing to worry about. (*Rose runs for the phone. Vinnie blocks her. He cuts a line in his palm.*) You still believe in parallel lines? (*He cuts a second. Parallel.*) Parallel lines never cross. That's what you said. Well, here I am. So all the evidence is saying you were wrong. (*He holds up his hand showing her the bloody lines.*) You could respond with a little la-dee-da or what-not if it struck your fancy. I'll wait. (*He waits.*) Time passes. Guess this is how you pass it huh? Livin' off in the middle of nowhere. Guess this is what it comes to. A whole lot of waitin'.

# SUN IS SHINING

Matthew Wilkinson

Seriocomic

Dave, thirties

*Dave is an Anglo-Chinese stockbroker, talking to Lorna, a petite Scottish artist.*

DAVE: Oh yes, you bow-wows. Oh yes. Wink wink, nudge nudge, I think we know the form, I think we've studied the book . . . Bin it. The luck of the lady shall prevail. My man arrives, he takes his place . . . and Here They Come: Ladies and Gentlemen. This is the fifth race. It's a grade A3 and it's a five-five-five meters flat . . . My man is waiting, the clock is ticking . . . Trap One. She's a Princess, owned by Mr. D. Kerridge and trained by Ken Tester. Trap Two, Tricky Dicky, owned by the RBG Boys Syndicate, the trainer there, Alf Ellis. Trap Three, Love a Duck: Owner — Yes, I can see it's having a shit, Derek . . . My man is waiting . . . Yes, it's certainly carrying less weight, Dezza. Eight to one, I'm sure you'll make a packet . . . Two minutes . . . my man looks up . . . get to him, get to him, get to him. Super quiet: "A grand. Top dog." Look round, up there . . . there she is . . . she's in the window . . . that's my baby that is . . . her tip, yeah . . . for a split second I can't hear the ring, I don't hear a thing, it's just her looking at me, me looking back at her . . . one minute to race . . . (. . .)

Lights down, hare is running . . . and they're off! GO ON YOU CUNT, GO ON! And with a jump it's two three and six, level neck, level neck as they break into the first, wide runner number four, well back, beginning to straighten up now, two and three take up the lead far corner, it's two and three level neck in the back straight, clear water far side, it's two and three as one moves up and in with three drop back, they're in behind, it's one now, picking up lively, coming round the near side as they straighten up and push for home, it's now one and three going past two, it's one and three, one and three, it's one

from three! At the finish, one from three at three to one, YOUR BIRD'S A CRYSTAL BALL! (*They both yell with delight.*) Now then, where's my man, my man, my — oh there's my man, skulking round the back of the Jack Humphreys stand like he doesn't even count. Mullered! Three grand plus the stake. The Lady Wins Again. The lady . . . All this my darling, all this, this little corner of the world. I present it to you . . . Yours!

# TESTING, TESTING

Alan Haehnel

Dramatic

Scott, late teens

*One test stands between Scott and his future. As soon as he graduates from high school, he'll be off to the military. Unfortunately, he has studied the wrong material and the test has him stymied. Here he is trying to convince his classmates to give him some assistance (i.e., to help him cheat).*

SCOTT: What is the big deal? I have laughed with you people. I have partied with you people. I have lived in this stupid building for the past twelve years with you people. I need somebody's help. If I saw any of you in trouble, I would be there, don't you know that? So why won't somebody help me?

People cheat every day. People cheat to get money, to . . . get ahead. I'm asking you to help me. It means you, Mr. Captain of the Soccer team, Mr. Class president, Mr. A student, Mr. son of the richest guy in town, Mr. Mercedes, you can afford all the honor you want. It's no skin off your back. You try being me. Honor's easy when you've got everything going for you, man. When you're on the right side of the people setting up the code, honor's easy.

But what if you don't have the brains or the athletics or the looks or the money . . . all the advantages? What if your old man is a drunk and your mother has to work three jobs and she still ain't got enough, huh, rich boy? It's not a pity party! It's the truth! How many of you have gone home to find every piece of furniture in the house smashed to pieces, huh? Smashed to bits because your father owed some crook money and that crook broke into your house and destroyed every piece of furniture?

# THEATRE DISTRICT

Richard Kramer

Dramatic

Kenny, late thirties to early forties

*Kenny, a lawyer, tries to justify his life to his partner George after a family meltdown earlier that day involving Kenny's fifteen-year-old son Wesley.*

KENNY: You know the first thing I thought of? When I found out he'd been hurt? My award. That I earn, every fucking day . . . I recruit gay students for the firm and not just the cute ones.

I remember Matthew Shepherd, I sue parades . . . I support the Harvey Milk this, the Walt Whitman that. Look at this — look at my book. Tuesdays — I give free advice at the AIDS legal center, Wednesdays — the committee for a sculptural remembrance of the gay victims of 9/11. Thursdays it's gay prisoners, every other Friday — it's right here, George! *In writing! I'm a good man! Look at my days!*

But they never make a story. Why is that? Where do you get all your stories from? The EQUUS tour, and the restaurants, and that summer you were the one-man-band! Your stories are *wonderful*, George! Sometimes, I pretend they're mine! I just can't do that with him because he's heard them from you! Since he moved in, to get to know me — *he's gotten to know you!*

We were on a trip to the Grand Canyon. I was fifteen. My parents, my sisters . . . All but my sister Claire, who had died three weeks before. We were fifteen months apart. I don't remember much about being young but I remember her. She was my favorite but I don't know if I was hers . . . When I was eleven she was diagnosed with leukemia and it took her four years to go. My parents just — went to that and my other sisters were already gone. My mother who did the very best she could brought home for me the food Claire couldn't eat. Where

were you then, George? With your *pesto*, and your *calamari*, and your white truffle shavings . . . Where were you then?

*(A pause. He is now in the past:)*

It was sunset, which is so beautiful there . . . It was cocktail hour. I went to the outhouse. There was a man there, I remember nothing about him. And I was — with him. And he said to me after “How many times can you come?” And I said “Oh, I can’t come again. We’re leaving tomorrow.” So that was when *I* knew. About my — general gayness. In a hundred words or less.

*(A pause.)*

And if Wesley is gay? If *he* knows? I don’t *want* him to know. I don’t *want* him to be. That’s my choice, since that’s the word of the day around here. I choose — for it to be gone. For him. I choose that for him.

# THEATRE DISTRICT

Richard Kramer

Dramatic

George, late thirties to early forties

*Earlier in the play fifteen-year-old Wesley has asked his father and his father's partner how they first knew they were gay. This is the partner (George's) response.*

GEORGE: (*To stop him:*) — You asked me a question this morning, Wesley. Before the day turned into — *today*. Remember? You asked me — among other things — how I knew. So.

*(A beat. George turns, comes downstage, looks out to us as we are, for now, the city. He breathes. Then, slowly he is filled with the answer to Wesley's early morning question:)*

So I would take the train. To the city. I was your age, about. Wednesdays, I'd cut school, get a half-price ticket to something, anything, it didn't matter what. Then one day — I actually get into — *A Chorus Line* . . .

Standing room. And there they are, with their pictures in front of their faces . . . And there's this guy.

*(A beat.)*

Standing. Next to me. Around my age . . . Then the pictures drop, and you see their faces —

*(He sings; it would be nice if the same moment from the original cast album could be heard, softly, at the same time.)*

"Who am I anyway . . . Am I my resume . . ."

*(A beat.)*

We're both leaning on our stuff, on the ledge, our coats and scarves. He never looks at me, I never look at him, but there's music and right behind us these tiny Irish ladies with flashlights, and lace — and his hand touches mine. Under the coats . . .

*(A beat.)*

Then — he slips a ring from his finger onto mine. That's all. And it stays there, till the end. We just keep looking forward, until everyone stands and cheers —

*(A beat, as he shuts his eyes, touches his ring finger, hears the cheers once more. He's almost lost in that until — )*

Then I say — “I'm George . . .”

*(After a moment:)* “I'm George, too.”

*(A beat.)*

And he's gone. It wasn't until supper that night . . . I was telling some lie about school that day, I was cutting a pork chop and I saw — I still had the ring.

# THE THEODORE ROOSEVELT ROTUNDA

Jennifer Camp

Dramatic

Ben, mid-forties

*Ben is a video games designer, visiting the Museum of Natural History in N.Y.C. This is direct address to the audience.*

BEN: My brother Nathan likes answers. Or rather, he likes answers that make sense. He likes answers that don't keep him up at night. So when he found out I was spending three afternoons a week in the lobby of the Museum of Natural History and that I didn't actually go *in* the museum, that I just *sat* in the lobby, he wanted an answer. What possible answer to that question could satisfy a man who expects to get a good night's sleep? We dislike what we don't understand. My father used to say that all the time. I think Nathan was usually harassing the dog when Dad got around to dispensing that one. "Chew your bone. Come on, chew your bone." Our dog didn't like bones. That made Nathan furious. I feel like that dog sometimes. I woke up one morning a couple of months ago with the phrase North American Mammals swimming around in my head. Then they all started coming to me, these phrases. Ocean Life. Birds of the World. Human Biology and Evolution. Childhood memories of these exhibits began leaking into my daily routine. When we came here as kids, Nathan always ruined it for me. He thought everything looked fake. "They just glued that grass onto that rock. This is *stupid*." Nathan has no sense of history. I remember always feeling part of something here, feeling very human. So here I am. "That is so like you, Ben," Nathan said. "To spend your afternoons with dead things. Must be a heck of a midlife crisis you're going through." Marianne said it wasn't a midlife crisis. Marianne said it was because of a broken heart. Kind of a brazen thing for my receptionist to say. She was wrong, though. It wasn't be-

cause of a broken heart. In fact, just the opposite. An unbroken heart. An unbroken heart? Is that the right phrase? Nobody ever talks about a heart that hasn't been broken. It's always the broken ones that get all the press.

# THE THOMAS PAINE PANTHER

T. J. Walsh

Dramatic

Mr. Smith, early twenties

*Mr. Smith is a young teacher of journalism at Thomas Paine High School. In this monologue, Mr. Smith confronts a student who is accusing him of hiding the truth about himself.*

MR. SMITH: Don't you know why I sent you away? You've been the best and brightest student I've ever had. You are the student I've cared most about. You are the student I've seen grown from a shy freshman afraid of her own shadow to a beautiful young woman, the editor of the *Panther*, going to Stanford on a full scholarship. You are, Heather, why I teach. Don't you see that? You are my work. I'm not an architect who has a building to look at after completing his work. *(Pause.)* You are my work. Alma is my work. Raj and Pete and Sam and Karen are my work. Don't you know why I sent you home? If I hadn't sent you home, I would have been destroying my work, what I am, who I am. I'm a teacher. Teaching is an art, Heather. *(Silence. Simply.)* You are my work of art. My beautiful work of art. *(Softly.)* You are going to go on and do wonderful things with your life. My life is about honor, and decency and truth. To have let you stay would have destroyed everything I have been taught, everything I teach, and everything I stand for. *(Silence.)* It isn't supposed to be easy, this gift of life we're given. But it can be magical and wonderful and a joyous mystery. We are on a fantastic journey. It isn't easy, but it's exhilarating. *(Silence. Mr. Smith moves to the door.)* You wrote a paper in Honors for me on your favorite poem.

"I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two road diverged in a wood, and I —

I took the one less traveled by  
And that has made all the difference.”

Are you going to join the mob, Heather? Or are you going to  
be the author of your own journey?

# TOUCH

Toni Press-Coffman

Dramatic

Kyle, twenties

*Kyle's wife Serena was murdered. Her body is finally found, and her killers caught. He has gone to the prison to talk to them, and here relates the last moments of the life of his wife.*

KYLE: They confessed. *(Kyle crosses to another part of the stage.)* I talked to each one of them separately. Each one could have said no, but each one agreed to speak to me. Which I didn't understand at first, but now I think it was Zoe. Zoe was smiling. Zoe was telling me, I am dying, Kyle. That's what my life is now. I'm dying. *(Kyle stops, and closes his eyes and breathes. He opens his eyes.)* The first one said no, he didn't notice she was smiling. He was young, still a teenager. *(Beat.)* She said if one of them would stay there with her until she died, she would like that. *(Beat, he can hardly say this.)* She would be grateful. *(Beat.)* Zoe hated to be alone. This kid was spooked by that. He told me he didn't know why, but he grabbed her purse and ran with it. He had killed before, but he didn't want to be there when Zoe died. So the other one stayed with her. He was closer to her age — mid-twenties. *(Kyle closes his eyes and breathes. His measured breath becomes more shallow, becomes panting. He opens his eyes.)* When he came into the visiting room, he sat down, rigid, and fixed his gaze on me. He didn't speak. *(He takes a deep breath, like he did then.)* I asked him if he noticed she was smiling and he said yes. *(Beat.)* But as she faded, she seemed less and less so. He leaned toward me, and said her smiling made him furious and he asked her what the hell was so funny. She said, "Funny?" *(Beat.)* He sat back again, straight in his chair. And he stared. He looked — right — through — me. *(Pause.)* I asked if she spoke my name. He said no. He said he didn't want to piss me off but she was "one weird chick." Because as she lay dying, she

mumbled something about the stars. (*Kyle closes his eyes and breaths. He opens his eyes abruptly.*) She died. I spoke to her murderer, I said to her murderer, whether or not there is life in some other galaxy, Zoe's huge heart notwithstanding, regardless of Triton's beauty, no goddamn matter how much she loved me or what shape Sagittarius is, she fucking died. He said you're crazy too, buddy. I banged the telephone on the Plexiglas separating me from him. I said did you touch her? Did you touch her while she was dying? And there it was. He flinched. He looked at me. DID YOU FUCKING TOUCH HER? (*Beat.*) She — uh — she reached her hand out to me, he said. She reached for me. (*Beat.*) Yeah. I let her touch me. (*Kyle stops, cries, breathes, waits.*) I said — I said — we met in my physics class.

# THE WOMEN OF LOCKERBIE

Deborah Brevoort

Dramatic

Bill, forties to fifties

*Bill's son died in the terrorist bombing of the plane that crashed in Lockerbie, Scotland. His son's body was never found. He has come to Lockerbie with his hopeless distraught wife to somehow connect with their son.*

BILL: *Beauty* . . .

Funny.

Beauty is the last thing I expected to find in Lockerbie . . .

This is the first time we've come here.

I was afraid to bring her all these years.

I was afraid it would make her grief even worse.

And it has.

I don't know . . .

maybe I did the wrong thing

by bringing her here.

I just thought that

*maybe*

if she came to Lockerbie

on the anniversary

to attend the service

and see the monument

and meet the other families

*maybe*

*then*

she'll stop weeping.

She's been weeping for seven years.

She lies on the living room couch and weeps.

All day.

She can't stop.  
Or won't.  
Our friends have given up.  
They don't call or visit anymore.  
Their patience is worn thin.  
*Mine* is worn thin.  
I didn't think it was possible  
for two eyes  
to cry so many tears.  
But it is.  
I have seen an ocean pour from her eyes.

# THE WOMEN OF LOCKERBIE

Deborah Brevoort

Dramatic

Bill, forties to fifties

*Bill's son died in the terrorist bombing of the plane that crashed in Lockerbie, Scotland. His son's body was never found. He has come to Lockerbie with his hopeless distraught wife to somehow connect with their son.*

BILL: What am I supposed to do?

Stop living?

Spend my days weeping on the couch like you?

No, I didn't cry, Maddie.

How could I?

I had to do everything!

I had to do everything

to keep you from falling apart!

I had to send the medical records to Scotland.

I had to talk to the friends and neighbors

I had to talk to the reporters

who stood on our lawn with *cameras*

taking pictures of my grief!

I even had to take his Christmas presents back to the mall  
because *you* couldn't stand the sight of them under the tree!

Do you know what that was like?

Can you even imagine it?

Try!

Try to imagine it, just for a moment!

*(Madeline runs back to the hills. Pause. Bill turns back to the women.)*

What do you say to the sales clerk?

What do you say to the sixteen-year-old school girl  
standing behind the counter at JC Penney's

who smiles at you and asks  
“Why are you returning the sweater, sir?”  
Do you tell her?  
What do you say?  
I just looked at her.  
I could tell it was her first job.  
Her face was round and soft.  
Her hands were still chubby, like a child’s.  
What do you say to someone so young and innocent?  
“This was for my son, but he died?”  
“He was blown to bits by a bomb?”  
“The plane he was taking home for Christmas . . . *crashed?*”  
What do you say to the pretty young girl  
with red and green ribbons in her hair?  
I said.  
“My son. . .”  
(*Pause.*)  
I cannot tell her.  
I cannot show my grief,  
because to do so would take her innocence from the world.  
I just said . . .  
“My son doesn’t need it anymore.”  
And then I breathe a sigh of relief  
because I think I’ve gotten through it.  
But I haven’t.  
Oh no!  
It doesn’t stop there.  
She smiles and says  
“Would you like to exchange this for something else?”  
(*Pause.*)  
Do I want to exchange this for something else?  
Oh . . . yes.  
Oh, yes, yes, yes, I do.  
Oh, what I would *do*  
to turn this in for something else.  
But I say,

“No. No, thank you . . .

Your store doesn't carry what I want or need right now.

Just give me the credit, please.”

And then I go to the next store.

To return the Nikes.

And the next store

to return the pajamas

And the next store

to return the bathrobe and the blue jeans and the bike helmet.

*(Pause.)*

I go to six stores before the day is through.

I have that same conversation in every single place.

*(Pause.)*

She's right.

I didn't show my grief.

I couldn't.

I had to keep myself numb just to get through it.

*(Pause. He turns around and looks in the direction of the hills.)*

Maddie?

*(She doesn't answer.)*

*(Bill turns around and looks at the women.)*

I . . . I'm sorry . . .

I . . .

Oh God.

God.

I don't know what to do.

## RIGHTS AND PERMISSIONS

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