

MY WORST AUDITION EVER

a theatrical satire

by Brett M. Rhyne

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CHARACTERS:

THE ACTRESS (must be able to do physical comedy).

THE PRODUCER, a woman.

THE DIRECTOR, a man.

THE PLAYWRIGHT, a man.

Note: Gender assignments are strongly suggested, but they can be changed as needed or desired. Ages are also indiscriminate.

AT RISE:

The stage is mostly empty. There is a table, upon which are an empty wine bottle, a heart-shaped box, a piece of cloth, a hand-held sewing machine, the *Riverside Shakespeare*, a spring-loaded telescoping umbrella and an upright walkie-talkie. Also onstage is a chair and, on the floor, a filled trash bag and a small suitcase.

THE PRODUCER paces in front of the stage.

THE PRODUCER

Where the hell are they? Where the hell are they? I'm gonna kill them if they're not here in the next five seconds. [counts five seconds] Okay, they're dead. They're dead. Now what do I do? I don't have a director, I don't have a playwright, I don't even have an actor. Nothing. I have nothing. Okay, I know what I'll do. I'll... I'll... I don't know what I'm going to do. [pause] God, I need a cigarette.

THE DIRECTOR enters at the back of the house and comes down the aisle.

THE PRODUCER

(seeing him)

There you are. Where the hell have you been. I've been worried sick about you. Are you all right?

THE DIRECTOR

I said I'd be here, didn't I? So here I am.

THE PRODUCER

I was just so worried about you, that's all. I was afraid you were late because you got dumped again. You didn't get dumped again, did you?

THE DIRECTOR

No. And I'm not late. You changed the time without telling me.

THE PRODUCER

It's okay, you don't have to apologize. You're not the one I'm mad at, anyway, even if you kept me waiting for half an hour. It's him. Where the hell is he? Damned egotistical playwrights. First he gives me this play full of harlequins, then he blows me off for this meeting... Can I bum a cigarette off you? This patch is just not working.

THE PLAYWRIGHT enters at the back of the house.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I have arrived.

THE PLAYWRIGHT moves to join THEM.

THE DIRECTOR

Harlots? I'm not working with harlots.

THE PRODUCER

Not harlots. Harlequins. The play is called *Harlequins in the Rain*. You know, harlequins, like clowns.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Harlequins. They have white faces and wear brightly colored clothes, with a single tear rolling down their faces...

THE DIRECTOR

Harlots, harlequins, concubines, Tantric escorts, I don't care what you

call them. I'm not working with circus people.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

My casting is never changed by directors.

THE PRODUCER

That's not the worst part. He says if we don't do his play as written, he's gonna spread it all over town that our group discriminates against carnies!

THE DIRECTOR

As if we could even find carnies to cast in this town. Now if this were New York...

THE PLAYWRIGHT

(chuckles) Hunh. I remember, my first play, *The Wild Boar* -- I'm sure you recall it, it was a smash -- called for a chorus of Zimbabwean Utunga (!) warriors. Well. As you can imagine, they were not easy to come by...

THE ACTRESS enters the stage from the wings, making a ruckus. SHE wears a loose-fitting blouse and knee-length skirt. The OTHERS do not notice her. SHE gathers her courage, extends her hand and crosses the stage toward the OTHERS. SHE trips over the suitcase with a thud. THEY stop talking and look at her. Pause.

THE DIRECTOR

Can I help you?

THE ACTRESS moves to respond, but is cut off by THE PRODUCER.

THE PRODUCER

Oh, so you're finally here. You've kept us all waiting for an hour, but that's okay. Don't feel bad. Did you rehearse that monologue I told you to do?

THE ACTRESS begins to speak, but is cut off.

THE PRODUCER

It doesn't matter. I'm sure whatever you prepared will be adequate. Do you have any smokes? Never mind. Just wait there and we'll get to you.

THE DIRECTOR

You brought me all the way down here to audition *her*? *This*? [to THE ACTRESS, smiling] *So glad you could come.*

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I would never cast such a clumsy actor in one of my works.

THE PRODUCER

(to THE ACTRESS)

We didn't hurt your feelings, did we, dear? Good. Because we like to think of our company as a happy little family, where the actors are like our children.

THE DIRECTOR

Actors *are* children. [to THE ACTRESS] Well don't just stand there, sit down. We'll get to you in a minute.

THE ACTRESS thanks him silently and sits in the chair.

THE DIRECTOR

I don't even know why you asked him to write for this season. He's simply impossible to work with. Talk about your self-absorbed playwrights.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I'm not a self-absorbed playwright. I'm not narcissistic. Vain. Conceited. Self-important.

THE PRODUCER

I know, I know. You can't tell him anything. Not only did he write a piece that I can't cast, he totally ignored my instructions about the eggs. I told him, no eggs.

THE DIRECTOR

I can tell you right now, I'm not working with eggs. No eggs, no cheese, no dairy products of any kind.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I never write about cheese in my plays. I'm lactose-intolerant.

THE PRODUCER

He expects me to find someone who can juggle a dozen eggs. Who can juggle a dozen eggs? Maybe if we hard-boil them...

THE DIRECTOR

I don't do dairy, I don't do meat, I don't do harlots...

THE PRODUCER

Harlequins! Harlequins in the rain. Who juggle eggs. Harlequins in the rain who juggle eggs. Brilliant.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Yes, it is brilliant, isn't it?

THE DIRECTOR

Oh sit down.

THE DIRECTOR and PRODUCER sit on one side of the stage. THE PLAYWRIGHT slouches on the steps and preens.

THE PRODUCER

(empathetically)

Come on, tell me the truth. You got dumped, didn't you?

THE DIRECTOR

No, I didn't get dumped. Oh who am I kidding? I got dumped! (sobs)

THE PRODUCER

I *knew* it! (now comforting) Poor baby.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I never get emotionally involved with anyone. I am a rock. I am an (singing a little) i-i-i-island!

THE PRODUCER

Did it hurt? Did it hurt getting dumped? Did it hurt? Did it? Huh? Did it hurt? Did it?

THE DIRECTOR

(adamant)

No. No, it didn't hurt get-ting dumped... (breaks into sobs again) Yes, it hurt so much! It hurts!

THE DIRECTOR collapses into THE PRODUCERS lap. SHE comforts HIM; smiles.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I build walls. A fortress, deep and mighty. I am shielded in my armor. Lying in my tomb, safe within my womb. I touch no one and no one touches me.

THE ACTRESS watches for a moment, debating whether or not to interrupt. SHE opens her mouth to speak, then thinks better of it. SHE sits dejectedly. SHE makes a face, rubs her tummy. SHE realizes she is hungry. Suddenly, inspiration strikes; SHE takes from her pocket, a banana. SHE lovingly peels it, but then discovers it's rotten. SHE throws it away. Now SHE's left with the peel. SHE plays with it for a minute, makes a corsage, an ascot, etc. Then SHE checks the OTHERS: they're still talking. So SHE casually tosses it over her shoulder.

THE ACTRESS is still hungry. SHE glances over to the table to see if there is any food. SHE spots the heart-shaped box of candy. SHE licks her lips. Surreptitiously, SHE begins sidling over to the table.

THE DIRECTOR spots THE ACTRESS moving toward the table. THE ACTRESS freezes, pretends to be doing something else. THE DIRECTOR gives her a dirty look, then pretends to return to the conversation. THE ACTRESS starts to move but freezes again, just before THE DIRECTOR tries to catch her moving. THE DIRECTOR gives her another dirty look.

THE ACTRESS, meanwhile, is starving to death. SHE makes a quick dash to the table, grabs the heart-shaped box and dashes back to the chair. SHE frantically tears off the lid, flinging it in the air behind her. SHE freezes. The OTHERS do not notice when it lands. Then SHE rips out the

paper liner. To her joy, there's candy in the plastic tray. SHE stuffs her mouth with candy, smearing it all over her face. Once she's emptied it, SHE turns the box over and shakes it, dumping the plastic tray onto her lap. SHE tosses the bottom of the box. Then SHE puts the plastic tray against her face and breathes rapidly so that it makes crunchy sounds.

THE OTHERS stop their conversation and look at her. THE ACTRESS stops. SHE takes the plastic tray away from her face and shrugs an apology.

THE DIRECTOR

Would you please be quiet. I said we'll be with you in a minute. (to the OTHERS) She doesn't take direction very well, does she? I hope you don't expect me to work with her. I don't work with prima donnas.

THE PLAYWRIGHT and THE PRODUCER stand.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

(snorts) She acts like there's no one else in the room. I would never act that way. Did you say something?

THE PRODUCER

I need a cigarette.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

What we need is a playwright, a verbal craftsman possessing superior skills in the theatrical arts, to step forward and create the consummate dramatic experience. But where will we find such a man?

THE PLAYWRIGHT pauses, waiting for THEM to ask him. A beat, while no one says anything. THE PLAYWRIGHT steps forward.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I am that man!

THE DIRECTOR

(ignoring him)

What we need is someone to slap something together before rehearsals start next week.

THE ACTRESS sticks out her tongue, makes a face. SHE is thirsty. SHE spots the wine bottle on the table. After first making sure the OTHERS are otherwise occupied, SHE goes over to the bottle excitedly. SHE picks it up, tries to pull the cork. It's stuck. SHE struggles to open the bottle. SHE holds the bottle between her legs, tugs on the cork; no luck. SHE grips the cork in her teeth, pulling at the bottle. Two tries, no luck. SHE prepares elaborately for a third try. This time, the cork comes loose and the bottle flies from her hands, clattering across the stage and into the wings. The OTHERS stop talking and look at her.

THE DIRECTOR

Maybe we could find an actor to improvise something.

THE ACTRESS brightens upon hearing this.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Improvise something?

THE PRODUCER

That's not a bad idea. We could find someone to do something with a lot of physical humor. This way, we wouldn't have to get somebody to write a script.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

No script?

THE DIRECTOR

Somebody with classical training. Someone who's done Shakespeare, with good comic timing. A Shakespearean clown. A Falstaff! Someone who's done Falstaff!

THE ACTRESS picks up the *Riverside Shakespeare* and mimes.

THE PRODUCER

Or someone who could do stage combat. Fencing. We'll stage a great sword fight. Like *The Three Musketeers*. Or *Zorro*.

THE ACTRESS does some fencing.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

No, not swordplay. Swordplay is so... puerile. No, I must stage a great war, with cataclysmic moral consequences. Vietnam. Iraq. Grenada. An epic battle of good versus evil. Men, with dirty faces, shooting, throwing hand grenades, bayoneting each other in the groin, losing limbs.

THE ACTRESS pretends SHE is in a battle scene. SHE shoots a machine gun, bayonets an enemy soldier, throws a hand grenade, gets injured. SHE uses the walkie-talkie to call for help.

THE PRODUCER

Men fighting. Well that's something different. What about a woman? What about a female soldier? Joan of Arc? I could have her smoking cigarettes.

THE ACTRESS kneels and prays; then smokes.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Yes! A woman. A sexy, sexy woman. A bombshell. With big ones. Great, big one, the size of a suburban home. I could craft a role of great depth for an actress with dramatic gravity and a great, big rack. Boobies. Melons. Knockers. Gazongas.

THE ACTRESS portrays herself as a sexy woman; then, realizing her bust line is inadequate, SHE snatches the cloth off the table and stuffs it into her blouse. SHE parades around the stage, unnoticed.

THE DIRECTOR

Who cares about her *chest*? It doesn't matter how big her *chest* is. Her chest is completely unimportant. I can't imagine a body part less important. As any true thespian knows, what matters when it comes to physical comedy are her legs. All the great screwball comediennes had great legs: Lucille Ball, Carole Lombard, Madonna. Breasts just

get in the way when one is trying to do physical comedy.

THE ACTRESS tears the cloth out of her blouse and flings it across the stage. Then SHE raises the hemline of her skirt. SHE grabs the sewing machine and tries to shorten her skirt. The skirt gets stuck in the machine. SHE struggles with it.

THE PRODUCER

Hmm. But where can I find someone like that on such short notice..?

THEY ALL look at THE ACTRESS. HER skirt tears away, exposing HER funny boxer shorts. SHE's embarrassed.

THE PRODUCER, DIRECTOR & PLAYWRIGHT
(together)

Nah.

THE ACTRESS fixes her skirt.

THE DIRECTOR

I can't work like this way. It's too stressful. I need a good cry. (to THE ACTRESS) We'll call you.

THE DIRECTOR storms off into the wings.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I think *I* shall have a cup of Earl Grey and read Proust all evening.

THE PLAYWRIGHT wanders off into the wings.

THE PRODUCER

(apologetically)

It's not you, dear. Oh, who the hell am I kidding? It is you, dear. I need a smoke.

THE PRODUCER walks off. THE ACTRESS is depressed. SHE meanders around the empty stage. SHE continues to the table, runs HER hand along the edge. SHE sees the *Riverside Shakespeare* and opens it randomly. SHE smiles at what SHE sees and forages on the table for a prop. SHE cradles the book in one arm and holds the umbrella out in front of her with her other hand. SHE reads:

THE ACTRESS

Is this a dagger which I see before me
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me
clutch thee--

As SHE grasps the dagger, SHE presses the umbrella button and it suddenly shoots out and expands. SHE cries out and drops it.

THE ACTRESS

Aah!

THE ACTRESS gathers herself and goes back to the book.

THE ACTRESS

(reading)

To be, or not to be: that is the ques-
tion:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suf-
fer
The slings and arrows of outrageous
fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of trou-
bles,
And by opposing, end them?

Inspired, THE ACTRESS looks around the stage. SHE finds the plastic garbage bag. SHE empties it onto the stage.

THE ACTRESS

To die: to sleep;
No more; and, by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural
shocks
That flesh is heir to...

SHE puts the bag over her head and holds it tightly around her neck, so that it deflates and inflates with her breathing. SHE sits on the floor. Suddenly SHE pulls it off, gasping for air.

THE PRODUCER enters from the wings. As SHE crosses, SHE almost steps on the banana peel. SHE does a balancing act on one foot to avoid it.

THE PRODUCER

Can I give you a hand with that? I'm
here to help. I just want to be help-
ful...

THE ACTRESS cries out mutely for help. THE PRODUCER exits. Woozy, THE ACTRESS struggles to get to her feet. Disoriented, SHE staggers away from the table.

THE PLAYWRIGHT enters from the wings.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Did I leave my Proust in here? I hate how all you actors think the whole world revolves around you. When, as we all know, the whole world revolves around me. Me, me, me!

THE PLAYWRIGHT starts to exit, avoids the banana peel.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

I would never script such a cheap gag.

THE PLAYWRIGHT exits. THE DIRECTOR enters from the wings.

THE DIRECTOR

(shaking his head)

Disgusting. And you call yourself a professional. What are still doing here? You're not getting the role. (pause; smiles) Thanks for coming down and auditioning.

THE DIRECTOR turns to exit; THE ACTRESS tosses the banana peel in his way. HE sidesteps it easily.

THE DIRECTOR

Amateur. Maybe we could have dinner sometime?

THE DIRECTOR exits. THE ACTRESS watches him go, then turns once more to the *Riverside Shakespeare*. SHE finds a passage and reads it aloud, to the audience.

THE ACTRESS

(out)

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this
vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous
palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe it-
self,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dis-
solve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant
faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such
stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little
life
Is rounded with a sleep.

THE ACTRESS looks out and accepts the audience's applause. SHE may even bow. Then SHE turns to exit. SHE steps squarely on the banana peel and her feet fly out from under her. SHE goes sprawling and finally lies there, unmoving.

BLACKOUT