

# **BANG!**

a backstage fringe comedy

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## BANG!

The world premiere of *BANG!* was presented by Art Street Theatre at EXIT Stage Left, San Francisco, CA, on March 5, 1999. The production was directed by the author, with the following cast and staff:

ELEANOR	Caroline Ford
SHELLY	Beth Wilmurt
JIM	Chris Kuckenbaker
KATE	Karen Hallock
BENNY	Eric Miller
JOAN	Kathryn Clark
Sound	Jake Rodriguez
Set, lights and costumes	Ana Hashimoto
Dramaturgy	Gillian Brecker and Kathryn Clark
Stage Manager	Kathryn Clark

*BANG!* was subsequently produced by The Play Café at the 2004 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The production was directed and designed by Joan Grinde, with the following cast and staff:

ELEANOR	Elizabeth Daly
SHELLY	Miranda Calderon
JIM	Thor Aagaard
KATE	Lily Oglesby
BENNY	Warden Lawlor
JOAN	Joan Grinde
Composer	Karole Langlois
Movement	Lauren Steiner

### Cast of Characters

*Eleanor, an audience member who once was mute but now can speak.*

*Shelly, an actress who cannot decide.*

*Kate, an actress on the go.*

*Jim, an actor slash playwright, caught between panic and conviction.*

*Benny, a director and ardent quoter of life.*

*Joan, a stage manager, period.*

## Time and Place

*Now, onstage and then backstage.*

## Note

*Indented dialogue is to be spoken simultaneously with the dialogue immediately following until the point indicated by \*\*\*, at which point both sections of dialogue should come to their conclusion.*

*A slash in the dialogue (/) indicates that the next actor should start their line, creating overlapping speech.*

## Preshow

*Upstage there are fifty empty chairs grouped on risers in a few rows. The front row is flanked on the left and right by the backs of flats or curtains. Downstage, the clutter of a dressing room.*

*ELEANOR is sitting in one of the chairs with a program in hand, her mind a million miles away. Eventually, BENNY enters and passes ELEANOR to stand as far back into the corner behind the rows of chairs as he can possibly squeeze.*

## Scene One and Only

*Suddenly, the play begins and the actors – SHELLY, KATE and JIM – pounce the stage. Light cues flicker rapidly and the sound hurdles forward through the loudspeakers as the actors scramble about enacting the entire show in a matter of moments. It is evidently an intense and complicated play with quite an absurd range of elements and emotions. It should appear somewhat ridiculous. Suddenly the ACTORS screech to a halt for the last scene.*

**SHELLY** Go ahead. Surprise me.

**JIM** I'm all out of surprises. The last of 'em went out with the garbage yesterday, didn't it? Ask some other sucker; I'm not moving.

**SHELLY** You have to do something. ...*Do something.* The country won't cave in, Jim. Love her. Love me. It doesn't matter.

**KATE** No, Shelly, it matters. It matters to me. I know this now. It's not that I have to be with him for the rest of my life; It's that I can't not be with him. ...It's almost an unfortunate situation, being in love.

**SHELLY** What do you know about it? After all that's happened? Secrets!

Bombings! Murdering that innocent child before it had the chance to cry out at the first sight of your lousy world! What do you know about love? It was never you that he needed, Kate!

**KATE** He loves me!

**SHELLY** You used him!

**KATE** I'm not that tricky.

**SHELLY** You need to believe in that, don't you?

**JIM** Do you two hear what you're doing? Again? You talk as if I'm not in the room well I have been in the room all night! I have been in the room all my life! A statue. A crowbar maybe. The man who nods when a nod is required. I have done everything that was asked of me.

**SHELLY** And that is your choice.

**JIM** My choice?

**KATE** Jim, don't listen to her.

**SHELLY** There's no gun to your head. Nobody ever made you shut your trap. Nobody forced you to join her line. Tell me I'm wrong and I'll cry uncle! ... Nothing. God, sometimes I wish you would slap me, spit on me, throw a chair at me from across the room, anything to let me know you are alive in there, that you can feel something!

**KATE** No, Jim, you are a good man. Please. Though you think so I have never taken you for granted. I never meant for things to get so thick. I can't bring the baby back but if you will forgive me that I will forget anything. The Cause. Her. Everything!

**JIM** Don't you see? It's not about that! Wake up! Wake up the world! I wake up! Every night! I wake up and my hand is reaching out. But I can never remember why. It's as if my dreams are held from me, (*he reaches out*) just out of sight. Every night there I am and I know that if when the sun rises I could still reach out, if I could only *reach out*, then someone, *someone* would take my empty hand and fill it! ...Someone would! ...At some point!

*JIM has been reaching out his hand in such a way that it is blatantly obvious he hopes ELEANOR will take it. Now, she reluctantly complies.*

**JIM** And like rain filling an empty desert, that palm filling my palm would bring new life! And I would know that I am not just between the two of you, or one cause and the other, but the sky and the earth, and that I am alive! (*lets ELEANOR's hand go*) I am alive!

*Pause. Blackout. Pause. Lights up. ELEANOR applauds as the ACTORS bow. BENNY applauds as well. The ACTORS exit the stage as post-show music plays. BENNY scrambles past ELEANOR and runs after them. ELEANOR remains in her chair, clearly in a mix of emotion. Soon,*

*JOAN shuffles in and out executing her various duties. But now we hear the actors as they enter the dressing room. They are bristling with post-performance electricity.*

**KATE** That was the most embarrassing experience of my entire life! This show is a turd!

**BENNY** The worst is not, so long as we can say “this is the worst.”

**KATE** Shut up, Benny.

**BENNY** *King Lear.*

**KATE** The rule is that if the actors out number the audience, the show does not go on.

**BENNY** “The show must go on.” That’s how the saying goes.

**KATE** I don’t care how The Saying goes. Being out there tonight was worse than diarrhea.

**BENNY** One person is better than none.

**KATE** No no: Benny: none would be perfect. None would be what I have prayed for. Tonight was hideous! It was like death! Death, do you hear me?!

**BENNY** How do you think I felt standing out there?

**KATE** No you get to do your squirming in the dark. We have to do it up on the stage in front of everybody! Or one body, as the case might be! *We* didn’t like it, *she* didn’t like it, *no* one liked it! It’s crap!

**BENNY** How do you know? She may have liked it.

**KATE** How do I know?! Benny, she was the only one out there! Nobody can enjoy a play when they’re the only person in the audience! It is not possible. It is the ultimate distraction!

**JIM** I don’t understand it. It makes no sense whatsoever. How could only one person show up?!

**SHELLY** At least she took your hand.

**JIM** Well who else was going to do it?

**SHELLY** That moment always makes me feel weird anyhow.

**JIM** (*stops*) It’s the best part.

**SHELLY** I don’t know.

**JIM** It’s the whole show. Without it the whole thing would be meaningless.

**SHELLY** It’s too pushy.

**JIM** Exactly! That’s the whole struggle of my character. That’s every one’s struggle: Pushing our limits!

**SHELLY** You’re right, you’re right, you wrote it, you’re right.

**JIM** ...No it's crap, you're right its crap. Every time I'm out there waiting with my hand out my bowels sweat.

**SHELLY** Well then cut it.

**JIM** No. That would negate the whole show. We need to call more rehearsals. I don't care about the money.

**SHELLY** I don't think anyone wants to rehearse anymore.

**JIM** (*obviously*) But the show needs it.

**SHELLY** What the show needs is an audience!

**JIM** That's not funny. You're right! But that's not funny. We're in trouble. I don't understand why nobody showed up. One person!

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**JIM** Benny!

**BENNY** Jim!

**KATE** Excuse me.

**JIM** Benny what is happening? Where is everybody?

**SHELLY** Okay, I'm going to change my clothes everybody, so don't look. Don't look... (*continues...*)

**BENNY** The beauty of the soul shines out when a man bears with composure one heavy mischance after another.

**JIM** What?

**BENNY** Aristotle.

**JIM** Benny! Where are the people?

**BENNY** I am as mystified as you are.

**JIM** Well you never seem very concerned, Mister Director.

**BENNY** To be unable to bear an ill is itself a great ill.

**JIM** What?

**BENNY** Bion, philosopher second century B.C.

**JIM** Benny! We are scandalous! We should be turning people away in droves!

**BENNY** I know.

**JIM** This play should piss people off. The Pro-choicers. The Right-To-Lifers. ACT UP. The NRA, the N double ACP. ...Triple A.

**BENNY** It is inflammatory, yes.

**JIM** Only if there is an audience to see it.

**BENNY** That is true.

**JIM** ...Well respond please!

**BENNY** Fate has no reprieve.

**JIM** What?

**BENNY** Euripides.

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**KATE** Why are you saying that? Nobody is looking at you.

**SHELLY** I just want to be courteous.

**KATE** It's a dressing room. Jesus.

**BENNY** Look, Jim, we can only do what we're already doing. It's not that bad. So we had another slow night.

**JIM** A slow night?!

**BENNY** Calmness.

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**JIM** One out of fifty seats sold! Those are bad figures Benny.

**BENNY** If we were doing it for the money, yes. But *we're* not doing this for the *money*.

**JIM** Yeah well it sure would be nice to make some of it back! Money *is* important! But I'm not even talking about the money! The money is not important! I want people to *see my play!* I mean the houses haven't been great but they haven't been empty. (*suspicious*) Then suddenly, on a \_\_\_\_\_ night, nobody shows up?

**KATE** (*to herself, a realization*) Shit!

**JIM** That is very peculiar, don't you think?

**KATE** Excuse me. (*exits quickly*)

**BENNY** Well, maybe it is too offensive.

**JIM** Oh come on if you put on a play that offends everybody you get an audience. It's math, Benny, its two plus two equals four. It's \_\_\_\_\_ *night* for cryin' out loud!

*JOAN, the stage manager, enters the dressing room. SHELLY sings to herself as she goes about her business, somewhat distractedly.*

**JOAN** Benny.... Benny.... Benny.... Benny.... Benny....  
Benny.... (*etcetera*)

**BENNY** Jim, it's out of our hands. There is nothing we can do about it now. We're listed in all the papers. We took out ads we have posters up we sent out postcards. We rehearsed for three months. You wrote a very interesting play.

**JIM** Interesting?

**BENNY** Yes.

**JIM** Interesting is a friendly word for terrible.

**BENNY** That is not what I meant.

**JIM** (*dawning*) You *do* hate it.

**BENNY** No I do not!

**JIM** I knew you hated it! And you're right! / I failed! Oh god I failed! Oh my god! Its *not* working!

**BENNY** No, Jim, it's poetic, it's funny, it's meaningful. It's got a few problems, of course, it's a new play. Maybe I staged it wrong!

**JIM** Benny.

**BENNY** What?

**JOAN** Benny.

**JIM** (*pointing*) Joan.

**BENNY** (*to JOAN*) What?!

**JOAN** Now that I have your undivided.

**BENNY** Sorry, Joan, yes.

*After a pause, JIM dashes for his script and begins to thumb through, looking at specific passages and analyzing them with intense scrutiny. SHELLY eventually stares at herself in a mirror, lost in pre-marital thought.*

**JOAN** Tonight is the night I have to leave early, recall? We talked about this.

**BENNY** Yes, give me the keys and I will lock up.

**JOAN** I would turn everything off myself but the *audience still hasn't left her seat.*

**BENNY** Why not?

**JOAN** I don't know, she's reading the program.

**BENNY** Do you think she liked it? I mean, could you judge her reaction from the booth?

*KATE soon enters the dressing room looking miffed and secretive.*

**JOAN** I'm not judgmental. Here are the keys. Double check everything. Make sure all the equipment is off and the lights are out. Lock every door that locks. I don't want the one night I break protocol and leave first to be the night something bad happens.

**BENNY** Everything will be fine, just go.

**JOAN** You have to be the last one out that door.

**BENNY** I understand. I'll take care of everything, now go have a good time.

**JOAN** I'm going to the airport on a \_\_\_\_\_ night so I can fly to Vegas and

watch my mother get *married* again, not to have a good time.

**BENNY** Welllllll make the best of it.

**JOAN** I'll make a gin and tonic. Goodbye actor people!

*The ACTORS drop what they are doing and all chime in...*

**ACTORS** Thank you Joan!

*...JOAN signals and THEY continue on as before.*

**JOAN** (to **BENNY**) Enjoy your meeting.

**BENNY** Look, Joan, could you check on that woman again as you leave

**BENNY** and let her know we're trying to close up shop so we can have our meeting.

**JOAN** Don't say I never did you a favor.

**BENNY** And be polite with her please.

**JOAN** Of course. (*exits*)

**JIM** Forget it! Forget it! Just forget it!

**SHELLY** What's wrong?

*JIM has crossed into an aisle amidst the real audience and is momentarily confused, then returns to the stage proper.*

**JIM** What am I doing? I have to change my clothes. What? Oh. The play is crap and its all my fault!

**SHELLY** Oh no.

**JIM** Yes it is, it's terrible.

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*BENNY approaches KATE happily. KATE attempts to keep her irritation, and so also the conversation, at low volume.*

**BENNY** So, Kate, about that rain check. We should pick a night to go get dinner this week.

**KATE** It's a busy week for me, Benny.

**BENNY** Okay, well, do you think you'll have some time?

**KATE** I don't know, I really... I don't know. Can we wait? Do we have to figure this out now?

**BENNY** No, we don't have to figure it out. Should we make a

plan to make a plan?

**KATE** Benny, I'm sorry, I want to go out, I do, I've just got a lot to do this week, okay?

**BENNY** Okay, maybe next week then. How's next week?

**KATE** You know I don't like to plan that far ahead.

**BENNY** Amid a multitude of projects, no plan is devised.

**KATE** Look.

**BENNY** Publilius Syrus.

**KATE** I'm sorry, I did not enjoy tonight, okay, so could you just give me a moment to deal with that, please, so that I do not strangle you.

**BENNY** Certainly.

**KATE** Thank you.

**BENNY** Don't forget we're having a meeting.

**KATE** Yes, Dear.

*BENNY busies himself with cleaning up. KATE busies herself with getting changed and ready to go, etcetera.*

**SHELLY** It's not that bad. It's political theatre.

**JIM** Well what does that mean?

**SHELLY** Well. *You* know.

**JIM** Just because a play says something doesn't automatically make it bad.

**SHELLY** You're right, I know, I'm sorry. You're right. I was just, nn-nn-nn. ...Listen do you think the meeting tonight will take long?

**JIM** What?

**SHELLY** I said do you think tonight's meeting will take long?

**JIM** I don't know.

**SHELLY** Because my fiancé is coming to meet me tonight.

**JIM** Who?

**SHELLY** My fiancé. We're madly in love.

**JIM** Oh, him, yeah, I don't know, I can't imagine it taking too long. Have you two, uh, set a wedding date yet?

**SHELLY** That's why we're going out tonight. We're going to go get a drink and set a date. A wedding date.

**JIM** You need a drink first?

**SHELLY** Not a *drink*, we're not going to *get drunk*. A glass of wine. Something romantic.

**JIM** That should be nice.

**SHELLY** Yes. If you like that sort of thing.

**JIM** What, romance?

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*JOAN has entered the house to speak with ELEANOR.*

**JOAN** Excuse me, we're trying to go home, do you mind?

**ELEANOR** Oh, well, I'd like to meet the cast if that's alright.

**JOAN** You can wait for them out in the hall. They'll show their faces eventually.

**ELEANOR** Oh alright.

**JOAN** My pleasure.

*JOAN shows ELEANOR out and then closes the curtains and exits.*

**JIM** (*180 degrees*) Why can't a play be political? Huh? What is wrong with politics? Politics fill the news! It's what people talk about everyday! Clinton this, Wall Street that! Everywhere you look there's politics! But no, not on stage! –Oh! unless of course it's fashionable. I could write a play about being a woman molested as a child and that would be just fine. I could strip to my skivies and say I'm a black gay man and proud of it and what's left of the NEA would give me a grant. But get up there and say you're a socialist, or that having only two political parties represented in Washington is killing democracy in America, or that we're popping out too many babies and maybe Jonathan Swift was on to something when he made that Modest Proposal, and everybody gets annoyed!

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**SHELLY** Have you seen my blue eyeliner?

**KATE** So are we having that meeting or what?

**BENNY** Yes.

**KATE** Good. Let's get to it, shall we?

**BENNY** We shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it.

**KATE** What?

**BENNY** Abraham Lincoln. Patience.

**SHELLY** Will this take long? My fiancé is coming to meet me soon.

**BENNY** Who?

**SHELLY** My fiancé. We're madly in love.

**KATE** Oh, do we finally get to meet this allusive fiancé?

**SHELLY** (*laughs awkwardly*)

**BENNY** Kindness it is that brings forth kindness always.

**KATE** Benny.

**BENNY** Sophocles. Be nice.

**KATE** Let's go!

**BENNY** So. ... Thank you all for agreeing to stay late. I don't pretend to know *your* exact thoughts – that's why were here, to give everyone a chance to openly speak her or his mind – but I feel that it is pretty clear that the show is not going as well as one might hope.

**KATE** Turds float better than this shit!

**JIM** Thank you! / Thank you, Kate! I'm only sitting right over here! Hello, here I am!

**SHELLY** / (*ears covered and singing*) Wh eh eh eh ere, is love?

**BENNY** Kate. Jim. Alright. Thank you. Thank you Shelly. Thank you. ... Now: Jim has expressed his conviction that we might need to call more rehearsals.

**JIM** Yes!

**BENNY** And I would agree that it wouldn't *hurt*... How do you two feel about that?

**KATE** I think my opinion on that is known throughout the land.

**BENNY** Okay, thank you. Shelly?

**SHELLY** Well. Uh. Sure– I mean: if everyone else wants to.

**KATE** What? Shelly. Tell them what you told me yesterday.

**SHELLY** Kate.

**KATE** Because I think it's about time someone did something to help flush this turd down the toilet.

**BENNY** Kate, would you please cut the turds.

**JIM** No she's right! It stinks!

**KATE** Even the playwright agrees.

**JIM** (*definite*) We need to call more rehearsals!

**KATE** I think this is your cue, Shelly.

**SHELLY** Kate!

**BENNY** What is it, Shelly?

**SHELLY** Kate, that was my business!

**JIM** Just say it Shelly what is it?

**SHELLY** Nothing, it's nothing, I'll tell you later.

**KATE** (*gruff, as to a dog*) Come on, Shelly.

**SHELLY** Kate! It's nothing it's nothing. Everyone just go back to what you

were doing.

**KATE** This is what we're doing. Now say it.

**JIM** What's going on?

**SHELLY** Nothing.

**KATE** Shelly.

**SHELLY** It's nothing.

**KATE** She's quitting the show.

**SHELLY** God!!! Kate!!!

**JIM** What?

**BENNY** Shelly, why?

**SHELLY** ...It grates on my stability. I don't agree with the idea of having an ideology... Has anyone seen my blue eyeliner?

**BENNY** Shelly. You can't just quit, we don't have an understudy. Besides, we only have \_\_\_\_ weekend(s) left.

**SHELLY** (*making light of it*) I know, I know.

**JIM** I am shocked.

**SHELLY** Jim it's not your script, your script is-- great. It's just not for me.

**JIM** Not for you?

**SHELLY** I-- I don't agree with it.

**JIM** You're an actress! You don't have to agree with it!

**BENNY** Shelly, please reconsider.

**SHELLY** I know, you're right. (*making light*) I'm not quitting, you're right, I was just-- talking aloud you know, the magic "what if." Where's my eyeliner! But I want to. Quit, I mean.

**JIM** She wants to quit.

**SHELLY** I'd like to.

**JIM** It is a turd.

**SHELLY** No no.

**JIM** A hot steaming turd!

**SHELLY** Ew.

**BENNY** Now let's calm down; The show-- is not-- a turd.

**SHELLY** I don't like that word.

**JIM** It's a stinking soapbox!

**KATE** It's embarrassing.

**BENNY** Kate.

**KATE** I'm *glad* only one person had to see me up there tonight!

**BENNY** Nay, come, Kate, come; you must not look so sour.

**KATE** Would you stop quoting.

**BENNY** Though old the thought and oft exprest, 'Tis his at last who says it

best.

**KATE** Stop that!

**JIM** I have something to say!

**JOAN** (*having entered*) But before you do, just know that your entire audience is waiting outside in the hall to meet you.

**BENNY** ...She is?

**JOAN** She enjoyed herself. Go figure.

**BENNY** Well, that's great!

**JOAN** Yes it is. We're a hit.

**BENNY** She really liked it?

**JOAN** She's been talking my ear off for the last \_\_\_\_ minutes. Now I'm deaf. And I've got a plane to catch. Good night everybody.

**ALL** Thank you Joan.

*JOAN exits.*

**BENNY** You see everyone, she liked it.

**KATE** She must be a retard.

**BENNY** Uh– Jim, what were you going to say?

**JIM** (*stunned*) She liked it? ...No, *she* didn't like it! She's lying! I have nothing to say. I don't even know why I bothered writing this damn play. I don't have anything to say to anybody. But I will say this! I know we're not making any money. But we've worked long and hard and the least we can do is hold out until the end. It can't be *that* bad?

**KATE** It is sooo *bad*.

**JIM** What!?

**KATE** It is excruciating. It's like bamboo torture. I like you Jim, believe it or not, I still do. But it is so painful–

**JIM** –Oh!– Why?! Why is it so painful for you?

**KATE** Eh– There's too much exposition, we stand around talking about something the audience never saw, it's self referential, it's preachy, it's way too political–

**JIM** –Here we go again!: What is wrong with politics! If Clifford Odets were alive today–

**KATE** –Clifford Odets is not alive today and there's a reason for that.

**SHELLY** He had a heart attack.

**JIM** In 1935 *Waiting For Lefty* got a forty-five minute, hysterical, standing ovation. Clifford Odets was back stage vomiting he was so overwhelmed. That could never happen in the theatre today–

**KATE** –Exactly my point!–

**JIM** –and it’s wrong! It’s wrong! It *should* happen! People *should* care! People *should* yell “strike” with the characters onstage! People should get up and scream and go crazy and riot in the streets!

**KATE** If people get up because of this show, Jim, they’ll be getting up to leave. The gutsy ones will yell rubbish as they go.

**JIM** That would be great!

**KATE** Wrong, / wrong, wrong!

**JIM** It would be a reaction! That’s the whole purpose!

**KATE** Jim, the purpose is to entertain them, not to annoy them!

**SHELLY** Can we not fight?

**KATE** You can’t just stick your finger in people’s faces.

**JIM** Well what would you stick in their face?

**KATE** Nothing.

*KATE bends over to pick something up, thus sticking her butt in the face of the front row of the real audience.*

**JIM** I state what I believe to be the truth. And what I believe happens to be political. That in and of itself shouldn’t be a problem in life. But: say something blatantly political on stage and everybody complains: “Oh it’s the author’s voice! Ew!” What about a big blatant *love* story? Why isn’t that ever the author’s voice? Love, no, that’s just fine, but politics, heaven forbid we talk about the *very thing that makes us who we are!*

**KATE** Why am I even trying? It’s too late, anyway.

**BENNY** If everyone would just sit down.

*SHELLY sits.*

**BENNY** Thank you, Shelly.

**KATE** Look, tomorrow I have to go to work after my morning spinning class which means I’m up at six AM and after work I have an audition, a chiropractic appointment, and a prescription to pick up before I come *here* again so please call me if luck has it and you cancel the rest of the run. Good night.

**BENNY** Kate, you’re not helping company morale.

*During the following explosion of argument, ELEANOR enters and observes from a distance.*

**KATE** What company morale?! We’ve all hated this for weeks!

**JIM** *You’ve* hated this for weeks!

**BENNY** Yes don't speak for other people, Kate.

**KATE** Did you not just hear what Shelly said? / She wanted to quit!

**SHELLY** I took it back I took it back!

**BENNY** / This is not helping our situation.

**JIM** You have done nothing but fight this show from the beginning, which is very peculiar given that you were sooo excited to be a part of it *before* you got cast!

**KATE** / *I was* excited about it! It was exciting!

**SHELLY** Peace. Peace now. No fighting! No confflect! No confflectomundo! You guys! Stop it! (*singing a la Carmen*) I don't like it, when people fight, I do not like it when they fight like this! (*speaking*) You guys! My fiancé is coming to pick me up any minute! You better stop! I'm gonna have to leave! You guys! (*singing again*) I don't like it, when people fight, I do not like it when they fight like this! When people fight, I do not like, I do not like it when the people fight! etcetera...

**JIM** "Oh the script is great Jim! Oh it's so timely Jim! It's gonna be a great show! I'm so excited!"

**KATE** / Oh come on, Jim.

**JIM** Then once you get cast suddenly it's turd this and turd that! Everything's a problem! You wouldn't even be here in the first place if Benny weren't in love with you!

**KATE** That is not true!

**BENNY** / Now, Jim, let's be fair!

**JIM** Oh come on Kate! You're not that dumb! He's in love with you, / that's why you're here!

**BENNY** Jim, I think we're straying from the purpose / of this meeting. Kate, it's alright.

**KATE** Our relationship is none of your business / and you don't know a thing about it!

**JIM** I'm sorry I said that out loud Benny / but I have had it with her mediocre attitude! (*to KATE*) It's mediocre!

**BENNY** That's okay.

**KATE** / Don't take that from him Benny.

**JIM** If you weren't always running around / with your head cut off doing a million things at once maybe you'd finally be able to make a commitment to something!

**BENNY** Kate, we can talk about it later. / I cast you because you're a good actress.

**KATE** He's insulting you left and right. (*to JIM*) Wait a minute what? What are you saying?

**JIM** / What are you doing?!

**BENNY** / Shelly would you please!

**KATE** Would you shut up Shelly!

\*\*\*

**ELEANOR** Excuse me! ...Excuse me. I'm sorry to interrupt.

**BENNY** Hello.

**ELEANOR** I was in the audience tonight?

**BENNY** We noticed you there, yes.

**ELEANOR** I'm sorry to interrupt... (*excitedly*) Were you just rehearsing?

**BENNY** No. No we were just having little a meeting. May I help you?

**ELEANOR** Well I just wanted to say what a wonderful job I thought you all did tonight, / it was a very powerful experience.

**BENNY** Oh, well thank you. ... Really?

**ELEANOR** Very powerful.

**BENNY** (*to the CAST*) That's great.

**JIM** Thank you.

**ELEANOR** (*to KATE*) You were sooo sweet! My heart just dropped for you.

**KATE** Thanks.

**ELEANOR** (*to SHELLY*) And you were very dramatic. Such powerful words.

**SHELLY** (*smiles awkwardly.*) huh-uh...

**ELEANOR** (*JIM and KATE*) And the way the two of you first met, ah! So touching.

**JIM** Thank you.

**ELEANOR** Very moving.

**JIM** Thank you very much.

**ELEANOR** You also wrote it, correct?

**JIM** Yes I did.

**ELEANOR** And you're the director?

**KATE** Ha!

**BENNY** ...Yes I am.

**ELEANOR** Well it was just terrific. All of you.

**JIM** Thank you.

**BENNY** Thank you.

**ELEANOR** Oh! I'm rude, my name is Eleanor.

**JIM** / Very nice to meet you, Eleanor.

**ALL** Hi. Hello. Etc.

**ELEANOR** (*waving program*) I know all of your names.

**KATE** May I ask: why you came tonight– how you got in?

**ELEANOR** I saw the sign.

**KATE** You *saw* the sign.

**ELEANOR** Well, poster, in the window of that corner store.

**KATE** Oh. ...But you came in the front door?

**ELEANOR** Yes. ...I should explain. You see I'd been walking aimlessly all day – all my life, actually, but that's a whole 'nother drama. (*chortles*) ...Anyway, I was walking and walking and I was about to flag down a cab to get to the Golden Gate Bridge so that I could– well, you know, throw myself into the ocean, –when I saw your poster! And I thought to myself: *Ah*, I have never seen a play before. In all my life I'd never gone to the theatre. Isn't that odd? I saw that the theatre was just down the block and I thought: here I am, as they say there is no time like the present, I might as well see a play before I jump. I'm not on anyone's schedule anymore. I quit my job today. –Well, I called in sick. But I know that I quit... Anyway– Now, mind you, I was in a terrible state. My make-up was running down my face from crying and I just looked awful. I had come early so I bought my ticket and went into the ladies room to sit down and collect myself. Then eventually I came in and found a seat– I was a million miles away; I didn't even glance at the program. I was still feeling just pathetic. And then the play! *Oh*, the play! I am so glad I decided to stop and see it. You were just so inspiring to me. I don't exactly have the words quite yet, but I've been thinking about it while I've been waiting in the hall and, something about it– ...it has changed my life.

**KATE** ...Right, and you didn't find it odd that you were the only person in the audience?

**ELEANOR** No. I didn't think much about it, actually. As I said, I've never been to the theatre before.

**JIM** (*stunned*) It has changed your life.

**ELEANOR** Oh yes. I feel– different somehow.

**BENNY** (*doubtful*) Really.

**JIM** That is great!

**KATE** Lovely. Benny? Could you...?

**BENNY** Yes. Uh, well, thank you very much for your comments, we appreciate them highly–

**JIM** –It is always gratifying to hear that one's work is appreciated. Thank you very much.

**BENNY** Yes. Thank you. But: we are in the middle of a meeting at the moment, actually, that we need to finish, so, uh, thank you for coming tonight, aaaand please tell your friends.

**ELEANOR** Are you discussing the play?

**BENNY** Yes, we are.

**ELEANOR** Oh I would love to listen in! If that's okay.

*BENNY looks to KATE. Her opinion is clear.*

**BENNY** Eeeeeeeewell, actually, I'm afraid it's a private company meeting.

**ELEANOR** ...I was going to shoot myself in the head and fall off the Golden Gate Bridge into the Pacific ocean tonight but after watching your play I have found a reason to live... (*pure enthusiasm*) And I'd really like to stay!

**BENNY** Oh. Uhm. Well, I'm glad we were able to-- give you a reason to live, but--

**JIM** That is wonderful!

**ELEANOR** You don't even know!

**JIM** What was it, exactly, that made you feel that way?

**KATE** Benny, / dear, may I have a moment?

**BENNY** / Yes.

*BENNY and KATE whisper heatedly to the side.*

**ELEANOR** Oh, many things. Your relationship with Kate. And what she said about how the common person is rendered silent by the modern societal machine. If I understood that correctly, that's me! My childhood, my job, my entire life. The way you spoke with each other so openly, I have never been able to do that myself, and when she said to you that one voice can be heard I thought, that is right, it can!

**JIM** That is great!

**SHELLY** Why were you going to shoot yourself and jump off the bridge? Oh! I'm sorry, that was rude.

**ELEANOR** Oh, that's alright. I brought it up, I suppose.

**SHELLY** It's just that you seem so happy. I can't imagine why would you. Jump, I mean.

**ELEANOR** Well, the usual reasons. ...I live alone... But enough about *me*, let's talk about *the play*!

*KATE shoves BENNY back toward the group.*

**BENNY** I'm! sorry to interrupt. Jim, Shelly, we really should be getting back to the meeting. It is late.

**ELEANOR** Please may I stay I won't be a bother! I'll just sit off to the side.

**BENNY** Well I don't think our meeting would really be of much interest to

you.

**ELEANOR** Oh!

**JIM** Actually, I think we have a rare opportunity to get some feedback from a member of our audience.

**KATE** *The member, if you will.*

**JIM** Maybe we should have her stay and ask her some questions.

**ELEANOR** Oh I would love that. Please! Please!

**JIM** What do you say, Benny?

**BENNY** Uh... ..That would probably be beneficial–

**KATE** –Oh!

**JIM** Great! Here, let's get you a chair.

**SHELLY** This means the meeting is going to go longer?

**BENNY** (*to KATE*) We'll just ask her a few / questions. It'll be good.

**SHELLY** Because my fiancé is coming to meet me and...

**ELEANOR** Oh how exciting! Now, as I said, this was my first play. So I'm no expert but I'll do my best... (*pause. Then, thrilled*) So!

**JIM** So, Benny, ask her a question.

**BENNY** Oh, okay. Uh–

**JIM** –You were saying about the common person, and being heard.

**ELEANOR** *Yes!*

**JIM** ...Well– ...what about it?

**ELEANOR** Oh! It's wonderful!

**JIM** ...Okay, uuuh, by “it” do you meannn–? ...What do you mean?

**ELEANOR** Well. Kate. And Shelly. And you. You made me want to stand up for *myself* too. I've never been able to protest or– no not complain– to *defend* myself out loud. But I feel it inside. To see each of you fight so hard for what you wanted. And that you *went* through so much. It was your personal or, your emotional battles that touched me, really, and that you would share them with me so openly. I could never do that before but now I think–

**JIM** –Okay, but how did you feel about the political aspects of the play? About how we handled them?

**ELEANOR** ...Well... They were explicit. I didn't really pay much attention to that, actually.

**KATE** Ha!

**ELEANOR** Am I wrong? Did I miss something? Am I wrong?

**JIM** No, no, whatever you experienced is what we want to hear.

**ELEANOR** It is my first play.

**JIM** That's fine. We want to hear what *you* think.

**ELEANOR** Okay, well, I didn't think much about those political things. But as

I said I've never been much of a revolutionary, of *any* kind. I just loved—

**JIM** —So— ...So, you didn't feel that by placing the love story in a greater political context, the petty concerns of love were elevated to a more substantial level, and that, by the same token, the social-political world of the play was juxtaposed against the lesser love story so that, just as the personal is made meaningful by the social, the social-political was made acceptable to you as an audience member by the comparatively inconsequential personal conflicts between the characters.

**ELEANOR** I'm sorry?

**BENNY** Did the politics bother you?

**ELEANOR** Oh. Well, again, I'm no expert. But my mind did tend to wander during those, I guess you're saying, political scenes. I just don't follow much of that sort of thing. It's all so... far away. But it was heartbreaking how that, uh, "The Cause," got between the three of you, so in that sense I suppose you do need to have all that political talk in order to explain things. I'm still not exactly certain what The Cause was. ...But you're so brave to share your story. That is what I found inspiring.

**KATE** What did you think about our names?

**ELEANOR** ...They're nice names.

**JIM** Did it make you, I mean, knowing that the character's names were our names as well, did that— ...do anything for you?

**ELEANOR** Well, you are the characters. *I mean*, they're you. It's about you.

**JIM** Right— well, they're just characters but we chose— *I chose*— to use our real names.

**ELEANOR** ...You mean—? (*to KATE*) ...So you've never had an abortion?

**KATE** No.

**ELEANOR** That didn't happen? The three of you aren't in love?

**KATE** No.

**ELEANOR** (*to JIM*) And you never fought for those causes?

**JIM** Well no, not personally. But I believe in them. No, I just used the same names because— well, my intent: was to heighten the sense that this stuff is Real.

**ELEANOR** ...Well that's very disappointing. I thought you *actually* cared about those things.

**JIM** Well I do. About the themes. But the story is made up.

**SHELLY** You thought it was autobiographical?

**KATE** You see? It implies that we all have some sort of direct, literal connection to our characters. *Which* we do not.

**SHELLY** Yeah.

**JIM** (*corrective*) Yes you do.

**KATE** They're characters, Jim, that *You Wrote*.

**JIM** How many times do we have to go through this, Kate? You have to believe in what your character believes.

**KATE** Tell him, Benny.

**BENNY** An actor who believes that he really is King Lear is emotionally ill.

**JIM** Benny.

**BENNY** Sonia Moore.

**JIM** Obviously I don't mean it like that. But you have to *believe in what you're doing* if you expect other people to— I mean, you don't have to *actually* believe it or, go blow up a catholic church or abort a baby or— I mean, obviously you don't have to actually believe— I mean, if I were playing Macbeth I certainly wouldn't go out and stab a— you know, I mean, just to— ...Line!

**JOAN** (*from the real tech booth*) What am I even talking / about.

**JIM** What am I even talking about? You know this, it's acting! Jesus it's acting!

**ELEANOR** Well then why did you lie about your names?

**JIM** ...Those are our real names.

**ELEANOR** What I mean is, if you never actually did those things in the play, why did you use your names? That's lying.

**SHELLY** I never understood the name thing either.

**JIM** As I said: I wanted it to be real, and personal. It's not *lying*. I thought it would make it seem more convicted. I never thought anyone would really think that we did the things our characters do, I mean, that would be crazy, I mean, no, we're not King Lear, of course. ...You thought that *we actually* did those things.

**ELEANOR** It seemed like you meant it.

**SHELLY** Told you! That's what I was saying but nobody would listen to me. That's what I was trying to *tell* you guys in the beginning. They're characters, they should have their own names. I'm not *Shelly*. I mean, I, Shelly, don't act like Shelly my character. I don't— *do* that kind of stuff. It's like you sneak up with our real names and put 'em on the program and try to make everyone think that we all really did this stuff. I don't believe in everything this play says.

**JIM** But we want them to *think* that you do. Ahg! Benny, would you help me please. This should be so simple.

**BENNY** She makes a good point.

**SHELLY** Good point, Shelly!

**JIM** What? You said the names were a good idea.

**BENNY** Yes. Yes I did. But.

**JIM** —But you didn't *actually* think so!

**BENNY** No, now— ...You seemed to think it would work and I didn't want to say No to something just because at first it didn't seem like a good idea to *me*. What if I were wrong?

**JIM** You're the director; you're supposed to be weeding out the bad ideas.

**BENNY** Where there is an open mind, there will always be a frontier.

**JIM** What?

**KATE** It's one of his favorites.

**BENNY** Charles F. Kettering. Where there is an open mind, there will always be a frontier.

**JIM** Okay, well, eventually you settle the frontier. I mean isn't that what happens? You make a decision Benny! You do know what a decision is don't you?

**KATE** Don't attack Benny. He *went* with the names, he went with *your* decision. True, he could try making some decisions of his own once in a while. But you *fought* for the name thing, Jim, come on. "It's the most important part! It's the whole show!" Just like the hand.

**JIM** Ah! What about the hand?

**ELEANOR** The hand.

**SHELLY** Not the hand!

**JIM** The hand, at the end, where you took my hand.

**ELEANOR** Oh. Yes. Actually. I wanted to ask you about that.

**JIM** Please.

**ELEANOR** ...Why did you do that?

**JIM** Well, what do *you* think?

**ELEANOR** ...I hated it.

**JIM** ...Benny she hated it. You told me that was a good idea too.

**BENNY** Jim, you wanted to keep it in.

**KATE** Yeah, that was "The Whole Show" too, remember?

**JIM** (*to ELEANOR*) ...You didn't feel that by taking my hand, by breaking the barrier between audience and actor, that you had a greater sense of the power of contact, the immediate and present need for contact in modern society, that we can't just pretend, like actors do, to make commitments to one another but that we must actually make actual contact if we hope to improve our lives!

**ELEANOR** No. Until that moment I was enjoying myself. When you made me take your hand it burst my bubble.

**KATE** / Ah HA!

**SHELLY** Yeah!

**ELEANOR** I'm not an actor.

**JIM** You could have chosen not to take my hand.

**KATE** Oh come on Jim you were practically slapping her in the face! She had no escape.

**JIM** She could have resisted. That would have been just as meaningful.

**KATE** You are such a hypocrite.

**JIM** (*serious*) Don't! call me that.

**ELEANOR** So you *don't* really love each other, do you?

**KATE** ...No. We played characters in a play. Theatre, play, illusion... You've seen a *movie* before, haven't you?

**BENNY** Kindness, Kate.

**ELEANOR** Yes but movies are fake.

**KATE** The play: is fake, okay?

**ELEANOR** Then why don't you make a movie? Why are you getting up there and doing it in front of people?

**KATE** You know I ask myself that all the time and I have no idea.

**ELEANOR** Well. That's not very good. I mean if you're going to go to the trouble of doing all of that in front of people night after night one might assume you would have a real reason.

**JIM** There we go! Hear that? That is what I'm talking about!

**ELEANOR** I mean it's embarrassing, after all, to get up in front of people.

**JIM** Yes! It is embarrassing! And that's what makes it great! Because it's embarrassing but you get up there anyway and you do it in front of people! Theatre is proof that we are mortal!

**KATE** Well I wouldn't go that far. But it is proof that we can look like idiots. If it were a book at least you could snap it shut and hurl it across the room; at the movies the actors aren't really there. But in the theatre you have to sit there and face these poor fools who are *actually* up there, *actually* being bad, and they know it's bad, and they know you know it's bad, and it's just *excruciating waiting for the whole thing to the end!*

**JIM** Theatre is the poetry of the performing arts.

**KATE** Well that's pretty, Jim. But you can count on your hands how many people actually read poetry anymore.

**JIM** There is still a poetry section at every Barnes & Noble in every mall across this country.

**KATE** Yeah, and it's bigger than the theatre section. And all the theatre section has is Shakespeare and those big Andrew Lloyd Webber books. We will never make a living doing *this*, Jim! Nobody wants it. This is America and Clifford Odets is dead. If you plan on making any money at all, ever, with this kind of play, which I assume you would like to do, then you've got to reinvent the entire history of this country, which is short, has all to do with money and very little to do with theatre, or art in general beyond old *habits dragged over from the Mother Country*.

**JIM** So then, Miss Americana, what are *you* doing here?

**KATE** I thought this was going to be good. It *sounded* good.

**JIM** Why? You don't like politics.

**KATE** No, Jim, no, you have never understood this. I do not oppose your

politics. Or you. I oppose your play.

**JIM** What's the difference? I *am* my politics. They are my beliefs and make me who I am. And my play is my expression of that and therefore to reject my play is to reject both me and my politics.

**KATE** You and your politics are confused.

**JIM** I don't think so.

**KATE** (to *ELEANOR*) Okay: The Ending. What did you think about the ending?

**ELEANOR** I told you, I didn't like it.

**KATE** I don't mean the hand thing, I mean before that, the whole last scene. Did you know what was happening there?

**ELEANOR** Well–

**JIM** Obviously it sums up the whole–

**KATE** Ehp! Let her answer! Go ahead. What happened at the end?

**ELEANOR** Well. Shelly wanted Jim to abandon your Cause and go with her. And you were willing to give up the Cause if Jim would stay with you.

**KATE** And then Jim, what did he do?

**ELEANOR** ...He stuck his hand in my face.

**KATE** Right, but what was he talking about?

**ELEANOR** Well I don't know exactly; I was very distracted by the hand. But he said something about not choosing either of you, or The Cause, and– being alive.

**KATE** That's it. (to *JIM*) What does that mean?

**SHELLY** It means we should cut the hand. (*covers her mouth*)

**ELEANOR** Yes, cut the hand.

**KATE** Besides that. What does that ending *mean*, Jim?

**JIM** It means– ...I mean it's obvious.

**KATE** She doesn't know what it means.

**JIM** Because of the hand.

**KATE** Okay so let's say we cut the hand. Same dialogue. No hand. What does it mean? What's the last line?

**JIM** Uh. Tsch. Okay, I'm holding her hand–

**SHELLY** We cut the hand.

**JIM** Okay well I'm holding my hand out! and I say, uh, "that palm filling my palm would bring new life. And I would know that I am not just between the two of you, or one cause and the other, but the sky and the earth, and that I am alive. I am alive."

**KATE** Pause. Blackout. What does that mean?

**JIM** ...Benny, would you explain this to her?

**BENNY** How much he gains who does not look to see what his neighbor says or does or thinks, but only at what he does himself.

**JIM** Jesus Christ.

**BENNY** Marcus Aurelius.

**KATE** *You* don't know what it means! You never decided. You don't choose me over Shelly. You don't choose love over politics or politics over love. You're hand is out there, and you're waiting. You choose to wait. You choose nothing. And then you say you're *alive*? What does that mean?

**BENNY** That's right, she's right.

**SHELLY** Yeah, what's up with that ending?

**JIM** Well, obviously, I choose politics.

**KATE** You, Jim, choose politics. But what does Jim the character choose?

**JIM** The whole play is about the politics. The love story is just something to help the medicine go down. It's a device. I mean who cares about two people sitting on a bench somewhere being in love, next to the U.S. Military accidentally inventing AIDS and calling it the Homo Cancer, or the inherent injustices built into American capitalism, or evil Catholic hypocrites who blow up abortion clinics. The only reason anyone cares about the love story is because of the politics. People cared about Leo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet because the Titanic *sank*, not because their love story was so great. It's the boat that mattered, *and the lower classes being locked up in the basement!*

**KATE** No, no, the whole last scene of your play is about love. Do you love me or do you love Shelly? That's what everything eventually boils down to. Love, not politics.

**JIM** But you and Shelly represent politics and love. You're symbols. It's clever.

**KATE** Okay, so why don't you choose? You wrote a love story. *That's* what you wrote. That's all she cared about.

**ELEANOR** Actually—

**JIM** She cared about being heard.

**BENNY** But not politically.

**ELEANOR** What I—

**KATE** Thank you.

**JIM** Don't put words in her mouth.

**SHELLY** No wonder nobody likes it!

**JIM** She's an adult, Kate, she can speak he own mind.

**ELEANOR** What I—

**JIM** As I recall, aside from the hand thing she loved the play.

**ELEANOR** But only because I thought—

**KATE** Jim she's never been to the theatre before!

**JIM** Well that's a bit elitist, don't you think?

**KATE** I didn't mean it like that.

**JIM** Oh how else could you have meant it? You just insulted her. Apologize.

**BENNY** All Kate meant is that maybe she enjoyed the experience but not the play.

**ELEANOR** I—

**SHELLY** She thought it was autobiographical.

**ELEANOR** Yes!

**BENNY** It was the experience.

**JIM** What are you talking about? The play *is* the experience! Have you gone crazy? Am I going out of my mind? Suddenly I have to define plays and acting to people who supposedly studied this stuff?

**BENNY** Listen, Jim, she sees a play for the first time and she gets caught up in the experience of a live – and rather lively – performance.

**JIM** Rather lively.

**BENNY** Okay provocative.

**JIM** No: You said: “rather lively.”

**KATE** God, Jim, you know what he meant.

**JIM** I thought I knew what he meant when he said several months ago that the play was Exciting. Now it's Rather Lively.

**KATE** So?

**JIM** So that was a covertly condescending remark. An insult really. If you had meant provocative you would have said provocative. And if you didn't like the play from the beginning you should have said as much and saved us all the “embarrassment” of “doing it in front of people!” *Sorry that I dragged everyone through such an agonizing experience!*

**BENNY** Jim.

**JIM** It's not like I put a gun to your heads! You all agreed to do it! You must have had a reason!

**SHELLY** I just wanted to be in a show.

**KATE** That's the only reason I did it.

**JIM** Why!

**KATE** Because it's theatre and it's what I want to do.

**JIM** Then why this show? You're not getting paid! It's not a stepping stone to boost your career! You don't even like it! Why did you agree to do it?

**KATE** Maybe you're right! Maybe I should quit right now!

**ELEANOR** No!

**KATE** *Shelly's* quitting!

**SHELLY** I'm not quitting! I *wanted* to!

**ELEANOR** No, you can't quit. You musn't quit. Just like you said in that first scene where you (*KATE*) wanted him to join that group and, and you (*SHELLY*)

wanted him to run away with you, (to KATE) what did you say?

**KATE** I don't remember.

**ELEANOR** Jim said, "I won't say a word. But I do have a voice." That was it. Then you (KATE) said, "You don't know *what* you have." You don't know what you *have*. Even if it wasn't real – I didn't know that at the time – feelings are important. You need to stick to them. You can't just Quit.

**KATE** I am not quitting, okay. I was just talking. I do not quit.

**BENNY** (*bitterly*) No, you don't.

**JIM** But you'd love it if Shelly would quit.

**SHELLY** I'm not quitting!

**JIM** I know, Shelly, I'm just saying, she hates the show and she wanted you to quit because then *she wouldn't have to!*

**KATE** You are ridiculous, do you know that?

**BENNY** It's true, Kate.

**KATE** Shut up Benny!

**JIM** Ah, suddenly Benny's back on your black list. How the tides turn!

**KATE** I told you to leave our relationship out of it.

**JIM** Who said anything about your relationship?

**KATE** Nothing. No one! Never mind. Alright, you want to know why nobody showed up tonight, *Jim?*

**JIM** Yes, why Kate? Why? You tell me why. Why did nobody show up?

**KATE** Because I have come to hate performing this thing so much that I put up a sign on the front door– apparently after Madam Suicide here slipped in and hid away in the bathroom– I put up a sign, on the door, that said "Show Canceled." Show! Canceled! That's how desperate I was to pinch this turd!

*Pause. JIM suddenly lunges at KATE. He throws her against the wall. She immediately does the same to him. They take turns for a moment. SHELLY dances around in fevered and vocal denial. Then JIM slaps KATE, spits on her, and picks up a chair with which to smash her. BENNY snatches the chair from JIM's hands and KATE pounces JIM, pinning him to the floor. BENNY pulls her off and JIM springs up. BENNY holds him back.*

**JIM** You hideous wench! You hag! You fiendish harpy!

*BENNY slaps JIM once.*

**BENNY** Oo! Sorry! Did that hurt?

**JIM** ...Oh my god. What did I do? I've gone insane. How could I lose control

like that? I'm a pacifist.

**KATE** You're a hypocrite.

*Pause. JIM suddenly lunges at KATE and throws her against the wall. She immediately does the same to him, and again he grabs her, slaps her, spits on her, and picks up the chair before BENNY pulls HIM away.*

**JIM** You put up a sign?! How could you *do* that? How could you even conceive of that idea without being totally insane and then actually do it?! You are an animal!

**BENNY** Calm down, Jim!

**JIM** What are you doing here when you should be off hopping around some carcass in the desert?!

**BENNY** Jim!

**JIM** "Show canceled," Benny! "Show canceled!"

**BENNY** I know.

**JIM** ...You knew?!

**BENNY** No! No! I had no idea!

**JIM** Oh Benny how can you *love that woman*?

**BENNY** Jim.

**JIM** Sabotage! Deliberate and cold-blooded! I am floored. I am– (*gains control*) I am very moved. This is unprecedented; I have never felt such anger. How could you hate me that much? It's a *play!* ...Show Canceled?!

*JIM has a brief fit of rage with clawing fingers but immediately contains it where he stands, clutching his face with his hands. Then:*

**JIM** I'm leaving. I quit. Ha! There! How do you like that? *I* quit. "Not a quitter," Ha! You quit a long time ago. You just couldn't say it out loud because what you really are is a coward! I am the only person in this room who has had the guts to make a commitment. You never committed to this show because you're too committed to too many things day and night to really be committed to anything, much less a play, much less *Benny* how do you think he feels? And you, Benny, you've never committed to a single thought of your own: "So-and-so said this, so-and-so said that!" And you, *you*, Missy, can't commit to *Anything! Ever!*

**SHELLY** Me?

**JIM** Yes you!

**SHELLY** I'm not quitting!

**JIM** But you'd like to!

**SHELLY** Well, yeah.

**JIM** So *do* it! *Do* it for god's sake! *Make a decision!* *Do something!* If Benny hadn't made all you're choices for you you never would have even *moved* in this show! You would have just stood there, stupidly! That is pitiful! ... Oh my god!

*JIM collapses in a heap on the floor. SHELLY is frozen by an epiphany.*

**SHELLY** ...He's right. I can't get married.

**BENNY** What?

**SHELLY** I can't get married. I've never wanted to marry that man.

**KATE** Shelly what are you talking about?

**SHELLY** That fiancé. He doesn't let me do what I want to do. He doesn't like my wanting to be an actress. He *hates* theatre. I don't want to marry him.

**KATE** (*sincerely*) Oh my god, Shelly.

**SHELLY** You're right. I never make a decision. I never even decided to marry him, *he* decided. "We're getting married," he said. "It's been decided." Just like that. I can't marry him. How am I going to get out of this marriage? ... Will you marry me?

**JIM** What?

**SHELLY** Will you marry me?

**BENNY** Shelly, maybe you should sit down.

**SHELLY** I can't sit down, I need to get out of my marriage.

**KATE** Just tell him you don't want to marry him.

**SHELLY** I can't do that. He'd be crushed. Shoot, he's gonna to be here any minute. What am I going to do?

**JIM** Shouldn't he have been here a long time ago?

**KATE** He always makes her wait.

**SHELLY** He could walk through that door at any moment, Jim, you have to marry me!

**JIM** No.

**SHELLY** I have to break my engagement!

**JIM** No Shelly!

**BENNY** Shelly? Why don't you sit down?

**SHELLY** I need to stand. I need to leave. I need to quit the show. -No, I need-I need to- ...I need to think for a second.

*SHELLY goes to a chair and sits, completely involved in her spinning mind. SHE does not even appear to register ELEANOR.*

**ELEANOR** Honey? Sweetie, now, I don't know anything about your relationship with this man, so I can't comment on that. But you can't quit this

play, dear. Jim needs to fiddle with that ending, yes, but you're doing something that is wonderful. *(to KATE)* And you too. You made me think that someone like me can stand up and be heard, that I could have meaning. I believed you. And I have to admit that it is very disappointing to realize you're actually a quitter.

**KATE** Look, I am not quitting, alright. Don't call me a quitter! You don't know about everything that has happened before tonight. Life is different on the hot side of the footlights, *Lady*.

**ELEANOR** It's Eleanor. My name is Eleanor.

**KATE** I cannot believe that *this play* changed your life!

**ELEANOR** Well it did.

**KATE** It did not!

**ELEANOR** How would you know?

**KATE** It's not even what you thought it was. And who are you to call me a quitter? Who are you period? You just walk in here. You were going to go blow your brains out and topple off the Golden Gate Bridge tonight and you're calling *me* a quitter?

**BENNY** Kate.

**JIM** Jesus Kate.

**KATE** A normal person does not share that kind of information!

**ELEANOR** I wanted you to understand how much you affected me.

**KATE** You wanted pity you liar! If you really wanted to kill yourself tonight you wouldn't have stopped to see a show! You would have gone and done it! You were going to commit the ultimate Quit! And you couldn't even follow through on that! So don't *you* call *me* a quitter!

**ELEANOR** Alright then! Watch me! You don't believe me? You think I'm a quitter? Watch me!

*ELEANOR pulls a gun from her purse and puts it to her head.*

**KATE** Go ahead! Pull the trigger!

**JIM** Jesus Christ Kate!

**BENNY** Maybe we should all sit down! Or sing!

**KATE** She's not going to do it! She was never going to do it!

**ELEANOR** I'll do it right now and splatter my brains all over your face! Then you'll wish you had been more polite!

**KATE** Oh! Will that be your Big Statement? Will you have been *heard*? You'll make me, one person, feel bad for being mean! Will that be the Grand Legacy you leave behind?

*A pause. Then ELEANOR takes the gun from her head and aims it at*

KATE.

ELEANOR ...I've always lived alone. I don't have any children. And I've never created any work of art. Who's going to remember me? I'm just the audience...  
...And you are very inconsiderate.

KATE I'm sorry.

ELEANOR (*sarcasm*) Why? What's changed?

KATE (*sarcasm returned*) The stakes.

BENNY Kate-

KATE -Sorry. I see your point, I'm sorry, I was wrong.

ELEANOR I'm not putting this away until you apologize to each person in this room for your bad behavior.

BENNY Eleanor it's okay, we like Kate.

ELEANOR Well I don't like her. She's rude. And that's not right. You have to live in this world with other people. They give you meaning. Which I've never had. But at least I know what I don't have.

BENNY Maybe you should put the gun down, Eleanor.

JIM Yeah, don't be crazy, Eleanor. (*making light*) I'm not really mad at Kate.

ELEANOR Yes you are. What do you mean you're not really mad at Kate, you tried to throw her through the wall?! ...She's right about you, you know. You are a hypocrite! When the going gets tough, huh? ...I'm not crazy. And I don't know what your play means. I thought I did but now I don't! You lied about your names, you took my hand, you don't believe in what you say you believe, and the ending *is* a mess!

BENNY Eleanor, we'll cut the ending!

JIM We're not cutting the ending!

BENNY Jim!

JIM It's the most important part!

KATE Jim would you focus please on the matter at hand!

JIM I am not wrecking my play because of some blue hair with a gun!

ELEANOR Pardon me! I am *not!* A blue! Hair!

*KATE grabs for ELEANOR's gun. BENNY and JIM join the tussle. The gun flies across the room and lands at SHELLY's feet. As JIM lets into ELEANOR, SHELLY slowly picks up the gun in a daze.*

JIM Good! Great! You're a nut! Grab that Shelly! I can't believe I ever thought you're opinion would have mattered for anything! You're crazy! Pulling a gun? What do you think this is? It's a play! You don't pull out a gun! You boo! You hiss! You walk out maybe! You could pick up a chair and throw it at us if you

really felt riled! That would be great! But you don't pull a gun on people! And you said *Kate* was rude? I am going to go call the police right now and you're gonna be in trouble! Hold on to her Benny!

*JIM makes for the door. But SHELLY is aiming the gun at him.*

**SHELLY** Jim get away from that door.

**JIM** Shelly what are you doing?

**SHELLY** Are you going to marry me or not?

**BENNY** ...Shelly?

**JIM** I told you, Shelly, no. Put that down, you're not thinking straight.

**SHELLY** Don't tell me what I'm thinking! I know what I'm thinking!

**KATE** Shelly, honey, put it down, don't be stupid.

**SHELLY** You be quiet, traitor!

**KATE** Shelly!

**SHELLY** You told them I was going to quit.

**KATE** You were.

**SHELLY** Well it was *my business!*

**ELEANOR** She's crazy.

**BENNY** Shelly, give Kate the gun.

**SHELLY** What's it gonna be Jim?

**JIM** Shelly you can't be serious.

**SHELLY** I have to get out of my marriage! It's been decided! By me! ...B-but I- But I can't do it by myself.

**JIM** Shelly this isn't the best way to go about it.

**SHELLY** I don't want to end up like her. That woman is me in thirty years. I don't want to end up alone and meaningless like her! -Sorry, sorry! I didn't mean it like that I, I just, I was going to marry him so that I wouldn't be alone. I'd still be alone only I'd be married! Married to a man who makes me wait. Look, he's not even here yet! That's not a marriage: *Waiting!* If he walked through that door right now I'd say: "You're Late!" And blow his head off! ...He said this play was stupid.

**JIM** Wwwhat?

**SHELLY** He said I was stupid for doing it.

**JIM** Bastard.

**SHELLY** He doesn't respect me. He doesn't make time for me. God, you have to marry me, Jim, please!

**JIM** But- -why me, Shelly?

**SHELLY** Well... We both like theatre.

**JIM** But I'm not in love with you.

**SHELLY** I can't tell him I'm not going to marry him without having a good excuse to back it up, *Jim!* I'll say I'm marrying you instead. I'll say you asked me first!

**JIM** But *he* asked you a long time ago.

**SHELLY** I'll say I forgot! Jim, I'm not going to go through my life letting other people decide things for me, things like Getting Married. I'm not going to always make time for other people. Now *I've* made a decision. Someone is going to make time for *me!* I'm *not* going to marry him. A decision's a decision! I'm making something *happen!*

**JIM** But Shelly!

**SHELLY** You will marry me right now!

*On sudden impulse, BENNY grabs the gun in SHELLY's hands and there is a tussle. SHELLY ends up falling to the floor.*

**BENNY** Oh! I'm sorry! Are you okay? Are you hurt?

**SHELLY** Yeah. I'm okay.

*Pause. SHELLY stays on the ground. SHE cries. BENNY stands, holding the gun, looking at SHELLY intently. KATE is looking at SHELLY as well. There is a pause. Then—*

**KATE** Benny?

**BENNY** What? ...What Kate?

**KATE** I don't like the way you quote all the time and I'd like you to stop.

**BENNY** ...Can we talk about that later?

**KATE** No. You're always quoting. You never tell me what *you* think and I need you to do that. I've never known what you want.

**BENNY** You know what I want.

**KATE** No I don't. We always do what I want. N—now I want to do what you want.

**BENNY** Well okay if that's what you want.

**KATE** No Benny!

**BENNY** Kate. Please.

**KATE** What do you want?

**BENNY** Kate— Eh— The personal life of every individual is based on secrecy,

**KATE** Benny.

**BENNY** and perhaps it is partly for that reason / that civilized man is so nervously anxious that personal privacy should be respected!

**KATE** Benny. Stop it Benny!

BENNY Anton Chekhov!!

KATE I left you because I never knew what you wanted!

BENNY Privacy, Kate!

KATE You never demand anything! It's maddening!

JIM Uh, you guys?

BENNY I want what you want.

KATE No, you don't!

BENNY Okay.

KATE If that's true, why did you decide to leave me.

ELEANOR I thought you left him.

KATE Be quiet, it's complicated! Why did you leave me after I came back?

BENNY (*growing agitated*) I thought it was what you wanted.

KATE I wanted you to express something yourself!

BENNY Kate, can we talk about this later. Shelly is very upset.

KATE Benny-!

BENNY -Kate. I do not want to talk about this in public.

KATE You never want to talk about it!

BENNY (*unleashed*) How would you *know*? You're never *around*!

*BENNY is now standing in such a way that the gun is incidentally pointing at KATE. Incidentally. But pointing, nonetheless.*

KATE I'm sorry. Is that it?

BENNY ...What do you mean is that it? ...Are you okay?

*SHELLY shrugs BENNY off and pulls herself up and onto a chair. BENNY turns to the others. HE is still holding the gun and, incidentally, it is still pointing.*

BENNY Now I think it's about time we called an end to this meeting. Thank you, Eleanor, for your comments. They were very helpful. Thank you Jim. And Kate. For being so honest-

KATE -Benny-

BENNY (*sharply*) -What.

KATE You haven't answered my question.

BENNY Kate, how can I be more clear. I want you: to drop it.

KATE And?

BENNY And that's it.

KATE And what else?

**BENNY** And go home.

**KATE** And then what?

**BENNY** And then nothing!

**KATE** And after another round of nothing, then what, Benny? What are we going to do?

**BENNY** Okay you want to know what I want? I want you to respect other people's privacy, and other people's beliefs. Just because you don't like something doesn't mean you have the right, or the obligation, as you seem to think, to say so! I want you to relax! I want you to stop filling up every hour of every day with things you "must" do before finding one hour at the end of the week to spend on me! I want you to devote some of your time to me! ...Oh, god you see I hate this. This is nobody's business. You goaded me into saying this and I didn't want to. It's private. It's between you and me and if you ever would have penciled me in I'd have told you as much! You never want me to leave but you never give me any of your time! You don't give you! I want you! "Love is above all the gift of ones self," Jean Anouilh!

**KATE** If you quote one more time I'm gonna slap you!

**BENNY** ...Kiss me, Kate.

*KATE slaps BENNY.*

**ELEANOR** Oh Kate! You are terrible.

**KATE** (*taking the gun*) And don't point that at me.

**ELEANOR** You are awful!

**KATE** Stay out of this!

**JIM** Can we put that thing down?

**ELEANOR** He just opened his heart to you!

**KATE** And it's none of your business!

**ELEANOR** You just won't admit that it's true. It is true, isn't it! It makes complete sense!

**SHELLY** What is going on?

**KATE** We are all going to go home now.

**ELEANOR** (*mocking*) "And then what?" "And then what?"

**KATE** Don't make fun of me!

**JIM** Can we put the gun away please?

**KATE** I am going home and I am calling the police and they're going to arrest you and lock you up in an insane asylum! And I am not performing this show ever again! This show is canceled!

**JIM** You stick that gun in your mouth and pull that trigger!

**BENNY** I think we all need to take a deep breath *right* now!

**SHELLY** What is going on?!

**KATE** This is the worst night of my life and it's your fault!

**JIM** Stop waving that around!

**KATE** Don't tell me what to do!

**JIM** You're insane!

**KATE** You're a terrible playwright!

*JIM grabs for the gun. There is a tussle. It is a wild one. EVERYONE else moves about calling out. SHELLY is practically banging her head against the wall in an utter, frazzled frenzy. Suddenly JIM has maneuvered the gun into a position against the front of KATE's forehead and pushes her backwards across the room, much to the concern of BENNY and ELEANOR. KATE grabs the gun and the struggle hits its peak! The gun is aimed straight out above the audience and the trigger is squeezed and—*

*Click!*

*Everything stops. Together, JIM and KATE, with perplexed expressions, pull the trigger twice. Click. Click. THEY relax their grip on one another and look at the gun.*

**JIM** It's empty.

**ELEANOR** Empty? Let me see that.

**JIM** Yeah, look, it's empty.

*JIM casually aims at KATE's head and pulls the trigger. Click. KATE suddenly realizes what HE is doing and slaps the gun away. ELEANOR takes it and checks it out.*

**KATE** Stop that.

**ELEANOR** I don't believe it. I swore it was loaded. It's been sitting on my nightstand for weeks, waiting there for me to work up the courage. I swore it was loaded.

**KATE** An empty gun? You are sooo stupid.

*Pause. ELEANOR looks at KATE, dumbfounded. ELEANOR looks around at everybody.*

**ELEANOR** I can't believe you people... What are you all doing here? ...I loved your play because I thought you were sharing your real feelings with me. That was it. And that was enough for me. As it turns out you're all a bunch of frauds.

You don't *know* anything. You're not *committed* to anything. Who are you? You're actors! You can't do some weird play where you grab people's hands and rant about things you don't really know anything about and then call it a day! "There, I've done my part!" You've never fought for Causes! You've never had an abortion! And if what I've witnessed here tonight means anything then you can't know what love means! You're hypocrites and quitters! Your play is worth nothing, I don't care if it *is* Art! If you loved what you were doing at least you could say that! But you all want to *quit!* You can't quit! What does that do? You can't reach out and grab people without knowing why! You can't fight to have the last word and leave it at that! You can't just pretend to change the world, you have to go out and do it!

*Beat. ELEANOR looks out. Epiphany. Then, abruptly, she exits and is gone.*

*Pause.*

*SHELLY picks up her bags and exits.*

*KATE, BENNY, and JIM are alone. THEY glance at one another.*

*Pause.*

*BENNY sits down.*

*Music. Lights fade slowly to black. Though still dazed, THEY notice the lights are fading.*

*The end.*