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## **That Darn Plot!**

By David Belke

### CAST

MARK W. TRANSOM: playwright (late 50's)

JO HARBER: Artistic Director of The Harvest Theatre, director of "The Cardboard Box" by Mark W. Transom (mid 30's)

GEOFFREY REGEANT: actor playing Martin, the father part in "The Cardboard Box" (40's to 50's)

RUSSELL CROFT: actor playing Lorne, the son part in "The Cardboard Box" (20's)

IVY SCHREIVER: stage manager (late 20's)

LLOYD TRANSOM: son of Mark W. Transom and representative of his estate, an electrical engineer (mid 30's)

Setting: The real and fictional world of MARK W. TRANSOM, most notably his work area and the rehearsal hall of the Harvest Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, the present day.

## **ACT ONE**

(The work area of MARK W. TRANSOM. TRANSOM is seated at his work desk but is asleep. He is surrounded by discarded papers, lunch detritus, empty bottles and one not yet empty bottle. There is also a phone with the receiver pointedly off the hook. Centred in the desk is a well worn manual typewriter. TRANSOM is in his late fifties, a weathered man whose appearance has clear evidence of the excesses of his life. He speaks with a smoker's voice and moves with a drinker's grace, but there is something dark and charming about the man. From off stage there is a knock. Then another one, louder, and then another. TRANSOM stirs only a bit.)

JO (offstage)

Mark! I know you're in there. Mark! It's eleven p.m. You have to be awake by now.

TRANSOM

I'm an adult in a democratically elected nation. I don't have to be anything.

JO (offstage)

Mark, I've been phoning all day. If you don't let me in I'll let myself in.

TRANSOM

(to himself) Have you no respect for the dead? (he fumbles for a drink)

JO (offstage)

Mark? Last chance. I'm giving you to the count of three. One. Two. Three. Three. Three. (pause) Okay. I'm coming in.

TRANSOM

(settling into his chair) Try as you will, thou shalt not penetrate the fulsome walls of fair playwrightville. The walls are thick and the locks are sturdy. Not since the fabled walls of Jericho....

(JO HARBER enters the room. In her thirties JO has already had a long and fruitful career in theatre, both as an actor and director. At present she is in the throes of a very difficult week and she is showing some signs of strain. She absorbs the pig sty of a room)

JO

Oh my God. The theatre's going to lose the damage deposit.

TRANSOM

(annoyed) How did you do that?

3

JO

How can you live like this?

TRANSOM

How the hell did you get in here?

JO

This is disgusting. (finding an ancient bag) Is this a sandwich?

TRANSOM

It was a sandwich, now it's a symbol.

JO

Of what?

TRANSOM

The destructive world order. Entropy overwhelming unity. The lack of maid service. Give me time. I'll think of something.

JO

Look, the theatre supplied you with a residence so you'd write, not disintegrate.

TRANSOM

I'm not disintegrating, I'm creating. This is the environment I thrive in.

JO

It's a wonder you're not mildewed.

TRANSOM

(lighting a cigarette) I don't hear anyone else complaining.

JO

(grabbing the match and cigarettes) I'm the only one you've got, Mark.

TRANSOM

Breaking and entering is a felony. I'll have you up on charges.

JO

I'm not the one in trouble.

TRANSOM

You broke in to my sanctum sanctorum. I distinctly remember throwing the bolts and locking the doors last night.

JO

(shows him a key ring) You also left the keys in the lock, genius. So. Where is it?

TRANSOM

Where's what?

JO

The play, Mark. The play I've been asking you about for the last month. The play the theatre paid you all that money to write.

TRANSOM

Oh. That.

JO

Yes. That. The Harvest Theatre is supposed to be opening the season with a new Mark W. Transom.

TRANSOM

You don't understand the process, my dear. You just don't sit down and write a play. You have to work up to it. Get your thoughts in order. Writing is easy. It's the preparing to write that's the tough part.

JO

You promised me a first draft a month ago.

TRANSOM

I gave you what I had.

JO

A title. Written on a beer coaster.

TRANSOM

It's a start.

JO

But then you told me the title had changed.

5

TRANSOM

I got a new idea.

JO

And now I've got nothing.

TRANSOM

You've got your health.

JO

The Board is meeting tomorrow morning. I've got to give them something.

TRANSOM

Tell them I'm working on something.

JO

Have you even started?

TRANSOM

I must have. I bought some paper.

JO

The Board is expecting a manuscript, Mark. They think it is such an achievement for a small theatre like the Harvest to be hosting a world premiere by one of the country's most famous playwrights. So when you told me you had an idea for a play....

TRANSOM

More of a notion than an idea.

JO

I trusted you. For old times' sake.

TRANSOM

And grand times they were.

JO

Despite the fact you haven't had a hit in six years.

TRANSOM

I know you're taking a chance, Jo. I appreciate the work. Really, I do. I need something to fill the endless hours.

6

JO

(picking up a bottle) Looks like you've been doing more emptying than filling.

TRANSOM

Tools in the search for inspiration.

JO

But I need a play by ten o'clock.

TRANSOM

That's eleven hours.

JO

Eleven hours.

TRANSOM

Don't worry. I work best with a deadline.

JO

I've put my job on the line for you. Do you want me to get fired? Do you want me... (notices a binder in the desk, she picks it up) What's this?

TRANSOM

Nothing. It's nothing. Leave it alone.

JO

(looking at title page) "The Cardboard Box"? This is a play, Mark.

TRANSOM

Bad play. It's a bad play, Jo. You don't want it. Believe me.

JO

This is a finished play. Has it ever been produced?

TRANSOM

It's not good enough to be produced.

JO

A premiere...

TRANSOM

It's a bad play. I found it in some old boxes. I don't even remember writing it. It's from one of the bad periods of my life.

JO

Oh Mark, your life is a never ending bad period.

TRANSOM

And that means I know bad. And believe me this is a bad play.

JO

I need a play.

TRANSOM

Not this one. (makes a grab for the play, JO dodges) It would serve you right if I let you have it. For all the misery you've caused me.

JO

I've caused you?

TRANSOM

Put that down.

JO

Okay. But I need a play to produce. Or else the Board will revoke your commission.

TRANSOM

What does that mean?

JO

That means no fee, no residence, no royalties. And you pay for the damages.

TRANSOM

I'll have something for you in the morning.

JO

A play?

TRANSOM

Something.

JO

A play?

TRANSOM

Okay, a play. You'll have a play in the morning. I promise. Now give that back.

(JO is about to give back the manuscript, but then pauses.)

JO

No. I think I'll just hold on to this for some incentive.

TRANSOM

Incentive? Do you really think I need incentive?

JO

If you can't deliver a producible play by tomorrow morning, then I'll present this to the board as our season opener.

TRANSOM

You can't do that.

JO

And if it's as bad as you say it is, then that means you're out on the street with no place to go.

TRANSOM

That's blackmail.

JO

I'm just following the rules laid out in the contract.

TRANSOM

I wish someone would shove regulations in your face.

JO

So what do you say? Do I give the Board this bad play?

TRANSOM

Okay. Okay. (sitting at the typewriter) I'll get to work. I can't believe you'd stoop so low. After everything we've meant to one another.



JO

All you mean to me right now is one brand new producible manuscript by ten o'clock in the morning. (turning to go) What in God's name did I ever see in you?

TRANSOM

Same thing you see now. Only back then you thought it was romantic and rebellious. (TRANSOM slides over for an embrace, he makes a grab for the manuscript, JO pulls away) This'll probably kill me, you know. I'll have a heart attack some time in the night and then you'll be stuck with nothing but that bad play to produce.

JO

Either way, I have a play. Work hard, little church mouse. And remember, you promised this one would actually have a narrative. None of that free association stuff. I want something even the little old ladies will enjoy. I'll see you in the morning.

(JO exits into the night with the play.)

TRANSOM

I hate little old ladies.

(TRANSOM inserts a piece of paper into his typewriter. He regards the empty sheet as if it were a mortal enemy.)

TRANSOM

I hate plays.

(He types a few words, rips out the paper and tosses it aside. He puts in more paper, types a single key and then rips it out. He inserts another paper. He regards the empty page. It stares back at him. After another moment he takes a swig out of his bottle. He leans back in his chair. Eventually he notices the audience.)

TRANSOM

It is my long considered conviction that everyone in the world should write a play, because I am of the opinion that hardship and adversity build character. And nothing builds characters like a play. When you become a playwright, you join a very select fraternity of malefactors, madmen and malcontents. Don't believe me? Look at Shakespeare. Abandoned his wife and children in Stratford so he could work in London. That is not civilized behaviour. The rest are no better. Moliere was a philanderer. Ibsen was a bastard. Eugene O'Neill was a neurotic drunk and Tennessee Williams was a drunken neurotic. Samuel Beckett was a prig. And George Bernard Shaw was Irish. And Mark W. Transom is all of the above. Except Irish. Managed to dodge that bullet. (regards the typewriter) How to start a play. There are those who say, playwrights should write what they know. Makes you wonder why there aren't more plays set in taverns. But when you don't have

time to be imaginative, writing what you know saves you having to make stuff up. There's never a shortage of characters, and if the ending stinks you can just blame it on life. There is no such thing as happy endings in life, why should theatre support that illusion? Playwriting is the ultimate exercise in control. I choose the place, the people, the story, the time. But with a few paltry hours to finish this thing, let's keep it simple. Start out with some place I know. A rehearsal hall.

(TRANSOM types. The lights come up on a rehearsal hall in Edmonton. A large table with four chairs has been set up for the first read through of the script. A few pieces of rehearsal furniture are also scattered about including a fifth chair in a nondescript corner by a small table. There is also a table set up with coffee supplies and a box of doughnuts. TRANSOM notices the appearance of the rehearsal hall and is pleased. Everything is on track.)

#### TRANSOM

This is a rehearsal hall. Seen a lot of these places. Dusty, empty venues filled with second hand furniture and first hand dust. The habitat of actors, directors, stage managers and other mythical characters. Speaking of characters, we might as well figure out who this play is about. Actors are always fun. Colourful, whimsical creatures. Kind of like pixies for a modern age. Little old ladies love plays about actors.

(GEOFFREY REGEANT enters. GEOFFREY is a veteran stage actor, the kind of performer who has lived through so many theatrical disasters and crises that he has gained a kind of "been-there-done-that" calm. Congenial, unflappable and ready to rise to any occasion, GEOFFREY is a dependable performer. He takes a pose centre stage.)

#### TRANSOM

This is Geoffrey Regeant. I met him at the Shaw Festival two years ago. Never worry about using real people in your story. You can always change names and genders in the second draft.

#### GEOFFREY

I just adore Shaw.

#### TRANSOM

That was the first thing he said to me. Not the best way to start up a conversation with someone who thinks Shaw is a long-winded overrated antique old anarchist.

GEOFFREY

I think my personal favourite in the Shavian repertoire is "Man and Superman", or maybe it was "Arms and the Man". Which is the one with all the talking in it? In any case, after a lifetime in the theatre, I've decided to gather all my experience into a memoir. The only question is do I put them in the form of a play or in a book? Or maybe an anthology of plays. Or a series of books. Or maybe both. You're a writer, what do you think?

TRANSOM

So maybe he isn't the protagonist. I don't have a lot of time and I don't think I can keep his dialogue under three hours.

GEOFFREY

Let me tell you about my Stratford days. I was in the festival for over eight years you know.

TRANSOM

So toss out that idea. We'll save him for comic relief or something. (GEOFFREY exits.) Maybe we need someone younger. (RUSSELL CROFT enters from the other end.) Someone with an edge. I met this kid at the University five years ago. Russell, something. I was a guest speaker for some sort of commencement. He comes up to me just as I'm getting into the cab...

RUSSELL

You're Mark W. Transom, right?

TRANSOM

I just wanted to get back to the Hotel.

RUSSELL

I am such a big fan of yours.

TRANSOM

But he won't let me go....

RUSSELL

I just wanted to ask you something.

TRANSOM

So then he asks...

RUSSELL

You know your play: "The Meaty Embankment"?

TRANSOM

One of my early plays.

RUSSELL

I just wanted to know. Were you on something when you wrote that? I mean, the play is just so full of bizarre images, it's so, well, anti-normal. A professor told me you were taking something to expand your mind. Not that I don't think you're not great when you're straight, but your work seems to be so out there, you know. So are you just naturally anti-social or is it induced? I have money riding on this.

TRANSOM

(pause) I've just decided. There are too many stories about actors. Put him on the supporting character pile. (RUSSELL exits) So who is there left to write about? Whose personality can I exploit in the name of Drama?

(JO enters the scene. TRANSOM glances over at the scene and is surprised.)

TRANSOM

Ah. Sometimes your brain just spews up the most unexpected things. And if you're smart you use what your subconscious offers. So the question is, how do I use her in a story? (thinks, then an evil laugh) Revenge. All right, Harber. You want a play? Then you're the play. A play about putting on a play. And guess what. Poor old Mark W. Transom did pass away in the night. Don't you feel bad? And now the only thing you have left to put on is.... (types)

JO

(picking up the script) "The Cardboard Box"...

TRANSOM

Ain't you lucky? Now. Getting the play started. Here's what I like to do: start low key. With one person engaged in an activity. Like looking over a script. (types)

(JO is sitting at the rehearsal table, looking over the script.)

JO

Ho boy.

TRANSOM

I warned you it was bad. (typing more lines)

JO

(she turns a page and reads some more.) Ho boy.

13

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TRANSOM

And now you're stuck with it. (types)

JO

Ho boy.

TRANSOM

Okay. This is nice. Protagonist stuck in a tough spot. But eventually we need another character. Then we will get some revealing interaction.

JO

Ho boy. Ho boy o boy o boy o boy.

TRANSOM

Or at least some dialogue. Enter a supporting character.

(IVY SCHREIVER enters. IVY is still young, but has developed all the skills of a consummate stage manager. Observant, unflappable and prepared, she is full of bustling energy in need of constant direction and focus. IVY is always ready for action and constantly looking for something to take her attention. She is also a real stickler for rules and regulations, living and breathing the Equity rule book.)

IVY

Good morning, Jo.

TRANSOM

Yeah, I know her too.

JO

(holding out her mug) Coffee?

TRANSOM

She's rather famous around the theatre community.

IVY

(pouring) Here you go.

TRANSOM

Or infamous.

JO

Great.

TRANSOM

Frankly I always liked her. So we'll throw her into the mix.

JO

I needed some coffee.

IVY

You seem wired enough already.

JO

Coffee settles me down, Ivy

IVY

Really?

JO

Weird body chemistry. Caffeine keeps me calm.

IVY

Nervous?

JO

Why shouldn't I be? If this doesn't work, the board will have my hide. (she downs the coffee quickly and pours another cup)

IVY

Listen, I just wanted to thank you...

JO

For what?

IVY

For the job. After what happened with the co-op... It's just I thought I might never work again. At least not in this town.

TRANSOM

There's a story here. In real life Ivy Schreiber shut down this little theatrical co-operative.

JO

I've always been able to count on you.

TRANSOM

Apparently the company was planning to do some student matinees.

JO

I need someone who isn't going to fold under pressure.

TRANSOM

So she phones Actors' Equity to ask about the regulations.

JO

I trust you.

TRANSOM

Turns out co-ops aren't supposed to do student matinees.

IVY

Thanks.

TRANSOM

Presto. She gets the co-op shut down.

IVY

I won't let you down.

TRANSOM

And Ivy Schreiver becomes one of the most unpopular people in the theatre community.

JO

I know.

TRANSOM

That's called backstory. Now on with the plot.

IVY

It's quite an honour to be involved in this show.

JO

It's the last Mark W. Transom. The country's greatest playwright.

TRANSOM

I like writing lines like that.

16

IVY

Which doesn't say too much about the state of modern Canadian theatre.

TRANSOM

What...?

JO

Ivy!

TRANSOM

(convincing himself) I must have meant to write that.

IVY

Frankly I never understood his appeal.

TRANSOM

I must be getting tired.

IVY

I always found his work a little pretentious.

TRANSOM

Leaving my mind open to suggestion.

JO

Pretension sells. Just ask Andrew Lloyd Webber.

TRANSOM

All good writers surprise themselves. Sometimes the plot takes on a life of its own.

JO

Mark may have been a little over the top...

TRANSOM

That's called discovery.

JO

But he was an amazing man. And playwright.



17

IVY

So it doesn't matter what I think. The important thing is that you think it's a good play. (JO quickly downs another cup of coffee and turns back to the pot away from IVY.) You do think it's good play, don't you?

JO

You read it. What do you think?

IVY

I'm the stage manager. I'm not paid to think.

JO

It could use a little help.

IVY

What kind of little help?

JO

Just a little here, a little there. And there. And there. It could use a lot of little help. And Mark's not here to help.

IVY

We don't need him. You've directed his work before. You know how his mind works. If anyone can pull this off, it's you.

JO

You're right. You're right. I'm no worse than any other director in town.

IVY

Now that's confidence. Low ball confidence, but confidence none the less.

JO

Once we get down to work I'll be fine. (downs the cup of coffee and then pours another)

IVY

The actors will be arriving any time now.

JO

The sooner I start sharing this nervous breakdown the better.

TRANSOM

The beginning of the play is the most important part. If an audience is going to tune out it'll be in the first fifteen minutes. (checks the audience) You must establish objectives....

JO

Putting on a play.

TRANSOM

Maybe introduce a subplot...

IVY

I never thought I'd work in this town again.

TRANSOM

And build some stakes.

JO

If this doesn't work the board will have my hide.

TRANSOM

That's enough to get the ball rolling, but if you want to tell a story, you need an obstacle.

IVY

By the way...

TRANSOM

Introduce it with subtlety.

IVY

Were you expecting anyone else today?

TRANSOM

Almost offhandedly.

IVY

Besides the actors?

TRANSOM

Narrative is created through conflict.

JO

Why?

TRANSOM

Stories are lot like life.

IVY

There was some guy waiting by the front door this morning.

JO

Who?

IVY

Just some little guy with a briefcase.

JO

Did he say what he wanted?

IVY

Just asked if this was the rehearsal for "The Cardboard Box". I said yes, unlocked the front door and when I turned back he had vanished. Briefcase and all.

TRANSOM

I have no idea what this story is about.

JO

Can you check through the building?

TRANSOM

No idea who the guy with the briefcase is.

JO

Make sure he's not hanging about?

TRANSOM

Just throwing in what ever occurs to me.

IVY

I'll be happy to.

TRANSOM

I'll figure out what it all means later.

JO

And I'll go take a walk around the block. See if I can shake this feeling of disaster.

IVY

Don't worry. We'll get through this, right?

JO

Right.

(IVY exits. JO, now finished her coffee, pours herself another cup and looks around the room.)

JO

Ho boy, that's a bad play. (exits)

TRANSOM

"The Cardboard Box." In all honesty Jo would have been better off directing the beer coaster. Here's the set-up. Father. Son. They haven't seen each other in decades. They had a falling out. The kid stormed out of the house, was never seen again. Now the father is fifty, sixty, whatever passes for old on stage. The son starts showing up. Just starts showing up in the house. They fight, of course, what father and son don't? But they start breaking down the barriers. (shudders) Who knows when I wrote it? There are whole decades I have difficulty remembering. But the story sounds familiar... Back on track. Got to get this thing finished by sunrise. Where is my supporting cast?

(GEOFFREY enters and immediately sets his sights on the coffee as his goal. He carries a journal tucked under one arm.)

TRANSOM

Good. The Shaw guy. He's good for a laugh or two.

(He arrives at the coffee pot and turns over the carafe, but it has been completely emptied.)

TRANSOM

You can tell he's an actor. In the room for less than a minute and he's already looking for free snacks. This is good. Maybe we can have him meet Jo first. Or maybe Ivy. Or maybe...

(GEOFFREY is examining the carafe when a little man with a briefcase enters. A little uncertain, the gentleman is dressed in a well pressed shirt and tie. His name is LLOYD.)

LLOYD

Hello?

TRANSOM

(surprised by the sound of the voice.) Oh Christ.

Hello? Is this the play place?  
LLOYD

How the hell did he get into this?  
TRANSOM

Do you know anything about the coffee?  
GEOFFREY

No. Should I?  
LLOYD

Bad subconscious, bad subconscious.  
TRANSOM

Are you with the show?  
GEOFFREY

You get tired...  
TRANSOM

No. Not really.  
LLOYD

And you lose control.  
TRANSOM

Then who are you?  
GEOFFREY

It's Lloyd.  
TRANSOM

I'm Lloyd.  
LLOYD

Pleased to make your acquaintance.  
GEOFFREY

I'm looking for the director. Is she here?  
LLOYD

GEOFFREY

You don't happen to know where they keep the coffee?

LLOYD

I thought I saw a kitchen in the back...

GEOFFREY

Maybe you should run out and makes us a pot?

LLOYD

I don't drink coffee.

GEOFFREY

And how do you survive in theatre without coffee?

LLOYD

I don't work in theatre, I'm an electrical engineer.

GEOFFREY

Perfect. Who better to cobble together a warmly brewed pot?

LLOYD

Me?

GEOFFREY

You must make the coffee.

LLOYD

Me.

GEOFFREY

I insist.

LLOYD

Is it really that important?

GEOFFREY

Lives depend upon it, man. Just fill up the carafe and bring it back. I'm sure there's some coffee supplies in the kitchen. There's a dear. I'll just be working on my memoirs.

LLOYD

Memoirs?

GEOFFREY

And I'll be recording my first impressions upon meeting you. Soldier on, brave coffee creator.

(LLOYD exits burdened down by the carafe and his briefcase. GEOFFREY writes.)

TRANSOM

Okay. Here's the scary truth. Fiction can get out of hand. It's not like writing history. Ideas pop out of nowhere. The trick is to know a bad idea when you see one. And that (meaning LLOYD) was a bad idea. Let's forget we ever saw him. He's gone, he's not coming back. There are more interesting characters. Like him.

(RUSSELL enters. He carries his lunch and other things in a carry-all. He is a young, freshly minted acting professional. Although highly trained, he is still feeling his way through the professional world. He dressed for a great deal of physical activity.)

RUSSELL

Hello.

GEOFFREY

Good morning.

RUSSELL

This must be...

GEOFFREY

It is.

RUSSELL

Then you must be....

GEOFFREY

I am.

RUSSELL

Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY

Geoffrey. And you must be....

RUSSELL

Russell. Russell Croft.

You're my son.  
GEOFFREY

Dad.  
RUSSELL

Seen the script?  
GEOFFREY

No. You?  
RUSSELL

I suppose we'll be seeing it soon enough.  
GEOFFREY

I can hardly wait. (starting to do some warm up stretches)  
RUSSELL

You seem quite excited about something you haven't even seen.  
GEOFFREY

It's Transom. It's bound to be good, right?  
RUSSELL

I knew I'd like this guy.  
TRANSOM

Even Shakespeare wrote some duds, chum.  
GEOFFREY

There's something appealingly confrontational in Transom's work. It's like a slap in the audience's collective face.  
RUSSELL

Yes. I always look forward to assaulting an audience.  
GEOFFREY

So much in theatre is complacent. It's like all they want to do is... is...  
RUSSELL

Entertain?  
GEOFFREY



RUSSELL

Yes. Transom alienates his audience and forces them to think. He's the best thing that has ever happened to the stage.

GEOFFREY

You know we're only doing the read through today, don't you?

RUSSELL

But we might be getting up on our feet. I like to be prepared.

GEOFFREY

When did you graduate theatre school?

RUSSELL

Two months ago. Want to join me in some floor stretches?

GEOFFREY

Done mine, thanks.

RUSSELL

What're you doing?

GEOFFREY

Writing my memoirs.

RUSSELL

Don't you have to be dead to do that?

GEOFFREY

Pardon me?

RUSSELL

I just thought that was something you did at the end of your career.

GEOFFREY

I've already had a career's worth of experiences, lad. I've filled twelve of these journals.

RUSSELL

So, you've been out of work, huh?

LLOYD

(entering with briefcase, carafe and coffee tin.) Pardon me.

TRANSOM

Damn!

LLOYD

I found the coffee.

GEOFFREY

Bravo, oh sturdy yeoman.

LLOYD

Where do I get the water?

GEOFFREY

From the kitchen? From the bathroom? From a tap?

LLOYD

How much?

GEOFFREY

Fill 'er up, lad. You're doing a marvellous job.

LLOYD

Thank you. (LLOYD exits)

RUSSELL

Who's that?

GEOFFREY

That's Lloyd. (returns to his writing) Tell me. Is "impending doom" one word or two?

TRANSOM

Let's get right to the meat of the thing. They're around the table, ready to work. No Lloyd. He's gone. He's never coming back. This is a story about a bunch of people putting on a play.

(As TRANSOM types, everybody starts taking their places around the table. RUSSELL watches IVY closely.)

JO

So if everybody has the rehearsal schedules, I guess that covers just about everything.

IVY

Maybe we should talk about the nude scene.

GEOFFREY

There's a nude scene?

RUSSELL

So I'm told.

GEOFFREY

I can't undress on stage. I'm a vivid blusher.

JO

Don't worry, Geoffrey. Russell is the only one who gets naked.

RUSSELL

I've never done a nude scene before. Not outside acting class.

GEOFFREY

I've always found that nude scenes tend to disrupt plays more than anything else. Once you get a naked actor on stage, he stops being a character and all the audience can see is the naked actor.

RUSSELL

Yeah. Isn't it great?

IVY

And I'll make sure all the appropriate warnings are posted.

RUSSELL

Will you?

IVY

We don't want to run into any trouble.

RUSSELL

I guess you'd know.

28

JO

Something wrong, Russell?

RUSSELL

No. Nothing. Just saying how important it is not to do anything wrong. We don't want any trouble.

JO

If you have something to say, I suggest you say it.

RUSSELL

(looking at IVY) We don't want to give anyone a reason to call Equity and have the show shut down. That happened to some friends of mine. Cost them a lot of time and money.

IVY

They should have followed the regulations and then no one would have gotten hurt. Here are your scripts. The coffee's over there. We seem to be out at the moment, but I'll make some more.

JO

Thanks.

RUSSELL

I like tea.

JO

Ivy?

IVY

(making a note) I'll take care of it.

RUSSELL

Darjeeling if you can.

IVY

Okay.

RUSSELL

Or maybe some Rose Hip.

IVY

Okay.

RUSSELL

Organic if you can manage.

IVY

Right.

RUSSELL

But not Earl Grey. Nothing too English Imperialist.

IVY

I'll see what I can do.

RUSSELL

Thank you, Miss Schreiber.

IVY

(biting the words) You're welcome, Mr. Croft.

JO

(sighing) Anything else? No? Fine. Well then. I want to spend the day just reading over and discussing the script...which we shall sadly be doing without the benefits of Mark's insight and talent. But before we start, I think we should just take a moment's silence. In memory of the writer who could not be with us today.

TRANSOM

Nice. That's nice. A little sentimentality to leaven the mood.

(At the table everybody bows their heads. Silence. LLOYD re-enters and proceeds right to the coffee set up. He carries a carafe of water and a bag of coffee grinds. He places the carafe by the coffee maker and after a moment's indecision, opens the coffee grinds and pours them into the carafe. He stirs the mixture with a spoon. The spoon rings against the glass sides of the carafe. Everyone turns towards the noise, breaking the moment.)

TRANSOM

Oh God. Where's the liquid paper when you need it?

JO

Can I help you?

LLOYD

Oh yes. Does the sugar go in now or do I have to wait until it's hot?

JO

What are you doing here? Who are you?

GEOFFREY

That's Lloyd. (Everyone at the table turns to face GEOFFREY) He's making coffee.

IVY

That's the guy from this morning.

LLOYD

I'm Lloyd. Didn't anyone tell you I'd be here?

JO

Listen, we're right in the middle of....

LLOYD

I'm sorry. I thought you'd been told. They told me everything had been set up through your office. Maybe you didn't hear. (going through his briefcase) I know I've got the papers here. Maybe they faxed you. Did you check to see if your machine was out of paper? Here's the letter from the lawyers.

JO

What lawyers?

LLOYD

Dad's lawyers. I'm Lloyd Transom. I'm here to protect my father's play.

(The scene freezes. TRANSOM gets up.)

TRANSOM

Yes. He's my son. That's the problem with this business. The more you write, the more bits and pieces of your life come bubbling to the surface and before you know it you've written a play about your mother. All right. Since he seems to want to keep appearing in this thing, I guess we have no choice but to use Lloyd. He'll be the obstacle. Something for our hero to overcome. A little bug to be squashed on the wind shield of life.

(The scene breaks. TRANSOM is back at the typewriter and types. IVY, GEOFFREY and RUSSELL exit. LLOYD is sitting in a shy and quietly nervous fashion. JO is watching LLOYD, sizing him up. LLOYD takes a casual look at JO's script. When she clears her throat, LLOYD quickly closes the script again. He smiles apologetically.)

31

LLOYD

Sorry about this. (pause) If you want to go on working...

JO

Ivy's just talking to the lawyers.

LLOYD

Is this the play you're doing?

JO

"The Cardboard Box." Yes.

LLOYD

I didn't know.

JO

You've heard of it?

LLOYD

Sure. Kind of. So this is my father's last play?

JO

Yes.

LLOYD

Is it good?

JO

Good enough.

LLOYD

Good.

JO

Mark never mentioned a son to me.

LLOYD

He moved out of the house when I was young.

JO

Mark was never a great one for following up on commitments.

LLOYD

It was a real surprise when I was appointed the executor of the estate. I never really knew him and suddenly I was in charge of cleaning up his life.

JO

So you gathered all his effects?

LLOYD

All the papers, all the notes, seven trips to the bottle recyclers...

JO

Any rewrites? Any new pages?

LLOYD

No.

JO

Oh.

LLOYD

All his papers were burned.

JO

Oh.

LLOYD

According to the instructions in his will.

JO

I guess he didn't want to leave anything incriminating.

(IVY re-enters with the lawyer's letter in her hand.)

IVY

Well, I just talked to the lawyers. Lloyd is the executor of the Transom estate.

JO

Which means?

LLOYD

Which means I am here to protect my father's play.



JO

Which means?

IVY

Which means, we can't do anything to the script without his approval.

LLOYD

I'm pretty sure that's what it means.

JO

I don't need someone judging everything I do.

LLOYD

I won't be. I know I'm not an artist.

JO

Good.

LLOYD

I'll just stay out of the way.

JO

Good.

LLOYD

I won't say a word.

IVY

So what do you think? Does he stay?

JO

Do we have any choice?

IVY

No.

JO

Welcome aboard, Lloyd.

LLOYD

Thank you. I won't be any trouble.

IVY

Shall I call the actors back in?

JO

Unless Lloyd has any problem about that.

LLOYD

Oh no. No trouble at all.

JO

Good.

LLOYD

Except....

(The word hangs in the air. JO and IVY turn back to LLOYD)

JO

Except?

TRANSOM

What?

LLOYD

Well.....

TRANSOM

Come on, Lloyd, show some backbone. Produce some conflict.

LLOYD

It's nothing. Nothing at all. It's just... That is your script there, isn't it?

JO

What about it?

LLOYD

There seem to be a lot of pencil marks.

JO

Those are notes.

LLOYD

You seem to have crossed out a lot of lines too.

JO

(suspicious) Yes.

LLOYD

And there are arrows too. It looks to me, and excuse me because I'm only a layman and I don't know how these things work, but it looks to me like you're planning to move some of words around.

JO

Those are edits.

LLOYD

Oh.

JO

Is there a problem with that?

LLOYD

No.

JO

Good.

LLOYD

But...

JO

What?

LLOYD

Well, I'm no expert, but I think you should hear the whole script as written before you start making changes. If that's all right with you. I just want to protect the play, that's all.

(JO looks over to IVY for support.)

IVY

He's the executor.

JO

JO

All right. Call them in. Let's get started.

IVY

Right.

LLOYD

I'll just sit right over here. You won't even know I'm in the room.

JO

And what do we do if there need to be any changes?

LLOYD

Maybe nothing needs to be changed at all.

JO

Tell me, Lloyd. Do you get a chance to see much theatre?

LLOYD

Don't worry. I may not know a lot about theatre, but I know what I like

JO

Wonderful.

(The scene freezes, then breaks into the next scene.)

TRANSOM

Okay. Thirty four pages. That's half an act. Only ninety more pages to go. Lloyd. Could you believe it? Too much father and son karma floating in the air.

(IVY, GEOFFREY and RUSSELL take their places at the table. LLOYD sits at a little table by himself. JO takes her place at the table. As IVY and RUSSELL pass by they exchange frosty glances at one another.)

IVY

It is now nine forty eight. Please remember we have an Equity regulated coffee break in one and a half hours. And lunch will be at twelve forty eight, not noon as previously announced.

RUSSELL

Thank you, Miss Schreiber.

IVY

Just doing my job, Mr. Croft.

RUSSELL

(under his breath) Hardass.

IVY

(under her breath) Jerk.

JO

Let's start the read through shall we?

GEOFFREY

Any edits or line cuts we should be aware of?

(JO glances in LLOYD's direction, everyone else follows her lead. LLOYD looks behind himself to see what everyone else is looking at.)

JO

(sighing) Ivy? Will you read the stage directions please?

IVY

"Act One, Scene One. We are in darkness. We hear a child crying. Suddenly two beams of light pick out two separate men. In one pool of light stands a young, handsome man dressed in casual clothing. This is Lorne, a conflicted Promethean figure with the wandering heart of a poet."

RUSSELL

Right. Promethean.

IVY

"In the other light stands Martin. Lorne's father. In late middle age, Martin has experienced more conflict than any man should ever have to deal with. As a young man..." He goes on for five paragraphs here. Should we just skip to the action?

JO

(She glances over to LLOYD, who is beaming and gives her the thumbs up) Go ahead.

IVY

All right. As a young man... Baby Boomer... Betrayed his youth... Bitter and betrayed... Sense of betrayal... Betrayal, betrayal, betrayal... Here we are. "The crying suddenly stops. The two men address the audience."

"Birth." RUSSELL

"Breath." GEOFFREY

"Growing." RUSSELL

"Grasping." GEOFFREY

"For life." RUSSELL

"For love." GEOFFREY

"We feel lost." RUSSELL

"So we find a home." GEOFFREY

"We feel lonely." RUSSELL

"So we find a lover." GEOFFREY

"We feel pain." RUSSELL

"So we go doctor." Shouldn't that be: "So we go to the doctor."

TRANSOM

Typos. Happens to the best of us.

(Everybody gets out their pencils to write the correction, as they are about to do so, LLOYD clears his throat.)

LLOYD

Maybe he meant to write "We go doctor".

(Everybody glances down at their scripts. There is silence as everyone analyzes the phrase.)

TRANSOM

What?

GEOFFREY

We go doctor?

LLOYD

Could be. Maybe. It might work.

GEOFFREY

But it doesn't make any sense. Nobody says "We go doctor".

LLOYD

Maybe that's the point. Maybe the father isn't supposed to talk like a real person.

RUSSELL

That's possible.

GEOFFREY

I would really like to talk like a real person. It would make things easier for me in the long run.

IVY

(to JO) So do we change the line?

LLOYD

How can we be really, really sure this isn't what he is supposed to say?

(JO has silently stood up from the table. While the discussion is going on, she slowly moves to an exit. Only IVY notices.)

GEOFFREY

Why would anyone say "We go doctor"? Is he a neanderthal?

RUSSELL

Sounds like Russian phraseology to me. Maybe you're supposed to use a Russian accent.

GEOFFREY

(doubtfully) I could do an accent. (trying it out) "We go doctor".

RUSSELL

See? That works.

LLOYD

I don't think the father is supposed to be Russian. Is Martin a Russian name?

RUSSELL

No! It's childhood grammar! You know, like a five year old would use. Oh my God, it's brilliant. We've just gone through this whole birth, breath thing and now we move on to the next stage of life. Don't you get it? It's like the seven stages of man! Brilliant.

IVY

Listen. I think you are all going to a great deal of effort trying to justify something that just escaped a proofreading. Why don't we hear what Jo has to say....

(There is a loud, hysterical scream from off stage. Everybody is stunned into silence and turn to the direction of the scream. After a moment JO returns to the room and with practised casualness resumes her place at the table. Pause.)

JO

"We go doctor". We'll make it work. Let's pick it up from "We feel lost". Page one.

IVY

Only 152 left to go.

RUSSELL

"We feel lost."

GEOFFREY

"So we find a home."

RUSSELL

"We feel lonely."



GEOFFREY

"So we find a lover."

RUSSELL

"We feel pain."

GEOFFREY

"So we go doctor."

LLOYD

(leaning over to confer with JO) You know. I think that'll work just fine.

JO

(putting her head in her hands) Ho boy.

TRANSOM

(stripping the paper from the typewriter roller) Cut. End of scene. That's it. Comedy, comedy, comedy. I've still got it. Don't slow down and you won't fall asleep. Concentrate on Jo. We need to know what's going on in her mind.

(JO and IVY are sitting at the table, exhausted. LLOYD's briefcase is sitting on the table.)

IVY

I see Lloyd left his briefcase. I suppose that means we can expect him tomorrow.

JO

What am I going to do? A read through of a two hour script is not supposed to take eight hours.

IVY

Thank God for Equity regulations or we'd still be here.

JO

He didn't approve a single cut.

IVY

Not even the scene where they say "It's Spring" and five minutes later they're looking through Christmas catalogues.

JO

I need a coffee.

42

Y

IVY

All out. I think we must have gone through twelve pots today. Even Russell stopped waiting for tea.

JO

Listen, I'm sorry about Russell.

IVY

I've heard it all before. I've heard worse. The regulations are there for protection. And if you can't follow the rules, you deserve to be shut down.

TRANSOM

Hey. This is good stuff. A character so moral, she's willing to destroy the thing she's supposed to be protecting.

JO

So, do you want me to talk to Russell?

IVY

No. I can handle him.

JO

I was impressed with his reading today.

IVY

He injected passion into that character.

JO

He's a passionate guy.

TRANSOM

The girl talk is nice...

IVY

Really?

TRANSOM

But that's enough character exploration.

JO

So what am I going to do about Lloyd?

TRANSOM

Back to the plot.

JO

This is only a first draft. I should be workshopping this thing, not rehearsing it.

IVY

We all knew this was going to be an interesting rehearsal process.

JO

Interesting yes. Suicidal no.

TRANSOM

Not enough action. Need to rock the boat a bit.

(GEOFFREY enters.)

GEOFFREY

I'd like to speak with you.

JO

Problems?

GEOFFREY

Act One, Scene Two. When the son returns home? I say that I haven't spoken to him in eleven years. But the whole plot depends on me knowing that Lorne has just left his job. How did I learn that?

JO

I would assume that the first statement is a mistake.

GEOFFREY

Hmmm. And what happened to my wife? I thought she was dead, but then there is that big love scene.

JO

Geoffrey I would fix it if I could, but...

RUSSELL

(entering) Ah, Jo. There you are. I wanted to talk to you.

GEOFFREY

And then there's this bit.

RUSSELL

I want to talk to you about the nude scene.

GEOFFREY

It's the scene with the feather duster...

IVY

Feather duster?

RUSSELL

On page 97, it says I take off my clothes.

GEOFFREY

The house cleaning scene.

RUSSELL

But nowhere does it actually say I put my clothes back on.

IVY

Oh yes.

RUSSELL

Does this nude scene ever actually end?

JO

It must.

GEOFFREY

I thought this was Christmas.

JO

(consulting the script) Mustn't it?

GEOFFREY

So why have we opened all the windows?

RUSSELL

Am I naked for the rest of the play?

GEOFFREY

Wouldn't it be chilly?

RUSSELL

Damn right it would.

JO

We'll find a way to get you dressed.

IVY

Jo?

JO

Ivy?

IVY

Geoffrey has a point.

JO

Okay.

RUSSELL

Jo!

JO

Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY

Me?

JO

Your problem?

RUSSELL

I'm buck naked for thirty nine pages!

LLOYD

(entering) Excuse me, everyone. (In silence, LLOYD crosses to the table and picks up his briefcase with all eyes following him. He walks to the exit, pauses and then turns with heartfelt emotion) I just wanted to say it's so wonderful hearing the play read. I was so moved. I just think you're all so... so... excuse me.

(On the verge of tears, LLOYD exits with his briefcase. Everyone watches him go. Then everyone turns their gaze back to JO.)

46

JO

(sigh) Go home everyone.

RUSSELL

But....

JO

Go. Home.

IVY

Come on everyone. Jo wants to be alone.

(Everyone exits. TRANSOM removes the page from the roller.)

TRANSOM

I know the feeling. God, it's three o'clock in the morning and still no end in sight. Why did I ever get into this business?

JO

Because you're good.

TRANSOM

Thanks. What? (He turns his attention to JO, but she remains in her own world.) You know you're really losing it when the characters start talking back. (He studies JO and smiles.) But it's been good to see you again, Jo. I missed you. Sometimes I wonder if I left too soon. But better too soon than too late. Right? Right? (JO doesn't respond, TRANSOM realizing the absurdity of talking to a character suddenly breaks away.) That's it. I've finally gone delusional. Commit him quick, boys, and remember it was the deadline that done him in. (to JO) See what you've done? (still no response) Just testing.

(returning to the typewriter) Back to that darn plot. The beast must be fed. Back to the rehearsals.

(JO and IVY are seated at the rehearsal table. RUSSELL and GEOFFREY are on their feet with scripts in hand, running a scene. LLOYD is once again off by himself at the little table. He is having soup.)

GEOFFREY

"What are you doing here? I thought I told you to stay away from my aquarium."

RUSSELL

"I just wanted to take a look. There's nothing wrong with that is there?"

GEOFFREY

"I don't want you here. You're a stranger."

RUSSELL

"I just wanted to see where you lived. How you lived. I was just looking. Nothing wrong with that."

GEOFFREY

"You little packrat, you parasite, parasite. There better not be anything stolen..."

RUSSELL

"Nothing is stolen. If things are missing it's only because you want things missing."

GEOFFREY

"Parasite. Parasite. Thief. I want you out of my room." He certainly says parasite enough. Can't we cut one of them?

(JO looks over to LLOYD who makes a very cheerful, sort of between friends shaking of his head.)

JO

Let's see if we can make it work.

GEOFFREY

It's a difficult word.

RUSSELL

A good actor can make any line work.

(GEOFFREY turns to face RUSSELL, JO steps in to stop the impending confrontation.)

JO

Geoffrey, we can't change the line. So you might as well get used to it.

GEOFFREY

Parasite, parasite, parasite. Didn't he own a thesaurus?

JO

Why don't we move on to the next scene? We'll come back to this.

Okay. RUSSELL  
(JO crosses over to LLOYD.)  
Good work. IVY  
Just doing my job. RUSSELL  
I thought it was good. IVY  
Who cares? (he turns away) RUSSELL  
(under her breath) Ingrate. IVY  
(under his breath) Liar. RUSSELL  
I need to change that line. JO  
I thought you said this was a good play. LLOYD  
I said it was good enough. JO  
Then why do we need to change anything? LLOYD  
Are you familiar with your father's process? JO  
Process? LLOYD



49

JO

Do you know that Mark would often overwrite the text expecting to make cuts? Usually in rehearsal?

LLOYD

No.

JO

I've worked with your father. I know how he worked. I know how he thought. And I know I need to change that line.

LLOYD

How can you be so sure he didn't want to keep it?

JO

Because I knew him!

LLOYD

I think the line has to stay. Just to be safe.

(LLOYD returns to his soup. IVY approaches.)

IVY

It's 12:01. The actors have to break for lunch.

JO

There's something else I'd like to break.

IVY

What?

JO

Lunch!!!

TRANSOM

Stop. This isn't working. Let's try it again.

(Another rehearsal. GEOFFREY and RUSSELL are on their feet. LLOYD is at his table with soup. JO and IVY are at the rehearsal table.)

IVY

The thievery scene.

GEOFFREY

Parasite, parasite, I hate words with long vowels. Makes my mouth look large.

JO

Okay. Let's take it from the top.

(GEOFFREY and IVY push back the rehearsal furniture. RUSSELL starts taking off his shirt.)

GEOFFREY

What are you doing?

JO

This isn't the nude scene is it, Ivy?

IVY

I said the thievery scene. Didn't I say the thievery scene?

RUSSELL

The more I rehearse in the nude, the more comfortable I'll feel.

GEOFFREY

Jo?

JO

Russ, I think we would all appreciate it if you kept your pants on.

RUSSELL

It's not like it's dress rehearsal. I can wear anything I like.

GEOFFREY

Jo?

JO

Russell, I would prefer concentrating on the script, rather than your...

IVY

According to Equity regulations, Mr. Croft can rehearse in any manner he chooses...

RUSSELL

(tossing her his shirt) Great.

IVY

As long as it poses no danger to the actor or the company.

GEOFFREY

Then let me go on record: I believe this is dangerous not only to my, but everyone else's, peace of mind.

IVY

(throwing back the shirt) A valid complaint has been lodged. You'll have to stay dressed, Mr. Croft.

RUSSELL

You're stifling my artistic expression.

IVY

Just following regulations.

RUSSELL

I have rights.

IVY

I'll tell you what your rights are.

RUSSELL

You'll tell me...?

JO

Russell. Ivy. Let's move on shall we?

RUSSELL

Okay.

IVY

Okay. Page forty four.

RUSSELL

But I'm going to keep my shirt off for this.

JO

Yes, fine, let's go. Stand across from one another. Hold each other's attention. Now remember. (GEOFFREY and RUSSELL stand at opposite ends of the performance space, watching each other with acted hatred.) Silence. Concentration. Hold the moment. I want to feel the tension. You don't want to be the first one to break the moment. It's like a staring contest. Hold it. Hold it....

(There is the sound of slurping from LLOYD's spoon, everyone turns to look. When he becomes aware of the attention, LLOYD waves back.)

TRANSOM

Hate it. Try it again. Proofreading and editing. That's how a play becomes great.

(Another day in the rehearsal hall. RUSSELL and GEOFFREY are in character.)

RUSSELL

"You can ask me to go, but you can't get rid of me."

GEOFFREY

"Just watch me."

RUSSELL

"I'm your son. Your sinew and your bone. We're connected. We're one."

GEOFFREY

"I gave you decades to design yourself and what do you bring me? The debris of a wasted life and a wasted love. Broken dreams and blunted ambitions. I have had enough of that myself. I should have drowned you at birth. I should've exposed you to the elements. My life is my own and no part of it is yours. You pathetic, spineless, broken, lifeless, little leftover."

(RUSSELL falls into a pose of exquisite artistic anguish.)

JO

Hold it. And end of Act One.

(The actors relax.)

TRANSOM

(studying the page) Where did that come from? Sometimes you surprise yourself. The things you write. That's so... Angry. But who's to say what's right or wrong?

LLOYD

Excuse me...

TRANSOM

Who's to say it should be cut?

LLOYD

I don't think he should be saying all those things.

TRANSOM

What?

JO

Pardon me?

LLOYD

I don't think he should be saying all those awful things. About the son. It's... too much.

TRANSOM

I'm more tired than I thought.

IVY

But it's the most important scene in the play. It motivates the breakdown scene...

LLOYD

It's not nice.

TRANSOM

Take control, Jo.

JO

Ivy. Let me handle this. What are you saying, Lloyd?

LLOYD

I just don't think anyone should say things like that. Not about anyone. It's so... ugly.

TRANSOM

But people expect ugliness from a Transom play. It's too late to change now.

JO

Are you saying you don't like that speech?

LLOYD

I am. I don't like it.

JO

Do you want us to cut it?

LLOYD

I... (he catches himself)

JO

Do you want to make a change to the script?

LLOYD

No. No changes. (he returns his concentration to his soup)

JO

(pause) Okay. Let's move on.

(The actors go to gather new pages. JO returns to her script.)

GEOFFREY

For a moment there, I thought I saw a breach in the ramparts.

RUSSELL

There's not going to be any changes. He respects his father too much for that.

GEOFFREY

I wonder....

RUSSELL

What?

GEOFFREY

If it's respect.

(While everyone prepares, IVY crosses over to LLOYD)

IVY

More soup?

LLOYD

Chicken and rice. Very nice. (he laughs to himself, enjoying his little joke)

55

IVY

That's a hard scene. There are a lot of hard scenes in this play.

LLOYD

There are.

IVY

This isn't easy for you, is it? Hearing your father's words come out like that.

LLOYD

It was never easy.

IVY

Then why...?

RUSSELL

(holding out his teapot) Miss Schreiber? I'm out of tea.

IVY

Excuse me. (crossing to take the pot) I'll make some more.

RUSSELL

Maybe a Lemon Zinger this time?

IVY

Whatever you want. (exiting with teapot, under her breath) Whiney little brat.

(LLOYD returns to his soup. RUSSELL begins to emotionally prepare himself for his next scene. JO approaches GEOFFREY.)

JO

So, how do you think this will all play out in your memoirs?

GEOFFREY

I think this will constitute the lost years of Geoffrey Regeant. A mysterious unknown period, when all were wondering what ever happened to that fair haired wonder of the stage, and who was that poor battered soul using his name in Edmonton. And how are you doing?

JO

Fine.

GEOFFREY

You don't look fine.

JO

Oh.

GEOFFREY

Just remember: you're doing this for no one but yourself.

JO

I wish that were true.

GEOFFREY

Who else would you be doing this for? Not me I hope.

JO

Mark.

GEOFFREY

And what's so special about him?

JO

I knew him.

GEOFFREY

Oh. Oh. Now when you say "you knew him", do you mean "you knew him" (casual wave) or "you knew him". (intimate gesture)

JO

(copying GEOFFREY's tone and gesture) "I knew him".

GEOFFREY

In the biblical sense?

JO

In every sense. He gave me my first break as a director, you know.

GEOFFREY

I didn't.

JO

So, this is more than a show. It's a way of saying thank you.



GEOFFREY

Wouldn't a little card in the mail be a lot less stressful?

JO

(smiling) Okay, everyone. Shall we try this one again? (to RUSSELL) With a little more truth?

(All this time, RUSSELL has been intensely stoking his emotional furnace.)

GEOFFREY

Ready?

RUSSELL

I'm finding the inner anger.

GEOFFREY

Anger?

RUSSELL

(menacingly) I'm going to play this scene like I want to stick steel spikes through your head and kick your twitching body into submission.

GEOFFREY

Jo?

RUSSELL

I want to beat you to death with a crowbar.

GEOFFREY

Jo?

JO

Don't play anger, Russ.

GEOFFREY

Thank you.

RUSSELL

How about rage?

GEOFFREY

Jo?

58

JO

JO

Could you find a positive objective in this scene?

RUSSELL

Like what?

LLOYD

How about longing?

TRANSOM

What?

LLOYD

Maybe the son actually wants to connect with his father? Maybe he wants to try to overcome all the things that have separated them? (pause) Maybe. My two cents. (returns to his table)

JO

Give it a try, Russell. See where it takes you.

GEOFFREY

"What are you doing here? I thought I told you to stay away from my aquarium."

RUSSELL

"I just wanted to take a look. There's nothing wrong with that is there?"

GEOFFREY

"I don't want you here. You're a stranger."

RUSSELL

"I just wanted to see where you lived. How you lived. I was just looking. Nothing wrong with that."

GEOFFREY

"You little packrat, you parasite, parasite. There better not be anything stolen..."

RUSSELL

"Nothing is stolen. If things are missing it's only because you want things missing."

GEOFFREY

"Parasite. Parasite. Thief. I want you out of my room."

RUSSELL

"You never will."

(RUSSELL makes a rehearsal exit. The scene is over. GEOFFREY and RUSSELL turn to JO for approval.)

JO

Well. That seemed to work. Russ?

RUSSELL

That's kind of interesting actually.

GEOFFREY

I'm just glad I don't have to duck crowbars.

(While the actors go to fetch their next pages, LLOYD crosses to JO.)

LLOYD

Well, that seemed to go very well.

JO

You really helped me there.

LLOYD

You're welcome.

JO

Don't ever do that again.

LLOYD

Pardon?

JO

Don't you ever give my actors direction again. It's bad enough trying to do my job without you interfering.

LLOYD

I was just trying to help.

JO

If you want to help, then let me do some rewrites.

60

LLOYD

(pause) I can't do that....

JO

Then just be quiet and stay out of my way.

LLOYD

But...

JO

Stay out of my way.

IVY

(entering with teapot) Lemon Zinger anyone?

JO

(marching over to the coffee machine) I need some coffee.

RUSSELL

(to GEOFFREY) Is it my imagination or is this play in deep trouble?

GEOFFREY

Lad, if this play were a boat James Cameron would be buying the screen rights.

TRANSOM

Punchline. End of scene. (All the characters except LLOYD disperse) Sorry about the kid, Jo. We've got the makings of a dandy little one act here. One hour of choice comedy. The little old ladies will love it. It's all falling into place now. No blocks. No surprises. Everything just right.

LLOYD

(softly, matter of factly) I hate you. (LLOYD exits without looking at TRANSOM)

TRANSOM

What did he say? That's what I thought. That's the problem with basing your characters on real people. They tend to come with their own baggage. He probably didn't mean it. I'm projecting my own feelings. I haven't heard from him since.... I have no idea what the real Lloyd would say. I just have to go by what I knew of him when... Writing a play is one part inspiration, one part talent, three hundred and fifty parts psychotherapy.

(TRANSOM returns to the typewriter. It is night in the rehearsal hall. Jo is in studious misery with the script. IVY enters.)

61

Working late?

IVY

I'm trying to fix Act Two Scene Two.

JO

What part?

IVY

All of it.

JO & IVY

(smiling weakly) I would love to trim three pages. We should combine Lorne's two monologues. And I'd like to cut this whole business with the family dog. It's superfluous and doesn't go anywhere.

JO

As long as you're wishing, you might as well wish for a rewrite. It's not going to happen.

IVY

Not with that idiot holding a knife to the production's throat.

JO

He doesn't mean to be evil.

IVY

What good is protecting the play if it ends up a bad play?

JO

Let's grab some coffee.

IVY

I'm sick of coffee.

JO

Supper?

IVY

I've got to figure this out.

JO

62

IVY

Tomorrow is an off day. You can figure it out then.

JO

Okay. I'll look at it in the morning.

IVY

A lot can happen in one day.

(They begin walking to the exit)

JO

Lloyd could get hit by a bus.

IVY

That's awful.

JO

It would make our lives easier.

IVY

Yes. But it's still awful.

JO

I suppose.

IVY

I just think he should be locked up somewhere.

JO

Or kidnapped.

IVY

Or abducted by aliens.

JO

Anything. Just get him out of my hair.

IVY

Our hair.

JO

God! What I wouldn't do for a rewrite.

(The two women exit. There is a moment's silence and then LLOYD dejectedly steps out from where he has been listening. He retrieves his briefcase from where he left it. He turns to go and then with a new thought he returns to the table. He picks up Jo's script and then after a moment's thought, exits the room. The scene shifts to the next day. Everyone assembles together the next day except for LLOYD. JO is the last to arrive. Everyone is busy with various tasks. JO looks at the room with the attitude of one about to enter a dentist's office. She heaves a sigh, puts on a happy face and enters.)

JO

Good morning, everyone. Shall we get started? (she crosses over to the table where IVY is waiting.) Listen. When we left here on Sunday...

IVY

Yes?

JO

You didn't happen to take my script did you?

IVY

You've lost your script?

JO

I can't find it anywhere.

IVY

Does that mean we can find a new play?

JO

Can I use yours this morning?

IVY

I'll run you a new copy during coffee.

JO

Thank you. There seems to be a rather pleasant absence today.

IVY

Do you want to wait for Lloyd?

JO

We all know what his contribution is going to be.

GEOFFREY

Where are we?

IVY

Act two, scene three. The breakdown scene.

RUSSELL

(brightening) My nude scene.

GEOFFREY

Oh God.

RUSSELL

Can I get undressed for this, Jo?

JO

I suppose we have to face this sooner or later.

LLOYD

(entering with briefcase) Hello, everyone.

RUSSELL

Great.

GEOFFREY

Must you?

LLOYD

Hello?

RUSSELL

I'd like to start getting comfortable with the nudity.

LLOYD

Can I....?

GEOFFREY

You seem pretty comfortable with it already.



RUSSELL

The concept of nudity is different than the actuality of nudity.

GEOFFREY

You're telling me.

LLOYD

Excuse me...

JO

Why don't we just block this scene first?

LLOYD

Pardon me....

GEOFFREY

Thank you.

RUSSELL

I would really like to...

LLOYD

(shouting) PARDON ME!

(Everyone turns in shock to LLOYD who immediately loses his nerve.)

LLOYD

Pardon me.

JO

Have you something to share with us, Lloyd?

LLOYD

Yes. Yes, I do. Last night I took out some boxes of my father's. Some old boxes that I saved from his house. Before we sold the house. Anyway, I saved some things. Some old papers from his desk.

JO

That's very nice. What is the point?

LLOYD

Well, I was going through the papers. Just to see what was there. Because I never really looked at these boxes...

JO

The point, Lloyd. What exactly is the point?

LLOYD

Well, the point is, I was looking through the boxes. And I found these. (He pulls papers from his briefcase.)

RUSSELL

Paper?

LLOYD

Yes. Well, no. Not just paper. They were on the bottom of the box. I think they're rewrites of Act Two, Scene Two. (JO rushes over and immediately grabs the papers from LLOYD)

TRANSOM

(suddenly paying attention) What's that?

LLOYD

I made photocopies for everyone.

TRANSOM

A nifty little plot development. Looks like I get to save the play.

(Soon everyone has copies of the rewrites.)

JO

Look at this. He cut two and a half pages.

TRANSOM

After all the damn thing definitely needed rewrites.

IVY

The family dog stuff has been cut.

TRANSOM

Might as well use them...

GEOFFREY

Good. I was not looking forward to saying "Now Bowser's a showering schnauzer".

Too bad. That's a funny line.  
TRANSOM

Hey! Did I lose a monologue?  
RUSSELL

They've been combined.  
JO

Looks like I'm the hero.  
TRANSOM

This is unbelievable.  
IVY

From beyond the grave.  
TRANSOM

(to heaven) Thank you, Mark.  
JO

You're very welcome.  
TRANSOM

JO  
Give me some time to look over these pages and then we'll start blocking them. Go run lines in the green room.

(GEOFFREY and RUSSELL exit. IVY pauses.)

Do you want me to stay?  
IVY

No. Just go run lines with the boys, okay?  
JO

Okay.  
IVY

(IVY shoots a wondering glance over to JO, whose attention is fixed on the new pages. IVY exits. LLOYD begins to go.)

68

JO

(still fixed on the paper) Not you, Lloyd.

(JO looks over the new pages, LLOYD waits nervously.)

JO

I thought you said all of Mark's papers had been destroyed.

LLOYD

Mostly.

JO

Too bad. This is good.

TRANSOM

Now all we have to do is wrap things up.

JO

In fact this incorporates some ideas that Ivy and I were talking about.

TRANSOM

Come on, Jo. We've got a real solid conclusion cooking here.

LLOYD

Good timing.

JO

Isn't it?

TRANSOM

All we need is punchline and I can go to bed.

JO

Did you know I lived with your father for a few months?

LLOYD

What? No. Why?

TRANSOM

The usual reasons.

JO

The fact is I lived with your father and I've seen Mark write.

TRANSOM

No more plot developments.

JO

He worked on this beat up old manual typewriter.

TRANSOM

Get back on course.

JO

This looks like it was typed on a Macintosh. Did you rewrite this scene, Lloyd?

TRANSOM

He's an electrical engineer.

JO

(to TRANSOM) That's not what I asked. (back to LLOYD) Did you write these pages?

LLOYD

Me?

TRANSOM

Him?

JO

You.

LLOYD

No.

TRANSOM

This is ridiculous. He's not a writer.

JO

Ivy closed down one show because of wrong doing.

TRANSOM

I'm the writer.

JO

And she's perfectly capable of doing it again.

He doesn't have any talent.

TRANSOM

Plays are rewritten all the time.

LLOYD

We have nothing in common.

TRANSOM

By the playwright, Lloyd. By the playwright.

JO

I'm ending it right now. That's it. Play's over. Good night and drive carefully.

TRANSOM

(to TRANSOM) Let me handle this.

JO

What?

TRANSOM

But you said you wanted changes.

LLOYD

Are you talking back to me?

TRANSOM

Not yet.

JO

I put dialogue in your mouth and this is how you repay me?

TRANSOM

I just wanted a few nips and tucks.

JO

This is open rebellion.

TRANSOM

You changed the entire scene.

JO

Stay on your side of the page.

TRANSOM

I know. I'm sorry.

LLOYD

He's not going to do any more.

TRANSOM

I'm not going to do any more.

LLOYD

I'm the writer.

TRANSOM

It wouldn't be right.

LLOYD

Right.

JO

Right.

TRANSOM

Right. Mark's the boss.

JO

Back on track.

TRANSOM

I just wanted to help.

LLOYD

TRANSOM  
Back in control. The play ends now. Lloyd is revealed as a forger. My son is humiliated and thereby neutralized. (This last sentence catches JO's attention) Jo and her buddies do the play as written. End of story. Unhappy ending.

JO  
(JO has been watching TRANSOM, she then glances over to LLOYD. She makes a decision, then calls) Okay come in everyone, we're ready!

TRANSOM

Of course the kid doesn't come off looking too good, but then that's his character, right? Every story has to have a loser.

(Everyone returns)

GEOFFREY

I love these edits.

TRANSOM

Sorry kid.

RUSSELL

And it's pure Transom.

TRANSOM

Art is a cruel mistress.

RUSSELL

In fact it's hyper Transom.

TRANSOM

Art demands closure.

RUSSELL

Pure distilled essence of Transom.

TRANSOM

Even if it's painful.

LLOYD

You like it?

TRANSOM

You're just the plot's fall guy.

GEOFFREY

It's wonderful.

TRANSOM

Stop talking about the new pages! Let's just wrap this thing up, okay? Jo?



JO

Hold it, everyone. There's something you have to know.

RUSSELL

Yes?

TRANSOM

Finally. Here comes the punchline.

GEOFFREY

What?

JO

These pages that Lloyd found. The fact of the matter is... Lloyd... also found new pages for Act One, Scene Three.

TRANSOM

What?

GEOFFREY

Thank God.

TRANSOM

Stop that.

RUSSELL

As good as these?

TRANSOM

Stop that!

JO

I'm sure they are.

TRANSOM

This play is over.

JO

I asked Lloyd to bring them in tomorrow.

74

IVY

Edits by Mark W. Transom?

JO

Yes.

TRANSOM

Okay, hold it right there! (TRANSOM balls up the script page. The action freezes. TRANSOM throws the wadded ball aside. Then he addresses the audience.) Against my better judgement what seems to be developing here is a full length play. When the characters start making their own decisions, it's time to take a break. Take a little intermission and I'll see if I can figure out what happens in Act Two.

(BLACK OUT)

## **ACT TWO**

(At LLOYD's table is an old portable typewriter like TRANSOM'S. He is reading "The Cardboard Box" script. JO considers what LLOYD is reading. TRANSOM is at his work desk with a box of cereal and a bowl placed on the corner. He regards JO and LLOYD with a combination of wonder and dismay.)

LLOYD

(reading) "How do we get ourselves in these situations? We rage, we blow and set ourselves impossible tasks. We need to change. To change our lives, to change our histories. To change destiny and change our pasts. Change our choices so we can change our possibilities. To remember, to recall, to reach out. Change is an illusion. There is no change, only regret. You're not my son. I am your father. I'm going to change the aquarium's water."

JO

He keeps saying the same thing over and over again. It's contradictory. And what is all this remembering and reaching out business? It doesn't make sense.

LLOYD

So you don't like it.

JO

Mark must have been half asleep when he wrote this.

TRANSOM

After some deep thought and careful contemplation, it is my reconsidered opinion that nobody should ever write a play.

JO

Let's look at it again.

TRANSOM

Especially not with characters based on reality.

JO

I think we can fix it.

TRANSOM

They keep making their own decisions.

76

LLOYD

Does it need fixing?

TRANSOM

Regardless of the consequences.

JO

I made some notes.

TRANSOM

It's like working with lemmings.

LLOYD

All right let me see what you've got. (LLOYD reads the notes)

TRANSOM

You hear it all the time. Writers say that the story takes on a life of its own. And they say it with a smile. Idiots. That way lies madness.

JO

(to TRANSOM) Wasn't it Shakespeare who said that the poet, the lover and the madman are all of one mind? Clever man. For a playwright.

TRANSOM

Are you still talking to me?

JO

I must be. The only people who talk to themselves around here are the geniuses.

TRANSOM

How?

JO

You're the writer, you tell me.

TRANSOM

Because it's five o'clock in the morning. Because I'm not in my right mind. (sighs) And I guess it's because you're Jo. And I know she would never let me do things the easy way.

JO

You do have a tendency to miss the big picture, Mark.

LLOYD

I suppose I could make some edits. (starts typing)

TRANSOM

(pouring cereal into his bowl) What in God's name ever possessed you to enlist Lloyd?

JO

You gave me my objective. I'm here to put on a play.

TRANSOM

With Lloyd?

JO

I need edits and Lloyd is the only one who can supply them.

TRANSOM

(pouring whisky on the cereal) I could have done edits in my spare time.

JO

It's a wonder you wrote "The Cardboard Box" at all, considering there was no one to lock up the liquor and chain you to the typewriter. You don't even take the time to check your spelling.

LLOYD

How do spell denial?

TRANSOM

D-E-N-N-I-A-L.

JO

One n. Bad spelling runs in the family. There's a little bit of you in him after all.

TRANSOM

Not an atom.

JO

How can you be so sure?

TRANSOM

(sitting at the typewriter) You want Lloyd? You got Lloyd. But this time I'm in the driver's seat.

JO

I've heard plots are like rivers. They follow their own meandering path until they find a natural and appropriate end.

TRANSOM

What idiot told you that?

JO

You did.

TRANSOM

Don't get me mad. I could have you crushed by a meteor.

JO

The set designer would kill you.

TRANSOM

Or maybe a plane crashes into the theatre.

JO

Not enough money in the budget.

TRANSOM

Or maybe this is all just a bad dream.

JO

Oh, Mark. That's such a cliché.

LLOYD

Ms. Harber...

TRANSOM

Back to the action.

JO

And what exactly is the action?

LLOYD

We were doing edits.

TRANSOM

In secret.

On the change speech.  
LLOYD

Oh yes.  
JO

I'm done.  
LLOYD

Read me what you have.  
JO

LLOYD  
Okay. (clears his throat) "How do we get ourselves in these situations? We need to change, but I'm in denial. I'm going to clean the aquarium."

That's a hell of an edit, Lloyd.  
JO

I made a few nips and tucks.  
LLOYD

Right.  
JO

Right.  
LLOYD

Right.  
TRANSOM

The actors will love this.  
JO

Right.  
LLOYD

Right. (pause) Right.  
JO

TRANSOM  
How about some plot action? Say something.

80

JO

(after a moment, JO smiles slyly as an idea occurs to her) Why don't we look at the father character? Geoffrey has no choice but to play him pretty rigidly. We could have him drop his guard and admit he cares about his son.

TRANSOM

Oh, good grief.

LLOYD

You want me to change the dialogue?

JO

Just a little transition piece.

LLOYD

It would be nice if a father actually acknowledged a connection.

JO

Absolutely.

TRANSOM

That was a low blow.

JO

(to TRANSOM) Stop me if you can.

TRANSOM

All righty then. (types) Lloyd replies.

LLOYD

But I don't think we should be rewriting the play. That's too much. Sorry. Good night. (whirls quickly and exits)

JO

(to TRANSOM) You're putting words in his mouth.

TRANSOM

That's what I get paid for.

JO

Isn't he allowed his own voice?



TRANSOM

He's a plot device. A colourless character designed to impede the plot. Nothing more.

JO

Only because you're writing him that way. (exits)

TRANSOM

You always have to have your own way, don't you Harber? You're setting yourself up for a death scene. No happy endings. Where's my ending? Unless this is a three act. Oh God, am I writing an opera? Back to the rehearsal hall. Compress time. Cover a week in one scene. Take the express route to the end.

(This sequence squeezes the events of a number of days into a single scene. It's almost a split screen with the company making demands of JO in one space and then JO and LLOYD conferring in another, both visible to the audience. LLOYD is seated at the typewriter with pages of script)

GEOFFREY

(entering) Jo, dear. This scene just doesn't make any sense. One minute I'm screaming at my son and the next I'm feeding my fish.

JO

I know.

GEOFFREY

I need some sort of transition.

JO

I know.

GEOFFREY

A word, a phrase, a pithy little quip about neon tetras.

JO

It's a bad scene.

GEOFFREY

Then why don't we make paper airplanes and forget we ever saw these pages?

JO

Lloyd won't allow cuts.

GEOFFREY

We open in two weeks.

JO

I know.

GEOFFREY

If you're unwilling to talk edits, how about kindling?

JO

Just hold on. Maybe some new pages can be found. (turning to LLOYD, who has just entered to sit at his table) Lloyd, I need another edit.

LLOYD

I can't do that. I've done too many already.

JO

But the last ones were really good.

LLOYD

They were?

JO

Mark would have wanted this. I'll say you found some more pages.

LLOYD

But no more, okay? This is the last. The very, very last.

JO

Right.

LLOYD

Right. (passes JO the pages from his typewriter)

JO

Here we are. (passes GEOFFREY the pages) Solve your problem?

GEOFFREY

Just what the doctor ordered.

JO

Good. Because I think these are the last of Mark's new pages.

(GEOFFREY reads the pages and IVY enters quickly with script)

Jo, we have a problem. IVY

What? JO

Here. IVY

Where? JO

Scenes Five and Six. Russell has no time to change costumes. IVY

I see. JO

He needs at least a minute. IVY

Okay. JO

But this scene comes right after the other. IVY

Right. Lloyd! JO

We need another page or two. IVY

Don't worry. (crossing over to LLOYD) Lloyd... JO

Not again. LLOYD

We need a rewrite. JO

A rewrite?  
LLOYD

I need some lines for Martin.  
JO

No, I can't. Edits are one thing, but creating dialogue...  
LLOYD

We really need it. For the good of the play.  
JO

Jo?  
IVY

Coming!  
JO

What do you need?  
LLOYD

(to IVY) Have you seen these edits?  
GEOFFREY

The father needs a speech.  
JO

Lloyd allowed edits?  
IVY

To cover a costume change.  
JO

He found new pages.  
GEOFFREY

What should he say?  
LLOYD

His timing is extraordinary.  
IVY

85

JO

Anything.

GEOFFREY

I'm not complaining.

LLOYD

Well, I have this idea...

GEOFFREY

Are you?

JO

What?

LLOYD

For a monologue.

JO

For who?

LLOYD

For the father.

JO

Perfect.

LLOYD

(quick type) Here it is.

JO

You wrote this?

LLOYD

I was playing with some stuff.

JO

Great.

IVY

Jo!

86

JO

Ivy.

IVY

What's going on here?

GEOFFREY

(indicating the pages he previously received) This is great.

JO

(passing pages to IVY) Here's some more lines.

IVY

More lines?

GEOFFREY

Another monologue?

JO

Yes.

GEOFFREY

Interesting.

IVY

Where did this come from?

JO

Lloyd found it.

IVY

A whole monologue?

JO

Don't worry, everything's fine.

RUSSELL

(entering) This is wrong.

JO & IVY

What?

RUSSELL

These new pages. They're all wrong. Now I'm supposed to say I've been studying engineering.

JO

What?

IVY

So?

RUSSELL

Right at the beginning I say I've been travelling the country.

JO & IVY

Oh.

RUSSELL

Yeah.

JO

Lloyd!

LLOYD

(types as he talks) Don't worry. I'm already on it. I wanted to rewrite the opening anyway. I've changed the offending lines and tightened up the dialogue. I've eliminated the excess verbiage and replaced it with some movement stuff. And forget the non-sequiturs, they never worked any way. I've kicked it off with some dialogue.

JO

And a monologue.

LLOYD

And a monologue. (ripping the new page off the type) I think you'll like this.

JO

You're a regular monologue machine. (passing pages to RUSSELL as LLOYD exits) Here.

IVY

What?

JO

New pages!

88

Again? IVY

Lloyd keeps finding them. JO

Where? IVY

Here. There. Behind the cushions. Under the bed. JO

It sounds like they're everywhere. IVY

Mark wasn't very organized. JO

The whole beginning's changed. RUSSELL

What? IVY

It's better. JO

That's a rewrite. IVY

It is. RUSSELL

A major rewrite. IVY

We're lucky. JO

How can we get a rewrite without the writer? IVY



Hey, I got a monologue.  
RUSSELL

(to JO) Something's wrong here.  
IVY

Me too.  
GEOFFREY

Aren't you worried?  
IVY

The play's improved.  
JO

This is better.  
GEOFFREY

That's what counts.  
JO

Yes it is.  
RUSSELL

It's all for the best.  
JO

I think we've got a hit.  
RUSSELL

(The ACTORS exit)

What do you say?  
JO

The ends don't justify the means. (exits)  
IVY

Ivy....  
JO

TRANSOM

Cut. Print. I can see where this is going. And it's not a going to be pretty. That'll teach you to mess with the playwright.

(JO makes an angry cross to confront TRANSOM, but is interrupted by LLOYD'S sudden entrance.)

LLOYD

Ms. Harber....

JO

What?

LLOYD

I think I've figured out a new Act Two opening.

JO

Have you?

LLOYD

I couldn't help it.

JO

And what are you going to do about it?

LLOYD

I was just wondering... if it would be okay if I wrote it.

JO

You have my permission.

LLOYD

Good. I think it'll work. (sits at the typewriter, starts typing.)

JO

And maybe we can get the father character to admit he likes his son.

TRANSOM

We've already discussed that.

LLOYD

I don't think it can happen.

91

JO

Just think about it.

LLOYD

(doubtful) It doesn't seem real. (returns to his typing)

TRANSOM

Do you actually think you can make him into a writer?

JO

I think he always was.

TRANSOM

What makes you so sure?

JO

I know you. For some reason he scares you silly.

TRANSOM

I am not scared of Lloyd.

JO

No. You're scared of your son.

LLOYD

Ms. Harber...

TRANSOM

I am scared of proximity.

LLOYD

Excuse me....

TRANSOM

You let people get close and they'll stick a knife in your back.

LLOYD

I was just wondering...

JO

Have you been hurt?

After watching....  
LLOYD

Never...  
TRANSOM

The last few weeks...  
LLOYD

I leave before the knives come out.  
TRANSOM

At my table...  
LLOYD

Oh, Mark...  
JO

Is it always this much trouble?  
LLOYD

You must be so lonely.  
JO

Putting on a play?  
LLOYD

I am what I am.  
TRANSOM

But you can change. If you want.  
JO

Impossible. (returning to typewriter) Your protégé has a question.  
TRANSOM

What?  
JO

Lloyd. Answer his question.  
TRANSOM

93

LLOYD

I said....

JO

Mark...

TRANSOM

(firm) Answer his question.

JO

(turning to LLOYD) What?

LLOYD

Is it always this much trouble putting on a play?

JO

It can be worse. Some day I'll show you my battle scars.

LLOYD

Then why do you do it? I'm sorry. It's a stupid question...

JO

No. I've got an answer.

LLOYD

You do?

JO

Or rather your father did.

TRANSOM

I did?

JO

I was directing "The Masticating Horde"...

TRANSOM

Our first play.

JO

A real nightmare. And I asked Mark, "Why do we put ourselves through all this?"

LLOYD

And what did he say?

JO

Come on, Mark. You had an answer for that once. Back when you were young and eager and actually enjoyed writing plays.

TRANSOM

(paused at the typewriter, racking his brain) Was I ever like that?

JO

It all has to do with....

TRANSOM

Sheep!

JO

Sheep.

LLOYD

Sheep?

JO

A city man finds a farmer watching this herd of sheep which has somehow ended up in a tree. One at a time they throw themselves into the air and fall to their deaths.

TRANSOM

Wet woolly splotches on the meadow.

JO

The sheep are trying to fly. "How can you let all these animals die trying to accomplish the impossible" the city man asks. And the farmer says...

TRANSOM & JO

"But think of the enormous financial benefits should they succeed."

(JO & TRANSOM share a laugh.)

LLOYD

(pause) I don't get it.

TRANSOM

(giving up) Oy!

JO

Theatre is one of the few places where the sheep fly. A dialogue is a leap of faith. Sometimes all you get is a flattened sheep...

TRANSOM

But on occasion....

JO

But on occasion, you end up with mutton nesting in the trees. You get it?

LLOYD

So you're saying that theatre is the impossible made possible?

JO

I know it's a cliché, but...

LLOYD

Then let's have the father admit he cares. (returning to the typewriter and inserting a fresh paper, then smiling) It's only slightly more impossible than flying sheep. (types)

TRANSOM

I can't believe I remember you remembered that story.

JO

I can't believe you let yourself forget.

(JO exits, leaving LLOYD typing away. TRANSOM ponders.)

TRANSOM

Flying sheep... (he studies LLOYD) Lloyd's showing some spirit. Maybe there's something of the old Transom blood in him after all... (he studies LLOYD a little longer, then he makes a decision, slipping a fresh piece of paper into the typewriter roll) Okay, kid, let's see what you got.

LLOYD

What?

TRANSOM

I'm giving you your own scene.

LLOYD

But what can I...?

TRANSOM

Find an objective. Pursue a dream. Solve a mystery. Anything. As long as it's important to you. (LLOYD rushes out, TRANSOM returns to the typewriter) And this better be better than I expect it be. Let's say Ivy and Jo are in a meeting off stage. Lloyd enters...

(The rehearsal hall. GEOFFREY and RUSSELL are studying new pages. LLOYD enters with a huge thermos.)

LLOYD

Hello. Good morning. I made soup for everyone. Actually it's borscht. You're welcome to try some at lunch. What's going on?

GEOFFREY

We're on break.

RUSSELL

But learning lines.

GEOFFREY

At the rate you're finding pages, we'll have memorized a whole new play by week's end.

LLOYD

It's still "The Cardboard Box".

RUSSELL

An improved "Cardboard Box".

GEOFFREY

Build a better "Cardboard Box" and the world will beat a path to your door.

LLOYD

(glances over at TRANSOM and then makes a decision) You really seem to know the characters. Understand them I mean.

RUSSELL

That's how an actor works. We crawl inside the characters brain until we know him as intimately as we know ourselves. An actor needs that inner understanding.

GEOFFREY

Whereas some of us just need a pretty costume.

LLOYD

So you know these characters?



RUSSELL

We better. We open in a week.

LLOYD

(turning to GEOFFREY) Then can I ask you something?

GEOFFREY

Certainly.

LLOYD

You're playing the father. The father my father wrote.

GEOFFREY

Yes...

LLOYD

How does the father feel about the son? Does he hate him? Does he even think about him at all?

GEOFFREY

I'm sure he does. That's what fathers do.

LLOYD

But what about my father's... character? Does he care about his son?

GEOFFREY

Yes. Of course he does.

LLOYD

Really?

RUSSELL

(searching through the script, dubious) The father loves the son?

GEOFFREY

Yes.

LLOYD

Oh. Good.

(GEOFFREY who has felt "on the spot" relaxes.)

RUSSELL

But if he cares for him, then why hasn't he talked to his son? It's not supported in the script.

GEOFFREY

Just because he hasn't made conversation, doesn't mean he's unconcerned. I'm sure he thought about his son every day. Sometimes without intending to. Sometimes he might spend a week thinking about nothing but Lorne all because he found some old picture or toy...

LLOYD

Oh. Good.

RUSSELL

Then why didn't he call? Why did he never visit? Why did he stop sending Christmas cards?

LLOYD

Yeah.

GEOFFREY

I can only speak about my own interpretation of the character.

LLOYD

I'd like to know.

GEOFFREY

I think Martin, the father character, the one in the play, values his independence. He doesn't want to be weighed down with responsibilities. If he acknowledges a connection with his son, then he becomes vulnerable.

LLOYD

So he leaves.

GEOFFREY

That's my interpretation. Take it for what it's worth.

LLOYD

Thank you. I think I understand. (beat) So he really cares?

GEOFFREY

(ending the conversation) Yes.

LLOYD

Oh.

RUSSELL

(pause) Noooo. That's not it at all. Don't you see? The father is this kind of Id-like monster. Martin thinks Lorne is this useless little schlub, lower than a worm, or a leech even. Martin can't wait to get rid of Lorne. In fact he was sorry he was ever born. It's right there in the script. You can see that can't you?

LLOYD

Um. Well. I don't know. (LLOYD exits)

GEOFFREY

They don't teach a lot of tact at theatre school, do they?

RUSSELL

What? What did I say?

TRANSOM

(ripping out the paper from the roller and throwing it away) God damn it! (he pauses, like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar) Well, I should know better than that. That scene didn't accomplish very much. Let's keep things moving. Damn the torpedoes...

(IVY and JO re-enter.)

JO

Are we all back?

TRANSOM

Full speed ahead.

IVY

All right, everyone. It's exactly ten-forty seven. Break was over two minutes ago.

RUSSELL

And we wouldn't want to lose two minutes.

IVY

Rules are rules.

JO

How is everyone doing with the new pages?

GEOFFREY

They're an overflowing garden of delights.

RUSSELL

They're good.

LLOYD

(entering with paper) Oh good. I'm glad. Because I found more rewrites.

JO

What?

LLOYD

It's the parasite scene. I made photocopies for everyone. I think it's better. Really.

(While IVY passes out pages, JO privately confers with LLOYD)

JO

We didn't rewrite the parasite scene.

LLOYD

No, I did. It was clunky and he said the word parasite far too often. (exits)

TRANSOM

That was emphasis.

IVY

Here are your pages, Jo. Unless you've already seen them.

JO

No. Thank you. I'd like to see them.

IVY

Transom did a lot of rewrites.

JO

Mark was like that. The hardest working man in show biz.

IVY

That doesn't sound like the Mark W. Transom I've heard about.

JO

I knew him. Take my word for it.

101

IVY

Those nips and tucks were one thing. But now the whole tone of the scene has changed.

JO

Nothing wrong with that.

IVY

Isn't it funny how he didn't keep the rewrites with the script? And why weren't they found all together? And why didn't he tell anyone about the new pages before he died? And why...

JO

Ivy! No more questions. I've got to look at these pages.

IVY

(pause) Okay. I'm the stage manager. I'm not paid to think.

JO

Ivy, I'm sorry. I....

IVY

Where do you want to start, Ms. Harber?

JO

(hurt) Just... let me look over these pages first.

(The scene freezes, TRANSOM crosses to address JO.)

TRANSOM

See what I mean, Jo? You don't get bruised if you don't let anyone under your skin.

JO

And what about Lloyd?

TRANSOM

What about him?

JO

Lloyd seems to have some issues of his own.

TRANSOM

(returning to the typewriter) I really hadn't noticed.

GEOFFREY

(breaking the freeze) That does rather seem to be the issue doesn't it?

TRANSOM

Now what?

RUSSELL

We have some concerns.

TRANSOM

When did you start talking? What's going on here?

IVY

Lloyd is being ignored.

TRANSOM

Lloyd is nothing but footnote stuff. This is a play about putting on a play. Shut the hell up.

GEOFFREY

Actually I've become quite interested in the footnote.

TRANSOM

Shut up.

JO

The cast and I were having a little conference.

TRANSOM

A little conference?

IVY

We want you to give Lloyd a voice.

TRANSOM

This is not a play about my son.

JO

We think it should be.

RUSSELL

At this rate I'll never get undressed.

GEOFFREY

We're dealing with more important issues.

RUSSELL

That's easy for you to say. As far as I can see, I have only six objectives in this play and two involve taking off my pants.

JO

Russell, please.

GEOFFREY

Perhaps you should be in a Brad Fraser play?

JO

The four of us were talking...

TRANSOM

This is not a democracy. We do not take votes, especially not from characters. You're only tools designed to serve the narrative.

JO

I think you have a bit of a tool uprising.

IVY

You have an opportunity to deal with your son.

GEOFFREY

None of this alienation nonsense.

RUSSELL

Not that we haven't enjoyed that in the past...

JO

So. Are you going to address your son, or are you going to go on pretending nothing is the matter?

TRANSOM

I've got a deadline to meet.

IVY

Looks like pretending wins again.

TRANSOM

Theatre is all about pretending. Audiences pretending they're watching reality. Actors pretending they're other people. And behind it all, playwrights pretending they can control the world. Well, I'm sending this truck clear off a cliff. (The characters except for JO disperse) I'm going to make sure every little old lady leaves the theatre on a stretcher. Good bye, Lloyd. Next stop anger and alienation.

JO

Mark!

TRANSOM

Silence please. (JO exits) I'm creating. Ivy is the key to bringing down this house of cards. (typing) So. Enter Ivy.

(The rehearsal hall. RUSSELL is memorizing lines. IVY enters.)

IVY

Sorry I'm late.

TRANSOM

No, no. Not like that. (the scene resets itself, typing) With more outrage.

IVY

(entering again) Where is everyone? It's nine o'clock. Doesn't anyone besides me pay attention to the rules around here?

TRANSOM

Finally. A character who can take direction.

RUSSELL

Jo and Geoffrey are running the parasite scene in the green room.

IVY

We're seven minutes behind schedule. There will be penalties to pay. And what do you think you are you doing?

RUSSELL

Memorizing. We got new pages this morning.

IVY

I've never seen so many rewrites come from a dead man. Where is Lloyd?



RUSSELL

He hasn't been in yet.

IVY

Stopped defending his father's work, has he?

RUSSELL

He'll show up. He just loves hearing the rehearsals now. Sits there with his soup listening with the biggest grin on his face.

IVY

Very suspicious. The only person who can rewrite a play is the playwright himself. It's right there in the rulebook.

RUSSELL

That book has a rule for everything, doesn't it?

IVY

You know what I think? I think someone is rewriting the play in secret. I think someone is trying to pass off their own work as Mark W. Transom's. That's fraud. That's a crime.

RUSSELL

Who cares, as long as it helps the show. Look, I got more lines. Isn't it great?

IVY

Is that all you care about?

RUSSELL

All I care about is doing my job.

IVY

Me too.

RUSSELL

Well, maybe if you kept your nose out of everybody else's business....

IVY

My business is everybody's business. According to the Equity rulebook....

RUSSELL

I am so sick and tired of hearing about that damn Equity rulebook. Don't you ever think for yourself?

IVY

(anger building) Don't you ever think about anyone but yourself?

RUSSELL

(anger building) At least I never shut down a show.

IVY

Is that what this is about?

RUSSELL

You betrayed your own company.

IVY

I did nothing wrong.

RUSSELL

You hardhearted little dictator.

IVY

You selfcentred artsy egotist.

RUSSELL

You hidebound codified little rule quoter!

IVY

You immature undisciplined stupid tea drinker!

RUSSELL

Bureaucrat!!

IVY

Exhibitionist!!!

RUSSELL

Narc!!!!

IVY

(enraged) God, do you know how attractive I find you?

RUSSELL

(enraged) Not half as attractive as I find you.

(Spurred by mutual passion, the two characters throw themselves into each other's arms and exit. TRANSOM can only watch in slack-jawed amazement the spectacle that follows. He turns to the audience.)

TRANSOM

(pause, to himself) Yippee. (to the audience) That's pretty frightening. Maybe we'd be better off setting up the end with the other characters. Jo and Geoffrey were running lines.... (types)

(GEOFFREY and JO enter. GEOFFREY is running dialogue and blocking from memory. JO is holding papers, reading RUSSELL's part.)

GEOFFREY

"I thought I told you to stay away from my aquarium."

JO

"I just wanted to see it, that's all."

GEOFFREY

"Get out of my room."

JO

"You've talked so much about it."

GEOFFREY

"There better not be anything stolen."

JO

"I'm no thief."

GEOFFREY

"You're a parasite. I don't want you here."

JO

"I'm going. Sorry."

GEOFFREY

"I'm sorry you came back."

JO

"I'm sorry I left."

GEOFFREY

And he exits.

JO

That's really come a long way.

GEOFFREY

Better than what we started with, that's for sure. Are these the last of the new pages?

JO

Probably.

GEOFFREY

They better be.

JO

Why?

GEOFFREY

Ivy's on the edge, Jo. She's ready to blow the whistle.

JO

On what?

GEOFFREY

Your rewrites. At best it's a violation of the playwright's contract. At worst it's a felony.

JO

Ivy won't close us down.

GEOFFREY

She's done it before.

JO

Why haven't you called the authorities?

GEOFFREY

Well, for one thing this is going to make a really juicy chapter in my memoirs. Aside from that, the play was improving. But more than anything, I don't want to see you get hurt.

JO

You're just an old softy, aren't you?

GEOFFREY

Don't let that get around. Stratford doesn't like softies and I'm still hoping to play Lear some day. So. No more rewrites.

JO

I'll talk to Lloyd.

GEOFFREY

Let's see if we can finish this rehearsal without bloodshed.

(GEOFFREY exits. JO turns to TRANSOM)

JO

You're setting me up for some kind of fall, aren't you?

TRANSOM

I was all prepared to let you be the winner at the end of Act One. You were the one who wanted an Act Two.

JO

If this were a one act, you wouldn't have dealt with Lloyd.

TRANSOM

I still haven't. I want to end this play.

JO

I need one more scene with Lloyd.

TRANSOM

Why?

JO

I told Geoffrey I'd talk to him.

TRANSOM

Fine. One last Lloyd scene. Then that's it. We call it a play.

JO

And the Harvest Theatre gets a new Mark W. Transom.

TRANSOM

You don't have to thank me.

110

JO

(exiting) I won't.

TRANSOM

Sore loser. Okay. So we start with Lloyd, happily typing away.

(LLOYD brightly enters and sits at the typewriter. He is quite enjoying himself. JO enters cautiously.)

LLOYD

Hi.

JO

We've got to talk.

LLOYD

Yes. Yes, we do. I'm almost finished. I've come up with a new end to Act One. I never liked that speech. The one that said all those awful things about the son.

JO

It's an important speech.

LLOYD

It's awful. Wait until you see what I've done. It's a hundred percent better.

JO

No more rewrites, Lloyd.

LLOYD

A thousand.

JO

Lloyd...

LLOYD

Writing is just so neat, isn't it? It's so primal, so exciting...

JO

Lloyd....

LLOYD

And so much fun!

111

JO

Lloyd, listen to me....

LLOYD

And it's all just flowing out of me now. Flying sheep, Jo. I've got a whole flock airborne and buzzing my brain. God. I love this...

JO

Lloyd...

LLOYD

(pulling out the page from the typewriter) I've rewritten the whole scene. It's not about anger. It's about the aquarium.

JO

The aquarium?

LLOYD

The aquarium is a symbol, right?

JO

A little world Martin can regulate and control.

LLOYD

Right, right, right. And Lorne's nudity. That stands for something too.

JO

Right.

LLOYD

I know why he's naked.

JO

What? Why?

LLOYD

You really want to know?

JO

Yes!

LLOYD

He's not just undressed.

112

He's not?

JO

He's skinnydipping.

LLOYD

Skinnydipping?

JO

In the aquarium. He's disrupting Martin's symbolic world with a symbolic act of chaos.

LLOYD

Oh my God. It actually makes sense.

JO

I know.

LLOYD

It's genius.

JO

Thank you. I want to see this scene on in the morning.

LLOYD

Yes. No. Wait. We can't do this.

JO

But it improves the play.

LLOYD

Listen to me. Ivy's ready to call Equity, the Playwrights' Union, and the Coast Guard. One more rewrite and it'll all be over.

JO

But it's the best I've ever written.

LLOYD

I'm sorry.

JO

(pause) Maybe if we slipped it into everybody's scripts...

LLOYD



113

JO

No more, Lloyd. (pause) You know, when this is all over. You really should think about writing your own play. This is Mark's after all.

LLOYD

This story really happened you know.

JO

"The Cardboard Box"?

LLOYD

A son suddenly visiting his father without any notice. All that really happened.

JO

You and Mark?

LLOYD

(nodding) I had just graduated High School. I hadn't seen him since I was twelve or thirteen. I decided to visit him in Toronto. He was writer in residence or something like that.

JO

At the Player's Stage on King Street. I remember.

LLOYD

I had his address from his last Christmas card and I just showed up on his doorstep. I brought a script. I had some silly idea about proving that I was a writer too.

JO

What did he say?

(TRANSOM has entered the playing area. He stands, regarding LLOYD. TRANSOM shares LLOYD's memory.)

LLOYD

He just stood at the door looking at me. I didn't say a thing. I wanted him to recognize me. I wanted him to know it was me. Finally he said...

TRANSOM

You must be Lloyd.

LLOYD

That's right. I've got a script. I'm a writer.

I didn't say a thing.

TRANSOM

Then he went to the kitchen.

LLOYD

What else could I do?

TRANSOM

After a little while I followed him inside. He was making soup.

LLOYD

It was supper.

TRANSOM

He didn't say a word, just gave me a bowl of cream of tomato. We ate without saying anything and then he went off to attend a rehearsal at the theatre.

LLOYD

I had a show opening in a week.

TRANSOM

And that's how I spent the time with my father.

LLOYD

It was an important show.

TRANSOM

We never talked.

LLOYD

It ran for six weeks.

TRANSOM

Just passed the crackers.

LLOYD

The reviews were amazing.

TRANSOM

And then off he'd go.

LLOYD

TRANSOM

I could've retired from the money that show made.

LLOYD

I left the script lying around the house.

TRANSOM

Hell, I should have.

LLOYD

Hoping he might read it.

TRANSOM

I thought about you.

LLOYD

He never did.

TRANSOM

I always see you in the kitchen. Eating soup. I remember you staring at me. Waiting for me to say something.

LLOYD

And then he was gone.

TRANSOM

The show had opened.

LLOYD

He left me a note.

TRANSOM

(to LLOYD) I had to go.

LLOYD

That's all it said.

TRANSOM

(back to audience) I admit it. I ran.

JO

That's horrible.

116

LLOYD

He left me some money for a bus ticket.

JO

What did you do?

LLOYD

I rewrote the script, left it with his things and then I went home. And I became an engineer.  
(he gathers up the type and starts to leave)

JO

What are you doing?

LLOYD

I'm going home. Back to Calgary.

JO

Lloyd... I'm sorry.

(After a moment, LLOYD exits. JO watches him go and then turns her attention to TRANSOM. After a moment...)

JO

How could you?

(She starts stalking TRANSOM around the set, ready to do violence. TRANSOM retreats in panic.)

TRANSOM

What?

JO

You never even said good-bye.

TRANSOM

I left him a note.

JO

And a bus ticket!

TRANSOM

I didn't want him getting attached to me. Do you know what a rotten human being I am?

117

JO

I'm starting to get an idea.

TRANSOM

Listen, he was better off without me. You know me, Jo. I would have been a horrible parent. I drink too much. I'm irresponsible. Can you imagine the two of us living together? I'm fatalistic and he's depressive. It would have been a race to see who put his head in the oven first.

JO

He needed you.

TRANSOM

I was teaching him self reliance.

JO

You never even talked to him.

TRANSOM

I have a very rich inner monologue.

JO

You could have read his script.

TRANSOM

No one gets a happy ending, Jo. Believe me, I know.

JO

He's your son.

TRANSOM

I never wanted a son! Not in life and certainly not in this play.

JO

Lloyd didn't just pop out of nowhere. He's real.

TRANSOM

Based on reality. Like you.

JO

Did I just pop in?

TRANSOM

No. Of course not. You fulfil a need in the story.

JO

Then maybe Lloyd fulfils a need too.

TRANSOM

Final scene. Places everyone.

(RUSSELL and GEOFFREY take their places onstage. JO refuses to budge.)

JO

Damn it, Mark. What's wrong with you?

TRANSOM

I became a bad person, Jo, and then I became a bad playwright. Ask Lloyd.

JO

I never thought you were so bad.

TRANSOM

Didn't you?

JO

You never stayed around long enough to find out.

TRANSOM

I had a show in Halifax.

JO

But...

TRANSOM

You don't get to speak for yourself any more. My words and no one else's.

JO

Mark...

TRANSOM

No more discussion. You've had your way, but now it's Armageddon.

(JO has taken her position in the scene and is once more in character.)

JO

Okay, everyone. I want to do one last run-through today. We're in good shape and I think we're ready for opening. We're going to do Mark W. Transom proud. Has anyone seen Ivy?

RUSSELL

Not since lunch. She must be looking over the new pages.

JO

(freezing) New pages? What new pages?

RUSSELL

The new end to Act One? They were slipped into everybody's scripts this morning.

JO

Lloyd, you didn't...

RUSSELL

What?

GEOFFREY

Didn't you talk to Ivy about these first?

JO

No.

GEOFFREY

Oh God.

RUSSELL

Is something wrong? Did I miss something?

JO

(grabbing pages from the actors) No more rewrites. Didn't he hear me say that? No more rewrites.

GEOFFREY

I think Ivy went to the office, Jo. Maybe you can catch her....

JO

I've got to explain....

(JO rushes towards the exit, but IVY steps into the room at that moment. JO pauses.)

And there you have it.	TRANSOM
Jo. I'm sorry...	IVY
Disaster...	TRANSOM
But this is wrong.	IVY
Doom...	TRANSOM
I tried to warn you...	IVY
Anger and alienation.	TRANSOM
What's going on here?	RUSSELL
Pure Transom.	TRANSOM
I talked to the lawyers.	IVY
What lawyers?	RUSSELL
They pulled the play.	IVY
The end.	TRANSOM
I'm sorry.	IVY



I suppose it's a little depressing.

TRANSOM

My God. I have no play.

JO

But it was unavoidable.

TRANSOM

I'm ruined.

JO

But who's to say it isn't right?

TRANSOM

(suddenly entering) I do.

LLOYD

What?

TRANSOM

It isn't right.

LLOYD

What do you think you're doing?

TRANSOM

(crossing to his typewriter) A rewrite.

LLOYD

You can't do that.

TRANSOM

(starts typing) Ivy's called the lawyers and they pulled the play. But then Jo says...

LLOYD

Wait a minute, Lloyd's done enough rewrites to create an entirely new play.

JO

That's right.

GEOFFREY

122

JO

We don't need Mark's play. We'll do an entirely new play by Lloyd.

RUSSELL

Hey, that's great.

GEOFFREY

And we'll only have to change one name on the posters.

JO

We're saved!

JO, GEOFFREY & RUSSELL

Hooray!!

TRANSOM

Things are never that easy, kid. Ivy turns around and says...

IVY

But Lloyd's play is based on the first play. That's copyright violation.

RUSSELL

Hey, that's right.

GEOFFREY

So we can't do Lloyd's play, because it isn't original.

JO

Oh God! We're ruined.

(JO, GEOFFREY & RUSSELL moan in despair.)

LLOYD

But then Jo says...

JO

But Lloyd was executor of the estate. He approved all the changes. The lawyers can't pull the play.

RUSSELL

Hey, that's true.

GEOFFREY

So now we can do the play as we rehearsed it.

JO, GEOFFREY & RUSSELL

Hooray!!

JO

Let's get down to work.

(The scene freezes except for the two writers.)

TRANSOM

(ripping the page from the roller) The unhappy ending is inevitable.

LLOYD

Prove it.

TRANSOM

(crossing over to LLOYD) Then let me explain. It doesn't matter if you were executor or not. "The Cardboard Box" is my play. The playwright is the only person allowed to make changes.

(LLOYD points to IVY, activating her)

IVY

Oh, well that's okay then.

(The other characters unfreeze)

TRANSOM

What?

IVY

I guess we're not in trouble after all.

TRANSOM

What?

IVY

Shall we start the run-through?

TRANSOM

What's going on here?

124

IVY

We don't want to fall behind schedule.

LLOYD

Ivy knows the truth.

TRANSOM

What truth?

IVY

Only the playwright can make changes to the script.

TRANSOM

Yes.

IVY

It's in the Equity rulebook.

TRANSOM

I made no changes.

LLOYD

Who said it was your play?

TRANSOM

It was in my things.

LLOYD

In a cardboard box.

JO

From the "Players' Stage".

RUSSELL

In Toronto.

IVY

But you have no memory of it.

GEOFFREY

And it's positively amateurish.

TRANSOM

It must be mine. Why else would it sound so familiar? Whose could it be but... (LLOYD steps forward) Oh no.

LLOYD

I tried to get you to read it. You never even looked at it. (exits)

IVY

So no rules were broken. The playwright approved all the changes.

TRANSOM

(watching LLOYD's exit, unable to take his eyes from his son) Lloyd...

JO

So, let's do the run-through.

TRANSOM

You're a writer.

IVY, RUSSELL & GEOFFREY

Hooray!

TRANSOM

I'm sorry.

GEOFFREY

I can't put this in my memoir.

TRANSOM

I should have read it.

GEOFFREY

It's unbelievable.

TRANSOM

We should have talked.

IVY

Let's get to work.

TRANSOM

I should have known.

126

JO

Wait a minute. We still haven't rehearsed the nude scene.

IVY

That's okay.

TRANSOM

Damn. (TRANSOM slowly returns to his work area and slumps behind the typewriter)

RUSSELL

Ivy and I had kind of a private rehearsal last night.

JO

(absorbing this new data) Oh. Well then: Action!

(BLACK OUT)

## **EPILOGUE**

(The morning in TRANSOM's work space. He is asleep at the typewriter. JO HARBER, the real JO HARBER, is already there reading the script. Eventually TRANSOM stirs and then looks up at JO.)

JO

Good morning.

TRANSOM

(startled) What? How did you do that?

JO

What?

TRANSOM

How did you get in here? I distinctly remember.... You didn't lock the door when you left last night.

JO

That's right, genius. (looking at the script, shaking her head) I don't know how you do it.

TRANSOM

Fall asleep on the space bar?

JO

You actually wrote an entire play in a night.

TRANSOM

A full length play, thank you very much.

JO

This even looks like a happy ending.

TRANSOM

Tell them I did it for the little old ladies.

JO

I will. (beat) This Jo character. Is she supposed to me?

TRANSOM

No. (pause) Maybe, just a little.

JO

Just a lot?

TRANSOM

Sorry.

JO

No. It's okay. It's just... You stayed up all night writing a play about me?

TRANSOM

Just writing what I think I know.

JO

I don't know whether to feel flattered or plagiarized.

TRANSOM

You fulfilled a need in the story. (taking her hand) I missed you, Jo.

JO

Have you been drinking?

TRANSOM

Drinking, yes. And thinking. I'm tired of working in isolation. It might be nice to catch my breath. Slow down a bit.

JO

Get to know people?

TRANSOM

If they're the right people. Do you think your Board would like another Mark W. Transom for next season?

JO

You have another idea for a play?

TRANSOM

More of a notion than an idea.

JO

And why should we trust you this time?

TRANSOM

Just think of the enormous financial benefits should I succeed.

JO

I don't understand.

TRANSOM

Sorry. It's a joke.

JO

I'll talk to them. I can't make any promises.

TRANSOM

I understand.

JO

Thanks for the play, Mark. (they embrace) I don't know how I'll feel about directing myself...

TRANSOM

Don't worry. We'll change the name and gender in the second draft.



JO

Thank you. Oh. By the way... (taking out the script from her bag) Do you want this bad play?

TRANSOM

It's not so bad. (taking the script) All it lacks is experience. Give it an opportunity and it just might fly.

JO

It just might at that. (heading for the exit) I knew I could count on you, Mark.

TRANSOM

No, you didn't.

JO

You're right. I didn't. But I had hopes that the black sheep might have one last ascent left in him. (exits)

TRANSOM

Impossible woman. (he regards the script in his hand and then after a moment's deliberation, rescues the phone receiver from the trash, he dials information) Calgary number, please. Lloyd Transom. (as he waits, he addresses the audience again) And so the play grinds to a halt. Lessons learned and morals given. And maybe even the playwright learns a thing or two. Maybe he learns to look beyond himself. Takes back something he's pushed away. And maybe even there's the possibility of a happy ending. (shudders, then to the phone) Yes, connect me. (back to the audience) After all, I suppose it's possible to be happy in real life. The fiction is in the ending. No matter where you stop the story, there is always something that will happen after. Hopefully something good. The trick is knowing when to bring down the lights. (suddenly to the phone) Hello?

(BLACK OUT)

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