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SF PERUSALS

Talking With...

by Jane Martin

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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Opening Night: October 1, 1982

TALKING WITH, by Jane Martin; directed by Jon Jory; set, Tony Straiges; costumes, Jess Goldstein; lighting, Pat Collins; production stage manager, Elizabeth Ives. An Actors Theater of Louisville production presented by the Manhattan Theater Club, Lynne Meadow, artistic director, and Barry Grove, managing director. At 321 East 73d Street, New York, N.Y.

FIFTEEN MINUTES, with Laura Hicks
SCRAPS, with Penelope Allen
CLEAR GLASS MARBLES, with Sally Faye Reit
AUDITION, with Ellen Tobie
RODEO, with Margo Martindale
TWIRLER, with Lisa Goodman
LAMPS, with Anne Pitoniak
HANDLER, with Susan Cash
DRAGONS, with Lee Anne Fahey
FRENCH FRIES, with Theresa Merritt
MARKS, with Lynn Milgrim

PRODUCTION NOTES

Ms. Martin's monologues present the director with the all important issue of their performing order. One must balance the rural with the urban, the tragic with the comic, the active with the passive, etc. The author has made clear her preference that the evening begin with "Fifteen Minutes" and end with "Marks" thus framing the experience. "Lamps" has always opened the second act because of the difficulty of setting up the 17 lamps and crates in a quick change. It is also valuable to place "Handler" and "Twirler" in different acts because of a surface sameness in structure and content.

As to production style the author prefers a different actress being used for each monologue lest the emphasis fall on actor versatility rather than content and is utterly opposed to the pieces being performed as a one-woman show.

Simplicity is valuable and the pieces play excellently with very little movement. Musical bridges are useful to cover the scene changes and the author has always requested (but never received) the presence of a string quartet on the stage.

Fifteen Minutes

Fifteen Minutes

A theatrical dressing room. A table and chair. Makeup for the evening's production is laid out on the table. Over the loudspeaker we hear the Stage Manager call, "15 minutes, please. The call is 15 minutes." The actress enters hurriedly and goes to the table. She wears a kimono over a slip. During the course of the piece she completes her makeup and dresses for the play she is doing. Though not actually present she looks into a mirror and thus directly toward the audience. She speaks to an unseen dressing room partner.

ACTRESS: Anyway, this guy, the director, actually used a buzzer. ZZZZZZZZZZ. Really. He would sit there wearing a Yankee's baseball cap and push this buzzer after each laugh line for as long as he thought the laugh would last. Laugh line. ZZZZZZZZZ. This was to train us not to step on the laugh. Can you believe it? Really. Oh, he trained us, believe me. The show opens, there are no laughs but we are waiting for the buzzer. A two-hour play lasted three hours while we paused for laughs that didn't exist. I aged seven years in a night. Directors! Last year I did Katrin in Mother Courage for this really *dour*, silent, unapproachable, East German woman. She sat on a camp stool, immovable, for hours during rehearsal. With her eyes closed yet. No reactions. Really. I felt like a radio show. Anyway, after a week she asks

me out for a beer and suggests that we should sleep together to get in tune with the play. I tell her she wants to get in tune with the play she should sleep with the author. She says, 'My dear, Bertholt has been dead for thirty years!' I said, 'In that case you're perfect for each other.'

(S)HE called fifteen right? My! Soooooo, we're really going to do this? Of course we are. It's really mysterious, you know? I mean they're already out there right? Sitting out there. Eating little candies. Peering in pocket mirrors. Who are they? Who knows. What are they expecting? Who knows. We do it. They watch it. We finish. They applaud. They go home. We go home. What was it? Who knows.

What I want to know, is how the hell do they live in a town like this without a decent Chinese restaurant?

O.K., O.K., O.K., O.K., . . . so, it's fifteen and I am in here getting ready for an evening of 'lacerating self exposure' and there are people out there reading the program, reading my bio, you know getting a little personal insight, getting to know me. And what I want to know . . . you think this is enough eyes for this house? Great. And what I want to know is who are *they*? Fair's fair, right? What I would like . . . other than some decent light in this dressing room . . . what I would like is a program delivered to me every night with bio's of the audience, you know, so we'd start out even . . . I am really a mutt, you know it? . . . where they live, last play they saw, favorite color, sexual preference, last relationship they screwed up, you know just basic stuff. Because then we'd be in this together, right? I do a little lacerating self exposure, they do a little lacerating self exposure and afterwards who knows maybe we get together for a drink, because then . . . O.K., what you see is what you get . . . because then there would be an exchange, an exchange

and not this unilateral crap, this "I'm in the light, you're in the dark" stuff, which truth to tell is beginning to wear on me. Me. Moira, the semi-Taurus from Julliard, with two Broadway credits, this baby, and an unreleased horror film where I am eaten by stone griffins on the towers of Notre Dame. (*Stage Manager's voice: "5 minutes. The call is 5 minutes, please."*) Right; five minutes, right. (*SHE begins to put on her clothes.*) I mean I have nothing against these people, these humans who have paid their money, some would say too much money, for an evening of . . . for an evening of . . . (*SHE pauses a moment transfixed by a memory.*) Entertainment. Wow. Y'ever think of it like that . . . what you are, you, are an entertainment? I strike me as a number of things, but I do not strike me as . . . look, what I would like . . . once . . . just after my entrance, is to walk downstage . . . (*SHE does, right to the footlights.*) and say, "Excuse me. Excuse me, could we have the house lights for a second please?" (*They come up.*) Hey, O.K., thanks. And I would like to look at them, the people who seriously believe that I am an entertainment . . . Hi . . . How are you? I would just *look* at them, you know, take them in . . . (*SHE does. A fairly long pause.*) And then I would say . . . see this would be better already . . . I mean it's better to have seen their faces. I would say that I'm . . . a little fragile . . . freaked out, you know . . . sort of at the end of a personal relationship . . . I mean not the character, well I mean the character is too but . . . you've all been through that, right? The end of a crucial relationship? You know, the self-doubt and everything . . . the feeling that you're not lovable . . . that you're a mutt, too much of a mutt to be loved . . . and that you have . . . I don't know . . . a crisis of confidence . . . is that a good description?

That it's hard to *act* . . . hard to be the entertainment for people you don't know . . . haven't looked at. So I just needed to see you tonight, O.K.? Just see you for a minute. That's all . . . O.K.? (*The stage manager calls places: "Places, please. The call is places. Places, please." SHE stands a moment longer and then moves back up to the dressing table. The house lights fade.*) Sooooooooo. Hey, O.K.! Ready to Rock-and-Roll, right? Ready to do it in the dark. For whoever and whatever, whoever makes of it. Hey, that's the way it's 'sposed to be. They got a law on this thing. Besides, hey listen, I ain't a mutt. I am *supremely* self-confident. I lacerate with my self exposure. Listen, don't screw with me, they said it in the *newspaper*! I am the entertainment and when I ope' my lips, let no dog bark! Plus, fuck 'em if they can't take a joke right? (*SHE checks the mirror one more time.*) And me, hey, I'm the joke! (*SHE loses herself again for a moment, staring in front of her, just for a moment.*) On the other hand, I'm in the light. (*SHE crosses out right. Lights fade out, sound of vacuum, which continues during scene change.*)

Scraps

Scraps

The lights come up on a woman in a multi-colored patchwork costume. Red, blue, green, yellow. Even the head. Button eyes, yarn hair, pearls for teeth. It is the Patchwork Girl of Oz. She is using a stand-up vacuum cleaner. She turns it off and looks at the audience.

I spend more and more time in Oz. Since I've turned thirty-five. Since Suzanne is in high school. This is Scraps. I had a dressmaker do it. It's not the only one I have. I have Ozma, I have Dorothy, I have Glinda the Good Witch. I'm even beginning to go out in this stuff. The midnight Rocky Horror Show, St. Patrick's Day parades. I went down one night to a gay bar and they waived the cover charge. Always as Scraps. My face doesn't show. Jack doesn't even know I have the books. He sure as hell doesn't know I do this. You know about the Patchwork Girl? It's the seventh Oz book. She was made from a patchwork quilt by Dr. Pipt, the crooked magician, to be his servant. He sprinkled the "powder of life" on her. But what nobody realized is that Ojo had dumped a bunch of *cleverness* into the Patchwork Girl's head. Too much for her to be satisfied as a servant. So she set off for the Emerald City with Ojo and the Transparent Glass Cat with the ruby heart and pink brains and the Living Phonograph. They called her Scraps and sometimes Patches.

I wish I was clever. Oh, I know how to hide nail holes with toothpaste, and how to spray cut flowers with hairfix to make them last longer, but I've never had a job because I don't know how to do anything. I mean anything they pay you for. I'm not too good at learning new things either. I just freeze up or something.

God, I loved the Oz books when I was a kid. Do you know the countries? Well you know the Munchkins. Everybody knows the Munchkins. The Winkies where everything's yellow. Jack Pumpkinhead, the Tin Woodman, The Scarecrow, they all have their castles there. Gilliken Country, Quadling Country. I can get around better in any one of those places than I can in downtown Cleveland. When Jack goes I just sit looking out the window for a long time and then I close the drapes and spend the day in Oz. I can clean and stuff and still be there. Jack doesn't understand why I put yellow linoleum in the kitchen.

Nobody dies in Oz. No matter what's happening to you Ozma watches on her magic picture and you always get saved. Listen, there are great bad guys! Old Mombi, The Gnome King, The Skeezers. You think I'm ill don't you? You want to send me to group therapy or self-improvement seminars or off to take night classes towards a law degree. God I hated school! How could anybody like it? Hell, you can live a whole life and never have to subtract. Have you noticed that nobody ever talks about anything? I bet I haven't heard anybody talk about anything in two years. God knows Jack doesn't. In the morning he reads me the cereal boxes out loud. He thinks *I'm* boring. He wouldn't think I was so boring if he came home and found me in this. What would he do I wonder? Call his mother for advice. She'd tell him to buy me a Cuisinart and an exercycle.

I live in Oz. I see it all. I've even gotten so I can smell it. "Two or three hours walk along this trail brought Ojo and Scraps to a clear level country where there were a few farms and some scattered octagonal houses, all bright Quadling red and smelling of peppermint." I can live in that sentence for a full 3 hours. You know what? I like that a lot better than life.

Someday I'll be at the front door when Jack comes home. The Chevette will pull up and he'll have the week's charts, the Southeastern sales figures, the demographics under his arm. And there I'll be to give him a nice kiss, holding the spatula, me, Scraps. "You certainly are a wonder, my dear, and I fancy you'd make a splendid pin cushion. If you belonged to me, I'd wear smoked glasses when I looked at you." (*SHE takes the "SCRAPS" head off.*) But I do belong to you Jack. I'm your helpmeet, your homemaker.

The thing that frightens me is I'm getting flashbacks, just like combat or acid.

We had some people over. Jack had bought an Atari. You know, those television computer space games? Asteroids, Space Invaders, Cosmic Cadet. God, I hate the sound of it. They were talking about municipal bonds or something. We were all around the T.V. with the pretzel mix. Jenny, Allen, Marty, Turk, Jack, me. And I went to Oz. I was in trouble and I was being rescued from a whirlpool by this Ork . . . a bird with four wings, four legs and a propeller tail, and I guess Jack was talking to me and I didn't answer. He had to shake me. I really didn't know where I was. I ruined his best score in the Atari. I suppose he'll leave me when he finds out. Take the Irish setter. He's the provider. Jesus, I'll have to make a living, won't I? Maybe Ozma will see me in her Magic Picture. Then they'll send the Scarecrow to come

and get me and we'll ride the Sawhorse all the way back to the Emerald City. We'll lunch with the Hungry Tiger and the Cowardly Lion. And the Scarecrow will say, "Why here's a right curious creation, midway between a ragbag and a rainbow. Why my dear, (*SHE puts the "SCRAPS" head back on and sings.*) you are quite bedazzling!" The Scarecrow has the very best brains the Wizard ever made. Perhaps we'll be married.

Kizzle-Kazzle Kore
The Wolf is at the door
There's nothing to eat
But a bone without meat
And a bill from the grocery store.

(*SHE freezes for a beat and then begins vacuuming.*)

LIGHTS OUT

Clear Glass Marbles

Clear Glass Marbles

A young woman is standing next to an end table with a lamp on it, holding a crystal bowl filled with ninety clear glass marbles.

LAURIE: The day my mother found out she was dying she asked me to go out and buy her these clear glass marbles. Dad and I hadn't even known she was ill which was nothing new. Whenever you asked my mother if she was ill she would throw things at you, sesame buns, the editorial page, a handful of hair ribbons. 'Do not,' she would say, 'suggest things to suggestible people.' Anyway, I brought her the marbles and she counted ninety of them out and put them in this old cut-glass bowl which had been the sum total of great Aunt Helena's estate. Apparently, the doctor had given her three months and she set great store by doctors. She said she always believed them because they were the nearest thing to the Old Testament we had. 'I wouldn't give you two bits for these young smiley guys,' she'd say, 'I go for a good, stern-furrowed physician.' She wouldn't even have her teeth cleaned by a dentist under fifty. So she counted out ninety clear glass marbles and set them in the bowl on her bedside table. Then she went out and spent twelve hundred dollars on nightgowns. She said, 'In my family you are only dying when you take to your bed, and that, my darlings, is where I am going.' And she did. Oh we hashed it around. Dad said she couldn't possibly be dying but the doctors convinced him. I told

her it seemed a little medieval to lie in state up there but she said she didn't want to be distracted from what she loved, us, and what she wanted to mull . . . And she said there was nothing outside except drugstores and supermarkets and drycleaners and that given her situation they were beneath her dignity. I asked her what she intended to do up there and she said study French, visit with us, generally mull and maybe call a few pals. Study French. She said she had made a pledge to herself years ago that she would die bilingual. Dad and I cried a lot, but she didn't. He was fun to cry with. From then on the doctors had to come see *her* because, as she put it, she *came in* with a house call and she was *going out* with a house call. And all day, every day, she would hold one of these marbles in her hand. Why? She said it made the day longer. Mother had her own bedroom. That was the way it always was, for as long as I can remember. She called my father 'The Thrasher.' Dad could really get into a nightmare. Apparently early on in the marriage he had flipped over and broken her nose and that was it. Separate beds. Her room was very spare really. Wooden floors, an old steel-and-brass bed, oak dresser, bedside table, and don't ask me why, a hat rack. No pictures on the walls. She never understood how people could look at the same darn thing day after day. She said it was bound to 'deflate the imagination.' We'd sit with her after dinner and talk about 'issues.' She told us she was too far gone for gossip or what we ate for lunch. Then we'd all turn in and in a little while, just before I'd drift off I'd hear this . . .* (*SHE rolls one of the marbles across the stage floor.*) Happened every night. After the third or fourth day I saw one on the floor and started to pick it up but she said 'leave it.' She said it very sharply. I asked, 'How come?' She said she was 'learning to let go

of them.' (*From now on THE ACTRESS frequently rolls marbles across the stage, indicated hereafter by an asterisk, ending up at last with only one.*) Oh, she passed the time. There were things she wanted. She made out a list of children's books from her own childhood and we got as many of them as we could find from the library. She said they were still the only good books she'd ever read.*

She wrote notes to, I don't know, maybe sixty or seventy people, and they told us later on that they were sort of little formal goodbyes, each of them recalling some incident or shared something, not very significant, but the odd thing was that in each one she included a recipe. A recipe in every one of them.

We got out the big cookie tin full of snapshots that somehow never became a scrapbook. She liked that. She showed my father how to do the medical insurance and how she handled the accounts. We went through her jewelry.* She wrote down the names of the roofers and plumbers and air-conditioning people. She called it 'wrapping it up.' 'Well, this is good,' she'd say, 'I'm wrapping it up.'*

She had the television moved up in her room and she called me aside to say that it was entirely possible that she might reach a stage where she really wouldn't know what she was watching but that I must promise her that I'd keep it on P.B.S.

Later on, when it started getting hard,* she told Dad and me that she would like to spend more time alone. 'I'm afraid,' she said, 'that I'm going to have to do this more or less by myself.' She said that she was glad, and she hoped we would be, that this was arranged so that you got less attached to the people you loved at the end. The next period isn't worth going into, it was just

. . . hard. (*SHE picks up the bowl of marbles.*) Do you know that from the very beginning down to the very last she never admitted to any pain. Never. She called it 'the chills.' The last thing she asked for was a picture we had in the front entrance hall of a labrador retriever she and Dad had owned when they were first married. He was, she said, a perfectly dreadful dog. 'When you are young,' she said, 'you believe in the perfectibility of dogs.'

I was in bed two weeks ago Wednesday toward dawn, then this . . . (*SHE pours the rest of the marbles on the floor. When they have stopped rolling, SHE speaks.*) Dad and I ran in there. The bedside table was turned over and she was gone. Dead. When the emergency medical people got there they found this . . . (*SHE opens her hand to disclose one more marble.*) The rest spilled when the table fell, but this one was still in her hand.

I keep it.

I keep it in my hand all day.

It makes the day longer.

BLACKOUT

Audition

Audition

An actress in her late twenties runs up on the stage. She is nervous. She shields her eyes against the light. She is dressed in a slightly bizarre and trendy style. She carries in her arms a cat on a leash.

Hi. Hey Hi. Wow. All Right. Nice Place. Nice, uh, nice theatre. Good Vibes. Yowsa me yesirree. Toy boat, toy boat, toy boat, toy boat. Now . . . Let's see here. For my . . . can you hear me? Can you? No? Yes? You are out there, right? (*SHE puts the cat on the floor, her foot on the leash.*) O.K., so we're all here. Well, I mean, you're *there* and I'm *here* but we're all . . . forget it. Let's see . . . Audition, RAH! Get that part! O.K., my *name* is . . . shit, I forgot my name. Right. This . . . this would be construed as craziness. My name is . . . I did, I forgot my name . . . my stage name . . . see I decided to use my new stage name for this audition . . . for uh, for luck, it was . . . it was very . . . look what d'you care, right? My human, world name is Mary Titfer. Titfer. You got it? Goodo! O.K., can you hear me? All the way back? Loud and clear Captain Marvel? A-O.K.! . . . Now, one more introduction and we're under way. The uh, the small person on my leash is my cat 'Tat'. My cat, 'Tat'. Get it? (*Points to herself.*) Titfer (*Points to cat.*) Tat. Right, you got it. Hey, we're waking up here. We're demonstrating consciousness. OK., O.K., now you . . . the imperial you . . . have a part. I, Titfer need a part. We are thus in tune. Synchronicity. Soooooo,

it's audition city! Now I've got two pieces for you today, and here's the surprise, I've got one classical piece . . . late greats, and I've got one contemporary piece . . . dispatches from the front. Good. For my classical piece I will take off all my clothes. 'Crude Rube Protrudes Dubious Boobies.' Beep-Beep. O.K., O.K., but all kidding and joshing aside I will take them off. Now, why is this classical? Surely, you jest. The body, the body is classical . . . it goes all the way back . . . and all the way front. Har, har. It starts the art, the body does. But there's no argument there, eh? Naturally not. O.K., O.K., now in the great tradition of auditions you may stop me at anytime. You can stop me one second after I start. But, *BUT* . . . and here is the stinger . . . (*SHE takes a hammer out of her purse, and a nail.*) Bear with me, O.K.? Little hyped-up. A simple task and I'll be back with you. (*SHE nails the cat's leash to the floor.*) There. Tat the cat, that's that. Nice kitty. Where were we? Toy boat, toy boat, toy boat, toy boat. O.K., stop me at any time. Right, O.K. Just yell 'Thank you Miss Titfer'. Firm but courteous and zaparoonie . . . I stop. I nip the strip. *But* when I stop my classical piece, I shift immediately into my contemporary piece which is . . . full attention now . . . beating the cat's head in with the hammer! Yipes! Holy Mackerel! 'Is this broad kidding?' Wellllll, I wouldn't want to spoil it for you but I don't think she's kidding. So, dear listeners, that's the full menu . . . that's all she wrote. But the tickle in the tushy are the options . . . Option A . . . we will let this poor, desperate, deluded girl debase herself . . . and I would, will, be debased . . . mortified . . . I mean . . . *no clothes* . . . here? In front of strangers? Crummy, yucky, hateful! Or . . . Option B . . . we can yell out 'Thank you Miss Titfer' and watch her clonk the kitty

. . . and remember, Miss Titfer is fast. It will happen in a flash . . . kittyplasm . . . and haven't we, you, 'fess up now' actually killed little puss? Responsibility! Or Option C, the second-to-last option, we could give Mary Titfer the crummy, undemanding, twelve-line, two-scene part, which, let me assure you, any mildly competent average workday actress could do while standing on her head humming 'You can take this job and shove it' . . . backwards. O.K., last option . . . now this is just too tawdry but we are nothing if not thorough. We could give her the part *now*, and then when she splits, she and the furry hostage, we could take it away from her on the basis that she needs . . . shhh, psychiatric attention. But if you did that . . . if you did *that*, Mary Titfer would find you and Jacobean revenge, kill the feline and, perhaps—disturbing thought—herself in a particularly garish and oriental manner RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU. Now she might not have the nerve but on the other hand we don't know. We just don't know. O.K., O.K. We're ready to go in the wooden O. We're out of the exposition and into the meat of the matter. Denouement. Everybody has their work cut out for them. The dialectic. You have a part. I want a part. We have serious business here. Right? Right.

Now, I will begin my classical piece by unbuttoning my Jordache blouse. Watch me closely, both my hands are connected to my arms. (*SHE begins to unbutton HER blouse as the lights fade out.*)

Rodeo

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