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SF PERUSALS

Anton in Show Business

A Comedy

by Jane Martin

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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Anton in Show Business premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in March 2000. It was directed by Jon Jory with the following cast:

T-Anne, Andwyneth, Don Blount .....Saidah Arrika Ekulona
Lisabette .....Monica Koskey
Casey .....Gretchen Lee Krich
Kate, Ben, Jackey .....Annette Helde
Ralph, Wikéwitch, Joe Bob .....Chick Reid
Holly .....Caitlin Miller
Joby .....Stacey Swift

Production Staff

Scenic Designer .....Paul Owen
Costume Designer .....Marcia Dixcy Jory
Lighting Designer .....Greg Sullivan
Sound Designer .....Martin R. Desjardins
Properties Designer .....Ben Hohman
Stage Manager .....Deb Acquavella
Production Assistant .....Amber Martin
Dramaturg .....Michael Bigelow Dixon
Assistant Dramaturg .....Ginna Hoben
Casting .....Laura Richin Casting

CAST

T-ANNE: The Stage Manager—also playing: Airport Announcer; Andwyneth; Don Blount; Gate Manager
ACTRESS #1: Kate; Ben; Jackey
ACTRESS #2: Ralph; Wikéwitch; Joe Bob
CASEY: 36 years old; tall, lean, plain
LISABETTE: 24 years old; charming and energetic
HOLLY: 30 years old. A drop-dead gorgeous TV star
JOBY: 26 years old. A recent graduate with an MFA in dramaturgy.

The play is performed by women in roles of both sexes.

SETTING

Various locations in New York and San Antonio
in the present.

There is one intermission.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

It is possible to use a bare stage and minimal furniture. Many costumes must be rigged for quick change. You need six female scene changers/dressers, who handle the furniture moves and quick changes. Costume changes were full and were not done in sight. All changes were possible with the given text. I strongly suggest that you have the scene changers in several rehearsals prior to tech. Actors continued to play during scene changes. Have fun!

ACT I

(A bare stage. In the darkness, rolling thunder, and then suddenly cutting across it, lightning. The flashes illuminate a mysterious cloaked figure. Thunder. A special. The figure speaks.)

T. ANNE. The American theatre's in a shitload of trouble. *(Flash, crash.)* That's why the stage is bare, and it's a cast of six, one non-union. *(Flash, crash.)* I'm T-Anne, the stage manager, but I'm also in the play. *(Flash.)* Like a lot of plays you've seen at the end of the 20th century, we all have to play a lot of parts to make the whole thing economically viable... *(Crash.)*... HOMAGE TO THORNTON WILDER. *(Flash, crash. She drops the cloak. She wears blue jeans, a T-shirt, many keys at her belt.)* The date is *(date)*, 2000, just before noon. Well, I'll show you a little bit about how our profession is laid out. Up around here are the Broadway theatres, sort of between 42nd and 52nd Street, we like to think that's the heart of everything. City of New York, State of New York, United States of America, the world, the galaxy, the universe. Down over here is Greenwich Village, around there we do off-Broadway, that's good too. Now Tribeca, Soho, Lower East Side, we call that the "downtown scene," off-off stuff. An incredibly colorful group of people who despise realism and have all won the Obie Award... that's good too. Beyond that, radiating out in all

directions for thousands of miles is something called "regional theatre," which I understand once showed a lot of promise but has since degenerated into dying medieval fiefdoms and arrogant baronies producing small-cast comedies, cabaret musicals, mean-spirited new plays and the occasional deconstructed classic, which everybody hates. After that, moving west, we reach the burning, uninhabitable desert and its militias who don't go to plays, and beyond that, singing a siren call, the twin evil kingdoms of Flic and Tube, the bourne from which no traveler returns. Now back to New York, thank God. Let's see, the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty and the Actors' Equity offices... that's our union. They make sure no more than 80% of our membership is out of work on any given day. And over there... yes, right over there is where we worship, yes sir, *The New York Times.* Well, that's about it. Now, with a short subway ride we get to one of the audition studios where producers and theatres come to find actors for their plays. Here's the front door, elevator up to the fifth floor, Studio C, where the San Antonio, Texas Actors Express has come to the big city to cast *The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov. He's Russian. At noon, you can always hear the actors doing their vocal warm-ups. *(Vocal warm-ups can be heard.)* Aya—there they are. Not much happens before noon. Theatre folks sleep late. So, another day's begun. There's Lisabette Cartwright walking into Studio C. She graduated from SMU (Southern Methodist) drama department and began teaching third grade. Then she was invited to New York for an audition because the producer once had her appendix removed by one of her uncles. Lisabette's really excited, and her mom, who is at this moment canning okra, is too. Over there is Casey Mulgraw, the one dressed in the skirt/pants, skirt/pants thing, a lot of people call her the Queen of off-off Broadway. She's a little hung over because she just celebrated the opening of her 200th play without ever having been paid a salary. She also

has a yeast infection that is really pissing her off. In our town, we like to know the facts about everybody.

(NOTE: All scene and costume changes are done by six female "changers," dressed in a variety of contemporary styles, but all in black. T-Anne, the stage manager, moves to a small out-of-the-way table where she sits and follows the script. Three folding chairs are placed to create the waiting room of Studio C. CASEY, a woman of 36, waits. LISABETTE, 24, enters. She has a rolling suitcase.)

LISABETTE. Hi. *(CASEY nods.)* Is this the Studio C waiting room for Actors Express? *(CASEY nods.) Three Sisters* audition? *(CASEY nods.)* Oh, my heavens, it's so humid! I feel like I'm oiled up for the beach or something. I surely admire your fortitude in wearing both skirt and pants. Bet you're auditioning for Olga, huh?

CASEY. Why? Because Olga is older and homely and a spinster and has no life of her own and thus has assumed the role of caregiver to her brother and it's usually thought to be the least interesting acting role of *The Three Sisters.* Would that be it?

LISABETTE. Well, no, I...

CASEY. It's what you meant.

LISABETTE. I think I'll just start over. *(She does.)* Hi.

CASEY. Hi.

LISABETTE. I'm Lisabette Cartwright, from La Vernia, Texas. Graduated SMU but then I taught third grade for two years, bein' scared of an actor's life, and Maple Elementary loved me and wants me back anytime, but in a dream the Lord himself reaffirmed my calling so I made my comeback in *Fiddler on the Roof* but this is my first New York audition and I'm so jumpy my breasts bob even when I walk real slow. What's your name?

CASEY. Casey Mulgraw, one of my breasts had to be sur-

gically removed because of a malignancy and I seem to be in remission but who knows how long that will last.

LISABETTE. Oh, my G-o-o-d-d-d!

CASEY. Want to do one more take?

LISABETTE. No, I would like you to forgive me for bein' such a dipshit, pardon the language, Jesus. I'm real sorry for your troubles and it looks to me like they did a real good match.

CASEY. *(Chuckles.)* And yes, I'm reading for Olga for the obvious reasons.

LISABETTE. Really, I think Olga is the most spiritual of all the sisters.

CASEY. Good try. You don't have a smoke by any chance?

LISABETTE. Ummmm, I don't.

CASEY. Cough drop?

LISABETTE. Beef jerky.

CASEY. No thanks.

LISABETTE. I'm auditioning for Masha.

CASEY. The dark, passionate, amoral poetess. I feel dark; men call me passionate; I'm definitely amoral, and I've actually had several poems published but they never, never, never let me read for that part.

LISABETTE. Because you're a little plain?

CASEY. Thank you for speaking the unspeakable.

LISABETTE. I did it again, huh? I'm, oh my, very nervous but that's just no excuse. I would like to say I'm in way over my head and could I have a hug?

CASEY. *(Not unkindly.)* If it's absolutely necessary.

(They hug. The stage manager enters to speak to the actors. A rolling door might divide the spaces. Behind her, a table with three chairs is set up as the audition room. RALPH BRIGHTLY, an English director, and KATE, the producer, are at the table. In a third chair, to the side, sits HOLLY SEABÉ, a TV goddess who is pre-cast as IRINA and is helping audition.)

STAGE MANAGER. Ms. Todoravskia is ready to see you both.

CASEY. Both?

STAGE MANAGER. Both. Hustle it up, we're running behind.

LISABETTE. *(Still in the anteroom. To CASEY.)* Do they usually see actors in groups?

CASEY. No. And we're not a group.

(CASEY and LISABETTE enter the audition room.)

KATE. *(Rising.)* Hi. I am Katrina Todoravskia, Producing Director of Actors Express. And you are?

LISABETTE. Me?

KATE. You.

LISABETTE. I'm sorry, I forgot the question.

CASEY. Your name.

LISABETTE. Oh, Lisabette Cartwright.

(KATE kisses LISABETTE's hand extended for a shake.)

KATE. You are devastatingly beautiful. *(Turns to CASEY.)* And I gather you're here to audition for Olga?

CASEY. How'd you guess?

KATE. You look like an Olga.

CASEY. Thanks.

KATE. This is the play's director, Ralph Brightly; he runs the Toads Hall Rep in London.

RALPH. *(Shaking hands.)* Well, a stone's throw outside, really. *(Shakes LISABETTE's hand.)* Charmed. *(Shakes CASEY's hand.)* Pleased.

KATE. *(Gesturing toward HOLLY.)* And this is...

LISABETTE. Oh my G-o-o-d-d, you're Holly Seabé. I can't believe it! Holly Seabé. I love your TV show! Your character

is so kooky and glamorous. You have such great timing. I've learned practically everything I know about foreplay from that show. You are so liberated!

HOLLY. Thanks.

LISABETTE. Oh my God, pardon me Jesus, are you going to be *in* the play?

HOLLY. Irina.

LISABETTE. *(Clapping her hands.)* She's going to be in the play. This is way cool! *(To CASEY.)* Isn't that cool?

CASEY. *(Smiling, but a bit reserved.)* Yes, cool.

HOLLY. Thanks.

LISABETTE. I am so stoked!

RALPH. Yes, well, off we go then. *Three Sisters*, as you know, by Anton Pavlovitch himself. I'll just drop some breadcrumbs along the path before we hear you...

KATE. Running 40 minutes behind.

RALPH. Right. Straight along. Give you the gist in five words. Funny, funny, funny, funny, tragic.

CASEY. We're referring to *Three Sisters*?

RALPH. *The Three Sisters,* yes.

CASEY. Funny, funny, funny, tragic?

RALPH. *Funny*, funny, funny, *funny,* tragic.

CASEY. Okay, I can do that.

LISABETTE. Do what?

CASEY. Show him that in our auditions.

LISABETTE. Gee, I didn't think it was funny.

RALPH. Precisely, that's to be our little revelation.

KATE. Forty minutes late.

RALPH, Right then, on we go.

(A young woman in the audience rises and says:)

JOBY. Excuse me.

RALPH. Let's get cracking.
JOBY. Excuse me.

(The actors glance up, confused. The "director" tries to go on.)

RALPH, It's Chekhov, don't you see, so we're certainly not ready to do text...
JOBY. *(From the audience.)* Excuse me.

(The actors stop. They look to KATE.)

KATE. Yes?
JOBY. Is the director... ummm ...
RALPH. *(Supplying the character name.)* Ralph.
JOBY. Right, Ralph. Is it supposed to be a man played by a woman?
KATE. Yes. *(To RALPH.)* Go on.
JOBY. How come?
RALPH. You mean why am I playing a man?
JOBY. I mean what's the point?
RALPH. Could you possibly sit down and let us act?
KATE. Wait. *(To JOBY.)* Hi.
JOBY. Hi.
KATE. What's your name?
JOBY. Joby. But I...
KATE. Joby, we want to thank you for coming to the theatre; we need young audiences.
RALPH. But...
KATE. Shhhh. Now you'll understand this as a woman, Joby...
RALPH. Could she please...

(KATE silences RALPH with a look.)

KATE. Eighty percent of the roles in the American theatre are played by men, and 90% of the directors *are* men. The point of having a male director played by a woman is to redress the former and satirize the latter. How's that?

JOBY. *(After a brief pause.)* Okay.

(JOBY sits down. KATE nods at RALPH.)

RALPH. Right. Onward and upward, eh? *(He looks at CASEY.)* What I'd like you to do, sweetie, is use only the word "tiddlypee" as text... *(He looks at LISABETTE.)* And you, dear, will say only "tiddlypoo." With these words, we will now play the scene where Masha tells Olga she's leaving her husband Kulygin and leaving town with the soldier Vershinin.

CASEY. But there is no such scene.

RALPH. Yes, precisely.

CASEY. So why?

RALPH. *(Sweetly.)* You don't wish to audition?

CASEY. That's the answer to "why?"

RALPH. Look, dear...

(LISABETTE, trying to circumvent the oncoming conflict, goes into the improvisation.)

LISABETTE. *(You wished to see me?)* Tiddlypoo, tiddlypoo?

CASEY. *(Is it true you and Vershinin are in love?)* Tiddlypee, tiddlypee, tiddlypee... tiddlypee?

LISABETTE. *(I am leaving Kulygin and going away with Vershinin.)* Tiddlypoo, tiddlypoo... tiddlypoo... tiddlypoo, tiddlypoo, tiddlypoo, tiddlypoo.

CASEY. *(If you go, what will happen to me?)* Tiddlypee... tiddlypee, tiddlypee, tiddlypee?

LISABETTE. *(You'll be fine.)* Tiddlypoo, tiddlypoo.

CASEY. *(To RALPH.)* How am I supposed to know what she's saying?

RALPH. Well, that would be the heart of the audition, wouldn't it?

(CASEY tries once more.)

CASEY. *(If you go, we'll be left with Natasha!)* Tiddlypee, tiddlypee... tiddlypee, tiddlypee. *(She stops.)* Look, this is ridiculous.

RALPH. *(Coolly.)* Really?

CASEY. Well, yes, really. Can't we just do a scene using the script? I mean that would be sensible, right?

RALPH. Perhaps to an American actress, dear.

CASEY. *(Not happy.)* Ummmmmm...

LISABETTE. Oh, but this is fun. Don't you think it's fun? It's kind of interesting.

CASEY. *(Slow burn.)* American actress.

LISABETTE. *(Feeling the tension.)* Just really, really, really, really fun!

CASEY. *(Burning.)* You know, Ralph ... dear... you Brits are arrogant, pompous, chauvinistic, smug, insufferable boors who take jobs from American actors and directors because of the toadying of the American press and the Anglophile American rich, and I've seen Chekhov done in London that really smelled up the place with its stiff-upper-lip, over practical, no-self-pity-or-despair-here-darling style that has nothing, nothing to do with Russian passion or spiritual darkness, so...

JOBY. Excuse me.

CASEY. *(Still on the emotional high.)* What?! What do you want?

KATE. Easy

JOBY. Isn't this all just a little self-referential?

KATE. I'm sorry, Joby, but we are trying to perform a play and...

JOBY. I mean it's all just about the theatre. Isn't that a little precious?

KATE. Why?

JOBY. Well, theatre people talking about theatre.

KATE. As opposed to theatre people talking about the international monetary fund or the cloning of sheep?

JOBY. Well, is theatre culturally important enough to be the subject of a play?

RALPH. Nice of you to buy a ticket.

JOBY. Actually, they're comps.

RALPH. Ah.

JOBY. I'd think your only hope is to work on a deeply personal and profoundly emotional level.

CASEY. Well, the thing about the Brits is very emotional.

RALPH. And plays aren't ordinarily deeply personal until after the exposition.

JOBY. Oh.

CASEY. Later on, the play takes hold, and there is devastating loss and a lot of really profound metaphors that will knock your socks off. I mean, *knock your socks off!*

JOBY. Oh.

CASEY. Okay?

JOBY. *(A brief pause.)* Fine.

(She sits down.)

CASEY. *(Going back.)* ... with its stiff-upper-lip, over-practical, no-self-pity-or-despair-here-darling style that has nothing, nothing to do with Russian passion or spiritual darkness. So don't give me that American actress crap!

(A tense moment.)

RALPH. Right. Nicely done. I think I've seen more than enough. Thanks ever so for coming in.

LISABETTE. We're finished?

RALPH. Lovely work, sweetie. *(Turning to CASEY, smiling.)* And I quite agree with you, dear, when Americans do Chekhov, it's just awash in self-pity.

(CASEY gives him the finger and stalks out.)

LISABETTE. Well, anyway, this was my first professional audition, and it was really a lot of fun, and I want to thank you for calling me in and I really hope to work for you someday and... *(She begins to cry.)* ... and I'm sorry I'm crying. I didn't mean to cry, and I've never even been to London but... she's right, you're a real jerk.

(LISABETTE runs out, leaving RALPH, KATE and HOLLY alone.)

RALPH. *(Ironically.)* Well, that was a breath of fresh air.

KATE. Ralph, I want to apologize to you as an American...

RALPH, No, no...

KATE. I've seen hundreds, thousands of auditions, and I never...

RALPH. No need, sweetie...

KATE. I mean, who do they think they are?

RALPH. Made their beds, haven't they? Fat chance they'll be getting any work from this old British fairy.

(KATE laughs appreciatively.)

HOLLY. I liked them. *(They turn to look at her.)* I've been treated like dirt in situations like this, but now I'm rich and famous and you need me so you're sort of shit out of luck, huh?

So here's the deal: I liked them and I'm bored with auditions so they're over and those two are in our play.

RALPH. Miss Seabé, they do not have the requisite talent.

HOLLY. Well, neither do I so maybe nobody will notice. *(She starts to exit.)* One thing, though. The little sweet one from Texas should play Irina, and I'll play Masha. Oh, and the Olga... well, she's Olga. Tiddlypee, tiddlypoo.

RALPH. So, Kate, love, I gather that's the horse that pulls our custard wagon, eh?

KATE. Well...

RALPH. Not to worry. In the kingdom of the barbarians, shit tastes like veal.

(Lights change. Furniture is removed as CASEY and LISABETTE move into two specials, where they talk to their mothers on the "phone.")

LISABETTE. Ma? It's me, Lisabette...

CASEY. Mother, okay, don't go ballistic...

LISABETTE. I got it! I got it! I got it! I got the part!

CASEY. Yes, I know I'm thirty-six years old, and I still have $40,000 in student loans...

LISABETTE. Ma, Ma, wait, no there's more...

CASEY. Yes, I would have to leave my day job...

LISABETTE. I'm gonna act with a TV star!

CASEY. Okay, the real deal...

LISABETTE. Holly Seabé! Yes! Me and Holly Seabé; can you believe it?

CASEY. Yes, it's kind of a crappy part; it's some hick town in Texas; the salary is like pesos; I'll lose my job; you won't have anybody to abuse but, lest we forget here, I'm supposed to be an actress!

LISABETTE. Ma, it's Chekhov!

CASEY. Mother...

LISABETTE. He's a Russian.

CASEY. Mother...

LISABETTE. No, it's beautiful and wise and sad, and I get to be a real professional!

CASEY. Screw you! Mother!

LISABETTE. Love you, Ma!

CASEY. *(Hanging up.)* Damnit!

LISABETTE. *(Hanging up.)* Yes!

(Two connected plane seats are brought on. LISABETTE and CASEY move to sit in them. We hear an airport announcement.)

GATE ANNOUNCER. Flight number 270 to San Antonio, Texas, gate 27B, boarding is now complete. Flight number 270. All passengers...

CASEY. My dad's great. I worked weekends for a thousand years in his hardware store.

LISABETTE. You are kidding!

CASEY. What kidding?

LISABETTE. My dad has a hardware store.

CASEY. Yeah?

LISABETTE. You sorted screws?

CASEY. Oh yeah. *(They smile.)* Your dad want you to run it?

LISABETTE. Me? No. He sold it. He works in a community center.

CASEY. Well, my dad wants me. I dream I take it over and I wake up, stapled to 3/4 inch plywood, screaming. Okay, the hardware connection.

LISABETTE. You're not married, right?

CASEY. I'm not married, right. You?

LISABETTE. I can't abide sex.

CASEY. Oh.

LISABETTE. Well, temporarily. I've kinda had some bad luck.

CASEY. Doesn't hold me back.

LISABETTE. I was kinda doin' it with my high school boyfriend in the back of his car, an' we were hit from behind by a drunk in a pickup.

CASEY. Ouch.

LISABETTE. They said they'd never seen that kind of whiplash.

CASEY. Sorry.

LISABETTE. Meanwhile, back at school I was kind of bein' forced into an affair by my history teacher an' just after that I was sort of halfway raped by a plumber.

CASEY. *(Horrified.)* Jesus.

LISABETTE. No, it wasn't too bad really. I had to deal, y'know? The only bad part was for three years I couldn't touch a man, even like a handshake, without throwing up. Projectile vomiting, so there were some awkward moments at parties.

CASEY. You're kidding me, right?

LISABETTE. No, really, it wasn't so bad. I'm over it, except really, really occasionally when I first meet people. How about your relationships?

CASEY. A lot of casual sex.

LISABETTE. Really.

CASEY. A lot. Always with members of the cast. And I've done 200 plays off-off.

LISABETTE. Wow.

CASEY. Outside of rehearsal, I'm actually a virgin.

LISABETTE. Wow.

CASEY. Of course, I'm always in rehearsal.

LISABETTE. Oh, I really respect that. I'm a virgin too. Except for being harassed, whiplashed, and on New Year's Eve.

(HOLLY enters from first class.)

CASEY. Hi.

LISABETTE. Oh my God.

HOLLY. I saw you guys when you came through first class.

LISABETTE. We walked right by you!?

HOLLY. No problem. I was enjoying some brain surgeon hitting on me.

LISABETTE. Excuse me, but... shoot ... I just want to say that when Kate, the producer person, made me the offer... well... she said you had put in a word for us... me and Casey... Casey and I... God, I am such a hick, Pardon me Jesus, anyway... thank you, thank you, thank you!

CASEY. It was really nice.

HOLLY. Well, hey, yeah I did, thanks but, you know, I was like nobody once too. Really down on the food chain like you guys... ummm... I won't even tell you the stuff I went through. Well, okay, the easy stuff was being told I had no talent like that director piranha said about you, right? And my deal was that talent isn't the point here... I mean, we're going to whatever Texas or wherever. Like, nobody who is anybody will see us or care. Maybe excepting my manager who has time for one client, me, and who would not care diddly dick if you guys had talent or not. *(A brief awkwardness.)* But the point is you didn't think *I* meant you had no talent, did you?

CASEY. No, no.

LISABETTE. No, no.

HOLLY. Because you can understand I have no way of knowing that. I mean ... tiddlypee, tiddlypoo.

LISABETTE. Right.

CASEY. Right.

HOLLY. My point is you guys were disrespected and he had to pay.

CASEY. You mean...

HOLLY. I mean, once they said you had no talent, I had to see you were hired.

LISABETTE. Wow.

HOLLY. Because I had that pulled on me, and now that *will not happen* in my presence. Like I'm the respect police.

CASEY. Thanks.

HOLLY. No problem. So I just wanted to shed a little light.

LISABETTE. That is really so nice.

CASEY. Just think, all of us have been told we have no talent.

HOLLY. Exactly!

CASEY. Well, that's something to build on.

HOLLY. Yeah, that's the other thing. We have to stick together down there in...

CASEY. Texas.

LISABETTE. Oh absolutely.

HOLLY. Because I have this intuition it's going to be like combat, but we stick together, we make them pay.

LISABETTE. Like we were three sisters.

HOLLY. That is so sweet and so right. That like zaps my guts.

CASEY. There's an empty seat.

HOLLY. Nah, I got to go back, I don't eat pretzels.

LISABETTE. We're talking about guys.

HOLLY. Them I eat. See you later.

(HOLLY leaves. Three folding chairs are set, facing two other chairs for the next scene. Please remember the changes are cinematic. We never stop or take the lights out for a change.)

T-ANNE. Please place your seats and tray tables in an upright position; we are beginning our descent into San Antonio.

(We are now in the rehearsal room on the first day. KATE, CASEY, HOLLY, LISABETTE and the new director, an African American woman named ANDWYNETH WYORÉ.)

KATE. *(Addressing them.)* Actors Express. Get it? Express? We are a serious theatre. We are unique. What is our artistic policy? Well, I can state that policy clearly. We live these ideas. At Actors Express, we call them the Seven Virtues. Number one, we do plays that... *(She makes a complex gesture.)* Two: our style is surgically defined as... *(A series of sounds.)* And only that. Fourthly, multi-cultural new works from the classical repertoire that say to the audience... *(An even more complex gesture.)* So that, in summation, or, seventh, we can say... *(She stares at the ceiling, thinking.)* and we say that with no fear of being misunderstood. Oh, I know, this policy makes us controversial. We offend, we pique, we challenge while at the same time bringing together, healing, and making our community one. In a nutshell. This unique mission has made us essential to San Antonio, not because... is there something out the window?

CASEY. Sorry.

KATE. Not because I have the best education money can buy...

LISABETTE. Wow.

KATE. Stanford, Harvard, Yale, but because... *(HOLLY is doctoring her lipstick.)* Holly, if you give this a chance, I think you'll find it's crucial to our work.

HOLLY. Stanford, Harvard, Yale...

KATE. Precisely.

HOLLY. *(Pointing at herself.)* Biddyup High, Biddyup, Nebraska.

KATE. But because... hear this... contemporary relevance.

CASEY. Contemporary relevance.

KATE. Contemporary relevance.

CASEY. Yes.

KATE. Our raison d'être! Does anyone find what I said moving? *(LISABETTE raises her hand.)* Because I am moved, and it is central to our aesthetic. *(LISABETTE applauds.)* Now I wanted to meet with you, our three sisters, before the rest of our cast arrived, to bond as sisters and to achieve a... It's now my pleasure to introduce our director, Andwyneth Wyoré, Artistic Director of San Antonio's Black Rage.

HOLLY. Doesn't that happen between countries?

KATE. Excuse me?

HOLLY. Cultural exchange?

ANDWYNETH. *(Chuckling.)* You got that right, girl.

KATE. Interestingly enough, Andwyneth also went to Stanford, Harvard, and Yale.

ANDWYNETH. 'Course I went free.

CASEY. What happened to the Brit?

KATE. Well, there were...

KATE/ANDWYNETH/HOLLY. Artistic differences.

ANDWYNETH. Uh-huh.

KATE. And I came to feel a sister...

ANDWYNETH. Girl, I'm not your sister. My momma see you, she faint, girl. She smack my daddy with an iron skillet! Huh-uh, baby, we got a little mutual use goin'. How about that? Down here in San Antonio you get some black people, some white people in the same room, there's always some foundation goes orgasmic. *(Cries deep in the act of sex.)* Multicultural! Multicultural! Yes! Yes!! Multicultural!! *(Back to her own voice.)* Pay a little rent, right? Suck a little green. Hey, I never did no white play, dig? Y'all a mystery to me, but I tell you one thing on Brother Chekhov, he just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk! Lord have mercy!

KATE, Well yes, but...

ANDWYNETH. Whine, whine, whine. Man, he got the self-pity diarrhea! Gushin' it out all over! Cut all that shit, X it out! Get down on the race question, down on the poverty question, get down on abuse of power, baby! No more, "Whine and dine with Brother Chekhov." Huh-uh. We gonna heat this sucker up! No script, huh-uh. I don't do script. Hell with that! What I see is a little white sisters thing, an' a black peasants thing. Little dance drama thing, little street corner doo-wap. *(HOLLY raises hand.)* S'up, girl?

HOLLY. I'm doing the script.

ANDWYNETH. You didn't follow the conversation?

HOLLY. Yeah, I can follow it, but I'm not doing that.

ANDWYNETH. Who the hell are you, girl?

HOLLY. You watch TV?

ANDWYNETH. Hell no, colored people all live in a cave.

HOLLY. I'm a big TV star.

ANDWYNETH. Well girl, you just pat yourself right on the back.

HOLLY. They begged me to come down here to wherever Texas to do a classic-style play. I don't give a shit about the race question or the poverty question. I don't have those problems. I got the film problem. I need to do film. No film, no respect. It's kind of like the race problem only in show business.

ANDWYNETH. You crazy, huh?

HOLLY. Yeah. So the rap is, you do TV you can't act. So my manager says to go backdoor. Get a little respect. Chekhov, Shakespeare, that stuff gives you shine. So like then you're a classical actress with fabulous breasts, and you can segue into sci-fi, action, cop-schlock, meet-cute or any genre.

ANDWYNETH. Let's cut to the bottom line, sister.

HOLLY. I'm saying every syllable Chekhov wrote, slow and clear.

ANDWYNETH. See, you are so far from my trip I can't even find you on the map.

HOLLY. Ms. Wyoré, the real difference between the two of us isn't what you think.

ANDWYNETH. Well, little thing, you bring it on.

HOLLY. The real difference is, you're fired.

(ANDWYNETH looks at KATE.)

KATE. *(At a loss.)* Well...

HOLLY. Trust me.

ANDWYNETH. You are one straight-up, no kiddin' around, in-your-face, don't misunderstand-me, bitch.

HOLLY. Sometimes, things just don't ... work out.

ANDWYNETH. *(Focusing on KATE.)* What are you, invisible?

KATE. Ummmmm...

ANDWYNETH. She's the deal, or you're the deal?

(HOLLY also focuses on KATE.)

KATE. *(Finally, to ANDWYNETH.)* She's the deal.

ANDWYNETH. You get me down here, whip up a little money on my color, cast a buncha white girls an' then blow me off 'cause this prime-time toots shows up? *(To KATE.)* I'm gonna pin "racist" to your ass, Momma. They gonna burn you in the public square to get right with my people. There won't be nothin' left of you but little snowy white ashes, dig? You an' Chekhov is both toast!

(ANDWYNETH exits.)

KATE. Ummm... if you'll excuse me.

(KATE exits to talk to ANDWYNETH. The sisters are silent for a moment.)

CASEY. Anyone want some Skittles?

LISABETTE. You just fired the director in front of the producer without asking.

HOLLY. I am saying the lines.

CASEY. She's saying the lines.

HOLLY. Directors are a very gray area for me. It has been my experience that they actually like to be fired because they suffer from severe performance anxiety. They have these pushy little egos but hardly any usable information, which makes them very sad and time-consuming. I wouldn't worry because after you fire them, they usually find successful careers on cruise ships where they are completely harmless.

LISABETTE. But to do that, is that ethical?

HOLLY. Lisabette, I like you. I do. You seem like a very nice person. I'm not a very nice person, but I can still appreciate one when I see her.

LISABETTE. Thanks.

HOLLY. In college plays, community stuff, arty nowheresville professional gigs like this, there is probably something called ethics, but up where the eagles fly and the wolves run, up where American presidents screw the actresses, there is only power. The ethics thing is a little foggy. Power, on the other hand, is clear, it's clear, it's understood. For a very short time, Lisabette, here in wherever-it-is Texas, you will fly with an eagle. Say whoosh.

LISABETTE. Whoosh.

HOLLY. Enjoy.

(At this moment, BEN SHIPWRIGHT, a craggy actor enters. He is playing Vershinin.)

BEN. Hello, ladies.

LISABETTE. Hi.

CASEY. Hi.

HOLLY. Hi.

BEN. Ben Shipwright. Gonna play Vershinin.

CASEY. Olga, the boring sister.

LISABETTE. Masha. But I can't shake your hand right now. I'll explain later.

HOLLY. Masha.

LISABETTE. You're playing Masha?

HOLLY. We'll talk. Where are you from, Ben?

BEN. Right around here. I do some acting but I actually make my living singing country.

LISABETTE. Oh my God, you're Ben Shipwright?

BEN. Yeah.

LISABETTE. Oh my God, I love your records!

HOLLY. You record?

BEN. Little bit.

LISABETTE. Little bit? This week he has two singles in Top 50 Country!

HOLLY. Really?

CASEY. Mazeltov.

BEN. *(To HOLLY and CASEY.)* You girls from New York?

CASEY. Yeah.

HOLLY. L.A.

BEN. *(To LISABETTE.)* Now I know *you're* a home girl.

LISABETTE. *How* do you know?

BEN. Well, you talk San Antonio and you listen to a bunch of no-good pickers like me.

HOLLY. Ben?

BEN. Yes ma'am.

HOLLY. This relationship thing that goes down between Masha and Vershinin? We probably should get together and talk that out.

BEN. Be my pleasure. I'll let y'all get settled.

(BEN starts to exit.)

HOLLY. Dinner?
BEN. I'm sorry, you speakin' to me?
HOLLY. I was speaking to you.
BEN. Well... ummm... I don't believe I caught your name.
HOLLY. Holly Seabé.
BEN. Well, Miss Seabé, I got me a couple of kids want me to barbecue some ribs tonight.

(Starts to exit.)

HOLLY. Drink later?
BEN. Well, ummm, no ma'am. No ma'am, I can't. No offense intended.
HOLLY. *(Smiling, but not pleased.)* Really?
BEN. No ma'am, I better not. My wife...
HOLLY. How old are your kids?
BEN. Four and seven. Seven and a half.
HOLLY. Won't they be asleep?
BEN. *(They regard each other.)* Just no-can-do, ma'am. *(Shakes her hand.)* Real pleased to meet you. Lookin' forward to rehearsal. Catch y'all later.

(BEN exits.)

LISABETTE. I don't think he knew who you were! Can you believe that? I mean, you are on the cover of TV Guide!
HOLLY. I'll have to buy him a copy.
LISABETTE. But, am I right or am I wrong, he is really cute!
CASEY. My take is if you... *(She indicates HOLLY.)* ... come

on to a guy, looking the way you do, and he stiffs you while talking about his kids, he is *really* unavailable.

HOLLY. If I come on to a guy... and I'm not saying I did... that guy can kiss his previous life goodbye for as long as I find said guy entertaining. And on this I would be willing to wager some fairly serious money.

CASEY. I think serious money to me and serious money to you could be seriously different.

LISABETTE. But what about his wife and kids?

HOLLY and CASEY. Shhh.

HOLLY. Okay, forget the money thing. We'll bet hair. Loser shaves her head.

LISABETTE. Wow.

CASEY. You can't afford to shave your head.

HOLLY. I won't have to.

CASEY. The guy's straight from Norman Rockwell.

HOLLY. I could screw anybody Norman Rockwell ever drew.

LISABETTE. This is so yeasty!

CASEY. Let's get it on.

(CASEY holds out her hand. HOLLY shakes it.)

HOLLY. He's going down.

LISABETTE. You aren't Baptist, huh?

HOLLY. Hey, Lisabette?

LISABETTE. Uh-huh?

HOLLY. I'm going to play Masha because it's the best part, and the most powerful person plays the best part. That's one of Hollywood's ten commandments. You'll play Irina, because I say so, but also because she's the youngest and you're the youngest and you would be really good doing her because you have yet to become a completely calcified diva.

LISABETTE. *(Not at all upset.)* Okay.

HOLLY. Everything's copasetic. Hey, let's go to the apartment hotel and get settled in fleabag hell and then find some cowboy dive with pine paneling and get unbelievably plotzed before tomorrow's first rehearsal, because I need to be hung over to face whatever director she digs up next.

(A scene change starts. Eventually, there will be two single beds, two chairs and a rolling door in place. This scene is played during the change.)

JOBY. *(From the audience.)* Excuse me. *(Scene change continues.)* Excuse me.

T-ANNE. What?

JOBY. Well, I... didn't you...

T-ANNE. Hey, spit it out; I'm busy.

JOBY. Well, didn't you consider that role offensive?

T-ANNE. Did you notice we're doing a scene change?

JOBY. Golly, as a person of color...

T-ANNE. You're a person of color?

JOBY. No, you are.

T-ANNE. Ooooo, I hate it when I forget.

JOBY. But, wasn't that... *(Whispers.)* ... stereotyped behavior?

T-ANNE. *(Again stopping her work.)* Listen, I have to... all right, okay... listen, Babyface, I would like to do something, almost anything, where nice white people like you didn't feel like they had to defend me. Particularly... *(Whispers back.)* .... in the middle of a scene change.

(T-ANNE goes back to work.)

JOBY. But it satirizes your political...

T-ANNE. Got to go.

JOBY. But, aren't you...

T-ANNE. No, I'm not. Want to know why?

JOBY. Oh, I do.

T-ANNE. 'Cause if I didn't do the plays that offended my color or politics or sex or religion or taste, I'd be shit out of work. Lights!

(T-ANNE exits. The scene light snaps on. JOBY is still standing.)

CASEY. *(To JOBY, not unkindly.)* Sit down, Joby. *(Starting the scene.)* I am *leveled* by the last drink. I am, as my beloved father would say, schnockered. *(Sings.)* Tell me I can't sing Karaoke?

HOLLY. You can't sing Karaoke.

LISABETTE. This is so amazing, it's like a pajama party.

HOLLY. *(Patting her knee.)* It is a pajama party.

LISABETTE. I mean, here I am, just out of drama school, and I am completely drunk, talking with real actors in a real way, including a great actress of the stage and a great actress from TV, and it just makes me want to cry.

HOLLY. Don't cry. Where did the vodka go?

LISABETTE. Holly, can I ask you a question?

HOLLY. Here it is.

(HOLLY pours herself another drink.)

LISABETTE. It's something about acting.

HOLLY. I don't know anything about acting.

LISABETTE. Okay then, have you had breast implants?

HOLLY. Yes.

LISABETTE. Yes?!

HOLLY. Yes.

CASEY. That actually makes me feel better.

HOLLY. I have had seventeen separate surgical procedures

to make me the completely natural beauty you see before you. They have even reshaped my toes because I do a lot of swimsuit.

LISABETTE. Those are artificial toes?

HOLLY. They are not artificial, they have been slimmed.

CASEY. How much?

HOLLY. Altogether?

CASEY. For the toes?

HOLLY. Seventeen thousand dollars.

LISABETTE. Wow.

CASEY. How much would it take to make me beautiful?

HOLLY. You're serious?

CASEY. Yeah.

HOLLY. Take off the sweatshirt.

(CASEY does.)

LISABETTE. But beauty is subjective.

HOLLY. Not in Hollywood. Stand up and turn around. Over here. Over here, over here. *(CASEY does.)* Look at the ceiling. *(She does.)* Hold your arms out like wings. Look left. Look right. Okay. I could be off 10, even 15% here depending on bone and muscle structure, but my estimate would be $600,000.

CASEY. Go ahead, flatter me.

HOLLY. Oh, there are divas who have paid more, and the kicker is even then there's no guarantee the camera loves you.

LISABETTE. Oh my God.

HOLLY and CASEY. Pardon me Jesus.

CASEY. I'm giving it one more year.

(CASEY refreshes her drink.)

LISABETTE. Give what?

CASEY. This. I don't have to put up with this hellish life. I have other skills.

HOLLY. Let me guess...

CASEY. For six years I worked in a slaughterhouse.

LISABETTE. No.

CASEY. Yeah.

LISABETTE. No way. You worked in your dad's hardware store.

CASEY. That was earlier. Where's the chocolates?

HOLLY. *(Handing her the box.)* There's only creams left.

CASEY. I took the slaughterhouse job because it paid more than waitressing, and I could cut the pigs' throats at night, which left my days free to audition.

HOLLY. Was there a lot of blood?

CASEY. Gouts.

HOLLY. I hate blood.

LISABETTE. I faint. I fainted the first time I had my period.

CASEY. I mean, look at us. Holly's the Frankenstein monster. You teach third grade. I support myself as a murderess from midnight to dawn so I can do godawful plays for free in black box theatres built into linen closets in welfare hotels. This is a career in the arts in America.

LISABETTE. But now we get to do Chekhov! It's like lacework. It's beautiful and delicate and demands everything. Everything! It's unbearably sweet and sad and painful, just like our lives.

HOLLY. Don't you love her.

CASEY. Plus I get a paycheck so my mother will think acting is actually a job.

LISABETTE. No, but it's Chekhov!

CASEY. As long as it pays the bills.

LISABETTE. That's so cynical.

CASEY. Lisabette, sweetie, I'm not cynical. Look at me. I'm like a beating heart you can hold in your hand. I just happen to live in a country where they give people who do what I do endless shit.

LISABETTE. But why can't it be beautiful? I want it to be beautiful.

CASEY. Lisabette, you're drunk.

LISABETTE. I am, I'm really drunk. But the three of us are so sad, right? I mean, I'm sad because I'm hopelessly naïve and have absolutely no idea what will become of me, like I'm running down the railway tracks and the train is coming. *(To CASEY.)* And you're sad because you're hoping against hope when you really probably know there is no hope. *(To HOLLY.)* And you're sad because... why are you sad, I forget?

HOLLY. I am sad because that beautiful country singer dissed me, and now I'm going to have to make him pay, and that'll make me feel badly about myself, and that'll put me back in therapy which means I have to switch therapists because my last one is too busy writing screenplays.

LISABETTE. See, Chekhov knows us.

CASEY. *(Nodding.)* 'Fraid so.

LISABETTE. To Chekhov.

(There is a knock on the door.)

LISABETTE. Who is it?

KATE. *(Outside.)* Lisabette? It's Kate. Kate Todoravskia. I wondered if you would like to drink red wine with me and make love?

LISABETTE. *(Sotto voice to the sisters.)* Oh my God.

KATE. I find you unbearably beautiful. I can't think, I can't eat. I want to produce *Romeo and Juliet* for you.

LISABETTE. *(To the sisters.)* What do I do?

(HOLLY beckons LISABETTE over and whispers.)

KATE. I just want to hold you. You could move into my apartment. I have a satellite dish.

LISABETTE. Kate?

KATE. *(Still outside.)* Yes?

LISABETTE. It's a little awkward because I'm in here having sex with Holly.

(LISABETTE mouths "Pardon me Jesus" to the ceiling.)

KATE. With Holly?

HOLLY. With Holly.

KATE. Oh... never mind... goodbye.

(They wait as KATE's footsteps recede.)

CASEY. Now that's Chekhov.

LISABETTE. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

HOLLY. No problem.

LISABETTE. *(Turning to CASEY, meaning KATE's crush.)* Did you know that?

(CASEY indicates "yes.")

HOLLY. Hey, Lisabette.

LISABETTE. What?

HOLLY. In my world, you'd be right there looking at her satellite dish.

(A change now moves from the apartment to a circle of folding chairs. It takes place during the opening half of KATE's speech.)

KATE. Dearest friends. Dearest, dearest actors. You may wonder why at this our first rehearsal I have spoken of my childhood for three hours. Why, I have told you of my Mother, the only American killed by prairie dogs, of my Father whose love of literature inspired him to inscribe 3 chapters of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* on the convex side of a single contact lens which was then tragically lost at Daytona Beach. These then are the threads with which I wove my love of the Russian Classics, and then carried in my heart here to San Antonio... San Antonio is to Houston as rural Russia is to Moscow. The sisters of San Antonio, their hearts beat with this play. We know what it is to be isolated, vulgarized, *we know* what it is to work! This play runs in our veins. Its pain is our pain. The pain of the women of San Antonio. So I say to you, on the brink of rehearsal, the final lines of Chekhov's Texas play, *The Three Sisters,* "In a little while we shall know why we live and why we suffer!"

(Applause from those gathered.)

CASEY. But that's not the final line, right?

KATE. I was speaking metaphorically.

CASEY. Because the final line is, "If only we knew."

KATE. Yes, Casey, that is the final line. Thank you.

CASEY. Said twice.

KATE. I'd like to move on if that's all right?

CASEY. Hey, it's your theatre.

KATE. Thank you. Thank you. And now it is my extraordinary pleasure to introduce our fabulous director, Wikéwitch Konalkvis, a fellow Pole and recent émigré who has directed 71 Chekhov productions and...

WIKÉWITCH. Seventy-two.

KATE. ... 72 productions and...

WIKÉWITCH. No, you are right, 71.

KATE, ... 71 productions and...

WIKÉWITCH. Every one jewel. Make beating heart of Chekhov.

KATE. ... and I just want to say...

WIKÉWITCH. Make beautiful from the pain of love this life which is like some...

KATE. ... he is *so*...

WIKÉWITCH. You, I know, will play Olga. You have pain. Have loss. Radiating of loss. Good. Good Olga.

KATE. I just want to say, and I'm likely to get a little emotional ...

HOLLY. Could we go around the room and meet the other actors?

KATE. Oh.

HOLLY. So we like know who we are. Like we were beginning a *process.*

KATE. Absolutely.

HOLLY. Holly Seabé, which probably goes without saying, Masha.

CASEY. Casey Mulgraw, radiating of loss, Olga.

LISABETTE. Lisabette Cartwright, Irina.

(Now T-ANNE moves from chair to chair, being all the other actors.)

GUNTER. Gunter Sinsel, Solyony.

ALLEN. Allen Greif, thrilled to be Andrey.

JAMES. James George, the hapless Tusenbach.

WIKÉWITCH. *(Ferocious.)* Not hapless!

JAMES. The definitely-not-hapless Tusenbach.

(T-ANNE indicates it would take too much time to do every introduction.)

T-ANNE. *(On book.)* Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. Introductions over.

WIKÉWITCH. Okay, now I talk...

KATE. Could I...

WIKÉWITCH. You are going to speak of deep love you feel for Chekhov...

KATE. Yes, because when I was 15...

WIKÉWITCH. Stop! This love for Chekhov is like American fantasy. You make God from Chekhov. You say Chekhov, bullshit, Chekhov, bullshit, Chekhov, bullshit, bullshit, bullshit. From God we can't make play. From God we make worship. Worship makes boring play. You want to know in this room who is God? Who is God here?

LISABETTE. *(A guess.)* You are?

WIKÉWITCH. This is very intelligent young actress. God in theatre is interpretation of play. I, Wikéwitch, make interpretation... In this room, in this time, I, Wikéwitch, will be God.

JOBY. Excuse me.

WIKÉWITCH. This is audience. Audience is talking!

JOBY. I mean, this is driving me crazy! This is the whole problem with 20th century theatre. This is part of the reason nobody wants to buy a ticket. We used to get stories; now we get "interpretations." The director is not God!

WIKÉWITCH. I am God.

JOBY. You are not God!

CASEY. Joby...

JOBY. *What*?!

CASEY. A character is talking.

JOBY. I know a character is talking, so?

CASEY. Who says it's the author's view?

WIKÉWITCH. *(Triumphantly.)* You are making interpretation!

JOBY. I don't care whose view it is, it's pernicious.

WIKÉWITCH. You are being God. Who gave you this position?

JOBY. I have a ticket!

WIKÉWITCH. If I do not make interpretation, you cannot make interpretation of my interpretation. You are secondary! I am artist! I fuck you with my art and you cry out.

JOBY. What the hell are you talking about?

WIKÉWITCH. Sit down, little audience, I give you *Three Sisters*. From big soul.

CASEY. *(Trying to calm her.)* Joby...

JOBY. I have never heard such unadulterated...

CASEY. Joby...

JOBY. Sit here and listen to...

CASEY. Joby! *(JOBY stops talking.)* Not now.

JOBY. Then "now" what?

CASEY. You are the audience, Joby. If you talk to us all the time, you become an actor, and then you would have to come down here. Do you want to come down here?

(JOBY, still upset, stands in silence for a moment, then, making a decision, sits back down. DON BLOUNT enters.)

KATE. Don!

DON. Running a little late.

KATE. Don Blount, everybody, Vice President for Grants and Contributions at Albert & Sons Tobacco, our wonderful corporate sponsor.

DON. Don't mean to interrupt. Please go on with the Art.

KATE. Thanks Don. Now, we have the opportunity to make Chekhov with... *(Indicating WIKÉWITCH.)* this fine artist...

WIKÉWITCH. Great artist.

KATE. Great artist, and I feel deeply, even profoundly, that...

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