SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

SF PERUSALS

Dusty and the Big Bad World

by Cusi Cram

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 2010 by Cusi Cram

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Cover illustration by Kyle Malone for Denver Center Theatre Company's 2009 world premiere production of *Dusty and the Big Bad World*

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *DUSTY AND THE BIG BAD WORLD* is subject to a Licensing Fee. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form the play is dedicated to the reading public only.

The amateur live stage performance rights to *DUSTY AND THE BIG BAD WORLD* are controlled exclusively by Samuel French, Inc., and licensing arrangements and performance licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur Licensing Fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a licensing quotation and a performance license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Licensing Fees are payable one week before the opening performance of the play to Samuel French, Inc., at 45 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

Licensing Fee of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

Stock licensing fees quoted upon application to Samuel French, Inc.

For all other rights than those stipulated above, apply to: The Gersh Agency 41 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010 Att: Seth Glewen.

Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured in writing from Samuel French, Inc.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc."

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

ISBN 978-0-573-69691-6 Printed in U.S.A. #29106

No one shall commit or authorize any act or omission by which the copyright of, or the right to copyright, this play may be impaired.

No one shall make any changes in this play for the purpose of production.

Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to Samuel French, Inc., for written permission before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of *DUSTY AND THE BIG BAD WORLD must* give credit to the Author of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for the purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author *must* appear on a separate line on which no other name appears, immediately following the title and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent of the size of the title type.

In addition the following credit *must* be given in all programs and publicity information distributed in association with this piece:

DUSTY AND THE BIG BAD WORLD
had its world premiere in 2009
At The Denver Center Theatre Company,
Kent Thompson, Artistic Director

DUSTY AND THE BIG BAD WORLD had its world premiere with the Denver Center Theatre Company (Kent Thompson, Artistic Director) at The Space Theatre in Denver, Colorado, in January 23, 2009. It was directed by Kent Thompson, with scenic design by William Bloodgood, costume design by Bill Black, sound design by Jason Ducat, lighting design by Charles R. MacLeod, dramaturgy by Paul Walsh, and voice and dialect coaching by Kathryn G. Maes. The stage manager was Christi B. Spann, the assistant stage manager was Mr. Erock, the production manager was Edward Lapine, the production assistant was D. Lynn Reiland, and the production intern was Sarah Johnson. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

JESSICA . . . . . Kelly McAndrew
KAREN . . . . . Jeanine Serralles
MARIANNE . . . . . Charlotte Booker
NATHAN . . . . . Sam Gregory
LIZZIE GOLDBERG-JONES . . . . . Chloe Nosan

The understudies were Rob Hille (Nathan), Kate Hurster (Karen), Jordan Haleigh Morgan, (Lizzie Goldberg-Jones), Tracy Shaffer (Jessica, Marianne)

CHARACTERS

JESSICA – Early forties, driven, focused, a TV producer. Seemingly hard as nails but has a vulnerable side.

KAREN – Twenties, edgy, neurotic, was an addict, is barely keeping it together, is deeply self interested because she has to be – smarter than she lets on.

MARIANNE – Late-forties, early-fifties, Southern, very Christian, driven, seemingly soft but secretly hard as nails – has a super maternal side.

NATHAN – Late-thirties, early-forties, neurotic, wants to be heroic but it's not easy for him – becomes monomaniacal as the play progresses.

LIZZIE GOLDBERG-JONES – An honest, somewhat precocious 11 year-old – not an annoying kid. She speaks the truth more than anyone else in the play.

ACT ONE

*(***MARIANNE** *sits at a desk in an office in Washington D.C. She unpacks some folders from a box and laughs to herself.)*

MARIANNE. I love my job. I know. I know it's not really alright to say that, not out loud. I could say it ironically, "I love my job," adding a whole other syllable to the word love. But that's not what I mean. Not at all.

In America – for the most part, people dislike their jobs but love the things their jobs give them – the actual stuff, the in-ground pool it finally buys, the many tiered pension plan – the freedom from a mortgage, or the ability to get an even bigger house and bigger mortgage that will never be paid off, no matter what job you get. It's so sad but so true.

People just love the illusion of freedom their jobs give them but they are not free precisely because they hate their work. They moan, they complain, they have heart attack after heart attack – always hating what they do. Not all people. But most.

I could shout that I love what I do off a roof top spinning in the wind – like some dope in a romantic comedy. And I don't do it for the money. Not at all. I love what I do. I keep this fact mostly to myself because I have learnt, learnt the hard way, to keep precious things close to my heart. But sometimes, sometimes, in spite of myself, it rushes forth – the love – it could be at a lecture to college students, or during an interview, or in the middle of a staff meeting. I feel it bubbling up, the ardor, the delight, the unqualified joy I take in my work.

MARIANNE. *(cont.)* I worry, I worry, I might seem smug or self-satisfied and THAT is NOT my intention, THAT is not a part of my agenda. I always want to appear humble, humble in the face of my happiness because I am. Truly so. And to appear any other way would be a fall, a fall from grace.

*(***MARIANNE** *opens a box of pencils and inhales the erasers. Her assistant,* **KAREN** *enters and sees her. She turns on her heels.)*

KAREN. I…should go…call someone to fix the fax.

MARIANNE. You caught me.

KAREN. Sorry…there was a message on the voice…

MARIANNE. There is so much possibility in a box of new pencils. I've always felt that. Ever since I was a little girl in South Carolina.

KAREN. Yeah. Sure. Possibility.

MARIANNE. It's so thrilling setting up a new office. I never thought I would be sitting in THIS chair looking at THIS view.

KAREN. Well…you are…so...

MARIANNE. I'm excited. So excited, I'm inhaling my pencils like a third grader. Are you excited?

KAREN. *(not so excited)* Sure.

MARIANNE. The country spoke again and here we are continuing on with the work we started in 2001. I feel so blessed to be here today, on the brink…the brink of so much change. You seem like you feel blessed too, Karen.

KAREN. Sure.

MARIANNE. Try again, you didn't convince me.

KAREN. Well. I do. Really. I was unemployed for a long time…before…before I got this job. So I feel blessed…or rather thankful for the work. Work is…good.

MARIANNE. Exactly. We are engaged in good work, Karen. And THAT gets me up in the morning. THAT'S what I want to hear from people on my staff.

KAREN. What?

MARIANNE. Excuse me?

KAREN. What exactly do want to hear from your staff… so…I know? I mean…so…I think…I'm just confused. I'm sorry.

MARIANNE. You *never* have to be sorry for asking for clarification. Never. This is what I want to feel from my staff, Karen: that every day, every hour of every day, every minute of every hour, every second of every minute that they are ready to WORK to effect CHANGE.

KAREN. Well, I'm not here for the strippers. That just came out…oopsy.

MARIANNE. Oh Karen, you…you are chock 'o block full of wit and humor and that is why I hired you. Because… laughter, laughter is the best medicine. Right?

KAREN. Right. There was a message on your voice mail…

MARIANNE. Between you and me, I just can't believe I'm here, Karen. It hasn't sunk in, filtered through the system, settled into my DNA. There are a lot of places I could be working but I am HERE.

KAREN. You sure are. I see you.

MARIANNE. I have a view! A view of the Capitol!

KAREN. Oh, is that what that round building thingy is?

MARIANNE. Oh you! You! 'Tween you and me, I never dreamt this could happen. "The President's Special Counsel on Children and Child Welfare."

KAREN. Big title.

MARIANNE. Big job.

KAREN. Your title…it's kinda broad.

MARIANNE. EXACTLY. I have been given a wide berth, Karen. Wide. God bless the president and his dedicated staff for wanting to take such good care of the children of this land. I wanted my office to be here though, here in the Department of Education because that's where real transformation can happen for little ones…in school. If you set them on a sturdy moral path when they are young, mostly likely they'll continue on that path.

KAREN. Yeah. Sure. Education is…important…for kids and non kids.

MARIANNE. Oh, I have so many plans and dreams and wants for this job. We have so much to do Karen. We do. And I use the word "we" very consciously Karen, because I don't do anything alone, no one does of course, your opinions are as important to me as my own.

KAREN. I'll make a note of that.

MARIANNE. Do you have children Karen?

KAREN. God no.

MARIANNE. You're young. There's time. You are blessed with youth.

KAREN. Youth, overrated.

MARIANNE. Funny, funny. You. I appreciate your humor. I appreciate you, Karen.

(An awkward pause. **KAREN** *doesn't know if she should leave.* **MARIANNE** *fingers a picture of a little girl on her desk.)*

MARIANNE. This *is* Susanna. I use the present tense and sometimes that confuses people. Susanna was taken from me. But she's always with me. She's with me today Karen as we set up our office and get ready to make a real difference for children in this country.

*(***MARIANNE** *looks at Susanna's picture.)*

KAREN. I'm sorry…about Susanna.

MARIANNE. Don't be sorry. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. Sometimes, I think everything I do for children, I do to protect her. If she were here, I'd probably be a stay at home Mom, driving her to soccer games, making her princess costumes and…big ole cakes. I'd have just one child. Now I have so many. God always has a plan for us, Karen. You said someone called.

*(***KAREN** *hands* **MARIANNE** *a message slip.)*

KAREN. Terry Johnson, the president of PBS.

MARIANNE. If Mrs. Johnson ever calls again, Karen page me wherever I am, yell at the top of your lungs, yank me from the ladies. Is that clear?

KAREN. Crystal. But just for the record she called at six am. I like to work but not that much.

MARIANNE. You! You! Sharp as a tack, that's why you got the job. Get me Mrs. Johnson on the phone and a complete list of all children's programming produced under the Department of Ed's "Time to Teach" grants. That'll probably be filed under "diversity" and/or multi-cultural programming. Cancel my lunch appointment with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and reschedule for next Tuesday. And a coffee, two percent milk, two sweet and lows and two stirrers. It's time to stir things up, Karen.

(blackout)

(A different office in Cambridge Massachusetts. **JESSICA** *furiously types.* **NATHAN** *enters.)*

JESSICA. This is a disaster.

NATHAN. *(rapid fire)* EXACTLY! It's Batman and Robin and the McCarthy era all over again.

*(***JESSICA** *rifles through a script.)*

JESSICA. Huh?

NATHAN. In the 40's a German psychiatrist wrote a fear mongering tome claiming that cartoons of men in tights living together would drive little boys to a life of sodomy.

JESSICA. Waaay to early for sodomy chat, Nathan.

NATHAN. A SENATE investigation followed of Batman and Robin, if you can believe it? Guess who was spearheading that little crusade?

JESSICA. No clue.

NATHAN. Jay Edgar Hoover and Roy Cohn. I rest my case.

JESSICA. What case?

NATHAN. I mean, even if Batman and Robin were sending crazy gay signifiers out to the universe – so what? Did the big conservative THEY really think that exposing little boys to robust, super-hero man love would somehow turn boys toward each other? You can't make someone gay, no matter how tight your tights are.

JESSICA. No idea. What. You are talking about. But Shirley's script sucks.

NATHAN. Oh my God, you haven't read Terry's e-mail! Read the e-mail, Jessica.

JESSICA. HOW is it possible for a writer to SUCK so profoundly?

NATHAN. That's not criticism, that's condemnation.

JESSICA. Have you read this…thing? It's talky, the dialogue is off, stakes are low, just…trim the fat.

*(***JESSICA** *throws the script toward* **NATHAN**.*)*

NATHAN. It's writing, not brisket.

JESSICA. Better yet, take the script away from her. Give it to Bill.

NATHAN. Jessica, she's the only woman we hired this season.

JESSICA. I think men are funnier.

NATHAN. You are so sexist.

JESSICA. On *this* particular show, on "Dusty." Men have the right edge.

NATHAN. You don't think women are edgy? You haven't met my wife.

JESSICA. The Dalai Lama would be edgy with three kids under five.

NATHAN. I'm not firing her.

JESSICA. Then make her script suck less.

*(***NATHAN** *paces a little, thinking.)*

NATHAN. What can we do…what can we do to poor Shirley's script? We could, we could make Spuds allergic to radishes?

JESSICA. *(dead serious)* But Spuds is lactose intolerant! You know that!

NATHAN. Everyone on this show is allergic to something.

JESSICA. Because allergies are a HUGE kid issue.

NATHAN. Why is everyone so allergic? In my day peanut butter was not a dirty word. Is it the environment? Or some conspiracy with drug companies to secretly peck away at our immunity rendering us helpless without their drugs which cure us, while simultaneously making us perpetually allergic and in need of their semi-toxic drugs. What do you think?

JESSICA. Ok. Make Spuds AFRAID of radishes.

NATHAN. Are radishes scary?

JESSICA. Anything can be scary if it's unfamiliar to you. *(getting an idea)* OK. OK. We can play up the whole sub theme of the season: difference can be frightening but then you learn about it and PRESTO, it's less frightening. I don't know if radishes are the right lens for this story, maybe something more exotic? Yucca? Coconut?

NATHAN. I'll think of an appropriately scary vegetable or legume. Read the email from Terry. Seems she has some pretty McCarthy-esque views on "difference."

*(***JESSICA** *reads her e-mail.* **NATHAN** *looks out the window.)*

NATHAN. Have you ever been snowshoeing? I think it might be peaceful. Less dangerous than skiing. *(beat)* I think I'm gonna take up snowshoeing. *(beat)* I'll never go snowshoeing.

*(***JESSICA** *looks up from her e-mail.)*

JESSICA. OK.

NATHAN. I have a bad feeling about this. Like, I-could-lose-my-job, heads-are-going-to-roll feeling. I can't lose my job, Jessica.

JESSICA. You won't lose your job, Nathan.

NATHAN. I would be so royally fucked without this job. I mean, who would hire me?

JESSICA. People would hire you, Nathan.

NATHAN. What you're saying is I'm going to lose my job.

JESSICA. I'm saying, you have a definite skill set that is desirable in the current job market.

NATHAN. Yeah, I don't know about that. The actual skills of a producer/story editor are hard to describe. I write a little, edit a little, and try to translate your crushing comments to writers, so they can actually write.

JESSICA. This is a meeting about a show we produced with our boss – the head of PBS. That's all.

NATHAN. Did you read the same thing I did? Phrases like "gravely concerned" and "severe consequences for future funding" jumped out at me.

Just when you think things can't get worse. They do. Get. Worse. Abu Ghraib. No WMD's. Fucker gets elected again. This.

JESSICA. Nathan, let's try to maintain some kind of perspective, here.

NATHAN. Oh, I think I have exactly the right perspective. Unbridled paranoia: appropriate response to our times.

That asshole stole another election by scaring ignorant Christians to the polls who usually don't vote by convincing them that gay people's right to marry would somehow endanger the moral fabric of their lives. Gay people don't live where those people live.

Roy Cohn? J Edgar Hoover? Puppies compared to Karl Rove and his league of Christian succubi. Give it another year and it's blacklist time.

JESSICA. Please. You're overreacting. You can never gauge tone from an e-mail.

NATHAN. But this was my little fiefdom of good, liberal values, Jessica. I could indoctrinate the next generation in our ways, so they wouldn't be forgotten.

JESSICA. We can still do that. Every day. We're safe, Nathan.

NATHAN. No one is safe. Not anymore. I really believed in that story.

JESSICA. It was a great idea AND it fit the mission of the grant – to promote diversity and different points of view.

NATHAN. I am so going to lose my job.

JESSICA. Everyone is vulnerable. We are a public organization – largely funded by the government. And our government SUCKS, more than Shirley's script, even.

NATHAN. The thing is, the thing is: I really liked that little girl.

JESSICA. She was chocolate in front of the camera.

NATHAN. She was vulnerable in all the right ways.

(blackout)

(Lights up on **LIZZIE**. *She speaks to a video camera.)*

LIZZIE. For the record: my favorite show is Sponge Bob. Sorry, it is. Do you guys watch that show? You should. Sponge Bob, he's like a sponge. He's supposed to be an underwater sponge but he looks like a dish washing sponge and he lives in a pineapple with his pet snail Gary and works as a fry cook at the Krusty Krab and has a really annoying neighbor, Squidward Tentacles who's like always taking bubble baths. *(***LIZZIE** *laughs, she snorts a little.)* That show rocks. Like sometimes it makes me laugh so hard I snort. Seriously.

My Dads like to watch the Gilmore Girls with us – they're really into the mother, Lorelei. I think she drinks way too much coffee and talks too fast. If my Dads talked that much, I'd put myself up for adoption. Honestly. I only watch it with them because we get to watch five hours of TV a week and because they watch the Gilmore Girls with me, it doesn't count because it's "family time." I love TV. My Dads say too much TV can make you dense as a Republican. They say that *all* the time.

I used to watch Dusty when I was little and it was OK. For the record: I don't watch it now and I only said I would enter this contest because my little brother Petey is obsessed with Dusty. He has Dusty sheets and PJs and can't go to sleep unless his two Dusty dust balls are tucked under each of his arms. I guess the whole idea of Dusty is kinda neat. I mean, it's cool that he's this dust ball and that he's made up of everything and everyone. And it's also kinda cool when he pulls some of himself off and then decides to go wherever that particle is from. But he travels in this magical dust-pan, which is a little lame, a dustpan? And his friend Spuds is lactose intolerant and that's ALL HE EVER TALKS ABOUT but whatever, the show is cool. I mean, if you're six. Petey is six.

So, when I heard the show had this competition, I thought, OK, why not? So. Dusty wants to know why he should come and visit us? Why we're special? I guess, first of all because Petey would love it more than anything in the world if you filmed us and then turned us into animated characters. It'd be like Sponge Bob – but not as cool. I also thought maybe if the kids at school saw. Petey on Dusty, saw my whole family animated – then maybe they would stop teasing Petey. It's not like he complains. But stuff bugs him. It bugs me too. People say the dumbest stuff, like it's really weird you have two Dads and the bible says this and that about gay people. And mostly I don't care about the bible or what other people say because we are agnostic Buddhists, anyway. But I thought if we were on TV then maybe people would stop saying stupid stuff. Because TV matters. It matters to everyone.

(Lights out on **LIZZIE***.)*

(Lights up on **MARIANNE**. **MARIANNE** *sits at her desk talking to a picture of Susanna.)*

MARIANNE. I want to thank you for today. Today was a banner day, Susanna.

*(***KAREN** *enters.)*

You are my guide, my beacon through the darkness.

*(***MARIANNE** *notices* **KAREN**.*)*

KAREN. I'm sorry. Should I knock? Is that how you want to do it?

MARIANNE. Don't be silly. Mi oficina e tu oficina. Do you speak Spanish Karen?

KAREN. I speak no languages.

MARIANNE. Spanish is useful. If Susanna were still here, I would make sure she learnt Spanish.

KAREN. Yeah. Sure. Here's your schedule for tomorrow. It's pretty tight in the afternoon. I pushed back your meeting with the director of The Focus on Family.

MARIANNE. Did you have a good day today, Karen?

KAREN. There were no disasters, that's a good day for me.

MARIANNE. I like your style, Karen. I like your style, precisely because it's so different from my own.

KAREN. Thanks.

MARIANNE. Tell me Karen, do you watch public television?

KAREN. Well…at this particular point in time, I don't own a television – I hope to soon – but if I did have a TV, I think I would watch public television, yes.

MARIANNE. And why is that?

KAREN. Well…um first and foremost, there are no commercials.

MARIANNE. Exactly.

KAREN. Exactly what?

MARIANNE. There are no commercials because the "public" pays for programming. Here is my million dollar question for you Karen – do you think public television reflects the public it serves?

KAREN. Um…well…sure.

MARIANNE. I beg to differ. I think, for the last however many years, public television has served a very specific sector.

KAREN. And what sector would that be?

MARIANNE. Urban liberals, Karen.

KAREN. Right.

MARIANNE. I think we need to make public television more public, don't you?

KAREN. I'm not quite sure what that means.

MARIANNE. It means that if indeed public television is public, then it should reflect a wider demographic. If it doesn't then isn't it really "private" television?

KAREN. But…I forgot to backup the hard drive. Silly me.

MARIANNE. Please Karen, I value your opinion.

KAREN. Um…I guess…if "urban liberals" support public television then THEY can program whatever the heck they want. I mean they're the ones forking it over during those endless fund drives.

MARIANNE. True. Only thing is they don't wholly fund it, we, the government pick up a big chunk of the tab.

KAREN. It seems like society has worse ills than PBS. I mean, did Masterpiece Theater ever scar someone for life?

MARIANNE. I'm not talking about Masterpiece Theater.

KAREN. I guess I'm not clear what you're talking about.

MARIANNE. Here's a juicy tidbit: a huge source of revenue for PBS is the profits they make off of merchandise associated with their children's programming.

KAREN. Silly me, that's where the Special Counsel on Children and Child Welfare comes in.

MARIANNE. With bells ringing.

KAREN. But I mean, just playing devil's advocate, or rather…whatever…PBS programs good television for kids – if such a thing exists.

MARIANNE. I think television can be instructive and informative and an excellent tool in early childhood development.

KAREN. I mean, who's gonna complain about Sesame Street?

MARIANNE. I have a bone or two to pick with that show. It caters exclusively to an urban demographic.

KAREN. But…but…there are a lot of kids in cities.

MARIANNE. Of course there are. But there are also children who live in suburbs and exurbs and in the middle of fields and trees and that particular show does not take those children and their specific belief systems into account.

KAREN. But I love Sesame Street! Kermit saved my life.

MARIANNE. And how did he do that?

KAREN. Oh. I had this thing about him when I was a kid. I only wore green socks all through second grade, which was a particularly tough time for me, messy divorce, custody battle…whatever. So, if anyone teased me, I looked at my socks and whispered to myself, "it's not easy being green." So much more than you need to know.

MARIANNE. You've proven my point.

KAREN. I didn't mean to…I mean…what point?

MARIANNE. That what children watch on television when they are young is highly influential. Now don't you worry, Karen, Kermit and all his little urban friends are not my current area of focus.

KAREN. Would you mind my asking who is?

MARIANNE. A certain animated dust ball.

KAREN. Dusty! My niece loves that show.

MARIANNE. Not for long.

KAREN. Did Dusty misbehave?

MARIANNE. You could say that Dusty is a deviant.

KAREN. Sounds intriguing…I mean complicated.

MARIANNE. If I have my way, and I usually do, Karen, Dusty and all his lucrative merchandise is about to become…

KAREN. Dust.

MARIANNE. You said it.

KAREN. You certainly are starting with a bang.

MARIANNE. I didn't plan to but sometimes God hands you the unexpected on a Chippendale platter.

KAREN. My surprises usually materialize on plastic.

MARIANNE. Funny, funny.

KAREN. True, true.

MARIANNE. It's great to have you on my team, Karen.

KAREN. Yeah it's good to be…on a team? Is there anything else?

MARIANNE. Go ahead and distribute the memo I sent you. I am more than done for the day.

*(***KAREN** *exits.* **MARIANNE** *looks at the photograph of Susanna. Blackout.)*

*(***KAREN** *at a pay phone. She looks both ways and dials a number. It rings. Lights up on* **NATHAN** *in his office. The phone rings.* **NATHAN** *picks the phone up.)*

NATHAN. *(curt)* I promise you I will pick up baby wipes and the pâté, honey. I have it written down on my hand. *(writing on his hand)* There's this major shit storm happening at work so could you lay off for ten minutes.

KAREN. Hello?

NATHAN. I'm so, so sorry. This is Nathan Friedman. And I don't always talk to my wife like that.

KAREN. I know.

NATHAN. Excuse me?

KAREN. I mean, I know who you are. You're a producer of Dusty, right?

NATHAN. And this is the point in the conversation where you introduce yourself.

KAREN. Look, you need to come to Washington and meet me.

NATHAN. You sound very nice but I'm married with three kids and I still don't know your name.

KAREN. It's better if you don't. This is serious. I work for the government. And there are people, people who um…they don't have your best interests at heart.

NATHAN. Me specifically? Someone in the government wants to kill me?

KAREN. The show, the show, they want to kill the show. Meet me at the Au Bon Pain in Union Station tomorrow at 7:30 p.m.

NATHAN. This is very weird, very Deep Throat, except I'm not a journalist. I wanted to be a journalist.

KAREN. I have an incriminating memo.

NATHAN. Who does it incriminate?

KAREN. Someone very important – someone at the top.

NATHAN. At PBS?

KAREN. At the mothership. Let's just say someone there is sleeping with the enemy.

NATHAN. Who? And who is the mothership? And what do you want from me? I think up stories about saintly dust balls with allergic Bunny friends. I need more information.

KAREN. I can't talk. Tomorrow. The Au Bon Pain. Union Station. 7:30 p.m.

NATHAN. Can't we meet at a bar?

KAREN. *(vehemently)* NO BARS. The Au Bon Pain or nowhere.

NATHAN. Well, maybe I don't go to Au Bon Pains, maybe I oppose their version of the croissant?

KAREN. There is a very small window of time here. My boss is like a forest fire.

NATHAN. Listen, my life is very complicated, mystery lady…

KAREN. 7:30. Union Station. Au Bon Pain. And keep this under your hat.

(The sound of a dial tone. Lights out on **KAREN**. **NATHAN** *looks confused.* **JESSICA** *sticks her head in* **NATHAN***'s office.)*

JESSICA. You ready for tomorrow morning?

NATHAN. For the wrath of Terry Johnson? How does one prepare?

JESSICA. It'll be fine, Nathan.

NATHAN. Fine like Guantanamo is fine?

JESSICA. What you need is a glass of white wine and a Valium.

*(***JESSICA** *hands* **NATHAN** *a little pack of Valium.)*

NATHAN. I feel beyond Valium.

(He takes the Valium.)

JESSICA. Hey, LOVED the whole lima bean beat. Good choice of a familiar yet slightly exotic legume.

NATHAN. Different but not TOO different. Right down the middle.

JESSICA. Come on, we don't play it safe. Remember last year when Dusty met that Muslim…what was it?

NATHAN. It was supposed to be a hedgehog but it looked more like a rat, which I, personally, don't think did much for Arab/American relations.

JESSICA. More like a mole than a rat.

NATHAN. That was last year. This year it's another country. You can't be fine with this meeting.

JESSICA. I am fine with this meeting. And thanks for making Shirley's script fly – I didn't think it was possible.

NATHAN. It's my job.

JESSICA. And you do it superbly, Nathan.

*(***JESSICA** *exits.)*

NATHAN. Not for long, if Terry Johnson has her way.

(blackout)

*(***MARIANNE** *packs up her briefcase and is about to leave. Her phone rings. She picks it up.)*

MARIANNE. Marianne Fitzgibbons, how may I be of service? Terr – iii! How is my most favorite Kappa Kappa Delt? So you got the MEMO. Uh huh. Uh Huh. Uh Huh. Sure thing Terr – iii, sweet pea. It is bold. No shrinking violet am I. You know and I know, that little girl should not have been chosen from a national contest and bless her it's not her fault she was. It's called "public television" not "special interest television that caters to people with alternative lifestyles not sanctioned by all the major religions in the entire world" television. You're with me there…right?

I hear you, baby, I know I am putting you in a tight spot. But I've never cared for that show…the main character Dusty…well…he seems a little too tolerant of just about everything and I know he is an inanimate object but honey, he seems like a homosexual dust ball to me. There, I said it.

Listen sweet thing, I know…I know that your concern was the episode. We can discuss the future of the show in more detail at a later date. But bottom line, they misused government funds and there has to be consequences. Action, reaction, it's a law of physics AND politics. Right. Right. Right.

Terry, people at the top, at the very tippy top will be ever so grateful if you…well if you stay flexible and open to suggestions. This administration is very open to like-minded women. If you catch my drift. *(beat)* Sounds like you caught it. I am going to do my Kappa Kappa Delta best to make sure that YOU get the lion's share of credit for this. Oh yeah…he got the MEMO too. EVERYONE got the memo…your little sorority sister is starting with a BANG.

Sweetie, I'm running beyond late, Frank'll have my head. He's cookin a ham. Ham, that's right. I know I can count on you, Terry. God bless you too.

*(***MARIANNE** *hangs up the phone.)*

(fiercely) YES!

(The next day. **JESSICA** *sits at her desk and shakes a sugar packet before putting it into her Starbucks coffee.* **NATHAN** *watches her. She shakes a another packet.* **NATHAN** *can't take his eyes off of her. He holds a coffee cup in his hands but doesn't drink it.)*

JESSICA. *(stirring)* We're behind on 213B. They need to start storyboarding next week. When are we taping voices?

NATHAN. Uh…

JESSICA. The twelfth. I think it's the twelfth.

NATHAN. The twelfth…yeah…that sounds like…a number…Can I have some sugar?

*(***JESSICA** *hands him some sugar packets. He puts the coffee on her desk and pours packet after packet of sugar in his coffee.* **JESSICA** *notices.)*

JESSICA. Sweet tooth's calling?

NATHAN. Yelling. I guess I don't understand…

JESSICA. I can go over the notes but I thought I was pretty clear – I just don't buy the B story with the goblin. Dusty can't be afraid for no reason. That's part of his charm…his universality. He is made of everything, therefore nothing is that foreign to him. AND the goblin doesn't seem real to me.

NATHAN. The goblin doesn't seem real to you? Well, none of this…this day…the meeting we just had and you… you shaking sugar into your Starbucks coffee as if it's just a day, like every other day where you shake the sugar – none of it seems the least bit real to me, Jessica.

JESSICA. I think the meeting went well, Nathan.

NATHAN. OK what you just said is more unreal than an animated goblin who is familiar but not familiar who doesn't seem real.

JESSICA. The meeting went well, because we're not going to lose the show. You have to trust me, Nathan.

NATHAN. But I don't.

JESSICA. What?

NATHAN. I mean, I get it…I do…You created Dusty… I mean you didn't create him but you lifted him up and out of the world of obscure children's literature and put him on lunch boxes and knapsacks and you… whipped up a world of little fluffy toys…but…

JESSICA. The show is a hit because we bust our asses making accessible but complicated stories for children and the lunch boxes and toys followed.

NATHAN. No, I know. I'm saying you made a good…some might even say great, show. And I helped you and I can understand wanting to hold on to that. But I can't help feeling…feeling that you hung me out to dry in that meeting to save some…some inflated notion of your purpose….

JESSICA. I thought we were in that room as a team.

NATHAN. Yeah…um…not a team I want to be on.

JESSICA. I was being diplomatic.

NATHAN. You were being sycophantic.

JESSICA. I was…surveying, surveying is very different from sycophanting.

NATHAN. You waffled…you balked…you gave up, Jessica.

JESSICA. Hardly, I decided to fight.

NATHAN. It didn't look like you were fighting.

JESSICA. Exactly, that was exactly my plan. Terry is my boss, she has the power to green light or kill all of our best ideas. So, if she has concerns about a show we made, I damn well better listen to her concerns.

NATHAN. Well…Terry Johnson doesn't seem to think gay parents should appear on children's television.

JESSICA. That's not what she said. She had some interesting points…

NATHAN. None…none of them were interesting.

JESSICA. Her point about whether it's really the job of television to educate children about homosexuality had some merit.

NATHAN. Yes. Yes, it is our job.

JESSICA. *I* can't say that I know that for a fact.

NATHAN. You would if you had children.

JESSICA. I am perfectly capable of making judgments about what children should or shouldn't know without having any of my own. AND my seven Emmys would seem to indicate that my knowledge of children's needs and likes is quite expert.

NATHAN. I think Terry Johnson and what she thinks children should and shouldn't know…is wacko. Kids… they are not these sacred little beings…our job is to educate them about the world…the complexity, hardship and beauty of it all not pretend that everyone is just like them and that – yipee – isn't that hunky dory.

JESSICA. I think Terry's views are more complex than that.

NATHAN. What about *your* views, Jessica?

JESSICA. My views are not the issue at this particular moment. You know and I know, that without the profits from Dusty lunch boxes there would be no Nova. No Frontline.

NATHAN. Not sure how much Frontline matters in the world we live in, Jessica. Unless they're planning a show about Karl Rove's use of bigotry and fear to control the minds of America's under educated electorate.

JESSICA. Nathan, I can't be angry all the time about everything.

NATHAN. But you have to be angry about THIS. This is a complete infringement of the First Amendment, Jessica.

JESSICA. I just don't view it that way. Look, I need to keep Dusty on the air and by doing that fund the three other programs I'm developing. If we lose the show, you know and I know, the whole network could…disappear….same way the Clinton surplus did.

NATHAN. Good luck with those shows. The way things are going, I think you'll be creating a sweet show about a little boy named Jesus whose Mom is so magical she didn't have to have sex to conceive him.

JESSICA. Terry had *specific* concerns about introducing the issue of homosexuality on a *specific* show.

NATHAN. But the episode was about a *family* not about homosexuality. And Lizzie's Dad's are married. It's not like they're living in "sin." /I don't even know what that means.

JESSICA. //I know they're married, Nathan.

NATHAN. Where do you stand on gay marriage, Jessica?

JESSICA. Come on.

NATHAN. I am not sure after that meeting where you stand on anything.

JESSICA. I'm pro everything you are, gay marriage, a women's right to choose, electric cars, never using a plastic bag or bottle again. *(beat)* Why am I doing this? I don't have to do this.

NATHAN. So, you're just going to sit back and let them cancel the episode?

JESSICA. Would you show it to your children, Nathan?

NATHAN. In a heartbeat.

JESSICA. Why?

NATHAN. Because the Goldberg-Jones are a fun and loving family and I want my children to see families different from their own.

JESSICA. We have to be sensitive to *all* our viewers. We owe them that.

NATHAN. Oh my God, it's like they got to you in the night and injected you with some "Doubting Christian" serum.

JESSICA. Can you try not to be ridiculous for one second. I think the whole episode was a misjudgment on my part.

NATHAN. No it wasn't.

JESSICA. If it hadn't been part of a national contest, if we hadn't gotten 15,000 video submissions. Maybe we stretched the meaning of the word diversity. The mission of the grant was to promote ethnic and religious diversity. Sexual diversity is a whole other kettle of fish.

NATHAN. Lizzie and her family are agnostic Buddhists. Not religiously diverse enough for you?

JESSICA. Believe me, I don't enjoy being in this position, Nathan.

NATHAN. But you are, Jessica, you are and now is the moment to fight, to scream from rooftops, to bully every PBS affiliate to air the show. What will happen if we do, will every child in America suddenly boycott their heterosexual parents in favor of Gay ones?

JESSICA. I'm trying to navigate something far bigger than myself, Nathan.

NATHAN. Well so is Lizzie Goldberg Jones. What are we telling her? We're telling her that it's not OK to be her.

JESSICA. I'll call her.

NATHAN. It's not a call.

JESSICA. You're right. I'll drive out and see her.

NATHAN. No…I will.

JESSICA. You don't have to, Nathan.

NATHAN. Yes I do. I do because I believe in her and her amazing parents and her pet pig and her little brother who does ballet. I believe in the way she conducts her life. And I want her to know that even though the President of PBS thinks she's a freak not worthy of air time – I think she's A-number-1 and I wish she was on my TV 24/7.

(a moment)

NATHAN. *(beat)* I just want to…to do good work, Jessica.

JESSICA. And you do. Sometimes, you have to compromise to keep doing good things. I am going to save Dusty. And by saving Dusty, I'm saving the 2 percent profit that we make on all the products he generates. And that money will save this network from complete and utter obsolescence. I just can't air Lizzie's episode and do it.

(a pause)

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.

SF PERUSALS