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SF PERUSALS

The Exit Interview

by William Missouri Downs

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH

FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-70090-3 Printed in U.S.A. #20383

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THE EXIT INTERVIEW was first produced as part of a Rolling World Premiere by Orlando Shakespeare Theater, Sand Diego REPertory Theatre, InterAct Theatre Company, Riverside Theatre, Actor's Theatre of Charlotte, and Salt Lake Acting Company as part of the National New Play Network's Continued Life program.

THE EXIT INTERVIEW was developed at the Orlando Shakespeare Theater's Harriett Lake Festival of New Plays. The Orlando Shakespeare Theater, in partnership with UCF, also staged its world premiere on September 29, 2012. It was directed by Patrick Flick. The set was designed by Robin Watts, the costumes were designed by Corinne Walsh, the lighting was designed by Mary Heffernan, and the sound was designed by Britt Sandusky. The stage manager was Melissa E. Koerner. The cast was as follows:

DICK FIG . . . . . Michael Marinaccio
EUNICE . . . . . Anitra Pritchard
ACTRESS #1 . . . . . Lauren Butler
ACTRESS #2 . . . . . Janine Klein
ACTOR #1 . . . . . Nathan Sebens
ACTOR #2 . . . . . Alexander Mrazek

CHARACTERS

DICK FIG - A young college professor with his leg in a cast - His PhD was on Bertolt Brecht

EUNICE - A pawn in the human resources department

ACTRESS #1

CHEERLEADER #1 - With pompoms

MARY - An oboe player - Dick's ex-girlfriend

SAMANTHA - A mother with a baby carriage

BUSINESSWOMAN #2 - An expert on underwear

DR. DOBSON - PhD in religious studies from Yale

ACTRESS #2

CHEERLEADER #2 - With pompoms

MRS. MEREDITH - Mary's mother

CHLOE - Eunice's young assistant

A MAKEUP LADY - She can make you look good

BETH - A mother with a baby carriage

BUSINESSWOMAN IN A BRA - An expert on bras

LADY NEWSCASTER - Foxy Fox Newscaster

ACTRESS #1 - Bertolt Brecht announcer

DR. KATTS - A distinguished scientist

ACTOR #1

MASKED GUNMAN - Who has killed ten people

ACTOR #1 - Bertolt Brecht announcer

A PRIEST - A celibate

BUSINESSMAN #1 - An expert on underwear

DR. HUBERT - President of the LDS Church

HANK STARLING - A professional baseball player

ACTOR #2

WALTER - Foxy Fox Newscaster

BUSINESSMAN #2 - An expert on underwear

DR. JAEGER - A distinguished scientist

ACTOR #2 - Bertolt Brecht announcer

Please Note: this play can be produced with a much larger cast.

SETTING

A theatre - The theatrical lights and bare walls of the stage are exposed. Scenes can be staged with as little as a few chairs and a desk – or, money allowing, a series of platforms. Whatever you do, never let the audience forget they're in a theatre.

Above the stage is a projection screen where scene titles appear. This projection screen represents god, and this play tilts away from realism.

The walls of the theatre, even those around the audience, are covered with banners and slogans:

Nature vs. Scripture
Create your purpose vs. Follow God's purpose
Human needs vs. God's needs
Humans are capable vs. Humans are imperfect
I did it! vs. God did it!
I did it! vs. The devil made me do it!
Many books vs. One book
Research vs. Revelation
The world happened vs. The world is designed
Observation vs. Theology
All people vs. Chosen people
Now vs. Later

Mixed in are:
Pepsi vs. Coke
Boxers vs. Briefs
Mac vs. PC
Honda vs. Toyota
Big Mac vs. Whopper

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play contains several advertisements in the second act. Some of these ads are projected from the screen above the stage; others are contained within the dialogue. If the theatre finds local businesses or organizations that would like to buy one of these advertisements, that section of the script may be rewritten to accommodate.

For more information about the play, including script updates, photos, production designs, interviews and notes, visit *The Exit Interview* website: www.uwyo.edu/thd2/downs/exit.htm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to: Patrick Flick, Jim Helsinger, Jason Loewith, Seth Rozin, Sam Woodhouse, Jody Hovland, Dan Shoemaker, Lou Anne Wright, Jojo Ruf, Michael Mainaccio, and Kelie Rae Rockey.

ACT ONE

(Raucous Rock and Roll. The screen above the stage doesn't just light up, it's a technical event as it oscillates to life. It reads:)

Warning Labels!

(Two effervescent college **CHEERLEADERS** *complete with pompoms enter cheering. They're followed by a ski-masked* **GUNMAN** *– He doesn't react; he stands unassumingly in the background pointing his gun in their direction, and listening to an iPod.)*

CHEERLEADER #1. *(bubbly)* Welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen!

CHEERLEADER #2. *(spirited)* Are you ready!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me an "O!" Come on give me an "O!"

(They prompt the audience to respond.)

AUDIENCE. O!

CHEERLEADER #2. Give me an "F!"

AUDIENCE. F!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me another "F!"

AUDIENCE. F!

CHEERLEADER #2. Give me an "E!"

AUDIENCE. E!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me an "N!"

AUDIENCE. N!

CHEERLEADER #2. Give me an "S!"

AUDIENCE. S!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me an "I!"

AUDIENCE. I!

CHEERLEADER #2. Give me a "V!"

AUDIENCE. V!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me an "E!"

AUDIENCE. E!

CHEERLEADER #1. What's that spell?

CHEERLEADER #2. Offensive! Offensive! This play is Offensive!

(They chest bump.)

BOTH. Yeaaaaaaaaa!

CHEERLEADER #1. Before we start. Please take a moment to off your cells and pagers!

CHEERLEADER #2. Cell phones totally off!

CHEERLEADER #1. Also, for those of you under the age of thirty–.

CHEERLEADER #2. Yeaaaaa under thirty!

CHEERLEADER #1. Please know that it's considered rude to text or twitter during a play.

CHEERLEADER #2. That's right! It's time to grow up and admit that no one gives a flying crap about what you're doing right now!

CHEERLEADER #1. The opinions expressed in this play do not necessarily reflect the views of ____*(fill in the name of your theatre)*!

CHEERLEADER #2. Let's hear it for _____*(fill in the name of your theatre)*!

BOTH. Yeaaaaa!

CHEERLEADER #1. This play is not suitable for viewers who find any of the following objectionable:

CHEERLEADER #2. Gun violence! Bang! Bang!

CHEERLEADER #1. Women in the workplace! Yea!

CHEERLEADER #2. Soccer moms discussing scientific method!

CHEERLEADER #1. Criticism of Fox News!

CHEERLEADER #2. Candid discussions on religion and politics!

CHEERLEADER #1. Priests defending the Holy Trinity using perplexing analogies!

CHEERLEADER #2. Plane crashes!

CHEERLEADER #1. *(upbeat)* With no survivors!

CHEERLEADER #2. School shootings!

CHEERLEADER #1. *(joyous)* With few survivors!

CHEERLEADER #2. Babies being run over by trains!

CHEERLEADER #1. Or Lutheranism!

CHEERLEADER #2. Or audience members who think realism is the only kinda theatre.

CHEERLEADER #1. Boo! Realism!

CHEERLEADER #2. This play contains Brechtian Alienation devices! Yeaaaaa! Bertolt Brecht–!

CHEERLEADER #1. Who's Bertolt Brecht?

CHEERLEADER #2. I have no idea! But I'll bet he'll make this play offensive!

BOTH. Yeaaaaaaaaa!

(They chest bump.)

CHEERLEADER #1. The management is not responsible for:

CHEERLEADER #2. Lost items!

CHEERLEADER #1. Misplaced tickets!

CHEERLEADER #2. Or any existential uncertainty or metaphysical isolation that may result!

CHEERLEADER #1. Let's hear it for existential uncertainty!

BOTH. *(prompting the audience to cheer)* Yeaaaaaaaaa!

CHEERLEADER #1. And metaphysical isolation!

BOTH. *(shaking their pompoms)* Yeaaaaaaaaa!

CHEERLEADER #2. This play contains over twenty characters!

CHEERLEADER #1. Which is a real problem because this theatre can't afford to pay twenty actors!*

CHEERLEADER #2. Yeaaaaaaaaa actors!

CHEERLEADER #1. So all the roles will be played by only six actors!

---

*Please note: These lines may be altered to match the size of your cast.

BOTH. So deal with it!

CHEERLEADER #1. Are we done?

CHEERLEADER #2. Totally!

CHEERLEADER #1. Ready? Hit it! *(prompting the audience to cheer)* Give me an "E!"

AUDIENCE. E!

CHEERLEADER #2. Explicit content!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me a "V!"

AUDIENCE. V!

CHEERLEADER #2. A whole bunch of violence!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me an "L!"

AUDIENCE. L!

CHEERLEADER #2. Lutheranism!

CHEERLEADER #1. Give me an "A!"

AUDIENCE. A!

CHEERLEADER #2. Adult themes!

CHEERLEADER #1. Put it all together and what's it spell?

BOTH. *(after the audience's failed attempt)* Yeeeeeeeea!

CHEERLEADER #1. Enjoy!

BOTH. *(shaking their pompoms)* Yeeeeeeeea!

(Pompom shaking exit. The **GUNMAN** *quietly follows them off.)*

(Transitions to new scenes are filled with rock and roll music and lights. The sign jumps to life. It reads:)

Last Day On The Job!

(Lights up on **EUNICE***, a dry, professional human resources administrator sitting at her desk. Her latest case is* **DICK***, a young professorish-type.* **DICK** *sports a large cast on his leg/foot and crutches.)*

EUNICE. And how are we today?

DICK. Fine.

EUNICE. Can you believe all this rain?

DICK. *(uncomfortable with small talk)* Sure is rainy.

EUNICE. I heard we might have more.

DICK. I suppose.

EUNICE. *(off his cast)* Skiing accident?

DICK. No.

EUNICE. Auto?

DICK. It's complicated.

EUNICE. I broke my big toe once. *(beat)* Skiing. Painful. Very painful.

DICK. If I may be honest–.

EUNICE. We're all about honesty here.

DICK. I'm kinda not into small talk.

EUNICE. Small what?

DICK. You know – How's the weather? What did I do to my foot? I don't mean to be rude. I'm being pink-slipped because of budget cuts and talking about the weather isn't going to make me feel better.

EUNICE. When one is transitioning-and-broadening-their-field-of-endeavor there can be pain and deep resentment. Just remember when God closes a door he opens a skylight.

DICK. Question–.

EUNICE. Yes, free psychological counseling is available through our secure website. Shall we begin? You are Dick Fig. Correct?

DICK. Richard.

EUNICE. It's says you're a "Dick".

DICK. I go by Richard.

EUNICE. *(writing on the form)* Question number one: besides petty politics what did you find least satisfying about your job?

DICK. Besides petty politics?

EUNICE. You were a non-tenured instructor at a university; they just assume there was petty politics.

DICK. Besides petty politics, I'd have to say – the exit interview.

EUNICE. *(un-amused)* You're being funny.

DICK. Just a little joke.

EUNICE. I've noticed that funny people are, more often than not, hiding their pain. Comedy comes from pain doesn't it?

DICK. True. That's why so many standup comedians come from Somalia.

(Beat. The stone-faced **EUNICE** *writes a note on the form.)*

EUNICE. Note: sense of humor.

DICK. What're you…?

EUNICE. There's a little side box here on the form and I'm noting that you have a sense of humor.

DICK. Why?

EUNICE. This way the higher ups get a sense for the personage. It helps them understand what transpired. For example if I noted "ruffled" they'd take that into account when they evaluate the results.

DICK. And what does "ruffled" mean?

EUNICE. Ruffled means that the interviewee more than likely has exaggerated complaints and feelings of inferiority.

DICK. And "sense of humor"?

EUNICE. Just a note.

DICK. But it must mean something–.

EUNICE. You're taking this far too seriously.

DICK. Just wondering…

EUNICE. Fine – a notation of "sense of humor" means that the interviewee is less than serious and that his answers should be given little or no weight. Perhaps even discarded if the attempts at humor continue.

DICK. My answers won't be taken seriously?

EUNICE. Let's not get ruffled.

*(***CHLOE** *rushes in.)*

(We hear the offstage **CHEERLEADERS**.*)*

OFFSTAGE CHEERLEADERS. *(This cheer repeats as needed.)* Hey, Hey, Hey! Be aggressive *(clap clap clap)* It's not over! *(clap)* Till it's over! *(clap clap)* It's not over! *(clap)* Till it's over!

EUNICE. Door!

*(***CHLOE** *closes the door. The* **CHEERLEADERS** *fade.)*

CHLOE. There's a student here–.

EUNICE. Appointment?

CHLOE. No, but he's really insistent.

EUNICE. You know the rules, no appointment means–.

CHLOE. He doesn't want to see *you*; says he has a meeting with Dick.

DICK. Richard.

CHLOE. You were supposed to've read his short story or something?

DICK. Oh. Forgot. Would you tell…ah…

CHLOE. Noah.

DICK. Would you tell Noah that I'm no longer employed by the university.

CHLOE. But this guy is really making me uncomfortable.

EUNICE. What did I say this morning? Be…

CHLOE. Aaaammmmmmm…decisive?

EUNICE. There're plenty of other students who'd kill to have this work/study job.

(Frustrated, **CHLOE** *opens the door.)*

OFFSTAGE CHEERLEADERS. *(This cheer repeats as needed.)* We're number one! Can't be number two! And we're going to beat the whoopsie out of you!

EUNICE. Door!

*(***CHLOE** *exits. The* **CHEERLEADERS** *fade.)*

---

*The Cheerleaders will have to be recorded to keep within only six actors.

EUNICE. Question number two: do you have any broad-spectrum complaints?

DICK. Broad-spectrum?

EUNICE. *(rapid fire)* For example, the university, for no apparent reason, moved me to this office. A former storage room that smells of chlorine. But there's little I can do 'cause there's no window. It's been two weeks and it still says "storage room" on the door and the lock is broken. To top it off, they put me across the hall from the Cheerleader Captain's office. If I hear him yell one more time, "Be authentic!" I might just never stop throwing up. If this were my exit interview, that'd be my broad-spectrum complaint.

DICK. I have no–.

*(***EUNICE** *checks a box on the form.)*

EUNICE. Three: now that you are transitioning-and-broadening-your-field-of-endeavor, who is your new employer?

DICK. None, I guess I'll be self-employed.

EUNICE. *(filling out the form)* Unemployed.

DICK. No, self–. I've written a book. Coming out next month. Confidentially–.

EUNICE. Everything here is confidential.

DICK. I just happened to have a friend of a friend who works at *The New York Times*. He thinks they're going to review it. My agent's assistant – who's probably wildly overestimating – says that it's entirely possible that I'll be in *The Times* top ten list within a matter of months.

EUNICE. Congratulations. I make it a habit to read every book on *The Times* top ten list.

DICK. Really. Every book.

EUNICE. Well, most…several…three–. What's yours about?

DICK. It's about the chaos of the human soul and the emptiness of the Copernican universe.

EUNICE. *(counterfeit)* That has bestseller written all over it.

DICK. Technically it's not about chaos or emptiness. It's more about Bertolt Brecht and how there's no divine presence in the universe, and that humans have little or no significant meaning in the vast cosmos.

EUNICE. Bertolt who?

DICK. *(He can't help but sound PhD-ish.)* Brecht – an influential playwright, director. Brecht felt the objective discernment that autonomous artworks presuppose in the viewer was inadequate while his didactic style reinforced his communist perspective. It's loosely based on my PhD thesis. It's called *No Religion, No Politics*.

EUNICE. I don't get it.

DICK. Those are the two things you're not allowed to talk about in polite society anymore. The title came from my girlfriend–. I should say, ex-girlfriend. When we used to go to her mother's – just before she'd open the door – Mary would squeeze my hand and say, "No religion, no politics." Two subjects we *should* be talking about but don't because it's considered impolite – even politically incorrect. So instead we engage in trivial small talk about things like the weather. Today she'd say, "No religion, no politics, no global warming–."

(During this next section **EUNICE** *professionally checks off the answers on the form.)*

EUNICE. *(cold)* There's that sense of humor again. *(She notes it.)* Next section. Rapid fire. "Yes." "No." Don't think, don't try to be funny, just answer. Ready. Go. Do you have any parking tickets?

DICK. No. Wait. No. Yes…no.

EUNICE. Do you have any overdue library books?

DICK. No.

EUNICE. Would you recommend this university to a friend?

DICK. No–. I mean, yes.

EUNICE. If you were a snowflake would you look forward to melting?

DICK. …ah–?

EUNICE. You're thinking.

DICK. What kind of–?

EUNICE. No think-think.

DICK. Maybe?

EUNICE. That's not a box on the form.

DICK. Okay, yes, no, yes–.

EUNICE. Were you pleased with the parking situation on campus?

DICK. That's a loaded question.

EUNICE. Excuse me?

DICK. That's known as a loaded question. All the others were simple "Yes" or "No" but this one has the word "pleased" located within it. "Were you *pleased* with the parking situation…"

(Beat – **EUNICE** *studies him.)*

EUNICE. We're feeling hostility aren't we.

DICK. No. It's just that the administration obviously wants a positive response. It's known as a loaded question…an unloaded would be, "What do you think of the parking situation?" See, that's unloaded.

(Beat. **EUNICE** *blankly stares at him. He gives up.)*

DICK. Yes, I was pleased with the parking.

EUNICE. If your bride said, "But my first love is the oboe," would you still marry?

DICK. Wait–.

EUNICE. I don't write the questions.

DICK. Obviously they've come up with some sort of peculiar psychological–. What do they hope to prove by asking if I'd marry an oboe player–?

EUNICE. You're reading into the question. It doesn't say she *is* an oboe player. It says she has deep affections for the oboe. More than she has for you.

DICK. No, if a woman loved her oboe more than me I wouldn't–.

EUNICE. We're positive?

DICK. Yes.

EUNICE. I'm not supposed to say this but…no one who has ever answered "no" to that question has ever been re–hired–. Why don't we come back to it.

DICK. No–. If a woman told me that she loved her oboe more than me I wouldn't get married. Final answer!

*(***CHLOE** *enters with the student's short story. As she opens and closes the door the* **CHEERLEADERS** *fade in and out.)*

OFFSTAGE CHEERLEADERS. *(This cheer repeats as needed.)* Trip'm, Kick'm, Smack'm in the head! Don't let up till you know they're–good–n–dead!

CHLOE. Problem–!

EUNICE. Door.

CHLOE. This student is rather insistent–!

EUNICE. Door!

*(***CHLOE** *closes the door.)*

CHLOE. Couldn't Dick just–.

DICK. Sure.

EUNICE. No. Classes are over.

CHLOE. But–.

DICK. It's really okay.

EUNICE. A writer needs to read great writing – to be inspired. But student writing – year in and year out – must be like death by a thousand cuts! Am I right?

DICK. In the ballpark.

CHLOE. You want me to tell him that?

EUNICE. Word for word.

(Frustrated, **CHLOE** *exits.)*

OFFSTAGE CHEERLEADERS. Strawberry shortcake, banana split – We think your team plays like shi-shake it to the left, shake it to the right, sit down, stand up, Fight, fight, fight!!

(The door closes and the **CHEERLEADERS** *fade.)*

DICK. Question–.

EUNICE. You're not allowed to ask questions until page six–.

DICK. Just one–.

EUNICE. But you're not–.

DICK. Hold on! *(beat)* How did you know my ex-girlfriend played the oboe?

(Rock and roll music and lights. The screen throbs to life. It reads:)

A Train Ran Over My Baby!

(A makeup room.)

(Beside **MARY** *are a baby carriage and an oboe case. Her arm is in a sling.* **WALTER**, *a hurried handsome newscaster, enters. During this scene he is constantly texting.)*

WALTER. *(hurried)* Wow, you look unremarkable, I mean after…

MARY. Thank you–.

WALTER. And the train never touched your…

MARY. A small scratch on his–.

WALTER. But your arm.

MARY. Oh. Unrelated.

WALTER. Ever done T.V. before?

MARY. First–.

WALTER. Few tips: stay calm, connect with me not the camera, don't slouch, and keep your responses to eight seconds or less.

(The **MAKEUP LADY** *enters. During the following she professionally touches up* **WALTER***'s makeup and hair. She is constantly texting.)*

WALTER. Cut to the chase – tell me a story.

MARY. Well…I was sorta preoccupied–.

WALTER. Aren't we all.

MARY. Was rushing up to the metro station platform–.

WALTER. And before you knew it…

MARY. Was trying to hold his bottle in my right hand and my oboe in my left–.

WALTER. When suddenly…

MARY. The baby carriage just started rolling and–.

WALTER. Then all hell broke lose.

MARY. Didn't know that the wheel-lock was–.

WALTER. Wow, great story, but let's not talk about it on air. We've been looping the metro station security video from the incident for two days. I think our viewers'll find it more entertaining if you talk about *why* this happened.

MARY. The lock was broken and my oboe–.

WALTER. No, I mean the bigger picture.

MARY. I had too many things in my hands and then the baby carriage started rolling and–.

WALTER. You suddenly you knew that God had a purpose for your son. Right?

MARY. I–.

WALTER. Few years ago, remember that Airbus that went down in Queens, or Brooklyn?

MARY. I guess–.

WALTER. Got an exclusive one-on-one with a man who missed the plane–. Ran up just as they were closing the door. Missed an all important job interview that would've changed his life. Was filling out a complaint form at the service desk when the news came that the flight, *his* flight, had gone in. Smoldering wreckage, *total carnage* – but great video – he said that he knew in his heart that he had been spared because God had a purpose for him.

MARY. So, you want me to–.

WALTER. You don't have to know what that purpose is, that'd be presumptive on your part.

MARY. But what if I don't–.

WALTER. You don't thank God for saving your son?

MARY. Sure–.

WALTER. Let me tell you something about this medium. War is better than peace, violent protests better than nonviolent sit-ins, louder better than soft, emotion better than reason, L. Ron Hubbard better than Buddhists.

MARY. So you want me to–.

WALTER. Tell'em what you really think.

MARY. Which is–?

WALTER. God has a purpose for your son. Why else did he allow him to live?

MARY. I just thought it would be kinda cool to be on T.V.–.

WALTER. You thought it would be cool… *(chuckling with the* **MAKEUP LADY***)* She thought it would be cool. *(He pulls himself together.)* I'll introduce you and you'll say…

MARY. But what about all those baby carriages that fall in front of commuter trains and the baby *is* killed. What's God's purpose–?

WALTER. We'd never put that on air. That's what newspapers are for.

(The **MAKEUP LADY** *holds a mirror in front of* **WALTER.***)*

Good. Now let's help her a little. Maybe some rings around the eyes.

*(***WALTER** *pulls the tissue from his shirt collar.)*

Wanta know the truth? That guy, the one I interviewed, the one who missed the plane – my brother.

MARY. You're kidding.

WALTER. Three seconds late – slammed the door in his face.

MARY. Wow. And he…?

WALTER. Died six months later – pancreatic cancer.

MARY. So…God's purpose for your brother was–.

WALTER. Apparently so.

MARY. But–.

WALTER. Who am I to question the higher ups.

MARY. By "higher ups" you mean–? *(She indicates the heavens.)*

WALTER. Yep, the management of *Fox News.*

*(***WALTER** *takes* **MARY***'s hand.)*

(taking her into his confidence) Look, just between us, I know why my brother died.

MARY. You do?

WALTER. We were twins. Inseparable. By taking my brother, God let me know that he wanted me to be strong – to be my own man. Now you gotta understand why God let this little bundle of joy survive. What's its name?

MARY. Ben.

WALTER. He could've *(snaps his fingers)* with a blink…so why not?

MARY. I…

WALTER. You can do it.

MARY. *(guessing)* He…wanted me to go on TV and warn mothers about defective Chinese made baby carriages–?

WALTER. Nope. News Corp is trying to get a new cable link set up in Shanghai so we can't mention China for three weeks.

*(***WALTER** *flips out his cell and hits auto dial.)*

(into cell phone) It's me. I think we should do the miracle baby story as a tape. We may want to edit this one… cause I'm detecting something…not much, but there is just a modicum of…that's right. Doubt…what? … Why didn't you tell me? *(hangs up)* Pleasure, gotta run. There's a gunman over at the campus. We're going to break in live. If you can stay around we'll try to tape you during a network break. *(to the* **MAKEUP LADY***)* Better give me a once-over. Neck? I'm sure they'll want to go national.

(The **MAKEUP LADY** *checks him.)*

WALTER. Showtime.

*(***WALTER** *exits.* **MARY** *sits dumbfounded.)*

MAKEUP LADY. You okay?

MARY. *(concerned)* My ex-boyfriend teaches at the College. Today was his last day.

MAKEUP LADY. Wow. Think he's there now? You should text him.

MARY. He doesn't believe in cell phones.

MAKEUP LADY. No cell, wow. What is he, like, really really old?

(Rock and roll music and lights. The sign jerks to life. It reads:)

The Secret of the Secret

(And we are back in the exit interview.)

EUNICE. I'm sorry that your ex-girlfriend played the oboe – that must've been very painful for you.

DICK. When you're in love you put up with a lot–.

EUNICE. You know what you need? *The Secret.*

DICK. What secret?

EUNICE. You're a writer and you haven't read *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne? – Was on *The New York Times* top ten list. And it was featured on Oprah – twice. It's great. You can master your destiny by just thinking–.

DICK. Please don't tell me that you believe–.

EUNICE. *The Secret?* It cured my cancer.

DICK. …Cancer?

EUNICE. Terminal lung cancer. Been cancer free for two years.

DICK. C'mon, they did something else…radiation–?

EUNICE. I prayed.

DICK. And your cancer…completely and totally–.

EUNICE. Had a spot on my lung and when I went in for further tests–.

DICK. Wait, you make it sound like you had full blown malignancy. You had–.

EUNICE. Cancer and I used *The Secret*'s laws of attraction to–.

DICK. You're doing it! Exactly what my book is about. You don't know if the spot was cancerous. It may have been a normal biological occurrence–.

EUNICE. I'm cured. Two years!

DICK. You're telling me with the help of a book you aligned the forces of the universe–.

EUNICE. It wasn't that easy. I had to make a collage.

DICK. A what?

EUNICE. You cut out of magazines the type of life you want, and then you paste it to poster board, although I found that foam board works better, and then you look at it each day and imagine yourself living that life.

DICK. …I don't follow.

EUNICE. I have mine right here.

*(***EUNICE** *takes out a large collage on which she has pasted her hopes and dreams. During the following she points at the various dreams she has cut out of magazines.)*

EUNICE. Here is the chlorine–free office I'll have some day. Here is my future Porsche. Here is where I'll travel once I become fluent in French and Italian. And this little blob down here represents the weight I'm going to lose, after which I will write a bestselling memoir, which is represented by this book right here. It's going to be about forgiveness.

DICK. *(not able to get his head around this)* You…you think you can make a collage, and think about it, and–.

EUNICE. I won an award for this collage. I was even interviewed on Fox News–.

(a far off gunshot)

DICK. What the hell…

EUNICE. *(doubting)* Thunder?

DICK. Don't think so.

EUNICE. Backfire?

DICK. Doubt it.

(another gunshot)

EUNICE. That's it. Car. Trust me. Happens all the time. The Cheerleader Captain has a crappy car. Back to work, next question. *(reading)* If you were going to be trapped on a desert island and you could take only one book. What book would you take?

DICK. Ah…

EUNICE. *(hopeful)* Yes?

DICK. …I'd take a book on how to survive on a desert island.

(Loud Rock and Roll, the lights shift. The sign springs to life. It reads:)

No Religion, No Politics

*(***MARY** *walks into a special light – this time her arm is not in a sling, nor does she have the baby carriage.)*

MARY. You knew it was a gunshot. You weren't being honest with yourself, but you knew it.

DICK. Yes. I knew it.

MARY. And what were you doing, talking about a spot on her lung. People want to believe what they believe–.

DICK. At least I can–.

MARY. That's why we failed.

DICK. Because I–?

MARY. No, because you can't keep your mouth shut.

DICK. I admit it; it wasn't my finest hour–.

(In this reality, **DICK** *pops off his foot cast and joins* **MARY.***)*

MARY. My poor mother. All she wanted–.

DICK. I was young–.

MARY. It was eighteen months ago!

(A doorbell. Lights up on **MRS. MEREDITH**, *Mary's mother – if anyone owns an Emily Post Etiquette book it's her. She enters wearing an apron and carrying a fancy tea set.)*

MARY. Look at her, she even polished grandma's silver.

DICK. Everything would've gone fine if you hadn't given me the manuscript.

MARY. Of course it's my fault.

(a doorbell)

MRS. MEREDITH. Coming!

*(***MARY** *and* **DICK** *hold hands, and join the scene. It is eighteen months earlier.)*

*(***MRS. MEREDITH** *runs out taking off her apron.)*

MARY. Relax. *(squeezing his hand)* She's a little set in her ways so be nice–. Oh, I forgot. They sent back the manuscript and your editor called. She wants a few changes.

(She takes his book manuscript from her purse. **DICK** *inspects it.)*

DICK. Changes. What changes?

MARY. Nothing major, she just wants you to cut out the part about small talk.

DICK. That's half the book.

MARY. Don't over react.

DICK. *(looking at the manuscript)* It's all red marks.

(Doorbell. **MRS. MEREDITH** *re-enters primping.)*

MARY. It's Thanksgiving – promise – no religion, no politics.

*(***MRS. MEREDITH** *walks up and hugs her daughter.)*

MRS. MEREDITH. My sweet little–. This must be Mr. Dick.

DICK. Richard Fig. Hello, Mrs. Meredith.

MRS. MEREDITH. Call me "Mom". *(to* **MARY***)* Am I right? *(to* **DICK***)* Come. Sit. Mary has said so many wonderful–. Can I get you something? Coffee?

MARY. Richard doesn't drink coffee, Mom.

MRS. MEREDITH. Probably best – stains your teeth and you have such nice—. How about a glass of milk?

MARY. He doesn't drink milk either. The pasteurization process overstresses the pancreas.

MRS. MEREDITH. I don't want you to have an overstressed pancreas.

MARY. He'd love a little carrot juice.

MRS. MEREDITH. Ah…I don't think we–.

MARY. Got carrots?

MRS. MEREDITH. I guess–.

MARY. Still got that old juicer?

MRS. MEREDITH. Haven't used it in–.

MARY. Then you got carrot juice. Right back. You two… You know…

*(***MARY** *exits. Awkward pause.)*

MRS. MEREDITH. Can you believe all this rain?

DICK. Excuse me?

MRS. MEREDITH. We're having a lot of rain.

DICK. …Yes.

MRS. MEREDITH. I heard we might have more. Rain is… *(beat)* …good.

DICK. Yes.

MRS. MEREDITH. Oh! And Merry Christmas.

DICK. …Thanks.

MRS. MEREDITH. What're you doing for Christmas?

DICK. …Ah, nothing…

MRS. MEREDITH. Heard it might rain this Christmas season. What've you heard?

DICK. Mrs. Meredith–.

MRS. MEREDITH. Mom.

DICK. Mom…I think it's important to let you know that–.

MRS. MEREDITH. Mary told me. You detest idle chat. I disagree. I find it a useful talent. I mean to be able to speak and not really say anything is an art. Am I right?

DICK. …No.

MRS. MEREDITH. *(not listening)* I even read a book on the subject. *Grace and Diplomacy – The Art of Small Talk.*

DICK. …Mrs. Meredith–.

MRS. MEREDITH. Mom.

DICK. About Christmas–.

MRS. MEREDITH. I agree, we're going to have a rainy Christmas.–.

DICK. No. …What I wanted to say is that I don't celebrate Christmas

MRS. MEREDITH. Pardon?

DICK. I'm not Christian.

MRS. MEREDITH. *(concerned)* …Mary failed to inform me… Happy Hanukah.

DICK. I'm not Jewish either.

MRS. MEREDITH. I don't suppose "Happy Kwanzaa" is called for?

DICK. I'm not anything.

MRS. MEREDITH. Oh. You have my condolences.

DICK. Truth is, I'm in the theatre.

MRS. MEREDITH. Yes, Mary mentioned you recently finished your PhD on Berky?

DICK. Brecht.

MRS. MEREDITH. *(She has no idea who he is.)* Brecht, right.

DICK. Brecht felt the objective discernment that autonomous artworks presuppose–. *(He stops and reconsiders.)* What I'm trying to say is that he eliminated the vicarious experience from the theatre by using various staging techniques to remind the audience that they were in a theatre.

MRS. MEREDITH. *(lost)* Okay.

DICK. He felt that theatre shouldn't be magical, i.e., it shouldn't just help us escape reality, but make us think. He did this sometimes by stopping a play in the middle and putting on a completely different play, or by having the characters break in to song for no reason.

MRS. MEREDITH. *(pouring tea)* That's so interesting…so, do you think we'll have more rain?

DICK. Look, Mrs. Meredith, Mom, I just want you to know that I don't celebrate Christmas because when Christians took power at the end of the Roman Empire they cancelled the theatre for nearly four hundred years.

MRS. MEREDITH. Did they now.

DICK. I must also tell you that we are not that into Thanksgiving.

MRS. MEREDITH. We?

DICK. Mary and I.

MRS. MEREDITH. Because…

DICK. We don't think pilgrims are anything to celebrate. Before they came to America they were called Puritans in England. It was the Puritans who tore Shakespeare's Globe to the ground.

MRS. MEREDITH. Is there anything you *do* celebrate?

DICK. The Winter Solstice.

MRS. MEREDITH. *(still trying to be nice)* And how do we celebrate – Human sacrifice?

DICK. We light candles, read poems to each other, and then Mary plays her oboe.

MRS. MEREDITH. I don't mean to be apathetic but you do know that my daughter was raised Presbyterian.

(A loud whine – it's the old juicer. They wait. It stops.)

And Presbyterians are "into" Thanksgiving, not to mention the birthday of our Lord and Savior.

(A louder whine, higher pitched this time – It's really straining. They wait. It scrapes to a stop.)

And not so much into carrot juice.

DICK. My intention is not to offend.

MRS. MEREDITH. Of course not.

DICK. I just thought it would be best to talk about this right away rather than years from now after we've had children.

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