Acting Edition

Angry Fags

by R.T. Robinson

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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ANGRY FAGS was originally produced by 7 Stages (Heidi S. Howard, Artistic Director) in Atlanta, Georgia on February 23, 2013. The production was directed by Justin Anderson, with set design by Nadia Morgan, costume design by DeeDee Chmielewski, sound and lighting design by Kevin Frazier, video design by Casey Williams, and properties by Melissa DuBois. The assistant stage manager was Holly Bennett and the stage manager was Kat Tierney. The cast was as follows:

BENNETT . . . . . Jacob York
COOPER . . . . . Johnny Drago
HAINES . . . . . Melissa Carter
KIMBERLY . . . . . Suehyla El-Attar
ADAM . . . . . John Benzinger
MUSGROVE . . . . . Marcie Millard
PRESTON . . . . . Michael Henry Harris

A substantially revised version of the work faced its first audience, again at 7 Stages (Heidi S. Howard, Artistic Director) in Atlanta, Georgia as part of the Homebrew Series in November 2017. It was directed by Topher Payne. The stage manager was Esther Lang Reeves. The cast was as follows:

BENNETT . . . . . Jacob York
COOPER . . . . . Pat Young
HAINES . . . . . Stacy Melich
KIMBERLY . . . . . Emily Sams Brown
ADAM . . . . . Daniel Carter Brown
MUSGROVE . . . . . Tiffany Porter
PRESTON . . . . . Mary Shaw

CHARACTERS

BENNETT RIGGS – Thirties. Speechwriter for a state senator. Cautiously optimistic, affable. Conflicted.

COOPER HARLOW – Thirties. Bennett's roommate. Caustic, clever, unpredictable. A fancy badass.

SENATOR ALLISON HAINES – Forties. A former activist, now the only out lesbian in the Georgia State Senate. Pragmatic, thoughtful, flawed. A dedicated public servant now wondering what happens when she's no longer celebrated by the public.

KIMBERLY PHILLIPS – Thirties. The senator's office manager, a married mother of two. Good-humored, quick, overworked. Probably really enjoyed her early twenties.

ADAM LOWELL – Thirties. The senator's chief of staff. Undeniably appealing and charmingly square. Likely owns a lot of books about Bobby Kennedy.

PEGGY MUSGROVE – Forties. The senator's opponent. Genuine, witty, nimble. A black female Republican, with all the conflicts and potential advantages that implies. She's found a way to weaponize being othered.

DEIRDRE PRESTON – Fifties. A local broadcasting legend. Has the shrewd and discerning eye of a brilliant woman who believes her best days are still ahead of her.

SETTING

Atlanta

TIME

After Trump

A NOTE ON THE MEDIA WALL

Angry Fags incorporates the use of scripted video projections. When stage directions indicate a character is "on screen," these are intended to be pre-recorded segments. Although if you're inspired to find a way to innovate and do the media wall live, perhaps broadcasting in real time from another room, the author admires your ambition and wishes you well in your endeavor.

This play is dedicated to

Johnny Drago
and
Suehyla El-Attar

For their endless support of my storytelling,
and for making it better.

ACT ONE

Scene One

*(***COOPER** *and* **BENNETT** *are on a hillside. A picnic basket is in front of them. They are both drinking red wine from plastic cups. A small cheese and cracker plate between them.* **BENNETT** *is eating pistachios.)*

COOPER. Time check.

BENNETT. It's five twenty-two.

COOPER. That a new watch?

BENNETT. Why yes it is.

COOPER. Snazzy.

BENNETT. Isn't it?

COOPER. Your old one die?

BENNETT. No.

COOPER. You got it wet and it died. You wore it in the bathtub, didn't you?

BENNETT. No. And that is an oddly specific accusation.

COOPER. No it's not. There's a pattern of behavior, Bennett. You spilled coffee on your laptop. Some sort of red sauce on that shirt you borrowed from me for your class reunion –

BENNETT. Never gonna live that down.

COOPER. And I'm sure there have been other sloshes and spills no one witnessed. But you know they happened. You have trouble with liquids. Be careful with that wine.

BENNETT. My old watch did not die. I left it at Sammy's. And after everything, I just thought there'd be a lot of unnecessary stress if I went back for it.

COOPER. Ah.

BENNETT. So I got a snazzy new watch.

COOPER. Could've had it mailed to you.

BENNETT. Nobody mails things anymore.

COOPER. Sure they do.

BENNETT. When's the last time you put something in the mail?

COOPER. Couple days ago. Netflix.

BENNETT. Why don't you just stream movies like a normal human?

COOPER. Netflix in the mailbox gives me something to look forward to. I'm certainly not expecting any letters. People used to write letters. Another lost art.

BENNETT. Which door is it?

COOPER. The one on the left. As I said before.

(He sips.)

I should write more letters.

BENNETT. I'd love to get a letter. Write me a letter, Cooper.

COOPER. We live in the same house. What would I say in a letter?

BENNETT. Next time you have a date –

COOPER. I don't date.

BENNETT. But the next time you *do*, don't tell me about it. Write it all down, slide it under my door. Then I'll read it and we'll talk about it.

COOPER. If I go to the trouble of writing you a letter, you're writing me back.

BENNETT. So we'll have the things we talk about, and the things we only write letters about?

COOPER. This sounds unnecessarily complex.

BENNETT. Pistachio?

COOPER. No. I do not support your newfound interest in pistachios. Sitting there with a pile of abandoned nut casings, stuffing your cheeks. You look like a chipmunk.

BENNETT. It's really heartbreaking that you're my best friend.

(They drink for a moment.)

Oh, shit, is that –

(He picks up binoculars and stands.)

COOPER. No, it's not. Sit down. You're jumpy.

BENNETT. Yeah, well. You're really going through that wine.

COOPER. I'm nervous, a little. Not bad nervous, more –

BENNETT. Anticipation?

COOPER. I think so. Like first date nervous.

BENNETT. Speaking of which, you talk to that volunteer from the office yet? David, right?

COOPER. Still avoiding him, but totally fantasizing. A Log Cabin Republican. That is a very complicated worldview, I don't know if I can take that on.

BENNETT. Your worldview is equally complex.

COOPER. To the contrary. My worldview is shockingly streamlined.

BENNETT. Sleeping with someone named David just sounds stable, solid. Biblical. I've slept with two Davids. Maybe three. Good people. You remember that line from *Steel Magnolias* about all gay men being named Mark, Rick, or Steve?

COOPER. Love that movie.

BENNETT. Me too. I don't think it's true anymore. Now they're all David, Ryan, or Chris.

COOPER. I know like eight Travises.

BENNETT. David, Ryan, or Travis. My aunt did *Steel Magnolias* at her community theater, few years back. The play's different. Whole thing's in the beauty shop. No hospital scenes, no bleeding armadillo groom's cake. I mean, they talk about it, but you never see it.

COOPER. Well that's not the same goddamn thing. That's why I don't go to plays. I always like the movie better.

BENNETT. Nothing replaces the live experience. It's one thing to see it on a screen, but having those emotions, that sense of immediacy, right there in the same room, it's amazing. The tiniest little action – smoking. When someone smokes in a movie, you see it. When someone smokes in a play, you *smell* it.

COOPER. But I don't like the smell of smoke.

BENNETT. Whether you enjoy it or not isn't the damn point. It's part of the world. You just have to deal with it. Everything's better live, because you can't get away from it. Total immersion.

COOPER. That's not better. That requires more involvement than I wanna sign up for. I saw *Hair* at some theater. Those fucking hippies came right up to my seat and sang in my face. This did not make it more *real* for me, because if someone did that in the *real* world, I would take my car keys and I would attack them.

BENNETT. I would enjoy seeing that.

COOPER. You try the cheese?

BENNETT. Nope. I'm suspicious. What's its name again?

COOPER. Lorraine.

BENNETT. That sounds made-up.

COOPER. Everything, at some point, was made up. Eat the goddamn cheese.

*(***BENNETT** *tries a delicate nibble, then makes an elaborate display of revulsion.)*

BENNETT. Muueehh. Mueeeeh. That's nasty. It tastes like Swiss.

COOPER. Oh, just stop it.

BENNETT. It tastes like sadness.

COOPER. Eat your fucking pistachios.

*(***BENNETT** *is satisfied. He returns to his pistachios.* **COOPER** *eats a hunk of cheese, defiantly, as a testament to its quality.)*

Mmmmm. Oh, I've got one. Action movies. You can't do action on stage.

BENNETT. Maybe not, but a car chase would be more exciting in person.

COOPER. This is true. Very exciting. Violence, mayhem, explosions.

BENNETT. But you don't like the smell of smoke.

COOPER. That's why you observe from a safe distance.

(A little laugh, realizing.)

You know who likes the smell of smoke?

BENNETT. Yes I do.

COOPER. Never see pictures of him smoking in public. Everybody's got their little secrets. Laura Bush smoked.

BENNETT. So did Obama.

COOPER. But nobody saw it. Sign of weakness.

BENNETT. That's so stupid. You can't just have a cigarette anymore without it *meaning* something.

COOPER. You miss it?

BENNETT. Every fucking day. It used to punctuate moments, you know? After a meal, after sex, the drive home from work. Those moments bleed together now. My life is a run-on sentence.

COOPER. Filthy habit.

BENNETT. To be certain.

COOPER. You smell better.

BENNETT. Thank you.

COOPER. How long now?

BENNETT. Forty-two days. I had my last one outside the police station the night everything went to hell.

COOPER. And you haven't cheated? Haven't snuck out for one with anybody from the office?

BENNETT. We're not talking about people from my office right now.

COOPER. That wasn't intentional.

BENNETT. You promised.

COOPER. I slipped.

BENNETT. Well, don't slip. Honor your promises.

(They snack in silence.)

BENNETT. I did think it'd be easier by now.

COOPER. What?

BENNETT. Quitting smoking.

COOPER. You can only change behavior. Not inclinations.

BENNETT. Shit, that's him!

COOPER. So it is.

*(***COOPER** *reaches into the picnic basket and takes out an inexpensive cell phone. They stand.)*

BENNETT. Wait.

COOPER. For what?

BENNETT. Let him get one good drag.

COOPER. You're a true humanitarian.

(They watch.)

All those years of him going on TV, saying *we're* gonna burn.

BENNETT. Cooper. Do it. Now.

*(***COOPER** *presses a button. They wait. Nothing happens.)*

COOPER. Shit.

(He frantically presses the button.)

BENNETT. Did you do it right?

COOPER. How would I know? I got the instructions online, you never know if that's reliable. They don't do user reviews for this sort of –

(An explosion. Deafening sound and a brilliant flash of light. **COOPER** *and* **BENNETT** *are knocked backward, their faces now illuminated by the orange glow of unseen flames.)*

BENNETT. Jesus Christ.

COOPER. Wow. You were right, that was so much better than a movie.

(They watch, intrigued and horrified, as lights fade.)