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This photo from the 1945 Broadway production of Lillian Smith’s Strange Fruit was published in the Dec. 24, 1945, issue of LIFE magazine, with the caption: “At Salamander’s Cafe, a Negro hangout, Big Henry, the Deens’ houseboy (Earl Jones, center) swaggers in and drunkenly boasts that Tracy Deen has just given him $100 to marry Nonnie Anderson because Tracy has got her into trouble. Sitting inconspicuously in a corner, Nonnie’s brother Ed (George B. Oliver, in white suit) overhears the boast and, in a blind rage at hearing his sister slandered, punches Big Henry in the jaw. Then, with murder in his heart, Ed rushes out to look for Tracy Deen.” Read more of the story and see additional pictures in LIFE at http://tinyurl.com/zxrp42v. Discover the circuitous route the play took back to the stage 70 years later in the story that begins on Page 8. Rights to cover photo purchased by Piedmont College through Getty Images. (Photo by Gjon Mili/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)
often talk with emerging artists who dream of being famous. I ask them, “Why do you want to be famous? Do you want to be famous for the amazing work you do – or do you just want to be a celebrity?”

The benefits of being a celebrity are obvious: invitations to the great parties, access to hard-to-get tickets, and a heftier paycheck that comes with bringing name recognition to a project. And just about anyone – talented or not – can become famous by simply being outrageous or posting a notorious video.

But the benefits of being a theatre artist who is famous for his or her work are even better. These are the working artists – whether a performer, director, producer, designer, stage manager, technician, development officer or box office treasurer – who become celebrities as a result of the quality of their performance on the job. They may be famous for their work in their own city – or they may be known worldwide.

So how does a working theatre artist become famous? I often refer to advice that Dave Clemmons, casting agent and auditions coach, gave in a masterclass I attended. He was asked, “What do I need to do to get you to notice me?” His response: “Be good.”

That simple answer, I believe, is the key. Assess your skills and polish them to a high sheen. Determine your attributes that need development and strengthen them. Challenge yourself within your field. Be good. Fame – if it is to be yours – will come from your good work.

Before teaching, I had the honor of working briefly with actors Chita Rivera and Sir Ian McKellen. Celebrities to be sure, but also hard-working artists who strive to be good. I also had the opportunity to work with a number of actors, dance captains, stage managers and stage hands whose names you likely wouldn’t know. From first-class tours to one-nighters, they gave their best efforts in each performance. While their names may never be trending, they are celebrities in my book.

So aim for the stars! But fuel your trajectory with craft and hard work. That is how you make your star the brightest in whatever galaxy you choose.

400 Words from H. Duke Guthrie, Professor, Valdosta State University and Managing Director, Peach State Summer Theatre

Celebrity vs. Working Theatre Artist: What Is Your Goal?

I

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From the SETC President

Applying new and relevant perspectives to history or traditions can often provide significant and poignant ways of looking at our cultural landscape. This issue of Southern Theatre highlights theatre artists and institutions that dared to go beyond the traditional or the expected to reach audiences in ways that are impactful.

One of these is Lillian Smith, whose controversial play about race relations, Strange Fruit, made its Broadway debut in 1945 and then was mostly forgotten. Jeremy Douylliez and David Price trace the story of how a New York director discovered an original version of the play and brought it back to a university stage in Georgia at a time when the play’s message of social justice is especially relevant.

At most universities, homecoming is a time when throngs of alumni and students pack stadiums to cheer on the football team. At the University of Montevallo in Alabama, the highlight of homecoming is also a game – but the game is played on stage, not on a field. Jen Nelson Lane shares the story of Montevallo’s annual homecoming competition to produce … the best musical theatre show.

We also feature the winning play in SETC’s annual Charles M. Getchell Award competition in this issue. Beginning on Page 25, you’ll find the first act of the 2016 winner, Another Man’s Treasure, by Ben Gierhart, which focuses on a garbage man who discovers something unexpected in other people’s trash. (Due to the length of the play, the second act is published online on the SETC website.) Darren Michael also interviews Gierhart about his work as a playwright and the development of Another Man’s Treasure, his first full-length play.

Looking for plays for your next season? In our “Hot off the Press” column, Megan Monaghan Rivas suggests looking at adaptations from literature and film to help round out your season. And in our “400 Words” column, Duke Guthrie provides advice for artists on the difference between being a celebrity and being a working theatre artist who is famous for good work.

Finally, in our book column, “Words, Words, Words,” Edward Journey reviews Nick Newlin’s The 30-Minute Shakespeare Anthology, which provides classical monologues for students as well as resources for teachers.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Southern Theatre, which shines a light on how we can use theatre to examine our history and our traditions through an au courant lens.

Tiza Garland, SETC President

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Adaptations of Books and Films

by Megan Monaghan Rivas

This edition of our regular column on newly available plays and musicals focuses on bringing familiar stories from literature and film to the live stage. Beyond the enormously successful Disney catalogue, publishers offer a wide variety of adaptations that are sure to offer something for every audience. To develop the following list of suggested titles, we surveyed major play publishers’ offerings during the past six months. With each play, you’ll find the cast breakdown and a referral to the publisher who holds the rights.

It’s a Wonderful Life, by Philip Grecian
Based on the film by Frank Capra
Generations have come to love the inspirational story of George Bailey, his bumbling guardian angel and the community of Bedford Falls. Playwright Grecian gives it a fresh spin as a 1940s radio show, exposing all the bells and whistles (and footsteps in the snow, and splashes in the pool and…) through inventively created live acoustic sound effects.

Cast breakdown: 4-8 females; 7-14 males; 4-8 children
Publisher: Dramatic Publishing
www.dramaticpublishing.com

Captain Blood, by Vidas Bardzukas
Based on the novel by Rafael Sabatini
What is a man unjustly sentenced to slavery to do when faced with the chance to claim his freedom, but lose his beloved? Of course, the answer is: become a pirate! This rendition of the 1922 classic combines a dramatic love story with urgent questions of freedom and choice – with plenty of swashbuckling and swordplay.

Cast breakdown: 3 females; 7 males; plus ensemble
Publisher: Dramatic Publishing
www.dramaticpublishing.com

High Fidelity, lyrics by Amanda Green, music by Tom Kitt, book by David Lindsay-Abaire
Based on the novel by Nick Hornby
Based on the popular book which led to the equally popular 2000 film, High Fidelity follows Brooklyn record store owner Rob’s late-breaking coming of age. As Rob works out what went wrong in his relationship with his sweetheart Laura and how to set it right, the audience relishes the rock-and-roll score and the salute to music geek culture.

Cast breakdown: 10-20 females; 10-20 males
Publisher: Playscripts, Inc.
www.playscripts.com

Candide, by Mark Ravenhill
Based on the novella by Voltaire
This 21st century take from the playwright of Mother Clap’s Molly House and Shopping and F*cking parallels Voltaire’s tale of the quintessential optimist Candide with that of Sarah, the survivor of a traumatic birthday party who loses control of the story only she can tell. Bursting with energy and overflowing with ideas, this is not your grandmother’s Candide.

Cast breakdown: 13 females; 23 males
Publisher: Samuel French
www.samuelfrench.com

Breakfast at Tiffany’s, by Richard Greenberg
Based on the novel by Truman Capote
When O. Henry award-winning novelist meets Tony-winning playwright, the results are unforgettable. In 1943 New York City, a young writer from Louisiana collides with party girl Holly Golightly. As the glamorous, unmanageable Holly helps the play’s narrator start to find his way in the city that never sleeps, her past actions threaten her future happiness – and his.

Cast breakdown: 4 females; 7 males; 1 cat
Publisher: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
www.dramatists.com

Scenes from a Marriage, by Emily Mann
Based on the TV miniseries by Ingmar Bergman
Spanning the length of Marianne and Johan’s relationship from youth to maturity, this intimate work draws the audience into the interpersonal politics of vulnerability, love and identity as it develops over decades. A highly theatrical experience for the audience, this play invites them to start at the beginning of the marriage – or in the middle, or at the end. Scenes and audiences rotate until everyone has witnessed the whole span of this probing story.

Cast breakdown: 5 females; 2 males
Publisher: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
www.dramatists.com

Megan Monaghan Rivas is an associate professor of dramaturgy in the School of Drama at Carnegie Mellon University. Recipient of the Elliott Hayes Prize in Dramaturgy, she served as literary manager of South Coast Repertory Theatre, the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, and Frontera @ Hyde Park Theatre in Austin, TX. She is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.
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Lillian Smith’s *Strange Fruit*

Controversial 1945 Broadway Play Returns to the Stage in Restored Version

by Jeremy Douylliez and David Price

Jacob Passmore (left) portrays Tracy, a white man who falls in love with Nonnie, a black woman, in 1920s Georgia in a restoration of the original version of Lillian Smith’s play *Strange Fruit*, presented at Piedmont College in Georgia in October 2015. Kordai Harris (right) portrays Henry, Tracy’s longtime friend. All actors performed barefoot “to be free of the artifice of period-defining shoes.” In the Broadway version of the play, pictured on the cover, the play was set in 1945, as evidenced by the calendar on the wall in Salamander’s Cafe.
With just two hours to go before the opening of *Lillian Smith’s Strange Fruit*, director Thom Fogarty was understandably nervous.

Some 70 years earlier, a play called *Strange Fruit* had opened on Broadway and closed after just 60 performances. Afterward, its author, civil rights pioneer Lillian Smith, had all but disowned the play because of the edits and rewrites demanded by its producers. But tonight, not far from Smith’s former home in northeast Georgia, Fogarty was bringing a restored version of Smith’s original work onstage at Piedmont College for its world premiere.

Bringing the play back to life had taken Fogarty – and his family – more than six years. It had taken them on a journey from New York’s Greenwich Village all the way to a tiny wooden cabin on Screamer Mountain in northeast Georgia, where in 1944 Smith had written her controversial novel *Strange Fruit* – set in a small Georgia town in the 1920s – and composed the racially charged play based on its story.

The play describes the tragic results when a young couple’s interracial love affair triggers a murder and mob lynching. Although the play was written in 1945, the issues of social justice raised in Lillian Smith’s *Strange Fruit* still resonate today.

Even as the curtain prepared to open at Piedmont’s Swanson Center Mainstage in October 2015, the entire country was reeling from a series of controversial police shootings that had begun a year earlier in Ferguson, MO. Fogarty was well aware that the play has just as much to say today as it did 70 years ago.

“I don’t think I have ever, or will ever again, experience an opening night like tonight,” Fogarty told his cast. “This is for all of us. This is from all of us. This is to all of us. In little less than two hours, we will give the stage back to Lillian Smith’s *Strange Fruit* – where it should always stay for countless others to take the journey to discovery.”

As the curtain opens, the audience sees a suggestion of a grand Southern house with a large porch – home of Tracy, the son of the town’s white doctor. On the opposite side of the stage is the front of a small tumbledown shack, home of Henry – Tracy’s black boyhood friend. The action begins with a prologue set 18 years before the main events. The character Mamie is beating her son Henry for sassing a white girl.

“I got to learn it to you, you hear,” she says. “You can’t look at a white girl like dat, you can’t tech one, you can’t speak to one cep’n to say, yes ma’m, thanky ma’m.”

It is a dark opening that establishes the harsh world of the play, where the class divide is clear to all, and where even a black soldier in uniform – just back from World War I – is dismissed by the white townspeople with a racial slur. If the tensions within the small Georgia town are just below the surface, they quickly become a powder keg when Tracy falls in love with Nonnie, a young black woman. After Tracy is murdered late in the play, an innocent black man is blamed and then lynched by an angry mob.

While there is no savior for the black community, and the few voices of reason on the white side of town have far too much to lose to dare speak out publicly, the children of the town have little to lose and everything to gain. Thus, the play ends with emboldened youths offering up a quiet reminder that perhaps they can create a more just world.

“We’re not like Mother or Father,” a young boy says. “They’re sleepwalkers – tied to a bad dream. They can’t wake up. But we – can’t we? You and me.”
Strange Fruit’s Path to Broadway

Strange Fruit was the only play ever written by Lillian Eugenia Smith, a teacher and author who was born in Jasper, FL, in 1897 and moved with her family to the mountains of Rabun County, GA, in 1915. She studied at Piedmont College in nearby Demorest and at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore before accepting a position as a teacher in Huzhou, China, at a Methodist school for girls. She returned to the United States in 1925 to operate the family business, Laurel Falls Camp for Girls, on Screamer Mountain near Clayton, GA. The camp, which operated until 1948, became a bastion for progressive thought and was known for its innovative instruction. While operating the camp, Smith began publishing, with her lifelong partner Paula Snelling, a quarterly literary magazine, Pseudopodia, which shined a spotlight on the South’s poverty and injustices as it encouraged black and white authors to assess Southern life.

From the 1940s through the 1960s, Smith wrote a series of novels and nonfiction books that attacked the segregationist Jim Crow laws of the era. Her 1944 novel Strange Fruit was a national sensation that topped the New York Times’ bestseller list after being banned in Boston and Detroit. In 1945, Smith and her sister, Esther, worked with actor and director José Ferrer to adapt the story for the New York stage.

The original Broadway production, which starred Robert Earl Jones, opened on Nov. 29, 1945, at the Royale (now Jacobs) Theatre. The play had a rather tumultuous history, however, which Smith described in letters as a “bitter and terrible fiasco.” She was disenchanted after facing daily demands for rewrites that she felt compromised the integrity of the play. After receiving mixed reviews, it closed after 60 performances. Smith said she would never permit Strange Fruit to be produced again and held true to her word. Her literary agents and estate had never allowed a new production to move forward, and the play was mostly forgotten.

A Controversial Work Is Unearthed

The play was rediscovered by Thom Fogarty, a long-time New York director and choreographer who currently is artistic director of 360repco, a repertory theatre company in New York. Fogarty’s daughter, Lulu, had become interested in Lillian Smith through a writing course at Syracuse University. In 2010, Lulu wrote a one-woman play, Lillian Smith: Being Heard, which updated Smith’s writings with Lulu’s own life experiences. Because Lulu was using Lillian Smith’s words, the family traveled to the Lillian Smith Center in Clayton, GA, to gain permission to perform Lulu’s play. The family met with Nancy Smith Fichter, Smith’s niece, who was at the time the executor of Smith’s estate and director of the Center.

Fichter granted Lulu performance rights and access to the Lillian Smith papers in the Hargrett Library at the University of Georgia. It was there that Fogarty learned about the play Strange Fruit and its history.

“Our family has a long and rich history of fighting against social injustices,” Fogarty says. “From civil rights to gay rights and the AIDS epidemic, and now immigrants’ rights. Our theatre is about doing work that pushes buttons and makes people think.”

Fogarty wanted to know more about Strange Fruit and the reasons it was not performed again after 1945.

“I needed to know why, which led to a multi-session conversation with Nancy Fichter, who allowed me to go through letters that had recently been given to the Hargrett Library,” Fogarty says. “I was hoping to figure out a way to get it back in the public domain. Nancy agreed, stating that she always thought it should be revisited.”

Fogarty and his wife, Leslie Dennis, an archivist by profession, dove into the records at the University of Georgia and at Screamer Mountain in Clayton, where the Lillian Smith Center had preserved Smith’s home just as it was in 1966 when she died. They found a series of letters indicating the play that appeared on Broadway was far removed from Smith’s original and that Smith indeed would have been open to a new production, had it been more faithful to her vision.

In a letter to author Judith Haig, Esther Smith wrote: “My sister, Lillian, was not happy with the version produced on Broadway. It was not the dramatization she originally wrote (that version was lost when her home burned). This being her first venture on Broadway, she listened to the urgency of the producer and director to change and rewrite scenes. In fact she was writing up until the opening of the
Broadway run. It turned out to be heavily realistic and an enormously expensive production, and it actually died of overweight. The best reviews complimented the author on the beauty of the lines, which were taken verbatim from the novel. Lillian talked with me a couple of years later about the play. She said if she did it again, she would do it so differently. She said that the heart of the plot would come directly from the novel, but would lead one to consider the greater problems of hate and separation which exist in the world at large. She felt the play could be a symbol of universal tragedy rather than just a melodramatic specific situation in a small southern town. I did not ask her how she would do this, but knowing my sister I knew she could do it, if the so-called ‘professionals’ would leave her alone.”

Esther said that she and Lillian were “novices thrust too quickly into the midst of ‘old Broadway hands.’ We did not have the experience or courage to fight for what we wanted. We knew the play would necessitate many different scenes, so we dreamed of settings that were almost skeletal facades so that the lighting and action could flow smoothly and quickly from scene to scene. We felt the words were so important that the action should move like music. ‘They’ thought this idea was unusual and no doubt a little crazy and completely unworkable. So the curtain went up on beautiful realistic sets which were heavy and unwieldy, taking forever to change. In order to manipulate the sets at all, an old turntable which squeaked was used. My sister and I were sick about it, but we had no control over backstage.”

Archives at the Hargrett Library indicated that the only known surviving copy of the script from the Broadway production was housed at the New York Public Library. It had been turned in by an actor after the show closed and has been reprinted in various anthologies over the years, with the disclaimer that the play was never to be performed. After spending several days in the Hargrett archives, the Fogartys asked Fichter if there was anything other than the Hargrett collection to explore.

“When Nancy said that there was a closet full of Esther’s things that were waiting to be catalogued, we went hunting,” says Fogarty.

It was there that the Fogartys – holding a flashlight in each hand, as Thom tells it – found an unaltered, original script, with handwritten notes by Lillian Smith herself scrawled in the margins.

“We were over the moon!” Fogarty says. “Nancy confirmed it was indeed Lillian’s handwriting, and it included notes and changes that had not been made in any previous version.”

Recreating the Original Script

With the blessings of Fichter, Fogarty began adapting the script. Using Smith’s notes, he restored the play to as close a representation of her original vision as possible. Fogarty said changes he made to the original were based on handwritten notes on pages of the script, or in letters and papers that Smith had filed away. He restored the prologue and reduced the size of the cast from 36 actors to eight, having each actor play multiple roles.

Fogarty also added a passage directly from the novel that hints at a same-sex relationship between two characters and becomes one of the most poignant moments in the second act. Although this scene was not in the original play, there were passages in the novel Strange Fruit that alluded to the lesbianism of the protagonist’s sister, Laura. Fogarty said he felt it was important to include that element in the play.

“I realized that with the passage of time it was important to touch on the other ‘unspeakable’ from the book,” he says. “I took the scene directly from the book, not changing a word – only the tense. It becomes a ‘memory monologue’ within the play and shows just how ahead of the curve Lillian was.”

Fogarty then sent the script to Rose Gladney, a retired professor of American studies at the University of Alabama and a leading expert on Lillian Smith’s writings, for review. She wholeheartedly approved of the adaptation.
“I think Lillian Smith would be so pleased,” she says. “It seems to fulfill all that she said she wanted to do with the novel.”

With the monumental task of adapting the script complete, Fogarty set about finding a theatre to stage the work. Again, luck was on his side. The Smith Foundation had recently deeded the Screamer Mountain site to Smith’s alma mater, Piedmont College, which has an active theatre department and a modern 350-seat proscenium theatre. Piedmont President James F. Mellichamp and department chair Bill Gabelhausen enthusiastically supported the idea.

“The partnership of the Smith Center and Piedmont College provided the perfect forum to give the play its rebirth,” Gabelhausen says. “It was beyond exciting for our students and faculty to become an important part of this play’s history and revival. It is so rare to be given an opportunity such as this.”

**From Page to Stage**

Fogarty arrived at Piedmont in August 2015 and lived at the Smith Center on Screamer Mountain as he began directing the play with the college’s theatre department.

While some might have been tempted to romanticize the play as a tragic love story set against the backdrop of a brutal, distant past, Fogarty said he was intent on using the play as a vehicle to address the greater issues of race that still exist today. He also wanted to make the play more accessible to regional and college theatres (the original production was over four hours in length and had a cast of 36). Fogarty devised a schematic that distributed the 36 roles among eight actors. Each actor plays black, white, male and female characters. For example, a black female actor leaves the stage as a black woman and returns moments later as a white man.

Stripping away the racial and gender identifiers of the actors, Fogarty said, left the audience to witness only the underlying hatred – the “strange and twisted fruit” that was a product of a racist society. Fogarty believes this is the direction Smith hoped the play would have taken.

“We’re still not having the conversation Lillian wanted us to have in the 1940s,” he often said throughout the rehearsal process.

After watching the students at auditions, Fogarty made additional changes to the play.

“For me, the students brought everything to it, because I had lived with just words for six years,” Fogarty says. “I went home that night after auditions and began to re-imagine the structure to allow as many students the opportunity to take this journey as possible.”

With that goal in mind, he devised a new schematic distributing the original 36 roles among 17 actors. (This change was only for the Piedmont production. The play will still be published with his original eight-person schematic.) As rehearsals began, Fogarty made more alterations, including bringing an offstage character out to center stage – a change that he incorporated into the final script.

“Aleek Reed [the male actor voicing the female character Eenie] brought such life to her, I had to get him on stage!” Fogarty says. “She became a peripheral witness to every scene in the white household.”

The set, designed by Piedmont professor Henry Johnson and constructed by theatre students, conformed to Smith’s original vision. Skeletal frameworks of the “white house” and the “colored house” provided space for most of the action. For some scenes, additional scenery or furniture was flown in and out quickly so that the action of the play flowed unhampered by laborious set changes. The costumes, designed by professor John Spiegel, were neutral and allowed the actors to shift seamlessly from character to character, often changing race or gender. Fogarty insisted that the cast perform the show barefoot.

“They needed to be free of the artifice of period-defining shoes,” he says. “This allowed them to be more grounded as they moved from one character to another.”

**The New Strange Fruit Opens**

Finally, the play was ready for its first performance on Oct. 1, 2015. In a letter written for the commemorative program, Fogarty stated, “This is in no way the same script that was produced and opened on Broadway at the Royale Theatre in New York. It fits the parameters set down by Lillian Smith herself. I am pleased to present this as the original work of Lillian Smith, with minor alterations to make it more producible for a modern audience.”

Several cast members were worried that lingering prejudice might cause some audience members to walk out of the production, but the show was well-received. In talk-backs held after shows, audiences were unanimous in their positive reactions. Conversations about race and sexual identity continued well beyond the allotted time. It seemed Smith’s words had resonated with today’s audiences.

For the students in Piedmont College Theatre, the
focus was always on the words of Smith, whom they affectionately refer to simply as “Lillian.” This was most evident when the theatre lost power shortly before a Saturday night performance. Students were adamant that the show go on. So they performed in the dim glow of emergency lighting, forsaking every aspect of the production except the simple truths found in the words of the play.

One of the cast members touched by the play was Cheyanne Marie Osoria, who played three roles, including the hypocritical Preacher Dunwoodie.

“This play really takes a lot out of me and everyone who is in the cast,” she said during rehearsals. “Sometimes, I go to bed mad, bitter, depressed, and wake up the same way. This is the first show that has ever made me feel so out of myself but myself at the same time. I am very blessed to have been a part of this life-changing journey. This is for you, Lillian. Thank you for making the effort, that everyone else was too afraid to put forward, to prove to the world that we are loving, important and equal.”

**What’s Next for Strange Fruit?**

Lillian Smith’s novels and nonfiction books are experiencing renewed interest and are being taught in college courses across a wide range of topics including race, religion, sexual identity and social unrest.

Fogarty hopes his restored version of her play also will find new life on stage. His ultimate goal is to have the play licensed through a publisher so it is widely available. However, theatres interested in presenting it can get rights currently through the Piedmont College Lillian Smith Center.

“It’s time for this amazing play to take its place in the pantheon of works that were ahead of their time,” Fogarty says. “As a Southern woman, she took on race and gender politics well before they were popular or being discussed. She was an original.”

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**Interested in producing Lillian Smith’s Strange Fruit?**

Contact Craig Amason at the Piedmont College Lillian Smith Center via camason@piedmont.edu.

Jeremy Douylliez received a theatre degree and an MBA from Piedmont College in Demorest, GA. He is the digital marketing and public relations manager for the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA.

David Price is director of public relations at Piedmont College in Demorest, GA. A former newspaper reporter and editor, he has written articles on local history for Georgia Backroads magazine.
Welcome to the University of Montevallo, where the Homecoming Game Is Played On Stage
It’s the middle of February, and most colleges and universities have put homecoming behind them long ago. But at the University of Montevallo in Alabama, the teams are just now lining up — and they’re not wearing football uniforms.

The Gold Side is on the right side of the house in 1200-seat Palmer Auditorium, where images of lions are visible throughout the crowd as the cast prepares to present the original musical *A Diamond in the Rough*. On the left, the theatre is alive with cheers from the Purple Side, whose excited celebrants have mixed black-and-white cow-print with their purple-themed attire as their cast prepares to present another original musical, *Love Bites*. They’re all about to make their entrances on stage, in front of an audience of cheering students, alumni and community members. Yes, at the University of Montevallo, the star attraction for homecoming is musical theatre — not football.

For nearly 100 years, UM students have celebrated musical theatre at College Night, the main event in the annual homecoming celebration held each February. Rather than competing on a football field (UM does not have a football team), students vie on stage in a competition to produce the best original musical. Everything about the shows is created by students, from the scripts and scores to the designs and choreography. On the Saturday evening of Homecoming weekend, three local theatre professionals are brought in as anonymous judges to evaluate the shows, then scores are tallied and a “victory” is handed over to either the Purple Side or the Gold Side.

The “game,” as many call it, leaves a lasting impact — inspiring a lifelong love of theatre in many students who go on to jobs in other fields, while also helping to prepare theatre majors for careers on stage.

“College Night most assuredly helped shape me into the artist I am today,” says Carl Dean, the Purple Side leader in 1996, who now is a teaching artist, actor, choreographer and director in the Birmingham, AL area. “College Night is where I truly learned about the collaborative nature of theatre as an art form. It is where I learned that, to have a successful production, you must trust the team you are working with and be willing to listen to ideas, incorporate those that solve problems, and also that you have to be willing to do whatever needs to be done in order for your show to be successful.” (See more of Dean’s story, Page 19.)

**How College Night Began**

The first College Night was held in 1919, when Montevallo was an all-girls school called Alabama College. The first few College Nights were competitions between classes. Then, in 1925, to celebrate the school’s 25th anniversary, the entire student body was divided into two teams, each named after one of the school colors, purple and gold — a tradition that continues yet today. Over the years, College Night added more events — including intramural sports competitions in the 1970s — but the shows remain the main focus of the festivities.

Today, the University of Montevallo is a liberal arts school with about 3,200 students. The College of Fine Arts houses the largest number of majors on campus, so College Night truly plays to the strengths of many students. All undergraduate students at UM may participate in College Night, provided they meet certain requirements, but participation is completely voluntary. Some students participate all four years,
while others may take a year off to concentrate on studies or non-academic obligations. Others declare themselves “green,” or neutral, and never participate.

**How College Night Works**

The road to College Night begins the previous spring semester, when students campaign for election as the next year’s College Night leaders. Two leaders – one male and one female, usually rising seniors – are elected for each side. While theatre majors are often chosen as leaders, many students from other majors have also held the position.

Over the summer, each side chooses a cabinet, a group of upperclassmen who guide the side’s activities and oversee each aspect of College Night. These leaders and cabinet members meet to discuss the best choice for director, then offer the position to the person they feel will lead their team to victory. While directors are often theatre majors, this is not a requirement.

**Choosing a Side**

No one is assigned a side – they form organically based on personality, relationships and, sometimes, family history. During summer orientation, the Purple and Gold leaders set up booths, where they give out information and mingle with incoming students as part of recruitment efforts. Once the fall semester is in full swing, social events and planning start for each side. Mixers are held and new students make the sometimes difficult decision on which side to join. Most students have chosen a side by the end of October.

The 2015 female Gold Side leader, senior musical theatre major Natalie Bonifay, said recruitment activities soon after her arrival on campus highlighted the importance of College Night on campus – and helped her make the decision on which side to join.

“My first few days on campus, I could tell College Night was a big deal and I wanted to be involved in the wonderful tradition,” she says. “I met so many wonderful people [while] trying to make my decision.”

Other students, like the 2015 female Purple Side leader, senior theatre major Hannah Stephens, are practically born into a certain side.

“My mom is a ‘Vintage Purple’ (the nickname for Purple Side alumni), and my dad is a UM faculty member, so I grew up coming to College Night each year,” says Stephens. “I would likely have been disowned if I hadn’t gone Purple!”

The students who have chosen to be “green” or neutral also play a role. Called the Palmer Staff, they “act as technical advisors to ensure the safety of sets, hanging scenery, and management of all wireless microphones during the production,” says Marion.
Brown, director of university events. Green students also set lighting cues and teach side members how to run lights during their productions.

**Faculty Oversees Process**

While driven heavily by students, College Night activities are supervised by a committee of faculty, staff members and two students – the Student Government Association (SGA) president and the student representative on the Board of Trustees – who “act as mentors and guides throughout the process,” Brown says. “For each aspect of College Night, there is a committee member who oversees each activity.”

Marcus Lane, an associate professor of theatre, heads the committee that selects judges for College Night. He also serves as a creative consultant to each side’s leaders.

“This year, I met with each set of leaders three times to work on the structure and content of the scripts, then attended three rehearsals per side to give feedback,” says Lane. “Whatever a faculty or staff member does for one side has to be offered to the other side, as well, to maintain balance and fairness.”

**Scripting the Show**

So where do the scripts come from? Students write them. Any student may submit a script to his or her chosen side. It must be a musical, must be less than one hour and 15 minutes in length, and must be submitted for approval in its entirety – no incomplete scripts or outlines are accepted.

Scripts are submitted in October. Each year is different, but typically four to seven scripts are submitted for each side. The winning script is selected by the leaders and their cabinets.

Recent graduate Katie Raulerson wrote and directed 2015’s Gold Side show. When writing her script, *A Diamond in the Rough*, Raulerson knew her side’s students included a composer with a passion for jazz music.

“When I wrote the show, I kept in mind the fact that this was his forte and tailored the script to include jazz music,” Raulerson says. “I also knew we had a choreographer with a strong interest in ‘50s style dance, so I was sure to allow the script to lend itself to that style.”

**Learning by Doing**

In addition to opportunities to write and perform in a show, College Night offers students a chance to learn a variety of offstage roles. Both sides have a business manager, responsible for keeping a balanced budget of the side’s expenditures. Other positions include stage managers, designers and technical directors who oversee set construction.

Hannah-Jean Farris, who served as a Purple Side stage manager for three years before becoming Purple Side’s business manager, says, “It is a great learning experience to help oversee set construction and work in the different departments on the side.”

Love Bites was the 2015 Purple Side show.
Leader her senior year, says the stamina she developed through work on College Night helped her in her first professional job.

“My first summer stock gig was intense, but after living through six weeks of College Night, I knew how to pace myself to work for long periods of time,” says Farris, who now works as an Equity stage manager for several regional theatres. “I also learned to juggle what seemed like a million things at once, between rehearsals, cabinet responsibilities and my classes. That multi-tasking ability has served me well as a professional stage manager.”

Rehearsals Begin in January

When students return from winter break in early January, College Night preparation goes into full swing. Auditions are held during the first week of classes. The rehearsal period begins immediately, lasts approximately six weeks – and is intense. Both sides rehearse seven days a week. On weekends, each side gets 24 hours in Palmer Auditorium – and sometimes all 24 hours are utilized. The sides take turns using the stage, alternating between that space and another rehearsal room on campus. Props, portable scenic elements, rehearsal costume pieces and supplies all have to be transported between the stage and the alternate rehearsal space. Anything left in Palmer is covered with tarps so the other side doesn’t see any of its competitor’s scenic elements until final dress rehearsal. There is very little down time, as the plays are constantly evolving throughout the process.

The 2015 Gold Side male leader Michael Cleary, a senior musical theatre major, says time management is the key to making it through the “sleep-deprived, patience-testing, mind-bending time” leading up to College Night.

“You may not think that you have the time to write that paper, go to class, and paint that last set piece,” he says. But you can “if you refrain from making excuses for yourself, and you focus on accomplishing your tasks at hand.”

Homecoming Weekend Arrives

The shows officially open on Thursday and run
College Night Alumni Perspectives

Carl Dean, Birmingham, AL
Teaching Artist, Actor, Choreographer, Director
Major: Theatre, University of Montevallo
1996 Purple Side Leader

How did College Night, coupled with your more formal training in the UM theatre department, help shape you into the artist you are today?

I learned to think outside the box – to work with a very limited budget to create the most impactful production possible. I worked with vastly disparate personalities and had to get everyone to function together with synergy. The interesting thing about CN is that, yes, you wanted to put on a great show, but you wanted a show that would be *better* than the other side’s. And I think that even now, although I am not necessarily competing with anyone when I produce something, I still want my shows to be “better” – better than other versions people have seen, better than audiences expect, better than the last thing they saw me do ... just “better.” I think College Night is where my incredibly high sense of expectations began.

Did you play every year you were a student at UM? What positions did you hold on the Purple Side?

I was in the cast four years – choreographed my sophomore and junior years (my first time working as a choreographer, which I have now done for almost 20 years), and was leader my senior year. Went 2 and 2 in the win-loss percentile.

What do you think when you see a resume with a CN show on it? What does that tell you about the artist?

At the end of the day, one thing all CN veterans know is that the show is the thing. Period. It’s not about one individual, it is about the collective. I know that anyone, Purple or Gold, understands what it takes to make that magic happen on stage.

Jeff Walker, Birmingham, AL
Instructor, Graduate School Professional Development Program, University of Alabama Birmingham; Co-founder, Brick by Brick Arts, a nonprofit theatre
Major: Communications Studies and History, University of Montevallo
2008 Gold Side Leader

What about College Night attracted you as a non-theatre major to the process?

My parents, both graduates of Montevallo, took me to College Night every year since I was about five or six years old. I immediately fell in love with the whole atmosphere: folks dressed as golden lions and purple cows; the sides circling up and singing their side songs; and the students putting on these unique and wonderful productions. I looked forward to attending College Night every year, and I knew that I had to be a part of it.

Did you play every year you were a student at UM? What positions did you hold on the Gold Side?

I played College Night for four years and was Gold Leader in 2008. I wrote the book and lyrics for three shows: *Wanted* (2006), *The Amazing Adventures of Power Guy and Gary Valor* (2007) and *How I Sold My Soul at Summer Camp* (2008). I also was a director, assistant director and cast member.

You are one of the founders of the theatre company Brick by Brick Arts, which you have said came into being because you and other Montevallo alums missed the College Night experience of putting on musicals. Tell me more about this.

Brick by Brick Arts is a nonprofit theatre company in Birmingham, largely made up of Montevallo graduates. We did *Into the Woods* as our first musical in 2010. It was an ambitious choice, but I knew we were prepared because of our College Night experiences. Since that first year, we’ve continued to grow largely through that College Night connection. I’m proud to say that last year we had all four Purple and Gold leaders involved in our summer musical.

“Once we do the show Thursday night, we can’t change anything,” says Stephens. “We actually get [spirit] points deducted for inconsistency. The point is to keep the game fair. [Since] the judges come on Saturday night, you wouldn’t want either side saving something for that night.”

The spirit points that Stephens speaks of are an
integral part of the competition.

In addition to the points earned from judging of the shows, the two sides also compete for spirit points. Each side begins the competition with 50 points and then may earn – or lose – up to 10 points in the following categories: ethics, leadership, respect, responsibility and synergy.

The Game Begins

Finally, Saturday – Homecoming game night – arrives. The judges for College Night – typically local theatre professionals, ranging from artistic staff members from professional theatres to professors from other universities – are immediately sequestered when they come into Palmer Auditorium. Committee members welcome them and talk them through the scoring process, doing their best to explain what is about to happen.

“The energy on campus was electric!” says Adam Miller, managing director of Theatre Tuscaloosa, who judged for the first time in 2015. “I thoroughly enjoyed the pomp and circumstance associated with the event and the fierce dedication that students exhibited for their [sides]. From side songs, to team cheers, to alumni recognitions, to wishing each other good luck, the entire event was both unique and inspiring.”

Cheerleaders for both sides lead the crowd in cheers before the performances begin. After the shows end, it typically takes up to an hour for the judges to make their decisions and for the judges’ scores to be combined with each side’s spirit points. Finally, the winner of the Homecoming “game” is announced from the Palmer stage by the SGA President.

Cheers erupt. Chants break out across the auditorium. Alumni join with current students in a united song to support their side. It’s a lot like the celebration that breaks out when one team prevails at the end of a Homecoming football game. But at the University of Montevallo, it’s all about theatre.

Gold Side members celebrate after their production, A Diamond in the Rough, is announced as the winner of College Night.

Jen Nelson Lane is an Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) stage manager and an adjunct professor at the University of Montevallo. She is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

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Ben Gierhart: Getchell Award-Winning Play Explores the Value of Memory

Ben Gierhart, winner of the 2016 Charles M. Getchell New Play Award for the play Another Man’s Treasure, is a playwright, actor and director living in Louisville, KY. He is a founding member of Derby City Playwrights, a Louisville playwriting collective dedicated to creating locally grown theatre. He works full-time as a staff writer for The Voice Tribune and Modern Louisville.

Another Man’s Treasure, his first full-length play, is currently being workshopped, with plans for production in Louisville in May 2017 as a special event in the 2016-2017 season of Acting Against Cancer, a charity theatre group that donates proceeds to aid in the battle against cancer. Additionally, Gierhart has recently been commissioned to write a new play for a play-reading series to be included in the 2016-2017 season of Pandora Productions, Louisville’s LGBTQ theatre. His short play Out of the Box won the 24-hour Play Festival at The Bard’s Town Theatre in Louisville in 2015. Gierhart also wrote the 10-minute plays Nightstalker & Canary, Dreaming on Empty and The Art of Card Selection, as well as Stops, a serialized play based on his own experiences riding public transportation.

A self-described avid reader, passionate film and theatregoer, intrepid adventurer and lover of all things story-related, Gierhart left college without graduating after realizing his major – engineering – wasn’t for him. He took some time off from school to figure out what he wanted to do and that led him to theatre, “a passion of mine from grade school and high school. I spent a lot of time acting in community and semi-professional productions. Ironically, it was in portraying characters that I truly found myself. One year, my friends were in a local 10-minute play festival. I watched it and thought, ‘I can do that.’ I combined my passion for theatre with writing, my first love, and submitted to that festival the next year.” Darren Michael interviewed Gierhart via telephone after the staged reading of Another Man’s Treasure at the 2016 SETC Convention.

DARREN MICHAEL: How do you approach writing a play? Do you have a particular process?

BEN GIERHART: I live a very hectic lifestyle. I work a 9-5 at a local paper, and I have a part-time job. I have an active social life as well as family obligations just like everyone else. I also try to act in a show every once in a while instead of writing one because I think one activity feeds the other. The point is, I’m busy. My opportunities to write come often in spurts and sprints at all times of the day. I’ve gotten up early to write before work. I’ve stayed up until four or five in the morning to write too. Something that I think really helps me is that even when I’m not writing, I’m writing. What I mean is that even when I’m really excited about a project, I am always thinking about it. Not in a passive way. I literally think of plot points and character motivations all the time. I think of how to make the moments I imagine to happen in concrete and substantive ways, so that when the time comes to actually sit and put the words on the page, they flow out easily, because I’ve already written them in my head. As far as the ideas themselves, I tend to think of concepts and situations before I think of characters. Once I have that, I try to create characters that are ill-equipped to handle that situation because that naturally creates conflict.

MICHAEL: What’s your favorite part of playwriting?

GIERHART: My favorite part of playwriting is that first idea, more specifically when you know you have the right idea. In the very beginning of a creative process for me, I’m filled with a vague but intense desire to write something. Anything. This fuels my brainstorming sessions, and I try and come up with as many ideas as I can. Sometimes it’ll happen completely organically from

Are You a Future Getchell Award Winner?

SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award recognizes worthy new scripts written by individuals who live or go to school in the SETC region or by SETC members who live in or outside the region. Entries are accepted annually between March 1 and June 1.

The winner receives a $1,000 cash award and an all-expense paid trip to the SETC Convention, where both a critique and a staged reading of the winning play are held. The winning play also is considered for publication in Southern Theatre magazine.

More info: Visit www.setc.org/getchell-new-play-contest

Ben Gierhart
something I read, see or hear. When I can no longer think about any other idea or I notice myself sort of naturally coming back to a concept, I know I’ve found it. It’s like the first day of school and shopping for school supplies all rolled into one. It’s an exciting time because anything is possible.

MICHAEL: Are there certain stories or ideas that appeal to you more than others? Or certain types of characters?

GIERHART: When I was little, I loved being transported to other worlds where people could do anything and anything could happen. As I grew up, it's not that I got bored with that because in a way I still love those stories, but I just started to realize that maybe some of that is in the everyday, that there are things that we don’t appreciate that happen around us. And I wanted to tell these stories that we don’t see or don’t know about in this hyper-realist way so that they are noticed. That’s kind of my thing, I guess. That’s what I kind of tried to explore with Another Man’s Treasure – how he collects all these stories and these memories of these people that they don’t even know they have that are valuable.

MICHAEL: And how does the main character experiences those memories of the things he collects?

GIERHART: I’m very much interested in fantasy. My dad’s from Panama, so I’ve always had this sort of loose tie to the magical realism movement from Latin America – authors like Gabriel García Márquez. Their magical realism movement is very interesting to me because almost nowhere else in the world in modern literature do you see such a respected blending of what’s considered to be academic and genre fiction. So I always like to evoke that in my own stuff. I was trying to tell this story about a garbage man, but in a way that makes sense to me and in the style that I would tell it.

MICHAEL: Do you enjoy the workshopping process? The nitty gritty of honing the play into something?

GIERHART: This is my first time really workshopping and honing something, so it's definitely a new experience for me. Honestly, there’s a part of my brain that says, “But I thought we were done!” There’s also another part of my brain, fortunately stronger, that says, “You mean I get to go back there? Yes!” My brain is a weird and colorful place. Because of that, I truly love hearing feedback. Any opportunity to take the world of the play out of my brain for a moment is good for me. It lets me really focus on how the audience perceives it, which is what really matters. I love the workshopping process for that.

MICHAEL: You mentioned acting. Is that how you got into theatre initially?

GIERHART: You know, that’s a good question. I really enjoy it so I don’t want to call it a distraction, but my first love really was writing. I think I was in a grade school play or something and really loved it and got bitten by the acting bug, as they say. I just really focused on it for a long time and did a lot of acting, and went to high school and community theatre and some semi-professional work. I don’t regret that time at all. I really enjoyed it, and it gave me an understanding of how to write a script that I don’t think I would have had if I had just decided to write plays from scratch. And I know a little bit of directing as well, and that really helps to understand things in a broader sense.

MICHAEL: Was there something that attracted you to writing for the stage that’s different than your other writing?

GIERHART: When I first started writing, I remembered that my dad had this typewriter when he was going back to school when I was, I don’t know, five or six. He had this really fancy electronic typewriter, and I was mesmerized by it. I thought it was beautiful. I used to beg my dad to let me write on it. He was rightfully so very protective of it because he had spent a lot of money on it and he needed it to do his homework. He always bought me books and was really supportive of my wanting to write and read, so he would let me, if it wasn’t too late, stay up and, under his supervision, write whatever I wanted. And I would write little short stories, just whatever came into my head. In a lot of ways, they weren’t particularly great, but I feel like I was way more free creatively.
than I am now. I wish I had some of that imagination that I had then.

This is really a roundabout way of answering your question, but doing theatre – acting – somehow allowed me to rediscover writing, and I thought, “There is no reason I can’t do both. I can use this experience I’ve had with theatre [acting] to write for theatre.” And Louisville is very fortunate in that it has a lot of grassroots movements to create new theatre.

MICHAEL: So being in Louisville has been helpful and allowed you a lot more opportunities?

GIERHART: I have friends who have come from bigger cities who say that our scene rivals or even surpasses theirs. Consequently, I’ve had a lot of opportunities to work with several different kinds of theatre companies, such as Pandora Productions, Louisville’s LGBTQ theatre company; Savage Rose, a company that focuses on the classical canon; and The Bard’s Town, a theatre that primarily deals with new, award-winning work that has never been performed in the city or region previously. Each of these opportunities has given me great insight into what it means to be a theatre professional.

Louisville also has a great playwriting scene. Brian Walker, Nancy Gall-Clayton and David Clark are all very respected writers in the community, and each of them has been invaluable to me as both mentors and friends. Brian started Derby City Playwrights nearly two years ago to foster the abilities of writers like me who had some ideas but no way to transform them into scripts. I’ll be forever grateful to him for inviting me to join because without that group, Another Man’s Treasure would not exist.

MICHAEL: Any other particular writers who have had a significant impact on your own work?

GIERHART: As far as playwrights go, I really like the dialogue of Teresa Rebeck. I like the overall language and beauty of John Logan. This is like when someone asks you your favorite movie and you think of every movie you’ve ever seen. There are just so many.

Shakespeare was sort of my gateway drug to theatre in general, both for acting and writing. He had such a vivid imagination but also an enviable ability to keep things grounded and reveal humanity in the most fantastical of characters. I’m definitely all about that in my writing.

I know it’s considered fairly juvenile to mention her, but I love J.K. Rowling. I think, even though she’ll always be remembered for this amazing fantasy world she constructed, her characters are some of the most real and complicated beings you’ll ever encounter on the page.

Writers like Gabriel García Márquez and Neil Gaiman (a more European take on that style) are huge loves of mine and major influences. I also enjoy the work of China Miéville though he can get a little political for me. I very much love comics as well. Of the modern writers, I’d say my biggest influences are Scott Snyder and Jeff Lemire. I love anything that tells a story well, so films often speak to me.

MICHAEL: What do you hope that your audiences get from your plays?

GIERHART: I don’t know when it happens. But I feel like as a society, and not just in the United States but globally, we’ve kind of lost touch with what can go on outside of our own lives and we’ve lost, I think, a little bit of compassion. And I really hope if someone reads my play or other plays I may write and they take a moment to consider a perspective or a story that is not their own, that the next time they run into someone where they may need to be a little more understanding or a little more compassionate, they have some basis for it.

Darren V. Michael is a professional actor, director and playwright, as well as a professor at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN. His play Scarecrows Will Never See the Sunset was recently published and is available through Steele Spring Stage Rights. Michael is chair of SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award Committee.
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The Rocky Horror Show, Fall 2015
CAST OF CHARACTERS:

GARY ZEELER: Male, mid to late 20s, sanitation worker.
BOB BAXTER*: Male, mid 50s, sanitation worker, Gary’s friend.
KATHY SHARP*: Female, early to mid 20s.
ADDISON ROSE: Female, mid to late 20s, aspiring scientist and photographer.
TOM CANSOLI*: Male, mid 40s, man who lives on Addison’s street.
FRANKLIN ZEELER*: Male, mid 50s, Gary’s father, played by the same actor as the one who plays Bob.
THE NAMELESS GIRL*: Female, teens to early 20s, small and waifish but feral.
* These characters are portrayed by the Reveries who act as a sort of Greek chorus throughout the play. They step into character only when a memory is accessed.

SCENE:

Many scenes take place in Gary’s apartment and outside Addison’s home. The various memories all occur at different places, so the set will need to be fluid and suggestive of many places and times. The Reveries are there to help with any set dressing or changes necessary.

FOR PRODUCTION:

The present as well as the times of the different memories.

Act I
Scene One
SETTING: GARY ZEELER’S cluttered apartment. There is an old-fashioned rotary phone attached to the wall, an unplugged toaster in a small kitchen, and a sofa with a camcorder from the ’80s on it. There is also a desk and chair, next to which is a black, locked chest. On the desk is a small photo album and at it is GARY.

AT RISE: GARY is at the desk, wearing a filthy worksuit, gloves, and an exhausted expression on his face. He looks at the photo album for a moment, removes a glove, reaches to touch it but changes his mind. He replaces the glove, and we watch him stare at the photo album for a moment or two in silence. Finally GARY looks at the audience.

GARY: I have this one memory that’s all my own. From a long time ago. From before all of this. I’m on this train. Man, I love trains. It’s something about the power of the locomotive coupled with the view you get and the time you get to look at it. Flying’s all right I guess, but you’re not in on the action up there. On a train, you’re racing on the earth, breathing the air. It’s a pure testament to the capability and ingenuity of the human race, and you get to ride it? Come on. We’re headed up to see my dad’s folks or something, but who cares? I am on this train, and I am loving it. It’s a long train ride though. My parents are pretty well-to-do, so we have the most comfortable seats money can buy, but I’m a kid. I’m pretty much genetically predisposed to get bored easily. I start asking my dad the question that every kid on any trip in every nation in every language asks, “Are we there yet?” Now, my dad was the most patient guy I knew, so each and every time I asked him, his answer was short and sweet, polite but firm: “No.” Naturally that only fuels my idleness and frustration, so I ask, “Well, when will we get there? It’s taking forever.” “It’ll take as long as it takes,” he answers. Typical, right? But then he says, and this is the part I’ll never forget, the part I can’t get out of my head right now, “Time away from loved ones is always a long train ride.” I think about this, and I start telling old grandma and grandpa stories to pass the time. Dad starts telling me some of his own, some I’d never heard before. They’re funny stories. We laugh so hard we cry. The stories begin to pour out, one after another, each one spilling onto the next one. That’s the thing about memories: they yearn to be remembered. And before I know it, we’re there. We’re with them.

GARY finally makes up his mind, removes a glove and touches the photo album. The lights dim. The Reveries enter and set the stage. They swarm around the apartment before exiting. One of the Reveries stays and assumes the role of BOB BAXTER, GARY’s coworker and only friend. He’s dressed just like GARY and holds an open beer in his hand. GARY takes a break, sits at the sofa,
Bob: Well, with your talent, we’ll just say, shouldn’t you see something? I mean all this stuff from the route...

Gary: I should, and I don’t. It’s liberating in a way. For the first time in my life, I think I’ve encountered a truly blank slate. It’s fascinating.

Bob: You’re such a sharp guy, Gary. What are ya—

Gary: Remember, Bob, that’s the one question you can never ask me.

Bob: Right. Well... Thanks for inviting me to take a look at your place. It’s real nice. I’ll see ya bright and early in the morning.

Gary: Good night, Bob. Thanks for coming. Bob nods and finishes his beer. He gets up and heads to the door. Before leaving however, he turns around.

Bob: Hey, kid, do you think... Before I go, could you show me one more time? You know what it means to me.

Bob walks over to rotary phone. Gary smiles and joins Bob over by the phone.

Gary: The phone... It’s one of my favorites. All I have to do is—

Gary grabs Bob’s hand and then touches the phone, and several things happen at once: The lights dim indicating we are now inside a memory, the phone begins to ring and one of the Reveries in the role of Kathy enters, presumably through the door to her home. Gary and Bob move back to the desk, no longer touching to watch.

Kathy: Kathy is wearing prims and neat 1960’s attire. We are in another time. She is carrying a bag of groceries and appears slightly woebegone. She answers the phone while holding the bag.

Gary: Kathy’s voice is tight and controlled. Kathy listens for a moment, and then her entire demeanor lights up.

Kathy: (to BOB) Hey, kid, do you think... Before I go, could you show me one more time? You know what it means to me. Kathy exits. Once she does, the Reveries enter and set the stage. The audience can clearly see a sign that shows that it is now the outside of Addison’s house and that her house is at 494 Reading Avenue. There is a single, city-provided garbage can. Gary walks over to take the trash when he notices that his boot is untied. He bends to tie it.

Gary: (offstage) Hurry up, Gar! We’ve gotta big route this morning, and we’re already behind!

Gary: Just a sec! Kathy takes a moment and removes his gloves to touch his boot. As soon as he does, the lights dim, and the Reveries playing Bob enters. We are in a memory. Kathy jumps right in.

Gary: Those boots I gave ya fit you all right, kid? Gary: They’re fine.

Bob nods but otherwise moves on.

Gary: All right, in case you weren’t listening back to the show, you know what Kathy is carrying. Right.

Bob: (timidly) Sure.

Gary: (smiling but just slightly) What’s that? You gotta speak up.

Gary: (barely better) I said sure.

Gary: (winks) Don’t tell anyone, okay?

Gary: (smiling but just slightly) Okay.

Bob: So what brings you to this classy job?

Gary: I don’t want to talk about it.

Bob: Sorry. Didn’t mean nothing.

Gary: No… it’s—
BOB: Tell you what. Boss says I’m just supposed to talk a bunch at ya today. Get ya “oriented.” We’ve got time. We’re gonna be partners. I like to know the man I’m working with. Tell me about yourself.

GARY: There’s nothing to tell.

BOB considers this for a long moment.

BOB: Now that’s horseshit. Pardon my French. I’ve got a sorta natural horseshit detector. Call it a superpower. Besides, everybody’s got somethin’ to tell. Even this old fart. Don’t let anyone tell you different. What do you like to do for fun? Where do you live?

GARY: Um… I live by myself… now. Sorta. I was living with my dad, but, uh, not anymore.

BOB: And do you like to do? Watch the tube? Drink beer? …Read?

GARY: I don’t really go out much. I don’t have any hobbies.

BOB: There must be something.

GARY: I collect… things.

BOB: There ya go! What kind of things?

GARY: All kinds of things. Everything.

BOB: Huh. That’s different. I had a stamp collection when I was a kid. My old man was in the army. Used to hold on to all the stamps from all the letters he sent us. Probably worth a pretty penny these days. I don’t know though. Some things are just worth too much for money. People say you learn a lot about someone by the things they have, but I say you learn even more by the things they throw out. Most people don’t have a job like this one to know any better I guess.

GARY: (actually excited for the first time) I completely agree!

BOB: Whaddya know? We’ve got a live one here after all. I think we’re gonna get along just fine. Well, it’s back to business sorry to say. Good news is I only have one rule. It’s pretty simple really: embrace the dirt. You’re gonna get dirty in this job no matter what you do; in fact, you’ll get dirtier if you try not to. Trust me. I don’t know why, but that’s how it works. Just don’t be afraid.

(BOB starts to exit. GARY starts to follow, but something in the house catches his eye.)

BOB: (back in place, tying his bootlaces) Excuse me?

ADDISON enters.

ADDISON: (eyes GARY with an expression that looks back at him and smiles) You coming?

BOB: (not moving) Yeah.

BOB: Something catch your eye?

GARY: Nothing.

(BOB exits.)

Just the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen. Lights return to normal. We are now out of the memory.

BOB: (still offstage) Come on, Gar! I’m not getting any younger!

GARY: (back in place, tying his bootlaces) Keep your shirt on! I’m coming!

GARY takes the photo album out of his pocket, sets it by the garbage can, but quickly pockets it again. ADDISON walks on stage carrying a heap of photography books. She is headed to the garbage can.

ADDISON: Wait! Wait!

(GARY waits but sheepishly looks everywhere but at her. ADDISON makes it to the garbage can.)

ADDISON: Excuse me?

GARY: (still not looking at her) You know you need to put those in a bag first, right?

ADDISON: I’m such a twelve-year-old boy sometimes. I mean though.

ADDISON: (I finally does) I…

ADDISON: (embarrassed) Oh, my god…

GARY: You’re really digging yourself a hole here, which is funny because entitled bitches usually have someone else do that sort of thing. It’s okay. I can see that you’re mortified.

ADDISON: I think I’m going to need emergency surgery to remove this foot from my mouth. I promise I’m not this tactless normally. It’s just… Well, is it really dangerous?

GARY: It can be. I read once that sanitation workers have twice the fatality rate of police officers and nearly seven times that of firefighters.

ADDISON: That’s crazy. That can’t be true, can it?

GARY: It makes sense when you think about it. What’s the first thing you do when you break something? Or spill something?

ADDISON: Throw it away.

GARY: Right. Broken glass, spilled chemicals, pieces of metal. You want it out of your home and out of harm’s way. Well, out of your harm’s way is into someone else’s. People don’t realize just how much trash there is either. There’s a whole city. A shadow city to this one. One full of armies of workers and machines in a constant war against ever-accumulating garbage. It’s almost like a bad sci-fi movie. Most people have no idea.

ADDISON: I certainly didn’t.

BOB: What’s the hold-up, Gar? (sees ADDISON for the first time) I’m sorry. You’re not real.

GARY: That is your girl?

ADDISON: She’s not your girl, Bob. And, yes. I would introduce you, but we haven’t really officially met one another.

ADDISON: (eyes GARY with an expression that seems to ask, “Your girl? but decides to move on”) I’m Addison Rose.

BOB: Beautiful name.

GARY: It’s a pleasure to meet you, Addison. I’m Gary, and this is Bob. Bob’s my route buddy. Bob: Nice to meet ya. I’d shake your hand, but you know, ew.

(The three stand awkwardly for a moment.)

I’ll gonna go ahead to the rest of the street, Gary. I’ll pick you up when I swing around. Have fun, kids.

ADDISON: Why do you feel like your dad just dropped you in the movies?

GARY: This is the part where I’d say that he just ruined my game, but I don’t have any game, so…

ADDISON: This is a little weird for me too. I don’t normally ask out sanitation workers. Again, not that there’s anything wrong with your chosen career, but I’ve never really talked to a sanitation worker before, so maybe you’re all like this, and I’m missing out on this hidden hoard of cute, interesting guys - I just said that.

ADDISON: I’d like to see you again.

ADDISON: That. That is what I was trying to say. Thank you. This is what I meant earlier when I asked why you have the job you do. There’s just something about you.

ADDISON: Maybe I’ll tell you sometime. You’re in luck. I just have a pick-up shift today, so my evening’s free. Would you like to meet at my place? I promise I’m not being forward. There’s just something there that I want to show you, and I think it might lead to my showing you something else.

ADDISON starts laughing.

GARY: What?

ADDISON: There’s something there that you “want to show me”? It just sounds dirty. I’m sorry. (She laughs again.)

“Might lead to my showing you something else.” I’m such a twelve-year-old boy sometimes.

GARY: Trust me, you’re not. I was one. From firsthand experience, you’re not even close.

ADDISON: I defer to your expertise.

GARY: So will you come?

ADDISON: Slightly creepy invitation accepted.


ADDISON: Okay.

GARY: Okay. I’m gonna go catch up with Bob. Don’t want to keep Dad waiting.

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ADDISON enters.

GARY:
Come in. Come in. You look great. ADDISON is holding a box of Vanilla Wafers.

GARY: remember if you said apartment three or four. I’m going to stop talking because if I don’t make my self stop I never will because you’re too nice to I’m going to stop talking because if I don’t make my self stop I never will because you’re too nice to

ADDISON:
Come tonight. I’m terrible. END OF SCENE

Scene Three
SETTING: The transition from outside ADDISON’s house to GARY’s apartment.

AT RISE: GARY is walking on stage holding the photo album. As he moves, the REVERIES reset to his apartment.

GARY: I feel like all I do is think about you. And talk about you. Like I’m the only person in the world that this has ever happened to. Maybe that’s how it’s supposed to be. Or maybe it’s some Hollywood/Mark Hallmark bullshit. I don’t know. That is how I feel though. Like I’m the only man in the world. But for a little while, I didn’t.

(GARY flips the page on the photo album and steps into the past. He goes offstage to change. Non-work clothes can be under the covers all that he’s been holding in.

(Rummaging can be heard offstage as GARY gets things ready. We hear an “Ow!” as GARY stubs his toe or elbow. There is a knock on the door.)

GARY enters back on stage. He finally makes it to his toe or elbow. There is a knock on the door.)

Coming! GARY enters back on stage. He finally makes it to the door. He opens it. He is very nervous.

ADDISON: Good. I got the right place. I couldn’t remember if you said apartment three or four. ADDISON is holding a box of Vanilla Wafers.


ADDISON: Thanks. So do you. (notices GARY’s gloves) Civies suit you.

GARY: (indicating the Wafers) You didn’t have to bring anything.

ADDISON: Are you kidding? My mother was a southern belle, and she would skin me alive if she knew I had shown up without something. I didn’t have much notice though, so I brought what was around. Who doesn’t like these? How unpalatable can they be? They’re Vanilla Wafers. But I have to say that I kind of prefer vanilla to chocolate, which I know is sacrilegious to women everywhere, but I just don’t get it. You know? Chocolate is delicious. I love it, but I just prefer vanilla. What is so wrong with that? Especially vanilla bean ice cream. And I’m going to stop talking because if I don’t make myself stop I never will because you’re too nice to shut up the very, courteous, vanilla lady.

GARY: (grabbing the Wafers) I love Vanilla Wafers too.

ADDISON smiles. GARY opens the box, shakes one out into a gloved hand, eats it and offers ADDISON the box. She takes it and eats one. There is a pause and she continues to slowly work her way through the box.

GARY: Thank you for sharing. Although, I have to say that they won’t really pair well with the tempranillo I have for us.

ADDISON: Do you really have tempranillo?

GARY: No. I barely know that’s a wine.

ADDISON: It’s a black grape varietal from the Iberian peninsula. Too bad you don’t have any. It’s delicious. (still munching on her Vanilla Wafers)

GARY: I’m more than content with eating these though.

ADDISON: Your secret plan all along, I see.

ADDISON: Don’t tease me. Okay, you can just a little. You know what would go well with these? Some milk.

GARY: That I do have. Be right back.

(GARY leaves the room to grab milk while ADDISON pokes over the various items in the apartment. The ’80s camcorder has been set up on a tripod. She glances at it worriedly. She makes her way to locked chest. She’s about to try and open it when GARY’s voice makes her jump.)

So how do you know so much about wine?

GARY: My degree is in microbiology, but I started to get into enology, you know, the science of winemaking, as a sort of hobby. It’s pretty interesting. Time seems to treat most everything so unfairly. I enjoy the reversal, that it can also make things better. I would have gone back to school for it, but—It’s mostly just a curiosity. I have a lot of hobbies.

GARY: I like to learn new things.

ADDISON: I think you know that. Do you trust me?

GARY: The world that this has ever happened to. Maybe… Man, now you think I hate fat people… no way currently resembles a centerfold. Nice girl I wouldn’t have been my friend anymore. It was—Me. I felt real bad that I did that, and I didn’t want a thing for her? Who did you hear it from first?

ADDISON: That’s Tom Cansoli’s house.


ADDISON: (warnly) I thought you said you never met him.

GARY: I haven’t. Not in person. The camera showed me.

ADDISON: That thing works?

GARY: Oh, no. I see what you mean. It was broken long before I had it. I guess that’s why he threw it out. I’m not very good at easing into this. It’s not like I can make it any less strange. When I touch objects, I experience the memories people have associated with those objects. Usually people leave one, maybe two strong impressions on one, and let me tell you, Tom has a great one here.

ADDISON: (truly freaked out now) Okay.

GARY: You don’t believe me. Okay. That’s very reasonable. I have definitely gotten that reaction before. It’s always best to just show people. I don’t know why I don’t just lead with that.

GARY removes his gloves and reaches to touch ADDISON.

ADDISON: I knew it! You’re crazy, and you invited me here for some kind of weird sex or murder thing. Possibly both. That’s why you’re wearing gloves! You’re gonna sex/murder me!

ADDISON makes a break for the door.

GARY: Wait, I shouldn’t have done that. Hear me out.

ADDISON stops but keeps a wide berth.

GARY: I know how strange it sounds. I do. I literally have one friend because most people just can’t accept it. I used for telling us I can’t anymore. It’s as big a part of me as my eye color or the fact that I have two left feet when it comes to dancing. You don’t know me, and you’re here at my apartment. I’m as scared as you. Believe me. I’m not crazy. I think you know that. Do you trust me?

ADDISON stares at GARY. Pondering. Considering.

ADDISON: I do. I don’t know why, but I do. She crosses over to GARY who has moved by the camera. GARY is wearing a tux, but he’s been partying too. (indicating the Wafers)

ADDISON: You never asked your question. Why would you throw away these books?

GARY: Thanks. So do you.

ADDISON: Good. I got the right place. I couldn’t remember if you said apartment three or four. ADDISON is holding a box of Vanilla Wafers.


ADDISON: Thanks. So do you. (notices GARY’s gloves) Civies suit you.

GARY: (indicating the Wafers) You didn’t have to bring anything.

ADDISON: Are you kidding? My mother was a southern belle, and she would skin me alive if she knew I had shown up without something. I didn’t have much notice though, so I brought what was around. Who doesn’t like these? How unpalatable can they be? They’re Vanilla Wafers. But I have to say that I kind of prefer vanilla to chocolate, which I know is sacrilegious to women everywhere, but I just don’t get it. You know? Chocolate is delicious. I love it, but I just prefer vanilla. What is so wrong with that? Especially vanilla bean ice cream. And I’m going to stop talking because if I don’t make myself stop I never will because you’re too nice to shut up the very, courteous, vanilla lady.

GARY: (grabbing the Wafers) I love Vanilla Wafers too.

ADDISON smiles. GARY opens the box, shakes one out into a gloved hand, eats it and offers ADDISON the box. She takes it and eats one. There is
It’s the first thing of yours I even tried. I haven’t been able to get enough since. It got kind of bad after that. This camera was the first one I found, and I haven’t looked at it since. There are so many memories, so many beautiful things that people just throw away.

Why did you?

ADDISON: I have no idea. Started when I was about twelve. My mum had me go see some doctors. They didn’t know either. I kind of stopped wondering.

ADDISON: What? It’s hard to explain. And I’m just publicity-hungry, but until I find a way to experiment with this, that’ll have to do. I haven’t told anyone this… Not even my folks.

GARY: What is it?

ADDISON: I had cancer. Really bad. Osteosarcoma. I didn’t tell anyone. Before I found this… Not even my folks. I think I subconsciously, profoundly, didn’t want to make memories with that photo album. I think it stuck.

GARY: I would.

ADDISON: You would what?

GARY: You would want to see the world how you see it.

ADDISON: No, you wouldn’t.

GARY: I’ll see. I used to do this by myself when I was a kid.

ADDISON: (sighing) Sorry. I’m feeling this moment.

ADDISON: (focusing) Sorry. I don’t feel anything.

GARY: Do you feel anything?


GARY: What else?

ADDISON: I admit that maybe I could use some specificity.

ADDISON: In what I’m saying.”

GARY: I admit that maybe I could use a little… magic. How do you suggest we do that?

ADDISON: Let’s fill that photo album with memories.

ADDISON: I sold my camera.

GARY: (glancing down at their hands) We don’t need that.

ADDISON: I guess not.

GARY: You are in? And here I was thinking. They maintain their position for a few more moments and finally break contact. ADDISON grabs the bowl of Vanilla Wafers and offers it to GARY. He takes one and eats it.

END OF SCENE

Scene Four

SETTING: GARY’S apartment.

AT RISE: GARY and ADDISON walk downstream, hand in hand, away from the previous scene and look at the photo album together, slowly leafing through the pages, reacting to things that only they can see. Meanwhile the REVERIES enter and begin resetting GARY’s apartment. GARY and ADDISON stop at a specific page and they split. GARY stays and ADDISON moving to the sofa. A REVERIE has placed a copy of “The Time Traveller’s Wife” on the coffee table.

GARY: I’d never met anyone who had embraced me and what I could do so quickly before. I guess, no need to. I’m a fan. I’ve been down the street for five years, and in that time, I’ve found that one, okay? But yeah. The camera though… That rotary phone. It’s not a projector. Nothing? Don’t… Sorry. Just don’t touch that one, okay?

GARY: It’s not a projector.

ADDISON opens the camera and looks inside.

GARY: There’s no tape. Like I said, it doesn’t even work. She shuts it.

ADDISON: H-How?

GARY: I have no idea. Started when I was about twelve. My mum had me go see some doctors. They didn’t know either. I kind of stopped wondering.

ADDISON: I mean, that was twenty-something years ago. I’m sorry. Still wrapping my head around it.

TOM nods. He’s finished. He turns off the video camera and exits. The lights come back up. We’re back in the present.

ADDISON: That was… That… Everything in this apartment…?

GARY: Not everything is particularly noteworthy, but yeah. The camera though… That rotary phone. That’s where we differ. I know it’s all a cliche ever. I am really sorry. I mean every word to you. You can iron now. Wow, this is the biggest thing of yours I even tried.

ADDISON: Why didn’t you touch anything before that?

GARY: Because… Because I knew that I liked you almost right away. I’ve seen you once a week, every week, for almost three years now. Sorry if it’s creepy. It’s how I feel, a simple statement of fact. Anyway, it felt wrong somehow. Reading your trash. Too invasive. I couldn’t help it with this though. It was like it was calling to me.

ADDISON: And… What did you see?

GARY: That’s the thing. Nothing.

ADDISON: Nothing?

GARY: No thing. Nothing. Lots of objects have really boring memories imprinted on them, but they have something. This is a blank slate. Or at least, a slate that’s been wiped clean. I’d say it’s probably the latter. It’s almost like it’s willfully blank.

ADDISON: That’s because it is.

GARY: What?

ADDISON: It’s hard to explain. And I’m just spit-balling here, but until I find a way to experiment with this, that’ll have to do. I haven’t told anyone this… Not even my folks.

GARY: What is it?

ADDISON: I had cancer. Really bad. Osteosarcoma. I didn’t tell anyone. Before I found this… Not even my folks. I think I subconsciously, profoundly, didn’t want to make memories with that photo album. I think it stuck.

GARY: I would.

ADDISON: You would what?

GARY: You would want to see the world how you see it.

ADDISON: No, you wouldn’t.

GARY: I’ll see. I used to do this by myself when I was a kid.

ADDISON: (sighing) Sorry. I’m feeling this moment.

ADDISON: (focusing) Sorry. I don’t feel anything.

GARY: Do you feel anything?


GARY: What else?


GARY: That’s where we differ. I know it’s all natural, but I think that’s exactly what makes it special. This is fundamental proof that you exist and that I exist and that we leave tiny, nearly un-deetectable energy imprints on the world. Energy cannot be created or destroyed. That’s a scientific law, right? I think what’s happening between our hands right now is what will be left of us when we die. It’ll keep existing in the world forever, even after the world itself is gone.

ADDISON: What you’re talking about is vague but not incorrect.

GARY: I admit that maybe I could use some specificity.

ADDISON: And I admit that maybe I could use a little… magic. How do you suggest we do that?

GARY: Let’s fill that photo album with memories.

ADDISON: I sold my camera.

GARY: (glancing down at their hands) We don’t need that.

ADDISON: I guess not.

GARY: Are you in?

ADDISON: I’m in.

ADDISON: They maintain their position for a few more moments and finally break contact. ADDISON grabs the bowl of Vanilla Wafers and offers it to GARY. He takes one and eats it.

END OF SCENE
ADDISON: (sarcastically but goodnaturedly) That mimicry is uncanny. Really. Wow.
BOB: Am I wrong?
ADDISON: (fiddling with her fork) While it’s almost impossible to screw up free, buttery bread for me, I will admit that you were correct, sir. The bread was delicious.
GARY: And the rest of the food too. Are we ready to head out?
ADDISON: Well, I never thought I’d say this, but I don’t think I could possibly eat another bite. I’m just going to use the restroom before we go.
GARY gives ADDISON a quick peck on the cheek and exits.
BOB: Hey, in case I didn’t say anything earlier. Thanks for letting me be your third wheel tonight. Geezer like me doesn’t get out very much these days.
ADDISON: Any time, Bob. A friend of Gary’s is a friend of mine.
BOB: Glad to hear it ‘cause I say the same. Things seem good between you two. He’s out and about, and it’s not work related. It’s a small miracle.
ADDISON: (fiddling with the photo album) Yeah, it is. And things are great. It’s so good to have you too. Knowing what you know about Gary. It’s such a relief to have someone to share that with.
BOB: Well, you know it was just him for a long time.
ADDISON: I do.
BOB: And I’ve been doing my best to look out for him the last few years. He’s not a child, but in some ways, a lotta ways, he kinda is.
ADDISON begins to say something, but BOB cuts her off.
My old man was a liar. I don’t really blame him, I guess. War changed him in ways I can only imagine. I didn’t always know what the truth was, but I always knew when he was lyin’. I know you’re lyin’ to him about somethin’. I’m a lotta things, and I’m also not a lotta things. But I can tell you, I’m no idiot. I think you care for him, but you’re lying to him about somethin’. I’m a lotta things, and I’m also not a lotta things. And it’s big.
(Before ADDISON can say anything, GARY reenters.)
GARY: All right, where to next?
(Again, before ADDISON can say anything, GARY puts his arms around ADDISON and BOB’s shoulders.)
Flash.
Lights flash. The REVéRIES enter. BOB becomes a REVÉRIE and assists the others in removing the table and chairs. ADDISON enters and begins to move around the apartment. She begins fiddling with various objects, dusting them, inspecting them. She makes her way to the chest and tries to open it to no avail. ADDISON begins to hear GARY enter, so she exits just as he enters. GARY is getting dressed for work but can’t find his boots. He searches frantically for a few moments. Finally ADDISON enters again. She has the boots.
ADDISON: What’s wrong?
GARY: My boots. I can’t find my boots.
ADDISON: I’ve got them right here. Besides, what do you need them for? I thought you were off today.
GARY: I’m not. I just don’t have a trash collection shift today. I still have to head down to the dump. GARY takes the boots and begins to put them on.
ADDISON: I’m sorry. I guess I forgot.
GARY: I don’t really see how you could manage to do that. My schedule is the same every week. (noticing the boots are sparkling clean, GARY stops to inspect them)
What did you do to these?
ADDISON: I had them cleaned. I know you embrace the dirt, but I thought surely a yearly cleaning couldn’t hurt. They’re good as new.
GARY: (sternly and more than a little annoyed) These are a gift from Bob. There’s a memory imprinted on them. You know how I feel about trying to clean or repair those.
ADDISON: Okay, I wanted to see if the memory would remain intact if I cleaned them. How fragile is this energy?
GARY: Wait, you did it on purpose? Are you experimenting on me. I have to say… That really bothers me.
ADDISON: Sorry. I didn’t realize.
GARY: Yeah, seems like there’s a lot you don’t realize.
(regretting it)
I-I’m sorry. I’ve been stressed out from work. They increased the size of our route and laid off even more sanitation workers.
ADDISON: You mentioned it.
GARY: Then I couldn’t find my boots. I’m sorry. I just wish you would’ve told me you were doing this. Maybe I would’ve helped out.
ADDISON: It’s okay… I want to move on, but you just seem so distant lately. I know there’s a lot going on at work, but-
GARY: It’ll pass.
ADDISON: I know, but- there’s just so much going on. So much that I don’t even know how to explain to you.
GARY: What are you talking about?
ADDISON: I-I… (ADDISON stares at GARY for a long moment. She seems like she’s finally going to be able to say something when she once again, says something else.)
I have to leave. Just for a little bit. Just to think.
GARY: Wait. What?
(Before GARY can say or do anything else, ADDISON exits. GARY is dumbfounded.)
Flash…
END OF SCENE

Scene Five
SETTING: GARY’s apartment.
AT RISE: GARY stands near the unplugged toaster in the kitchen area of his apartment. He is holding the photo album. His gloves are on. Lights are dim with just enough light to see GARY but only just.
GARY: I used to think that life was like a story. That there would be this huge, monumental moment. A climactic epiphany with all sorts of foreshadowing and rising action to clue you in on its presence. It would be impossible to miss. Incapable true and poignant. A moment that explains everything. A moment when everything changes and all the burning questions of your existence are answered. My experience in the real world has taught me this instead: If there is such a moment, you don’t know it when it’s happening. Oh, that would make life that much simpler wouldn’t it? In real life, the monuments are invisible, and their heralds are muffled. I think it’s the very quest for meaning that blinds you to the answers. Only after you’ve stumbled into the moment, and either celebrated your serendipity or survived your stupidity, do you know for sure that it was there.
I’m not wise. I’m not. All I’m saying is that I know you were there and that you changed everything. GARY removes a glove and flips through some pages in the photo album. Even though the pages are blank, GARY knows them all by heart. He knows the one he wants. He finds it, removes a glove and touches it. Lights come up more but not to full.
The REVERIES enter and set their corresponding objects in the apartment in a sort of ballet and exit. GARY sets the photo album down and walks aimlessly around the apartment. He arrives at the rotary phone, thinks of touching it, and changes his mind. He does the same with the camcorder on the couch. He keeps a wide berth from the locked chest and settles on the toaster. He touches it. One of the REVERIES enters, the same one that plays BOB, only this time, he assumes the role of FRANKLIN ZEELER, GARY’s father. He immediately begins inspecting the toaster. He has a small array of tools.
FRANKLIN: Watch closely, Gary. I want you to learn something.
GARY: (adopting his role with familiarity) What’s that, Dad?
FRANKLIN: What’s wrong with this toaster?
GARY: Uh huh… it’s broken?
FRANKLIN: Unbridled genius, Gary. I always knew it.
GARY: I don’t know. That’s why I asked you to take a look at it.
FRANKLIN: I taught you better than that. Come on, use that brain.
FRANKLIN hands the toaster to GARY.
GARY: I told you. I don’t know what’s wrong with it. Normally, I put the bread in, press it down, maybe play with the darkness settings a bit. That’s just about as complicated as it gets. I mean, it’s a toaster. Nothing’s happening when I press the bread down.
FRANKLIN: You know, things like that, things like this toaster, were designed to be used. And I say that to say that the person who designed the toaster knew that another person of comparable intelligence would be making toast with it. I promise you that designer was on your side. He didn’t want you to say that to say that the person who designed the toaster knew that another person of comparable intelligence was going to use it. Nothing good. Trust me. I’ve told you before.
FRANKLIN: But if this memory, or whatever’s in the locked chest, is so terrible, so terrifying, why keep it? I mean, I would get it as far away from me as possible.
FRANKLIN: It’s a reminder.
GARY: What do you mean?
FRANKLIN: I mean that not all memories are good. What’s in the chest reminds me of that fact. It reminds me to be careful.
FRANKLIN: To be careful of what?
GARY: You asked your question. And another one.
FRANKLIN: Okay.
GARY: Now what the hell is going on?
FRANKLIN: I’ve been lying to you. (FRANKLIN continues to stare at her in silence.)
GARY: I’m sorry. That’s the most melodramatic way to say it.
FRANKLIN: I taught you better than that. Come on, use that brain.
GARY: Get out. Please leave.
FRANKLIN: What do you want?
GARY: Get out. Please.
FRANKLIN: Little stretches her arms, reminiscent of the energy sharing GARY showed her in Scene Three.
FRANKLIN: It’s just like you said. My energy cannot be created or destroyed… I’ll be around forever as one of your memories… I don’t want you to be a memory, Addison!
FRANKLIN grabs the phone off the wall next and throws it on the ground. A REVERIE enters and becomes KATHY. Her and FRANKLIN’s lines repeat in sequence as GARY continues.
FRANKLIN: (repeats over GARY’s lines) Learn by inspection.
KATHY: (repeats over GARY’s lines) Happy Valentine’s Day.
GARY: Why do you think I collected those stupid, fucking things in the first place? Knowing real people is scary because they can fucking die on you! GARY goes to the camcorder next and throws it off stage. Another REVERIE enters and becomes TOM. He adds his line to the sequence. GARY grabs ADDISON’s hands.
FRANKLIN: (repeats over GARY’s lines) Learn by inspection.
KATHY: (repeats over GARY’s lines) Happy Valentine’s Day.
TOM: (repeats over GARY’s lines) That’s what I’m good at.
GARY: I mean, you are real. You’re not some echo or phantom. I can touch you and you respond to what I’m saying because you’re actually here.
FRANKLIN: I’m not some ghost on fucking replay!
(roughly)
I forgot. You can’t even hear them right now, can you? All you hear is my pathetic voice. I am literally shouting just to hear myself over the din in my head right now, but I forgot, you have it so fucking easy. They all do. Or did, I should say… They did. Past tense.
FRANKLIN: I’m sorry.
GARY: Just go. I’ll give you some much needed practice time on the whole being alone thing.
ADDISON: How can-
GARY: Leave!
ADDISON exits. GARY slams the door shut, locks it, and puts his whole body weight against it for a while, as though in opposition to some undelectable force. After a moment, GARY dejectedly goes to the locked chest and opens it. As soon as he touches it, the REVERIES stop and exit. GARY reaches inside and pulls out a blackened, burnt pillowcase. GARY puts it against his face, and as soon as he does so, the lights dim. We’re in a new memory. There is an orangish red cast to the room now, and the cracking of wild flames can be heard. A REVERIE enters, a young woman. She has no name. Her face is completely covered by the pillowcase she is using to breathe through the smoke. She tries to escape the room but cannot. Slowly she begins to succumb to asphyxiation, and she collapses. She begins to be burned alive. GARY and the REVERIE let down their pillowcases and scream.
BLACKOUT
END OF ACT I
Words, words, words … [Hamlet II,ii] reviews books on theatre that have a connection to the Southeast or may be of special interest to SETC members. Scott Phillips, associate professor and chair of the Auburn University Department of Theatre, edits this regular column. If you have a book for review, please send to: SETC, Book Editor, 1175 Revolution Mill Drive, Studio 14, Greensboro, NC 27405.

**The 30-Minute Shakespeare Anthology: 18 Student Scenes with Monologues**

by Nick Newlin

2015, Nicolo Whimsey Press


Price: $19.95 (paperback); $19.99 (e-book)

by Edward Journey

Often it seems that students’ apprehension about tackling Shakespeare is passed on by equally apprehensive teachers. The Bard is held in such high esteem that the biggest obstacle to instilling an appreciation might be inhibitions about not “getting it right.”

With that in mind, Nick Newlin, a veteran performer and a teaching artist with Folger Shakespeare Library, has published The 30-Minute Shakespeare Anthology to help ease the intimidation factor. In it, Newlin presents abridged scenes from 18 plays from the canon with stage directions, set and prop lists, suggested sound cues, and conversational performance notes.

In addition to serving as a tool for high school teachers and lower-level college educators who teach and direct Shakespeare, the book includes one-to-two-minute monologues with separate monologue notes in each of its five-to-ten-minute scenes. These make the book a valuable resource for young actors preparing for a classical audition or adding new monologues to a repertoire.

Each scene was road-tested by Newlin with high school English students during the Folger’s Secondary School Shakespeare Festival. Newlin’s chatty notes liberally use examples from productions he directed at the Folger. For example, directing a 2008 production of a Macbeth abridgement, Newlin analyzes challenges he faced with a couple of witches with “serious attitude problems,” which resulted in “indifferent, blasé characters.” Newlin shoulders the blame for the actors’ indifference, presenting ways in which he could have better addressed the challenge. A Julius Caesar scene includes specific directions for adding a Chorus, providing another way to involve the maximum number of student performers in the process.

Newlin helpfully includes “Suggested Viewing” lists of two video productions for each play and wisely stresses the importance of watching Shakespeare in performance. Some of the suggested choices are predictable, while others might surprise. The list ranges from war horses like the William Dieterle and Max Reinhardt “all-star” 1935 A Midsummer Night’s Dream to Justin Kurzel’s 2015 Macbeth starring Michael Fassbender and Marillon Cotillard.

A generous appendix includes texts on Shakespeare, theatre games and improv, directing, and Internet sites.

The 30-Minute Shakespeare Anthology is an accessible new resource, especially valuable for high school teachers and their students. The book is the latest in Newlin’s 30-Minute Shakespeare series, which also includes 30-minute abridged versions of 18 Shakespeare plays.
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