PANTO
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‘ONE OF THE SIGNAL PLEASURES IS
MENKEN’S MELODIC MUSIC
AND SCHWARTZ’S NIMBLE LYRICS’
- THE NEW YORK TIMES

Michael Arden and Caissie Levy
Photo from Paper Mill Playhouse’s production of The Hunchback of Notre Dame

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The first act of the 2017 winner of the Charles M. Getchell Award, given by SETC to recognize a worthy new play, is published. Act II is available for reading online at www.setc.org/miss.

Cover
Ariana Grande (left), Neil Patrick Harris and Charlene Tilton appear in the December 2012 production of Lythgoe Family Panto’s A Snow White Christmas at Pasadena Playhouse in Pasadena, CA. Grande portrays Snow White, and Tilton is The Wicked Queen, while Harris makes an on-screen appearance as The Magic Mirror. Pantos, traditionally performed in Britain during the holiday season, are now being performed at some theatres in the U.S. as well. Read the story, Page 6. (Photo by F. Scott Schafer; cover design by Deanna Thompson; Photoshop work by Garland Gooden)
New Plays by Women

by Megan Monaghan Rivas

Our regular column on newly available plays and musicals focuses in this issue on plays written by women. In the 2016-2017 season, women wrote just over 20 percent of the plays produced by the Theatre Communications Group’s (TCG) member professional theatres – a figure that is lower than the previous season. In an effort to bring those statistics more in balance, this month’s column will raise up works by female playwrights. Take a look and find some powerful women’s voices to showcase in your next project or season. 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.

**Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley, by Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon**
Opening two years after the events of *Pride and Prejudice*, this holiday delight focuses on Elizabeth Bennet Darcy’s scholarly, perpetually overlooked middle sister Mary. The flamboyant Bennet family’s Christmas gathering at the Darcy estate becomes the setting for a funny and heartfelt romance that has earned critical praise.

**Cast breakdown:** 5 females; 3 males

**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service  
www.dramatists.com

**Not Medea, by Allison Gregory**
When a working mom takes a desperately needed night off at the theatre, her fantasy about a different life – a child-free life – crashes up against that night’s play, a tragedy she has no desire to see. She takes over the play and its audience in what *The Washington Post* called “a resonant meditation on guilt, alienation, resilience and double standards for men and women.”

**Cast breakdown:** 2 females; 1 male

**Publisher:** Playscripts, Inc.  
www.playscripts.com

**Sending Down the Sparrows, by Laura Lundgren Smith**
Viktor seems to have everything a 17-year-old would want during the Third Reich. He’s a fine, upstanding boy and a member of the powerful Hitler Youth organization. But behind Viktor’s perfect façade lies a secret – his beloved sister, a ward of the state due to her developmental disabilities. When the Nazi government begins to enact racial and genetic purity policies, Viktor must decide which to protect: his secret, or his sister.

**Cast breakdown:** 3-7 females; 5-13 males

**Publisher:** Playscripts, Inc.  
www.playscripts.com

**Tuck Everlasting, adapted by Claudia Shear and Tim Federle from the novel by Natalie Babbitt, music by Chris Miller, lyrics by Nathan Tysen**
Eleven-year-old Winnie lives a safe life behind her family’s picket fence, but her heart longs for adventure. She finds it in abundance when she gets wrapped up in the highly unusual Tuck family. This multi-generational charmer features a singable score of country- and folk-infused music.

**Cast breakdown:** 3 females; 6 males; 1 girl; plus ensemble

**Publisher:** Samuel French  
www.samuelfrench.com

**The Play About My Dad, by Boo Killebrew**
Set in Gulfport, MS, this “epically intimate” family-biographical play shows Killebrew’s father through his daughter’s loving eyes. Dr. Larry Killebrew, an emergency room surgeon with a family and a lively mind, is tested to the limit when Hurricane Katrina threatens to drown his beloved town.

**Cast breakdown:** 4 females; 4 males; 1 boy

**Publisher:** Samuel French  
www.samuelfrench.com

**Wonderland: Alice’s Rock & Roll Adventure, adapted from Lewis Carroll’s classic novels by Rachel Rockwell, music by Michael Mahler**
At seven and a half, Alice is full of potential – and of fears, doubts and all the challenges of growing up. With a sound as varied as Alice’s own imagination – a little bit of punk, some ska, some classic R&B, and even a Bollywood dance number or two – *Wonderland* shows that all children can face fear and find their own confident voices.

**Cast breakdown:** 4 females; 6 males; cast can be expanded

**Publisher:** Dramatic Publishing  
www.dramaticpublishing.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 in Costa Mesa, CA; the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta; and Frontera@Hyde Park Theatre in Austin, TX. She is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.
Looking for new plays for your theatre? If yours is like most, the season probably skews heavily toward plays written by men. In our “Hot off the Press” column, Megan Monaghan Rivas suggests making an effort to even out the mix. She shares details on six plays by women that you may find of interest for your next season.

We start with a story on pantomime. Here in the U.S., the word conjures up images of silent performers clothed in black. However, it has a whole other meaning in the British Isles. There, panto is an over-the-top comedy with music (often based on a fairy tale) that is the cornerstone of holiday entertainment – and a huge money-maker, drawing the largest crowds of the year to British theatres. Adam Howard shares this tradition, spotlights how some American theatres have adopted it for their stages, and explores how it could help create a new tradition – and an annually returning holiday audience – for theatres in this country.

None of us want to think that an active shooter incident or other violent act could happen in our theatres, but experts say it is essential that performing arts venues make the time to prepare for such events in today’s world. Stefanie Lehmann and Dominic Yeager share information from security experts on the steps that theatres should take to ensure their staffs are trained and ready to react should such an event occur.

Also featured in this issue is the winning play in SETC’s annual Charles M. Getchell Award competition. Beginning on Page 29, you’ll find the first act of [Miss] by W.L. Newkirk, which explores how a pioneering female doctor fought sexism and pharmaceutical companies’ deceit in the 1960s to successfully block FDA approval of thalidomide, a drug found to cause severe birth defects. (Due to the length of the play, the second act is published online on the SETC website.) Darren Michael also interviews Newkirk, a retired medical doctor, about his successful second career as a playwright and the development of [Miss].

From the SETC President

This issue of Southern Theatre provides readers with the opportunity to jettison preconceived notions on a variety of topics. We invite you to expand your view of pantomime to include a very different British model, and we urge you to contemplate the inconceivable by attending to security concerns in your theatre. We also introduce you to the play [Miss], which highlights the value of standing up to conventional thought. Finally, we introduce you to a handful of new plays that may help you incorporate more female voices into your production season.

Tiza Garland, SETC President
Could Britain’s Hottest Holiday Show Draw New Audiences to Your Theatre?

by Adam D. Howard
Setting: A theatre, anywhere in the British Isles, at Christmastime. A rowdy crowd of adults and children eagerly awaits the curtain. The children wave light-up toys frantically as they sing along with the music being pumped into the auditorium. Projections light the stage, and, if the set is visible, it is colorful and perhaps even cartoonish. As the lights go down, a hush does not fall over the crowd. If anything, the noise increases as a character takes the stage and addresses the audience with a greeting: “Hiya, boys and girls!”

Rather than sit in polite theatre-going quiet, the audience will invariably answer with a rousing “Hiya” right back. The audience will continue to interact with the cast – sometimes in planned events, sometimes in spontaneous reactions – throughout the performance. The actors expect and encourage this back-and-forth, and the “fourth wall” is nowhere to be seen, because we’re watching a panto.

The modern panto, short for pantomime, is a beloved staple of the holiday season in the British Isles – which include England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland – and due to its popularity, it’s the financial life-blood of most professional theatres located there. “For many British theatres, the income derived from pantomime season is vital to the financial stability of the venue,” says Chris Jordan, managing director of Jordan Productions, Ltd., based in Eastbourne, England, which produces eight pantos annually. “Most venues see their biggest audience numbers during panto season.”

While panto was virtually unknown in the United States until recent years, a handful of theatres and producers have begun bringing this British holiday tradition to the U.S. Not only does panto translate to an American audience, but it also represents a new option for American theatres to build an annually returning holiday audience and creates an opportunity for local writers to shine.

What Is Panto?

In the British Isles, the term “pantomime” is used almost exclusively in reference to these holiday-season performances. It rarely describes the kind of performance most Americans expect. No one in a black leotard and white face paint appears in these productions. Nonetheless, today’s pantos trace their origins to the traditionally silent pantomimes most of us think of when we hear the term.

The evolution of pantomime into a new performance style began around the 16th century. When English theatre troupes returned from mainland Europe after performance tours, it occurred to some of them that since they and their audiences all spoke the same language, they could finally speak on stage. This began with opening prologues, and gradually more narration, songs and dialogue were added to the performances. The fact that the “pantomimes” now contained words was ridiculed by the rest of Europe, but the name persisted, even though these performances are nowhere close to silent. In fact, pantos are some of the most raucous productions of live theatre anywhere in the world.

Holiday pantos in the British Isles typically are two-act comedies with contemporary music and stock plots. Rather than holiday stories, pantos take their content from fairy tales and other public domain works. The stories and characters are always familiar, and the audiences know the archetypes and major plot points before they even buy tickets. Local and regional references are added to every panto for the sake of the audience. Everything is funnier when the audience feels “in” on the joke.

Pantos are family-friendly. That is not to say by any stretch that pantos are children’s theatre. They are written to appeal to all ages, with many bawdy or topical jokes that sail far above the children’s heads. “Pantomime is a theatre form that is accessible for everyone, from a 2-year-old excited to see their storybook hero, to a gaggle of teenage girls lusting after Prince Charming, to the grumpy dad chuckling at the slightly blue jokes, to a 90-year-old granny enjoying the magic and spectacle of Cinderella going to the ball,” says British panto director Dorcas Wood. “There aren’t many other forms of entertainment that can tick all of these boxes and, with a guaranteed happy ending, you can’t go wrong.”

“Audiences love panto because it’s silly and funny and entertaining, and you have a chance to become involved with the action on stage.”

- Nicky Swift, Liverpool-based panto actress
There is an expected relationship between panto performers and their audience, namely one of interaction and good-natured heckling. Antagonists are booed with every entrance, and a vocabulary of jokes and interactions that is familiar to all ticket-holders is part of the fun.

“Audiences love panto because it’s silly and funny and entertaining, and you have a chance to become involved with the action on stage (through call and response and sing-alongs, for example),” says Nicky Swift, a Liverpool-based panto actress. “They see people making a fool of themselves, and it is entertaining to an audience. Panto is a lot like reality TV. … It’s not high art, but there’s something quite addictive about it. We know we shouldn’t really like it, but we do.”

Panto as Business

The modern holiday panto may be full of laughs for the audience, but it is serious business for the theatre world. In the British Isles – as well as in Australia, New Zealand, Bermuda, South Africa and other parts of the British Commonwealth – pantos are as much a part of Christmas as eggnog. With the holiday season comes the panto season. Virtually every theatre stages a panto.

Actors, directors, producers and artistic directors begin planning for their pantos months, if not years, in advance. Some theatres produce their own pantos. Others look to outside panto-specific production companies for scripts and directors. Still more theatres simply serve as receiving-house venues for outside panto companies.

A large and growing number of production companies produce pantomimes exclusively, including Qdos Entertainment in London. This company, which works year-round on panto productions, has produced close to 700 pantos in its nearly 35-year existence. It is responsible for casting actors, hiring writers, and employing directors, choreographers, designers and costumers for dozens of productions throughout Britain each year. According to Newsweek magazine, Qdos made more than $31 million from panto ticket sales in 2013. Other production companies based in England include Jordan Productions, Ltd., Evolution Productions, Shone Productions, LHK Productions and Imagine Theatre.

One of the keys to pantos’ success is that shows include jokes based on current events and usually have local connections. Jordan, the managing director of Jordan Productions, notes that each of his company’s scripts is updated specifically for each theatre every year to keep jokes current and to tailor dialogue to that season’s actors. The emphasis on topical, updated local humor provides opportunities for writers, who find work writing or updating pantos annually. The proceeds from holiday pantos also provide a guaranteed income for actors who are repeat hires in pantomimes every year.

The annual panto season typically runs from mid-November to late January. The droves of family audiences who attend pantos often put theatres’ budgets in the black.

“For many people, the pantomime is a traditional part of their family Christmas celebrations and often it is (unfortunately) their only trip to the theatre each year,” Jordan says. “For most venues, the houses will be near to capacity for up to 12 shows a week. That income, combined with massively increased ancillary sales (bar, ice creams, merchandise, programs, etc.) means that panto is a vital part of their annual programming.”

Massive production budgets, major dance numbers, spectacular effects and music are all part of the panto experience in Britain. Productions often rely on local, national and even international celebrities to secure audiences, and American actors have gotten into the game. Pamela Anderson, Henry Winkler and David Hasselhoff, to name a few, have all performed in major commercial pantos in Britain. A big name can earn as much as 100,000 British pounds (about $129,800 in American dollars in August 2017) for a run, as well as a percentage of sales.

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SO MUCH DRAMA

Students at UNCSA's School of Drama submit to a rigorous program of study that includes voice, speech, Shakespeare, mask, clown, movement, combat, singing, dancing and production. Talent is a threshold, training is the catalyst.
What Is a Panto Like?

A show must include certain devices and gags for it to be considered a traditional panto. Productions vary from company to company, but the following elements can always be expected:

1. A familiar story.

It’s usually a fairy tale, such as *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*, or another public domain story, such as *Aladdin*, *Mother Goose* or *Peter Pan*. Because they use works in the public domain as source material, writers can take as many liberties as they like with the story, tailoring the performance to a theatre’s particular audience.

2. Audience interaction.

A “Goodie” character, such as a Good Fairy, a Friendly Servant or Mother Goose, usually introduces the play. These characters typically narrate the play from the beginning. Specific greetings are often scripted in. For example:

   JACK: “Hiya, boys and girls!”
   AUDIENCE: “Hiya, Jack!”


One typical panto gag is having a character address the audience while another character hides behind the first actor. For example, in a *Peter Pan* panto, Captain Hook might address the audience about his plan to drown Tiger Lily as Peter sneaks up behind him. The audience, being familiar with the genre and a bunch of good sports, will know from centuries of tradition to shout out a warning, to which there is always the following reply:

   HOOK: “Where is that Peter Pan?”
   AUDIENCE: “He’s behind you!”
   HOOK: “Ohhhhhhh, no, he’s not!”
   AUDIENCE: “Ohhhhhhh, yes, he is!”

This kind of standard interaction may be hard for the uninitiated to imagine. But it’s not too different from standard American vaudeville schtick such as:

   VAUDEVILLIAN: “I knew this sailor who was soooo fat…”
   AUDIENCE: “How fat was he?”

With roots in the morality plays of the Middle Ages, pantos adhere to some ancient traditions. For example, the “Goodie” character *always* enters and exits stage right, and the “Baddie” character, such as Captain Hook, the Evil Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty* or the Wicked Stepmother in *Cinderella* or *Snow White*, *always* enters and exits from stage left or through a trap door in the stage floor. The entrance of the “Goodie” is nearly always greeted with a response the audience was taught in the beginning of the show, and the “Baddie” is *always* booed by the audience with great delight. All of these traditions have medieval roots, whether or not the audience realizes that.

4. A man in a dress.

When women were finally permitted to perform on stage in England after 1660, most of them were not interested in playing the older characters, instead opting for the Juliet and Desdemona roles finally available to them. In pantomimes, the roles for older women, or the “Dame” roles, were played by men – and this tradition continues today. The “Dame” in a panto is always the most comedic of roles, depending on lavish and absurd costumes. There is no pretense: The audience knows it’s a man, and it’s all part of the fun. Dame roles are coveted for their prestige, comedic flavor and the opportunity they provide to shine onstage.


Pantos include song and dance. Sometimes music is written specifically for the production,
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but usually pantos make use of recent hits and/or music appropriate to the situation. Peter Pan may sing Sondheim’s *Not While I’m Around* as he watches over Wendy and the Lost Boys, or the stepsisters may sing Blondie’s *One Way or Another* as they attempt to dance with the prince. Traditionally, the show ends with a sing-along for the audience, often with lyrics provided via a drop, song sheets or a projection. Actors trained in musical theatre tend to do a panto every year in Britain, since the performances are heavily musical.

6 *Slapstick comedy.*

Action may drop for a long scene, while the servant/clown characters perform a comedic bit. These scenes of back-and-forth banter evolve from the same comedic ancestors as Abbott and Costello.

7 *Love over comedy.*

The romantic characters’ plot floats above the rest of the story. The prince and princess fall in love despite the antics of the characters around them. The lovers, like the *inamorati* of *commedia dell’arte*, have minimal interaction with the comedic characters.

8 *Local and topical humor.*

Local rivalries and political references abound. Here in the U.S., a “Dame” character might say, “Get your hands off me! Who do you think you are, Donald Trump?” Points are also scored with the audience based on regional rivalries. For example, the panto at Stages Repertory Theatre in Houston, “has at least one Dallas joke in every production,” according to Artistic Director Kenn McLaughlin. Similarly, if a panto was set in Cleveland, OH, it would make sense to that audience for the panto to dress villains in Pittsburgh Steelers uniforms. The booing would be that much louder!

9 *Action onstage and off.*

There’s a lot going on at a panto: prizes hidden under audience seats, audience members brought to the stage, sight gags, actors breaking character, audience participation, and constant feel-good entertainment. Balloons drop from the ceiling. Children can buy light-up toys in the lobby that add to the atmosphere of the show. Audience members heckle and get heckled right back.

10 *Candy.*

Traditionally, during Act Two of a panto, candy is thrown to the audience, because … why not?
Panto's Place in America

There are perhaps a dozen theatres in the United States regularly producing panto. Productions run the gamut from low-budget community theatre to student productions to Equity theatre shows to big-budget commercial spectacles. They all follow the British format in varying degrees, presenting a slapstick adaptation of a fairy tale with current and local humor and contemporary music. And all of them have seen success with their shows, just as the British have.

Stages Repertory Theatre, a professional Equity theatre in Houston, is preparing this year for its 10th annual panto production. The idea for doing a panto production came from one of the theatre’s board members, a native Brit who loved the humor of panto. Kenn McLaughlin, the theatre’s artistic director, took a trip to London to see some panto productions and quickly fell in love with the genre himself. The theatre’s first panto production was Cinderella, which Stages Repertory will reprise in 2017.

Stages Repertory’s original panto audience was the British expat community in Houston, McLaughlin says, but the show attracted a wider audience quickly. The audience now includes season ticket-holders as well as people who might never have come to Stages Repertory for its regular season productions. A song written for that first production helped explain the genre and attract audiences, McLaughlin says.

“We had written for that particular production a sort of educational song [about how a panto audience might behave], The Rules, which was really fun and
was all about how there are no rules – just open your heart!” McLaughlin says. “It really just set the tone. It was like a magic charm.”

Stages Repertory’s audience base “has expanded significantly because of our pantos,” McLaughlin says. “It is a grounded, classic tradition that is incredibly accessible for audiences,” he says. “It allows us to keep our adult audiences engaged in rather high-end, sophisticated humor with their kids in the room. We have families who come back every year to take pictures with certain actors, and now some of those who were kids in the beginning are bringing their kids. It’s not just children’s theatre but theatre as a communal event with their families. It’s exactly why we do theatre; it’s the core of it. It breaks so many barriers.”

Although staging a panto as the annual holiday show at Stages Rep required a large initial investment, McLaughlin says it was well worth it. “You have to invest big time if you want to do it right – but the investment has paid off tenfold for Stages Rep,” he says. “The major regional theatres in America have defaulted to A Christmas Carol and A Christmas Story, and they can’t afford to give them up! So much of their economic model depends on it. Our panto is our Christmas Carol, and it’s certainly our cash cow.”

He encourages other theatres to consider adding pantos to their seasons. “It’s a great place to use experimental designers, and it becomes an incredibly fertile greenhouse for theatre makers,” he says. “It’s been a win-win for us on every level. Our panto is a Houston tradition.”

Waterworks Players, a community theatre in Farmville, VA, began annual holiday panto productions at about the same time as Stages Rep. Mary Jo Stockton, a member of the theatre’s board of directors who grew up in Scotland, proposed the idea. The theatre presented its first panto, Puss in Boots, in 2006. Stockton says audiences quickly caught on to the genre. “I thought we were going to need plants in the audience to make it work for an American audience but, as a native Brit, I was amazed at how it seemed to come naturally,” she says. “The kids just loved it and had no trouble figuring out what to do. We’ve been doing it for 10 years now, and kids in our community have grown up with the tradition so they know what to expect.”

Shows, which attract both children and adults, have included Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast and May the Farce Be with You.

One of the newest and most successful entrants into American panto is Lythgoe Family Panto, owned by Kris Lythgoe (son of American Idol and So You Think You Can Dance producer Nigel Lythgoe) and his wife Becky. Since their Los Angeles-based company was founded in 2010, they have produced 12 pantos based on familiar stories, featuring well-known TV and film stars and familiar pop songs by artists such as Katy Perry and Bruno Mars.

Lythgoe Family Panto doesn’t have its own venue. Instead, it partners with existing theatres on the shows. Lythgoe’s pantos have been presented at theatres in Salt Lake City and Houston, as well as in California at Pasadena Playhouse, Laguna Playhouse and The Lyceum Theatre.

Ann E. Wareham, artistic director of Laguna Playhouse, an Equity theatre in Laguna Beach, CA, says she decided to add a panto to the season after being approached by the Lythgoes. “I had been on the hunt for both a holiday show and something that could perhaps become a holiday tradition at the Playhouse, and I was really delighted by the pantos I had seen at Pasadena Playhouse,” she says. “So, we decided to give it a go here.”

Laguna presented its first Lythgoe panto in 2015. She says the panto has met its budgeted goal both years it has been presented, and “our audiences are loving it. The Lythgoes are terrific at helping educate audiences about panto – what it is, both today and traditionally – and our audience has certainly gone along for the
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How I Became a Fan of Panto

I was pursuing a master’s degree in performance at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2008, when some British friends dragged me to the annual Christmas panto presented by students. My classmates seemed to think that I’d be horrified at this lowbrow art form, but that attending was somehow compulsory, the way New Yorkers feel about Times Square: It’s garish, but you might as well see it since you’re here. When I asked them what to expect, they acted embarrassed, hemming and hawing, and couldn’t explain what I was in for. The panto in question was Mother Goose, and the first character on stage was a traditional Good Fairy character who immediately greeted the audience. I thought I had been tricked into attending a piece of children’s theatre. The antagonist was The Devil, and he was immediately booed by the audience in what I would come to know as perhaps the strongest of panto traditions. As an American steeped in theatre etiquette, I was appalled at first. By the time the devil sang Disco Inferno, I was both booing and laughing at the same time. Within a year, I was music directing a panto in Glasgow at the Citizens Theatre. A year after that, I was in the cast of the Rock ’n’ Roll Panto at the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool. The absurdity of every production I was a part of— and the sheer willingness of the audience to be a part of that absurdity— caused me to fall in love with this performance style for its complete lack of snobbery, its infectious energy and its almost Muppet-like sense of play.

- Adam D. Howard

ride. … Both young people and grown-ups alike respond to the multi-generational humor and music.”

Kris Lythgoe writes the Lythgoe Family Panto shows, which have ranged from Aladdin and His Winter Wish (starring Ben Vereen, Jordan Fisher and Ashley Argota) to Peter Pan and Tinker Bell – A Pirate’s Christmas (starring Sabrina Carpenter and John O’Hurley) to A Snow White Christmas (starring Ariana Grande, Neil Patrick Harris and Charlene Tilton, shown on this magazine’s cover, in one iteration). Lythgoe notes that adapting the shows for an American audience has been key to their success. Including songs kids recognize and casting well-known actors also adds to the magic.

“Primarily, it is a story kids know, with pop songs they know. And when you add talent like Ariana Grande, Ben Vereen and Sabrina Carpenter to the shows, they really come alive,” he says.

Theatres that would like to produce pantos need to keep in mind that these shows are designed to appeal to a wide variety of the public— not just the traditional theatre audience, he says.

“To be able to produce a good panto, theatres need to concentrate on the community around them, not just the theatre community around them,” Lythgoe says. “Pantos are always written for the people in a similar way to how Shakespeare wrote for the people.”

Panto’s Future in the U.S.

So, is it time for panto to take its place alongside A Christmas Carol, A Christmas Story and The Nutcracker as a holiday tradition in the U.S.? We saw a British invasion of pop music in the 1960s, followed by an infusion of mega-musicals on Broadway in the 1980s. America in the 21st century seems ready to give a big “Hiya” to Britain’s favorite holiday show.
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ACTIVE SHOOTER
Is Your Theatre Prepared for the Unthinkable?
The unthinkable happened to the Town & Gown Players of Athens, GA, in April 2009, when three of its members were shot and killed by the husband of one of the victims at a reunion picnic outside the Athens Community Theatre.

Even after hearing about such events, arts organizations typically don’t make readiness planning part of their current business standard, according to A Vision for Emergency Readiness, Response and Recovery in the Arts Sector, published by the National Coalition for Arts’ Preparedness and Emergency Response.

“When South Arts surveyed arts and cultural organizations across the country in May 2008, results showed that 68 percent of these organizations had experienced a crisis situation and did not have a plan in place before the event, and still did not have one in place afterwards,” the report said.

The two main reasons for this resistance, the Coalition noted, are that individuals don’t know where to begin and that planning is not a current priority for leadership.

Organizations of all sizes need to make planning a top priority, says Steven A. Adelman, vice president and resident active shooter response expert for the Event Safety Alliance, an international trade association dedicated to changing the culture of live event production to emphasize “life safety first.”

“There is no reason to think that armed bad guys go only to large events,” Adelman says. “To the extent that active shooters are a realistic concern, they are a concern for everyone, in venues of all sizes. ... The fact that a reasonably foreseeable event is relatively unlikely absolves no one from the duty to plan and train for the possibility.”

Just hoping it won’t happen at your theatre is not enough. “Hope is not a plan,” says Adelman. “Or, to paraphrase Hunter S. Thompson, ‘Call on God, but row away from the rocks.’”

That advice was echoed by Jeffrey A. Slotnick, president of Setracon Enterprise Security Risk Management Services, a critical architect in the Homeland Security Enterprise, and a senior regional vice president of ASIS International, a professional organization for security professionals.

“Just because you ignore risk, doesn’t mean it isn’t still there,” Slotnick said. “And you are still liable. ... Not having a system in place and addressing your risk is simply unacceptable. ... Everyone should have a plan – every organization, every family.”

Manchester, Paris, London, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Hood, San Bernardino, Columbine, Virginia Tech, Orlando, Aurora, Newtown ... the list goes on. Active shooter events have become all too common internationally and here in the U.S., where the number of active shooter events increased from just one in 2000 to 20 in 2015, according to the FBI. Locations where events occurred varied greatly – from schools to movie theatres to nightclubs to arenas – but all were places where citizens gathered together.

Because of their role as community gathering spaces, theatres and other arts venues are recognized as potential targets for those wishing to cause harm. Whether you work for a college theatre, a large performing arts center, or a small community theatre, your facility needs to invest the time required to prepare for an active shooter event.

**What Is an Active Shooter?**

The Department of Homeland Security defines an active shooter as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.” Chris Grollnek, a Texas-based consultant who is one of the nation’s leading experts on active shooter events, notes that the term is not used just for events involving guns: “Although a firearm is often used, the term ‘active shooter’ is also applied to incidents involving other weapons, such as vehicles, knives or bombs.”

Having a plan for what to do if an active shooter event occurs is critical to the safety of both the staff and the audience attending an event.

“I don’t believe in fear tactics,” says Grollnek. “However, [let me share] a statistic central to this discussion: zero to seven minutes. The average active shooter incident is over within seven minutes – and, on average, it takes 17 minutes for police to arrive on scene.”

An organization’s safety plan for an active shooter event should be focused on preparing for what could occur during those seven minutes, Grollnek says.

**It’ll Never Happen Here**

Perhaps you’re thinking, “Our staff is swamped, and we’re just a small venue. We don’t really need to worry. It’ll never happen to us.” Although the statistical probability of an active shooter event touching your organization is small, things that have never happened before happen all the time.

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Being Prepared Is Part of Your Mission

Arts organizations place an emphasis on serving their missions, but many don’t focus on how important it is from a mission standpoint to have a strong program in place to protect their patrons’ safety. Connecting those dots is vital.

“To put it bluntly, if the event is unsafe and people get hurt, no one will remember the show,” says Adelman, whose firm, Adelman Law Group, offers active shooter response training for venues and events. “It’s like the quip, ‘Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?’”

He also notes that active shooter or similar events at arts organizations can have a domino effect that impacts the overall industry.

“If there are too many high-profile incidents, guests won’t want to come to shows at all,” he says. “Then we’d all have to find something else to do with our lives.”

In advocating for safety initiatives at theatres, Slotnick notes: “You would never consider sending an actor onstage without proper rehearsals. Why would you treat the safety of your audiences and staff any differently?”

He explains that safety risk assessment and training have a lot of parallels with the production process. In presenting a play, “you need to analyze the script, identify the roles that need to be cast, cast the right person for the right part, direct the character, memorize the part, and practice-practice-practice, and then you’re ready for the show,” he says. This process is nearly identical to that of emergency preparedness, he notes: “Have a plan, train the plan, practice the plan.”

Live events require special consideration for numerous reasons, including the nature of the work being presented, technical elements, audience behavior and the overall environment. Unfortunately, there are no one-size-fits-all handbooks or ready-to-use standards for the theatre industry.

Who Can Help Create a Plan?

A lot of information about active shooter training and strategies can be found online. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and FEMA have published thorough safety manuals outlining general guidelines. There are also trade organizations, publications and reports that may help explore the considerations for live event venues. Local police departments also have crime prevention officers that...
can be valuable sources for consultation.

Best practices for event safety are continually evolving and being debated, which can make it complicated for venues to develop and maintain emergency plans.

This is illustrated by Grollnek when he discusses the well-known mantra, “Run, Hide, Fight.” He notes that “what we see now is that [Run, Hide, Fight] can forget the human element. This is what I call the forgotten ‘F’: Freeze.” Instead of running, hiding or fighting, many people simply freeze and are unable to do anything out of fear, he says. To overcome this, Grollnek recommends a new slogan, “Get Up, and Get Out,” aiming “to shift the paradigm of a generation: ‘Yes, it is okay to run.’”

If your institution has little knowledge and limited local resources in event safety, the best place to turn for help creating a plan may be an organization or a professional that specializes in event safety and active shooter incidents. These sources will be able to assist your organization in seriously examining the unique challenges at your individual venue and the potential threats to plan for.

Slotnick advises that organizations look into any benefits they may accrue from spending money to improve the venue’s safety. “For a smaller organization, you might be looking at a $3,000-4,000 investment,” he said. “However, insurance companies may discount their rates or cover the costs as it minimizes their risk exposure.”

While some leaders may balk at the money required to develop an individualized plan, Adelman warns, “If something bad happens, no one will be sympathetic to the boss’s desire to stay within the annual planning budget.”

**Elements of a Plan**

Once you have decided to develop a plan, take time to get it right. Talk to the boots on the ground, imagine a variety of hypothetical crises, have the discussions that no one wants to think about. Grollnek, who advises at the highest levels of government and leads a coalition of the nation’s leading security experts, suggests, “It’s not putting aside all other recommended practices – it’s merging [them] all together and leading with a basic common-sense approach.”

Just remember: Whatever plan you develop must be simple, actionable and reliable.

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Security expert Jeffrey A. Slotnick (above) says: ‘You would never consider sending an actor onstage without proper rehearsals. Why would you treat the safety of your audiences and staff any differently?’
Below are some actions typically included in a plan, but do not hesitate to individualize the components to serve your organization.

1 Complete a venue risk assessment.
   This is often recommended as a good first step in overall emergency planning for a venue, but you can also focus this assessment on a specific concern, such as the potential for an active shooter event. A risk assessment will allow you to identify areas of vulnerability through visual inspections of the venue, review of critical documents, and interviews with key personnel. Once this step is completed, venue managers can begin the process of creating an emergency action plan.

2 Develop an Emergency Action Plan.
   Venues should have action plans for all potential emergencies. However, creating an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) specifically for an active shooter event is of new significance in today’s society. An EAP can help reduce the disruption of operations, avoid a prolonged shutdown of the venue, and prevent injuries and even death.

   In creating your EAP, be sure to involve a variety of stakeholders, not only in your venue but in your community as well. The Department of Homeland Security suggests you involve your employee management, facility owners and operators, local law enforcement and emergency responders. The DHS says the components of an effective EAP include:
   - A preferred method of reporting emergencies.
   - An evacuation procedure.
   - Emergency escape routes and procedures, plus contact information for and responsibilities of individuals to be contacted under the EAP.
   - Name, telephone number and distance to local hospitals from your location.
   - Emergency notification system to alert various parties of an emergency, including individuals at remote locations within premises, local law enforcement and area hospitals.

3 Designate specific roles for staff.
   In any emergency, the ability to respond in an efficient manner should be the first goal. The DHS notes certain responsibilities that human resources and facility managers have in preventing an adverse event and responding if one occurs.

   Human Resources responsibilities:
   - Conduct effective employee screening and background checks.
   - Create a system for reporting signs of potentially violent behavior.
   - Make counseling services available to employees.
   - Develop an Employee Assistance Program that includes policies and procedures for dealing with an active shooter situation, as well as an effective action plan.

Facility Manager responsibilities:
   - Institute access controls (e.g., keys, security system passcodes).
   - Distribute critical items to appropriate managers and employees, including: floor plans, keys, facility personnel lists and telephone numbers.
   - Coordinate with the facility’s security department to ensure the physical security of the location.
   - Assemble crisis kits containing radios, floor plans, staff roster and emergency contact numbers, first aid kits and flashlights.
   - Place removable floor plans near entrances and exits for emergency responders.
   - Activate the emergency notification system when an emergency situation occurs.

4 Carry out training exercises.
   To develop a full-scale training exercise, you need to identify the purpose, scope and objectives of the event. Once these three areas are addressed, it’s time to develop and publish an exercise schedule. This schedule is an important tool to communicate how long the event will last, whom it will involve and what specific community or communities it will affect. Items to consider entering into the schedule include a pre-exercise orientation and safety briefing, and a post-mortem meeting.

   In an active shooter exercise, there would be several categories of participants, with defined rules for each. Common categories include safety officials, controllers, players, actors and observers. All participants should wear identifying badges or lanyards with a specific color T-shirt identifying their participation category.

   Once all of the participants have been defined and given their exercise parameters, the next step is to provide the entire team with the rules for the exercise. These can vary depending upon how you want the exercise to be run. However, the No. 1 rule for this type of exercise is safety.

   As a performing arts venue, your theatre faces extra challenges in training for active shooter events because the majority of individuals witnessing an active shooter event will be unknown audience members. These individuals will not know your
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plan and will not be able to train alongside your employees. You can help prepare staff for this obstacle by including “audience members” in your training exercises and spelling out procedures for helping patrons exit the venue in your overall plan.

Schedule continuing education.

The difficulty of planning these types of events is often enough to persuade venues to never do them again. However, theatre managers must be diligent in planning continuing education on this topic and doing follow-up assessments of their capability to handle emergency events. Training that is one-and-done creates the potential for staff to forget what they are supposed to do when an emergency situation happens – adding to the chaos.

Recommendations vary on how often venue managers should go over the responsibilities of the staff in an emergency situation. While it is not necessary to complete a full-scale training exercise every quarter, it is good practice to participate in some type of training event once a year. Experts recommend planning for quarterly small-scale training operations if possible. Small-scale training could include something as simple as a staff walk-through of the facility or taking time to re-evaluate practices and the evacuation plan. At this same time, staff can ensure emergency supplies are in working order and stored appropriately, and can integrate new staff members into the plan. Although this quarterly training session is valuable for the entire staff, it is essential for staff working in the front-of-house, production, security and facilities areas.

Enhance Planning with Awareness

Planning is critical, but encouraging workers to be aware of their surroundings on a daily basis is just as important in preventing or dealing with an active shooter event at a venue. As Adelman points out, “The key to responding to an active shooter is the same as the key to avoiding safety and security issues of all kinds: situational awareness.”

The staff working live events need to be especially observant – even more so than they would be in their daily lives.

“Anyone who works in a theatre environment knows that people make mistakes and miss obvious problems all the time,” says Adelman. “We are able to get through our days precisely because we don’t (Continued on Page 36)
W.L. Newkirk: Getchell Award-Winning Play Spotlights Thalidomide Scare

I am not sure the Charles M. Getchell New Play Award has ever had a more eclectic winner than W.L. Newkirk, who won this year’s competition with his play [Miss]. With degrees in government from Harvard and medicine from the Ohio State University, Newkirk has published three medical textbooks, written 65 scientific articles and book chapters, lectured at medical schools and founded a research corporation that created occupational electronic medical records systems. As Newkirk puts it, “I spent much of my medical career focused on treating, predicting and preventing illnesses and injuries arising from work in local factories.” While at Harvard, Newkirk formed a small film company, and he has continued to maintain a strong interest in theatre and film. After concluding his medical practice in 2010, he studied playwriting with Don Salvo in Stetson University’s Lifelong Learning program. Now a full-time playwright, Newkirk has written 24 plays, including East Lansing (Best Play, Tampa Bay Theatre Festival, 2014), In Me (Vigoda Award Winner for Best Dramedy, 2015), 5 to 4 (Best Play, 4x6 Fest, Tampa, FL, 2015), Suffocation (Grand Prize, Emerald Theatre Company New Play Festival, 2016) and The Nude (Best Play, A Strong Woman Play Festival, Washington, DC, 2016). In addition to writing, he teaches playwriting to other aspiring writers in Stetson’s Lifelong Learning Program. He and his wife also operate the William Newkirk and Cheryl Tschanz Family Foundation, which provides grants to organizations and communities that are working to develop new programs to help those less fortunate and to encourage greater access to healthcare, elder care and the arts. Newkirk is a member of the Dramatists Guild and lives in Florida.

DARREN MICHAEL: Your play [MISS] is based on the true story of a U.S. doctor who played a critical role in blocking FDA approval of thalidomide, a drug that caused severe birth defects. How were you inspired to dramatize this story?

W.L. NEWKIRK: I read Frances Oldham Kelsey’s obituary in The New York Times in 2015. She died at 101. Like many people my age, I distinctly remember the August 10, 1962, issue of Life magazine that showed pictures of the deformed thalidomide babies and discussed what Kelsey had done. I was 11 at the time, and the article scared me to death. After I read the obituary, I started researching Dr. Kelsey and came across a deposition from the drug company’s medical director, Raymond Pogge. I was shocked how he freely admitted to faking the authorship of a medical journal article that falsely attested to thalidomide’s safety in pregnancy. Having written many medical journal articles myself, I was offended by this breach of medical ethics and its horrific implications. I was amazed at how Kelsey withstood the pressure brought to bear on her. I came to believe that only Frances Kelsey, with her unique collection of talents, could have prevented the thalidomide tragedy in the United States. Since much of the story, particularly the drug company’s malfeasance, only came to light years after the thalidomide news broke and the publicity died down, I felt it was important to tell the story anew. I had a lot of experience writing medical history as a book chapter or a medical article. The challenge was whether I could write it as a play. When I sent the play, in its 30th version, to my dramaturg for the first time, I asked her only one question: “Is this a play?” Fortunately, she said “Yes.”

MICHAEL: Does writing a play about real events present challenges?

NEWKIRK: Yes. No matter how closely a playwright attempts to follow real historical events, a stage play is fundamentally fiction. In the theatres where I usually work, I get up to eight actors, one set and two hours to tell a story. These constraints necessarily require reworking history –
combining multiple people into a single character on stage, creating fictional characters that allow the telling of real events, altering timelines to make them more understandable, arranging for more direct conflict between characters, etc. My goal in [Miss] was for an audience member to leave the play understanding the major historical events that took place, knowing the names of the real people involved in those events (in case the audience member wanted to look them up and read more later), and having had an emotional response to what happened. I tried as much as possible to tell the story fairly, but obviously the audience will come away from the play with strong negative feelings toward certain characters – because those people did incredibly bad things in real life. I also wanted to try to give the audience a sense of what it must have felt like to be an older woman in those events (in case the audience member wanted to look them up and read more later), and having had an emotional response to what happened. I tried as much as possible to tell the story fairly, but obviously the audience will come away from the play with strong negative feelings toward certain characters – because those people did incredibly bad things in real life. I also wanted to try to give the audience a sense of what it must have felt like to be Dr. Kelsey.

**MICHAEL:** This play has resonance even in today’s social and political climate, right?

**NEWKIRK:** When I started researching the play, it never crossed my mind that the rules put in place at the FDA after thalidomide to prevent it from happening again would be called into question. But, of course, that has happened. So [Miss] is instructive in why the rules exist and shows what can, and probably will, happen if the rules are repealed. Another major theme of [Miss] is the struggle against misogyny. The anti-woman comments and behavior in [Miss] were extremely common in the early ’60s, and Kelsey struggled against these biases for much of her career. Misogyny, of course, still exists and may be on the rise. [Miss] tells an authentic story of a woman speaking truth to power and, in the process, saving 20,000 babies. I hope the women in the audience find it empowering. One of my favorite moments from the Orlando production of [Miss] occurred in a scene where Kelsey stands up to the two doctors from Merrell. When she yells at them, losing her patience after explaining yet again why she won’t approve thalidomide, an audience member shouted out: “You go, girl!”

**MICHAEL:** So [Miss] is as political as it is historical. Was that on purpose? Does much of your writing fall into this pattern?

**NEWKIRK:** In general, I don’t write political works – not that I don’t have a political viewpoint, but I think other story lines are more meaningful to explore. My primary goal in [Miss] was to tell Dr. Kelsey’s story because I thought it was fascinating and largely forgotten. I was interested in the role of women in society and science, because it was central to the story, as Kelsey was only admitted to graduate school because she was thought to be a man, and her being a woman played a significant role in Merrell’s battles against her. So, politics grew out of the story rather than drew me to it.

**MICHAEL:** Are there certain stories, ideas or characters toward which you gravitate?

**NEWKIRK:** My preference is to write plays that feature middle-aged or older women in the lead role. I think their stories are inherently more interesting. Also, having been on the board of a theatre, I realize that without women in this age group doing all that they do to sustain theatre companies, many of the opportunities for playwrights would cease to exist. It seems to me that there should be more robust roles for older women on stage. So, I like creating the roles. My plays that feature older female leads have been more successful than my plays that do not.

**MICHAEL:** Do you have a particular writing process?

**NEWKIRK:** A new full-length play takes me about two years from the time I get the original idea until the play completes its first run in a professional theatre. So, for me, the hardest decision is the first one: Do I want to devote two years of my life to this topic? This is becoming even more important as I get older and the number of years I have left is limited. Sometimes the search for a topic seems endless. I get really impatient and frustrated, but I have to tell myself that it’s better to get a great topic than to start writing prematurely. Once I select a topic, my approach to writing follows the same pattern I’ve used for over 35 years. I write about five hours per day. There are two chairs at my keyboard: one for me, one for my cat.

I’ve written medical textbooks, scientific articles, history, poetry, software and stage plays. Of these, I think theatrical writing is the most difficult and most competitive. In some ways, theatrical writing mirrors the process of writing computer code: the pages look similar; the language is highly structured; and you can’t assess the quality of what you’ve written solely by reading. Computer code must run through the computer; theatrical writing must be spoken out loud by actors on the stage. Like with computer code, I am careful to keep track of versions – labeling and retaining each day’s version so I can backtrack if I head in the wrong direction. I listen to, rather than read, my writing by having the
MICHAEL: The editing or workshopping process? The first sit-down to write? What’s your favorite part of playwriting? The first sit-down to write? The editing or workshopping process? NEWKIRK: Except for rejection, which like most folks in theatre, is my constant companion, I love everything else – the way the theatre feels before a show, rehearsals, writing and rewriting the script, seeing characters that once only existed in my head come to life. But if pressed to pick a favorite part, it would be rewriting. Once I complete the first draft of a play, I will rewrite it every day for months. I love the feeling of chasing, but never quite finding, perfection. Getting lost in the story. Finding the best rhythm. Looking for the perfect word.

NEWKIRK: Stylistically, I’m trying for Hemingway meets The West Wing. I’m definitely from the “Life is short. Talk fast!” school of playwriting. I come from a family of writers. My father wrote until his death at 86 even though nothing got published for the last 20 years of his life. Nonetheless, he kept writing. The words themselves were the goal. That is what inspires me and drives me forward. I am extremely fortunate to write with a group of active and successful playwrights: Ken Preuss, Tracey Jane Smith, Tony Pelham, David Strauss and Irene Pynn. They challenge me to keep up with them. My students force me to distill my jumbled thoughts about playwriting into a more cohesive philosophy. I try to see a lot of newly-written plays, both full-length and 10-minute.

MICHAEL: Was the Getchell reading and feedback session helpful with your work on [Miss]?

NEWKIRK: The Getchell reading and feedback session was a great gift to me. Craig Pospisil, who served as the adjudicator, is brilliant. I felt doubly blessed because Craig had previously served as adjudicator on the performance of [Miss] at FutureFest 2016 [a new play competition in Dayton, OH]. I came away from FutureFest with a laundry list of things that needed fixing in the play and spent about six months making those changes. The Getchell session gave me a chance to get Craig’s feedback on how well I’d responded to his earlier commentary and to get direction for further rewriting. We were also in the middle of rehearsing the play for its Orlando run at the time and the director and actors there had questions that they wanted posed to the Getchell reading director, cast and audience. That feedback was very helpful.

MICHAEL: Where are things right now as they stand with [Miss]?

NEWKIRK: [Miss] just completed a successful two-week run at the Orlando Shakespeare Center after winning Playwrights’ Round Table’s Premiere Competition. The Orlando director, Chuck Dent, recommended changes that significantly improved the play. Nicole Darden Creston, who played Dr. Kelsey, found vulnerability in the Kelsey character that I had not appreciated, which allowed her to connect deeply with the audience. Now that both the Getchell reading and the Orlando run are completed, I am revising the play further and making preparations for the next production.

Darren V. Michael is a professional actor, director and playwright, and a professor at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN. He is chair of SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award Committee.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

DR. FRANCES OLDHAM KELSEY: FDA scientist, female, early 20s, mid-40s.
DR. RAYMOND STEHLE: McGill professor, male, mid-40s.
JOHN YODER: Husband of Betty, male, 30s.
BETTY YODER: Merrell pharmaceutical rep, female, late 20s, early 30s.
DR. JOSEPH MURRAY: Merrell contact man, male, early 40s.
DR. RAYMOND POGGE: Merrell medical director, male, late 40s.
GERTRUDE HELFER: FDA staff, female, late 20s, 30s.
MARY BECK: Merrell pharmaceutical rep, female, 30s.
DR. RAY NULSEN: Physician, male, early 50s.
NOTE: DR. RAYMOND STEHLE can be doubled with DR. RAY NULSEN.

NOTES ON STAGING:
The play is designed for a minimal unified set to facilitate very rapid scene changes. The script envisions a table and two chairs stage right (FDA), a table and two chairs stage left (Merrell), items suggesting a living room upstage center (Ohio home), on risers if desired, and the ability to illuminate various parts of the stage.

TIME:

ABOUT THIS PLAY:
[Miss] is a fictional theatrical drama about true events. It is based on court testimony, lawsuit filings, FDA documents, participant recollections, marketing materials, scientific articles, newspaper accounts and scholarly textbooks. Casting considerations required that some of the characters be composites of more than one person. Some encounters which occurred over several days have been condensed into a single encounter. In instances where there exist strong differences of opinion as to what happened, deference has been given to Dr. Frances Oldham Kelsey’s personal recollections of events. Some characters and events have been created or modified for dramatic effect.

FOR PRODUCTION:
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PROLOGUE
February 16, 1936. McGill University. Montreal, Canada. Outside in Montreal in February. It’s cold. FRANCES OLDHAM (KELSEY), 21 and a student, wearing a winter coat and hat, anxiously paces. She has a letter in one hand which she is tapping against the other hand. DR. RAYMOND STEHLE, also dressed for the cold, enters.

KELSEY: Dr. Stehle!

STEHLE: Miss Oldham. What’re you—

KELSEY: Read it!

(STEHLE opens the letter and reads silently, then...

STEHLE: If you can be in Chicago by March 1, 1936, you may have the Research Assistantship for four months and then a scholarship to see you through a Ph.D. Please wire immediate decision. That’s wonder—

KELSEY: No. The first part.

STEHLE: (Going back to the first page.) “We received your letter of—”

KELSEY: Before that!

Dr. Frances Oldham Kelsey (played by Nicole Darden Creston) confronts drug company executives (played by Russell R. Trahan and Jeff Hole) in the April 2017 Playwrights’ Round Table production of [Miss] at the John and Rita Lowndes Shakespeare Center in Orlando, FL.
BETTY: “Dear Mister Oldham.”

KELSEY: MISTER Oldham.

STEILE: (Beat) I see.

KELSEY: Look. I know I’m no Jean Harlow, but I hope to God I can’t pass for MISTER.

STEILE: It’s the name Frances.

KELSEY: But men are I-S. I’m E-S.

STEILE: They musta missed it.

KELSEY: What should I do?

STEILE: Well—

KELSEY: I’m gonna write and tell them. STEILE: Don’t be ridiculous! KELSEY: I don’t know something. I can’t just show up and have Geiling say: “No girls allowed.”

STEILE: He won’t do that.

KELSEY: But you said yourself that he doesn’t hold much with women as scientists.

STEILE: That is true. (Pause. Thinks.) OK. Here’s what you do: Accept the job, sign your name, put Miss in brackets afterwards, then go.

KELSEY: That’s it?

STEILE: That’s it.

KELSEY: Miss? In brackets?

STEILE: Uh-huh.

KELSEY: And Dr. Geiling won’t send me home?

STEILE: No.

KELSEY: You sure?

STEILE: Geiling may be old fashioned, but once he’s met you, he’ll want to keep you.

KELSEY: Why?

STEILE: He’s not stupid. (Hands the letter back.)

KELSEY: “Dear Mister Oldham.”

STEILE: (Beat) OK. Here’s (Incredulous)

MURRAY: “Three Comrades”?

POGGE: Right. Dead. Overdue.

MURRAY: From what?

POGGE: Barbiturates. They’ll kill you if you mix ‘em with booze.

MURRAY: And Kevedon’s safer?

POGGE: Much. If Margaret Sullivan had taken Kevedon, she’d still be alive.

MURRAY: (Pause. Thinks. Worried.) So, why’d Smith-Kline drop it?

POGGE: Sorry?

MURRAY: If Kevedon’s so much safer, why’d Smith-Kline drop it?

POGGE: Oh, that.

MURRAY: They had it in testing for years.

POGGE: No one knows.

MURRAY: The world’s first safe sleeping pill. The market’s gonna be huge. You don’t just walk away from that.

POGGE: Smith-Kline did.

MURRAY: Think they found somethin’?

POGGE: I don’t know.

MURRAY: Shouldn’t we try’n find out?

POGGE: Smith-Kline’ll never talk to us.

MURRAY: How ’bout the Germans? Would they tell us?

POGGE: Maybe. If Smith-Kline told them.

MURRAY: So, do we try’n track it down?

POGGE: Don’t ya think we’d be seein’ somethin’?

MURRAY: You’d think. It’s already in forty countries.

POGGE: Forty-six.

MURRAY: And nothing anywhere, right?

POGGE: Right.

MURRAY: Anything serious would be showing up by now, wouldn’t ya think?

POGGE: I’ll tell you this: Checkin’ it out’ll take a lot of detective work.

MURRAY: Kevedon’s gotta be on the market for Christmas.

POGGE: You’ll be lucky to make the Fourth of July.

MURRAY: That’s no good.

POGGE: (Beat) So, can I send it in?

MURRAY: Sure. Send it in. How long ’til we hear?

POGGE: Six weeks, tops.

MURRAY: So, Christmas is a lock.


MURRAY: You gotta admit: It has a certain ring.

POGGE: Like a cash register.

MURRAY: Lotta anxious ladies and sleepless nights over the holiday days.

POGGE: And we’re gonna play Santa. (END OF SCENE.)
Scene Three
One week later. September 13, 1960. Food and Drug Administration, Washington, DC. DR. FRANCES OLDHAM KELSEY: now 46, prim and conservatively dressed, unpacks items at her desk. She is moving in.

GERTRUDE HELFER, carrying two sets of files, one of which is the three binders from the last scene, crosses toward KELSEY.

HELFER: Excuse me. Do you know where I can find Dr. Frances Oldham Kelsey?

KELSEY: Here.

HELFER: (Beat. Surprised.) You? KELSEY: Yes. HELFER: You sure?

KELSEY: Pretty sure. I was Frances Oldham Kelsey when I got up this morning.

HELFER: Sorry. It’s just. I thought you’d be older. (Beat, puts out her hand to shake hands.) Gertrude Helfer.

KELSEY: (Shakes hands.) I think I’d go on like you. Gertrude Helfer.

HELFER: (Sees KELSEY’s diploma.) Ph.D., the University of Chicago, right?

KELSEY: MD and Ph.D.

HELFER: God. You musta been in school forever. (Seeing the picture on KELSEY’s desk.) God. You musta been in school forever. HELFER: (Handing KELSEY the application.) It’s a pretty sure. I was Frances Oldham Kelsey again and created all these jobs.

KELSEY: That’s not what I heard.

HELFER: Geiling wrote the paper.

KELSEY: OK. Kevadon.

HELFER: (Smiles) I’ll try’n stay awake.

KELSEY: Sleeping pills are easy.

HELFER: OK. Kevadon.

KELSEY: By dying.

HELFER: (Starts to leave, stops, grabbing the second application.) Oh, I almost forgot: Kevadon, a sedative.

KELSEY: A sleeping pill?

HELFER: Sleeping pills are easy.

KELSEY: I’ll try’n stay awake.

HELFER: (Beat) Is that a joke?

KELSEY: (Smiles) Who makes it?

HELFER: Germans. It’s already bein’ sold all over the world.

KELSEY: Who’s handling it here?

HELFER: Merrell, Cincinnati.

KELSEY: Oh. OK.

HELFER: It’s no big deal. (END OF SCENE.)

Scene Four
Six weeks later. October 26, 1960. Kevadon Sales Training Session. Women’s restroom. MARY BECK is standing at a table downstairs center, miming looking in a mirror. During the scene, MARY and BETTY will look in the mirror, fix their hair and apply—Toilet flush. BETTY YODER enters, having just vomited.

MARY: Betty!

BETTY: (Stops.) Don’t tell me!

MARY: It just ended.

BETTY: DAMMIT!

MARY: It wasn’t that good.

BETTY: I’m gonna get fired!

MARY: No, you’re not.

BETTY: Merrell’s just lookin’ for an excuse.

MARY: I covered for you.

BETTY: You did?

MARY: We girls gotta stick together.

BETTY: Thanks.

MARY: You won’t worry. As far as Merrell knows, you atta everything. (Hands BETTY a box of samples and a brochure.) Here, I even picked up your samples. (MARY studies BETTY.)

BETTY: How can I ever—

MARY: You look just awful.

BETTY: Gee. Thanks.

MARY: No, I mean: In case you haven’t noticed. BETTY: Oh, I’ve noticed.

MARY: You wanna tell me what’s goin’ on?

BETTY: I’ve been throwing up a lot.

MARY: (Excited, suspects pregnancy.) Really? BETTY: Food poisoning.

MARY: (Skeptical) Food poisoning?

BETTY: Yeah.

MARY: That’s what you’re callin’ it?

BETTY: It was something I ate.

MARY: Honey, if you ate it, you wouldn’t be in this condition.

BETTY: Shh! (Mimes looking under bathroom stalls to make sure no one heard.)

MARY: Or so I’m told.

BETTY: Or so you’re told.

MARY: Congratulations.

BETTY: Thank you.

MARY: How’s John taking the news?

BETTY: He’s over the moon. He never knew his father, you know.

BETTY: How far along?

MARY: I guess this is his chance to make things right, somehow.

MARY: Men are weird.

BETTY: Couple of months. You can’t tell a soul.

MARY: My lips are sealed.

BETTY: I don’t wanna lose my job.

MARY: How can I help?

BETTY: Start by telling me what I missed.

MARY: OK. Kevadon.

BETTY: Morning sickness.

MARY: Marrell’s latest wonder drug.

BETTY: What’s it for?

MARY: (Pointing to a spot on the brochure.) You name it.

BETTY: (Reading) Abdominal pain, alcoholism, anorexia, asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, dental procedures, emotional instability, functional bowel distress, kidney disease, marital discord—

MARY: I’m giving it to Richard.

BETTY: Menopause, nervous exhaustion, nightmares, poor school work, premature ejaculation—

MARY: Did I mention I’m giving it to Richard?

BETTY: Tuberculosis, Vomiting.

MARY: (Points at BETTY) Morning sickness.

BETTY: Morning sickness?

MARY: Oh. Yes. Germans. They love it for morning sickness.

BETTY: Germans?

MARY: It’s a German drug. Merrell’s just selling it.

BETTY: So, it’s safe during pregnancy?

MARY: Our guys say: “The safest thing since water.”

BETTY: The safest thing since—

MARY: Can’t kill rats with it.

BETTY: (Beat, puzzled.) You can’t kill rats with it?

MARY: That’s what our guys say.

BETTY: What’s that even mean?

MARY: I don’t know.

BETTY: (Making joke.) Maybe if your rat’s suffering from nervous exhaustion, you can give it to him and not worry.

MARY: Something like that.

BETTY: When’d the FDA approve it?

MARY: The FDA? They haven’t.

BETTY: They haven’t?

MARY: But any day now.

BETTY: Our guys’ll tell us when it’s approved so we can start pushing.

MARY: No. We start now.

BETTY: Hang on. I must be missin’ somethin’. We start pushin’ it before it’s been approved?

MARY: Right. Before.

BETTY: Is that even legal?

MARY: Our guys say: “Yes”.

BETTY: Really?

MARY: Apparently, there’s this loophole.

BETTY: Must be some loophole.

MARY: They’re callin’ it a “clinical investigation”.

[MISS] by W.L. Newkirk

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**Scene Five**

Two weeks later: November 9, 1960. Food and Drug Administration, Washington, DC. DR. FRANCES OLDHAM KELSEY sits at a table while searching through a stack of papers. GERTRUDE HELFER crosses to KELSEY, carrying a newspaper and a small plant. She tosses the paper down on KELSEY’s desk, interrupting KELSEY.

**HELFER:** The Times finally called it. Kennedy.

**KELSEY:** Of course. Your first drug approval.

**HELFER:** With disappointment. An enema.

**KELSEY:** You gotta start somewhere. So — how’s Kevadon?

**HELFER:** A very popular topic these days.

**KELSEY:** Tomorrow.

**HELFER:** You do know that if you don’t decide by the deadline, Kevadon gets—

**KELSEY:** Approved automatically. Yeah. I know. You’re like the tenth person today to—

**HELFER:** Sorry. (Beat) Whatcha gonna do?

**KELSEY:** I don’t know.

**HELFER:** You want me to ask one of the guys who’s been around—

**KELSEY:** No—

**HELFER:** Really, it’d be no trouble. I can ask—

**KELSEY:** No—

**HELFER:** Look. I’m sure they’d—

**KELSEY:** I don’t need their help!

**HELFER:** (Beat) (Like: I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.)

**KELSEY:** I asked my husband—

**HELFER:** You asked your husband?

**KELSEY:** What he thought of Merrell’s application.

**HELFER:** Oh. Right. Must be convenient to have a husband who happens to be a world-famous pharmacologist.

**KELSEY:** Most of the time, I’d prefer a plumber.

**HELFER:** But not now.

**KELSEY:** No. Not now.

**HELFER:** And?

**KELSEY:** He wanted a memo.

**HELFER:** (Beat. Suddenly worried.) What’d you say?

**KELSEY:** He wanted a memo.

**HELFER:** A memo?

**KELSEY:** (Beat. worried.) He’s leaving a paper trail.

**HELFER:** You think?

**KELSEY:** Something must be wrong. He’s worried someone is gonna come in after the fact and review the Kevadon decision. (Beat) Can I see it?

**HELFER:** The memo? Sure. (Looks around on her desk for the memo. Finds it. Hands it to HELFER.) Here.

**HELFER:** (Reads the memo. Laughs. Slowly.) “An interesting collection of meaningless pseudo-scientific jargon, apparently intended to impress chemically unsophisticated readers.” Ouch. He doesn’t mince words.

**KELSEY:** And that’s not the worst. Look at his conclusion.

**HELFER:** (KELSEY recites from memory as HELFER reads quote.) “I cannot believe this to be honest incompetence.” (Beat) Really?

**KELSEY:** Uh-huh.

**HELFER:** He thinks someone’s lying?

**KELSEY:** He does.

**HELFER:** Who?

**KELSEY:** That, my friend, is the $64,000 Question.

**HELFER:** And your deadline is?

**KELSEY:** Tomorrow.

**HELFER:** Wow. (Beat. They think.)

**KELSEY:** Gertrude. You’ve been here a while. What do folks do in cases like this?

**HELFER:** Most cases hate this.

**KELSEY:** But, usually.

**HELFER:** Well, usually, it’s cut-and-dried. Do you have evidence Kevadon’s not safe?

**KELSEY:** No.

**HELFER:** It gets approved then.

**KELSEY:** Really?

**HELFER:** The only reason you can turn a drug down is if you’ve got evidence it’s unsafe.

**KELSEY:** Even if someone’s lying?

**HELFER:** Can you prove they’re lying?

**KELSEY:** (Beat, thinks.) Not yet. (END OF SCENE.)

**Scene Seven**

MURRAY: You rejected it?
KELSEY: No.
MURRAY: What’re you doing then?
KELSEY: Returning it.
MURRAY: Returning it? Why?!
KELSEY: It’s (Beat. KELSEY thinks.) Incomplete.
MURRAY: It’s. Incomplete? How?
KELSEY: Well, you cite a lot of German studies.
MURRAY: It’s a German drug.
KELSEY: But, your German translations are — wrong.
MURRAY: You cannot be serious.
KELSEY: I am. Get a better translator.
MURRAY: (Beat. Getting his bearings.) Anything else?
KELSEY: You include thirty reports from American doctors.
MURRAY: Our investigational study.
KELSEY: These aren’t even remotely an investigational study. They’re testimonials.
MURRAY: They’re a study.
KELSEY: To be honest, most of them are barely believable.
MURRAY: You don’t like them?
KELSEY: It’s not a matter of liking them. You need real studies.
MURRAY: Anything else?
KELSEY: Your rats.
MURRAY: Let me guess; You want them to die.
KELSEY: Rats have trouble absorbing certain drugs.
MURRAY: So, now you’re an expert on rats?
KELSEY: Actually, I am.
MURRAY: Unbelievable!
KELSEY: And if you want to give Kevadon to pregnant women.
MURRAY: You know we do—
KELSEY: Provide us with research that shows Kevadon’s safe in pregnancy.
MURRAY: You done?
KELSEY: No, there’s a few more.
MURRAY: I’m sure.
KELSEY: I can put them in the cover letter, if you’d like.
MURRAY: That’d be great.
KELSEY: Fine. Let us know if you want to resubmit.
MURRAY: Oh, we will.
KELSEY: Bye.
KELSEY hangs up and gives a big sigh of relief.
MURRAY: That shows Kevadon is safe.
POGGE: You apparently can translate German.
KELSEY: (Explodes) DAMMIT! THERE GOES CHRISTMAS!
POGGE: No way she turned us down.
MURRAY: She didn’t.
POGGE: So, what’s the problem?
MURRAY: She’s returning our application.
POGGE: Can she even do that, legally?
MURRAY: She thinks she can.
POGGE: Doesn’t she know how the game is played?
MURRAY: Apparently not.
POGGE: Blah.
(Murrs. They think.)
POGGE: We gotta crush her.
MURRAY: I’ll start making some calls.
POGGE: Who?
MURRAY: Public Relations to start.
POGGE: Those PR guys’ll make her wish she never heard of Kevadon.
MURRAY: And. We apply again.
POGGE: What’d ya need from me?
MURRAY: Research.
POGGE: She’s already got the German stuff.
POGGE: That’s gonna take time.
MURRAY: And a study on pregnancy.
POGGE: Pregnancy?
MURRAY: That shows Kevadon is safe.
POGGE: I might have someone for that.
MURRAY: Who?
POGGE: Ray Nulsen.
MURRAY: Never heard of him.
POGGE: He was Don Merrell’s fraternity brother.
MURRAY: Is he sharp?
POGGE: Let’s just say: He’ll be very cooperative and geographically convenient.
MURRAY: Good.
POGGE: Oh. Christ. What about marketing?
MURRAY: Marketing?
POGGE: (Laughs) Those guys are gonna be pissed.
MURRAY: Why?
POGGE: They’ve already started distributing Kevadon counting on FDA approval.
MURRAY: I asked them about that: They said it’s part of an investigational study.
POGGE: Investigational study, my ass.
MURRAY: What?!
POGGE: Hey! Don’t look so shocked. Everybody does it. Marketing’s just trying to get as many docs using Kevadon as they can before—
MURRAY: Wait a minute? Are you saying it’s not a real study?
POGGE: Marketing didn’t tell you? It’s a sham. Do you really think those idiots—
MURRAY: Ray, could we justify that it’s a real study?
POGGE: Why?
MURRAY: I don’t know. Say someone asks.
POGGE: Who’s gonna ask?
MURRAY: The FDA?
POGGE: The FDA won’t ask.
MURRAY: Suppose they do, could we justify that it’s a real, investigational study?
POGGE: Not a marketing program?
MURRAY: No. A legitimate medical investigation, in case someone looks closely.
POGGE: Not a chance.
MURRAY: Why?
POGGE: No study design. No controls. (Chuckles) Hell, we even tell the docs they don’t have to report their results—
MURRAY: How are we ever gonna find out anything if the docs don’t report—
POGGE: That’s not the point.
MURRAY: (Beat) Think marketing’ll shut it down?
POGGE: Are you kidding? D’you realize how much has already gone into this?
MURRAY: I can’t believe she didn’t just approve it.
POGGE: It’s strange.
MURRAY: They always do.
POGGE: Don’t worry; she’ll cave.
MURRAY: Of course, she’ll cave. But Christmas. Christmas is lost.
POGGE: Maybe January.
MURRAY: No. It’ll be March, at least.
POGGE: (Beat) Joe, in Germany, parents can buy Kevadon syrup without a prescription to sedate their kids when they go to the movies. They call it Kinosaft, cinema juice.
MURRAY: Leave it to the Germans.
POGGE: You and I, on the other hand, can’t get it past a damn housewife at the FDA.

[END OF SCENE.]

Scene Eight
Five days later. November 15, 1960. Food and Drug Administration, Washington, DC. DR. FRANCES
OLDHAM KELSEY and GERTRUDE HELFER are eating lunch and are in the middle of an animated discussion.

KELSEY: So, I had to pee really bad—

HELFER: What was showing?

KELSEY: Casablanca.

HELFER: (Bad Bogart impression.) Here’s looking at you, kid.

KELSEY: The theater was packed.

HELFER: Don’t ya hate that? Squeeze’ past everyone, knowin’ that they’re all thinkin’: Why didn’t this bimbo go before the show started?

KELSEY: Did I mention I had to collect my urine—

HELFER: On your first date? —

KELSEY: In a big jar.

HELFER: (Laughs) Fun!

KELSEY: It was doomed from the start.

HELFER: Why?

KELSEY: Was it doomed?

HELFER: No. Why’d ya hafta collect your urine in a big jar?

KELSEY: To find a new drug for malaria.

HELFER: What was wrong with quinine?

KELSEY: We were running out. Japan had just taken the Dutch East Indies.

HELFER: And if you can’t treat malaria, you can’t fight in the tropics.

KELSEY: And if you can’t fight in the tropics, you can’t win the war. So, they launched this crash program to find a substitute. There wasn’t time to look for volunteers.

HELFER: You tested the drugs on yourself?!

KELSEY: We took turns. My bad luck: The one I took damaged my liver and I was jaundiced.

HELFER: A canary.

KELSEY: As a canary.

HELFER: On your first date?

KELSEY: I looked just hideous.

HELFER: And looking hideous is so helpful on a first date.

KELSEY: Isn’t it? Anyway, I went to the bathroom and filled the jar to the top. Then I thought: Now what? How’m I gonna get back to my seat without spilling urine on everyone.

HELFER: Since the folks sittin’ around you held you in such high regard already.

KELSEY: I know, right? I finally got up the courage to come out. And there was Fred. Just standing there. He took the urine, put it in our empty popcorn bag, gave me his arm and led me back to our seats.

HELFER: And you knew.

KELSEY: And I knew. We got married the next year.

HELFER: Great story. Did ya end up discovering anything? I mean: Besides your husband?

KELSEY: No new malaria drug. But, we did stumble on to something no one had ever described before. Pregnant rabbits? —

HELFER: Break down quinine fine, but for some reason, fetal rabbits — (Phone rings.) — they can’t break it down at all. Hang on. (KELSEY picks up.) Frances Kelsey. (Pause, listens.) I don’t know who told you that. But it’s not true. (Beat) No. It doesn’t work like that. (Beat) I’ll take it into consideration. (Beat) Well, thanks for sharing that with me. (Beat) OK. Goodbye. (Hangs up the phone. Beat.) That was odd.

HELFER: Who was it?

KELSEY: Some Congressional staffer. He said he’d heard I made a mistake with the Kevadon application.

HELFER: He what? —

KELSEY: How would he even know?

HELFER: Merrell.

KELSEY: You think?

HELFER: Consider it a warning. Where’d you get that anyway? An incomplete application?

KELSEY: It’s in the regulations.

HELFER: I’m impressed.

KELSEY: I mean: if it had been a lifesaving antibiotic or heart med... But it’s another tranquilizer.

HELFER: It’s starting.

KELSEY: What?

HELFER: Merrell’s coming at you. And it’s gonna get ugly.

KELSEY: (Facetious) Wonderful. How do these things generally work out?

HELFER: They win.

KELSEY: Me? Always. They don’t stop. Not ‘til they get what they want.

KELSEY: Well, we might just have to change that.

HELFER: With all due respect, Dr. Kelsey, you have absolutely no idea what you’re talkin’ about.

KELSEY: You’re right.

HELFER: (Beat, somewhat amazed.) But you still think you can handle it.

KELSEY: (Laughs) Me? I don’t know. But back home in Canada, I was the only girl at an all-boy prep school. So, I have a lot of practice with guys coming at me.

(End of scene.)

Scene Nine

The next day, November 16, 1960. Country Club, Cincinnati, Ohio. DR. RAY NULSEN, wearing a windbreaker, lazily swings a golf club. DR. RAYMOND POGGE, also wearing a windbreaker and carrying a golf club, walks up. He reaches out and shakes NULSEN’S hand.

POGGE: Dr. Nulsen.

NULSEN: Dr. Pogge.

POGGE: Great you could get away on such short notice.

NULSEN: Couldn’t miss my last chance for golf before the snow flies.

POGGE: Don Merrell sends his regards by the way.

NULSEN: How’s Don? —

POGGE: Fine.

NULSEN: Good.

POGGE: Don said we could count on you.

NULSEN: Count on me? For what?

POGGE: We’ve run into a bit of a problem.

NULSEN: A problem?

POGGE: How’s that Kevadon we’ve been sending you?

NULSEN: Beautiful.

POGGE: And, by all accounts, absolutely harmless. NULSEN: Even better. So, what’s the problem?

POGGE: This new woman at the FDA’s being an absolute pain in the ass about approving it.

NULSEN: What’s she need?

POGGE: (Mokes hand gesture with golf club) inferring sex.) I’ll tell you what she needs.

NULSEN: I mean: For Kevadon?

POGGE: Research.

NULSEN: About?

POGGE: Pregnancy.

NULSEN: What’s that got to do with me?

POGGE: We need you to do a study.

NULSEN: Me?

POGGE: That shows Kevadon is safe in pregnancy. Published in a major American journal.

NULSEN: (Pause. Thinks.) Well, you’ve got two problems.

POGGE: OK.

NULSEN: I’m not a board-certified obstetrician.

POGGE: We can get around that.

NULSEN: You can?

POGGE: Sure. That’ll be easy. What’s the other problem?

POGGE: I’ll have to write it.

NULSEN: What if someone asks?

POGGE: I’ll write the study.

NULSEN: With what data?

POGGE: I’ve already got stuff from the Germans. And I’ll take anything you can give me.

NULSEN: Then, you write it?

POGGE: I’ll send it to you for review, of course.

NULSEN: And then what?

POGGE: Submit it.

NULSEN: Under my name?

POGGE: Under your name.

NULSEN: Even though you wrote it.

POGGE: Right.

NULSEN: (Beat) Is this some sort of joke?

POGGE: No. No joke.

NULSEN: Seems like a helluva lot of trouble to go to just to get some article published.

POGGE: No one can know it’s from Merrell.

NULSEN: Why not?

POGGE: Since Merrell’s name isn’t on it, we can present it to the FDA—

NULSEN: Oh. I get it. You wanna be able to say: “Here’s this independent study”—

POGGE: “That shows Kevadon is safe in pregnancy.”

NULSEN: How’d ya know the study’s gonna show Kevadon’s safe in pregnancy?

POGGE: Trust me. It will.

NULSEN: Sounds like you’ve been down this road before.

POGGE: Writing articles for other doctors? Maybe thirty times.

NULSEN: Thirty times?

POGGE: Everybody does it.

NULSEN: Really?

POGGE: You’d be surprised.

NULSEN: And it’s OK?

POGGE: They get published.

NULSEN: Past peer review and everything?

POGGE: Yep. Didn’t you ever wonder why the medical journal ads and research articles just seem to — line up?

NULSEN: What happens if they find out I didn’t write it?

POGGE: They won’t.

NULSEN: What if someone asks?

POGGE: No one’s gonna ask.

NULSEN: Suppose someone talks?

POGGE: Who’s gonna talk?

NULSEN: Someone.

POGGE: Only you and I’ll know. I’m certainly not gonna announce it. Are you?

NULSEN: No.

POGGE: See?

NULSEN: Couldn’t I lose my license?

POGGE: Lose your license? Get serious. This is how the system works. You think they’re gonna throw hundreds of docs out on the streets? C’mon. It’s a win-win. You get a major study to put on your resume and—

NULSEN: Merrell gets Kevadon approved.

POGGE: Right. Merrell gets Kevadon approved.

NULSEN: With what data?

POGGE: (Beat) Look, Ray. I know this must seem a bit unconventional. But it’s what we do every day. We’re just trying to get Kevadon past some stupid bureaucrat in Washington. Whaddaya say? (Beat. Firmly.) Don said we could count on you.

NULSEN: (Pause. Thinks.) OK. I guess.

POGGE: You won’t regret it.

(End of scene.)
Scene Ten
Six weeks later. Christmas Week 1960. A small home in Ohio. Food and Drug Administration, Washington, DC. William S. Merrell Company, Cincinnati, Ohio. There is a pitiful, artificial Christmas tree sitting on a table. There is a box for a coat wrapped and on the floor beside it. JOHN YODER and BETTY YODER enter. JOHN has his hands over BETTY’S eyes. BETTY is wearing a bathrobe. They stop.

JOHN: You up for this?
POGGE: Will you stop asking me that?!
JOHN: Just checking.
BETTY: It’s cramps. I have them all the time. I’m fine.
JOHN: You sure?
POGGE: (Annoyed) John. I’m fine.
JOHN: OK. No peeking then.
(As JOHN walks BETTY to the Christmas tree...)

BETTY: I’m not peeking.
JOHN: I don’t trust you.
BETTY: I’m not!
(As JOHN takes his hands from BETTY’s eyes as she is standing by the Christmas tree...)

JOHN: Ta Dah!
(Pause as BETTY looks at the tree.)

BETTY: That is quite honestly the most pathetic Christmas tree I’ve ever seen.

JOHN: You sure?
BETTY: I need it.
JOHN: You’re breaking all the rules.
BETTY: Open it.

POGGE: (Smiles) I’m gonna hafta figure out a very special way to punish you. (Lights out over JOHN and BETTY. Lights up on MURRAY and POGGE. MURRAY is on the phone in the middle of a discussion with Commissioner Larrick.)

MURRAY: Look. Commissioner Larrick, we appreciate the fact that Kelsey’s new but Kevadon is far too important to us to be part of some woman’s on-the-job training. (Beat) I just wanted to call and let you know that we’re unhappy about this and remind you we’ve got some very powerful friends in Congress. (Beat) No, sir. Not a threat. A fact. (Beat) We want Kelsey replaced.

MURRAY and POGGE (Lights out over MURRAY and POGGE.)

KELSEY: Hang on. Here it is: 700.

HELFER: (Beat) So, Kevadon reaches the fetus?
KELSEY: (Beat, ominious.) Kevadon reaches the fetus.

HELFER and KELSEY (Lights out over MURRAY and POGGE.)

JOHN: Open it.
(HELFER opens the box and takes out a winter coat.)

BETTY: Oh. John. It’s beautiful. (BETTY gives JOHN a quick kiss.) Thank you.

JOHN: Here, try it on.

BETTY: Oh, I’ll do that. (BETTY turns. JOHN removes her robe. Blood is visible on her robe and the back of her nightgown between her upper thighs.)

JOHN: (With quiet alarm.) Betty... (BLACKOUT)

(ENDED SCENE.)

[MISS] by W.L. Newkirk

Read Act II of [MISS] on the SETC website at www.setc.org/miss
Active Shooter

(Continued from Page 24)

focus on everything equally. Unfortunately, this means that we all suffer from an acute absence of situational awareness. To some extent, this can be addressed and overcome with training and practice … by placing considerable emphasis on enhancing situational awareness of the routine risks in live event production.”

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