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Anxiety Café: A One Act Play

Kerri McKinney

Ouachita Baptist University

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“Anxiety Café – A One Act Play”

written by

Kerri McKinney

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for completion of the
Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

thesis director

second reader

third reader

honors program director

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The playwright is a central figure in any theatrical event. He or she provides the script, which is the beginning of most all productions. However, the playwright then takes a backseat to the director, designer, and actors who will be creating the event from his words. Few playwrights are well known by name; most are recognized by the works they have written. Up to now as an actor the only contact I have had with a playwright is learning a role created by one. My education of the theatre experience has only been in the production aspect of a script - putting it on stage. For my thesis, I stepped to the other side of the script.

Each person has their own playwright somewhere in the back of their mind. Life experience and personal stories are the material from which most scripts evolve. Everyone's experiences are unique, though. This is why there are no rules for writing plays. Anything the mind can imagine can be written. As I have learned from my experience working with my own script, the process is long and frustrating at times. Movement, speech, scenery, costumes, staging, music, and silence all have to be considered in the beginning stages of creation. Although my script is in its final written form, it will only be completed by performance on stage. A script is just a blueprint for a show.

Each playwright works differently. Some begin with a theme or moral that they want to present and build the show around it. Others start with one character then create a life for him. Sometimes it is a beginning and an end a playwright has in mind, and they only need to fill in the middle. I began my journey with a combination of these. At the start, I had four characters and a basic idea of what was going to happen to them. In the course of writing, I found the necessity to add other characters to move the story along. I

became so familiar with the characters as I wrote that they began to become real to me. I could see them moving and talking. As I understood each character more, the lines they spoke came more naturally. These characters became like my friends, and I knew their individual personalities. Each line is written to fit each personality which, in turn, makes the character believable to an audience. Since I was so close to the script, objectivity in re-reading it was difficult. The need for outside critiques became necessary. Many people, of varied theatrical background, read the script and gave me their impressions of it. Several revisions of the script ensued.

Although there are no set rules for writing a play, there are general guidelines for distinguishing a good play from a not-so-good one. To be a good play, several qualities have to be present. The actions must flow logically. That is, it must be believable for the character to be in the situation at that time, and his reaction to the situation must fit his personality. This is called credibility. It means that characters act out their desires and feelings while maintaining consistency. Credibility has more to do with the audience's willingness to believe than anything else. The playwright must make the belief possible. Intrigue is the quality of a play that makes the audience want to know what happens next. It keeps their interest. To achieve this, the playwright must create characters that make the audience care about them. This does not mean they have to like the character. Wanting the hero to get the girl and wanting the villain to fail are equal emotional investments from an audience. Intrigue is what draws people into a play. It is credibility that keeps them there.

Another aspect important to a "good" play deals with the dialogue. It must be written so as to achieve maximum impact when spoken. Dialogue does not have to

resemble everyday speech to be good, although today's theatre is generally geared in that direction. Speakability, stageability, and flow are necessary. Speakability is the shape and rhythm of the dialogue. Stageability is the capability of the dialogue to be spoken effectively. Both are equally important to keeping the audience interested. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of written dialogue, however. It is not until the play is heard that these qualities can be evaluated.

Gravity and pertinence are terms used to describe the importance of a play's theme and its overall relevance. Gravity means that the theme of the play is significant to the audience. It does not have to be a major philosophical maxim. A relevant theme can be as simple as "love yourself." Pertinence refers to the audience's ability to relate to the play's theme. Some things, such as current events, are only pertinent for a short time. Others, such as love, are eternally pertinent.

In my writing experience, I attempted to forget all of these things at the outset. I had an idea and a few characters, and I began to create a world for their existence. After my initial draft, I read back through the play, changing many things that did not fit in with the qualities mentioned. I decided to keep the dialogue fairly close to everyday speech but added a few quotations and outbursts to give enough diversity to stay interesting. Since the play is a one-act, too many complications would be confusing. In my play, there is one major conflict with several small problems for variety. Although the storyline is not one I have personally experienced, the characters and personalities are from aspects of my own life. For the most part, the characters are loosely based on people I know closely. Certain traits were emphasized for use in the script, however.

Many of the ideas, and even some of the lines, are taken from friends, conversations, and general situations I have observed.

Looking back to the beginning of this project and my first sketched out ideas, I am amazed at the way the play took shape. At the start I was a bit overwhelmed by the possibilities before me. Choosing one storyline and creating characters not just real to myself but to others as well has been a rewarding experience. Each character and each line have a specific purpose. I have a much better understanding of the time and love put into a script after completing this one. I am proud to call this play mine.

Characters

Joe – the writer

Duke

Johnny

Dahli

Candie

Sylvia

Two burly attendants

Lawn gnome

(There are two spaces onstage. The smaller is JOE's, the writer. A telephone, paper, a framed picture, pens, pencils, a coffee mug, and a hairpin sculpture sit on his desk. The larger is a community room in a psych ward. DAHLI sits on top of a cabinet with a rubix cube. JOHNNY sits in a chair, legs tucked under him, clutching several pieces of paper. Small bits of this paper lead in a trail from the door to the chair he is in. DUKE stands on a table, a towel pinned to his shoulders like a cape, a purse strapped to his waist. All three are still until JOE enters and begins to write. DAHLI begins to work on the cube. JOHNNY looks about nervously. Suddenly, DUKE jumps from the table with a wild yell. He lands on the floor in a heap.)

DUKE: Ouch.

JOHNNY: Don't do that.

DAHLI: (without looking up) You'll poke your eye out.

JOE: (stops writing) Yep. That was stupid. (He speaks the following as he writes. The characters follow his directions.) Duke climbs to the top of the table, preparing to fly...

DUKE: I can fly. I CAN fly! I can FLY!!

(DUKE jumps and falls to the floor.)

DUKE: Whoa. Did you feel how strong the gravity was right there? It just pulled me down.

JOHNNY: You can't fly. It's physically impossible.

DAHLI: Nothing is law that is not reason.

JOHNNY: Yeah, don't be such an idiot! You'll kill yourself.

DUKE: What did you say?

JOHNNY: Um...I....um...I said, never leave mayonnaise out in the sun too long because it will kill you.

(DUKE moves toward JOHNNY.)

JOHNNY: (little voice) Don't hurt me.

DUKE: You've given me a fabulous idea, little man.

JOHNNY: I have?

DUKE: Well, no, actually. I think it came to me when my head bounced on the floor, but if it makes you feel better to think you had something to do with it, go right ahead and think that.

JOHNNY: Gee, thanks. I guess.

DUKE: I'm only here to help. (reverent stance) It's my sworn duty as CAPTAIN PRONTO to aid those less fortunate than myself, uplift the weary and unconfident, and drop large heavy objects on less than brilliant mastermind super villains, squashing them flat in a single...

JOHNNY: I thought your name was Duke.

DUKE: (confidentially) That's my disguise, my alter ego, if you will. But don't tell Lois.

JOHNNY: Who's Lois? She's not a (gulp) lawn gnome, is she?

DUKE: I had almost forgotten what a complete imbecile you are. Thank you for reminding me.

JOHNNY: Any time. (smiles)

DUKE: (moving away from JOHNNY) Now, my brilliant idea... What I need is a sidekick. Every superhero has a sidekick. Batman's got Robin, Dean Martin had Jerry Lewis, Scooby's got Shaggy. (He looks back and forth between JOHNNY and DAHLI.) Doesn't look like I've got much to choose from here.

(DUKE takes a coin out of the purse and flips it. He begins to go to JOHNNY.)

JOHNNY: Is it getting warm in here? I definitely feel hot. Very, very hot! (screams) Somebody help me! Please, I don't want to go like this!!

(DUKE pulls a water gun from the purse and shoots JOHNNY in the face.)

JOHNNY: Thanks, Duke. You saved my life. I owe you.

DUKE: I live to serve. (goes to DAHLI) So.... (She doesn't respond. DUKE clears his throat.) I said, so.... you must have heard that I happen to have an opening for a sidekick. I could tell from across the room you were interested in the job. The pay's not so good, well it's nothing, actually, but the perks are great. For one thing, you get to follow me around all day. Isn't that exciting? (DAHLI continues to focus on the cube.) Hey, are you listening to me? I'm giving you

the offer of a lifetime here. (pause) Excuse me. (He pokes DAHLI.)

DAHLI: (suddenly looking at him) I know why the caged bird sings.

(DAHLI and DUKE look at each other for a moment. DAHLI returns to the cube.)

DUKE: Ah, well. Yes. (backing away) I'll be taking resumes soon. I'll get back to you.

(DUKE turns back to JOHNNY, who has risen and is moving to another chair, tearing bits of paper and dropping them behind him as he goes.)

DUKE: Well, Johnny-boy, looks like it's your lucky day.

JOHNNY: Is Ed McMahon here?

DUKE: No, no. Even better than that. You, my boy, have been chosen to accompany me in fighting the good fight, righting wrongs, finding the hoodlums that tear the tag off the mattress, signing autographs, and saving fair maidens.

(JOE's phone rings. He seems confused for a moment before he answers it. The action in the ward freezes when he stops writing.)

JOE: Hello? Mr. Thomas, I'm just working on it now. Well, I mean to say I've been working on it, and I'm still... yes, sir. I understand, yes. Don't worry, you'll love... No, of course I don't mean to tell you what... Yes, sir, as soon as it's done, sir. Of course. (looks at receiver) Bye? (JOE hangs the phone up, runs his hands through his hair, picks up his pencil and scribbles on the page. The characters speak gibberish. JOE looks at the page, then upwards.) Lord, please take me now. (He pauses. He looks about, waiting for an answer. He shrugs. He writes. The action resumes.)

JOHNNY: Fair maidens?

DUKE: That's what I said, isn't it?

JOHNNY: I don't see any fair maidens. You don't think the lawn gnomes got them, do you?

DUKE: No, I don't think... (considers) Yes! The lawn gnomes captured all the fair maidens, and we have to save them from impending doom!

JOHNNY: Impending doom? I don't like the sound of that. Maybe I'm not the best choice for sidekick.

DUKE: Nonsense. I'm never wrong about these things. You just need a good pseudonym.

JOHNNY: I don't know. The last time I took one of those my dead partner Marley appeared and then three more ghosts visited me during the night. I couldn't sleep at all.

(CANDIE enters in JOE's space, dressed for a date in a short, plain sundress. She throws a key on the desk.)

CANDIE: Here's your key back.

JOE: Candie! Hey, I'm glad you came....

CANDIE: Oh, shove it, Joe! We were supposed to go to dinner. You were going to pick me up, remember? An hour and a half ago?!

JOE: Oh, Candie, I'm sorry. I forgot.

CANDIE: Forgot? *Forgot!

JOE: You know I've got a deadline, and I...

CANDIE: Yes, a deadline. Joe, I'm sick and tired of you treating me like this!

JOE: You don't have to get huffy.

CANDIE: (growls) Don't call me, Joe. (She begins to leave.) Oh, by the way, I ran over one of those stupid lawn gnomes by the driveway.

JOE: (calling after her) Candie... Candie, come back. We'll have dinner. I'll order Chinese. Candie? I'm sorry. Candie? (pause) Humph. Sometimes I think she belongs in a nuthouse. Hey... (He writes again.)

(Two attendants dressed in white enter through the doors, CANDIE between them. She is wearing a long flowing skirt over her previously seen dress and a small tiara. They leave her in the middle of the room and exit, closing the doors behind them.)

DUKE: (to JOHNNY) Look, a fair maiden. I'll see if she needs saving. You watch out for lawn gnomes.

(JOHNNY looks about the room and cowers in his chair.)

DUKE: (to CANDIE) Well, hello there. My name is CAPTAIN PRONTO, and I've

come to rescue you from, um, well, whatever you need rescuing from.

CANDIE: Rescue me?

DUKE: Yes, ma'am.

JOHNNY: You haven't seen any lawn gnomes, have you?

CANDIE: Lawn gnomes?

DUKE: If ever you need rescuing, ma'am, just call CAPTAIN PRONTO.

CANDIE: (to JOHNNY) I thought Pronto was the Lone Ranger's friend.

(JOE's phone rings.)

JOE: Arg! (answers) What! Mom? Well, I'm writing... Candie called you?... No, I didn't... I know, I'm not getting any younger... Yes, mother... But I don't want a normal job, I mean, I have a... I know you want grandchildren, but I... Yes, mother... It is too normal to not have... Yes, mother... I'll do that. Love you, too. Bye.

(JOE hangs up. He looks at the page and chuckles. When SYLVIA enters, she is wearing a red stocking cap like that of the lawn gnome.)

JOE: (writing) Suddenly, Mom, I mean, Sylvia is thrown into the room by the two burly attendants. They exit, closing the doors and leaving her where she has fallen on the floor. She stands, only to be stabbed repeatedly by Duke. Sylvia falls, dead. (He stops writing) No, that's not really in his character.

(As JOE erases, DUKE backs up and puts the butter knife back in his purse. JOE writes again.)

JOE: Sylvia stands.

DUKE: (to SYLVIA) Dubious lawn gnome! Meet thy maker!

JOE: Duke runs to Sylvia and breaks her neck in one swift twist. She falls, dead.

CANDIE: No! Sylvia!

JOE: Candie runs towards the fallen body. A lawn gnome enters, sees Sylvia on the floor...

GNOME: My Queen! Someone will pay for this!

JOE: The lawn gnome pulls a revolver from his holster and shoots everyone,

GNOME: Bang! Bang! Bang, bang!

JOE: including himself.

GNOME: Bang!

JOE: They all die. (He stops writing, looks at the page, and shakes his head.) I need coffee. (He exits with the mug.)

(pause)

SYLVIA: (She is rolling her head from side to side to see if her neck is okay.) I thought I was dead!

CANDIE: (She checks herself for bullet holes.) Me, too. What's going on?

SYLVIA: (She rises and looks at the fallen gnome.) That thing needs serious psychological help.

CANDIE: I think I'd have to agree.

DAHLI: (looks up) "The time has come," the Walrus said.

(DAHLI goes back to the cube. The others stare at her for a moment.)

JOHNNY: (He whispers urgently from where he is curled up in a chair.) Duke! Duke!

DUKE: What do you want?

JOHNNY: Is that lawn gnome still there?

DUKE: Yeah.

JOHNNY: Ahh! (peeks over chair) AHH!

CANDIE: (going to JOHNNY) Shh. It's okay.

SYLVIA: What's his problem?

DUKE: He has a deep-rooted fear of lawn gnomes.

SYLVIA: Lawn gnomes?

DUKE: And spontaneous combustion.

SYLVIA: That's not normal.

JOHNNY: Do something, Duke. Do something.

DUKE: What do you want me to do?

JOHNNY: I don't know, you're Captain Pronto.

DUKE: Johnny! You revealed my secret identity!

JOHNNY: Oops. Sorry, Captain...uh, Duke.

DUKE: (looking around) That's okay, don't get uptight. Lois didn't hear. (He drags the gnome outside the doors and re-enters, closing the doors behind him)

JOHNNY: Who's Lois?

CANDIE: Sylvia, are you okay?

SYLVIA: Yes. (pause) Candie, I thought you were going on a date with my son.

CANDIE: I don't want to talk about Joe.

SYLVIA: Sometimes I don't know what to do with him. (pause) Candie, sweetie, what are you wearing?

CANDIE: (She looks at her clothes.) I'm not sure.

SYLVIA: Didn't you put that on?

CANDIE: I don't think so. I don't remember doing it.

SYLVIA: Who are these people?

CANDIE: I don't really know. (She looks around the room.) It's all very strange, and it's vaguely familiar, too.

SYLVIA: I want to know what's going on.

CANDIE: I want to know who the one in the corner is.

JOHNNY: She doesn't say much.

DUKE: Even when she does, it usually doesn't make much sense. We don't know her real name. We call her Dahli.

CANDIE: Dolly? As in, "Hello, Dolly? Well hello, Dolly, it's so nice to have you back where you belong." Dolly?

DUKE: No, as in camel.

SYLVIA: Llama.

DUKE: Excuse me?

SYLVIA: Llama, not camel. Dahli Llama.

DUKE: What's the difference?

CANDIE: The number of humps?

SYLVIA: Why do I always get stuck with the lunatics?

DUKE: (to CANDIE) Why don't you go ask her why she doesn't say much?

CANDIE: I wouldn't want to interrupt her....work.

DUKE: She won't mind. She's been working on that for, well, as long as I can remember.

CANDIE: (to DAHLI) Um, hi! I'm Candie. (She sticks out her hand but gets no response. She lowers her hand.) Anyway, I just wanted to...

DAHLI: (without looking away from cube) It is easier not to speak a word at all than to speak more words than we should.

CANDIE: Wow! Are you some kind of fortuneteller or philosopher-ess or something? I mean, that was amazing. Did you just come up with it?

DAHLI: (She puts the cube down and looks at CANDIE for a moment.) No. It is from Thomas A Kempis' Imitation of Christ.

CANDIE: Isn't imitating Christ like illegal or something?

(DAHLI looks at CANDIE for a moment, picks up the cube, turns her back to CANDIE, and continues working. JOE enters, puts the mug down, and sits. He looks at the page, shakes head several times, and looks at the page again.)

JOE: What is this? I didn't write this? At least, I don't remember writing this. (He looks around the room.) Is someone here? Hello?

(JOE picks up the mug, sniffs it, and takes a sip. He shakes his head, puts the mug in the trashcan, and picks up his pencil.)

JOE: Let's see. I was... (phone rings) I'm not answering. (ring) No! (ring) I'm not here. (ring. He picks up the phone) Hello... I ... but... No... you... Hey! Hey, hey... Okay, I don't want to argue about this anymore, Candie... I... how can you... There's no one else, I... You're the only... (looks at receiver) She hung up! (He sticks his tongue out at the receiver before slamming it down. He writes for a moment.) Die. Die. DIE!

(CANDIE grabs her throat and makes choking sounds.)

DUKE: I'll save you! (He gives CANDIE the Heimlich maneuver.)

CANDIE: Thanks, Duke.

JOE: You can't do that! I didn't write it! (He writes for a moment again.)

(CANDIE begins to shiver, her teeth chattering.)

DUKE: Fear not, fair maiden. I'll warm you with my heated x-ray vision.

CANDIE: (stops shivering) My hero!

JOHNNY: Stop, Duke! She'll explode! Combust! Disassemble!

JOE: (jumps up) What's going on here? I'm the writer. You're just imaginary! I'm in control!

(JOE crumples the top piece of paper into a ball and throws it down. The characters flail wildly and emit confused yells as they all quickly gather in the middle of the ward in a pile.)

DUKE: (He pulls himself out of the pile.) Whoever's out there, don't mess with CAPTAIN PRONTO!

(JOE picks up the next piece of paper in disbelief. He puts the page back on the desk, backs away a couple steps, then screams and runs out. CANDIE and DAHLI rise. CANDIE dusts herself off. DAHLI returns to her counter.)

SYLVIA: (DUKE helps her up.) I must say, some strange things go on here. It's almost

like someone is controlling us.

JOHNNY: (He crawls back to his chair, leaving his paper trail.) I knew this guy in geometry class that heard voices. He said they were saints. He thought he was a stripper and ran around the room with nothing but a protractor and that big...

DUKE: Johnny! Not in front of the children. (JOHNNY looks around confusedly. DUKE thinks for a moment.) Someone else that controls us... hmmm. (snaps fingers) It must be my arch nemesis, Gepeto!

JOHNNY: It could be gnome enchantment!

CANDIE: So what do we do?

SYLVIA: Since she knows so much, we could ask Dahli.

JOHNNY: Who's going to do it?

(They all look at JOHNNY.)

JOHNNY: No, I can't.

CANDIE: Go ahead, Johnny.

JOHNNY: I don't want to. That lawn gnome might come back.

SYLVIA: Grow a spine!

DUKE: Johnny, if you don't go, I'll use my heated x-ray vision and...

JOHNNY: No! I'll do it! Stop, please! (fanning himself) I'm hotter already! Stop! I'll go! I'll go.

(JOHNNY jumps out of his chair and runs towards DAHLI, tearing bits of paper and dropping them behind him as he goes.)

SYLVIA: What's he doing?

DUKE: It's so he won't get lost.

SYLVIA: That's just not normal.

JOHNNY: Excuse me, ma'am. I don't mean to disturb you, but I, we just wanted to, I mean, they sent me...

DAHLI: (puts cube down) Johnny,

JOHNNY: Yes, ma'am?

DAHLI: What is it that you need?

JOHNNY: Well, they... we... they

DAHLI: Johnny, have you ever noticed that there were always plenty of beautiful women on the Dukes of Hazard for the Duke boys, but there were no really handsome men for Daisy?

JOHNNY: Uh, I never really thought about it, but now that you mention it, you're right. Boy, poor Daisy.

DAHLI: Yes. Well, others noticed, too, but the lack of men never changed, and life went on as normal for all involved. (She goes back to the cube.)

JOHNNY: Thanks,*Dahli. You're the best.

(JOHNNY returns to the group, trailing paper. They all stare at him, waiting.)

SYLVIA: Well?

JOHNNY: Yes very, thank you.

SYLVIA: No, you fool. What did she say?

JOHNNY: Oh! Apparently everything will be fine if we find handsome men for Daisy Duke.

CANDIE: We're going to need a good plan for that.

SYLVIA: (to DUKE) Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right...

DUKE: (looking around her) Are you hallucinating?

SYLVIA: No, it's a song that never mind.

(SYLVIA begins picking up paper bits from the floor. JOE sneaks back in to his desk.)

DUKE: Let's forget finding men for Daisy Duke. We still need a plan for whatever we're going to do from now on. Johnny...

JOHNNY: Wait. Does this in any way involve me getting naked in front of a large, angry mob of people and singing "I'm a Little Teapot" while imitating Jimmy Stewart and balancing an unabridged Webster's Dictionary on my head?

DUKE: I don't think so. Why?

JOHNNY: Let's just say I don't dream like other people.

SYLVIA: (placing paper bits next to JOHNNY's chair) That's not normal.

(JOE writes.)

JOHNNY: Herd of angry moss!

(JOE stops and watches the page.)

DUKE: What?

JOHNNY: I don't know why I said that.

CANDIE: Herd of angry moss?

DUKE: (looking around) Gepeto, you feeling lucky, punk? Show thyself!

CANDIE: What could make a herd of moss angry?

SYLVIA: (to CANDIE) Let's think about this. (She points at JOHNNY.) The thing with lawn gnomes... (She points to DAHLI.) The rubix cube...

(SYLVIA and CANDIE turn to DUKE.)

CANDIE: Duke?

SYLVIA: "The Duke".... John Wayne!

CANDIE: (She thinks for a moment.) It's Joe?

JOHNNY: Joe could make them angry?

SYLVIA: What?

JOHNNY: The herd of angry moss.

CANDIE: No, Joe must be writing all of this.

DUKE: Aha! A new villain! Greetings, Joe. Make my day, pilgrim.

SYLVIA: What are you doing?

DUKE: Talking to him.

JOE: This is strange.

SYLVIA: He's not a villain, and you can't talk to him.

DUKE: Sure I can. He's a person. We're people. People talk. Are you sure he's on our side? It could be a clever ploy.

JOE: You aren't people. You're imaginary.

CANDIE: Why can't we talk to him? We usually talk to him.

SYLVIA: It's just not normal, that's why. This is different. We're inside his story now.

JOE: They're imaginary. It's all in my head. (writing) The room is turned into a vacuum, all the air sucked out. (He stops writing. The characters gasp and die.) Yes. They're imaginary. I knew that. I write, they...

DUKE: That was fun. Let's play another game.

JOE: Maybe I'm going crazy. Life imitates art, right?

DUKE: Hey, guys. Hello? You're not really dead. (pause) What fools you mortals be!

(DAHLI resumes with the cube. The others stir slowly. JOE's phone rings.)

JOE: Ahh! Oh, the phone. I hate this phone. (answers) Hello? (short pause) You have reached Joe's apartment. I'm not available at the moment. Please leave a message after the beep. (He hangs up, looks at the phone, and takes it off the hook.)

JOHNNY: Duke, I'm scared.

SYLVIA: That's not surprising.

CANDIE: Hey, leave him alone.

DUKE: Would you all please stop. I need to talk to Joe.

JOE: It's all in my head. It's all in...

DUKE: So, Joe, buddy, could you write us in a pool table and some pizza or something?

JOE: (writes line) All the characters are stricken with . . . um, Bubonic plague!

CANDIE: I don't feel so good.

JOHNNY: (runs to another chair, paper trail behind him) You're not feeling warm, are you?

CANDIE: No, sick.

DUKE: Me, too. I'll use my superior medical skills as CAPTAIN PRONTO to see what's wrong. (scans others) Whoa! You've got Bubonic plague. And you. And you. We all do!

CANDIE: Joe gave us the plague?

SYLVIA: He can't give us Bubonic plague.

CANDIE: Apparently he doesn't know that.

JOE: I can do anything I want! Ha, ha, ha. Bring out your dead! Ha, ha, ha.

JOHNNY: Why can't he give us the plague? He can summon lawn gnomes at will. He could probably even make me explode! (curls into fetal position and whimpers)

SYLVIA: He can't give us the plague because it's a government conspiracy for population control.

DUKE: It is not.

SYLVIA: It is, too.

CANDIE: It is?

JOHNNY: Yes, it's the same with cold sores and especially cancer. That's why you should never buy cigarettes with checks or credit cards. It leaves a paper trail. A special secret CIA task force keeps track of all those transactions. They take your address and sneak in at night to inject you with cancer... or give you cold sores... or in this case, they send in rats to spread Bubonic plague.

CANDIE: (jumps on chair) Rats?!?

SYLVIA: (nodding in agreement) See? (DUKE stares at her.) They do!

DUKE: Congratulations, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: What for?

DUKE: That's just not normal. Besides, there aren't any rats here.

CANDIE: Are you sure?

JOHNNY: You don't think lawn gnomes spread the plague, do you?

JOE: This is like being in the Twilight Zone. (looks around) Is somebody playing a game with me? This is a trick, right? No, a dream! I'm dreaming. (pinches self) Ow! (pause) Maybe I just need a good stiff drink. (He looks at the page.) Or maybe just some popcorn and hot chocolate. (He starts to exit.) At this rate, the play will be finished well before the deadline.

(JOE exits.)

CANDIE: So what are we going to do?

JOHNNY: I wanna go home.

SYLVIA: I don't particularly like it here, either.

DUKE: That's a great idea! We'll leave.

JOHNNY: Leave?

CANDIE: Like escape?

DUKE: Sure. We'll escape.

(JOE returns with popcorn and mug. He sits and watches pages, occasionally flipping to the next. DAHLI puts the cube down and watches the action.)

JOHNNY: Escape? What if that lawn gnome is still out there? Or the killer Dobermans chew us into hamburgerhelpmakesagreatmeal before the beefed-up tazer-armed guards drag our bloody, broken bodies away in shackles!

JOE: (laughs) That kid's funny. I wonder if this is what it means to get in touch with your muse.

SYLVIA: If we escape, we'll be literary fugitives or something.

CANDIE: I don't know if I could handle being a fugitive. I'd have to get a tattoo, smoke Marlboro Lights in a box, ride a Harley, and use the phrase "two-liter engine" in everyday conversation.

(DUKE tries to open the doors.)

SYLVIA: Candie, I don't think it will go that far.

DUKE: These doors are locked.

DAHLI: Do you have a hairpin?

DUKE: I'm taking that as a direct assault on my masculinity.

CANDIE: Wait, why do we need out? We have everything we want here, right?

JOHNNY: But what about the lawn gnome?

SYLVIA: There are a lot more things I want out of life than this.

DUKE: No, she's right. We may not have it now, but we can get it. We just have to convince Joe to write it for us.

JOE: Hey!

CANDIE: How are we going to do that?

DUKE: We need that plan we were talking about.

SYLVIA: Okay, so what is it?

DUKE: I don't know. I just know we need it.

(DAHLI moves from the counter to them, bringing the cube. She has removed most of the stickers and placed them back on correctly.)

JOHNNY: Dahli?

DAHLI: (As she speaks she removes the remaining incorrect stickers and replaces them so that the sides are complete.) Sometimes the solution is not obvious. You have to re-examine your tactics and go around the obstacle. Choose a different path. (She hands the cube to DUKE and returns to the counter where she lies down to nap.)

CANDIE: What does it mean? What do we do?

SYLVIA: We sing.

JOHNNY: (begins singing) Night fever, night fever...

SYLVIA: Johnny! Not that song. (She sings. Joe exits during the song.) P is for potty, and potty is for pee. P is for potty, and potty is for pee. P is for potty, and potty is for pee. Oh, potty, potty, potty, potty, potty starts with P.

DUKE: What are you doing?

SYLVIA: That was Joe's potty training song. It always makes him go. I had to get rid of him so we could plan. Obviously, something Joe is using is enchanted.

JOHNNY: I knew it! (He runs in a circle, paper bits flying.) Gnome enchantment! Gnome enchantment! (SYLVIA slaps him.) Ow!

SYLVIA: Now, Duke, do you have something in that purse to open the doors?

DUKE: It's not a purse, it's a utility belt.

SYLVIA: Whatever. Is there anything helpful in it?

(DUKE begins to empty his purse onto the table.)

DUKE: Well, I've got a small can of shark repellent, a water gun, a butter knife, some coins, a few smoke bombs, a roll of duct tape... ooh, one of those nifty pens that astronauts use that can write upside-down, and a saltshaker.

CANDIE: A saltshaker? Why?

DUKE: To kill giant mutant slugs, of course.

JOHNNY: Slugs? Giant slugs?! I bet they're in league with the lawn gnomes!

(SYLVIA slaps JOHNNY.)

SYLVIA: (to DUKE) That's all?

DUKE: Yes.

SYLVIA: That's everything that was in that purse?

DUKE: Utility belt. And yes, it's everything.

SYLVIA: Let me see it.

DUKE: No, it's mine. It's empty.

CANDIE: He said that was everything.

SYLVIA: Candie, sweetie, you know Joe almost as well as I do. There's got to be a hairpin in there.

DUKE: There's no hairpin! Real men don't have hairpins!

CANDIE: But Joe liked playing with them because they bent easily.

SYLVIA: Exactly.

CANDIE: And that weird mess he calls a sculpture on his desk is made completely of hairpins.

SYLVIA: Yes!

CANDIE: Hold him!

(SYLVIA grabs DUKE's arms as CANDIE rummages in the purse.)

CANDIE: There's a whole handful of them!

DUKE: They aren't mine! Real men don't... Johnny, help me here!

JOHNNY: (weakly) Um, stop that.

(SYLVIA and CANDIE go to the doors with some pins.)

DUKE: (to JOHNNY) Some sidekick you are.

SYLVIA: Stop whining and come help us.

JOHNNY: What exactly are we going to do?

SYLVIA: Well, first we have to get the doors open, then we get the lawn gnome and send him...

JOHNNY: Did you say lawn gnome? Lawn gnome? Lawn gnome!

(SYLVIA raises her hand to slap JOHNNY. He slaps himself.)

DUKE: How is a lawn gnome going to help?

CANDIE: Oh, I get it! I get it! We send the lawn gnome for take-out!

SYLVIA: Are you sure you're a college graduate?

CANDIE: I was at the top of my beauty school class.

JOHNNY: Wow. I've always wanted to go to welding school myself.

SYLVIA: Could we all please focus for a minute.

DUKE: Door's open!

SYLVIA: Great. Drag that gnome in and wake him up.

(JOHNNY, moaning and shaking, hides behind CANDIE. DUKE brings GNOME in.)

CANDIE: So are we getting Chinese food or not?

SYLVIA: No, sweetie. We're sending the gnome to get the pencil and paper from Joe's desk.

JOHNNY: Won't Mr. Joe get mad if we steal his work?

SYLVIA: Don't worry. He won't have time.

DUKE: (to GNOME) Okay, apparently all you have to do is get the paper and pencil off the desk.

GNOME: What do I get in return?

SYLVIA: What do you want?

GNOME: (looking at JOHNNY) How about the little frightened one?

SYLVIA: (slaps JOHNNY before he can scream) Sorry, he's ours.

GNOME: (goes to table) Can I have this pen?

CANDIE: Sure.

(GNOME crosses into JOE's space and begins gathering papers and pencils from the desk.)

DUKE: Hey, that was my pen!

SYLVIA: We'll get you another.

CANDIE: I don't understand how he did that.

DUKE: He's a gnome. It's enchantment.

JOHNNY: GNOME ENCHANT...

(SYLVIA goes towards JOHNNY menacingly. He hides behind CANDIE again. GNOME steps back in from JOE's, one foot in each space. He looks back and forth between the two spaces and drops the papers and pencils into the ward.)

GNOME: Bye. (re-enters JOE's space) Now to free my comrades! (He exits.)

(CANDIE, JOHNNY, DUKE, and SYLVIA gather the papers and pencils excitedly. They move to the table. JOE enters, carrying a statue of a lawn gnome and the astronaut pen.)

JOE: How did you get inside? (He places the statue on the desk and looks at the pen.)
I've always wanted one of these pens. (looks at desk) Hey! Where's all my stuff?

SYLVIA: Now, let's teach my pinhead of a son a thing or two. (She writes.)

(JOE screams and falls. DAHLI awakens and sits up at the scream.)

JOE: What in the...

(As SYLVIA writes, the two attendants enter in JOE's space, pulling him from the floor. They exit with him.)

JOE: Hey! No, wait...

CANDIE: What are you doing?

SYLVIA: Shh. I'm working.

(The attendants bring JOE in through the ward doors and leave him. They begin to leave.)

SYLVIA: Hold that door! Come on, Candie.

JOE: Mommy?

SYLVIA: You'll like it here, Joey.

CANDIE: Yeah, just watch out for lawn gnomes.

JOE: Mommy, don't leave me.

SYLVIA: Everybody has to face their inner demons sometime, son. It's time to grow up.

CANDIE: Your next girlfriend will thank us.

(CANDIE and SYLVIA exit with the attendants, closing the doors behind them.)

JOHNNY, DUKE, DAHLI: (moving in on JOE) Hi, Joe.

JOE: (He looks around wildly and giggles madly.) Uh-oh.

(Lights down, leaving spot on paper and pencil left on table. Lights out.)

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