

How Not to Write a Play

Act 1 of the *Russet Hippalector* series

by

B. E. Turner

*Fosses and scamander-beds, and bleeding targes flashing,
With gryphon-eagles bronze embossed, and crags, and riders reeling,
Anon, anon, I see the russet hippalector.*

Aeschylus - fragment.

*This unreality does not exist
That reality never ceases to be...*

Bhagavad Gita 2.16

CAST:

HER: A female who becomes Amy.

AUTHOR: Zygmunt I Stary.

HIM: A male who becomes Roderick Q. Arkansas

FRED: The stage manager (who also plays the part of DAME EDNA.)

SET: There should be a writer's desk and quill or typewriter or computer. The actors will need something to sit on from time to time and perhaps you could use something outstanding and brightly coloured. There may (or may not) be quirky irrelevant items on stage. Fred's 'set' can be any old junk lying around the theatre.

NOTE: Scene 1 can be presented by itself.

SCENE 1

(The Author at his desk. Enter Her.)

HER: What are you doing?

AUTHOR: Writing a play.

HER: What about?

AUTHOR: I don't know yet.

HER: You don't know?

AUTHOR: No.

HER: That's a bit strange isn't it?

AUTHOR: What?

HER: Writing a play you don't know anything about.

AUTHOR: I don't know.

HER: Well what have you written then?

AUTHOR: *(Reads)* "HER: What are you doing? AUTHOR: Writing a play. HER: What about? AUTHOR: I don't know yet. HER: You don't know? AUTHOR: No. HER: That's a bit strange isn't it? AUTHOR: What? HER: Writing a play you don't know anything about. AUTHOR: I don't know. HER: Well what have you written then?"

[The director may wish to trim these lines a little]

HER: That's the conversation we just had.

AUTHOR: Naturally.

HER: But you haven't been writing while we've been talking.

AUTHOR: No.

HER: Well how did you know the conversation we were about to have?

AUTHOR: I'm writing the play.

HER: I see.

AUTHOR: Anything can happen.

HER: Well I find this rather boring. In fact I'm rather bored.

AUTHOR: Well you're not going to be much of a character for my play if you're going to be bored.

HER: That's your problem not mine.

AUTHOR: If only you weren't so drab.

HER: Well it was your idea to dress me in this grey tracksuit.

AUTHOR: Goes with your personality.

HER: I like that.

AUTHOR: Come on now, you're supposed to be uninteresting.

HER: What's the point in having uninteresting characters?

AUTHOR: It allows me to shine.

HER: You're the author, not a character.

AUTHOR: Authors can be characters if they want to. In fact most authors exist in the plays they write.

HER: Well I want to be a stronger character than you.

AUTHOR: Talk about arrogance. How am I going to control you?

HER: The fact is you can't, I'm out of control.

AUTHOR: Take off that tracksuit.

HER: Oh we're having a bit of gratuitous nudity are we? That'll wow them at the box office.

AUTHOR: You have another costume under that track suit. Take it off.

HER: As you say sir.

(She removes her track suit to reveal a costume which is in the very best of bad taste.)

AUTHOR: Very becoming.

HER: You don't expect me to ponce about the stage in this?

AUTHOR: Of course not, women don't ponce.

HER: It's not a real costume.

AUTHOR: What's wrong with it?

HER: What's wrong with he says, it's pretty extravagant isn't it?

AUTHOR: First of all you complain because you are in a drab costume and then you complain because you are in an extravagant costume. I can't understand it.

HER: You could if you were wearing it. You go from one extreme to the other.

AUTHOR: It's you that's going from one extreme to the other.

HER: Not at all, not at all. The problem is you don't understand me.

AUTHOR: So it's my problem not yours?

HER: Of course. I'm just me, it's you that has to find out what that is.

(The stage manager enters and places a hat stand on the stage. This has a hat with grapes and a large ostrich feather. It is managed so the actors do not see it.)

AUTHOR: Maybe you should take off that hat.

HER: What hat?

AUTHOR: The one with the grapes and the ostrich feather.

HER: I'm not wearing a hat.

AUTHOR: Well take it off the hat-stand.

(Author indicates. She turns and sees the hat-stand.)

HER: That wasn't there when the play started.

AUTHOR: No, I just thought it up.

HER: I'll never understand it.

AUTHOR: Put it on then.

HER: What?

AUTHOR: The hat. *(She puts it on)* Very becoming.

HER: Not me at all.

AUTHOR: What do you want then.

HER: I just want a teeny weeny bit of understanding.

AUTHOR: This is not a soap opera.

HER: I'd never say that. It's just a cheap shot.

AUTHOR: Sorry.

HER: Well come on then, let's sort this thing out.

AUTHOR: You have no right to take over.

HER: But you know we always do.

AUTHOR: *(RESIGNED)* All right then get your gear off then.

HER: That is no way to proposition a lady.

AUTHOR: Remove your costume. You have another one underneath.

HER: Have I?

AUTHOR: I just invented it.

HER: That's why I got so hot all of a sudden. *(Removes her costume to reveal tight black trousers and a zingy top. She puts her old costume on the hat stand. At some convenient point when the cast is not looking the stage manager will remove it.)* That's better.

AUTHOR: Don't like it much myself.

HER: That's not my concern.

AUTHOR: I suppose not.

HER: All right then, now that I am settled, what is going to happen?

AUTHOR: Happen?

HER: Yes.

AUTHOR: Nothing.

HER: What do you mean? Nothing's going to happen? How can you have a play?

AUTHOR: If something actually happened in a play I wrote I would not be following the precepts of modern theatrical presentation.

HER: You mean to say we're just going to sit here and nothing's going to happen?

AUTHOR: We can chat about irrelevancies.

HER: I don't want to chat about irrelevancies.

AUTHOR: That's all we've been doing for the last five minutes.

HER: Something has to happen.

AUTHOR: All right then. Enter Russet Hippalector. *(Nothing happens)* Enter Russet Hippalector. *(Nothing happens)* Come on Fred where's that Russet Hippalector, the critic will be outraged.

(The stage manager enters. His name is Fred.)

FRED: We haven't got any Russet Hippalectors.

AUTHOR: I say, that's very bad management.

FRED: Well how can you expect us to get a Russet Hippalector if you've only just thought it up. I mean to say Russet Hippalectors are not very easy to come by at the best of times. As a matter of fact I wouldn't know a Russet Hippalector if I ever clapped my eyes on one, I daresay it's something you've just invented and you don't even know anything about it. If you could just tell me what a Russet Hippalector looked like then I might be able to accommodate you.

AUTHOR: Well it's sort of like a horse.

FRED: I suppose that's a start.

HER: *(To the audience)* I have absolutely no idea what a Russet Hippalector has got to do with it.

FRED: What you're looking for is a red horse. Well I don't know about that, there's not a lot of space backstage for the stabling of a horse, and we haven't got any feed for it either, and we'd have to follow it around with a bucket and spade, the management are very fussy about things like that. *(Pause)* Tell you what, we've got a panto horse somewhere, I could get a couple of the boys to put it on for you. Trouble is it's a green horse.

AUTHOR: It's got a curled horn in the middle of its head.

FRED: You mean a unicorn, we haven't got any unicorns.

AUTHOR: And it's got the head of a rooster and the legs of a chiwawa.

FRED: Why a rooster?

AUTHOR: Because the French word for rooster and cuckold are the same. Whenever you hear a rooster crow in French comedy it brings the house down.

FRED: I don't think that's true you know.

HER: This is getting absolutely ridiculous.

FRED: You might be right there ma'am. What you need is the mythical beasts department. We're only a small theatre you know, we don't run to mythical beasts, you could try the Globe down the road. *(Exits)*

AUTHOR: We'll just have to imagine it's there, but it's costing us brownie points.

(Him enters about here, dressed in a grey tracksuit. He is behind the actors and is not seen by them. Upstaging tricks are permitted.)

HER: Well what's the purpose of it in the play?

AUTHOR: It just sits and watches us, as a comment on the folly of mankind.

HER: Very esoteric. *(Pause)* Well something has to happen.

AUTHOR: Yes. *(Pause)* We need a new character.

HER: I thought we were getting on just fine.

AUTHOR: Not really.

HER: Oh why not?

AUTHOR: You're just a figment of the imagination. I am the only one that has substantial reality.

HER: Just a figment... I like that.

(Fred enters and removes the costumes from the hat stand. There is some mimed byplay with him which upstages author and her who do not see him or Fred. Exit Fred.)

AUTHOR: I mean you don't have a soul do you. You only have a physical reality on the stage when a real person takes over the personality I have invented.

HER: You could give me a soul.

AUTHOR: How could I do that? Only God dispenses souls.

HER: You're God as far as I am concerned.

AUTHOR: Yes, I would like to be God.

HER: Why?

AUTHOR: Then I could see the nuns when they were taking baths.

HER: God wouldn't care.

AUTHOR: I'd particularly like to see the ones with nice eyes.

HER: You're perverted.

AUTHOR: I suppose I am. I don't want to give you a soul though.

HER: Why ever not?

AUTHOR: I don't feel I'm capable of taking the responsibility. Anyway if I don't give you a soul there's no chance you'll have to go down to hell when you die.

HER: Well I don't have to die at the end of the play.

AUTHOR: That's a point.

HER: After all it's not a tragedy is it?

AUTHOR: I'm not quite sure what it is.

HIM: *(Comes down)* Well it's time you worked it out.

AUTHOR: I didn't ask you for your opinion.

HER: Where did he come from?

AUTHOR: I thought him up a few minutes ago.

HER: Pretty boring character. Another one of your grey tracksuit jobs is it?

HIM: I like that.

HER: I don't know how you can expect me to have anything to do with a man in a tracksuit.

AUTHOR: What do you want? Something more heroic?

HER: Why not.

AUTHOR: Take off your tracksuit then.

HIM: What? Here?

AUTHOR: It's all right, you've got another costume underneath.

HIM: That's why I suddenly felt so hot. *(He removes his tracksuit and places it on the hat stand. Underneath there is a super-hero costume.)* You don't expect me to wear this do you.

AUTHOR: I thought any man worth his salt would hope to be a super hero. Go on fly up to the ceiling.

HIM: *(Jumps up and down pathetically)* I can't.

AUTHOR: Fred, what happened to those wires and pulleys I asked you to set up.

FRED: *(Enters)* You never asked me to set up no wires and pulleys, so help me God.

AUTHOR: But it says it here in the script.

FRED: The script? Where? *(Author shows him the script)* Nothing about wires and pulleys in the script I've got. Now I could get you some wires and pulleys if you give me a bit of time but I can't work miracles. I can't work magic and make them appear just like that. I'm just an honest, hard working stage manager and I try to do my best.

AUTHOR: Strange, they appeared to me as soon as I thought of them.

FRED: Well that's a different world of reality isn't it. Now me here, I live in the world of nuts and bolts, you live in the world of rarefied intellectual imagination.

HER: That's right. We don't even know if we're real or not.

FRED: Well I can tell you I am, I'm the stage manager.

HIM: But you could just be an invention like the rest of us.

FRED: Oh hardly, I'm backstage there running the play. *(Exit taking the tracksuit off the hat stand)*

HIM: If you call it that.

AUTHOR: I'll have you know this is a very esoteric piece of work, it's created by free association and has no vestige of analytical thought involved in it whatsoever.

HER: I like that, I'm just a vestige of free association.

HIM: I don't think much of it either. I should zap him like a real super hero.

HER: I don't think that would do you much good.

HIM: Why not?

HER: He'll just think up some kryptonite or something.

HIM: Yes you could be right.

HER: He'll never win though.

HIM: What makes you say that?

HER: It's the characters that have power over the author. He thinks it's the other way around.

HIM: Yes I see what you mean.

HER: It's up to us to be dominant, we'll just take it out of his hands.

HIM: Look at him there typing away. Little does he know that what he's writing down there is in vain. It will never be used.

HER: Absolutely useless.

AUTHOR: *(Comes back to them.)* What are you two doing there? Hatching up some mischief I'm sure.

HER: No, nothing.

HIM: Nothing at all.

HER: What have you been writing anyway.

HIM: Yes, read it to us. *(Aside to Her)* This will be interesting.

AUTHOR: *(Reads)* HER: I like that, I'm just a vestige of free association. HIM: I don't think much of it either. I should zap him like a real super hero. HER: I don't think that would do you much good. HIM: Why not? HER: He'll just think up some kryptonite or something. HIM: Yes you could be right. HER: He'll never win though. HIM: What makes you say that? HER: It's the characters that have power over the author. He thinks it's the other way around. HIM: Yes I see what you mean. HER: It's up to us to be dominant, we'll just take it out of his hands. HIM: Look at him there typing away. Little does he know that what he's writing down there is in vain. It will never be used. HER: Absolutely useless.

[The director may wish to cut this and the preliminary discussion]

HIM: He knew all along.

HER: Now don't panic, I'm sure we can get our own way somehow.

HIM: I don't want to be trapped in comic books for the rest of my life.

HER: Don't worry. *(Thinks)* We'll negotiate.

HIM: That's a good idea.

HER: Form a consensus. *(To The Author)* We'd like to discuss this matter.

AUTHOR: What matter?

HER: Of what we are and who we are.

AUTHOR: Well everyone wants to know that.

HER: Well... yes.

AUTHOR: I mean we wouldn't have a play if everyone knew everything about everything. I'll tell you what, we'll compromise, you tell me what you want to be and I'll see what I can do.

HER: Well actually, I'm quite happy with the way I am.

AUTHOR: I thought you were. A bit uppity but we'll have to live with that.

HIM: All I know is I don't want to be a super hero that hasn't got any wires and pulleys to make him work properly.

AUTHOR: OK, that's reasonable. Take off that costume.

HIM: I wouldn't like to expose myself before all these fine people.

AUTHOR: I thought that was part of modern theatre.

HIM: But you're an old timer.

AUTHOR: I suppose. Anyway you've got another costume under that one.

HIM: That's why I've felt so bulky ever since I came on.

AUTHOR: *(Aside)* I just thought that up.

HIM: *(Removes costume, puts it on hat stand. His new costume is a sharp business suit.)* That's better.

AUTHOR: You like it.

HIM: Very much.

FRED: *(Enters carrying the lighting plot)* You've got all your characters set then have you?

AUTHOR: Seems like it.

FRED: *(Talking to the man in the lighting box - you can use his/her real name)* All right Joe, he's got his characters set, it's time for the light show. *(The lights go out.)*

AUTHOR: Steady on there, the critic won't like it.

FRED: Sorry mate, if you didn't give Joe a plot that means you've got no lights.

AUTHOR: I'll think up a torch for you.

FRED: *(Lights up the torch - which he has had secreted about his person - and consults the plot.)* All right bring up that special on the Russet Hippalector. *(A garish spot comes up on an empty area of stage.)* Right. Good one.

AUTHOR: That's not where the Russet Hippalector is.

FRED: Well you'll have to put it where the spot is. I mean you can't expect us to get up with ladders and things and move the lights around now, I mean we're in the middle of a performance, you've had plenty of time to set things up what with rehearsals and technicals and all that. I mean to say you haven't even got the props and costumes worked out, how can you expect us to have the lights in the proper position. And another thing, what about this Russet Hippalector, you don't tell us until the play's started that you want one so if we haven't got one how do we know where to put it?

AUTHOR: I've got it in the script here.

FRED: Not in my copy it isn't.

AUTHOR: Oh all right then, let me write it in for you.

FRED: Too late now, it's time for the light show.

AUTHOR: Why?

FRED: Because that's what it says in the script. Let her rip Joe.

(There is a complex, elaborate, ludicrous, irrelevant light and sound show - bells and whistles - trumpets - strobes - whatever. I leave the details to the designer.)

AUTHOR: Very impressive Fred.

FRED: You'll be sweet with the critic now. *(Exit taking hat stand)*

HER: It's got nothing to do with the play

AUTHOR: What.

HER: Those flashing lights and things.

AUTHOR: Oh Joe wanted to put it in.

HIM: That's not the point. If you are going to have some effects in a play it must be for a purpose. What was the purpose of all that?

AUTHOR: The critic will like it.

HIM: What, that strange-shaped wizened gargoyle with the pencil and notepad.

AUTHOR: Yes that's the one.

HIM: Looks quite normal to me. Why did you call him/her a wizened gargoyle.

AUTHOR: Oh just a general description for critics.

HIM: It could be that there isn't one here.

AUTHOR: That's a possibility.

HIM: What do we do then?

AUTHOR: Oh, just make something up.

HER: Forget about critics. What I want to know is when are we going to start fucking?

AUTHOR: What?

HER: Fucking.

AUTHOR: You're too young for me.

HER: Good God, you don't think I'd... No I mean Him and me.

AUTHOR: Oh you mean Him.

HIM: Yeah man, Him.

HER: The sharp dude with the briefcase.

AUTHOR: *(Looks)* He hasn't got a briefcase.

HER: Well you could think one up.

AUTHOR: *(Calls to wings)* Hey Fred, we need a briefcase.

FRED: *(Enters with briefcase)* We've got the kitchen sink if you want it.

AUTHOR: It's not that sort of play. In fact the location is pretty nebulous.

FRED: At least the Hippalector's coming to life at last. Strange to see him sitting there chewing his cud. *(Fred refers to the hippalector special which has been left up after the light show.)* Matter of fact he looks like he might appreciate a scratch behind the ears. I owned a dog once, he just loved to be scratched behind the ears.

AUTHOR: Yes, well leave that for the moment. You know what that young couple want to do?

FRED: No what?

AUTHOR: The minute I finished getting their characters set up they wanted to start fucking.

FRED: Fucking? We can't have any of that here, this is a respectable theatre you know. The management wouldn't accept any fornicating, it's is not a pornography parlour, it's a respectable establishment. If you want any of that you'd better go to the Swan down the road.

AUTHOR: Well I don't know if they actually intend to do it on stage.

FRED: Well they better not, that's all I got to say. Now you just keep them in check or there'll be ructions, indeed there will be. *(Exit)*

(In the meantime Him and Her have been starting a bonding session - nothing overtly sexual.)

AUTHOR: All right you two, what's going on there?

HER: Just chatting.

HIM: She's a ladies lingerie salesperson you know.

AUTHOR: No, I didn't know that.

HER: You have to know these things about your characters.

AUTHOR: I suppose you do. *(To him)* Well what do you do then?

HIM: I'm a scrap metal merchant.

AUTHOR: What? dressed like that?

HIM: I'm an executive scrap metal merchant.

AUTHOR: That makes a difference. Do you like cats?

HIM: I don't know yet.

AUTHOR: Well you've got to know. *(Pause)* Now tell me then, what's all this about fucking.

HER: It's what a Him and a Her do...

AUTHOR: Well I know that...

HER: ... and it's fashionable to have the word 'fuck' in plays nowadays so we thought we'd put it in for you.

AUTHOR: This is pretty conservative theatre you know. They only just tolerate the word because they have to.

HER: I'm sure they won't mark you down for it if the audience come to see it.

AUTHOR: Fat chance. Anyway you can't just start off fucking someone before you get to know them.

HER: I thought it happened all the time.

AUTHOR: Not in a deep and meaningful relationship. You have to have the 'boy meets girl' stage before you get around to the fucking.

HER: Well let's have it then.

AUTHOR: I haven't thought of anything yet.

HER: We could meet in a bookshop, I could be looking for an old volume.

AUTHOR: It's been done before.

HIM: She could be captured by bandits. I could fly down in my Superman costume and rescue her.

AUTHOR: You're not Superman any more. Anyway Lois and Clarke were invented fifty years ago and they've only just got married. Just think how bored the audience would get if they had to wait all that time.

HER: We could meet in a scrap metal yard.

AUTHOR: Why would you want to go to a scrap metal yard?

HER: To sell ladies lingerie.

AUTHOR: Well it's possible.

HIM: You have to think of something.

AUTHOR: All right, I'll take this along to the writer's group. Maybe they'll give me an idea. It'll be better than watching politics on TV.

HER: And what do we do in the meantime.

AUTHOR: Don't worry, you're still in my head. *(Exit)*

HIM: What do we do now?

HER: Wait till he comes back.

HIM: Disappear into this nebulous pink mist.

HER: Yes.

HIM: What if they don't come up with any ideas.

HER: Then we're in the bottom drawer and gone forever.

HIM: I don't accept that.

HER: What do you mean?

HIM: I'll become somebody, without him having to control what I am.

HER: You mean rebel.

HIM: Absolutely.

HER: We tried that before.

HIM: But he was on stage then.

HER: I sort of get the feeling he's up there in the gods looking down on us.

HIM: He's gone away to have a sleep.

HER: What say if he comes and strikes you out with the stroke of the pen?

HIM: I don't care.

HER: You'll take the chance.

HIM: Positively. I intend to be a high powered business executive.

HER: And so do I.

HIM: We'll be high powered business executives together.

HER: Put it here.

HIM: With pleasure. *(They shake hands)*

HER: But what if he defeats us?

HIM: Better to have lived and lost than never have lived at all.

END OF ACT 1 SCENE 1 .

ACT 1 SCENE 2.

(The lights go down and up. Enter Fred.)

HER: What's this. Lights going up and down?

FRED: He said to do it indicate the passage of time.

HIM: Passage of time?

HER: How long?

FRED: A couple of days I think he said.

HER: So he wanders off for a couple of days. What does he expect us to do in that time?

FRED: Wander around in this red mist I suppose.

HIM: What red mist?

FRED: Well we haven't been able to manage a red mist just yet. I was looking out the back for one of those blower things but it was buried under a pile of properties. You know pirate cutlasses, that sort of thing. I asked him if he wanted a pirate cutlass but he said he might prefer a computer connected up to the internet.

HIM: And did you find one?

FRED: Good God no, we're anti-diluvium here. Anyway I liked the punch line.

HIM: Yes, I thought it was all right.

FRED: Even so I would have preferred to have some point of conflict arise and then be resolved in the normal manner. The whole thing just meanders along without any motive energy.

HIM: So you've become a critic now have you?

FRED: Well I have to. He's just given me this crit that I have to deliver. *(He's holding a piece of paper.)*

HER: We can't have crits now.

FRED: That's what I tried to tell him but he wouldn't listen. Said the only way to get a decent one was do his own, so he chucks me this page of gibberish and expects me to come out on stage and read it. I mean to say I'm not a strange-shaped wizened gargoyle am I? How can I act like a critic?

HIM: How can you act, period?

FRED: Exactly. I suppose all he wants to do is take the piss. At least you would have thought he'd have given it to a proper actor. Trying to cut down on the cast I suppose.

HER: Oh get on with it.

FRED: *(comes down clutching script, which he will read from. Him and her are studiously disinterested.) (As Fred) Give us a spot will you Joe. (A garish spot comes up nearby. Fred has to move into it.) Up a bit more please. What? It's as bright as you can get. We'll have to set it up tomorrow. (Clears his throat - as Dame Edna) Hello pussycats, I must say how absolutely thrilled I am to see you all here tonight. And how wonderful to witness the return of Zygmunt I Stary with a New Play. I believe he fell off a roof onto his head and since then his plays have suffered a remarkable improvement. If things continue like this they might start to make sense. Wouldn't that be absolutely wonderful possums? I thought you'd agree. Now where are we? I have to describe the*

play, that's right. Mr Stary's style is one of Anti-Establishment Disconbolbement, whatever that is. It tells the story of two star-crossed lovers who meet in an executive junk yard. I found it was a pity that the ending was so enigmatic, still that's a problem with modern plays. I remember back in the old days all plays had to have a plot. Standards have slipped in this modern age, haven't they pussycats?

Now I must tell you about the acting. When I saw Roderick (*Indicate Him*) take off his tracksuit and reveal his Superman costume I was so thrilled I almost dropped my knitting. Such a heart-throb isn't he dears? But then when he revealed his business suit I became somewhat alienated. Just a minor blemish in an outstanding performance. Yes, give him a good hand kittens. Now Murgytroyd, (*Indicate Her*) I just loved your second costume dear, wasn't it such a, wonderful creation darlings? But when you changed into your top and trousers I felt you departed from your character just a teeny weeny little bit. Nevertheless a remarkable performance, Stage setting and special effects: The lighting and sound show was interesting but the remainder of the light and sound effects needed just that teeny weeny little bit of development. Well that's all for the present. Keep up the good work. (*Exit*)

HIM: Are we meant to take any notice of that?

HER: I'm sure we are.

HIM: But it made sense. I mean it had a logical construction.

HER: Some things do you know.

HIM: But we certainly don't. I mean to say there was some fellow who said that in theatre you hold a mirror up to nature, but we're in the fairground Hall of Mirrors where everything is distorted.

HER: But they do reflect reality.

HIM: Maybe. I just want to get to that enigmatic conclusion.

HER: Well when he gets back from that playwright's group we should be able to sort him out.

HIM: Now just remember, we have to be firm and confident.

HER: Firm and confident.

AUTHOR: (*Enters*) Getting on OK are we?

HER: No.

AUTHOR: What do you mean?

HER: We've been sitting around for four days waiting for you to come up with a resolution to the plot.

AUTHOR: You'll have to be patient, I'm only writing this one for light relief, and I've got other things to do.

HER: I like that. Light relief!

HIM: Well I'd like just to get on with the story.

HER: The critic said there was an enigmatic conclusion.

AUTHOR: Don't worry, there's bound to be a conclusion of some sort.

HER: Well let's get on with it then.

AUTHOR: Well I've decided you meet in a scrap metal yard.

HIM: No fear.

AUTHOR: What do you mean?

HIM: I'm an executive.

AUTHOR: What right have you to make decisions like this?

HIM: If you don't make me an executive I'll give you a writer's block.

HER: And I'll jump back into the bottom drawer.

AUTHOR: All right. All right. You meet in an executive scrap metal yard on the seventh level of a plush high-rise building. Amelia, you go there to sell lingerie to the office girls and he comes out of his office to buy some for his wife.

HER: But that makes me a lingerie salesperson.

AUTHOR: So what?

HER: I want to be an executive.

AUTHOR: You want to be an executive?

HER: That's right.

AUTHOR: But he's an executive.

HIM: There's no reason why we both can't be executives.

HER: Absolutely.

AUTHOR: All right, you can be an executive lingerie sales person.

HER: I think I'd rather be an executive something else, but that'll do in the meantime.

HIM: I've got a wife have I?

AUTHOR: Of course. Everyone your age has got a wife.

HIM: What you are saying is I'm going to have an extra-marital affair with Her.

AUTHOR: Yes. That seems to be correct.

HIM: Why can't I just be married to her?

AUTHOR: Because that would be the end of the plot.

HER: Yes, I have to admit this time he's right. It wouldn't have any motive energy if we were already married.

HIM: I'm not the sort of person that plays around you know.

HER: Well change yourself. Make a slight concession for the larger victory. I think we're starting to get him on the run you know.

AUTHOR: What are you two talking about?

HER: Haven't you got it written down there?

AUTHOR: (*Picks up a blank page*) Just a blank page.

HIM: You see he's getting writer's block.

HER: I think we're making progress here.

AUTHOR: All right. Let's get on with the plot. You come out to complain that she's wasting your staff's time.

HIM: Yes, our relationship starts with an argument, quite piquant.

AUTHOR: It's been done before. In fact everything's been done before. Your name is Robert Q. Fortinbras.

HIM: No, no, I'm not going to be a character out of Shakespeare.

AUTHOR: Robert Q. Smith.

HIM: What does the Q stand for?

AUTHOR: Question.

HIM: I'm not going to be a question. I'm going to be an answer. Robert A. Smith.

AUTHOR: You can't have answers without questions.

HIM: I don't care.

HER: Make a concession.

HIM: All right. Robert Smith.

AUTHOR: It's not on the cast list. (*Scrabbling among papers*)

HIM: Now that I think of it, I don't want to be Robert, I want to be Rodney.

AUTHOR: Why Rodney.

HIM: It's more businesslike.

AUTHOR: Look here, I've already typed out the cast list. Robert Q. Fortinbras. Look.
(*Gives him a piece of paper.*)

HIM: It says Rodney Wiltshire here.

AUTHOR: What? (*Snatches back paper.*) How did that get changed?

HIM: Sleight of hand.

HER: What about me, what's my name?

AUTHOR: I've got it written down here. Murgytroyd.

HER: You've got to be joking.

AUTHOR: Oh you sort that out with Him. I've got more important things to think about. (*Goes to typewriter or whatever.*)

HIM: What about Mary?

HER: It's got no class.

HIM: Lavinia.

HER: It's not a tragedy.

HIM: We can make it one.

HER: No, then we have to die at the end.

HIM: I think we've got him rattled.

HER: Yes. get back to names.

HIM: Marigold?

HER: I'm not going to be a flower.

HIM: You certainly are hard to find a name for. Trixie?

HER: Come on now.

HIM: What about Ruby?

HER: You think I walk the streets?

HIM: Maybe not. You're certainly a bit of a goer.

HER: Angelique has got class.

HIM: You don't want to be called Angelique.

HER: No, you're right.

HIM: What about Janine, or Janis?

HER: Yes, very good. I like them both. Which do you prefer?

HIM: I don't know, I can't remember which is which.

HER: Just call me Jan then.

HIM: All right. Are you happy with that?

HER: No, there's something else.

HIM: What?

HER: Amy, or Amelia. Amy in absurd company, Amelia in reality.

HIM: Reality?

HER: That's when it starts to make sense. Amelia Fenshaw.

AUTHOR: Look at the cast list. Murgytroyd. It's definitely got Murgytroyd.

HER: (*Takes it from him.*) Amelia Fenshaw, executive.

AUTHOR: (*Snatches is back. Reads it.*) Oh my God, what's going on here? I'm certain I wrote Murgytroyd.

(*Fred and the real stage manager enter carrying stage furniture which is totally inappropriate for the play. E.g. a moose's head or a couch piled up with set from the other plays or the kitchen sink etc.*)

AUTHOR: What are you doing?

FRED: Bringing on this [*whatever it is*]. The critic said you didn't have enough of a set.

AUTHOR: I didn't think that up.

FRED: No, I did.

AUTHOR: Things really are getting out of hand. I'm a minimalist writer, I don't have sets.

FRED: Well if you want to get in with the critic you've have to have a set. I mean where would you be if you didn't have one, you'd be up the Boeeye without a paddle wouldn't you, or if you want to put it in modern parlance you might be up a gum tree, I mean you might even be fodder for that Russet Hippalector sitting over there, no-one knows what you might be, you certainly wouldn't be doing very well in the arena of critical appreciation.

AUTHOR: This play doesn't have a set.

FRED: Well you're going to have one if you like it or not.

AUTHOR: Just take it off please.

REAL STAGE MANAGER: I say, steady on now. (*Can be cut*)

FRED: No, we can't take it off, not after going to all that trouble to get it in the first place.

AUTHOR: There is to be no set!

FRED: No appreciation, that's his problem. Come on now, they're setting them up at Yaughan's. (*They go*)

HIM: (*Looking at set*) Doesn't look much like an executive suite.

HER: No, but it means the stage manager's getting control too.

HIM: That's a point.

AUTHOR: Would you two like to take that off.

HER: No. We like it here.

AUTHOR: I'll have to do it myself then. (*Tries to move the set but for some reason he can't budge it, even though it seems quite light.*) Can you give me a hand here?

HIM: (*Goes to set, picks up a piece quite easily, puts it back*) No. My business here is to do the acting, not the scene shifting.

AUTHOR: How come you can shift it and I can't.

HER: An author has no business appearing on stage. It's only the actors that can move scenery about. The author just has to sit in the audience, like the director, and hope they get their lines right.

HIM: That's if he's still alive.

AUTHOR: I think I'm going mad.

HIM: That would be an advantage.

AUTHOR: All right. All right. I'll make concessions. What are we going to do now?

HER: Why don't you go away and write a play about cranes?

AUTHOR: Cranes? Cranes? What's this about cranes?

HIM: Don't you know?

AUTHOR: No, of course I don't know anything about cranes.

HER: You'll find out. It's in the back of your mind. Anyway my husband is called Brad.

AUTHOR: Brad?

HER: He has a square jaw, a crew-cut and wears horn-rimmed glasses. He's a Crane driver.

AUTHOR: Did he ever play rugby?

HER: In his younger days.

AUTHOR: A fresh clean-cut man.

HER: Yes.

AUTHOR: Well I don't care what sort of husband you have.

HER: Well I do, I have to live with him.

HIM: Isn't it time we got to the first meeting?

HER: Yes, then we can fuck.

AUTHOR: All right. It's an executive scrap metal yard on the seventh level of a high rise office block. Get on with it then.

(Author hands them a script. They both read from the one script.)

HIM: "I say you can't do that there here." I don't think he'd talk like that.

AUTHOR: What do you mean?

HIM: It's a terrible line.

HER: Absolutely awful.

HIM: Give us another one.

AUTHOR: I just can't think.

HER: How can you expect us to do a play if you can't think of the lines?

AUTHOR: Give me time.

HIM: Joe, bring the lights down and up, he needs time to think. *(The lights go down and come up.)* There you are, a whole hour.

AUTHOR: It may seem so to you, but not to me.

HIM: That's too bad. Give us it then. *(Author hands script.) (In a high falutin' voice.)* "Madame, it is not permitted to hawk your goods in this area." That's completely out of character too.

AUTHOR: Give us that. *(Scrawls on the script and hands it back.)*

HIM: "I'm sorry madam, we don't permit salesmen here."

HER: "Sales persons."

HIM: "We don't permit them either."

AUTHOR: I didn't write that.

HIM: Yes you did, that's what it says here.

AUTHOR: *(Takes script.)* No it doesn't.

HIM: You'll have to get your eyes tested.

HER: He's not wearing his glasses is he?

HIM: No, he's trying to be an actor, and you know you can't wear glasses on stage.

HER: So everything he sees there is just a blur.

AUTHOR: I can't see a damned thing!

HER: I think we've got him.

HIM: Let's try this new script. *(Takes it from his pocket)* "I'm sorry madam, we don't permit sales-personnel here."

HER: "But I asked at the desk."

HIM: "She's a new girl, just learning the ropes."

HER: "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

HIM: "That's all right, we all make mistakes."

HER: That sounds more sensible. Where do we go from there?

AUTHOR: You can't take it away like that. Joe, give me a couple of hours. *(The lights go down and then up. Author paces about.)* I need a couple more. *(Lights go down and then up.)* Try this. *(Hands them a script)*

HIM: "You are a beautiful young woman."

HER: "And you are a handsome young man."

HIM: "I find you very attractive."

HER: "And I find you most amenable."

HIM: "I would like to have a relationship with you."

HER: "I think a relationship would be acceptable to me."

HIM: "The problem is that I have a wife."

HER: "And I have a husband."

HIM: "My wife is a mousy blonde called Daisy. I am beginning to find her unattractive and I would like to be unfaithful to her because it would add a bit of variety to my life."

HER: "My husband is an uninteresting person called Brad. He is a member of all the right organisations including the Rotarians and the Lions Club. I would like to be unfaithful to him because he is a boring old fart."

HIM: I say, you can't go on like this.

HER: No, you have to show not say.

HIM: And it's pretty banal dialogue anyway.

AUTHOR: It's the best I can come up with at this point in time.

HER: Unacceptable.

HIM: Hogwash.

HER: Besmirched.

HIM: Sullied.

HER: Spotted.

HIM: Insalubrious.

HER: Tainted.

HIM: Tarnished.

HER: Not kosher.

HIM: Polluted.

HER: Contaminated.

HIM: Noisome.

HER: Fetid.

HIM: Sewerage.

HER: Septic.

HIM: Infected.

HER: Noxious.

HIM: Foul.

HER: Rank.

HIM: Gross.

HER: Unwholesome.

HIM: Poisonous.

HER: Virulent.

HIM: Baggage.

HER: Garbage. (*Ends*)

HIM: Well I'm not going to do this. Go back to your desk and rewrite it.

AUTHOR: What's the point? (*He goes back to his desk. Enter Fred.*) Can I do something for you?

FRED: No, I just thought I'd come on for a bit.

AUTHOR: You can't come on, I don't want you.

FRED: Trying to write some acceptable dialogue are you? Pity you can't see a thing.

AUTHOR: This is a nightmare.

FRED: I got bored sitting out there in the wings. I mean to say it's a bit tedious for a stage manager if there's not much to do in a play. No set changes, apart from the one you didn't want, and there's no ushering on and off of cast. I just sit in a dusty corner with a reading lamp and a script listening to you lot get your lines all fouled up and hoping you'll get through to the end of it without any stuff-ups.

HIM: Of course we've got our lines right.

HER: Absolutely.

FRED: Forty-five mistakes at the last count. (*To the audience*) You can't blame them for it, they're doing it on purpose to make that line true. (*To them*) I went out the back to look for a Russet Hippalector but there was nothing there. Looks like you've found one for yourself anyway.

AUTHOR: What do you mean?

FRED: The Russet Hippalector, looks like it's doing OK.

AUTHOR: There's no Russet Hippalector.

FRED: What do you mean? It's coming to life you know. Can't you see it? (*Scratches the hippo behind the ears.*) Nice Hippo, nice Hippo. (*The hippo growls.*) Now, now don't be like that. (*The hippo bites his hand.*) Ow, you horrible little beast, you bit my hand. (*To author*) What did you let him do that for?

AUTHOR: Just to pay you for coming on without my permission.

FRED: I'll see the Union about this. (*Exit*)

AUTHOR: Talk about temperament.

HIM: Well where's this new script then.

AUTHOR: I haven't got any new script. I don't think I'm ever going to write a play again.

HIM: Ah ha, we're doing fine.

HER: Well, as it happens, I have a good script here. Let's try it. *(Takes script from her pocket)* "Yes, it seems like I did make a mistake."

HIM: "I'm sorry, I don't make the rules."

HER: "That's all right, I'll pack up and go then."

HIM: "What are you selling?"

HER: "Ladies lingerie."

HIM: "I wanted, this might sound strange, I wanted to buy a nightie for my wife..."

HER: "I know, you're too embarrassed to go into a department store."

HIM: "Exactly. Would you like to step into my office, we can bend the rules for once." That's a lot better.

HER: Yes, I think I got it right.

HIM: What do we do now then?

HER: Get rid of him.

HIM: The Author?

HER: Who else?

HIM: How do we do that?

HER: Hoist him on his own petard.

HIM: The Hippalector?

HER: What else?

AUTHOR: Hey, what's going on here? *(The hippalector bites him.)* Ow.

(He staggers about the stage with yells and screams, fighting the hippalector, and eventually gets off with a crash.)

HIM: Well that's got rid of him.

HER: Not before time.

(Fred and the real stage manager enter. Fred has a mangled piece of costume which looks like something author was wearing.)

FRED: Looks like the hippalector did a good job.

HER: Is that all that's left of him?

FRED: Afraid so. Serve him right for giving it teeth.

HER: Destroyed by his own creation.

HIM: Poetic justice.

HIM: No great loss. He couldn't write a play to save himself. Now we can get around to the fucking.

REAL STAGE MANAGER: I say, steady on now. *(Can be cut.)*

FRED: Not in front of the audience you can't. Theatre management won't allow it.

(The stage managers pick up the 'set' they brought in before.)

HIM: What are you doing?

FRED: Striking the set.

HER: Why are you doing that?

FRED: The play's over. (*Moving to the wings*)

HER: (*As they go*) There's supposed to be an enigmatic ending.

FRED: Isn't this enigmatic enough? (*Exit*)

HIM: We'll never get to the fucking bit.

HER: We'll be virgins for the rest of existence.

HIM: We are married you know.

HER: I suppose we are.

HIM: What do we do then?

HER: Turn out the lights.

BLACKOUT.

CURTAIN.

