

RITUAL

By Dennis Bush

Copyright © 2010 by Dennis Bush, All rights reserved.
ISBN: 1-60003-531-0

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers, LLC.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with Brooklyn Publishers, LLC

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Brooklyn Publishers, LLC.

CHARACTERS

Actor 1	Don
Actor 2	Miranda
Actor 3	Alice
Actor 4	Tom
Actor 5	Mother, Sharon
Actor 6	Father, Bob
Actor 7	Hannah
Actor 8	Ron

SETTING

Here and there. Now and always.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

After an initial reading by members of Element 8 Theatre Company in New York City in November 2009, the premiere production of RITUAL was presented in Phoenix, Arizona. The original cast included Ben Whitmire, Cera Naccarato, Alex Rivera, Derek Weber, Nicholas Petrovich, Roxanne Feldhake, Emily O'Brien and Rosemary Zinke. The production was directed by the playwright. Technical elements were created and produced by Chess Venis.

The playwright gratefully acknowledges Lex Williford, director of the online bilingual Creative Writing M.F.A. program at the University of Texas at El Paso, for his support and encouragement during the creation of this play.

RITUAL
by
Dennis Bush

At rise, ACTORS are scattered around the stage like mannequins that have survived the explosion of a department store. White sheets or a similar fabric is draped over set pieces like dust covers thrown over furniture in a house whose occupants have left for a long trip.

The ACTORS begin to move around the playing space. The MALES wander around aimlessly yet with a cockiness of entitlement to the space. The FEMALES remove the dust covers, fold them, and put them away. After all the fabric has been removed, the ACTORS return to their original positions.

ACTOR 1: We are...

(The following three lines are spoken in rapid succession, like an echo to the first line but with equal volume.)

MEN: We are..

WOMEN: We are...

ACTOR 1: We are...

ALL: *(With strength)* Gathered...

(The following seven lines are spoken in rapid succession, as if the sound is bouncing around the set with equal volume.)

ACTOR 2: Here.

ACTOR 3: Here.

ACTORS 4 and 5: Here.

ACTORS 6 and 7: Here.

ACTOR 8: Here.

ACTOR 1: Here.

ALL EXCEPT ACTOR 1: Here.

ACTOR 1: *(With a forcefulness that borders on anger)* We are gathered here to...

MOTHER (ACTOR 5): *(To FATHER)* Wrap the present.

FATHER (ACTOR 6): I will.

MOTHER: When?

FATHER: When I get to it.

MOTHER: We don't have much time.

Ritual – Page 4

(The following seven lines are spoken in rapid succession, as if the sound is bouncing around the set with equal volume.)

ACTOR 1: Time.

ACTOR 2: Time.

ACTOR 3: Time.

ACTOR 4: Time.

ACTOR 7: Time.

ALL EXCEPT MOTHER and FATHER: Time.

FATHER: *(To ALL)* I'll do it!

MOTHER: Don't wait till the last minute.

FATHER: I won't.

MOTHER: And wrap it pretty.

FATHER: What difference does it make?

MOTHER and ALL EXCEPT FATHER: *(Aghast)* What?

FATHER: What difference does it make?

MOTHER: It makes a difference.

FATHER: She's a year old. She won't notice how it's wrapped. She won't care.

MOTHER: I'll notice. And I'll care.

FATHER and ALL EXCEPT MOTHER: You would.

MOTHER: You bet I would.

FATHER: Then why don't you do it yourself?

MOTHER: Because I asked *you* to do it.

FATHER: *(Logically)* You'll be the one unwrapping it for her, so you should wrap it.

MOTHER: But I asked *you* to do it.

FATHER: I have other things to do.

MOTHER and ALL EXCEPT FATHER: More important things?

FATHER: Just things.

MOTHER: Things that are more important than the baby?

FATHER: No.

MOTHER and ALL EXCEPT FATHER: No?

FATHER: No. *(Pause)* But more important than wrapping a present for a birthday she won't even remember.

MOTHER: There'll be pictures.

FATHER: That she won't care about.

MOTHER: *I'll* care.

FATHER: So *you* wrap the present.

MOTHER: *(Bitterly)* I *will*.

FATHER: *(Coldly)* Be sure to make it pretty.

(Time begins to pass. At first, the pace is deliberate. Then, each section moves more and more quickly. Each mention of “birthday” marks the passing of another birthday and another year.)

ACTOR 1: She’s so pretty.
ACTOR 3: *(Like an echo)* Pretty.
ACTOR 4: *(Like an echo)* Pretty.
ACTOR 2: You’re so lucky.
ACTOR 7: *(Like an echo)* Lucky.
ACTOR 8: *(Like an echo)* Lucky.
MOTHER: We’re so happy.
ALL EXCEPT MOTHER and FATHER: Happy?
MOTHER: *(Adamantly)* Happy!
FATHER: *(Grudgingly)* Happy.
ACTORS 1 and 2: Pretty.
ACTORS 3 and 4: Lucky.
MOTHER and FATHER: Happy.
ALL EXCEPT MOTHER and FATHER: Smile!

(The following section is spoken faster, but is crisply articulated.)

ACTOR 1: She’s so pretty.
ACTOR 2: You’re so lucky.
MOTHER and FATHER: We’re so happy...
ACTORS 7 and 8: *(As if finishing MOTHER and FATHER’s thought)*
 Birthday!
ALL: Smile!
ACTOR 1: Pretty.
ACTOR 2: Lucky.
ACTOR 7: Happy.
ALL: Smile!

(The following section moves even faster and even more crisply articulated.)

ACTOR 1: She’s so pretty.
ACTOR 2: You’re so lucky.
MOTHER and FATHER: We’re so happy...
ACTORS 7 and 8: *(As if finishing MOTHER and FATHER’s thought)*
 Birthday!
ALL: Smile!
MOTHER and FATHER: We’re so happy...
ACTORS 7 and 8: *(As if finishing MOTHER and FATHER’s thought)*
 Birthday!

Ritual – Page 6

ALL: Smile!

ACTOR 1: Pretty.

ACTOR 2: Lucky.

ACTOR 7: Happy.

ALL: Smile!

(The following section moves still faster with sharp enunciation.)

ACTOR 1: Pretty.

ACTOR 2: Lucky.

MOTHER and FATHER: Happy.

ALL: Smile!

(The following section is even faster and increases speed, as it goes, but remains sharply enunciated.)

ACTORS 7 and 8: Birthday!

ALL: Smile.

ACTORS 1, 2, 3 and 4: Birthday!

ACTORS 5, 6, 7 and 8: Smile.

ALL: Birthday. Birthday. Birthday. Smile!

(The following line is spoken with great speed and is sharply enunciated.)

ALL: Birthday. Birthday. Birthday. Smile!

(The following line should be even faster but still sharply enunciated.)

ALL: Birthday. Birthday. Birthday. SMILE!

(The following four lines are spoken simultaneously.)

MIRANDA (ACTOR 2): She was smiling as he was choking her.

(Clarifying) My dad had his hands around my mom's neck and she was smiling. I didn't think strangulation was something to smile about. Especially when it's your husband doing the strangling.

That's what I was thinking about as I watched it happen.

SHARON (ACTOR 5): He had a crooked smile. *(Quick pause)* The first boy who asked me out on a date had a crooked smile. It wasn't his teeth that were crooked. It was his lips... his mouth. It looked like he'd had a stroke or something. It was hard to take him seriously.

When he asked me out, I laughed. *(Quick pause)* Right in his face.

ALICE (ACTOR 3): My twin sister was always smiling. People started calling her "the happy one," which meant that I was, "the sad one." I

wasn't any more sad than she was. (*Quick pause*) Really. I just didn't smile as much. I think *she* was the sad one and she just smiled a lot so nobody would ask her what was wrong.

HANNAH (ACTOR 7): She smiled like she had a secret. (*Explaining*)

The porcelain doll that my grandmother gave me when I was little. I wasn't allowed to play with it. It had to sit on the shelf over my desk. She stared at me while I was trying to go to sleep at night. She stared and she smiled that I've-got-a-secret smile at me.

(*The dialogue returns to individual delivery.*)

MIRANDA: She was smiling as he was choking her. (*Clarifying*) My dad had his hands around my mom's neck and she was smiling.

SHARON: He had a crooked smile. (*Quick pause*) The first boy who asked me out on a date had a crooked smile.

ALICE: My twin sister was always smiling. People started calling her "the happy one," which meant that I was, "the sad one."

HANNAH: She smiled like she had a secret. (*Explaining*) The porcelain doll that my grandmother gave me when I was little.

ALICE: I wasn't any more sad than she was. (*Quick pause*) Really. (*Pause*) I just didn't smile as much.

SHARON: It wasn't his teeth that were crooked. It was his lips... his mouth. It looked like he'd had a stroke or something.

MIRANDA: I didn't think strangulation was something to smile about. Especially when it's your husband doing the strangling.

ALICE: I think *she* was the sad one and she just smiled a lot so nobody would ask her what was wrong.

SHARON: It was hard to take him seriously. When he asked me out, I laughed. (*Quick pause*) Right in his face.

HANNAH: I wasn't allowed to play with it. It had to sit on the shelf over my desk.

SHARON: It was funny to watch how his crooked mouth formed the words to ask me out.

MIRANDA: That's what I was thinking about as I watched it happen.

HANNAH: She stared at me while I was trying to go to sleep at night. She stared and she smiled that I've-got-a-secret smile at me.

MIRANDA: I could have said something, I guess. I could have screamed or called 9-1-1 or tried to get him to stop choking her. But she was smiling. How bad could it have been if she was smiling? People don't smile for no reason. So, I watched. I just stood there and watched.

SHARON: I said "yes." When he asked me out with his crooked mouth, I said, "yes," but only if it was just the two of us. Group dates are dangerous. The guys are always so competitive.

ALICE: She shaved her head once. She said she wanted a different look than I had. A perm or highlights would have been an option but, no, she shaved her head.

HANNAH: On my fifteenth birthday, I took the doll down from the shelf.

ALICE: And because she was the one who smiled all the time, people thought it was cute. They thought *she* was cute and the idea of shaving her head was cute.

SHARON: Your parents think group dates are cute and sweet and old-fashioned. They're clueless.

HANNAH: I think she was glad to be down off the shelf.

SHARON: Your date has one eye on you and the other one on his friends, seeing what they're doing with their dates. Then, your date tries to get away with more than the other guys are getting away with so his friends will think he's the big man.

MIRANDA: I watched my dad shoot himself in the head, a couple hours later.

SHARON: He's the big man.

HANNAH: And I jumped on the doll.

ALICE: People thought it was cute.

HANNAH: I jumped on her head.

(The following six lines should be delivered as if it is one person speaking a single uninterrupted thought.)

ACTOR 1: And...

ACTOR 4: Shoulders...

ACTOR 6: Knees...

ACTOR 8: And...

WOMEN: Toes.

MEN: Knees...

WOMEN: And...

TOM (ACTOR 4): Toes are like fingers for your feet.

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from RITUAL by Dennis Bush. For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script, please contact us at:

**Brooklyn Publishers, LLC
P.O. Box 248 • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406
Toll Free: 1-888-473-8521 • Fax (319) 368-8011
www.brookpub.com**

Do Not Copy