

STANDING ROOM ONLY

by Thomas Hischak

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STANDING ROOM ONLY

Six Comedic Plays About Theatre

by **Thomas Hischak**

SYNOPSIS: Welcome to the crazy world of the theatre! You won't believe the thoughts that go through an actress' head during an audition. Or imagine what happens when a gruff American voice coach tries to teach a British actor how to sound American. Looking at the theatre days of old, we find an aging acting couple having disagreements in the dressing room about each other's performances on stage. Then observe Shakespeare trying to tell his over-enthusiastic literary agent that he wants to drop her and fireworks break out. Emotions run high when two London charwoman are cleaning the stage of a West End theatre and one of them announces to the other that she giving up the theatre. Finally we take pity on a young playwright who sees his work destroyed by a flamboyant avant garde director. It's all and more than you can expect when you enter the insane asylum known as the theatre.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1-4 females, 1- 4 males, 2-8 either; gender flexible, doubling possible)

THE AUDITION:

ELIZABETH (f).....	A young actress, poised, nervous but well spoken. <i>(46 lines)</i>
BETH (f)	The actress' psyche, any age, blunt, loud, easily angered. <i>(60 lines)</i>
VOICE (m/f).....	An unseen director, impersonal. <i>(19 lines)</i>

THE VOICE SPECIALIST FROM AMERICA:

SAM KAUFMAN (m/f).....	A gruff, impatient American, no longer young. <i>(45 lines)</i>
MALCOLM (m).....	A gentle, patient British actor, young. <i>(44 lines)</i>

TEN-MINUTE CALL:

- WALDO KITTRIDGE (m) A mature actor of undetermined age, always speaking in the grand manner. *(54 lines)*
- FANNY KITTRIDGE (f) A mature actress of undetermined age, of the old school, his wife. *(52 lines)*
- VOICE (m/f) A young person. *(5 lines)*

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW:

- ROSALINE (m/f) A literary agent, lively, melodramatic, just about any age (with a few line changes, can be played by a male actor and renamed Benvolio.) *(61 lines)*
- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (m) A playwright, mild, gentlemanly, just about any age. *(58 lines)*

BELLES OF THE WEST END:

- LIZZIE (m/f) A British charwoman, loud, brittle, complaining, just about any age. *(47 lines)*
- CLARA (m/f) A British charwoman, quiet, gentle, forgetful, just about any age. *(46 lines)*

HOW THEATRE IS MADE:

- NOLAN (m) A young playwright, nervous, naïve. *(55 lines)*
- EVELYN/EDDIE (m/f) His agent, a confident New Yorker, loud and cheerful. *(36 lines)*
- MARCIA (f) A producer, flamboyant, enthusiastic. *(40 lines)*

JULIAN/JULIANNA (m/f) A director, artsy, theatrical.
(36 lines)

CAST NOTE: Characters marked as "either" gender (m/f), may be played by a woman or a man with a few line changes.

DURATION: 60 minutes

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Standing Room Only is a comic look at the theatre. The six short plays are about actors, producers, directors, playwrights, agents, a voice coach, and even the people who mop up the stage between performances.

Standing Room Only can be done as an evening of one-act plays or each play can be used for a short entertainment, a school or civic assembly, play competitions, or a classroom project. The six playlets have worked successfully in all of these forms. The scenic demands are minimal. If two or more plays are produced together, it is suggested that the same few furniture pieces be reused for each play, keeping scene changes short and simple.

Although there are fourteen speaking characters in the complete play, a great deal of flexibility and diversity is possible in casting the playlets. Several characters are indicated as being able to be played by a male or female with some line changes. In some cases, it adds to the humor to have one gender play the opposite gender. *Belles of the West End*, for example, has been very successfully produced with two men playing the slovenly charwomen.

The important thing is to have fun poking fun at the theatre with all its foibles and eccentricities.

THE AUDITION

by Thomas Hischak

SYNOPSIS: While the young actress Elizabeth auditions with a speech from *Romeo and Juliet*, her alter ego Beth tells us what the actress is really thinking and feeling about being treated like just another nameless face in the impersonal audition process.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 1 either)

ELIZABETH (f)..... A young actress, poised, nervous but well spoken. *(46 lines)*
 BETH (f)..... The actress' psyche, any age, blunt, loud, easily angered. *(60 lines)*
 VOICE (m/f)..... An unseen director, impersonal. *(19 lines)*

DURATION: 10 minutes

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A bare stage.

SOUND EFFECTS: The voice of the director, either live or recorded.

COSTUMES

ELIZABETH – Simple but attractive dark dress. Shoes with a slight heel.

BETH – The exact same dress, perhaps in a lighter color. Same with the shoes.

AT RISE: *The bare stage is empty. A VOICE is heard from the back of the house.*

VOICE: Next!

ELIZABETH enters timidly from the wings followed by a less timid BETH. They cross to center stage and stand side by side.

VOICE: And you are...?

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth Garrison...

BETH: Beth. No one's called me Elizabeth since my christening. *(To back of the house, shouting.)* Beth Garrison!

VOICE: Garrison...?

ELIZABETH: Yes. That is correct...

BETH: It's Beth! Why did I use Elizabeth on my resume? I feel like he's talking to a stranger!

VOICE: I don't seem to have a resume here for a Garrison...

BETH: *(Sarcastic.)* Terrific!

ELIZABETH: I...I gave it to the stage manager...

BETH: And what a creepy looking guy he is! He probably burnt it.

While ELIZABETH remains center stage for most of the scene, BETH frequently moves about the stage.

VOICE: You said Garrison?

ELIZABETH: Yes. Elizabeth Garrison...

BETH: It's the resume that's full of lies. Just like every other resume!

VOICE: Let me look again...

BETH: I never really played Ophelia in a theatre. It was just an acting class project...

ELIZABETH: I think I have another copy in my purse...

BETH: But I know all of Ophelia's lines if you want to hear them.

VOICE: Oh, here it is.

BETH: About time!

VOICE: I spilled some coffee on it and it got stuck to Mary Jane Abbott's resume. Sorry.

BETH: Of all the stupid – !

ELIZABETH: That's okay.

BETH: Who's Mary Jane Abbott? I hate her!

VOICE: So let's see here...

BETH: Don't read my resume! It's all lies! Just let me do my monologue!

VOICE: Ophelia, huh? Where did you play that?

BETH: And don't look at my head shot! I hate that photo!

ELIZABETH: Just a community theatre in Philadelphia...

BETH: Liar!

VOICE: Are you going to do some Shakespeare for us today?

BETH: Us? There's more than one of you out there?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

BETH: Why do they always sit out there in the dark?

ELIZABETH: I'd like to do Juliet's speech from Act Three Scene One.

BETH: Why did I wear this dress? I look awful in this dress!

ELIZABETH: It's the one while she's waiting for news about Romeo.

BETH: I should have done my hair differently. This style makes me look like an airhead!

VOICE: Isn't that monologue kinda long?

BETH: What is this? You gotta catch a plane or something?

ELIZABETH: It's just thirty-three lines...

BETH: Which took like *forever* to memorize!

ELIZABETH: But you can stop me anytime if you want...

BETH: What are you saying? (*To the house.*) I want to do the whole speech!

VOICE: All right then...

ELIZABETH: Thank you...

BETH: Let's get out of here! (*Tries to exit.*) We don't need this!

VOICE: Begin, please...

BETH: Drop dead, please!

ELIZABETH: All right... (*As Juliet.*) "Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, Towards Phoebus' lodging!"

BETH: I can't remember if Phoebus was the god of the sun or of the forest! Does it matter? I don't understand half of what Juliet says!

ELIZABETH: "Such a wagoner

As Phaeton would whip you to the West

And bring in cloudy night immediately."

BETH: Who was Phaeton? I can't remember that either!

ELIZABETH: "Spread thy close curtain, love performing night,"

BETH: Why did I pick this monologue!

ELIZABETH: “That runaway eyes may wink,”

BETH: I don’t even like *Romeo and Juliet*...

ELIZABETH: “...and Romeo

Leap to thee arms untalk’d of and unseen.”

BETH: Actually, I like Romeo. It’s Juliet who gets on my nerves.

Throughout the audition, ELIZABETH remains still but BETH paces about, sometimes crosses down to the edge of the stage, and other times returns and stands right next to ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH: “Lovers can see to do their amorous rites

By their own beauties;”

BETH: “Amorous rites?” Does that mean what I think it means?

ELIZABETH: “...or, if love be blind,

It best agrees with night.”

BETH: Love is blind? Is this where that expression comes from?

ELIZABETH: “Come, civil night,

Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,”

BETH: This speech is a big mistake!

ELIZABETH: “And learn me how to lose a winning match,

Play’d for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.”

BETH: “Learn me how?” Is that good grammar?

ELIZABETH: “Hood my unmann’d blood, bating my cheeks,”

BETH: “Hood my unmann’d blood?” I have absolutely no idea what that means!

ELIZABETH: “With thy black mantle till strange love, grown bold,

Think true love acted simple modesty.”

BETH: Why didn’t I stick to that monologue from *Our Town*?

ELIZABETH: “Come, night; come, Romeo; come, thou day in night;”

BETH: Or the speech from *Glass Menagerie*...

ELIZABETH: “For thou wilt lie upon wings of night

Whiter than new snow upon a raven’s back.”

BETH: Anything but this speech!

ELIZABETH: “Come, gentle night; come, loving black-brow’d night;”

BETH: Enough with all this “night” talk!

ELIZABETH: “Give me my Romeo;”

BETH: This is so boring. I'll bet you anything that director is out there sleeping!

ELIZABETH: "...and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,"

BETH: That's gross!

ELIZABETH: "And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun."

BETH: Or is that the "garnish sun"? I can't remember.

ELIZABETH: "O, I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possess'd it,"

BETH: Well, you can't have everything.

ELIZABETH: "...and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd it."

BETH: I think that means you can't have your cake and eat it too.

ELIZABETH: "So tedious is this day"

BETH: So tedious is this speech!

ELIZABETH: "As is the night before some festival"

BETH: "So tedious is this play!

ELIZABETH: "To an impatient child that hath new robes"

BETH: So tedious is this audition!

ELIZABETH: "And may not wear them."

BETH: This whole profession is tedious! I should have majored in Math
in college!

ELIZABETH: "O, here comes my nurse."

BETH: And about time too!

ELIZABETH: "And she brings news;"

BETH: Almost finished!

ELIZABETH: "...and every tongue that speaks
But Romeo's name..."

BETH: Don't rush it.

ELIZABETH: "...speaks heavenly..."

BETH: Take the pause for effect.

ELIZABETH: "...eloquence."

BETH: Done! Got through it!

ELIZABETH: Thank you.

BETH: (*To the back of the house.*) Don't applaud or anything!

VOICE: That's fine...

BETH: It was better than fine!

ELIZABETH: Would you like to hear a contrasting piece? A comedy?

BETH: I'll do the *Merry Wives of Windsor* speech!

VOICE: I don't think we have time.

BETH: Jerk!

VOICE: Thank you very much, Miss... Abbott.

BETH: Cretin!

ELIZABETH: It's Garrison. Elizabeth Garrison.

BETH: Imbecile!

VOICE: Of course it is. Thank you, Miss Garrison. (*Shouts.*) Next!

ELIZABETH: Thank you...

BETH: For nothing!

ELIZABETH starts to exit to the wings.

BETH: Don't call us, we'll call you!

ELIZABETH exits followed by BETH, but in a second BETH re-enters and crosses to center stage while ELIZABETH re-enters and stands near the wings.

BETH: Of all the rude, idiotic directors that I've run across, you take the cake! I am a person up here! I have a name! You can at least get it right! And I handed in a resume but you're too stupid to find it! And I have a comic piece from *Merry Wives of Windsor* that would knock your socks off if you had half a brain to appreciate it! But you haven't got time! Well, I don't have time for callous, dim-witted, no-talents like you!

VOICE: Was there something else, Miss Garrison?

ELIZABETH: No... Thank you again...

ELIZABETH exits. BETH runs after her but stops before she exits and shouts out.

BETH: Next!

Blackout.

THE VOICE SPECIALIST FROM AMERICA

by Thomas Hischak

SYNOPSIS: The busy American voice coach Sam Kaufman tries to give a lesson to the reticent British actor Malcom in his office in London but keeps getting interrupted by phone calls and his own commentary on British actors doing American plays. By the end of the lesson, Malcolm starts to get the feel of playing a tough American gangster.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male, 1 either)

SAM KAUFMAN (m/f).....A gruff, impatient American, no longer young. *(45 lines)*
 MALCOLM (m)A gentle, patient British actor, young. *(44 lines)*

DURATION: 10 minutes

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A simple but sloppy office in London.

SET

The set contains a desk, two chairs and perhaps some file cabinets and piles of papers. There could be a window with a distant view of Big Ben to set the location.

SOUND EFFECTS: The ringing of Sam's cell phone.

PROPS

- desk
- two chairs
- briefcase (MALCOLM)
- 5 DVDs (MALCOLM)
- cell phone (SAM)
- stick of gum (SAM)
- folded up script (MALCOLM)

COSTUMES

SAM – Dress shirt rolled up at the sleeves, loosened colorful tie, dark pants and shoes.

MALCOM – Conservative dark suit with a grey tie.

AT RISE: *SAM KAUFMAN sits at the desk talking loudly on his cell phone.*

SAM: Sure... Sure... it's always an emergency, ain't it? The last time it was also an emergency. Remember? ...Yeah, that actress that was trying to do *Barefoot in the Park* with a Southern accent... That was some job, Nigel. But again, it was an emergency. So what's the problem this time? ...Yeah? ...Yeah? ...Well, why did they cast him? ... What do you mean. "he looked American"? Did he come to the audition wearing a cowboy hat or something? ...Listen Nigel, I'd love to help you out but I got pupils scheduled all afternoon... Yeah ... Yeah... When do you start tapping? ...Uh huh...

MALCOLM cautiously sticks his head into the room, sees that SAM is on the phone, then starts to leave. SAM sees him and motions him to come in and sit down. MALCOLM does so, hesitantly. He carries a slim briefcase.

SAM: Well, I can't do miracles by Tuesday, Nigel. Even Henry Higgins got a few months to work on Whats-Her-Name... sure, sure... Okay, Nigel, you win. I'll tell you what. Send him over here around... (*Looks at his watch.*) around four and I'll try my best... Yeah, I'm a saint and you, Nigel, are a polite pain in the you-know-what. ...Right... See ya. (*Hangs up.*) I don't know who they think I am!

MALCOLM: A student of yours, Mr. Kaufman?

SAM: Heck no. That was Nigel Whats-His-Name at the BBC. They're going to send me some Oxford kid and they want him to sound like Tom Cruise by Tuesday morning. And why are they in this jam? All because he *looked* like an American! I'll tell you something, Morris—!

MALCOLM: Malcolm...

SAM: Yeah. I don't know why I bother with these lessons. You wanna get cast as an American in this town? Forget this speech stuff. Just go to the audition with a two-day beard, spit on the floor once or twice, and the part is yours.

MALCOLM: Really, Mr. Kaufman...(*Tries to laugh.*)

SAM: You think I'm kidding? London is crawling with American plays and the people producing them don't know diddley! They cast any joker who looks like Brad Pitt and when they find out he sounds like Belgrave Square, they call me and say it's an emergency! (*He gets up and paces the room as he pulls out a piece of gum and starts chewing noisily.*)

MALCOLM: I suppose it's a very great compliment, in a way.

SAM: How's that?

MALCOLM: Well... it does prove you are the best vocal coach in the West End. Everyone says so.

SAM: Ah, what do they know. Sometimes I just feel like packing it in and taking the first cheap flight out of here. I miss New York.

MALCOLM: I can quite understand.

SAM: I doubt it, kid. I really do. (*Returns to his chair.*) But enough of my bellyaching. You're paying by the hour. So, what have you been working on since last week?

MALCOLM: Well, I've been practicing that gangster exercise you gave me.

SAM: Good, good...

MALCOLM: And I located a copy of that DVD you told me about. (*Pulls some DVDs from his briefcase.*) The one with Marlon Brando. *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

SAM: Yup. Brando's good.

MALCOLM: Yes. It's excellent. I also found these other DVDs which seem to be very instructive.

SAM: Let me see. (*MALCOLM hands him a small stack of DVDs.*) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* with Jack Nicholson. A bit obvious but not bad. Dustin Hoffman... *Marathon Man*. Okay. Tom Hanks... *Sleepless in Seattle*. Well, I suppose. What's this?

MALCOLM: *Chocolat*. With Johnny Depp.

SAM: Don't waste your time. Johnny's played so many foreign roles lately people are starting to think he's British. (*Gives him back the DVDs.*) Any auditions this past week?

MALCOLM: Yes. One. It was for a Tennessee Williams one-act play at a Fringe theatre in Camden Town

SAM: Well, ya gotta start somewhere. How'd it go?

MALCOLM: I must say I was pleased with my efforts. I wish I could say that the management was equally pleased.

SAM: No dice, huh?

MALCOLM: I'm afraid not.

SAM: Well, don't get bent out of shape over a Williams part. London has been Blanche DuBoised to death this season anyway. It's the Mamet and the Shepard stuff you gotta prime yourself for. They eat up those guys like candy around here.

MALCOLM: And there is a Neil Simon play auditioning at the King's Head on Thursday.

SAM: Simon is okay. You could do Simon. Just don't wear a tie to the audition, whatever you do.

MALCOLM: Yes, Mr. Kaufman.

SAM: Okay, let's hear that gangster piece you been working on.

MALCOLM: Certainly. (*Stands, recites slowly from memory.*) "Okay, you guys... listen and listen good. You do what I say and, as I figure it we'll clear six grand each—"

SAM: Figger.

MALCOLM: I beg your pardon?

SAM: Figger! Figger! As I figger it...

MALCOLM: Oh. Of course. "As I figger it, we'll clear six grand each or we'll end up in the cemetree—"

SAM: Cemetery!

MALCOLM: Cemetery.

SAM: Not too bad. Watch those final d's. Six gran', not six grand. Nobody in the States has pronounced that final d since Teddy Roosevelt was in the White House.

MALCOLM: Six gran'...

SAM: Better. Keep going.

MALCOLM: "Now here's the plan. Everybody sticks to the shed-ule and things will—"

SAM: Schedule! (*Rises and paces.*) Schedule! You just walked into the biggest trap there is!

MALCOLM: Sorry...

SAM: And don't apologize. Americans never apologize. You got to think American to talk American. All right. (*Sits on the edge of the desk.*) Go on.

MALCOLM: "Everyone sticks to the schedule and things will go real smooth like. Louis—"

SAM: Louie!

MALCOLM: “Louie, you drive the cah-r—”

SAM: Car! Car! This ain’t Boston!

MALCOLM: “You drive the car and Squinty, you take care of that nosey clark at the gerage—”

SAM: You’ll be laughed off the stage!

MALCOLM: What’s that, Mr. Kaufman?

SAM: Clark at the gerage? Clerk at the garage!

MALCOLM: Oh...

SAM: I tell you, an American doing a lousy English accent may be nauseating but a Brit doing a phony Yank is hysterical!

MALCOLM: I see. “Clerk at the garage.”

SAM: Right. Watch yourself there, Milton.

MALCOLM: Malcolm. . .

SAM: Yeah. Go on. *(Cell phone rings.)* Wait a sec. *(Sits in chair and picks up phone.)* Sam Kaufman here. Whaddya want?... Gillian! Long time, no see! *(To MALCOLM.)* It’s Gillian Whats-Her-Name at the Royal National. *(Into the phone.)* I’m still here. Howya doin, sweets? ...What’s the problem?... Yeah... Yeah... *(To MALCOLM.)* Another emergency. *(Back into the phone.)* Uh huh... She did, did she? ...Uh huh... Chicago? Sure, everyone wants to sound Chicago these days. Blame it on John Malkovich... Yeah? ...Pretty bad, huh? ...Why don’t you you cancel and do *The Odd Couple* instead? It’s a funnier play... Sure, sure ...Listen, Gillian, I got pupils all afternoon... That’s right. Completely shed-uled. *(Winks at MALCOLM.)* ...When do you open, sweets? ...Well, change the rep and do something like *Private Lives* first because this bimbo sounds like she’s gonna take months! ...Uh huh... Okay, you win. I’ll tell you what, Gillian. Send her over around four this afternoon and I’ll see what I can do... That’s right... Yeah. Well remember me when I need tickets to the next Cameron Mackintosh show... Yeah. Bye! *(Hangs up.)* Who the heck do they think they are doing *The Front Page*? Just because we do their Shakespeare in Central Park is no reason for them to screw up our classics! Where were we?

MALCOLM: In the garage. I mean the garage.

SAM: Yeah. Go on.

MALCOLM: “The rest of you guys will come with me. And bring your rods with you. They just might be necess’ry—”

SAM: Necessary!

MALCOLM: Necessary.

SAM: That and “secratree” gets them every time. Go on.

MALCOLM: “I don’t want no disahster like last time—

SAM: Disaster! Disaster! Think of jackass and you can’t go wrong.

MALCOLM: Disasster—?

SAM: Better. Keep going.

MALCOLM: “I don’t want no disasster like last time with Mickey in hospital and the rest—“

SAM: What’s that?

MALCOLM: “With Mickey in hospital and—“

SAM: Let me see your script. (*MALCOLM pulls out a folded paper from his pocket and hands it to SAM who looks at it carefully.*) Just as I thought. “I don’t want to disaster like last time with Mickey in the hospital and the rest of the gang—“ You hear that?

MALCOLM: That’s what I said. “Mickey in hospital—“

SAM: The! The! In *the* hospital! You say “the hospital” or “a hospital” in the States. You leave out the *the* and you’re in Piccadilly.

MALCOLM: “With Mickey in *the* hospital and the rest of the gang hiding out in Staten Island all week-END—“

SAM: WEEKend! (*Rises and paces again.*) Not week-END! I’ll tell you, Melvin, you don’t learn to say weekend you might as well spend the rest of your career touring in *My Fair Lady!* Go on. (*Cell phone rings.*) No, don’t. (*Returns to desk and answers it.*) Sam Kaufman here. What’s your problem? ...Joey! How ya been?... (*To MALCOLM.*) Joseph Tanquary. Talk about a lost cause. He went to Harrow and Cambridge and did the worst Willy Loman I ever seen! (*Into phone.*) What’s new, Joey?... You don’t say! Who?... Thames Television? Terrific! (*To MALCOLM.*) He got on a series. They must be desperate. (*Into phone.*) I’m still here, Joey. So what’s the problem? ... New Jersey, huh? What part of New Jersey? ...Of course there are different parts! You want to sound Holboken or you want Princeton?Yeah... Yeah... Okay, you win, Joey. Tell you what. Come and see me around four today and I’ll do what I can. ...Sure. I know. I’m lovely, lovely... See you then. (*Hangs up.*) What a case! He’s about as American sounding as Hugh Grant. Where were we?

MALCOLM: The weekend in Staten Island.

SAM: Yeah. (*Rises and crosses to MALCOLM.*) Listen, Marvin, you got a lot more work to do on this piece. Keep listening to Nicholson and Brando. See if you can pick up on some of that rough quality. Think rude. You say something in a rude way, it sounds more American. Anger helps too. Rude and angry. It's a start. (*Returns to his desk.*)

MALCOLM: Rude and angry... (*To self.*) Rude and angry... (*Phone rings as MALCOLM crosses to the other side of the room and paces.*)

SAM: That phone again! (*Picks it up.*) Sam Kaufman here. I'm awfully busy and ...Penny! How's it going, kid? (*To MALCOLM.*) Penny Whats-her-Name. Nice girl from Phoenix who's in *The Lion King* company. (*Into phone.*) I'm still here, Penny.

MALCOLM: (*Still to self.*) Rude and angry... Rude and angry...

As SAM continues on the phone MALCOLM starts his speech, getting louder and ruder and angrier as he goes along. SAM pays no attention until MALCOLM is nearly finished.

SAM: How's my little girl? ...Really? Well, well, we all get a little homesick, sweets... Yeah, I understand... Old Sam knows what ails the aching heart... Uh huh? Of course I'm free. To see you, I'll move mountains! ...What do you say we try and find a place that knows how to make a good Chicago-style pizza? (*Laughs.*) You said it Penny! ...Of course I meant it ...Didn't I find that great little chili parlor in Kensington? ... What's that, Penny? I'm having a little trouble hearing you...!

MALCOLM: (*Spoken simultaneously with SAM'S speech above.*) "Okay, you guys... listen and listen good. You do as I say and, as I figger it, we'll clear six gran' each or all end up in the cemetery. Now here's the plan: everybody sticks to the schedule and things will go real smooth like. Louie, you drive the car and Squinty, you take care of the nosey clerk at the garage. The rest of you guys will come with me. Bring your rods with you. They just might be necessary. I don't want no disASster like the last time..."

MALCOLM has moved closer to SAM and grabs the phone out of his hand, shouting into it.

MALCOLM: ...with Mickey in THE hospital and the rest of the gang hiding out in Staten Island all WEEKend!" (A pause.) Rude and angry! (Meekly gives the phone back to SAM.)

SAM: (Impressed.) Not bad, Malcolm. Not bad at all.

MALCOLM: (Surprised.) You... you called me Malcolm...

SAM: That's your name, isn't it? (Into phone.) You still there, Penny? ...Oh, nothing. Just an actor. You want to meet me here? ...Sure. Anytime. (Looks at his watch.) Look, Penny, maybe you better come by soon... Yeah. I got to get the heck out of here before four o'clock... Right. See ya, sweets. (Hangs up, looks at MALCOLM.) Shed-ule! Crazy Brits!

Blackout.

TEN-MINUTE CALL

by Thomas Hischak

SYNOPSIS: Set in the 1940s, two middle-aged but still active players, Waldo and Fanny Kittridge, put on their makeup in the dressing room and prepare for a performance. They are a civilized married couple but underneath they have had to put up with each other's little annoyances for years.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 1 male, 1 either)

WALDO KITTRIDGE (m).....A mature actor of undetermined age, always speaking in the grand manner. *(54 lines)*

FANNY KITTRIDGE (f).....A mature actress of undetermined age, of the old school, his wife. *(52 lines)*

VOICE (m/f)A young person. *(5 lines)*

DURATION: 10 minutes

TIME: The 1940s.

SETTING: The dressing room of an old theatre.

SET

There are two makeup tables facing the audience, each with a chair and various powders and makeup supplies on each table. There is one door into the room. There are two costume racks behind the actors, each with five period costumes hanging on them.

SOUND EFFECTS: Voice of the call boy, live or recorded.

PROPS

- two makeup tables
- two chairs
- various makeup supplies
- 2 makeup pencils
- 2 costume racks
- five costumes hanging on each rack
- hairbrush (FANNY)
- hat (WALDO)

COSTUMES

FANNY – An expensive but well-worn, full-length, colorful dressing gown, and slippers.

WALDO – An expensive but well-worn, maroon dressing gown that goes just below the waist. Under it he wears a white shirt, black trousers, black bow tie, black shoes. His black suit jacket hangs on the costume rack.

AT RISE: WALDO and FANNY sit at their makeup tables doing their makeup. The sound of a knock at their door is heard.

VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Ten-minute call, Mrs. Kittredge.

FANNY: Thank you, dear.

VOICE: Ten-minute call, Mr. Kittredge.

WALDO: Thank you, Roger. (*Pause as each works on their makeup.*)

Dash it! My pencil just broke!

FANNY: Just as well. You've been overdoing it lately.

WALDO: My makeup? Overdoing it?

FANNY: Among other things.

WALDO: Have you a dark brown I can borrow?

FANNY: If you insist. (*Hands him a makeup pencil; another pause.*)

By the way, it's not Roger.

WALDO: Who's not Roger?

FANNY: The call boy. Roger was in Pittsburgh. This is Cleveland.

WALDO: Are you sure?

FANNY: I should know what city I'm in!

WALDO: I mean are you sure it's not Roger?

FANNY: I'm sure. Roger was in Pittsburgh.

WALDO: Then what's this one called? I mean, here in Cleveland?

FANNY: I have no idea. But I know it's not Roger.

WALDO: How come you called him Roger then?

FANNY: I didn't. You did. I called him... "dear," I think.

WALDO: Dear. Getting awfully chummy with the call boy, I'd say.

FANNY: Well, I had to call him something.

WALDO: Here's your pencil back. (*Gives her the pencil.*) It's the wrong shade.

FANNY: Sorry. (*Pause as they continue doing their makeup.*)

WALDO: What did you mean when you said "among other things"?

FANNY: Waldo, I'm having trouble following you this evening.

WALDO: When I asked you if you thought I was overdoing my makeup, you said "among other things."

FANNY: Oh...

WALDO: What other things?

FANNY: I'm sure I don't know...

WALDO: Fanny, don't be evasive. What things? My acting and such?

FANNY: And such.

WALDO: I'll have you know that I am giving the exact same performance here in Pittsburgh—

FANNY: Cleveland.

WALDO: In Cleveland as I did in New York!

FANNY: Bravo for you.

WALDO: Yet you have implied that I have made changes... that I am overdoing it.

FANNY: Is that what I implied?

WALDO: Yes!

FANNY: How clever of you to figure it out.

WALDO: (*Dramatically.*) I am not overdoing anything!

FANNY: Yes, dear.

WALDO: Don't be condescending, Fanny!

FANNY: I was just agreeing with you. Don't be so sensitive. (*Pause.*)

WALDO: All right! One example! Give me one example of my overdoing anything. Name one time when I... overdid!

FANNY: This is silly.

WALDO: One example! (*Beat.*) Ha! You can't! Just as I thought.

FANNY: Well, there is the umbrella.

WALDO: What about the umbrella?

FANNY: That bit you do with the umbrella in Act Two.

WALDO: What bit? I don't do bits!

FANNY: All I know is you used to enter dripping wet with the umbrella open and simply closed it and said your line.

WALDO: Precisely.

FANNY: But now you seem to struggle with the umbrella for a full minute before you finally manage to get it closed. Some nights I can down another martini in the time it takes you and that umbrella to get on with it.

WALDO: Sometimes the umbrella is temperamental.

FANNY: Aren't we all? But it's nothing compared to the *pas de deux* you do with that letter in Act Three.

WALDO: What about that letter?

FANNY: Waldo, dear, you are supposed to pick up the letter, open it, and read the contents within a reasonable length of time. But now you sniff the letter, hold it up to the light, massage the darn thing, and fiddle with the paper knife *ad finitum* before opening it. Thank goodness there are those munchy little canapés on the set to snack on or I would die of boredom!

WALDO: Well, the audience isn't bored. In point of fact, on most matinees I get a laugh at both of those moments.

FANNY: I rest my case. (*Brushing her hair.*) I cannot for the life of me get my hair to behave tonight. How much time have we got?

WALDO: We just got the ten-minute call from... Whats-his-name.

FANNY: Too late to wash it and start over.

WALDO: You don't go on until the second scene. (*Pause.*) It hardly bears mentioning...

FANNY: Then why are you mentioning it?

WALDO: I was put in mind of it when you talked about that bit... the business with the letter.

FANNY: Put in mind of what?

WALDO: Some might say that you are... overdoing that scene with Miles Bannister. The scene on the terrace.

FANNY: The love scene?

WALDO: Yes...

FANNY: One kiss. You call that overdoing it?

WALDO: It just seems to me that the scene of late has gotten a bit more... heated.

FANNY: Heated?

WALDO: Passionate. I know it's only one kiss but...

FANNY: But what?

WALDO: It seems the nature of the kiss has... changed. More heated... er, more passionate.

FANNY: I think I would have noticed.

WALDO: You seem to be so caught up in the scene that I wonder if you *do* notice. You seem quite besides yourself.

FANNY: Waldo, it called *acting!*

WALDO: Is that all it is? Miles Bannister is... not unattractive.

FANNY: He's young enough to be my son.

WALDO: Possibly.

FANNY: And he wears too much makeup. Especially for such a handsome young man.

WALDO: Young and handsome... yes...

FANNY: And beside all that, he's not... my type.

WALDO: I see. *(Pause.)* What is your type?

FANNY: I don't know. I suppose... you. You're my type.

WALDO: Someone not young and not handsome and who overdoes things on stage?

FANNY: Waldo, what is all this about?

WALDO: Sorry about your hair. *(Gets up from the chair and goes to the rack; takes off his dressing gown and puts on a suit jacket as he continues to speak.)* I imagine all will be right by Scene Two. I, on the other hand, come on six and one-half minutes after the curtain rises on Scene One. So I must be off...

FANNY: Waldo... *(Rises and goes to him.)* Are you jealous of Miles Bannister?

WALDO: He's not a very good actor, you know.

FANNY: That's not what I asked you.

WALDO: He's stiff and unnatural onstage. Has a habit of turning profile too often. Slow on cue pick up in the argument dialogue. But... that scene on the terrace. He's so... believable. *(Takes a hat from the rack and puts it on.)* I think he's in love with you. There is no other explanation.

FANNY: Then you *are* jealous?

WALDO: *(A bit too loudly.)* Of course I'm jealous! What do you think?

FANNY: *(Smiles warmly.)* How very dear of you.

WALDO: And I'll tell you something else. You're jealous too!

FANNY: Whatever of?

WALDO: That laugh I get when I do the letter bit.

FANNY: I thought you didn't do bits.

WALDO: Every night you try to get a laugh with the cigarette lighter. You know the part. When you ask me if I could light your cigarette. But it never quite works, does it? So you're jealous.

FANNY: I hadn't considered that before.

WALDO: I'll give you a tip, Fanny.

FANNY: A tip?

WALDO: Tonight... instead of asking for a laugh, just ask for a light. You just might be surprised and get a laugh. *(A knocking heard.)*

VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Places for Act One, Mr. Kittredge. Act One.

WALDO: Thank you, Rog—I say, son. What *is* your name?

VOICE: Roger... sir.

WALDO: Why... (*Smiles at FANNY.*) Thank you, Roger.

VOICE: Yes, sir.

FANNY: What are you smiling at?

WALDO: Your hair. Bound to get a laugh. Adieu, Mrs. Kittredge.
(*Kisses her hand.*) See you in Scene Two.

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