

THE NIGHT BEFORE

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A Ten-Minute Play

by

Scott Glander

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## Cast

VAL - a female playwright, early 30s

DAVEY - a director, her husband, early 30s

ANGELO - from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, male early 30s

ISABELLA - from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, female 20s

SUSANNA Centlivre - a playwright from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, female 30-40s

HENRY Birdsong - an archaeologist, male 30s-40s

PAROLES - from Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (doubles with Davey)

NATALIE – a female actor (doubles with Isabella)

## Setting

A theatre

## Time

2001

## ACT I

A stage. A table and chairs set for a table-reading

VAL flips through script, prepares a thought and makes a note. ENTER DAVEY

DAVEY

Did he really say that?

VAL

Did who, say what?

DAVEY

Your teacher?

VAL

Oh that, yeah, he did. Everyone laughed.

DAVEY

It's good advice.

VAL

It is.

(As a former Writing Teacher)

"Never put yourself in your own story. You never know who you might have to kill off."

DAVEY

Why did they laugh?

VAL

Davey, you're avoiding.

DAVEY

I, ah ... there was a lot going on.

VAL

Hence the energy. You said you liked the energy.

DAVEY

I wish you'd gotten into that MFA program.

VAL

They had nothing to teach me -- you know that.

DAVEY

But they could've --

VAL

They lied to me. I can't learn from people who lie to me.

DAVEY

We're all flawed Val.

VAL

Yes, I know -- I know I am.

DAVEY

You should've --

VAL

I can't work with people I don't trust Davey. You know that -- you know it doesn't work.

DAVEY

You said it was an honest mistake.

VAL

Forgetting to call me back about the interview was an honest mistake -- but then lying about it, to cover it up -- was not.

DAVEY

Still, you'd make contacts, professional --

VAL

There is nothing professional about a school that lies to a prospective student.

DAVEY

Val, they could've --

VAL

Is it over, Davey?

DAVEY

Yes, it's over. I told you it was.

VAL

Then don't bring it up again.

DAVEY

It's just that --

VAL

Davey -- stop! Just stop! I want to move on.

DAVEY

So do I.

VAL

She's out of your life?

DAVEY

Yes, she's out of my life.

VAL

Fine. As long as it's over, then we move on. Okay?

DAVEY

All I'm saying is --

VAL

Can we talk about my play? Let's talk about my play.

DAVEY

That's why we're here.

VAL

You didn't like it.

DAVEY

I didn't say that.

VAL

You didn't have to. How about this? You didn't like it well enough to produce it. How's that?

DAVEY

It has a few problems.

VAL

Every play has problems -- hence the workshop.

DAVEY

It's a bit too ...

VAL

First act? Second act?

DAVEY

It's not really ...

VAL

Is it a particular character or scene?

DAVEY

It's just ...

VAL

What? It's just what? Give me something specific I can work with --

DAVEY

All of it! Damn it! It's a goofy mixed-up mess! Characters coming and going -- morphing into new characters -- an archaeologist digging holes in the stage -- a poet with rocks? Give me a fucking break!

VAL

Well that's specific.

DAVEY

Nothing, just none of it made any sense.

VAL

Nothing made any sense. After all of this time -- how can you say that?

DAVEY

Why don't you go back to that other one -- the Shakespeare thing.

VAL

The Shakespeare play?

DAVEY

Yeah, that one.

VAL

We tried it -- a "true" comedy version of *Measure for Measure* wasn't going to work.

DAVEY

It was funny.

VAL

It wasn't supposed to be that kind of funny. If we were going to change it we should've turned it into a full blown tragedy where everyone dies at the end.

DAVEY

Then maybe you should do that. Val, why don't we ...

VAL

How long have you felt this way?

DAVEY

From the beginning.

VAL

I've got over two years of my life in this play. Why didn't you say something sooner?

DAVEY

I thought ... I ... hoped it would get better. Or I ... hoped you'd figure it out for yourself.

VAL

Two years of my life. You could've saved me two years of my life.

DAVEY

It's not a total waste.

VAL

It's not?

DAVEY

It's a learning experience.

VAL

Two years and nothing to show for it.

DAVEY

I thought you were a process person.

VAL

Nothing worked?

DAVEY

Nothing.

VAL

Not even the 17th Century playwright getting into a sword fight with her own characters?

DAVEY

No, not even that.

VAL

You sent everyone home, I take it.

DAVEY

I thought it best, not to -- I'll go grab my coat and we can --

VAL

I could use a drink.

DAVEY

Me too.

(EXIT)

VAL

I'm a failure! This is what the process of a complete failure looks --

A DOOR SLAMS back stage. ENTER ANGELO and ISABELLA

ANGELO

I fail to see your point.

ISABELLA

It is about my brother, Claudio.

ANGELO

He that is supposed to die for fornication?

ISABELLA

The same, my lord.

VAL

Glenn, Natalie rehearsal's over. You're very kind and I appreciate your enthusiasm.

ANGELO

Fornication is nothing to be sneezed at!

ENTER HENRY Birdsong and SUSANNA

HENRY

(Sneezes)

That one cleared out the old sinuses!

SUSANNA

That would be a wonderful line for a play. I'll have to use it sometime.

ISABELLA

I didn't sneeze.

HENRY

That was me.

VAL

You can drop the act, all of you.



HENRY

Madame, we have not yet begun to drop -- my trowel, what happened to my trowel?

ANGELO

(Shows TROWEL)

I have your trowel, Sir.

HENRY

That's a good magistrate!

(Takes TROWEL)

Now if I only had something to dig up.

ANGELO

He's an archaeologist you know.

VAL

Laura, Tim you too, thanks but --

ISABELLA

But my brother, Sir?

ANGELO

He must die, Isabella.

ISABELLA

But --

ANGELO

But then we all must die sometime, mustn't we?

SUSANNA

Historically speaking, this is a comedy -- but not a "true" comedy, only a theoretical comedy. I know because I write both comedies and tragedies.

HENRY

What have we here?

(Begins to dig)

SUSANNA

Strictly speaking, brothers don't die in comedies.

ANGELO

Nor is there fornication in a comedy. The law of Vienna says -- he must die and die he shall!

ISABELLA

I beg of you, can you not condemn the fault, but not the doer?

ANGELO

No way, no how! Death is what this play is about. Don't ever forget that.

ISABELLA

Is there not room in your heart for charity and kindness.

ANGELO

Ah, no. However there is room in my bed for you.

ISABELLA

Fie, fie upon you.

HENRY

(Pulls BOOK from the stage)

Eureka!

SUSANNA

He's found something. What is it professor?

HENRY

It looks like a book.

SUSANNA

Is it a comedy or a tragedy?

HENRY

I'm not sure.

(Reads)

Noodles of this sort die a most curious death.

ISABELLA

So my choices are: to sleep with the magistrate or my brother dies?

SUSANNA

It's only a noodle.

ISABELLA

It's my brother.

HENRY

Her brother's a noodle, but that doesn't mean he has to die, does it?

VAL

Stop, stop, stop! All of you stop -- this isn't helping me!

ENTER PAROLES

PAROLES

Are you a virgin?

VAL

Davey, where did you get those clothes?

PAROLES

I asked you a question.

SUSANNA

Now we're getting somewhere.

PAROLES

I'll only ask you one more time. Are you a virgin?

ISABELLA

Of course I'm a virgin. Isn't everyone?

ANGELO

It's about time something real happened.

PAROLES

We are to the wars you know?

ISABELLA

Is it a war you seek with me?

PAROLES

Well a battle, let us say -- not a war.

VAL

Davey, stop it -- this isn't funny anymore.

ISABELLA

You see it is a war.

ISABELLA and PAROLES KISS and EXIT

HENRY

But it isn't about popsicles.

VAL

Then what is it about?

HENRY

Ask Mr Paroles.

VAL

I knew he wasn't in my play.

SUSANNA

Honey, don't fight it -- they always take on a life of their own.

ALL EXIT, but VAL. LAUGHTER from off stage, ENTER  
DAVEY and NATALIE

VAL

Well isn't this a surprise! A new one?!

EXIT NATALIE

DAVEY

Val? I ... I heard the door slam. I thought you'd ... I didn't want you to find out, not this way.

VAL

Is there a better way.

DAVEY

We're all flawed Val.

VAL

Some more than others.

DAVEY

It was too close.

VAL

What are you talking about?

DAVEY

Your play. It's good. It makes sense, perfect sense. It will play well.

VAL

Then why did you --

DAVEY

It was too close. It revealed too much ... about us, about me ... I couldn't put that out there.

VAL

At least I didn't waste two years of my life with my play.

END OF PLAY