

THE GAME
a morality play in one act

by Louise Bryant

The following one-act play is reprinted from *The Provincetown Plays*. New York: Frank Shay, 1916. It is now in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

CHARACTERS

LIFE
DEATH
YOUTH
THE GIRL

[AT THE RISE, Death is lying on the ground at left, idly flipping dice. Now and then he glances sardonically at Life who is standing at the extreme right and counting aloud.]

LIFE: *(Counting abstractly)* Fifty thousand, fifty-one, sixty-five, ninety-- *(She goes on through the next speech.)*

DEATH: Come come, Life, forget your losses. It's no fun playing with a dull partner. I had hoped for a good game tonight, although there is little in it for me-- just a couple of suicides.

LIFE: *(With a gesture of anxiety)* My dear Death, I wish you would grant me a favor.

DEATH: *(Grumbling)* A favor. A favor. Now isn't that just like a woman? I never saw one yet who was willing to abide by the results of a fair game.

LIFE: *(Earnestly)* But I want these two, whether I win or lose. I really *must* have them. They are geniuses--and you know how badly I am in need of geniuses right now. Ungrateful spoiled children! They always want to commit suicide over their first disappointments.

DEATH: (*Impatiently*) How many times must I tell you that the game must be played! It's the law--you know it as well as I do.

LIFE: (*Shrugging*) O, the law! Laws are always in your favor, Death!

DEATH: There you are. I always said the universe would be in a wild state of disorder if the women had any say! No, you must play the game.

LIFE: (*Indignantly*) Whoever said anything about not playing? All I want is your consent to let them meet here before the game begins.

DEATH: I'll bet this isn't so innocent as it sounds. Who are they? I haven't paid much attention to the case.

LIFE: Youth and The Girl. He is a Poet, and she a Dancer.

DEATH: A strong man and a beautiful woman. (*He laughs, ironically*) Up to the same old tricks, eh? You sly thing, you think if they meet they'll fall in love and cheat me! (*Pause.*) Well, suppose I consent. What will you give?

LIFE: (*Quickly*) I'll give you Kaiser Wilhelm, The Czar of Russia, George of England and old Francis Joseph--that's two to one!

DEATH: Now that's dishonest. You're always trying to unload a lot of monarchs on me when you know I don't want them. Why, when you play for them you almost go to sleep and I always win. No bargaining in kings, my dear.

LIFE: I'll give you a whole regiment of soldiers.

DEATH: (*With scorn*) Soldiers! What do you care about soldiers? Look at your figures again. You've been losing millions of soldiers in Europe for the past two years--and you're much more excited about these two rattle-pated young idiots. Your idea of a fair trade is to get something for nothing. You love too much. With such covetness how can you ever know the thrill of chance?

LIFE: (*Pleading*) O I'll give you *anything*.

[*Enter Youth, with hanging melancholy head.*]

DEATH: Sshh! Too late! Here's one of them.

LIFE: (*Turning*) Youth! (*To Death*) You've tricked me. You were only playing for time.

DEATH: Come, sister. Be game. All's fair in everything but the dice. And just think. If you win this cast the other is half won. They'll meet then ...

YOUTH: (*Seeint the two and starting. To Life.*) Who are you?

LIFE: (*Anxiously*) I am Life!

YOUTH: (*Bitterly*) O, I am through with you ... I want none of you! (*Turning his back and addressing Death*) And who are you?

DEATH: (*Rising with cheerful complacency*) I am Death!

YOUTH: (*Taken aback*) Death! How different from my dream of you. I thought you were sombre, austere; and instead, you're--if I may say so--just a trifle commonplace.

DEATH: I'm not as young as I once was. One's figure, you know--

LIFE: (*Delightedly*) Ah!

DEATH: Look at *her*. A pleasing exterior, eh? And yet you wouldn't be seeking *me* if you didn't know better. Alas, my boy, beauty is not even skin deep.

YOUTH: That is true. (*Going to Death*) Ah, Death, I have been seeking you for weeks.

DEATH: Yet I am always present. Where did you seek me?

YOUTH: (*Excitedly, with gestures*) I tried poison, but just as I was about to swallow it they snatched it from me ... I tried to shoot myself. They cheated me; the pistol wouldn't go off.

DEATH: Well-meaning idiots!

YOUTH: So I came here to leap into the sea!

DEATH: Very good. Only hurry. Some one might come.

LIFE: Why do you wish to die?

YOUTH: (*Hotly*) As if you didn't know. Did you not give me the power to string beautiful words into songs--did you not give me Love to sing to and take Love away? I cannot sing any more! And yet you ask me why I want to die! I am not a slave! Slaves live just to eat and be clothed--you have plenty of them!

LIFE: (*Sadly*) Yes, I have plenty of them.

YOUTH: If I cannot have love to warm me, I cannot create beauty. And if I cannot create beauty, I will not live!

LIFE: Are you sure it was Love? I think it was only Desire I gave you; you did not seem ready for Love.

YOUTH: (*Passionately*) Falsehoods. Evasions. What *is* Love, then? You gave me a girl who sold flowers on the street. She had hair like gold and a body all curves and rose-white like marble. I sang my songs for her, and the whole world listened. Then an ugly beast came and offered her gold ... and she laughed at me--and went away.

DEATH: (*Laughing indulgently*) That is Love, my boy. You are lucky to find it out so young.

LIFE: Now I know it was desire.

YOUTH: (*To Death*) Why will she persist in lying?

DEATH: (*Gallantly*) I am a sport and a gentleman and I must admit that Life is as truthful as I am.

LIFE: Listen, Youth, and answer me. Did your sweetheart understand your songs?

YOUTH: Why should she? Women do not have to understand. They must be fragrant and beautiful--like flowers.

LIFE: And is that all?

YOUTH: (*Slightly confused*) I do not know many women.

LIFE: I will show you one who understands your songs. She is coming here.

DEATH: (*Harshly*) To leap into the sea, like you!

LIFE: Because she is lonely--waiting for you.

YOUTH: For me! But I do not know her!

LIFE: But she knows you--through your songs...

DEATH: (*Scornfully*) And you have been seeking me for weeks! Are you to be fooled again by this tricky charlatan? You who have had enough of Life? There is no place for cowards among the lofty dead!

YOUTH: O Death, forgive me! Life, farewell!

[He stretches out his arms and turns towards the cliff.]

LIFE: (*Crying out*) Hold! We must play first.

[Youth stands as he is, with outstretched arms as they play.]

DEATH: (*Jovially*) So now it is you who are asking me to play! Come, Life do me a favor. Give me this one and the girl shall be yours!

LIFE: (*Excitedly*) No. The game must be played. It is the law!

[Death laughs. They go to center stage and throw the dice. Death frowns and grumbles.]

LIFE: (*Rising with a happy smile*) I have won!

YOUTH: (*Dropping his arms and turning slowly. Sadly.*) Then I am to live--in spite of myself. Death, I have lost you. Life, I hate you. Without Love you are crueller than Death.

LIFE: Soon the Girl will be here. Then you will think me beautiful.

DEATH: That's the comedy of it. You probably will, you know.

YOUTH: (*With a gesture of revulsion*) Promises. Promises. Love comes but one--

[He breaks off and stares as the Girl rushes in. She almost runs into Life, then suddenly recoils.]

GIRL: Who are you?

LIFE: I am Life.

GIRL: O, Life dear, I must leave you! I cannot bear you any longer. You are so white and so cold!

LIFE: What have you to complain of? Have I not given you Fame, and Worship and Wealth?

GIRL: What are all these ... without Love?

DEATH: *(With a smile)* What--you without Love? How about those who stand at the stage door every evening--and send you flowers and jewels? One of them shot himself because you stamped on his flowers. Believe me, my dear, that is all the Love there is--

GIRL: Love? No. That was Desire!

DEATH: Bah! Desire when they seek you--Love when you seek them.

GIRL: No, No. Love understands. They didn't. They wanted to buy me in order to destroy me. That is why I stamped on their flowers.

DEATH: *(Humorously)* Ah, the young. Incurably sentimental.

YOUTH: *(Impetuously)* Good. I'm glad you did.

GIRL: *(Startled)* Why, who are you?

YOUTH: I am Youth.

GIRL: *(Drawing back)* Youth, the Poet? You? O I know all your songs by heart. I have kissed every line. Always, when I dance, I try to dance them. *(Looking around fearfully)* But why are you here?

DEATH: *(Grimly)* He came to throw himself into the sea!

GIRL: (*Alarmed. Clutching him by the arm.*) Oh, no. You must not. What would the poor world do without your beautiful songs?

LIFE: Do not be afraid, my dear, I have won.

YOUTH: (*Sighing*) Alas!

GIRL: Why did you want to die?

DEATH: (*Slyly*) His sweetheart left him.

GIRL: (*Drawing back coldly*) His sweetheart! So he loves someone! I don't believe you. How could any woman he loved ... when he sings so sweetly--

LIFE: His songs meant nothing to her.

GIRL: Nothing! (*Going to Youth*) O then she was not worth your love. She was like the men who wait for me at the stage-door; she wanted to destroy you.

DEATH: Such is Life, my dear young lady, Love is the destroyer always.

YOUTH: (*Bitterly*) You are right. It is all a myth--Life, Love, Happiness. I must idealize someone, something--and then the bubble bursts and I am alone. No. If she could not understand, no one could understand.

GIRL: (*Eagerly*) O how wrong you are! *I* understand. Don't you believe me? I have danced all you have sung. Do you remember "The Bird Calls?"

[*She dances. Youth watches with astonishment and growing delight.*]

YOUTH: How beautiful! You *do* understand--you *do*! Wings flash and soar when you dance! You skim the sea gloriously, lifting your quivering feathery breast against the sunny wind. Dance again for me. Dance my "Cloud Flight!"

GIRL: The loveliest of all! (*Remembering sadly*) But I can never dance for you anymore. I came here to die!

DEATH: And you'd forgotten it already! O you're all alike, you suicides. Life's shallowest little deceit fools you again--though you have seen through her and know her for what she is.

GIRL: (*Hesitating*) But I have found Youth.

YOUTH: (*Swiftly*) Yes, and Youth has found Love--real Love at last. Love that burns like fire and flowers like the trees. You shall not die. (*To Death*) And I will fight you for her! Love is stronger than Death!

DEATH: Than Life, you mean. Think of the great lovers of the world--Paola and Francesca, Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde. I, I claimed them all. Who are *you* to set yourself up against such august precedents? (*To the Girl*) You think he loves you. It is not you he loves, but your dancing of his songs. He is a Poet--therefore he loves only himself. And his sweetheart, for lack of whom he was going to die. See! He has already forgotten her! (*Slowly*) As you will one day be forgotten.

LIFE: (*To Girl*) Why ask too much of me? I can only give happiness for a moment--but it is real happiness--Love, Creation, Unity with the tremendous rhythm of the universe. I can't promise it will endure. I won't say you will not some day be forgotten. What if it is himself he loves in you? That, too, is Love.

GIRL: To be supremely happy for a moment--an hour--that is worth living for!

DEATH: Life offers you many things--I but one. She pours out the sunshine before you to make you glad; she sends the winter to chill your heart. She gives you Love and Desire--and takes them away. She brings you warm quietness--and kills it with hunger and anxiety. Life offers you many things--I but one. Come closer, tired heart, and hold out your weary hands. See! What a pearl I offer--to kings and beggars alike. Come--I will give you *peace!*

GIRL: (*Spurning him*) Peace? Do you think I want peace--I, a dancer, a child of the whirling winds? Do you think I would be blind to the sunlight, deaf to Youth's music--to my sweet applause, dumb to laughter? All this joy that is in me--scattered in darkness? Dust in my hair--in my eyes--on my dancing feet? (*Hesitating*) And yet--and yet Life is so cruel!

YOUTH: (*Going to her*) My dearest. We will never leave one another.

LIFE: She is mine!

DEATH: (*Sardonically*) Haven't you forgotten something? The game!

LIFE: It is half-won. She too has found love.

DEATH: Ah! But in willing to die she laid her life on the knees of the Fates. So we must play for her. It is the law.

LIFE: O I am not afraid to play. This time I have you, Death.

DEATH: Have *me!* Ho, Ho. Nay, Life. I am cleverer than you. On this game hangs the doom of both!

LIFE: (*Astonished*) Of both? (*Furiously*) You lie, Death! I have already won Youth, he cannot die.

DEATH: (*Laughing*) Ho. Ho. Youth cannot die, you say. True. But the Girl dies if I win; isn't that so? (Life nods.) Well, and if she dies, what then? He loves her, yet he cannot follow. Nay, he shall live--forever mute, forever regretting his lost love, until you yourself will beg me to take him!

LIFE: (*Falling on her knees*) O Death, I beg of you--

DEATH: Ho. Ho. Life on her knees to Death. No, sister. I couldn't help you if I would. It is the law. Let us play.

LIFE: (*Resigned*) It is the law.

[*They go to the center of stage and play.*]

LIFE: (*Joyously*) O I have won again!

DEATH: (*Blackly, hurling the dice to the ground*) Yes, curse the luck! But some day we'll play for those two again--and then it will be *my* turn.

YOUTH: Yes. But we will have *lived*. Until then, Death, you are Powerless. I fear you not, and I will guard her from you.

DEATH: (*Shrugging*) Geniuses! Geniuses!

GIRL: (*To Youth*) How brave--how strong--how beautiful is my lover!

[*They go offstage with their arms about each other.*]

DEATH: Well, it was a good game after all. You see, that's the difference between you and me; you play to win, and I play for the fun of the thing. (*He laughs.*) But tell me, Life; why is it you make such a fuss over dreamers and care so little for soldiers?

LIFE: O, soldiers don't matter one way or the other to me; but some day the dreamers will chain you to the earth, and I will have the game all my way.

DEATH: That remains to be seen. But how about kings?

LIFE: Kings are my enemies. Do you remember how careless I was during the French Revolution? I've always had it on my conscience, and I think I'd feel better if I told you; whenever I threw a good combination, I--juggled the dice!

DEATH: (*Nodding*) I'm not surprised. Heavens, aren't women unscrupulous! And yet they call me unfair ... Well, I suppose I've got to keep an eye on you.

LIFE: I warn you I will stop at nothing. By the way, what's the game tomorrow night?

DEATH: A Plague. And in that game, I regret to say you haven't a chance in the world.

LIFE: Don't forget I have Science to help me.

DEATH: Science, Bah! A fool's toy! I sweep them all together in my net--the men of learning and the ones they try to cure.

LIFE: But remember that the sun, the blessed healing sun still rises every morning.

DEATH: (*Irritated*) Oh, don't remind me of the *sun!*

[*He goes.*]

LIFE: (*Beginning to count her losses again*) Two hundred thousand, seventy-five, three hundred and ten. (*Looking up.*) I must never let him know how much I mind losing soldiers. They are the flower of youth--there are dreamers among them...

CURTAIN

THE TALK

A Ten Minute Meeting By Eric Coble and Darius Stubbs

(CURTIS, black, and DAVID, white, sit in two chairs with perhaps a table between them. A coffee shop. They are at least acquaintances/co-workers/could be friends)

DAVID

I can't imagine, I can't even imagine, but I have to, you know, as a fellow human being, I have to at least try, but how I can I - the African-American experience is so far beyond me, so far and so deep, you know? - it goes so deep, such pain and rage and resilience - right? The resilience? I was reading a thing on *Huffington Post* last week about how teaching resilience to young people is so crucial, you know, and I was like: the only people who should be teaching resilience are African-Americans, they've lived it, are living it, you know? I mean, Jews and Latinos and women and gays, all minorities, they're all living it, but not the same way, not in America, it'll never be the same as for African-Americans — and that's what I want to find out, what are you resilient-ing against? You know, you personally, what in the culture now are you having to overcome, your mountains, your daily- your hourly mountains - that's what I'll never really know, but I need to know, you know, as a fellow human being. As an ally.

(Beat. Curtis nods. About to reply)

DAVID (Continued)

'Cause that's the only way I can truly be an ally, right, is to understand, or get as close as I can to understanding. There was this terrific article in *The New Yorker* about empathy? And how we're actually hard-wired to pick up- to mirror the feelings of other people, and we actually have to train ourselves to ignore other people's pain, like develop the skill - isn't that fascinating? And awful? And like I'm just trying to just

(Gestures)

pull off this armor, all this decades of iron armor put on me by culture and history, you know, and now I'm asking you to help me pull it off - and it's not your job, I

totally get that, it's my job as a white straight male to deal with my armor. But I can only do my job by having empathy, which means you sharing your story and helping me do my job, which is so ironic, right, and... unfair. The whole thing is unfair. But that's what I need to know - what are your unfairnesses, your injustices - that's the first step. Listening. Listening, open and listening.

(Beat. Curtis nods. Waits to see if he can jump in... looks like it. Starts to speak-)

DAVID (Continued)

And I'm sorry, just one more thing, I want you to be totally honest. We can't get anywhere unless we both go right down to the core, right, the murky buried scary shit core. That's what I want. And I want to share my shit with you. But only after you've shared your shit with me - white people have been sharing their scary shit for 400 years, right?

DAVID (Continued)

Let's shut up and take shit for once! And that's what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna shut up now and stop blabbing and listen - I'm gonna listen, I'm so sorry for going on and on, I'm sorry, you go. Go.

(Curtis immediately starts to speak-)

DAVID (Continued)

And I'm sorry, I just need to apologize again - I just, not just for... the-

(Gestures behind him)

-history, everything - but for rattling on just now, I am a total jerk, I'm sorry. That's gotta be one of the hardest things about being black is white people barreling over you, right, and here I was doing it, just totally unconsciously doing it, Jesus, I can't- I am so sorry. You see how far we have to go? How far I have to go - you don't have to go anywhere, you're there, right? I was listening to a podcast about the Ten Hardest Things About Being Black In America, and I'm like - Yes! But Curtis! I need to hear Curtis' Ten Hardest Things! And I will- let me just say this and I'll shut up, I'm gonna shut up, but I've been thinking about this - because even though I will never understand in my soul what it is to be black, I have read a lot and I think that on some level, when I've taken in this diet of dozens of African-American stories and thinkers and biographies, that that collection of knowledge may almost possibly be equal to one personal perspective. You know? You know like, you're one reviewer of a movie I haven't seen and

never will see - but if I go to Rotten Tomatoes, there's 200 reviews of that movie, and read all those and that collected knowledge may be of equal value - maybe - to your one personal review. You know? But I still need that one personal review, your review, and you're here now and I'm here now and we should just totally-

(Curtis quickly, firmly yet gently, puts one finger on David's lips to silence him.

David is surprised. Shuts up. Beat. They hold this. David takes this in. Curtis removes his finger)

DAVID

I'm

(Curtis holds up a finger for silence. David stops. Beat.)

DAVID

I just

(Curtis holds up finger. David stops again. They hold... David consciously not speaking...)

CURTIS

You don't have to apologize. It's not your fault. It's not *your* fault. Product of your culture. Your generation.

You know, it's difficult to know what to do about this so-called race problem in America. I mean we are inundated with it every day. Especially if we consume social media. Which most of us do.

And we are inundated, just drowning in pictures and videos of dead or dying black bodies.

CURTIS (Continued)

I can't even watch half the stuff that comes up on my feed. Broken black bodies. Dead black bodies. Faces that look my mother, my sister, my cousins. Nieces and nephews. Just drowning in it. When you find the latest news story or viral video of a black teenage girl who gets taken down in broad daylight by an armed police officer twice her size, what do you do? Post the story on Facebook? Let everybody else know that they should know about it? Then what you do? Scroll down and watch a cat video? Get distracted by a quiz about what flavor potato chip you really are? I mean, what else can you do? Right? Product of your culture. You

consume black death like entertainment, but couch it in the language of empathy. Like we all do.

I don't think you really want to hear my shit.

David starts to object

No.

You want other people to hear you say that you want to hear my shit. It's the chic and socially acceptable thing to do. But you don't really want to hear it. Not until it's boiled down and softened. The "African-American Experience" seasoned with that highly palatable *New York Times* flavor. I mean, reading about the "African-American experience" is a little easier than facing the flesh and blood reality of being black in America. Right? Heh, "African-American experience" sounds like a safari ride at Disney World. It's a little easier to get the cream of wheat version of the fallacy of the black monolith. The "African American Experience". And we all get fed that shit, all of us, black, white, whatever. The thing is, when you're brown, when you're black, you've got context for that junk food. We still get it shoved down our throats, but we recognize who's doing the shoving. And it ain't us. And it probably ain't anybody who looks like us. I've got context. You don't. You don't have context because you've got no skin in the game. You've got no skin in the game and you're never going to. Even though we are all made to believe that the fight is black vs. white, you're never going to have any skin in the game. You don't actually have to fight because you are white and an American. You don't have to fight for respectability or consideration. It is assumed that you have it. You have nothing to fight for, so as long as we continue to convince ourselves that the only real fight is black vs. white, you will have no skin in the game. As long as the mainstream picture of black people is relegated to stories about poverty, dropout rates and murder by police, you're never going to have any skin in the game. As long as we use phrases like black-on-black crime but never say anything about white on white crime, you're never gonna have any skin in the game. You're only going to be a witness to the beat down. A voyeur in a genocidal orgy from which you and your children and your children's children will continue to benefit. And there's nothing you can do about it.

DAVID

But don't you think...

CURTIS

Nothing. You can do about it. I mean...unless you actually want to shut up and listen. How about this, the next time you're at a social function, a party a fundraiser, whatever, find the oldest person of color in the room, go up to them and ask them if you can ask them a question. Ask them if you can ask. Then ask them a question about their life, any question, and then shut up and listen. Then thank them for answering and walk away. Then, find the youngest person of color in the room and do that again. Then do it again. Then do it again, any and every chance you get. You want to be an ally? Listen to the people you want to foster ally-ship with. Listen and carry their stories with you all the time.

CURTIS (Continued)

Carry them like the counterweight to the farina stories about what black people's lives are like. Yeah. Do that. Tell me about the African-American experience then.

(Curtis gets up from the table)

DAVID

Hey, I didn't...I didn't mean to offend you.

CURTIS

Yeah. I know you didn't.

(Curtis leaves)

(David stares after him)

Incident at 57th and 6th
by
Amy Evans

Incident at 57th and 6th
An office at a city police station.
Industrial desk covered with papers.

SAMANTHA sits opposite the desk, facing the audience (who are in the position of whoever is conducting the investigation). SAMANTHA is a young African-American woman, well-dressed, pleasant — but something about her demeanor suggests the clothes and smile are a mask.

SAMANTHA
Did I do it on purpose?
No. Maybe.
I don't remember everything exactly.
I remember I was walking across town to meet a friend.
Running late — as usual.
Something's going on, some event. Roads blocked off. Cops on every corner telling people where to turn.
And people are honking their horns. Trying to turn left and the cop's telling them they gotta go straight. You can tell who checked the traffic report before they left and who didn't. Lotta people didn't.
Corner of 57th Street. I'm waiting for the light to change.
And this cop, boy! People are begging her to let them go left. And she goes:
"No, you got to go straight!"
She's short. Curly hair. Island woman. Reminds me of Patrice, the lady who works at the Haitian place on my block.

I remember thinking how glad I was walking and not driving.
I don't actually have a car ... anyway.

I'm looking at my phone. Thinking I'm going to be really
late, my friend's going to kill me. And then I hear:

“SIR! YOU CANNOT TURN HERE!”

There's a black SUV. A white guy at the wheel. A woman, maybe
his girlfriend or wife, in the passenger seat. Trying to go
left. And there she is, the cop. Trying to tell him he can't.
He's saying something to her. I can't hear what it is. The
cop shakes her head and I hear her tell him again, you know —
“You can't turn here.”

The cop steps away from the car, and he —

He grabs the wheel, and just —

I mean, I can hear the tires screeching, he's actually trying

—

She just told him three times he can't —

He almost hits her! He's this close! She's right there, and
he almost —

She shouts at him. “What are you doing?” He shouts back. And they're
going at each other, and I don't know what he's
saying, but the cop — oh, man —

Her face, I mean, we all know that look —

She goes: “IT TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE! AND YOU WOULD KNOW
BECAUSE YOU GOT ONE SITTING NEXT TO YOU!”

*SAMANTHA laughs — short, a laugh of
disbelief rather than humor.*

SAMANTHA

Just like Patrice, the lady at the Haitian place. Is it an
island thing?

Fire back quick like that?

When I was a kid, it was always “Hold it in.” Like that made
you better than they were.

But when you hold it in
hold in the thoughts, the anger, the rage
it doesn't just dissolve.

It goes all through your system
and comes out in other ways:

a clump of hair on your pillow

a cut on your arm

a bracelet or a stick of lipstick in your pocket

that sets off the alarm as you leave the store
and you don't know how they got there ...
laughing too loud when nothing's funny
or staring, silent
and you can't figure out what's wrong –
The thoughts are taking SAMANTHA down a
painful path. She catches herself,
regains the mask.

SAMANTHA

Not Patrice. She always speaks up.
always yelling at the kids, the guys on the corner
the young girls:

“Hey! Don't you dare come at me with that!”

“Hey! Customers only, read the sign!”

“Hey! Don't walk with your face in that phone! You think
people going to step out the way for you?”

I wonder what it was like in her family. And I wish mine had
raised me like hers.

Real

instead of respectable

Like the cop ...

She's on to the next car now

The next idiot that wants to go left.

She's made her point. She's done.

And the guy in the SUV —

He's going straight, like she told him to.

She's the law after all.

She doesn't need me to stand up for her.

But I couldn't —

(SAMANTHA gestures “let it go”)

The way he jerked the steering wheel, about to hit her
and then shouted at her for doing her job and called her a
nasty name

And gets away with it. Gets to drive off.

What would happen if it was the other way around?

If the white guy was the cop and she was in the driver's seat
and she did a Patrice on him?

“Hey! Don't tell me go straight! I got to turn, Ima turn!”

All the money

All the respectability in the world wouldn't save her

if the tables were turned.
That's the last thing I remember.
The next thing I know he's in front of me, screaming about
the scratch on his car
that goes all the way down the driver's side
from the front end of one door to the back end of the other.
The cop is standing between me and the man, her hand
on my shoulder, talking into her radio.
I look down and there they are:
My keys.
What am I doing with my keys in my hand?
I don't even remember opening my purse.
Did I do it intentionally?
I don't think so.
But if you want the truth
I've done a lot of things
I never meant to.

BLACKOUT.

<https://bishopartstheatre.org/the-monologue-project/>

PITY THE FOOL

by D. M. Larson

Pity the Fool by D. M. Larson from freedrama.net (cast: 2m 2w)

A man, JEORGE, hangs on the wall as a part of a modern art piece. People walk through the gallery and look at the odd pieces of modern art. A couple of women, SAGE and MARY stop at the man.

SAGE

What's this?

MARY

It's called "Pity the Fool."

SAGE

It's amazing. The man looks so lifelike.

Mary

It's like he could walk right out of the painting and talk to us.

Suddenly Jeorge's eyes pop open and the women are startled.

JEORGE

Do you have any water?

His eyes close again. Sage and Mary look at each other and then the painting again.

SAGE

You heard that, right?

MARY

Yeah.

JEORGE

Water.

SAGE

I'll get some water.

Sage leaves. Mary wants to follow and doesn't want to be left alone.

JEORGE

Wait. Please.

Mary reluctantly stops. She looks around but is alone. She cautiously returns.

MARY

What? Uh... who? I mean...

JEORGE

Why am I here?

MARY

Sure... let's ask that question.

JEORGE

This is my self-portrait.

MARY

Pity the fool?

JEORGE

Yes.

MARY

Well... it's working. I feel sorry for you.

JEORGE

Everyone does.

MARY

Oh...

Mary looks around nervously hoping Sage will return. Jeorge climbs down off the background and sits at the edge of the art looking very hurt and sad. Sage returns with some bottled water.

SAGE

Found some water.

Jeorge takes it from her and gives a weak smile.

JEORGE

Thank you.

Jeorge drinks and lets the water refresh him. Mary and Sage look at each other and then at Jeorge nervously.

MARY

So uh... this is a self-portrait.

SAGE

You're the artist?

JEORGE

Yes.

SAGE

I have to say I've never seen anything like this.

JEORGE

It's a variation on the living statue idea.

MARY

So not original?

JEORGE

Not really.

They are all quiet a moment.

SAGe

Well, I've never seen anything like it.

JEORGE

Then you haven't been out much.

SAGE

What? Look, we're trying to be nice.

JEORGE

Because you pity me.

MARY

That's what you want, isn't it?

JEORGE

How do you know what I want?!

Sage and Mary start to back away. Jeorge curls up at the bottom of his art.

SAGE

Look. I think you're a little too much of a method artist.

George is starting to cry.

MARY

Is he crying?

SAGE

Let's get out of here before he totally flips out.

MARY

But he's so sad.

SAGE

It's some twisted performance art, I think.

Mary

You have to admit. It's pretty original.

SAGE

Just because it is different, doesn't mean it's good.

George looks up sadly at Sage.

GEORGE

You... you don't think it's good?

SAGE

Let's go.

Sage tries to go but Mary doesn't leave.

MARY

I think it's one of the most interesting things I've ever seen.

GEORGE

You're just saying that to be nice. You don't really feel that way.

MARY

I do. Really. Art is always so bland and two dimensional. Your work is so...
alive... literally.

George gives Sage a pouty look.

GEORGE

She hates it though.

Sage gives him a dirty look and George gets sad and collapses into his art.

MARY

Say something nice to him.

SAGE

What? No.

MARY

Do it.

Sage reluctantly goes up to Jeorge. Mary pushes her closer, and Sage slaps her hand away. Sage is next to him.

SAGE

Okay, I have to admit. This is the most unusual... (*Mary pokes her*) ...different... most creative piece of art here tonight.

Jeorge says weakly:

JEORGE

Thank you.

Sage turns to Mary and pulls her away.

SAGE

Can we go now?

MARY

You go. I'll catch up in a minute.

SAGE

Whatever.

Sage leaves. Mary goes up to Jeorge and kneels down next to him.

MARY

What happened to you that inspired this?

Jeorge sits up slowly and looks up at his background.

JEORGE

It's a long story. Everything you see here represents something that's happen in my life that has brought me to this point.

MARY

The images are stunning. I've never seen a work of art with so much story to it. I could probably sit here for hours trying to figure it all out.

JEORGE

Stay then.

MARY

I have to go... how long will you be... on display?

JEORGE

This is the last night. I'll hopefully be showing this in other galleries though.

Mary gives him a business card.

MARY

I would like to see you... and your work again. Here's my number. Call me when you're showing this again.

JEORGE

I will.

MARY

I better go. Great work on this. It's very moving.

George gives a weak smile and waves good-bye as Mary leaves. He climbs back up into his original position. Frank enters and goes up to George.

FRANK

You got another number, didn't you?

JEORGE

Yup.

FRANK

There has to be an easier way to pick up women.

JEORGE

What can I say? I'm a fool.

FRANK

Ain't that the truth.

THE END

ENEMIES
a play in one-act

by Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood

The following one-act play is reprinted from *The Provincetown Plays*. Ed. George Cram Cook & Frank Shay. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1921. It is believed to be in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

CHARACTERS

HE
SHE

SCENE

A Living-room

TIME

After Dinner

[SHE is lying in a long chair, smoking a cigarette and reading a book. HE is sitting at a table with a lamp at his left--manuscript pages scattered before him, pen in hand. He glances at her, turns the lamp up, turns it down, rustles his MS., snorts impatiently. She continues reading.]

HE: This is the limit!

SHE: *[calmly]* What is?

HE: Oh, nothing. *[She turns the page, continues reading with interest.]* This is an infernal lamp!

SHE: What's the matter with the lamp?

HE: I've asked you a thousand times to have some order in the house, some regularity, some system! The lamps never have oil, the wicks are never cut, the chimneys are always smoked! And yet you wonder that I don't work more! How can a man work without light?

SHE: [*glancing critically at the lamp*] This lamp seems to me to be all right. It obviously has oil in it or it would not burn, and the chimney is not smoked. As to the wick, I trimmed it myself today.

HE: Ah, that accounts for it.

SHE: Well, do it yourself next time, my dear!

HE: [*irritated*] But our time is too valuable for these ever-recurring jobs! Why don't you train Theresa, as I've asked you so often?

SHE: It would take all my time for a thousand years to train Theresa.

HE: Oh, I know! All you want to do is to lie in bed for breakfast, smoke cigarettes, write your high literary stuff, make love to other men, talk cleverly when you go out to dinner and never say a word to me at home! No wonder you have no time to train Theresa!

SHE: Is there anything of interest in the paper?

HE: You certainly have a nasty way of making an innocent remark!

SHE: [*absorbed in her book*] I'm sorry.

HE: No, you're not. The last remark proves it.

SHE: [*absently*] Proves what?

HE: Proves that you are an unsocial, brutal woman!

SHE: You are in a temper again.

HE: Who wouldn't be, to live with a cold-blooded person that you have to hit with a gridiron to get a rise out of?

SHE: I wish you would read your paper quietly and let me alone.

HE: Why have you lived with me for fifteen years if you want to be let alone?

SHE: *[with a sigh]* I have always hoped you would settle down.

HE: By settling down you mean cease bothering about household matters, about the children, cease wanting to be with you, cease expecting you to have any interest in me.

SHE: No, I only meant it would be nice to have a peaceful evening sometimes. But *[laying book down]* I see you want to quarrel--so what shall we quarrel about? Choose your own subject, my dear.

HE: When you're with Hank you don't want a peaceful evening!

SHE: Now how can you possibly know that?

HE: Oh, I've seen you with him and others and I know the difference. When you're with them you're alert and interested. You keep your unsociability for me. *[Pause.]* Of course, I know why.

SHE: One reason is that "they" don't talk about lamp-wicks and so forth. They talk about higher things.

HE: Some people would call them lower things!

SHE: Well--more interesting things, anyway.

HE: Yes, I know you think those things more interesting than household and children and husband.

SHE: Oh, only occasionally, you know--just for a change. You like a change yourself sometimes.

HE: Yes, sometimes. But I am excited, and interested and keen whenever I am with you. It is not only cigarettes and flirtation that excite me.

SHE: Well, you are an excitable person. You get excited about nothing at all.

HE: Are home and wife and children nothing at all?

SHE: There are other things. But you, Deacon, are like the skylark--
"Type of the wise who soar but do not roam--"

True to the kindred points of heaven and home."

HE: You are cheaply cynical! You ought not to insult Wordsworth. He meant what he said.

SHE: He was a good man.... But to get back to our original quarrel. You're quite mistaken. I'm more social with you than with anyone else. Hank, for instance, hates to talk--even more than I do. He and I spend hours together looking at the sea--each of us absorbed in our own thoughts--without saying a word. What could be more peaceful than that?

HE: [*indignantly*] I don't believe it's peaceful--but it must be wonderful!

SHE: It is--marvelous. I wish you were more like that. What beautiful evenings we could have together!

HE: [*bitterly*] Most of our evenings are silent enough--unless we are quarreling!

SHE: Yes, if you're not talking, it's because you're sulking. You are never sweetly silent--never really quiet.

HE: That's true--with you--I am rarely quiet with you--because you rarely express anything to me. I would be more quiet if you were less so--less expressive if you were more so.

SHE: [*pensively*] The same old quarrel. Just the same for fifteen years! And all because you are you and I am I! And I suppose it will go on forever--I shall go on being silent, and you--

HE: I suppose I shall go on talking--but it really doesn't matter--the silence or the talk--if we had something to be silent about or to talk about--something in common--that's the point!

SHE: Do you really think we have nothing in common? We both like Dostoyevsky and prefer Burgundy to champagne.

HE: Our tastes and our vices are remarkably congenial, but our souls do not touch.

SHE: Our souls? Why should they? Every soul is lonely.

HE: Yes, but doesn't want to be. The soul desires to find something into which to

fuse and so lose its loneliness. This hope to lose the soul's loneliness by union--is love. It is the essence of love as it is of religion.

SHE: Deacon, you are growing more holy every day. You will drive me to drink.

HE: *[moodily]* That will only complete the list.

SHE: Well, then I suppose we may be more congenial--for in spite of what you say, our vices haven't exactly matched. You're ahead of me on the drink.

HE: Yes, and you on some other things. But perhaps I can catch up, too--

SHE: Perhaps--if you really give all your time to it, as you did last winter, for instance. But I doubt if I can ever equal your record in potations.

HE: *[bitterly]* I can never equal your record in the soul's infidelities.

SHE: Well, do you expect my soul to be faithful when you keep hitting it with a gridiron?

HE: No, I do not expect it of you! I have about given up the hope that you will ever respond either to my ideas about household and children or about our personal relations. You seem to want as little as possible of the things that I want much. I harass you by insisting. You anger and exasperate me by retreating. We were fools not to have separated long ago.

SHE: Again! How you do repeat yourself, my dear!

HE: Yes, I am very weak. In spite of my better judgment I have loved you. But this time I mean it!

SHE: I don't believe you do. You never mean half the things you say.

HE: I do this time. This affair of yours with Hank is on my nerves. It is real spiritual infidelity. When you are interested in him you lose all interest in the household, the children and me. It is my duty to separate.

SHE: Oh, nonsense! I didn't separate from you when you were running after the widow last winter--spending hours with her every day, dining with her and leaving me alone, and telling me she was the only woman who had ever understood you.

HE: I didn't run after the widow, or any other woman except you. They ran after me.

SHE: Oh, of course! Just the same since Adam--not one of you has spirit enough to go after the apple himself! "They ran after you"--but you didn't run away very fast, did you?

HE: Why should I, when I wanted them to take possession if they could? I think I showed splendid spirit in running after you! Not more than a dozen other men have shown the same spirit. It is true, as you say, that other women understand and sympathize with me. They all do except you. I've never been able to be essentially unfaithful, more's the pity. You are abler in that regard.

SHE: I don't think so. I may have liked other people, but I never dreamed of *marrying* anyone but *you*.... No, and I never thought any of them understood me, either. I took very good care they shouldn't.

HE: Why, it was only the other day that you said Hank understood you better than I ever could. You said I was too virtuous, and that if I were worse you might see me!

SHE: AS usual, you misquote me. What I said was that Hank and I were more alike, and that you are a virtuous stranger--a sort of wandering John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness!

HE: Preachers don't do the things I do!

SHE: Oh, don't they?

HE: Well, I know I am as vicious as man can be. You would see that if you loved me. I am fully as bad as Hank.

SHE: Hank doesn't pretend to be virtuous, so perhaps you're worse. But I think you ought to make up your mind whether you're virtuous or vicious, and not assume to be both.

HE: I am both as a matter of fact, like everybody else. I am not a hypocrite. I love the virtuous and also the vicious. But I don't like to be left out in the cold when you are having an affair. When you are interested in the other, you are not in me.

SHE: Why do you pretend to fuss about lamps and such things when you are

simply jealous? I call that hypocritical. I wish it were possible for a man to play fair. But what you want is to censor and control me, while you feel perfectly free to amuse yourself in every possible way.

HE: I am never jealous without cause, and you are. You object to my friendly and physical intimacies and then expect me not to be jealous of your soul's infidelities, when you lose all feeling for me. I am tired of it. It is a fundamental misunderstanding, and we ought to separate at once!

SHE: Oh, very well, if you're so keen on it. But remember, you suggest it. I never said I wanted to separate from you--if I had, I wouldn't be here now.

HE: No, because I've given all I had to you. I have nourished you with my love. You have harassed and destroyed me. I am no good because of you. You have made me work over you to the degree that I have no real life. You have enslaved me, and your method is cool aloofness. You want to keep on being cruel. You are the devil, who never really meant any harm, but who sneers at desires and never wants to satisfy. Let us separate--you are my only enemy!

SHE: Well, you know we are told to love our enemies.

HE: I have done my full duty in that respect. People we love are the only ones who can hurt us. The *are* our enemies, unless they love us in return.

SHE: "A man's enemies are those of his own household"--yes, especially if they love. You, on account of your love for me, have tyrannized over me, bothered me, badgered me, nagged me, for fifteen years. You have interfered with me, taken my time and strength, and prevented me from accomplishing great works for the good of humanity. You have crushed my soul, which longs for serenity and peace, with your perpetual complaining!

HE: Too bad. [*Indignantly.*] Perpetual complaining!

SHE: Yes, of course. But you see, my dear, I am more philosophical than you, and I recognize all this as necessity. Men and women are natural enemies, like cat and dog--only more so. They are forced to live together for a time, or this wonderful race couldn't go on. In addition, in order to have the best children, men and women of totally opposite temperaments must live together. The shock and flame of two hostile temperaments meeting is what produces fine children. Well, we have fulfilled our fate and produced our children, and they are good ones. But really--to expect also to live in peace together--we as different as fire and water, or

sea and land--that's too much!

HE: If your philosophy is correct, that is another argument for separation. If we have done our job together, let's go on our ways and try to do something else separately.

SHE: Perfectly logical. Perhaps it will be best. But no divorce--that's so commonplace.

HE: Almost as commonplace as your conventional attitude toward husbands--that they are necessarily uninteresting--*mon bete de mari*--as the typical Frenchwoman of fiction says. I find divorce no more commonplace than real infidelity.

SHE: Both are matters of every day. But I see no reason for divorce unless one of the spouses wants to marry again. I shall never divorce you. But men can always have children, and so they are perpetually under the sway of the great illusion. If you want to marry again, you can divorce me.

HE: As usual, you want to see me as a brute. I don't accept your philosophy. Children are the results of love, not because of it, and love should go on. It does go on, if once there has been the right relations. It is not re-marrying or the unconscious desire for further propagation that moves me--but the eternal need of that peculiar sympathy which has never been satisfied--to die without that is failure of what most appeals to the imagination of human beings.

SHE: But that *is* precisely the great illusion. That is the unattainable that lures us on, and that will lead you, I foresee, if you leave me, into the arms of some other woman.

HE: Illusion! Precisely what *is*, you call illusion. Only there do we find Truth. And certainly I *am* bitten badly with illusion or truth, whichever it is. It is Truth to me. But I fear it may be too late. I fear the other woman is impossible.

SHE: [*pensively*] "I cannot comprehend this wild swooning desire to wallow in unbridled unity." [*He makes angry gesture, she goes on quickly.*] I was quoting your favorite philosopher. But as to being too late--no, no--you're more attractive than you ever were, and that shows your ingratitude to me, for I'm sure I have been a liberal education to you. You will easily find someone to adore you and console you for all your sufferings with me. But do be careful this time--get a good housekeeper.

HE: And *you* are more attractive than you ever were. I can see that others see that. I have been a liberal education to you, too.

SHE: Yes, a Pilgrim's Progress.

HE: I never would have seen woman, if I hadn't suffered you.

SHE: I never would have suffered man, if I hadn't seen you.

HE: You never saw me!

SHE: Alas--yes! [*With feeling.*] I saw you as something very beautiful--very fine, sensitive--with more understanding than anyone I've ever known--more feeling--I still see you that way--but from a great--distance.

HE: [*startled*] Distance?

SHE: Don't you feel how far away from one another we are?

HE: I have felt it, as you know--more and more so--that you were pushing me more and more away and seeking more and more somebody--something else. But this is the first time you have admitted feeling it.

SHE: Yes--I didn't want to admit it. But now I see it has gone very far. It is as though we were on opposite banks of a stream that grows wider--separating us more and more.

HE: Yes--

SHE: You have gone your own way, and I mine--and there is a gulf between us.

HE: Now you see what I mean--

SHE: Yes, that we ought to separate--that we *are* separated--and yet I love you.

HE: Two people may love intensely, and yet not be able to live together. It is too painful, for you, for me--

SHE: We have hurt one another too much--

HE: We have destroyed one another--we are enemies. [*Pause.*]

SHE: I don't understand it--how we have come to this--after our long life together. Have you forgotten all that? What wonderful companions we were? How gayly we took life with both hands--how we played with it and with one another! At least, we have the past.

HE: The past is bitter--because the present is bitter.

SHE: You wrong the past.

HE: The past is always judged by the present. Dante said, the worst hell is in present misery to remember former happiness--

SHE: Dante was a man and a poet, and so ungrateful to life. [*Pause with feeling*] Our past to me is wonderful and will remain so, no matter what happens--full of color and life--complete!

HE: That is because our life together has been for you an episode.

SHE: No, it is because I take life as it is, not asking too much of it--not asking that any person or any relation be perfect. But you are an idealist--you can never be content with what it-- You have the poison, the longing for perfection in your soul.

HE: No, not for perfection, but for union. That is not demanding the impossible. Many people have it who do not love as much as we do. No work of art is right, no matter how wonderful the materials and the parts, if the whole, the unity, is not there.

SHE: That's just what I mean. You have wanted to treat our relation, and me, as clay, and model it into the form you saw in your imagination. You have been a passionate artist. But life is not a plastic material. *It* models us.

HE: You are right. I have had the egotism of the artist, directed to a material that cannot be formed. I must let go of you, and satisfy my need of union, of marriage, otherwise than with you.

SHE: Yes, but you cannot do that by seeking another woman. You would experience the same illusion--the same disillusion.

HE: How, then, can I satisfy my mystic need?

SHE: That is between you and your God--whom I know nothing about.

HE: If I could have stripped you of divinity and sought it elsewhere--in religion, in work--with the same intensity I sought it in you--we would not have needed this separation.

SHE: And we should have been very happy together!

HE: Yes--as interesting changers.

SHE: Exactly. The only sensible way for two fully grown people to be together--and that is wonderful, too--think! To have lived together for fifteen years and never to have bored one another! To be still for one another the most interesting persons in the world! How many married people can say that? I've never *bored* you, have I, Deacon?

HE: You have harassed, plagued, maddened, tortured me! Bored me? No, never, you bewitching devil! [*Moving toward her.*]

SHE: I've always adored the poet and mystic in you, though you've almost driven me crazy, you Man of God!

HE: I've always adored the woman in you, the mysterious, the beckoning and flying, that I cannot possess!

SHE: Can't you forget God for a while, and come away with me?

HE: Yes, darling; after all, you're one of God's creatures!

SHE: Faithful to the end! A truce then, shall it be? [*Opening her arms.*] An armed truce?

HE: [*seizing her*] Yes, in a trice! [*She laughs.*]

CURTAIN