

The Actress' Dilemma

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a short play

by

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Cast

ACTRESS

DIRECTOR

Setting

A theatre. Bare stage.

Time

Morning.

THE ACTRESS' DILEMMA

Theatre. Bare stage. A voice from the audience calls:

VOICE: Next.

THE ACTRESS ENTERS, YOUNG AND ATTRACTIVE. SHE STRUTS CONFIDENTLY TO CENTRE STAGE.

ACTRESS: Good morning.

VOICE: Is it still only morning ?

ACTRESS: (BIG SMILE) Just.

VOICE: Only eight hours to go.

ACTRESS: You're seeing a lot of people today ?

VOICE: Yes we are. But we can't just sit here all morning exchanging witty banter, can we ?

ACTRESS: Time is money.

VOICE: Is it ?

ACTRESS: That's what they say.

VOICE: They do ?

ACTRESS: (LAUGHS) Got me. My name is Rebecca Paddle and today I'll be performing –

VOICE: I'm sorry, did you say "I didn't bring a saddle" ?

ACTRESS: No, I said "my name is Rebecca Paddle."

VOICE: Oh it's your name.

ACTRESS: My name is Paddle, not -

VOICE: I'm glad it's just your name. I was thinking "Good God ! Why did she bring a saddle ?"

ACTRESS: Paddle.

VOICE: A paddle too ? A paddle and a saddle.

ACTRESS: No. My name is –

VOICE: Neither of them's going to come in handy unless we're doing "Annie Get Your Gun, underwater" which we aren't. Are we ?

ACTRESS: Of course I was just saying –

VOICE: What darling ?

ACTRESS: You have my photo and biog.

VOICE: We do.

ACTRESS: My name's on there.

VOICE: Good thinking.

ACTRESS: I'll just get started.

VOICE: That would be nice, we are waiting. And what are you going to be doing for us today ?

ACTRESS: Blanche du Bois from Streetcar.

VOICE: How original. Why in the world did you choose that ?

ACTRESS: I played it last year. Summer stock.

VOICE: But you're too young.

ACTRESS: Thank you.

VOICE: Wasn't a complement honey.

ACTRESS: Oh.

VOICE: Never mind. Blunder forth.

ACTRESS: I'm sorry.

VOICE: We're ready ! In your own time.

THE ACTRESS TURNS, PREPARING HERSELF. SUDDENLY THERE IS A LOUD "NEIGHING" FROM THE BACK OF THE THEATRE.

VOICE: Neeeeiiiiiggghhh ! Nnnnneeeeiiggghhhh !

THE NEIGHING STOPS. THE ACTRESS COMPOSES HERSELF. SHE IS JUST ABOUT TO TURN WHEN THE NEIGHING COMES AGAIN.

VOICE: Nnnnnneeeiiiiiggghhh ! Nnnnneeeeiiggghhhh !

SHE TURNS AWAY.

VOICE: I'm sorry, is there a problem ?

ACTRESS: (TURNING) Sorry, I was just -

VOICE: Don't be sorry darling it's just we do have -

ACTRESS: I was just waiting for -

VOICE: Talent ?

ACTRESS: No, the neighing. I was just waiting for the neighing to stop.

VOICE: (FLABBERGASTED) The what ?

ACTRESS: The ... neighing.

BEAT.

VOICE: You've got a fixation haven't you ? Saddles, neighing - next you'll be talking of bareback mounts.

ACTRESS: I'm sorry.

VOICE: Don't be darling. We all have our little fetishes. Let's forget all about it. Our little secret.

ACTRESS: It's just -

VOICE: Yes I know, neighing. I know, here's a good idea. Let's start again. Shall we ? Why don't you just go out and come in again ? Just like brand new.

ACTRESS: Okay. Thank you.

VOICE: My pleasure darling.

THE ACTRESS EXITS.

VOICE: (TO HIMSELF) Neighing ... a saddle ... goodness.

THE ACTRESS RE-ENTERS AND STRIDES CONFIDENTLY TO THE CENTRE OF THE STAGE.

ACTRESS: Good morning.

VOICE: Morning.

ACTRESS: I'm Rebecca Saddle, I mean Paddle and today I will be neighing – I mean playing Blanche from “A Streetcar named Horse.” I mean “Desire”.

VOICE: Thank you Belinda - when you're ready.

THE ACTRESS TURNS AWAY, PREPARING HERSELF.

VOICE: I knew it was saddle. (BEAT) I wouldn't mind saddling that. Look at those bum cheeks. I'll give you mounts. Ooh, I'd love to slip one into you after the audition.

THE ACTRESS TURNS.

ACTRESS: I am sorry !

VOICE: Why ? What have you done now ?

ACTRESS: I heard what you were saying.

VOICE: We just can't get this right can we ?

ACTRESS: It's very inappropriate.

VOICE: A little bit unprofessional perhaps – I wouldn't class it as inappropriate.

ACTRESS: I know what's inappropriate.

VOICE: Darling, you're being a bit hard on yourself. We've all dried once or twice – even the great Gielgud.

ACTRESS: I didn't dry.

VOICE: Then what's wrong ?

ACTRESS: I heard you say “You'd like to (SOFT) saddle me”.

VOICE: I'd like to what ?

ACTRESS: (LOUDER) “Saddle me” ?

VOICE: You do have a fixation with all things equinine.

ACTRESS: And then you said you'd “love to slip one in after the audition.”

VOICE: Good god no !

ACTRESS: I distinctly heard you.

VOICE: Darling, I said “I’m glad we could slip you in for an audition.” I had heard you were very talented. Although I’m starting to doubt that information.

ACTRESS: I’m sure you said ...

VOICE: What ?

ACTRESS: Nothing.

VOICE: Well, once more then. Let us hope for the last time - when you’re ready.

THE ACTRESS TURNS AGAIN, PREPARES.

VOICE: Great arse.

THE ACTRESS TURNS.

ACTRESS: Did you just say –

VOICE: Another glass ? It’s very dry in here. The air conditioning. I was asking for a glass of water. Why ? Did it disturb you ?

ACTRESS: I distinctly heard you say –

VOICE: What ? What did you ‘distinctly’ hear me say ?

ACTRESS: Nothing.

VOICE: Good – and I am sorry but we do have many talented people waiting. I’m going to have to ask you to get it right next time – or not at all.

ACTRESS: If you would just ...

VOICE: Just what ?

THE ACTRESS HOLDS UP HER HANDS. SHE TURNS AGAIN, PREPARES.

VOICE: Silly bitch.

THE ACTRESS TURNS.

ACTRESS: I will not stand up here and be abused.

VOICE: What is it ? What’s happened ?

ACTRESS: I’m sorry but I clearly just heard you say “Silly bitch.”

VOICE: (LAUGHING) No, goodness me.

ACTRESS: That's what you said.

VOICE: I said "Nice pitch." As in your voice has a nice pitch. I was paying you a complement.

ACTRESS: No – you said "Silly bitch."

VOICE: Whatever gave you that idea ? I'm shocked.

ACTRESS: I heard you.

VOICE: Really ? Is this a regular problem ? Do you often mis-hear things ?

ACTRESS: I heard –

VOICE: That could be a problem if you were lucky enough to obtain the role. You might mis-hear the other actors. Could make things difficult. When was the last time you had your hearing checked ? I'm afraid we may have to ask for a full medical.

ACTRESS: Okay, okay, forget it.

VOICE: No, please. If you are concerned. Let's discuss it further.

ACTRESS: Just give me a moment.

VOICE: My pleasure. But remember – the clock is ticking.

THE ACTRESS BEGINS TO WALK AROUND STAGE. SHE TURNS SIDE ON TO THE AUDIENCE.

VOICE: Love to get my hands on those.

ACTRESS: Alright, that's enough ! I don't care who you are - you can not get away with saying things like that.

VOICE: I said "You look as lovely as a rose." Which is exactly what I'm looking for in this part. It's just such a pity we weren't told about the hearing problem. And the horse fetish.

ACTRESS: (SHOUTING) There is no horse fetish. For the last time – I am not obsessed with hearing and my horses are fine ! I meant hearing ... my hearing is fine.

VOICE: Would you like me to come down there ?

ACTRESS: No it's alright.

VOICE: It's okay. I'm coming down.

ACTRESS: I'm sorry. I apologise.

VOICE: No problem. It's important you feel comfortable. I'm coming. I'm coming. Sounds like a Sarah Kane play.

THE DIRECTOR ENTERS.

VOICE: I'm here. Now, would you like to take a break ? Come back. Tomorrow, next week, next century.

ACTRESS: No it's okay. I'll just ...

VOICE: Take your time. Relax. We want you to do your best.

ACTRESS: Look, can I just do my piece and leave ?

VOICE: Of course darling. Honestly I feel it's I that should apologise ?

ACTRESS: Really ?

VOICE: Of course – as the auditioner I feel the responsibility is for me to create the proper environment. Warm and safe, where you free to do your best work. Clearly I haven't done that.

ACTRESS: You mean you're admitting –

VOICE: Whatever words have been spoken there's clearly been too much ambient chat from my side. Unnecessary, a distraction.

ACTRESS: That's very good of you –

VOICE: Not at all. So I'm just going to button up. Not a smidgen. Complete silence – the only voice will be yours and the words of the great Mr Williams. Let his soul fill up this sacred space. The rest is ...

ACTRESS: Thank you I'm ... touched.

VOICE: I'll just go back out there. (EXITING) Not a fart. Flicker. Flickering fart. Smidgen. Buttoning up the hole.

THE ACTRESS TURNS, PREPARES. COMPLETE SILENCE.
EVENTUALLY SHE TURNS.

ACTRESS: (IN SOUTHERN ACCENT) "He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you –"

VOICE: (OVER ACTRESS) Imagine doing Tennessee Williams.

ACTRESS: (CONTINUING REGARDLESS) “suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow – “

VOICE: (OVER ACTRESS) Silly old Queen. How do they choose these pieces ?

ACTRESS: (RAISING VOICE, GOING ON) “that’s how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded !”

VOICE: (OVER ACTRESS) You can say that again.

ACTRESS: (FALTERING) “There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness”

VOICE: (OVER ACTRESS) I think you mean hopelessness.

ACTRESS: (LOSING IT) “... which wasn’t like a man’s ...”

VOICE: A man ? That’s what you need.

ACTRESS: “although he wasn’t the least bit effeminate-looking ...”

VOICE: At least she’s off horses.

ACTRESS: (BREAKING OUT) I’m sorry. I just can’t go on.

VOICE: Darling what is it ?

ACTRESS: Would you just shut the fuck up ?

VOICE: (RE-ENTERING) Me ? I wasn’t saying a word.

ACTRESS: I can not handle this !

VOICE: Darling, whatever is wrong ?

ACTRESS: There is nothing wrong with me.

DIRECTOR: Obviously something’s wrong, you were in the middle of that beautiful piece and you just stopped –

ACTRESS: I heard voices.

DIRECTOR: Voices ? Really ? How long have you been hearing voices ?

ACTRESS: I mean voice. I heard your voice. Back there.

DIRECTOR: Me ? I made a promise.

ACTRESS: “Flickering fart.”

DIRECTOR: You did what ?

ACTRESS: Stop it ! I heard you. “Silly old queen”, calling me butch.

DIRECTOR: Butch. How preposterous. You’re gorgeous.

ACTRESS: Listen, I may be desperate, as are all the actors in this town but I’m not that desperate. I will not stand on stage and be abused by some jumped up director in the backrow.

THE DIRECTOR IS STUNNED.

DIRECTOR: Ouch. I think I need to sit down. (SITS)

ACTRESS: What do you think we are ? Some light entertainment to get your rocks off. Just something you can poke fun of. It’s hard enough -

DIRECTOR: Jumped up ? I’m wounded.

ACTRESS: Look don’t get upset. It’s not that serious.

DIRECTOR: No you’re wrong. This is serious. I didn’t know this was how I was regarded within the industry. How people were feeling.

ACTRESS: It’s not how people are feeling. It’s just me – and I don’t feel that, except for before.

DIRECTOR: Jumped up !

ACTRESS: I didn’t mean it. You’re a great director. Very humble. All the actors say that. That’s why I so desperately wanted to work with you. I was prepared to do anything. Almost - anything.

DIRECTOR: Then I don’t understand what the problem is.

ACTRESS: There’s no problem. You just mustn’t yell things out while I’m trying to do my piece.

DIRECTOR: But I wasn’t.

ACTRESS: I know what I heard.

DIRECTOR: Yes. The voices.

ACTRESS: Not voices. Your voice. Calling out abusive and very strange things.

DIRECTOR: But darling, I never said a word.

PAUSE.

ACTRESS: Look I might just leave it.

DIRECTOR: Not audition ?

ACTRESS: I think I'll just go. Everything's just got very ... odd.

DIRECTOR: But you come very highly recommended.

ACTRESS: Really ? By who ?

DIRECTOR: Arnold Humplebum and Louisa Feathersnatch. We were seriously considering you for the lead role. Along with Hilary Whoseherwatsit and Gemima Puddleduck. She'd be brilliant in the horse scene. Riding bareback through the kindling on that wild lawnmower.

THE DIRECTOR BEGINS TO GALLOP AROUND STAGE AS IF RIDING A "WILD LAWNMOWER".

DIRECTOR: "Once more dear fish, once more, Into the pissing pond rode the seven hundred (CALLING) Ca-snoogle, ca-snoogle"

ACTRESS: I am just going to go.

DIRECTOR: If you really think it's best.

ACTRESS: Thanks for your time.

DIRECTOR: Maybe for the next project.

ACTRESS: I'll keep it in mind.

THE DIRECTOR OPENS HIS ARMS. THE ACTRESS LOOKS AT HIM.

DIRECTOR: Just show there's no hard feelings. Forgotten and forgiven.

THE ACTRESS LOOKS AT HIM.

DIRECTOR: Well, if you really don't want to.

ACTRESS: No of course. All forgotten..

THE ACTRESS MOVES TO THE DIRECTOR AND GIVES THEM A HUG.

THE DIRECTOR REACHES DOWN AND WITH BOTH HANDS GIVES THE ACTRESS' BUM A BIG SQUEEZE.

DIRECTOR: Couldn't wait to get my hands on those chubblie-lubblies.

THE ACTRESS PULLS HERSELF FREE AND SLAPS THE DIRECTOR ACROSS THE FACE. SHE STORMS OUT.

THE DIRECTOR IS STUNNED. HE COMPOSES HIMSELF FOR A MOMENT, THEN:

DIRECTOR: What a strange man. (CALLING) Next.

THE DIRECTOR EXITS INTO THE AUDITORIUM.