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*Dramatic Publishing*

# DESIGNER GENES

by

KENT R. BROWN



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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**Designer Genes** premiered on August 6, 2004, as part of Tail Eats Snake: An Evening of One Acts, produced by The Side Project in Chicago, Ill., under the artistic direction of Adam Webster. The play was directed by Chris Arnold and featured Claudia Garrison as Marian, Laura Sciotino as Alice and David Earl White as Wesley.

On September 24, 2004, **Designer Genes** was produced at the Los Angeles Theatre Center as part of the Moving Arts 11th Annual Premiere One-Act Festival under the artistic direction of Kimberly Glann. The festival was produced by Lisa Marie Marschall and Michael Shutt. The play was directed by Paul Nicolai Stein and featured Alison Robertson as Marian, Elizabeth Ann Harris as Alice and Robert Boris as Wesley. Scenic Design by Akeime Mitterlehner. Lighting Design by Chris Wojcieszyn. Sound Design by Vikram Kirby. Costume Design by Marjorie Baer.

# DESIGNER GENES

A One-act Play  
For 1 Man and 2 Women

## CHARACTERS

ALICE FLEMING . . the sales rep for Designer Genes, Inc.

MARIAN JORDAN . . . . . the wife

WESLEY JORDAN . . . . . the husband

TIME: The not-too-distant future. A large city in America.  
It makes no difference which one. They are now all the same.

SETTING: The Jordans' apartment living room. A leather-upholstered conversational grouping, a lean and angular floor lamp, glass and steel tables. Clean lines everywhere. Two tall, narrow windows that seem to disappear into the ceiling. A sense of space and nothingness at the same time. Perhaps an outline of the "city" can be seen in the background.

The only item of warmth is a baby's crib, festooned with all the color and toys that one associates with happy, healthy children. Accent pillows key on the central colors defining the crib.

Budget permitting, there might be numerous slides and/or posters featuring babies' eyes: blue, green, brown, hazel, all and every color imaginable—unnatural colors as well, those that could only be the result of genetic configurations. Many, many eyes would be best. Perhaps the city outline/silhouette could, in fact, be made out of pictures of babies' eyes.

**LIGHTS/SOUND:** Sirens, human screams, gunfire from the street, screeching birds, overhead helicopters, loudspeaker announcements from the street, television advertisements from the next apartment—babies' cries. Sometimes the sounds are sharp and assaulting, sometimes muted, almost musical in their punctuation of time and space. The lighting should be stark. Periodically, a helicopter's searchlight slices through the living room windows. The baby crib is lighted to suggest it is an apparition. These sounds, and the lights, seldom faze anyone anymore.

# DESIGNER GENES

*AT THE CURTAIN: Muted SOUNDS of gunfire are heard in the dark. A voice yells somewhere outside the room, unintelligible, but clearly the voice of an angry, frightened person. A siren wails.*

*LIGHTS bump up harsh and bright. All three characters stand motionless in the living room. Two large sample cases rest beside the sofa. For a long moment, perhaps even too long, the three remain motionless, as if they are robots...and they might be.*

*Interspersed throughout their motionless silence can be heard a series of screams, perhaps a next-door television ad announcing a new breakthrough life-extending drug.*

*Then, after several seconds...*

ALICE. So, Mrs. Jordan. Finally.

MARIAN. Yes. Thank you for coming.

WESLEY. We appreciate you arriving after dark.

*(SOUNDS of sirens, a human cry.)*

MARIAN. It's not the safest time, but—

ALICE. Not at all. I prefer a busy life.



MARIAN. Oh, yes. Very busy. All of us. Too busy, some would say.

ALICE. Absolutely. (*Pressing forward with her agenda.*) I want you to know that we at Designer Genes, Incorporated appreciate greatly your patience...for having placed your faith in us.

MARIAN. Seven years. That's a long time to wait for approval.

ALICE. Seven years, four months and twenty-three days.

MARIAN. It's important to be exact, isn't it?

ALICE. In our business? Down to the very nanosecond. (*Beat.*) That's a joke we enjoy in the laboratory.

*(The irony seems to be lost on MARIAN and WESLEY.)*

MARIAN (*gesturing toward the sofa*). May we begin now? We're very...eager.

ALICE. Certainly.

WESLEY. You can understand.

*(ALICE sits and opens a sample case. She is about to make a presentation. MARIAN sits next to ALICE, anxious to see the product. WESLEY remains standing. He is discreetly removed from the women, back a few feet, but eager in his own way.)*

ALICE. Well...I wouldn't be here if you failed to fulfill all the qualifications. That should please you. Excellent backgrounds.

MARIAN. We had loving parents.

ALICE. Excellent Stability Assessment Reports. That's very important.

WESLEY. I had that bout of depression after the corporation failed to...uh...secure the Johanson contract, do you remember, Marian? I should have done more...been better prepared for the acquisition...but...I took some sick leave...but that was a long time ago.

ALICE. You handled the disappointment wonderfully, Mr. Jordan. We have extensive character references for both of you...let's see... (*ALICE thumbs through a series of letters.*) from your company president, your bankers and mortgage officers, your trust officers, Father Swanson, your sorority and fraternity acquaintances, graduate advisors...even your high-school bandleader, Mrs. Jordan, do you remember her name?

MARIAN (*smiling*). Elaine Williamson? Is she still alive?

ALICE. She said you were the most responsible ninth-grader she ever had... (*Reading from Mrs. Williamson's letter.*) That you anticipated difficulties, had the spine of a true leader. And other comments, of course. We're very thorough.

MARIAN. We were worried.

ALICE (*trying to ease into the evening's duties*). You do understand that this is the first of three visits, what we call the Orientation Visit?

MARIAN. To chat, visit, talk, get to know each other.

WESLEY. Face to face. And here we are.

MARIAN (*overly eager*). The tea! How could I forget. It's a special herbal blend. We have it flown in from Vietnam, you'll find it tingly and most refreshing, would you like some? It will only take a moment and then we can begin!

WESLEY. Marian, do you need to take a short rest, perhaps?

MARIAN (*snapping back at WESLEY*). Why would I want to do that, Wesley? We have been waiting for a thousand years and now Ms. Fleming is here, in our living room, and you want me to take a nap?

WESLEY. We're just a little tense.

ALICE. It's very understandable. Everyone is nervous.

MARIAN. You want to take our temperature, don't you, Ms. Fleming? To take the temperature of our souls.

ALICE. How poetic. I suppose I do, yes.

MARIAN. In college I took a class in literature from a blind professor who read all his books in Braille or paid students to read to him. I was one of his students... and—

WESLEY (*lovingly, but with a degree of caution*). Marian, Ms. Fleming is on a tight schedule.

MARIAN (*pushing onward*). He would sit for hours each day and “slip under the radar of life”...that's what he called it. I would read, hour after hour, and he would peer into the souls of the characters who peopled his imaginary literary world. Taking their temperature...to see how alive they were. Then we would make love. He was a wonderful teacher.

ALICE (*long pause*). I can come back later in the month, if you prefer, but the longer we postpone the orientation phase of the—

WESLEY. Please. We're fine.

*(Muted SOUNDS of the city can be heard, sporadic gunfire.)*

ALICE (*referring to her checklist*). And...let's see...yes, you have exceeded our minimums for wealth productiv-

ity. I know it is an awful lot of money. But these procedures require considerable funding.

MARIAN. Wesley is a wonder in that department.

WESLEY. Making money is easy. All you have to do is do everything right. I do everything right...with money, I mean. Everything has to be just so. I find it...awkward when things aren't...well...

ALICE. Perfect.

WESLEY. I like to think so. Perfect is best, isn't it?

ALICE. And you, Mrs. Jordan? Is perfection at the top of your priorities as well?

MARIAN. The very top. What could be more perfect than perfect?

ALICE. It must have been painful when your son...I'm sorry, I've been in meetings all day. (*ALICE is seeking information in one of her several binders.*)

WESLEY. Adrian. His name was Adrian.

ALICE. Yes, Adrian. I found it here, good.

MARIAN. Named after Wesley's grandfather.

ALICE. Adrian had a few...deficiencies, am I correct? By that I mean—

MARIAN. Don't make him sound like a cripple!

WESLEY. He was a loving and charming and intelligent child, Ms. Fleming.

ALICE. Of course he was. I didn't mean to imply otherwise.

MARIAN. He had the laugh of an angel.

ALICE. But he wasn't perfect.

WESLEY (*long pause*). Adrian was not perfect, that is correct.

MARIAN. He had a slight problem.

ALICE. With his heart, correct? A valve didn't...