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Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

By

PAT MONTLEY

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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CAST:

Christine Demuth	Michelle Lee
Chris Edwards	Richard Peck
Flinn Leigh Eng	Vernon Rey
Melissa Feliciano	Molly Ruhlman
Layla Hodge	Owen Sahnnow
Timothy Johnson	Sally Wall

PRODUCTION:

Director	Pat Montley
Set, Sound & Lighting Designer	Daryl Beard
Stage Managers	Naomi Berkenbilt, Javier Jaramillo
Set Crew	Jim Houston, Scott Macleod, Richard Peck, Owen Sahnnow

Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

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For Sally
my best critic
and dearest

Enough

CHARACTERS

ZERO: Any age, race, sex; a homeless person who is intelligent, well read, frustrated, desperate and clever.

RAY: Any age, race, sex; a business executive who is wealthy, accustomed to power and smug.

TIME: Any time.

PLACE: A surrealistic crossroads in a distant place of metaphor/nightmare, or a street corner.

Question: Should we give until it hurts?

(A bench on a street corner. ZERO's stuff includes a beat-up backpack, an open McDonald's bag and a small hand drum.

At lights up, ZERO, unkempt, barefoot and wearing shabby clothing, beats the drum on bench.)

ZERO (*singing to the tune of "Jingle Bells"*).

BEAT THE DRUM,

BEAT THE DRUM,

BEAT IT LOUD AND CLEAR.

IF YOU DO NOT SHARE THE WEALTH,

THE END IS SURELY NEAR ... EAR!

SOME HAVE MUCH,

SOME HAVE LESS,

SOME HAVE NONE AT ALL.

NOW'S THE TIME TO EQUALIZE,

SO HEAR YOUR CONSCIENCE CALL.

(RAY enters, dressed in a suit, working a smartphone or its futuristic equivalent. He looks out, as though waiting for someone. ZERO stares at RAY, who is oblivious.)

ZERO *(cont'd)*.

NOW'S THE TIME TO EQUALIZE,
SO HEAR YOUR CONSCIENCE CALL.

(ZERO continues to beat the drum.

RAY now notices ZERO's stare and tries to ignore it but grows increasingly uncomfortable.)

RAY. What?

(ZERO stops playing, continues to stare.)

RAY *(cont'd)*. What?!

ZERO. I suffer.

RAY. I see.

ZERO. Will you help?

RAY *(unnerved)*. Well ... I guess ... yes ... of course. Not to help would be selfish, wouldn't it?

(RAY extracts a dollar bill from his wallet and drops it into ZERO's McDonald's bag. He waits for a "thank you.")

RAY *(cont'd)*. Don't bother to thank me. It's my *moral* obligation.

ZERO. Yes, that's true.

RAY. You're welcome.

(Beat.)

ZERO. I need more.

RAY. More?

ZERO. I still suffer.

RAY. Well, *do* something about it.

ZERO. What?

RAY. Pick yourself up by your own—

ZERO. I have no boots.

RAY. Is that my problem?

ZERO. Yes.

RAY. Why?

ZERO. Because you have many.

RAY. Which I worked very hard to get.

ZERO. No harder than I.

RAY. Then why don't you have—?

ZERO. Poor soil. Drought. Flood. Famine. War. Uneven playing field. Unemployment. Bad government.

RAY. Get rid of it.

ZERO. I tried.

RAY. Look, I sympathize ...

ZERO. Show me.

RAY. Oh, all right. (*Putting another bill in ZERO's bag.*)
Here's a ten.

(ZERO does not look at it.)

RAY (*cont'd*). Now will you leave me alone?

ZERO. You are the one free to leave.

RAY. I'm meeting someone here.

ZERO. I see.

RAY. Look, I've been more than generous.

ZERO. You have given from your excess.

RAY. What do you expect?

Life/Choice

CHARACTERS

CAROL: 43, woman of any race; pro-life.

JESSIE: 25, woman of any race; pro-choice.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A political rally on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Question: How can we disagree without being disagreeable?

(At lights up, we see a bench and hear noise of a crowd of people. For a few seconds, sounds of two sets of many voices repeating simultaneous chants: "It's a child, not a choice!" And, "Keep abortion legal!"

CAROL *(offstage, calling to a companion)*. No, you go ahead.

(CAROL enters, one shoe untied, carrying a backpack and a sign reading "It's a Child, not a Choice." She calls again to her offstage companion.)

CAROL *(cont'd)*. Go on! I'll catch up. Just be a minute.

(She puts the sign down, takes off her backpack, sits and ties her shoe, her head bent over the shoe. The sounds fade out.)

JESSIE *(offstage, calling to a companion)*. Yes, I'll meet you there!

(JESSIE enters, backing in, carrying a sign reading “Keep Abortion Legal.” Facing offstage, she calls.)

JESSIE *(cont’d)*. They can’t *all* be unreasonable. Humor me. *(Points over her shoulder at CAROL.)* Just want to try a little one-on-one! *(Turns, crosses to CAROL, checks out CAROL’s poster.)* Good morning.

(CAROL looks up.)

JESSIE *(cont’d)*. Oh!

CAROL. Not the “one” you were hoping to go one-on-one with?

JESSIE *(flabbergasted)*. I ... wow ... I don’t know what ... how could ... what are you ... ?

CAROL. Doing here? Same thing as you. Exercising my right to free speech.

JESSIE. But ... you volunteer at Planned Parenthood.

CAROL. Because I want to make sure women have access to contraceptives.

JESSIE. And you ... you’re a ...

CAROL. Socialist, progressive, feminist—

JESSIE *(finishing her sentence)*. Left-wing liberal! So how can you ... ?

CAROL. Come on. You know better than that. Liberals don’t all think alike.

JESSIE. Yeah. But ... on this issue?

CAROL. Why should this one be exempt?

JESSIE. Well, because ... because it’s ...

CAROL. Because *you’re* on the other side?

JESSIE. But how did that happen? I mean that *you’re* on the other side? And ... I didn’t know it.

CAROL. We live half a country apart.

JESSIE. But it's not like we don't visit, phone, text.

CAROL. We've been going to different rallies. Until this one.

JESSIE. Yeah, but I told you about mine. How come you never ... ?

CAROL. Because I know how you feel ... what you believe.

What all your friends—as well as most of mine—believe.

I guess I ... sometimes liberals are just so darn ... narrow-minded! I didn't think telling you would make a difference.

JESSIE. How could it not?!

CAROL. Anyway, you have a right to your opinion. And to act on it.

JESSIE. Yes. That was one of the most memorable lessons of my childhood.

CAROL. Good. Music to every Sunday-school teacher's ears.

JESSIE (*meaning "it's more than that"*). Come on.

CAROL. So you're acting on your right to voice your political opinion. And I'm acting on mine.

JESSIE. But ... but I thought you believe that women's lives matter.

CAROL. I do believe it.

JESSIE. That laws that impose motherhood on women are totalitarian.

CAROL. They are.

JESSIE. That children should be wanted.

CAROL. They should.

JESSIE. That my life—my woman's life—is worth something!

CAROL. It certainly is.

JESSIE. Then why? ... How can you? ... I mean, if you agree with everything I've—

Just Deserts

CHARACTERS

DERRICK: any race; high-school senior, has been cast as the Duke in *The Merchant of Venice*.

PENNY: any race; high-school senior, has been cast as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A rehearsal room—bare, except for two chairs.

Question: Which is more important—justice or mercy?

(At lights up, DERRICK and PENNY, both carrying scripts of The Merchant of Venice, enter to run lines. DERRICK sits with his script open. PENNY closes hers and remains standing.)

PENNY. How long do we have?

DERRICK. Mr. Donaldson said about ten minutes. He's just re-blocking the scene where Antonio makes the deal with Shylock. Then you'll need to get back for Portia's scene with Nerissa. So come on, let's have it.

PENNY *(takes a deep breath, concentrates, recites matter-of-factly)*. The quality of mercy is not strained.

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath;

(She forgets what comes next, makes a face. DERRICK holds up two fingers.)

PENNY (*cont'd*). It is twice blest;

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:

(She strains to remember. DERRICK makes a show-off-the-biceps gesture.)

PENNY (*cont'd*). 'Tis mightiest of the mightiest—

DERRICK (*interrupting*). “In.”

PENNY. 'Tis mightiest *in* the mightiest: it becomes

The thronèd monarch better than his crown;

(She forgets, makes a face. He gestures holding a scepter.)

PENNY (*cont'd*). His scepter shows the force of temporal power,

The attribute to awe and majesty,

Wherein doth sit the fear—

DERRICK. “Dread and fear.”

PENNY. Dread and fear of kings;

(PENNY revs up. Then on a roll, she rushes to the finish line.)

PENNY (*cont'd*). But mercy is above this sceptered sway;

It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,

It is an attribute to God himself;

And earthly power doth then show like God's

When mercy seasons justice.

DERRICK (*trying to be supportive rather than critical*). Well, Penny ... you got the *lines* anyway ... almost.

Well, Penny ... you got the *lines* anyway ... almost.

PENNY (*disgusted with herself for forgetting*). Yeah. As long as you're there to cue me.

DERRICK. I will be there. I'm in that scene. It's my one scene. Too bad we didn't have a little more "justice" in casting. I really wanted Bassanio, and instead I got the Duke—a walk-on.

PENNY. He's not a walk-on, Derrick. He's the big man in Venice.

DERRICK. Nevertheless, he's only in Act Four, Scene One. Fifty-seven lousy lines. I got a walk-on, and Lanny Myers got Bassanio. Is that fair? Is that "just"?

PENNY. You've got a great costume.

DERRICK. What if The Don had given Portia to Cylene, and Nerissa to you? Would you think that was fair?

PENNY. I'd trust his judgment.

DERRICK. Really? When we all know you're a much better actor.

PENNY. This is high school, not Broadway. Teachers make choices for, like, our educational benefit or whatever.

DERRICK. If that's true, what's the point of auditions?

PENNY. To give us the experience. To challenge us.

DERRICK. So if someone rises to the challenge and does the best audition, shouldn't they get the lead they deserve?

PENNY. All other things being equal, yes.

DERRICK. What other things?

PENNY. Well, the teacher might feel it's, like, more fair to give a lot of students the chance to play major roles than to have the same kids play the leads all the time.

DERRICK. But would that be fair to the more talented students—like you?

PENNY. Doesn't the same thing happen in sports? Coaches try to make sure everybody plays.

Suckled by Wolves

CHARACTERS

STEVE: 40s, any race; previously Rick's best friend, man with a conscience and a mission, a realist.

RICK: 40s, any race; previously Steve's best friend, sensitive, a romantic.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A parlor in the bishop's residence.

Question: Who deserves forgiveness?

(At lights up, we see a parlor with two chairs. STEVE and RICK stand, waiting.)

STEVE. What's taking him so long?

RICK. He was never very ... punctual, Steve. Don't you remember?

STEVE. No.

(Beat.)

STEVE *(cont'd)*. I try not to.

RICK. I thought you went through years of remembering.

STEVE. That was a long time ago.

RICK. Right after?

STEVE. Not right.

RICK. Later, then.

STEVE. Much later. You?

RICK. Right after.

STEVE. Oh.

RICK. My parents.

STEVE. Of course.

(Beat.)

STEVE *(cont'd)*. Rick, we do have an appointment, don't we? I mean you called and talked to him.

RICK. Well, not to *him*. But we have an appointment.

(Beat.)

RICK *(cont'd)*. How's Sharon?

STEVE. Fine. Up for tenure at St. Mary's this year.

RICK. A shoo-in.

STEVE. We hope.

RICK. And the wunderkind?

STEVE. Good. Great.

RICK. Show me.

STEVE *(taking out his smartphone)*. Prepare to be dazzled.

(Shows picture.)

RICK. Wow! Cap and gown time already.

STEVE. Only grade school.

RICK. What're you saying—that we're not *that* old?

STEVE. What about your twins?

RICK *(getting out his smartphone and showing)*. Child prodigies, both. I think they actually look like Mike, don't you?

STEVE (*looking*). Wow—you're right. Amazing resemblance.

Considering. (*Taking the phone for a closer look.*) A mighty pair.

RICK. Regular Romulus and Remus.

(*RICK takes his phone back from STEVE.*)

STEVE. Don't.

RICK. I was only—

STEVE. I hated when he called us that.

RICK. Sorry. (*Referring to the photo as he puts phone away.*)

They're just about the age we were when ...

(*RICK trails off. STEVE pats his arm. Beat.*)

RICK (*cont'd*). Do you ... can you ever forgive him?

STEVE. For starters, he'd have to repent.

RICK. You think he hasn't?

STEVE. In the confessional, where it's easy and anonymous, sure.

RICK. He has publicly apologized.

STEVE. For the sins of ... (*Imitating the bishop's tone.*) "all those priests in my dioceses who have committed such heinous crimes." But not for his own sins. And not to us.

RICK. Perhaps he will ... tonight.

STEVE. And what about restitution? What about the obligation to restore what was stolen.

RICK. How can he give us back our innocence?

STEVE. He stole our sense of worth and dignity. And now he has to give them back.

RICK. But you have those things.

STEVE. *You* don't—not in the eyes of the church.

RICK. Is that his fault?

March!

CHARACTERS

IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT: 51, Black; an imposing presence, talented journalist and courageous anti-Jim-Crow activist.

ALICE PAUL: 28, white; chair of the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, determined, intense, idealistic, a born activist with a talent for organizing.

TIME: March 1, 1913, three days before the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson.

PLACE: Alice Paul's office in Washington, D.C.

PRODUCTION NOTE: In 1909, a group of Black civil rights activists—including Ida B. Wells-Barnett—founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For the first two-thirds of the 20th century, “colored” or “Negro” (the term championed by W.E.B. DuBois, following the lead of Booker T. Washington) were used by Black Americans to describe themselves. In 1967, Stokely Carmichael published *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, and the next 15-20 years saw the rise in usage of “Black.” In 1988, Jesse Jackson led the push toward “African American.” So while today “African American” and “Black” are considered respectful usage, in 1913—the time in which this play is set—“colored” and “Negro” would have been considered respectful.

**Question: Is it ever OK to compromise our values?
What happens when we do?**

(At lights up, ALICE PAUL sits at her desk. IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT storms in.)

IDA. I expected this—from anybody but Alice Paul!

ALICE. What makes you think you know me?

IDA. I know you're a Quaker and that Quakers were leaders in the movement to abolish slavery and—

ALICE. True. But—

IDA. And that they provided many stations on the Underground Railroad.

ALICE. I'm always impressed by someone who does her homework.

IDA. I'm a journalist. Doing homework is my job.

ALICE. Which you do with passion and power. I've read many of your stories on the horrendous lynchings you're bringing to light.

IDA. I've taken time out from that campaign to come to Washington and march for women's suffrage.

ALICE. I appreciate that, but—

IDA. And I've brought sixty other colored women from the Alpha Suffrage Club in Chicago to march with me in the Illinois delegation.

ALICE. Mrs. Wells-Barnett, you are correct, my family has always defended the rights of the Negro. But who do you think will be the spectators at tomorrow's women's march?

IDA. I suspect most of the district will turn out. And folks flooding in from all over the country for Tuesday's inauguration of Woodrow Wilson.

ALICE. Most of whom will be traveling north, singing “Dixie,” ecstatic that we’ve elected the first Southerner in sixty-four years—one who has vowed to *re-segregate* the Federal government, eliminating all the racial progress made since the Civil War, making it almost impossible for your people to get Federal jobs and work side by side with whites. We will be marching through a crowd unlikely to be sympathetic to—

IDA. I’ve been in far more dangerous situations.

ALICE. That is not my point.

IDA. Then what is?

ALICE. To keep the parade about *suffrage* and not about race.

IDA. How can the parade be about race when only—? Tell me, how many white folks will be marching?

ALICE. I’m not quite certain of—

IDA. Yes, you are. No organizing detail escapes you.

ALICE (*conceding*). About ... eight thousand.

IDA. What else is in the parade?

ALICE (*taking a deep breath*). Twenty-six floats, ten marching bands, four mounted brigades, three heralds and six chariots.

IDA. Who will lead it?

ALICE. A winged goddess in a white cape riding a white horse, carrying a banner that reads, “Forward out of error, leave behind the night, forward through the darkness, forward into light.”

IDA. How will the parade end?

ALICE. On the steps of the Treasury Department ... with a spectacular allegorical pageant. The figure of Columbia will be summoned forth to the strains of “The Star-Spangled Banner” while dancing women in white will portray American ideals of liberty, charity, justice, peace and hope.

Voting Your Conscience

CHARACTERS

BOBBIE: 18 to 80 years old, any race, any gender.

DARNELL: 18 to 80 years old, any race, any gender.

TIME: The evening of a past or future election day.

PLACE: A polling place in the USA.

Question: How do we decide if the end justifies the means?

(At lights up, we see a folding table with a chair. On the table, we see a large canvas bag with a zipper and lock, marked with large letters spelling “Provisional Ballots” and a large loose-leaf binder marked “Chief Election Judge Manual.” Leaning against a table leg is an upside-down sign that reads, “No Electioneering Beyond This Point.” We hear noise of tables and chairs being folded up and stacked in the next room and sounds of a storm outside. BOBBIE is sitting at the table, filling out a form. DARNELL enters backwards, with a large bin marked “Voted Ballots.”)

DARNELL *(calling offstage while entering)*. You all can leave when you’re finished stacking those tables and chairs. Use the back door by the parking lot. It locks automatically. Bobbie and I will wait for the pick-up. *(To BOBBIE, teasing.)* The price we pay for power, eh? *(Parks the bin.)* This is the first one. There are a dozen more—and they’re heavy. Whose idea was it to return to paper ballots?

BOBBIE. Certainly not the wanna-be hackers.

DARNELL. Did you call central?

BOBBIE. Yeah. Said they'll be an hour.

DARNELL (*looking at watch*). The weather, I guess. It's a mess out there.

BOBBIE (*gesturing to the bin*). Oh well, that gives us plenty of time to lock up the ballots. (*Holds up the bag.*) Here, I've got the provisional ones. (*Holds up a sheet of paper and pen.*) If you just sign next to mine, we're done with these.

DARNELL (*signing*). You know, I was surprised to find out you were the "other" chief judge. I didn't know you were ... I mean ... I never saw any election signs in your yard or ...

BOBBIE. Come on, Darnell! Never imagined that the neighbor who mowed your lawn while you had a broken arm could possibly be a Republican?

DARNELL. No! That's not—I just don't ... I guess I can't imagine how such a decent person as you—how any Republican—can want ... *him* for president.

BOBBIE. Some of us aren't voting for "him." We're voting for conservative policies.

DARNELL. But how can you want such a dangerous man in the White House? Aren't you afraid?

BOBBIE. A lot of people are counting on his coming around to being advised by—

DARNELL. As if he would take advice—

BOBBIE (*ignoring the interruption*). By people with more sense and experience.

DARNELL. "More sense and experience"? The Cabinet *he* appoints? The judges *he* nominates? The Congressional reps that ride into power on *his* coattails? Really?

BOBBIE. OK, OK. Now we just have to sign and lock all the ballot bins and we're good to go.

DARNELL. Doesn't feel "good" to me. Most of these votes are probably for him.

BOBBIE (*teasing the "losing" opponent*). Cheer up—we're only one district.

DARNELL. Yeah, but the largest and most heavily Republican district in the state.

BOBBIE. Just one state.

DARNELL. A very critical *swing* state. It could make all the difference.

BOBBIE. Come on. Really?

DARNELL. Really. These votes could decide the election.

BOBBIE. Wow.

DARNELL. But you probably see that as "good."

BOBBIE. Well ... if you want to know the truth ... (*Looks around, checking for privacy.*) I'm actually not a Republican.

DARNELL. What?!

BOBBIE. I just switched parties last year so I could vote Republican in the primary and try to get somebody *else*—anybody else—as the Republican candidate.

DARNELL. So you're a ...

BOBBIE. Democrat. Right.

DARNELL. But you signed up to be a Republican poll judge.

BOBBIE. I didn't plan it. But they asked me—the woman at the Board of Elections—Shawna. They were desperate. Can never find enough Republicans to be poll judges—even in this district. I guess they're all too indispensable at their high-paying jobs to take the day off.

DARNELL. But you're a *chief* judge. There's supposed to be one from each party so there's no ...

(*They look at the bin of ballots.*)

Foxholes

CHARACTERS

DEVON: 18 to 25 years old, a soldier, male, any race.

JAMIE: 18 to 25 years old, a soldier, any gender, any race.

(For purposes of pronoun efficiency, Jamie is referred to as “she.” Please adjust pronouns as needed.)

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A foxhole in a war-torn country.

PRODUCTION NOTE: Profanity may be substituted as needed.

Question: What gives meaning to life?

(At lights up, we hear ear-splitting sounds of battle: bombs dropping, helicopters hovering, machine guns firing, soldiers shouting. Two soldiers—DEVON and JAMIE—fire in the direction of the enemy. While continuing to fire, DEVON sings.)

DEVON *(singing loudly, defiantly).*

AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND,
THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME ...

(The battle noise subsides. The soldiers take a breath. DEVON remains facing the direction of the enemy with gun poised.)

JAMIE. Do you think you're a wretch?

DEVON. Say what?

JAMIE. "That saved a wretch like me."

DEVON. Well now, that wouldn't reflect a very healthy self-image, would it?

JAMIE. So why are you singing it, Devon dear?

DEVON. 'Cause if I sing loud enough, Jamie darlin', I can't hear the ... (*Gesturing towards enemy line.*) racket. Besides, my singing's so bad and loud and foreign, it's gotta scare the shit outta *them*, right?

JAMIE. What makes you think that?

DEVON. One time I was walking home after my night shift, and this guy comes outta nowhere with a knife and says, "Gimme your wallet and you won't get hurt." Now I don't believe him, and I am not gonna hand over my wallet. So I just channel my choir-boy training, point my four fingers at his eyes, and start screaming:

*AVE MARIA, GRATIA PLENA, DOMINUS,
TECUM, BENEDICTA TU IN MULIERIBUS!*

Before I could even get to "Pray for us sinners," his ass was gone. (*Delivering "the lesson."*) People— (*Gesturing to the enemy.*) even people with weapons—are afraid of "crazy."

JAMIE. Or maybe it was the power of prayer.

DEVON. Yeah, right. And what about here? Don't you think the other side's praying too?

JAMIE. Sure. But maybe they don't have "right" on their side.

DEVON. Like six million Jews, a gazillion Native Americans, millions of African slaves and twenty Sandy Hook first-graders didn't have "right" on their side?

JAMIE. So ... you don't think it's worth praying?

DEVON. I just don't believe there's anybody listening.

JAMIE. But what if there is?

DEVON. I'm not a "what-if" kinda guy. If somebody's making nice with me "just in case" I might be a generous god, I'm not giving 'em what they want ... even if they need it.

JAMIE. So you ... you're an atheist because you're too damn selfish to be an agnostic?

DEVON. Shit, you ask a lotta questions.

JAMIE. You sing. I ask questions. Whatever works.

DEVON. And *is* it working for you, Jamie? Is it taking you mind off our ... situation? 'Cause it sure as hell ain't working for me.

JAMIE. What *would* work for you, Devon? What would ... distract you?

DEVON. We can't afford to be distracted—don't you forget it. But I'll tell you what could make me happy, even right here and now. A pair of clean, dry socks.

JAMIE. Happy, huh? Who cares? Maybe none of it matters. Happiness ... misery ... life ... death ... money ... poverty. The Buddhists believe that, you know. My sister's dating a Buddhist. "All illusion." That's what he keeps saying. "Illusion." Like that's some magical explanation that makes all the suffering shit OK. Like if we just don't care, it won't hurt. Like if we ignore the bad things, they'll go away. And if we don't get "attached" to the good things, we won't miss them when *they* go away. Well, it's not. It's not OK! Suffering is not OK! (*Shouting in the direction of the enemy.*) Do you hear me?! (*Suddenly stands and shouts.*) SUFFERING IS NOT OK!

(*JAMIE fires her machine gun at the enemy. DEVON grabs JAMIE, pulls her down.*)

Madrigal in Black and White

CHARACTERS

LIZ: Mid-to-late 20s, white.

SHADOW LIZ: Older, white; Liz's uncensored, wisecracking alter ego.

CLEO: Mid-to-late 20s, Black.

SHADOW CLEO: Older, Black; Cleo's uncensored, wisecracking alter ego.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: The street in front of Liz's suburban house.

PRODUCTION NOTES: Liz and Cleo can be played realistically. But the performances of the shadows should be stylized. They are less the ominous Jungian "evil twin" than they are the sometimes humorous, always embarrassing, meddlesome aunt, urging the warnings of an earlier generation. Nonrealistic costumes and stylized movement might serve them best. The shadows generally talk to their respective persons, but the persons—although they hear these comments—speak only to each other. The "car" can be represented by a two-dimensional cutout frame or simply by chairs or black boxes.

Question: How can we move beyond racial stereotypes?

(At lights up, there is bright sunlight and the sound of a lawnmower. LIZ is [miming] mowing the lawn. CLEO

is sitting in the driver's seat of a car with headlights on. SHADOW CLEO is in the car with CLEO. SHADOW LIZ accompanies LIZ. LIZ stops mowing and crosses slowly toward the car, squinting into the sun, but within a few feet of it, stops abruptly.)

LIZ. Oh! Sorry. I didn't see anyone in the car. I, um ...

SHADOW LIZ. You didn't see her because she's Black.

LIZ. The sun! The sun was in my eyes.

SHADOW CLEO (to CLEO). You're invisible.

CLEO. The sun? (Turns to look out the back window.) Oh. The sun was ... in your eyes.

LIZ (finishing the sentence with her). In my eyes. Yes. (Self-consciously pointing and squinting.) West. (Gesturing to the lawnmower she left behind.) I was, uh, mowing the lawn and I ... saw the car sitting here.

SHADOW LIZ. A car you didn't recognize, in your *cul de sac*—

LIZ. And I wondered—

SHADOW LIZ. What it was doing in front of the Johnson's driveway.

LIZ. Why the lights were on.

CLEO. Oh. I didn't realize they were ... (Turns lights off.) Thanks.

SHADOW CLEO. Neighborhood Watch at work. They'll all sleep safer tonight.

LIZ. I was going to turn them off. I mean if no one was in the car. So the battery wouldn't ...

SHADOW CLEO. She was going to rifle the glove compartment for crack, then call the cops.

CLEO. Tricky business.

LIZ (misunderstanding). What? No, really. I was only thinking that the battery would—

CLEO. No, I didn't mean—I meant you always feel ... a *person* always feels—

SHADOW CLEO. A *Black* person always feels—

CLEO. You always feel funny about doing that to another person's car.

SHADOW LIZ. Doing what?

CLEO. Reaching in the window.

LIZ. Right! Or opening the door to turn off—

CLEO. Yeah. So you make a big deal of it. Or look around the parking lot for an accomplice so you can say, "Should we try to turn the lights out in that car before the battery—"

LIZ. Exactly! And you think the cops are going to pull up just as you put your hand on the switch.

(LIZ and CLEO laugh.)

SHADOW CLEO *(to LIZ)*. They wouldn't arrest *your* white ass, sweetheart.

SHADOW LIZ. So ask her what she's doing here.

SHADOW CLEO. Better tell her what you're doing here.

CLEO. I'm waiting for my brother. *(Gestures to the house next to LIZ's.)* He's in there.

LIZ. Oh.

SHADOW LIZ. Didn't know the Johnson's were having any work done.

SHADOW CLEO. She thinks he's robbing the place.

CLEO. His car's in the shop.

SHADOW CLEO. Tell her he's a financial adviser. American Express.

SHADOW LIZ. Wait. They did talk about getting a new roof. Remember they asked us about recommending—

The Cutting

CHARACTERS

FATHER: 70s-80s, any race; infirm.

DAUGHTER: 40s-50s, any race; his caretaker.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A room in their home.

Question: Who gets to say which human life has worth?

(At lights up, FATHER is sitting on a chair or stool next to a walker with a tray containing a collection of pills on it. He deals with waves of nausea.)

FATHER. Call Kevorkian!

DAUGHTER *(offstage)*. He's ... not available.

FATHER. Did you put me on the waiting list?

DAUGHTER *(offstage)*. Sure.

(DAUGHTER enters with a barber's cape and scissors.)

DAUGHTER *(cont'd)*. Have you ever considered maybe I don't want you dead?

FATHER. Because of the money?

DAUGHTER. What?

FATHER. My pension check.

DAUGHTER (*hands him the scissors to hold while she puts the cape around his shoulders*). I was paying the mortgage before you moved in.

FATHER. Then why?

DAUGHTER. Maybe we're not finished.

FATHER. Not finished what?

DAUGHTER (*starts tying the cape at his neck*). I don't know.

FATHER (*pulling the cape away*). No more haircuts! What's the point? I don't care what I look like. I just want to—

DAUGHTER (*putting the cape back on*). Well, I'm the one who has to look at you.

(She reaches for the scissors, but he won't let them go.)

FATHER. I should've had the operation.

DAUGHTER. With a ninety percent chance of ending up dead?

FATHER. It would be better than this.

DAUGHTER. I know you're depressed, but—

FATHER. It can't go on like this.

DAUGHTER. Dad ...

FATHER. Feeling so nauseated all the time.

DAUGHTER. But then you have some good days too.

FATHER. And now ... last night ...

DAUGHTER. Everybody's entitled to wet the bed once in a while. I've done it myself.

FATHER. I knew I had to go. I just couldn't get up. I mean the walker was right there. But I didn't have the strength—I was too slow. And by the time I ... it was too late.

DAUGHTER. It'll be better now, with the commode in your room. Don't fret about it. That's the first time since you've been here.

FATHER. But not the last.

(Beat. She reaches for the scissors again. He releases them.)

FATHER *(cont'd)*. It's going to get worse, you know.

(Beat.)

DAUGHTER. I know.

(She starts cutting his hair.)

FATHER. *Then* what? A nursing home? With some underpaid foreigner desperate for work cleaning up my shit. Nobody should have to do that. It ain't ... fair, ain't ... right. I don't want that.

DAUGHTER. Me either.

(She cuts in silence.)

FATHER. How big is it?

DAUGHTER *(feeling a spot on his head)*. Same as before. You know that from last week's CAT scan.

FATHER. Then why am I getting weaker and weaker if it's not growing.

DAUGHTER. Because you haven't had any real exercise in three years. Because the cells around the tumor are dead or damaged. Because you're exhausted from having seizures.

FATHER. And I don't understand that either. This Dilantin stuff is supposed to stop the seizures.

DAUGHTER. Only if you take the full dosage.

FATHER. But the more I take ... it makes me sick to my stomach. And dizzy. I stagger around like some ... can't get my words out right.

Rachel Carson Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

CHARACTERS

RACHEL: 51; failing health, but happily at home at the edge of the sea. As a mother, she is patient but not indulgent; as a temptee, she is intense, quick-witted, controlled but vulnerable.

BOY: 6; a handful.

MAN: Ageless; with just a hint of the sinister, he is a man of the world who enjoys an intellectual challenge.

TIME: Summer 1960.

PLACE: A rocky coast at low tide.

Question: What would you sacrifice to save the earth?

(At lights up, we hear sea sounds for a moment. RACHEL is sitting on a rock, studying with her hand lens the periwinkles attached to the side of an adjacent rock. A metal bucket is on the ground. She sits up, puts down the glass and rubs her neck as one who has been at it for a good while. She slowly stands, lightly shaking out the stiffness in her body, closes her eyes and begins a “wakame” exercise—pretending her limp body is seaweed being gently moved about by the sea. Then music. The image of a mermaid swimming is projected

onto her and onto the backdrop behind her. She is taken up into this reverie. After a few moments, BOY enters. He wears swimming trunks and goggles pushed up on his head like horns. He throws [imaginary] stones at the ground around RACHEL's feet. RACHEL opens her eyes, and the mermaid music and projection disappear abruptly.)

RACHEL (*not looking at BOY*). You don't have to throw stones at me to get my attention.

BOY. Aunt Rachel, I want some ice cream. I'm hot.

RACHEL. Go for a swim in the big tide pool.

BOY. I don't like swimming.

RACHEL. You do.

(She sits back down on her rock.)

BOY. I don't like swimming as much as eating.

RACHEL (*resumes studying the periwinkles*). In a little while, I'll come in and fix you and Gran some lunch.

BOY. I want some ice cream.

RACHEL. After lunch.

BOY. Gran wants ice cream too.

RACHEL (*turns to him*). Did she say that?

BOY (*turns away, throws a stone in the other direction, then turns back*). What are you doing?

RACHEL. Watching the periwinkles. Come look.

BOY (*crossing to her*). It's boring. They don't DO anything.

RACHEL. Oh but they *do*! They break through their egg capsule! They search out a safe home on a slimy rock. They scrape off the slime with their long tongues that have thirty-five hundred sharp little teeth. They grow big and strong till finally they spawn. Then the adventure begins again!

BOY. It's boring.

RACHEL. Or ... they get washed out to sea and eaten by little crabs, who get eaten by little fish, who get eaten by big fish, who get eaten by little boys who get—

BOY (*interrupting*). I don't like this story.

RACHEL. Get Gran to read you one you like better.

BOY. Which?

RACHEL. *Hansel and Gretel*.

BOY. It's dumb.

RACHEL. Why?

BOY. There's no such thing as witches.

RACHEL. Ah ... the woods are full of them!

BOY. You're just saying that to scare me.

RACHEL. Are you scared?

BOY. No.

RACHEL. *The Little Mermaid*, then.

BOY. I don't believe in mermaids.

RACHEL. The sea is full of them.

BOY. Well, I don't see them.

RACHEL. Do you see fish?

BOY. Everybody sees fish.

RACHEL. Then ask Gran to read you the one about the fisherman's three wishes.

BOY. You just want to get rid of me.

(*No response.*)

BOY (*cont'd*). Well, if I had a wish, I'd wish ... I'd wish I was with my *real* mother ... I'd wish I was dead.