

**SIDES FOR “TALKING WITH” AUDITIONS AT T.O.S.A.C. – FEB. 2018
AGE RANGE MEANS CAN PLAY, NOT ACTUAL**

“15 MINUTES” [mid 20’s – mid 40’s]

Anyway, this guy, the director, actually used a buzzer. ZZZZZZZZZZZZ. Really. He would sit there wearing a Yankees baseball cap and push this buzzer after each laugh line for as long as he thought the laugh would last. Laugh line. ZZZZZZZZZZZZ. This was to train us not to step on the laugh. Can you believe it? Really. Oh, he trained us, believe me. The show opens, there are no laughs but we are waiting for the buzzer. A two-hour play lasted three hours while we paused for laughs that didn’t exist. I aged seven years in a night. Directors! Last year I did Katrin in Mother Courage for this really dour, silent, unapproachable, East German woman. She sat on a camp stool, immovable, for hours during rehearsal. With her eyes closed yet. No reactions. Really. I felt like a radio show. Anyway, after a week she asks me out for a beer and suggests that we should sleep together to get in tune with the play. I tell her she wants to get in tune with the play she should sleep with the author. She says ‘My dear, Berthold has been dead for thirty years!’ I said, ‘In that case you’re perfect for each other.’

SHE called fifteen right? My! Soooooooo, we’re really going to do this? Of course we are. It’s really mysterious, you know? I mean they’re already out there right? Sitting out there. Eating little candies. Peering in pocket mirrors. Who are they? Who knows. What are they expecting? Who knows. We do it. They watch it. We finish. They applaud. They go home. We go home. What was it? Who knows.

What I want to know, is how the hell do they live in a town like this without a decent Chinese restaurant?

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“SCRAPS” [mid 40’s – mid 60’s]

You think I’m ill don’t you? You want to send me to group therapy or self-improvement seminars or off to take night classes towards a law degree. God I hated school! How could anybody like it? Hell, you can live a whole life and never have to subtract. Have you noticed that nobody ever talks about anything? I bet I haven’t heard anybody talk about anything in two years. God knows Jack doesn’t. In the morning he reads me the cereal boxes out loud. He thinks I’m boring. He wouldn’t think I was so boring if he came home and found me in this. What would he do I wonder? Call his mother for advice. She’d tell him to buy me a Cuisinart and an exercycle.

I live in Oz. I see it all. I’ve even gotten so I can smell it. “Two or three hours walk along this trail brought Ojo and Scraps to a clear level country where there were a few farms and some scattered octagonal houses, all bright Quadling red and smelling of peppermint.” I can live in that sentence for a full 3 hours. You know what? I like that a lot better than life.

Someday I’ll be at the front door when Jack comes home. The Chevette will pull up and he’ll have the week’s charts, the Southeastern sales figures, the demographics under his arm. And there I’ll be to give him a nice kiss, holding the spatula, me, Scraps. “You certainly are a wonder, my dear, and I fancy you’d make a splendid pin cushion. If you belonged to me, I’d wear smoked glasses when I looked at you.” (SHE takes the “Scraps” head off.) But I do belong to you Jack. I’m your helpmeet, your homemaker.

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“CLEAR GLASS MARBLES” [mid 30’s – mid 60’s]

The day my mother found out she was dying she asked me to go out and buy her these clear glass marbles. Dad and I hadn't even known she was ill which was nothing new. Whenever you asked my mother if she was ill she would throw things at you, sesame buns, the editorial page, a handful of hair ribbons. 'Do not,' she would say, 'suggest things to suggestible people.' Anyway, I brought her the marbles and she counted ninety of them out and put them in this old cut-glass bowl which had been the sum total of great Aunt Helena's estate. Apparently, the doctor had given her three months and she set great store by doctors. She said she always believed them because they were the nearest thing to the Old Testament we had. 'I wouldn't give you two bits for these young smiley guys,' she'd say, 'I go for a good, stern-furrowed physician.' She wouldn't even have her teeth cleaned by a dentist under fifty. So she counted out ninety glass marbles and set them in the bowl on her bedside table. Then she went out and spent twelve hundred dollars on nightgowns. She said 'In my family you are only dying when you take to your bed, and that, my darlings, is where I am going.' And she did. Oh we hashed it around. Dad said she couldn't possibly be dying but the doctors convinced him. I told her it seemed a little medieval to lie in state up there but she said she didn't want to be distracted from what she loved, us, and what she wanted to mull . . . And she said there was nothing outside except drugstores and supermarkets and drycleaners and that given her situation they were beneath her dignity.

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“AUDITION” [18 – 30]

My human, world name is Mary Titfer. Titfer. You got it? Goodo! O.K., can you hear me? All the way back? Loud and clear Captain Marvel? A-O.K.! . . . Now, one more introduction and we're under way. The uh, the small person on my leash is my cat 'Tat'. My cat, 'Tat'. Get it? (Points to herself.) Titfer (Points to cat.) Tat. Right, you got it. Hey, we're waking up here. We're demonstrating consciousness. O.K., O.K., now you . . . the imperial you . . . have a part. I, Titfer need a part. We are thus in tune. Synchronicity. Sooooooo, it's audition city! Now I've got two pieces for you today, and here's the surprise, I've got one classical piece . . . late greats, and I've got one contemporary piece . . . dispatches from the front. Good. For my classical piece I will take off all my clothes. 'Crude Rube Protrudes Dubious Boobies'. Beep-Beep. O.K., O.K., but all kidding and joshing aside I will take them off. Now, why is this classical? Surely, you jest. The body, the body is classical . . . it goes all the way back . . . and all the way front. Har, har. It starts the art, the body does. But there's no argument there, eh? Naturally not. O.K., O.K., now in the great tradition of auditions you may stop me at any time. You can stop me one second after I start.

NOTE: THIS PART INVOLVES HANDLING A LIVE CAT

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“RODEO” [mid 30’s – mid 50’s]

Used to be people came to a rodeo had a horse of their own back home. Farm people, ranch people – lord, they knew what they were lookin’ at. Knew a good ride from a bad ride, knew hard from easy. You broke some bones er spent the day eatin’ dirt, at least ya got appreciated.

Now they bought the rodeo. Them. Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, Marlboro damn cigarettes. You know the ones I mean. Them. Hire some New York faggot t’sit on some ol’ stuffed horse in front of a sagebrush photo n’ smoke that junk. Hell, tobacco wasn’t made to smoke, honey, it was made to chew. Lord wanted ya filled up with smoke he would’ve set ya on fire. Damn it gets me!

There’s some guy in a banker’s suit runs the rodeo now. Got him a pinky ring and a digital watch, honey. Told us we oughta have a watchamacallit, choriographus or somethin’, some ol’ ballbuster used to be with the Ice damn Capades. Wants us to ride around dressed up like Mickey Mouse, Pluto, crap like that. Told me I had to haul my butt through the barrel race done up like Minnie damn Mouse in a tu-tu. Huh-uh, honey! Them people is so screwed-up they probably eat what they run over in the road.

NOTE: THIS PART INVOLVES SAYING THE WORD “FAGGOT”

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“TWIRLER” – [mid teens – mid 20’s]

I started when I was six. Momma sawed off a broom handle, and Uncle Carbo slapped some sort of silver paint, well, grey really, on it and I went down in the basement and twirled. Later on, Momma hit the daily double on horses named Spin Dry and Silver Revolver and she said that was a sign so she gave me lessons at the Dainty Deb Dance Studio where the lady, Miss Aurelia, taught some twirling on the side.

I won the Ohio Juniors title when I was six and the Midwest Young Adult Division three years later and then in high school I finished fourth in the nationals. Momma and I wore look-alike Statute of Liberty costumes that she had to send clear to Nebraska to get and Daddy was there in a t-shirt with my name, April. My first name is April and my last name is March. There were four thousand people there, and when they yelled my name gold balloons fell out of the ceiling. Nobody, not even Charlene Ann Morrison, ever finished fourth at my age.

Oh, I’ve flown high and known tragedy both. My daddy says it’s put spirit in my soul and steel in my heart. My left hand was crushed in a riding accident by a horse named Big Blood Red, and though I came back to twirl I couldn’t do it at the highest level. That was denied me by Big Blood Red who clipped my wings. You mustn’t pity me though. Oh, by no means! Being denied showed me the way, showed me the glory that sits inside life where you can’t see it.

NOTE: THIS PART INVOLVES SAYING THE WORD “NIGGER”

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“LAMPS” [mid 50’s and up]

I endlessly wondered what older age, later years would be, feel like. As have you. A diminishment? A narrowing? There are so many things one obviously cannot do. Many of the people once central to one’s life are gone or dispersed. One is less often . . . useful. My grandfather, when he was very rich in years, used to call himself ‘deneeded and unpacked.’ There are necessarily fewer people. Thinking about it, it seemed sensible then to invest more feeling in objects, enrich my relationship to them so that I . . . so that I wasn’t without intimacy. I have one sister, Amelia, and she resides in a sort of Leisure World, a planned community in Albuquerque . . . New Mexico. Her husband was a thoracic surgeon and she is very well off. She moved there from Catsafall and tells me that she is ever so busy with . . . activities. She has many, many friends there she says. Imagine. Amelia has not a single, solitary acquaintance who knew her before she was sixty. There she is, a sort of amnesiac with many friends and no memories, baking herself in the sun like a pop-tart. Quite beyond me. Several years ago she visited me here. She sat there, just where you are, and shared this odd mixture of patterns, heat and memory. I showed her, for instance, how extraordinarily hands take light. Lovely. Well, after a very long silence, a very nice silence really, she rose and said ‘Lila, you are as mad as a March hare.’

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“HANDLER” [mid teens – 30]

It's right there in the scripture . . . Mark, Chapter 16, verses 17 and 18. 'And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak in new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.' Don't figure it could be much clearer than that. There's some churches don't use snakes, use strychnine, powdered poison, same idea though. They mix it with Cherry kool-ade, sing 'em a hymn, drink it off, and then just stand around waitin' to see if they fall over. Ain't much of a show. Not like snakes. Dada does fire but I can't do it. Pours some kerosene in a coke bottle, sticks a rag in the top and lights it up. Holds that fire under his chin, passes it down the arm, puts his hand in it, you know, that kind of stuff. He says there's people do blow torches down to Tennessee. I don't know. Jamie give it a try 'fore he went to Detroit. Just about burned his ass off. Sorry.

When I handle, I keep 'em in this box. Dada gimme this and some Heidi doll on my ninth birthday. Sometimes I'll just open up the lid and put my foot in or, uh, maybe stick it open side to my chest. There's some lay it to their face. I don't. Scares my eyes. Durin' service we take 'em right out, pass 'em around. It's more dangerous than a single handler. Snake gets to comparin' who got the spirit a whole lot an' who jes got it some. Somebody's jes about to come in second. Don't get me wrong now. Y' don't die everytime yer bit.

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“DRAGONS” [early 20’s – early 40’s]

Dear St. Margaret, patron saint of childbirth, let me live, let my child live, and enough with the labor O.K., St. Margaret? I get the idea, you know what I mean? Ow. Ow. God, I must look like a drowned gerbil. I thought after 23 hours of this they either had to give you a C-section or a hairdresser. Ow. St. Margaret? Don't let Dr. Gussler gasp or faint or throw up or anything when he sees the baby. I mean he hasn't delivered a woman of a dragon lately and he is not ready for this! 'You must abort, my dear lady. One must think of one's husband, one's lifestyle in these cases. An abnormal child will scar your psyche and spoil your dinner parties.' Creep! Ow. Ow. I thought we just did this? Oh boy. Hey St. Margaret, send Wally back from the coffee shop, O.K.? Oh. Ow. Coming down. Coming down. Lawsa mercy. (Releases a breath.) Hey baby, you got the classical nine resemblances? Horns of a stag, head of a camel, eyes of a demon, neck of a snake, belly of a clam, scales of a carp, claws of an eagle, soles of a tiger, ears of a cow? Wait'll Dr. Gussler tries to count your toes, huh? Will you cause the owls to cry and the horses to run mad? Sure, you betcha. (calls out) Wally? (a moment) It's my body, Jane Fonda said so.

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“FRENCH FRIES” – 60 and up

I've seen a man healed by a Big Mac. I have. I was just sittin' there. Last summer it was. Oh, they don't never move you on. It's a sacred law in McDonald's, you can sit for a hundred years. Only place in this world. Anyway, a fella, maybe thirty-five, maybe forty, come on in there dressed real nice, real bright tie, bran' new baseball cap, nice white socks and he had him that disease. You know the one I mean, Cerebral Walrus they call it. Anyway, he had him a cock leg. His poor old body had it two speeds at the same time. Now he got him some coffee, with a lid on, and sat him down and Jimmy the tow-head cook knew him, see, and he brought over a Big Mac. Well, the sick fella ate maybe half of it and then he was just sittin' you know, suffering those tremors, when a couple of ants come right out of the burger. Now there ain't no ants in McDonald's no way. Lord sent those ants, and the sick fella he looked real sharp at the burger and a bunch more ants marched on out nice as you please and his head lolled right over and he pitched himself out of that chair and banged his head on the floor, loud. Thwack! Like a bowling ball dropping. Made you half sick to hear it. We jump up and run over but he was cold out. Well those servin' kids, so cute, they watered him, stuck a touch pepper up his nostril, slapped him right smart, and bang, up he got. Standin' and blinkin'. 'Well, how are you?' we say. An he looks us over, looks right in our eyes, and he say, 'I'm fine.' And he was. He was fine!

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“MARKS” [late 30’s – early 50’s]

Until I was thirty-five there was nothing out of the ordinary, nothing remarkable about my life. My days were very like one of those baroque string quartets. Soothing. Placid. Repetitive. School years without protest or excess. Prom years. Not so much as a single evening’s anarchy. My uncle, a Connecticut lawyer, was heard on the eve of my nineteenth birthday to raise a toast which described me, in a positive way he thought, as ‘unsurprising.’ In college, an unexceptional college, I appreciated. Appreciated music. Appreciated art. I was, if memory serves, a major in a subject whose actual point or content now escapes me, cultural geography. Had I died at that time, perhaps of acute boredom let us say, in the school cafeteria, eating peas, it would have been agreed, by all who knew me that my epitaph should read ‘She did as she was told.’ Or blander yet, ‘she did as she supposed she might be told.’

I met my husband, Arthur, at a festive tea held to honor the retiring faculty advisor of the Christian Youth Center. He proposed a toast, grapeade I think it was, and we were married two years later after weekly dates shared out among three restaurants of vastly ordinary cuisine. We were, I’m sure, the last of our generation to save ourselves for marriage. We had two children. First a girl and then a boy. Two job transfers. Two homes. Two subdivisions. And then on our 15th anniversary, Arthur left me, saying I had nothing further to give. I was, he said, unmarked by life.