

GENESIS

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Donald Tongue

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SYNOPSIS: As a playwright struggles with her rewrite, she finds herself in direct conflict with her own characters as she battles for control.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(TWO MEN, ONE WOMAN)

WOMAN Playwright. (39 lines)

MAN ONE Stock character. (37 lines)

MAN TWO Stock character. (51 lines)

SETTING: The Woman's study.

SET: A chair, table, and laptop.

AT RISE:

WOMAN is sitting at a table staring at a laptop computer, showing signs of frustration, long beat, she starts to type.

MAN ONE enters from stage right.

WOMAN stops typing.

MAN ONE: (To WOMAN.) Hi.

WOMAN continues to stare at the computer.

WOMAN: Hi.

MAN ONE: So...what are we doing today?

WOMAN: I don't know. The producer wants some new characters with a supporting sub-plot or...or...

MAN ONE: Or what?

WOMAN: Or he'll pull the plug. Kill the whole project.

MAN ONE: Oh...so, what have you got so far?

WOMAN: So far? Nothing.

MAN ONE: (*Sotto voce.*) Why am I not surprised.

WOMAN, annoyed, glares at MAN ONE for a beat, starts to type.
MAN TWO enters from stage left.

WOMAN stops typing.

MAN ONE: (*Continues, referring to MAN TWO.*) Huh...This is different.

MAN TWO: How's that?

MAN ONE: Usually you're a woman.

MAN TWO: Really. Mostly male-female relationship stuff?

MAN ONE: Yeah, something like that.

MAN TWO: (*Joking.*) So, which gender do you usually play?

MAN ONE: Biting wit is not really her style.

MAN TWO: Just killing time. Geez.

MAN TWO acts bored, fidgets, walks behind WOMAN, looks at the computer screen.

MAN TWO: *(Continues.)* Man One? Man Two? We don't even have names?

WOMAN: It's a Pinter thing.

MAN TWO: What?

WOMAN: Pinter. Harold Pinter. He never gave his characters names when he started a new play. He would just call them man or woman - A or B. I like using numbers.

MAN TWO: If you ask me? It sounds like someone has trouble naming their characters.

MAN ONE: She once named me Alistair.

WOMAN: I am perfectly capable of naming my characters.

MAN TWO: Alistair? Ouch!

WOMAN: It fit the character.

MAN TWO: So why all this generic nomenclature?

WOMAN: I told you...

MAN TWO: Yeah, I heard you. Pinter used to blah blah blah...Why do you do it?

WOMAN: It keeps me from getting too attached to my characters.

MAN TWO: Oh, now I get it. You have commitment issues.

WOMAN: No! It's just...names can sometimes be confining...

MAN TWO: Uh-huh.

WOMAN: Cause you to make choices you wouldn't otherwise make...

MAN TWO: Sure.

WOMAN: And...and why am I explaining this to you?

MAN TWO: Don't you want us to speak to you - tell you what we want?

WOMAN: Possibly, later, if things work out. All I have, so far, is you entering stage left and...

MAN TWO: Well, I don't like being some ambiguous man...man...

WOMAN: Two.

MAN TWO: TWO?! I'm not even ONE? A nameless afterthought?

WOMAN: I am not ready to give you a name. So just go back over to where I put you and be quiet.

MAN TWO reluctantly returns to stage left, beat.

MAN TWO: (To *MAN ONE*.) So what are the women like?

MAN ONE: Strong. Smart...intimidating.

MAN TWO: Big surprise there.

WOMAN: (*Typing.*) Man Two can't talk.

Pause.

MAN TWO: (To *MAN ONE*.) I was in a Mamet last week.

WOMAN: Hey!

MAN ONE: (*Impressed.*) You were in a Mamet?

WOMAN: (To *MAN TWO*.) You are not supposed to be talking!

MAN TWO: Oh come on. You know actors never read stage directions.

MAN ONE: (To *MAN TWO*.) So! What was it like?

MAN TWO: Great! We are talking total testoster-rama.

MAN ONE: (*Excited.*) Really?

MAN TWO: Yeah, character of a lifetime. The conflict was so palpable—in your face.

MAN ONE: Wow.

MAN TWO: And the dialogue was flying so fast.

MAN ONE: I've always dreamed of being in a Mamet.

WOMAN starts to type Mamet-esque dialogue.

MAN TWO: So I went down to Charley's office.

MAN ONE: You went down to Charley's office?

MAN TWO: Yeah, I went down to Charley's office.

MAN ONE: Was Charley there?

MAN TWO: Why would I go down to Charley's office if he wasn't there?

MAN ONE: Wow, you saw Charley. Amazing! What did Charley say?

MAN TWO: You want me to tell you what Charley said?

MAN ONE: You actually talked to Charley.

MAN TWO: Yeah, I went down to Charley's office, walked right past his secretary, told her we were not to be disturbed...

MAN ONE: Wait a minute. Charley doesn't have a secretary. He runs a strictly no-skirts operation.

MAN TWO: I didn't say Charley's secretary was a dame.

MAN ONE: You said - "told her."

MAN TWO: Did not.

MAN ONE: Did too.

MAN TWO: Do you want to hear what Charley had to say or not?

MAN ONE: Wow! You actually talked to Charley!

WOMAN stops typing.

WOMAN: Is that what you want? Is that zippy enough dialogue for you?

MAN ONE: Not bad.

MAN TWO: It's close, but Mamet really makes it sing...

WOMAN: I'M NOT MAMET!

MAN TWO: Huh, you can say that again.

WOMAN: I have my own style of writing.

MAN TWO: Yeah, right. Since when does staring blankly at a computer screen constitute a style of writing?

WOMAN: Listen mister - I am this close to using the backspace key on you.

MAN TWO: I've heard that before.

WOMAN: Don't push it!

MAN TWO: Ooo, I'm shaking in my quotation marks.

MAN ONE: Careful. You don't want to get on her bad side. That's how I ended up being an Alistair. Trust me, you'll be wishing for the backspace key.

MAN TWO: I'm not trying to be difficult. I just think she should at least listen to what we have to say; what we want; hear where we are coming from...

WOMAN: (*Resigned.*) Okay, okay. So, tell me what you want. Talk to me.

MAN ONE: Really?

WOMAN: Sure. Tell me your deepest darkest desires.

MAN ONE: Well, for starters? I would just love to eat.

MAN TWO: Yeah, that would be great.

MAN ONE: I can't remember the last time I was in a scene where I was eating.

MAN TWO: They think it's impractical - too messy to stage. That's why we never gain any weight.

MAN ONE: Occasionally we have something to drink, but that brings up another problem.

MAN TWO: *(Nodding.)* Bathroom.

MAN ONE: Right! We never go to the bathroom.

WOMAN: Okay, I can see this isn't getting us anywhere.

MAN ONE: You asked.

MAN TWO: But she's right. It's not about us. It's about her.

MAN ONE/WOMAN: What do you mean?

MAN TWO: I mean, when you get right down to it - it's always about the playwright. It may or may not be intentional, and if they've done their job well it won't be obvious, but the playwright is always somewhere in the scene. A gesture or turn of phrase.

WOMAN: I never say - turn of phrase.

MAN TWO: And thus it's used to avoid having characters sound like you. Avoidance can be as much of a hallmark as inclusion.

WOMAN: Huh...you've changed.

MAN TWO: Have I?

WOMAN: Yes. You've suddenly become all professorial like. Almost like a strong male role model.

MAN TWO: Hmm. I think you're right. Is that good or bad?

WOMAN: I'm thinking...good. Yeah. Something I can work with.

WOMAN seems drawn to MAN TWO, MAN ONE feels left out.

MAN ONE: *(Vying for attention.)* It is an interesting thesis...The whole notion that the playwright is always lurking in the shadows.

WOMAN: *(Dismissive.)* Yeah.

MAN TWO: Well, it's true of all writers - not just playwrights.

WOMAN: *(More engaged.)* Interesting!

MAN ONE: I was thinking the same thing.

MAN TWO: Not surprising. It's kind of obvious.

WOMAN: (*Referring to MAN ONE.*) He does have a knack of always stating the obvious, but you're different.

MAN ONE/MAN TWO: How so?

WOMAN: It's like...you're getting to the essence of why we are here and...where we are.

MAN ONE: (*Sarcastically.*) And just where, exactly, are we?

WOMAN: In my head.

MAN TWO: (*Overlapping.*) In her head.

WOMAN: (*To MAN TWO, admiringly.*) You do understand.

MAN TWO: So, does this mean I can have a name?

WOMAN: Yes. I think I'll call you... (*Typing.*) Alistair.

MAN TWO: Alistair. I like that. Has a nice ring to it. Respectable.

BLACKOUT.

THE END