

SMELL OF SUCCESS

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Matt Thompson

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SYNOPSIS: A frustrated author is attempting to create his next best seller. There's only one problem: he has no lead character! With a looming deadline, the author frantically searches the far reaches of his creativity to develop the perfect character. As he types, his creations come to life, from a handsome lifeguard to a teenager on a cell phone! When all seems lost, our author invents a classic comedic solution.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 MAN, 1 EITHER)

AUTHOR (m/f).....Novelist who is struggling to write a lead character for his novel. His publisher is expecting a new book in two weeks!

CHARACTER (m).....Plays out every character that the Author creates.

AT RISE:

Blank stage. Two chairs. A small desk with a typewriter. Crumpled paper litters the stage.

NOTE: The AUTHOR should insert fresh paper into the typewriter with the start of each new "idea" and crumple it up when the AUTHOR becomes frustrated. A laptop computer may be used in place of the typewriter. The AUTHOR's frustration should then come out of backspacing, dramatically, on the laptop, to give the impression that s/he is erasing what has been written.

A frustrated AUTHOR sits in a chair, attempting to write a novel. Walking aimlessly about the stage is the CHARACTER, waiting for the AUTHOR to give him life. The AUTHOR never acknowledges the existence of the CHARACTER.

AUTHOR: Deadlines! Deadlines! I've got to finish this novel! I know this book is going to be a success! I can taste it! Now, let's see, who is this character? (Beaf.) Ah!

As the AUTHOR writes, the CHARACTER acts out exactly what is being "created."

AUTHOR: Wall Street! The hustle and bustle of the big business world! It's the middle of the night. Needing to outbid his competitor, he decides to break into their office and steal those leads. He approaches with caution.

CHARACTER moves slowly.

AUTHOR: He takes a moment to catch his breath. He slowly opens the door.

CHARACTER "opens the door."

CHARACTER: Creeeeeeeeek.

AUTHOR: He tiptoes into the room.

CHARACTER tiptoes.

AUTHOR: No! He jumps into the room.

CHARACTER jumps.

AUTHOR: No! He sashays into the room.

CHARACTER stops, not quite sure how to "sashay." He makes an attempt to do so.

AUTHOR: He stops. Uncertain of what might be waiting in the shadows. He stands there patiently . . . on one foot. No! His feet firmly set upon the ground. Suddenly a sound! He drops to the floor.

CHARACTER drops to the floor.

AUTHOR: He mills about the room, stealthy as a Gila monster.

CHARACTER walks on all fours like a Gila monster.

AUTHOR: The sound is gone. Quickly, he jumps to his feet.

CHARACTER jumps to his feet.

AUTHOR: He searches for hours, but nothing. In need of a break, he sits down on the floor. No, he sits on a chair. No, he stands up. No, he does sit down . . . on the floor, I mean the chair . . . and proceeds to pull out a stopwatch. No. He pulls out a cigar. No. He pulls out one of the Dead Sea Scrolls and starts reciting them.

CHARACTER: "A long time ago, there was good and evil . . ."

AUTHOR: In Latin.

CHARACTER: "Dominus maximus pater noster qui es in caelis . . .
wait a minute! (*Stops.*) You haven't established that I can speak
Latin, and what am I doing with the Dead Sea Scrolls?

The CHARACTER speaks, but the AUTHOR cannot hear him.

AUTHOR: (*Pulling the paper out from the typewriter and crumpling it
into a ball.*) Oh, this will never work!

CHARACTER: You're telling me.

AUTHOR: This character is completely underdeveloped.

CHARACTER: Look, pal, I'm your meal ticket. I'm your boat ride to
the bestseller list.

AUTHOR: I have a publisher that needs a novel in two weeks and
I've got nothing!

CHARACTER: I'm not a publisher; I'm your lead character. And right
now, I'm a *boring* lead character. Think!

AUTHOR: Alright, let's think! Who is this character? What is it that
people like to read about? (*Change.*) People want action,
adventure! They want exotic locations . . . of the past.

CHARACTER: Look, if you don't start adding some real dimension to
this character, I'll see to it that you have writer's block through the
end of time.

AUTHOR: End of time? Maybe I need to think outside the box.

CHARACTER: That's the ticket!

AUTHOR: Something totally unpredictable.

CHARACTER: Go for it!

AUTHOR: The savage prehistoric Neanderthal stood there at the
precipice of the blustery volcano . . . But before he can react, he is
"jerked" back into character. The giant Sasquatch-like creature
drags his knuckles across the ground.

CHARACTER: Hey, what's the big idea - -

*CHARACTER drags his knuckles across the ground while make a
growling sound.*

AUTHOR: His shoulders hunched forward.

CHARACTER hunches his shoulders.

AUTHOR: He pounds on his chest.

CHARACTER pounds on his chest.

AUTHOR: And lets out a huge roar.

CHARACTER lets out a huge roar!

AUTHOR: (*Ripping paper out from the typewriter.*) Oh . . . What am I doing? This is ridiculous! (*Change.*) I know. I've got it! A beach drama! Girl in distress! Our lead character is a lifeguard! Tall - -

CHARACTER: Yes!

AUTHOR: Handsome.

CHARACTER: Of course.

AUTHOR: Athletic.

CHARACTER: I bowl 280.

AUTHOR: Women adore him!

CHARACTER: Hey, there!

AUTHOR: And he's a mute.

CHARACTER: Mmmmmmm.

AUTHOR: Okay, no. He needs to speak.

CHARACTER: (*A gasp of breath.*) Ah!

AUTHOR: The chiseled lifeguard strikes a sculpted pose.

CHARACTER strikes a handsome pose.

AUTHOR: Suddenly there is a scream for help!

CHARACTER: (*As a girl.*) Help! Help!

AUTHOR: The lifeguard breaks for the open seas.

CHARACTER runs in place as if he is running into the ocean.

AUTHOR: In slow motion.

CHARACTER runs in place in slow motion.

AUTHOR: He enters the water.

CHARACTER puts one toe "into the water."

CHARACTER: Ohhh, it's cold!

AUTHOR: No. He dives into the vast unknown.

CHARACTER dives into the ocean.

AUTHOR: And begins to swim toward the barking cries for help!
While he swims, his beautiful teeth glisten as he smiles. He
says - -

CHARACTER: "Don't worry, darling!"

AUTHOR: He swims out thirty miles from shore to discover . . . It was
a seal lion. (*Stops, frustrated, tearing the piece of paper from the
typewriter.*) Oh, this will never work! What about something . . .
Romantic. Yeah! (*Change.*) The roses litter the dusty earth, as the
entire wooden stadium cheers him on. The sun blazes down on
the back of the dark ugly horned beast. In the center of the
frenzied sensation is our matador.

CHARACTER: Ole!

CHARACTER strikes a pose.

AUTHOR: His name is . . .

CHARACTER: (*Quickly.*) Fernando Ricardo las Sacapuntas papas
fritas de la Guacamole!

AUTHOR: He tips his sombrero to the crowd.

CHARACTER tips his imaginary hat.

AUTHOR: Guadalupe, his fiancée, watches from the audience. He winks.

CHARACTER winks.

AUTHOR: As the raging bull makes his way towards the flowing red cape, without fear, Fernando teases the vicious bull.

CHARACTER: Here, bully, bully! Your hooves are so cloven-like!

AUTHOR: (*Backspacing.*) Not tease. He antagonizes the creature verbally.

CHARACTER: (*With a New York accent.*) "You lookin' at me! Hey, Mr. Bull, are you lookin' at me?! You sure you ain't lookin' at me?!"

AUTHOR: (*Frustrated again.*) No! No! No! (*Quickly, closes his eyes, and meditates.*) Taste it. The success is there for the taking. Just taste the success. (*His eyes open quickly.*) I've got it! (*Change.*) One man struggles to believe in his abilities!

The CHARACTER pops up.

AUTHOR: A soldier fighting a no-win situation in an apocalyptic future.

The CHARACTER turns into a soldier.

AUTHOR: Guts and glory! He screams as he drives into battle.

CHARACTER: Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!

AUTHOR: He tells the enemy that he will never surrender.

CHARACTER: I'll never surrender!

AUTHOR: In Japanese.

CHARACTER: Akiramenai zo!!!

AUTHOR: He fights hard to the end.

Making his hand a gun, the CHARACTER shoots wildly.

CHARACTER: Take that! And that!

AUTHOR: Then, from out of nowhere, he is shot in the arm.

CHARACTER covers his arm.

CHARACTER: Ahhh!

AUTHOR: No, in the stomach!

CHARACTER covers his stomach.

CHARACTER: Uhhhh!

AUTHOR: In the eye!

CHARACTER covers his eye.

CHARACTER: AHHHHH!

AUTHOR: In both kneecaps!

CHARACTER drops to the floor.

CHARACTER: (Very simply.) Ow.

AUTHOR: (Pulling the paper from the typewriter.) Oh, this won't work either!

CHARACTER slowly recovers from the physical exertion.

AUTHOR: What am I going to do? Who is this character? (Change.)
He's a singer.

CHARACTER lets out a note.

CHARACTER: Ahhhhh!

AUTHOR: No! A pirate!

CHARACTER: (As a pirate.) Swab the deck, ye landlubber!

AUTHOR: No, a monkey!

CHARACTER acts like a monkey.

AUTHOR: A baseball player!

CHARACTER steps up to bat and takes a swing. Home run! He begins to run around the imaginary bases.

AUTHOR: A teenage girl on a cell phone.

CHARACTER: *(As a teenage girl.)* Like, I can't believe it! Are you kidding? Todd is sooooo cute!

AUTHOR: No, no, no!

AUTHOR drops his head as the CHARACTER drops from physical exhaustion.

AUTHOR: OHHHH! What am I doing?! I need something clever, something convincing, something classic. *(Change.)* Wait a minute. I can smell something. *(The AUTHOR types, very calmly, truly inspired, with confidence, Speaking with a film noir voice.)* Boston. 1942. Eugene T. Murphy was just your average American Joe, with a set of extraordinary taste buds. His tantalizing tongue propelled him to the monumental status of the city's most influential food critic. His hobby was tasting the difference between Roquefort and Danablu cheeses blindfolded. His palate was as sensitive as a pretty dame without any make-up. Every restaurant in town made him a celebrity. His bountiful buds were insured for 5,000 clams from *Lloyds* of London. Fifty-two years old, unmarried, no kids. Outside the glitz and glamour of being a food critic, his life was as still as the Saint Charles River on a hot summer day. That is, until Detective Jack Purvis walked through his door. The gumshoe knew that this night wasn't like any other. He had a feeling in the pit of his stomach, like Joe Louis had just given him a one-two in the ribs. He heard a desperate meow off in the windy night. Even the stray cats felt the danger coming, like a freight train with a hurricane tail wind. The private dick, walked right up to the fantastic food reviewing nasal nitwit and said - -

CHARACTER is now Jack Purvis.

CHARACTER: "You've got the best buds in Boston."

AUTHOR: With a cigarette dangling from his lips, the detective took the cancer-causing stick and threw it on the floor, stamping it out with his feet.

CHARACTER: "But your days as a fine food celebrity are over, pal."

AUTHOR: Eugene closed his mouth as the private detective's eyes widened to the size of saucers. With a right hook, he laid the middle-aged beanpole to the floor with a sock to the jaw.

CHARACTER "punches" the imaginary Eugene.

AUTHOR: The wiry man fell backwards behind the table as a plate of Roquefort blue cheese rattled with a shudder. The private dick just looked at the poor quivering pat of butter on the ground and said - -

CHARACTER: "That's for being careless."

AUTHOR: Eugene rubbed his jaw and looked up at the man decked out in a black fedora hat and trench coat. Private Detective Jack Purvis picked up the plate of blue cheese that Murphy was nibbling on and dumped it into the trashcan.

CHARACTER: "So long, lactose."

AUTHOR: Eugene looked up as if to ask, "What was that all about?"

CHARACTER: "I'm here about some chicken cacciatore down on Warren Street. You see, the restaurant is owned by the mob. And they didn't take too kindly to your negative review in the Boston Herald. Somebody wants you and your Five-G taste buds dead."

AUTHOR: Eugene the food critic, the darling of the Boston restaurant scene of 1939 was in trouble. He had given out poor reviews before, but none that ever put his life in peril. "You've got to help me," Eugene said, shaking like the lead singer in a salsa band.

CHARACTER: "I'll see what I can do."

AUTHOR: For years, Jack Purvis worked the small-time cases: cheating housewives, missing ponies, but now he'd stumbled onto one of the city most dangerous and high-profile cases. If he solved this one, he'd have enough dough to pay his rent for the month.

CHARACTER crosses as if to exit. He stops.

CHARACTER: "I've got enough of a lead to keep those beautiful taste buds of yours bound to your body for another fifty years. Don't worry, buddy, I'll be successful."

AUTHOR AND CHARACTER: "I can taste it."

CHARACTER winks and he exits as AUTHOR continues typing with joy.

THE END