

BUTTS ON SEATS

a one-act play

by NONA DWIBBLE

CHARACTERS: (3)

ACTOR #1, any age, male or female

ACTOR #2, any age, male or female

AUDIENCE MEMBER, any age, male

SETTING: An intimate table with a tablecloth, two chairs.
Later a curtained doorframe.

(The lights are dim)

ACTOR #1: (sexily) Have I ever told you how much . . . how much . . . how much
(now angrily) I hate you and want to kill your baby?!

ACTOR #2: What? You want to kill my baby?

ACTOR #1: Are you hard of hearing? How can you possibly not understand the
words "I want to kill your baby"?

ACTOR #2: I just didn't think you'd said that!

ACTOR #1: Well, I did. I hate you. I loathe you. I despise you. I – I . . .

ACTOR #2: Abominate me?

ACTOR #1: Thank you.

ACTOR #2: You're welcome.

ACTOR #1: That's why I'm leaving you. Your baby is mean and your vocabulary
is better than mine.

ACTOR #2: You're leaving because my vocabulary is better than yours?

ACTOR #1: Stop repeating my dialogue!

ACTOR # 2: Do you want to know what I think of you? What I've thought of you
for years?

ACTOR #1: Not really.

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ACTOR # 2: I'm going to tell you anyway. You're boring.

ACTOR #1: How can I being boring if I'm going to kill your baby?

ACTOR # 2: Monumentally boring.

ACTOR #1: It takes one to know one.

ACTOR #2: And do you know how boring you are? Totally, utterly predictable. I knew before you said it that you were going to say you were going to kill my baby.

ACTOR #1: You did not!

ACTOR #2: It's just the kind of extreme thing you'd say.

ACTOR #1: Then why do you hang around? You must *like* it.

ACTOR #2: Spare me your psychobabble. I hang around because I can't do any better than you. And that just fuels my self-disgust, of course, and so I stay. I suppose even you are worse than nothing at all for someone as worthless as me.

ACTOR #1: And do you know why I stay with you, or why I did for so long?

ACTOR # 2: I don't really care.

ACTOR #1: Because I'm weak. I was afraid to leave, afraid to let go even when what we had was dehumanizing and terrible. We called it a deep, lasting commitment, but it was just a lack of nerve, at least on my part.

ACTOR #2: If you don't stop, I'm going to say what I really think.

ACTOR #1: Go ahead. I dare you.

ACTOR #2: Okay, here goes. (noticing the audience) Who are those fucking people watching us?

ACTOR #1: (looking out) Those people in those seats?

ACTOR #2: Yes! Your exposition is as bad as mine!

ACTOR #1: Whatever!

ACTOR # 2: I think they've been eavesdropping on us.

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ACTOR #1: (to audience) Hey, we're having a private conversation here. What do you think you're doing?

ACTOR #2: Do we sit next to you and listen in? Who do you people think you are?!

ACTOR #1: (standing up) Hey, you! Stop staring at us. Goddamn Peeping Toms!

ACTOR #2: Exactly.

ACTOR #1: (sitting back down) Now where were we? . . . Hey, some of them are still listening.

ACTOR #2: If someone yelled at me like that, I'd at least put my eyes down. What's wrong with them?

ACTOR #1: (getting up again) I've had it! I'm coming out there, and I'm going to rip some ears off.

ACTOR #2: And not a minute too soon, either. Go get 'em!

(ACTOR #1 goes toward the audience, but suddenly is stopped near the edge of the stage)

ACTOR #2: What's wrong?

ACTOR #1: There's something here. It's stopping me.

ACTOR #2: What is it? A conflict between your psyche and your social interactions?

ACTOR #1: No, it's an invisible fourth wall. (Feels it)

ACTOR #2: How did it get there?

ACTOR #1: I have no idea.

ACTOR #2: Well, break it!

ACTOR #1: I'm trying to! (Bangs on it, tries harder) I can't do it!

ACTOR #2: You're so ineffectual. Here, let me do it. (Gets up, goes to the invisible wall, bangs, to no avail) God!

ACTOR #1: See, smartass!

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ACTOR #2: There must be an opening here somewhere. (Finds a place) Look! Here's something. (Sticks part of hand through)

ACTOR #1: Is that it? You're sure?

ACTOR #2: (struggling, gritting teeth) If I can just get my hand . . . through here! (Struggles, fails) Shit!

ACTOR #1: Your mime is so bad! (throwing hands up) Those Peeps are still eavesdropping on us!

ACTOR #2: Where were they raised, in a fucking barn?

ACTOR #1: They look middle class, but you'd never know if from the way they're acting.

ACTOR #2: Let's just sit for a while and not speak. Maybe they'll leave.

ACTOR #1: Rude bastards!

ACTOR #2: Don't say anything. They'll lose interest.

ACTOR #1: Jesus! Where do they get off?!

ACTOR #2: You're just encouraging them. Don't say anything. (Folds arms)

ACTOR #1: Okay, okay. (Folds arms)

(The two sit and stare at the audience with arms folded)

ACTOR #2: (after a good pause) I think they're about to go.

ACTOR #1: It's about time. . . . Now where were we?

ACTOR #2: Wait! Not yet.

ACTOR #1: (singling out a member of the audience) Is that guy still listening? You're really pissing me off, you know that!

ACTOR #2: Don't confront him directly!

ACTOR #1: He's looking at me! Why can't I look at him?!

ACTOR #2: Let's turn out backs. That'll work.

ACTOR #1: You think so?

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ACTOR #2: Move your chair. (Turns chair around, with the back to the audience)
(to #1) Come on!

ACTOR #1: All right, all right! (Turns chair around)

(Now both are sitting with their backs to the audience. Silence.)

ACTOR #1: I don't think this is working.

ACTOR #2: (partly turning to look) Isn't he gone yet?

ACTOR #1: He sees us looking! You're spoiling it!

ACTOR #2: I am not. You're always criticizing! What's wrong with you?

ACTOR #1: Shut up. I can tell that he's getting tired of us – though not quite yet.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Okay, I'm out of here! (Gets up) I don't like this kind of the-ay-ter.

ACTOR #1: (mockingly) Oh, he 'don't like this kind of the-ay-ter!' Sit down,
asshole!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: I thought you wanted me to leave.

ACTOR #2: Unfortunately, we need you. There is no here without you there.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: I hate audience-participation the-ay-ter!

ACTOR #2: Oh, now he thinks he's too good to interact with us.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: I didn't say that. I just can't stand it when characters start noticing
they're in a play; they're supposed to pretend they're *not* in a play!
And then they start running through the audience calling to each other
or sitting on our laps and stroking our heads and crap like that!

ACTOR #2: You don't have to worry. I'd never want to sit on your lap.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Or you start arguing with us, like you just did. Or trying to make us
feel bad because we don't give you a check for pandas with
Parkinson's or whatever, or to keep your theater going. I *really* hate
that!

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ACTOR #2: How about when we throw things at you? How do you like that?
(Throws something at AUDIENCE MEMBER, who dodges it)

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Hey!

ACTOR #1: Or how about when we spit on you (over-articulating) because our
terrific diction is so precise!

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: It's gross! The Board of Health should close you down!

ACTOR #1: He dreads our spit!

ACTOR #2: But we will not quit!

BOTH: Shall we give him a fit? (They advance toward AUDIENCE MEMBER as if
to spit)

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Don't you dare! (Moves away) Don't you dare!

ACTOR #1: Maybe later.

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Maybe never!

ACTOR #2: We're not doing this because we *want* to, you know.

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Oh?

ACTOR #1: The playwright makes us do it.

ACTOR #2: That's right. We're just puppets. He makes us say these hateful lines.

ACTOR #1: And if he's lucky, we say them exactly the way he wrote them.

ACTOR #2: (to #1) Really? We're supposed to do that?

ACTOR #1: He makes us say lots of things we don't even believe.

ACTOR #2: That is so true.

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MEMBER: Now you want me to feel sorry for you?

ACTOR #2: Not sorry. Just understand us.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: If you don't like what you have to say or do, why don't you just walk off?

ACTOR #2: Easy for you to say.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: C'mon, just walk out of here.

ACTOR #1: You know what? I like that. I'm leaving. If he can leave, we can leave.

ACTOR #2: You sure it's okay?

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: You have nothing to lose but your chains. Take a step and then another . . . (Demonstrates)

ACTOR #1: Like this? (Takes a step)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: See how easy it is.

ACTOR #1: We're not off yet.

(The two actors stop at the edge of the stage)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: What's the matter?

ACTOR #2: We can't move any further. And which way? We need stage directions.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Sure you can! Show some gumption!

ACTOR #1: We've got gumption! Don't be so judgmental! You can leave. We can't.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Try it!

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ACTOR #2: Okay, damn it, here I go. (Tries to walk off but can't)

ACTOR #1: What's wrong now?

ACTOR #2: (Points to throat)

ACTOR #1: Something's wrong with your throat. I gather as much. But what is it?

ACTOR #2: (Points overhead, excited)

ACTOR #1: God?

ACTOR #2: Same thing. The playwright.

BOTH: (dismissively) Yeah, right!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: So the playwright has stopped your words?

ACTOR #2: (Nods vigorously)

ACTOR #1: Oh, this is ridiculous. The playwright's not even around here. . . .
The way it should be all the time!

ACTOR #2: (with reverence) He's everywhere!

ACTOR #1: Like hell he is. He just has you thinking that. That's how he controls
you.

ACTOR #2: Maybe so. Let me check the other side of the stage. (Goes toward it)
Yes, yes, yes, I see that this is the way to free — (Chokes, points to
throat)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Not you too!

(ACTOR #1 and ACTOR #2 stomp around, unable to talk, pointing to their
throats, gasping)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: You guys are pathetic. I'm out! Now! (Suddenly chokes, holds throat)

ACTOR #1: (ironic and with a croak) Something wrong?

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AUDIENCE

MEMBER: He's got *me* now! What to I do?

ACTOR #1: (with a croak) Have some gumption!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: All right, enough of this crap. This is just "the-ay-ter"!

ACTOR #1: (toward the ceiling) We get it, author!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: I don't even like the-ay-ter. I just came with my date. And she left already.

ACTOR #2: Oh, so we're just something between you and a good fuck. Is that it?

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Yeah, like, sort of. What do *you* think you're for?

ACTOR #2: Truth, beauty, art, understanding of life.

ACTOR #1: Plus children earn three times as much income as adults when they are exposed early to the arts.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Oh, bullshit! You just like people to watch you prancing around, despite what you said earlier about me eavesdropping. And the playwright is just trying to be clever so that people will give him compliments afterwards.

ACTOR #2: So cynical. That's all we are to you?

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: The-ay-ter isn't about me. It's about you. It's about ego. E . . . G . . . O. Which is the largest organ in the human body – and the last to go.

ACTOR #1: You didn't think that up. The playwright did.

ACTOR #2: (about AUDIENCE MEMBER) True, he wouldn't say that.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: But I said it, didn't I? Give me a little credit. Just because I mispronounce "theater" it doesn't mean I'm totally stupid. Okay?!

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ACTOR #1: So now you want to take a bow?

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Why not? Why should you get all the attention? And I just have to sit there and “appreciate” you. (Takes a bow) Well, there!

ACTOR #1: (to the ceiling) Why is he suddenly getting the best lines?

ACTOR #2: And it’s a contradiction! Earlier he said he didn’t like audience-participation theater and now you have him wanting to take bows.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: People change their minds. Besides, I sort of like being up here. (Takes another bow)

ACTOR #1: But we can’t have the audience taking the bows! It would . . . it would destroy the balance of Nature. It’s an unspoken contract. We act. You react.

ACTOR #2: We declaim; we strike poses. Your mouths drop open in amazement and wonder.

ACTOR #1: We thespianize. You oo and ah – and don’t run to the bathroom.

ACTOR #2: We glitter! You roar!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: You stink! We snore!

ACTOR #2: This is not a play in verse!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: So you don’t like it when one of us gets the spotlight, even for a minute, except when we’re being humiliated and badgered, to say nothing of overcharged. The least I’m entitled to is a goddamned bow.

ACTOR #1: But you didn’t even rehearse! You can’t just waltz in here and take over.

ACTOR #2: Do you have even a glimmer how boring rehearsals are? We have to say these lines over and over and over for weeks and weeks, and even have to memorize them. Especially *these* lines. And then we get notes from the director about everything. Your timing was off, that cross in the blocking was wrong!

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ACTOR #1: And after we go through all that, you think you're going to come in here and take over our play?! No fucking way is that going to happen!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: You have to resort to dirty words when you have nothing really valuable to say.

ACTOR #1: Oh, fuck you!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Now you've said that word two lines in a row.

ACTOR #1: What word? "Fuck"?

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: What a poverty of imagination! Once maybe, three times you're desperate. Or the playwright is.

ACTOR #1: (to ceiling) Writer, this guy would not say that. It makes him sound like a fussy critic.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Every audience is a critic, whether you like it or not.

ACTOR #2: I think the writer just wants us to keep noticing him. Hence the constant references to himself and his almighty powers.

ACTOR #1: Wait. Let's not get off the topic. (to AUDIENCE MEMBER) You have an opinion, sure, but it evaporates with the breath it takes to say it. A written review is forever.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Just like your performance.

ACTOR #1: He's too self-aware.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: However long it lasts, this critic is not enjoying this performance. I don't like my part. I don't like your parts. I don't like the parts that are coming up. So I'm done. Farewell, so long, *auf wiedersehen*. Do you need it in any other language? In a nutshell, I'd rather watch spit dry on a sidewalk.

ACTOR #1: What is this thing with spit?

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ACTOR #2: So now we're not interesting enough. I thought we were at least annoying.

ACTOR #2: There's a lot to be said for annoying theater. At least you remember it.

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Believe me, I won't remember this.

ACTOR #2: Yes, you will!

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Sorry, I won't.

ACTOR #2: Okay, let's see what we can do to change that. Sit down.

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Not gonna happen.

ACTOR #2: You will. Put that butt on that seat!

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Make me.

ACTOR #1: Did you hear about the funny thing that happened to me on the way to the the-ay-ter?

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: Don't try to distract me. I've got my eye on both of you. And I don't see my butt on that seat! Do you?

ACTOR #2: (to #1) He's a tough audience.

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: I got that! And do you see me laughing?

ACTOR #1: (trying a different ploy) Did you see what happened over there?
Behind that curtain?

(Suddenly ACTOR #2 produces a curtained doorframe, possibly on wheels)

ACTOR #2: This one.

AUDIENCE
MEMBER: No. And I don't want to. I'm just going to back out of here, and that'll be the last we'll ever see of each other.

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ACTOR #1: It was really terrible. Just awful.

ACTOR #2: Yeah. (Touches the doorframe)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: (after a moment) What was it?

ACTOR #1: Oh, you wouldn't want to know. Not you. And you're leaving besides.

ACTOR #2: Right. . . . Although it was one of the worst things I have ever seen in my life.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: What? . . . *What?*

ACTOR #2: Not your cup of tea.

ACTOR #1: You wouldn't be interested.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: That's right. I'm not!

ACTOR #2: We understand. But it was . . . (Shakes head sadly)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Tell me!

ACTOR #2: It's just "the-ay-ter."

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: For God's sake, tell me what it is!

ACTOR #1: Whatever it was, this thing that happened behind this curtain, (lifting it just a little as a tease) will simply have to wait for somebody else, I suppose. (Puts the curtain back down)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Goddamn it! What is it?

ACTOR #1: If you really want to see it, I'm afraid there is nothing we can do . . .

ACTOR #2: Without a surcharge.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: A surcharge?

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ACTOR #1: Are *you* deaf too? Yes, more money.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: And exactly what's behind there?

ACTOR #1: Laughs, tears, swordfights, derring-do, pageantry, fun!

ACTOR #2: Romance, lust, pretty girls, gorillas!

ACTOR #1: The pastoral-historical!

ACTOR #2: The tragical-frothical!

ACTOR #1: Epic and magical!

ACTOR #2: And gladiatorial!

ACTOR #1: Intimate and searing!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Any problem plays? I don't care for those.

BOTH ACTORS: We don't either!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Nothing depressing, is there?

ACTOR #1: Wouldn't dream of it.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: But a little bit scary? You won't pick me out again and make me the butt of your jokes just because I'm from the audience, will you?

BOTH ACTORS: Never!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: You won't try to dress me up like an actual butt and put me on a seat over there, will you? A butt on a seat.

ACTOR #2: Of course not.

ACTOR #1: (to #1, quietly) That's *good*, though.

ACTOR #2: But you don't want to go behind this curtain, so why are we even discussing it?

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ACTOR #1: True.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: (after a beat) How much is it again?

ACTOR #2: Tell you what. For you, just this time, it's free.

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Free?

ACTOR #1: Just for you, my friend. (Slips behind the curtain and out of sight)

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Oh, what have I got to lose? (Starts to go, then stops) But should I or shouldn't I?

ACTOR #2: (gritting his teeth, sotto voce) Just go in, for God's sake!

ACTOR #1: (on the other side of the curtain) Oh, my word! Wow!

AUDIENCE

MEMBER: Oh, hell, I got to see this.

ACTOR #2: Be our guest. (Pulls aside the curtain)

(AUDIENCE MEMBER goes behind the curtain, then out of sight)

ACTOR #2: (to audience) Want to come? It's old; it's new. We put it on just for you! What is it? you ask. An unsuspecting member of the audience is taken behind a curtain and . . . well, you'll just have to see for yourself, won't you? Come on. Come on! Yes, there is a charge, but wouldn't it be worth it to see that guy get his? We're calling it Snuff The-ay-ter. You'll love it, trust me! It has suspense, laughs . . . *swords!*

(Takes out a sword and goes behind the curtain)

BLACKOUT