

A CELEBRITY STALKING

— a one-act play

CHARACTERS:

DALE, male or female, gracious, any age, over fifty might be better
THE WRITER, male or female, any age, eccentric, with a
briefcase full of things
VOICE, flight attendant, male or female

SETTING: Two seats on an airplane. Three chairs next to each other will do just fine

(At rise, DALE, neatly dressed, is sitting in the widow seat, reading a magazine. After a few moments, THE WRITER arrives, carrying a briefcase, a bit rumpled-looking.)

WRITER (indicating the aisle seat) I would guess this would be me.

DALE (Smiles pleasantly, nods.)

WRITER I hope nobody sits in this middle seat, don't you?

DALE (Smiles, nods.)

WRITER More room for our things. (Puts briefcase in the middle seat.) They call this first class? (Looks back.) But it doesn't look too crowded today. Great! (Sits more comfortably, notices the seatbelt.) Are they still using these old things? (Looks back for the flight attendant.) Just between you and me and the bedpost, these things are more dangerous than they are good. Have you heard about hundreds of people in plane crashes who would have survived if they had been able to get out of their seatbelts once they'd crashed! *If!* But, no, they were trapped in their seats by their seatbelts and consumed, utterly consumed, by flames as they screamed and screamed. . . . Don't hear much about that, do you now!? They don't put that in the ads, do they?!

DALE No, I imagine not.

WRITER So I never use a seatbelt. When the flight attendant comes by, I'll fake it. They never know the difference.

DALE Uh . . . (Doesn't quite know what to say.)

WRITER So don't squeal on me, okay? Oh, I'm sorry. You're trying to read.

DALE A little bit. (Waves the magazine.)

WRITER (Pause, then.) I hate people who just jabber on and on when they're on airplanes.

DALE Yes.

WRITER . . . So thoughtless.

DALE Yes.

WRITER I suppose you recognize me, don't you? It's becoming quite a burden.

(DALE looks at THE WRITER to see if the person looks familiar.)

DALE (not having a clue) Are you, uh . . . ?

WRITER (beaming) You've got it! I'm Madison Horse. The writer.

DALE (still not recognizing the writer but playing along) Oh, the writer! Madison Horse.

WRITER It's a pen name. Now don't start bugging me about my real name, okay? And I do, do hope you won't ask for my autograph. It is becoming so hard to write it anymore. I get so many requests, I now have carpal tunnel! (Waves affected fingers at DALE.)

DALE (sincerely) How terrible for you.

WRITER Thank you for caring. Perhaps I can muster up one more autograph for you. (Starts searching.) I have a quill in my briefcase somewhere. (Can't find it.) Where is a damned quill when you need one?!

DALE (being nice) Oh, it can wait.

WRITER You don't mind waiting?

DALE (being polite) Maybe at the end of the trip.

WRITER (Stops searching.) Oh, thank you, thank you. And my fingers thank you too! (Waves the carpal tunnel syndrome fingers at DALE again.) Besides, all the autographs, I've just been writing and writing and writing like a mad, mad person. Can't seem to stop myself. Hyper, hyper, hyper! (Pause.) You can't tell, *can* you?

DALE (being nice) Not that much.

WRITER I'm on my way to receive an award. Oh, I shouldn't have told!

DALE Really?

WRITER I don't tell just everybody, but it's a very prestigious award.

DALE Really?

WRITER If you promise not to tell anybody you met me, I'll tell you what it is.

DALE That's a deal.

WRITER It's the Nobel Prize.

DALE You won the Nobel Prize?

WRITER (looking around) Shhh! I don't want it to get out.

DALE Won't it be in the newspapers?

WRITER Oh, I suppose! What's a poor writer to do?!

DALE So you're making a connecting flight to Stockholm then?

WRITER Oh, it's not *that* Nobel Prize.

DALE There's another one?

WRITER It's even better.

DALE Better than the Nobel Prize?

WRITER They spread that one around from country to country too much. It's a little tainted.

DALE And which Nobel Prize did you win, if you don't mind telling me?

WRITER (reaching in the briefcase) Here's my resume. (Drags out a messy piece of paper, Points.) There at the top there. (trying to get it back) Don't look!

DALE (reading anyway) "The City Commission of Nobel, Kansas, is proud to award you —"

WRITER (taking over) "— Our Prize as Third Place Runner-up in the second annual Nobel Monologue Fringe Festival."

DALE I see you know it by heart.

WRITER Would you like that copy to keep?

DALE (being gracious) Why, thank you. (Keeps it.)

WRITER I have more. (Taps the briefcase.) Requests, requests, I can barely keep up!

DALE You must be very proud.

WRITER I hate to say it, but I am. Damn it, I am proud! Excuse my language, but when you win the Nobel Prize why should you have to be modest about it?

DALE Exactly. (Goes back to the magazine.)

WRITER Is this thing ever going to take off? (Looks back.)

DALE There was an announcement before you got on. A small leak they're fixing.

WRITER Oh, great! The Nobel Prize Ceremony is at five today. I hope I don't miss it.

DALE At five?

WRITER They go to bed early in that part of Kansas.

DALE I know I shouldn't ask, but what was your prize-winning monologue about?

WRITER Oh, it doesn't matter now, I guess, if I let it out of the bag. It's to be published in a pamphlet by the city of Nobel in a few months, and then just *everybody* will know about it anyway. Just as soon as they get incorporated.

DALE The city's not incorporated?

WRITER It's a hamlet. No, I stand corrected. They're going to be incorporated *as* a hamlet.

DALE . . . Must be very charming.

WRITER I've never been there, but they say they have the biggest mosquitoes in the world.

DALE Amazing.

WRITER The size of sparrows. They have a collection of mounted ones right off Highway 16. People come from all over the world to see it. The Mosquito Museum.

DALE A collection of dead mosquitoes . . . my . . .

WRITER And there's an all-you-can-eat right next door to it. But there's every likelihood that the Monologue Fringe Festival will outstrip it in popularity by this time next year. When — I might add — I hope to pick up my *second* Nobel!

DALE Not too many people can claim to have two Nobel Prizes. Your family no doubt must be very proud of you.

WRITER I'm sure they would be, but I have no family.

DALE Well, your friends then.

WRITER I have no friends.

DALE (at a loss for words) Oh.

WRITER I have no time for things like that. I spend all my time writing. (Pats briefcase.)

DALE You're really quite something.

WRITER Thank you. What can I say? The gods send their gifts to some, and all the recipient can do is to try to be grateful. (suddenly) Oh, my god!

DALE What is it?

WRITER I haven't told you what my prize-winning monologue is about, have I?

DALE Indeed you haven't!

WRITER It's the heartfelt cry of a lonely soul growing up in a small town in Kansas. As a dwarf.

DALE Did you say *dwarf*?

WRITER I grew up as a dwarf. The preferred term now of course is "little people," but I think that diminishes dwarves, don't you? It wasn't in Kansas, though. It was in Nebraska. I changed it to Kansas — because of the rules of the contest. It's only open to Kansans.

DALE How creative of you.

WRITER I've had to learn. It wasn't easy, growing up *dwarfish*. The other kids didn't understand.

DALE I'll bet. . . . Do you mind if I say that you don't look that little?

WRITER Oh, I outgrew it.

DALE How fortunate.

WRITER But the pain still lingers.

DALE It must.

WRITER Sometimes I have nightmares.

DALE How awful.

WRITER Still, it makes me creative!

DALE I've heard that happens. Well, it's been nice talking to you. (Reads magazine.)

WRITER (sailing right along) I just happen to have a manuscript in my briefcase. Would you like to read it? It's terrific.

DALE The winning monologue?

WRITER Better than that! A new novel. (Starts to retrieve it from the briefcase.) It's not finished, but perhaps you can tell me the parts you like best. (Hands huge manuscript to the other.)

DALE (apprehensive) How long is it exactly?

WRITER If you start right now, you can probably finish it. Are you a fast reader?

DALE Not particularly.

WRITER It's only 465 pages, so far. If you really like it, I can send you the rest.

DALE Why, thank you.

WRITER Or you can access it from one of my links online. I'll give you my code.

DALE Aren't you thoughtful!

WRITER You can access the Internet from an airplane now. I'll start down-loading the rest of the novel for you. Start reading! (Bangs on armrest for flight attendant.)

DALE I really don't know that I'll have enough time to finish it. (Tries to hand the manuscript back.)

WRITER Then read as much as you can. (Looks around.) Where is that flight attendant? Or should I say flighty attendant! The service around here s-u-c-k-s. Pardon my *Francoise*.

DALE And I forgot my glasses. I can actually barely see this magazine. I've just been pretending to read it.

WRITER You should have that surgery on your eyes — you know the one. Then you'd be able to read my book.

DALE My loss, I guess!

WRITER I did buy a special surgery kit online. It's in here somewhere. (Goes to the briefcase again) (Searches.) Where *is* that? It's put out by this doctor who believes there are too many legal requirements. He's providing tools so that the whole world can do eye surgery themselves. Isn't that a wonderful idea? (Pulling out the tool kit.) Ah, here it is! Lean back. (Points.) (Opens the tool kit.) Oh, here's my quill! (Pulls it out.)

DALE You want to operate on my eyes? *Here?*

WRITER It's very steady here. I'll be finished before we take off. (Searches through the tool kit.) You just go zit-zit-zit! And you're done! It even comes with instructions! Somewhere in here. (Searches more.) Where *are* those? It's amazing what it will do for your sight! They're here somewhere.

DALE I think I'll take a rain check on that.

WRITER (perturbed) You don't want to read my novel? You're just sitting here.

DALE Oh, it's not that. It's just that I'm not feeling all that well at the moment.

WRITER That's why you should read my novel. It's very uplifting. I wrote it to be read on an airplane. (Gives up on searching.) I thought those directions were right here. But never mind! I think I remember them!

DALE Why don't we hold off for a while, until I feel better. (Feels chest.)

WRITER (with the tool kit) Sure you don't want the eye surgery before we take off?
You never know, it might be bumpy up there, making it harder later.

DALE Not right now, thanks.

WRITER How about if I read it to you?

DALE The whole novel?

WRITER How much you want bet that you'll beg me *not* to stop once I start? I have an
excellent reading voice.

DALE Perhaps you could record it on a CD and send it to me.

WRITER Now there's an idea!

DALE Excuse me, I need to get up. (Stands.)

WRITER Let me check for you. (Looks.) They all say occupied.

DALE That's okay. I'll stand outside until one becomes available.

WRITER I can watch for you. I have excellent vision.

DALE I'm sure you do, but I really need some air. And . . . and . . . (Feels chest.)
I think I ate something that disagreed with me.

WRITER I have some Mylanta in here. (Pats the briefcase.) I get gas myself. I sit so
much. Lots of writers have gas. The real writers, I mean. Just full of gas – like a
plane!

DALE I really need to get out!

WRITER Do you want to take my novel with you to the restroom?

DALE It's too cramped!

WRITER But you can get a good head start. Take just twenty pages with you. (Offers some
pages.)

DALE No, please! Let me out. Let me out!

(Before s/he can leave, DALE collapses back into the seat.)

WRITER Feeling better, huh? I knew it would pass.

(DALE's head suddenly falls forward. Doesn't move.)

(THE WRITER doesn't notice that DALE is dead.)

VOICE Ladies and gentlemen, we're very sorry for the delay. But the captain informs us that we should be taking off very shortly. Please check to see that your tray tables are in their locked and upright positions. And that your seatbelts are securely fastened.

WRITER (whispering to DALE) Yeah, like mine are!

VOICE The crew has managed to fix the small leak, and we should be taxiing onto the runway and into take-off position any time now. Please sit back and relax. We will be serving a complimentary cocktail or other beverage just as soon as we are airborne. Thank you.

WRITER That's pre-recorded! They always sound pre-recorded even when they're live. They think we don't notice!

(There is no response from DALE, who remains dead. However, THE WRITER does not notice.)

WRITER I wonder if I could get them to pre-record my novel and have it broadcast over the intercom system here. Why didn't I think of that before?! (to DALE) Don't you think that's a great idea? (not waiting for a reply) With the Nobel Prize in my possession now, they'll want this novel for sure. But I'll start them out slow, with just my Fringe monologue. Then I'll follow up with a winning chapter from the novel. It'll be like in the old days, when Oscar Dickens and writers like that used to write a chapter a month, and then a small lad would pick it up and run it to the printers. For the magazine that was carrying it. Only we'll bring it all up to date! Broadcast over the public address system. Or through headsets! People will be flying this airline just to hear the latest installment on Madison Horse's work! 'I'm sorry, madame, we're all booked on the flights that are playing Madison Horse's latest. But you could buy it in a cassette or a mini-disk and try to sneak it onboard some other airline, madame.'" I must write that idea down! (Gets the briefcase.) Yes! Instead of a movie, they'll have my book. All my books! On all the flights on all the airlines across the globe! Yes!

VOICE Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to depart. Thank you for your patience. Will the flight attendants please take their positions for take-off.

WRITER It's about time! (to DALE) God, you're patient! (Looks over.) By the way, what do *you* do for a living? (No response.) Oh, you're one of those, huh? Fall right off to sleep just as soon as we hit the runway. Me, I can never sleep on a plane. Get much too nervous. Now I may not seem it, but I am! Just don't like flying! (Plane starts to move. The actors can mime it.) As long as I live, I don't think I'll ever get used to flying! But you, there you are, sleeping like a baby! God, I envy you! . . . You know what, I have a short story with me that's going to knock you over. It's only forty-two pages. It's in here somewhere. You're going to love it! (Starts searching in briefcase.) It'll keep you awake, you wait and see!

BLACKOUT