

***MEAN ENOUGH FOR YA?***

A Play

CHARACTERS: (6)

The Playwright, white male, any age

The Dramaturg, male or female, any age

Board Member #1, male or female, any age

Board Member #2, male or female, any age

Bad Actor, male, any age

Mother, female, old enough to be the Playwright's mom

SET: No set required. Add minimal props and accessories as needed

LIGHTS UP

(A man is sitting in a chair with either a real or a make-believe computer before him. He is typing and laughing at what he types.)

(His cell phone rings.)

PLAYWRIGHT: Damn. (Answers the phone) Speaking. (Listens) It is. I don't want any. (Listens) Yes. (Listens) Playwright. Yes, I entered your contest. Why, did I forget to pay the entrance fee? (Listens) Oh, you got it. (Listens) And my play as well. Did I win? (Listens) I didn't. You're just calling to notify me that I'm not eligible. Well, thank you! (Listens) No, I read the contest rules. (Listens) Yes, I realized that the contest is for women of color only. (Listens) No, I'm not a woman of color. (Listens) I entered anyway because I don't think you should have restrictions about color. Or gender. (Listens) I really don't want to argue about it. (Listens) No, I don't think they're under-represented. *I'm* under-represented! (Listens) Hello? You call me and then hang up? (Turns off his his phone. Growls.) *Grrr!*

(The Playwright goes back to typing. He laughs at something he has typed.)

(His cell phone rings again)

PLAYWRIGHT: (answering) I apologize for not being a woman of color! (Listens) Oh, you didn't just call? Why *did* you call? (Listens) Did I win? (Listens) Who did win? (Listens) Well, I'm sure they will have a highly successful play festival. Just sorry that I'm not under twenty-one and dyslexic. (Listens) And *Tibetan!* (Listens) No, I wasn't being sarcastic. I sympathize with your goal of being

(cont'd.)

'inclusive.' How could you not be 'inclusive' in being so 'exclusive.' I happen to be dyslexic actually! But I am over twenty-one. By thirteen seconds! And I'm only one-quarter Tibetan! And, yes, I am being sarcastic. (Hangs up)

(He types some more. Loves it.)

(His phone rings a third time, answers it)

PLAYWRIGHT: Yeah? (Listens, rolls eyes at the long explanation) So you're saying I won the contest? (Listens) I *didn't* win the contest. But you want me to donate to your theater company!? (Listens) No, I'm afraid my funds are limited. But I wish you well in your fund-raising efforts! (Wants to hang up) (Listens) And what is that one thing more? (Listens) Read new scripts for you? Why's that? Did your last play reader quit? (Listens) (chagrined) Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Self-immolation? Well, that's dreadful. (Listens) And he lit submitted scripts to do it? That's even dreadfuler – more dreadful. Just awful. And what made you think of me? (Listens) You loved my dialogue. *And* you noticed that I had been a script reader before. (Listens) That's very flattering, and I thank you, but the last time I was a script reader, I committed suicide myself. (Listens) Yeah, I'm kidding. (Listens) Just out of curiosity, are there any parameters on the kinds of scripts your company is looking for? (Listens) Only plays about the Terrible Immigrant Experience by immigrant playwrights. I see. (Listens) Yes, I was in the Peace Corps in Honduras. (Listens) You were hoping my experience there would make me a natural for reading scripts for your contest. But I myself am not eligible to enter your contest? (Listens) Yes, it's very clear. (Listens) Sorry, I'd rather be water-boarded. (Listens) Yes, that's a no. (Hangs up) (He starts to type again but stops immediately. He searches for the last number on his phone finds it, then re-dials)

PLAYWRIGHT: (when someone answers) Yes, you just called me. You know what. I think I'd like to read scripts for you after all. (Listens) I think the Terrible Immigrant Experience by terrible immigrant playwrights is a theme I can get behind. (Listens) Oh, the playwrights don't have to be terrible. Just have terrible experiences. Well, I can start reading for you in about a week or two. (Listens) Sure, I can read the scripts as attachments. Not a problem. (Listens) Only ten pages? Sure, I promise to read at least ten pages of each and every script. You have my e-mail address, correct? (Listens) Perfect. Wait a week and send me them Terrible scripts! (Listens) No, it will be a pleasure working with you and your company! (Listens) Very good. Bye bye. (Hangs up)

(Rubs his hands together like a villain.)

PLAYWRIGHT: (revising his script page) Okay, you want to play games with your entry rules. Let's play games. I love reading scripts! I love recommending scripts, especially *my* script! (as he types the new title of his play) "The Terrible Truth" by Hermione – no, too British! By Kaneesha Jefferson. No – Kaneesha . . . Molina . . . hyphen . . . Wong . . . And a Tibetan surname? (typing, saying) "The Terrible Truth" by Kaneesha Molina-Wong . . . Dalai Lama! . . . Plus Owuku! For good measure. Now there's a contest winner if I ever heard one!

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP

(PLAYWRIGHT enters)

DRAMATURG: (entering) Mr. Carter?

PLAYWRIGHT: That's me!

(They shake hands)

DRAMATURG: Hi! I'm Chris, the Dramaturg here. So great to meet you! So glad you could come in to discuss the problem.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, I just happened to be coming downtown anyway. (Winks at the audience)

DRAMATURG: Great! As I said on the phone, it's about this script we love. You loved.

(Shows the script)

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm glad you liked it too. Something off?

DRAMATURG: No, it's perfect for our "Terrible Truth" festival. We definitely want to include it.

PLAYWRIGHT: Good! I thought it might be. . . . *But?* There's always a 'but.'

4

DRAMATURG: We haven't been able to reach the playwright. She gave no mailing address.

PLAYWRIGHT: Maybe she's just shy. (Looks at the audience)

DRAMATURG: We very much want to work shop the script with (looking at the script's front page) Miss Molina-Wong-Dalai-Lama-Owuku. What a breadth of experience she must have!

PLAYWRIGHT: I think you should just go ahead and do it.

DRAMATURG: Really?

PLAYWRIGHT: I've known many a playwright who simply wanted the script put on but didn't want to go through all the rest of it. Rehearsals and so on.

DRAMATURG: There are a few things we'd like to talk to her about.

PLAYWRIGHT: Ah, there's the *but*! Like what?

DRAMATURG: Oh, a few things.

PLAYWRIGHT: Nothing major?

DRAMATURG: A word here and there.

PLAYWRIGHT: Go ahead and change them. I'm sure it'll be all right.

DRAMATURG: We always want to honor the text! Can you possibly get in touch with the playwright? Maybe you could run the changes by her.

PLAYWRIGHT: (looking at the audience) I can try.

DRAMATURG: Have you ever talked to her?

PLAYWRIGHT: (calculating his answer) Have I ever talked with her? Ah, I think so.

DRAMATURG: You don't remember?

PLAYWRIGHT: She was very shy. Very! And we had a bad connection.

5

DRAMATURG: Do you still have her number?

PLAYWRIGHT: Her telephone number?

DRAMATURG: Or a text?

PLAYWRIGHT: I might have a text number. But nothing else.

DRAMATURG: I'd really like to run some things by her. We never want to violate the playwright's own words.

PLAYWRIGHT: I remembering her saying that if there were any small changes that needed to be changed she would be completely comfortable with that. Small ones.

DRAMATURG: She sounds very reasonable.

PLAYWRIGHT: She is. Sweet as can be.

DRAMATURG: Could I have her text number?

PLAYWRIGHT: No!

DRAMATURG: No?

PLAYWRIGHT: I wouldn't want to disturb her privacy. I believe the poor woman takes care of her elderly mother. She's very busy.

DRAMATURG: And she works too?

PLAYWRIGHT: I believe she does. And she also takes care of an elderly . . . ferret.

DRAMATURG: She sounds amazing.

PLAYWRIGHT: She is. Did I mention that she's blind?

DRAMATURG: It must be quite difficult handling all that.

PLAYWRIGHT: And yet she never complains.

DRAMATURG: That makes me feel even prouder that we have selected her script.

PLAYWRIGHT: Me too. I'm just so glad I have played a small part in bringing her work to the theater world.

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

(Enter Playwright)

PLAYWRIGHT: Anybody here?

DRAMATURG: You're back!

PLAYWRIGHT: I am!

DRAMATURG: And?

PLAYWRIGHT: And it just so happens I ran into our favorite playwright on the street.

DRAMATURG: Wonderful! . . . How fortunate. Is she coming in? I'd love to meet her. I just re-read her script. I think it's fantastic. So you have her number now?

PLAYWRIGHT: I asked her, but I'm afraid she can't be in touch.

DRAMATURG: (disappointed) Oh?!

PLAYWRIGHT: She's just too busy. Her elderly father, who she looks after, has come down with osteo-arthritis, in both hips.

DRAMATURG: I thought it was an elderly mother.

PLAYWRIGHT: Did I say father? Of course I meant mother. So hard to tell the difference when they get that elderly.

DRAMATURG: So this elderly parent is having trouble walking?

PLAYWRIGHT: Practically immobile.

DRAMATURG: And then there's an elderly ferret as well?

7

PLAYWRIGHT: Absolutely. And that ferret has a touch of Alzheimer's and bit our friend on the knuckle of her her writing hand. She writes everything in long-hand first.

DRAMATURG: Sounds like she's having a very bad patch in her life.

PLAYWRIGHT: She is, she is. However!

DRAMATURG: Yes?

PLAYWRIGHT: She has officially designated me as her surrogate.

DRAMATURG: Really?

PLAYWRIGHT: Indeed! In fact, she wants me to act as her direct emissary. Any alterations in the script you can run by me. I assured her – as she was very concerned – that you want to honor her text and want only teeny, tiny changes.

DRAMATURG: Still, I wish she could make it here. Even one time. It would make it so much easier.

PLAYWRIGHT: She said that she trusts me completely. She realizes I have only her – and her work's – best interest at heart.

DRAMATURG: Did she by any chance put that in writing?

PLAYWRIGHT: In writing? (Mulls it over) As a matter of fact she did.

DRAMATURG: And you have it?

PLAYWRIGHT: I do.

DRAMATURG: Can I see it?

PLAYWRIGHT: It's in my car. Or maybe I left it at home.

DRAMATURG: Can you go get it?

PLAYWRIGHT: I'll bring it next time I come.

DRAMATURG: I'd appreciate that. We have now given the script to some of our Board members. They may wish to make some suggestions. Once I see that authorization, you can step right in and handle whatever we need.

PLAYWRIGHT: Sounds good to me. I won't forget. By the way, who are these Board members?

DRAMATURG: You'll meet them. We have quite a large Board membership since we are a publicly funded theater company.

PLAYWRIGHT: How many are we talking about?

DRAMATURG: About a hundred or so.

PLAYWRIGHT: You have a hundred Board members?!

DRAMATURG: Don't worry. They don't all show up for the work shop.

PLAYWRIGHT: Is the work shop where they all can give their input?

DRAMATURG: Don't you want to hear what people have to say before we open? Those Board members bring in a lot of money with their fund raising. Naturally we have to pay attention to their suggestions.

PLAYWRIGHT: And may I ask just how extensive do these suggestions tend to be?

DRAMATURG: I'd say it depends entirely on the piece. Or the Board member. Some just like everything. Some have quite a few notes which they like to give.

PLAYWRIGHT: What if the playwright doesn't like the notes?

DRAMATURG: We work it out. We work it out. *Usually.*

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

(The Playwright enters at the same time as the Dramaturg.)

DRAMATURG: Ah, just the person I want to see.

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm flattered, I'm sure.

DRAMATURG: Do you have that authorization from our playwright?

PLAYWRIGHT: As a matter of fact I do! (Pulls out a single page) *Voila!* (Hands it over)

DRAMATURG: Thank you. I'm so glad you found it.

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm a man of my word.

DRAMATURG: (reading the page aloud) "I hereby authorize Bill Carter to stand in for me in all matters pertaining to my play 'The Terrible Truth' produced by the Theater Theatre Company."

PLAYWRIGHT: How does that sound?

DRAMATURG: Excellent. It's even signed. (Reads) "Kaneesha Wong-Molina-Dalai Lama-Owuku."

PLAYWRIGHT: Every jot and tittle!

DRAMATURG: I thought her name was "Kaneesha Molina-Wong. Not Wong-Molina.

PLAYWRIGHT: Really? . . . (stalling) Really? She told me she's easy about the order of her names. You know how different cultures are.

DRAMATURG: (suspicious) Well, I'm sure you know her best. And her cultures.

PLAYWRIGHT: I don't like to boast.

DRAMATURG: Well, guess what I have for you! Some suggestions on her script.

PLAYWRIGHT: And what, pray tell, might those be?

DRAMATURG: (suddenly) You aren't trying to keep me from seeing our playwright, are you?

PLAYWRIGHT: Now why would I do that?

DRAMATURG: I don't know exactly. I've just never encountered a writer who was less interested in getting their work put on in the very best form it can be.

PLAYWRIGHT: If there is a problem, I'm sure we can solve it. What *is* the problem?!

DRAMATURG: It's the name of the characters. One of our Board members thinks some of them are inappropriate.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, that's nonsense! . . . I'm sorry. Which ones?

DRAMATURG: One of the women characters is called Miss Buns.

PLAYWRIGHT: So?

DRAMATURG: It seems a very sexist name for a female character.

PLAYWRIGHT: As I recall, the character is a bicyclist, noted for her athleticism – in riding a bike.

DRAMATURG: We realize that. But Miss Buns?

PLAYWRIGHT: What would the Board member like her to be called?

DRAMATURG: Anything except Miss Buns.

PLAYWRIGHT: What about Miss Bunsforth?

DRAMATURG: Bunsforth? That's worse.

PLAYWRIGHT: She is always sticking her buns in somebody's face and bragging about what a strong woman she is. So why not Bunsforth?

DRAMATURG: That's another thing. This same Board member thinks it sexist for the character to be so crude about displaying herself that way.

PLAYWRIGHT: All the characters in the script have names that point to a major trait they possess.

DRAMATURG: Not very subtle, is it?

PLAYWRIGHT: I believe the author isn't trying to be subtle, just applying eighteenth-century traditions to modern characters. The characters are supposed to represent flawed types.

DRAMATURG: We don't stereotype around here!

PLAYWRIGHT: How about Miss No Buns?! Is that non-sexist enough?

DRAMATURG: We don't see why attention must be called to her buns at all. Or any body part, for that matter. Do you want to objectify women!?

PLAYWRIGHT: No, I don't want to objectify women. What if we call her Miss Big Brain? Would that be all right?

DRAMATURG: I think that would be acceptable.

PLAYWRIGHT: Of course it would be. The brain is also a body part, in case anyone cares. What about the male character, Mr. Dick Lacking? I believe his name means something.

DRAMATURG: We have no objection to that name.

PLAYWRIGHT: (under his breath) Of course not.

DRAMATURG: What?

PLAYWRIGHT: How come nothing was said earlier about the names of the characters?

DRAMATURG: Well, upon a second reading, certain things emerged that . . .

PLAYWRIGHT: Okay, okay. Anything else?

DRAMATURG: Have we agreed that "Buns" will be changed?

PLAYWRIGHT: What would you, or the Board member, like her to be called?

DRAMATURG: We thought Miss B might work.

PLAYWRIGHT: Miss B? That's it?

DRAMATURG: The audience will connect the B to the bicycle. It's perfect.

PLAYWRIGHT: You really think Miss Bicycle. is preferable to Miss Buns or Miss Bunsforth?

12

DRAMATURG: We do. Don't you?

PLAYWRIGHT: Done! It's changed. Do feel free to go through the script and change the name wherever it appears.

DRAMATURG: Thank you. We already have.

PLAYWRIGHT: You almost don't need me, do you?

DRAMATURG: There is another name that we have a small problem with as well.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, goody, what is that?

DRAMATURG: Miss Fits.

PLAYWRIGHT: What about Miss Fits?

DRAMATURG: Doesn't the name imply something?

PLAYWRIGHT: Like what?

DRAMATURG: That the woman has fits, or maybe doesn't fit in.

PLAYWRIGHT: Yes, both of those things.

DRAMATURG: Well, we can't have any suggestion that the woman has fits, or is hysterical, or anything like that!

PLAYWRIGHT: Are you saying that no woman has ever had a fit?

DRAMATURG: We just feel that that kind of portrayal of women is no longer acceptable. Not at all.

PLAYWRIGHT: Miss Fits is one woman, not *all* women! (controlling his temper) Okay. What would make her "acceptable"?

DRAMATURG: We thought she might be called Miss Bright.

PLAYWRIGHT: But she's supposed to be crazy!

13

DRAMATURG: Perhaps you could change the sex of the character. Make it an hysterical man.

PLAYWRIGHT: Mr. Tutti Fruity is an hysterical man – in Act II.

DRAMATURG: Well, now that you bring it up. Calling a man Mr. Tutti Fruity seems rather homophobic, don't you think?

PLAYWRIGHT: But Mr. Tutti Fruity is not gay! He's just . . . hysterical. And hysterically funny, is he not?

DRAMATURG: We agree that the character comes off as extremely funny. Still, a screaming queen in this day and age? It seems . . .

PLAYWRIGHT: Observant? . . . Hysterically funny no matter what day and age it is?

DRAMATURG: I was going to say . . .

PLAYWRIGHT: . . . Unacceptable?

DRAMATURG: Yes.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, for God's sake!

DRAMATURG: You don't want to change it?

PLAYWRIGHT: Okay, okay, on behalf of the playwright I accept the change. Mr. Tutti Fruity will be called . . . ?

DRAMATURG: Yes?

PLAYWRIGHT: Mr. Tootles!

DRAMATURG: (mulling over the name) Mr. Tootles? Isn't that still just a bit . . . ?

PLAYWRIGHT: All right, he's Mr. Loopy Loo.

DRAMATURG: Oh, I like that.

PLAYWRIGHT: It's terrible! Can't you hear the difference between Mr. Tutti Fruity and Mr. Loopy Loo?!

14

DRAMATURG: To my ears, Mr. Loopy Loo is infinitely superior.

PLAYWRIGHT: We obviously have quite different ears. But what's in a name? Let Mr. Loopy Loo smell as sweet! Is there anything else?

DRAMATURG: Not at the moment.

PLAYWRIGHT: Well, good!

DRAMATURG: Thank you for being so cooperative.

PLAYWRIGHT: My pleasure!

DRAMATURG: And thank the playwright of course!

PLAYWRIGHT: I will!

DRAMATURG: I do hope she is able to make it to opening night, at the very least!

PLAYWRIGHT: So do I!

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

PLAYWRIGHT: (to audience) What have I gotten myself into? If I just didn't need a theater company! But nobody else reads plays. Even me! I'm meeting with a Board member today. Our "work shop" is finally getting underway. Oy!

(Enter Board Member. Holding two scripts)

BOARD MEMBER #1: Mr. Carter?

PLAYWRIGHT: Present!

BOARD MEMBER #1: So nice to meet you.

PLAYWRIGHT: The same.

15

BOARD MEMBER #1: I understand that you are filling in for the real playwright, Miss Wuoku.  
Is that correct?

PLAYWRIGHT: Too true. Owuku.

BOARD MEMBER #1: What?

PLAYWRIGHT: It's Owuku, not Wuoku.

BOARD MEMBER #1: Of course. I was wondering if you would read through part of the script  
with me.

PLAYWRIGHT: That's why I'm here!

BOARD MEMBER #1: Good. I hear that you've been very cooperative.

PLAYWRIGHT: That's my middle name.

BOARD MEMBER #1: I believe this script will be the highlight of our little festival.

PLAYWRIGHT: One can only hope.

BOARD MEMBER #1: However, there is one part that troubles me.

PLAYWRIGHT: Is it about the names? I think your dramaturg and I –

BOARD MEMBER #1: Oh, we took care of those. It's something else.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, and what is that?

BOARD MEMBER #1: This section here – a reference to Shakespeare's Richard III, possibly.

PLAYWRIGHT: Don't you love it, the perfect allusion. Adds a bit of class, don't it now?!

BOARD MEMBER #1: While we love and endorse Shakespeare wholeheartedly, some of us  
are a little troubled by the demeaning of a character with birth defects.

PLAYWRIGHT: What?!

BOARD MEMBER #1: Here, read with me. (Hands him a script)

PLAYWRIGHT: Okay, if you insist.

BOARD MEMBER #1: Now I'm not actor, but do you think this appropriate? (Reads)

“Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time  
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
And that so lamely and unfashionable  
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them.”

PLAYWRIGHT: Beautifully expressed.

BOARD MEMBER #1: True, yet attributing downright evil to one who has suffered the misfortune of being born developmentally disabled?!

PLAYWRIGHT: You're serious, aren't you?

BOARD MEMBER #1: It encourages making fun of the handicapped!

PLAYWRIGHT: It's not – what do you want it to say?

BOARD MEMBER #1: Far be it from me or any of the Board members to ask you to cut the lines.

PLAYWRIGHT: Good!

BOARD MEMBER #1: However, we thought maybe this might work instead. (Hands him a separate page) Would you mind reading it aloud?

PLAYWRIGHT: Well, I'm no actor. But sure. (Looks over the lines, then reads)

“Physically challenged though I be,  
And born premature because of faulty science  
And absolutely through no fault of mine own,  
Even dogs like mine company  
When I let them ride on mine lap  
In mine motorized vehicle,  
Which allows me to be 'otherwise-abled.’”  
(Looks up) You wrote this?

BOARD MEMBER #1: (proudly I did!

PLAYWRIGHT: We *could* cut the entire reference to Richard III.

BOARD MEMBER #1: Oh, no, we wouldn't that. We just see it as a teachable moment, in passing, to emphasize the importance of inculcating the proper attitudes toward certain groups. We have quite a few youngsters in our audience usually.

PLAYWRIGHT: You mean people under sixty?

BOARD MEMBER #1: We have several subscribers in their early fifties actually. So what do you think? Can we make this little change in the script?

PLAYWRIGHT: Why wouldn't we?! It flows off the page like. . . like poultry. I mean poetry.

BOARD MEMBER #1: Do you really think so?

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm not one to flatter, but I think this is better than the original Shakespeare.

BOARD MEMBER #1: No! You're not serious!

PLAYWRIGHT: (Laughs) Would I "prove a villain"?! I wouldn't have it any other way. It's in!

BOARD MEMBER #1: Fantastic! You're sure the actual playwright won't mind?

PLAYWRIGHT: Not a bit. She'll probably wonder why she didn't think of it herself.

BOARD MEMBER #1: Yes, We have noticed that some writers are not as sensitive to some issues as they should be.

PLAYWRIGHT: And they're supposedly the "sensitive" ones too, aren't they? The brutes!

BOARD MEMBER #1: Exactly! Some of them are downright "insensitive," I've noticed.

PLAYWRIGHT: Except about themselves, right?

BOARD MEMBER #1: Exactly!

PLAYWRIGHT: But they have you and the other Board members to set them straight, don't they? They are so damn lucky!

BOARD MEMBER #1: That's what we think.

18

PLAYWRIGHT: There wouldn't be anything else you want altered, is there?

BOARD MEMBER #1: No, no, that's it.

PLAYWRIGHT: Whew! (Wipes brow)

BOARD MEMBER #1: Although now that you mention it, another Board member does have a problem with . . .

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

BOARD MEMBER #2: (replacing Board Member #1) Roma!

PLAYWRIGHT: I beg your pardon?

BOARD MEMBER #2: There is an entire sequence in which Roma, or gypsies, are shown to be robbing tourists in London!

PLAYWRIGHT: And?

BOARD MEMBER #2: We can't have that on our stage.

PLAYWRIGHT: Why not? It happened to me. To the playwright, I mean.

BOARD MEMBER #2: But it makes gypsies look like thieves!

PLAYWRIGHT: Gypsies aren't thieves? I thought it was part of the lifestyle.

BOARD MEMBER #2: That's just a small, small minority of the Roma world.

PLAYWRIGHT: No, it's not! They teach their kids every con in the world from this high.  
(Holds his hand the height of a child)

BOARD MEMBER #2: You obviously haven't considered how offensive this is!

PLAYWRIGHT: You obviously haven't had your pocket picked in Trafalgar Square.

BOARD MEMBER #2: And there's another reference to gypsies finagling money out of shopkeepers.

PLAYWRIGHT: That's something else I've seen with my own eyes. The woman of color playwright has seen it with her own eyes as well.

BOARD MEMBER #2: That may be, although I doubt it. It's nevertheless not "sensitive" to portray it on stage. Certainly not on our stage! We definitely need to do something about it.

PLAYWRIGHT: How about having a word with the gypsies. I'm sorry, I mean Roma!

BOARD MEMBER #2: I don't know any gypsies.

PLAYWRIGHT: Of course you don't.

BOARD MEMBER #2: It's bad enough that we don't have a real gypsy to play the part. But even if we did, how could we ask him, or her, to portray a gypsy as a thief!?

PLAYWRIGHT: Yes, how terrible. But guess what!

BOARD MEMBER #2: What?

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm a gypsy!

BOARD MEMBER #2: You're not!

PLAYWRIGHT: I am too. Full-blooded. Who are you to say?! You yourself said you've never met a gypsy.

BOARD MEMBER #2: I saw one in Paris. Three of them,

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh? And what were they doing in Paris, admiring Notre Dame?

BOARD MEMBER #2: Actually they were . . .

PLAYWRIGHT: Yes?

BOARD MEMBER #2: I forget!

20

PLAYWRIGHT: How convenient.

BOARD MEMBER #2: Well, if you must know, they were selling trinkets.

PLAYWRIGHT: Trinkets? Not ten-year-old girls as wives?

BOARD MEMBER #2: (shocked) How can you say such things?!

PLAYWRIGHT: Because they happen?

BOARD MEMBER #2: This is some of the worst hate speech I have ever heard in my life!

PLAYWRIGHT: Really? Have you ever been at a gypsy training camp? It's people just like you that they love to target.

BOARD MEMBER #2: I don't believe that for a moment. (Pause) Just who are you now?

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, I'm nobody important. Just a friend of the playwright filling in for a friend.

BOARD MEMBER #2: (meditative) Hmm. And your name?

PLAYWRIGHT: Carter. Do you want my mother's maiden name too?

BOARD MEMBER #2: You say Carter, huh?

PLAYWRIGHT: Yeah, it's an old Roma name!

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

(Enter Dramaturg)

(Enter BOARD MEMBER #2, opposite)

BOARD MEMBER #2: Oh, good! You're just the person I want to see.

DRAMATURG: What's up?

BOARD MEMBER #2: It's about that consultant. Something Carter is his name.

DRAMATURG: Yes, he's been very helpful around here.

BOARD MEMBER #2: I'm not so sure about that.

DRAMATURG: Why? What's happened?

BOARD MEMBER #2: I think he's an imposter.

DRAMATURG: An imposter? Of what?

BOARD MEMBER #2: I believe he wrote one of the scripts we have chosen for our festival  
and put a phoney name on it.

DRAMATURG: Why would he do that?

BOARD MEMBER #2: To win a place for himself in our festival!

DRAMATURG: You know what – I think you may be on to something. That man has been way  
too cooperative. Most playwrights don't want to budge an inch on their  
“babies.”

BOARD MEMBER #2: Exactly!

DRAMATURG: I always suspected there was something fishy going on with him. Someone  
asked him to read scripts for us, and then he selected his own script!

BOARD MEMBER #2: The bastard!

DRAMATURG: Exactly!

BOARD MEMBER #2: He needs to be exposed and expelled from the festival.

DRAMATURG: I agree, but we have to be cautious.

BOARD MEMBER #2: You're right. He could sue us.

DRAMATURG: Or we could sue him.

BOARD MEMBER #2: You think?

DRAMATURG: For submitting a script fraudulently.

BOARD MEMBER #2: Exactly!

DRAMATURG / BOARD MEMBER #2: (as one) The bastard!

BOARD MEMBER #2: But can we prove it? He's cagey.

DRAMATURG: And maybe even dangerous. Anyone who would forge his name on a contest must be desperate. God knows what he could wind up doing!

BOARD MEMBER #2: Who does he think he is, violating our rules like that!

DRAMATURG: We have every right to say who can enter our contest and who can't!

BOARD MEMBER #2: If we don't have restrictions, we'd never get any scripts from new writers.

DRAMATURG: And those scripts from under-represented writers are getting better. I know they are!

BOARD MEMBER #2: Our last festival was. . . was . . .

DRAMATURG: Exactly!

BOARD MEMBER #2: Besides, some things are more important than quality!

DRAMATURG: I couldn't agree more!

DRAMATURG / BOARD MEMBER #2: (together) Diversity!

DRAMATURG: And that Carter fellow is not going to ruin our plans, our work here.

BOARD MEMBER #2: He most definitely is not!

DRAMATURG / BOARD MEMBER #2: (together) The bastard!

LIGHTS OUT

## LIGHTS UP

(The Playwright is sitting in a chair, making revisions to a script)

(Enter Dramaturg)

DRAMATURG: Mr. Carter, can I have a word with you?

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm working on those changes! It takes time.

DRAMATURG: Then you have run those changes by the playwright?

PLAYWRIGHT: I did. She's fine with them. She said I should just alter the lines in the script.  
She'll incorporate them when the run is over for a nice, tidy final version.

DRAMATURG: If you've been in touch with Ms. Owuku, may I ask how she is doing?

PLAYWRIGHT: Ms. Okuwu.

DRAMATURG: Are you sure? I thought it was Ms. Owuku.

PLAYWRIGHT: Let's check the first page, shall we? (He checks that page) What do you know!  
You're correct! It's Owuku, not Okuwu.

DRAMATURG: I gather that means you really aren't that close, you two, since you don't know  
her actual name.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, we're close. Very close. Almost like brother and sister.

DRAMATURG: Except that she is African born and you're not.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, that! I feel that people are pretty much alike under the skin.

DRAMATURG: (unconvinced) I see. Well, give her my regards, won't you? If you see her.  
Tell her that we'd love to meet her. I do so hope she can make the opening.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, I do too! I hope she'll know which play is hers.

DRAMATURG: Meaning?

PLAYWRIGHT: Nothing, nothing, a slip of the tongue.

DRAMATURG: We do give an audience prize for the best-liked play in the festival. It would be grand if Ms. *Owuku* could say a few words if she wins.

PLAYWRIGHT: She may not win, of course. Unless it's a sure thing, I'm positive that she would never leave her ailing –

DRAMATURG: – ferret? She can bring her ailing ferret with her. Tell her, won't you?

PLAYWRIGHT: It's possible she may not like your production.

DRAMATURG: Not like it?

PLAYWRIGHT: You know how fussy some playwrights can be.

DRAMATURG: Yes, I've heard.

PLAYWRIGHT: And of course you know that Ms. *Owuku* doesn't speak English, so her words wouldn't communicate much.

DRAMATURG: Of course a few words in Swahili, or whatever language she speaks, would be touching. We'd all get the message. There might even be tears.

PLAYWRIGHT: Tears of joy for all, I'm sure.

DRAMATURG: Imagine, a playwright who doesn't speak the language and yet her script is in perfect English. How did that come to be?

(The Playwright is temporarily stumped)

PLAYWRIGHT: How did she write in English?

DRAMATURG: (pressing) Yes. How?

PLAYWRIGHT: Uh, she didn't write in English. She wrote in her native language, Bantu, I believe, and then she used one of those translation devices to convert the whole thing. (Snaps fingers) Like that!

DRAMATURG: How modern. And convenient.

PLAYWRIGHT: Isn't it? You've got to keep up with the times if you're going to compete, aren't you?

DRAMATURG: I don't write plays myself, so I can't really say.

PLAYWRIGHT: Believe me, you can't leave a stone unturned to get anyplace these days.

DRAMATURG: Have you ever submitted a play to our festival, Mr. Carter?

PLAYWRIGHT: (quickly) No!

DRAMATURG: You're sure?

PLAYWRIGHT: I only served as a judge for your esteemed contest.

DRAMATURG: I seem to recall reading a script, or even several, from you in the past.

PLAYWRIGHT: So you do read them then?

DRAMATURG: We do, Mr. Carter. We do. Didn't you send us one about a playwright who submits his own play to a contest, a contest that he is a judge for, a play he submits under a name other than his own?

PLAYWRIGHT: Now who'd do that?!

DRAMATURG: Someone with no ethics?

PLAYWRIGHT: He must have been desperate.

DRAMATURG: As I recall, the play you submitted was actually on a theme we've seen before, that is, a play entered under false pretenses. We've had any number of those.

PLAYWRIGHT: Perhaps it's a theme that's in the air. Frustration!

DRAMATURG: It's a theme I don't find to be my cup of tea, I'm sorry to say.

PLAYWRIGHT: Indeed, plays about fraudulent contest entries must be as common as plays about adultery.

DRAMATURG: I find plays about adultery "evergreen" as a subject.

PLAYWRIGHT: Do you?

DRAMATURG: I do. I prefer subjects I can relate to.

PLAYWRIGHT: (Pause) Did you just come out as an adulterer?

DRAMATURG: (embarrassed) Oh, that came out wrong.

PLAYWRIGHT: You sure?

DRAMATURG: I think you have misinterpreted my words, Mr. Carter.

PLAYWRIGHT: My bad!

DRAMATURG: But then you have a facility with re-arranging other people's words, it would seem.

PLAYWRIGHT: Are you accusing me of something?

DRAMATURG: No. . . . Should I be?

PLAYWRIGHT: No. . . . You shouldn't be.

DRAMATURG: You look a little sheepish, Mr. Carter. What am I to make of that?

PLAYWRIGHT: That I'm a sheep?

DRAMATURG: I didn't mean that at all.

PLAYWRIGHT: I suspect that you *did* mean it. But let me assure you that the last thing I am in this world is a sheep.

DRAMATURG: I'm sorry if I've touched some nerve, Mr. Carter. I'm afraid I must get back to the office. I've taken up too much of your valuable time already. You must be itching to write something new.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, don't worry about me. I'm perfectly content to stay here and work on these revisions that need to be made to satisfy your little festival.

DRAMATURG: Our little festival thanks you. I'll be going now.

PLAYWRIGHT: Bye! And thank you!

DRAMATURG: Thank *you!* (The Dramaturg turns and almost leaves, then turns back)  
And thanks likewise to you, Ms. Owuku.

(The Playwright hears this but carefully chooses not to acknowledge it)

DRAMATURG: Ms. Owuku?

(The Playwright does not react)

(The Dramaturg shakes head and exits)

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

(Enter Bad Actor)

BAD ACTOR: Mr. Carter? . . . Mr. Carter?

(Enter Playwright)

PLAYWRIGHT: Are you looking for me?

BAD ACTOR: Yes. The Dramaturg – or is it *Dramaturge?* – told me I should seek you out.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh?

BAD ACTOR: You're helping out around here, I'm told. Sort of.

PLAYWRIGHT: A bit. And you want . . . ?

BAD ACTOR: I'm playing a part in Ms. Cuckoo's play.

PLAYWRIGHT: Owuku. Yes?

BAD ACTOR: Somebody said that you might be able to help me with my acting. You see, they  
have cast me in a major part.

28

PLAYWRIGHT: What part is that?

BAD ACTOR: The lead. I forget the name.

PLAYWRIGHT: No matter. So they sent you to *me*, did they?

BAD ACTOR: Somebody in the office said you knew a lot about pretending. And that's what acting is, isn't it?

PLAYWRIGHT: So they say.

BAD ACTOR: Could you help me I think I might be really bad, but they say I'm improving.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, how promising!

BAD ACTOR: Promising?

PLAYWRIGHT: Because there is so much we can improve! It's all about the theatrical journey, is it not?

BAD ACTOR: Oh, but they don't want me to improve. They are afraid I am losing my rough edges, the more I practice.

PLAYWRIGHT: I don't follow. They don't want you to get better?

BAD ACTOR: They cast me because I'm not professional.

PLAYWRIGHT: I see. Of course they did.

BAD ACTOR: Can you watch and see if I've gotten too good?

PLAYWRIGHT: Why not!

BAD ACTOR: Should I just begin acting?

PLAYWRIGHT: Why not?

BAD ACTOR: I'm ready.

29

PLAYWRIGHT: So am I! . . . Act!

BAD ACTOR: (acting very badly) “The terrible truth is, Madame, that you are of inestimable worth, a treasure far more than I am worthy of.” (Pause) That's the last line.

PLAYWRIGHT: I know.

BAD ACTOR: How did it sound? Was I bad? Some of those words are hard to say.

PLAYWRIGHT: Uh, who exactly cast you?

BAD ACTOR: A Board member.

PLAYWRIGHT: Did nobody else audition for the part?

BAD ACTOR: Oh, lots of people did.

PLAYWRIGHT: Were they all bad – I mean, inexperienced?

BAD ACTOR: Lord no! Lots of them were very good.

PLAYWRIGHT: But they cast you?

BAD ACTOR: They said they wanted to give under-represented groups a chance.

PLAYWRIGHT: And what group do you represent?

BAD ACTOR: It might be . . . Actors who can't act?

PLAYWRIGHT: You're perfect!

BAD ACTOR: You want to hear some more?

PLAYWRIGHT: No, that's fine. I think you've got it down.

BAD ACTOR: You sure? I know it by heart.

PLAYWRIGHT: That's fine.

BAD ACTOR: So I'm not getting too professional then?

30

PLAYWRIGHT: No.

BAD ACTOR: How about this?

(The Bad Actor assumes a new theatrical acting pose.)

(The Playwright applauds slightly)

BAD ACTOR: (mumbling) "I came to announce the miracle of spring."

PLAYWRIGHT: What?

BAD ACTOR: (mumbling) "I came to announce the miracle of spring."

PLAYWRIGHT: You're mumbling.

BAD ACTOR: I know! Isn't that great? He's supposed to be announcing something but he mumbles it.

PLAYWRIGHT: Interesting acting choice! A herald who mumbles. What will they come up with next?

BAD ACTOR: So you can help me?

PLAYWRIGHT: But you're already so what they want. I'll just spoil you.

BAD ACTOR: I get so few chances to be on the stage. And I audition a lot.

PLAYWRIGHT: Who knows! Maybe you're the start of a new trend.

BAD ACTOR: You think so?

PLAYWRIGHT: You are blind casting as its epitome.

BAD ACTOR: Wow. I'm flattered.

PLAYWRIGHT: (aside) Don't be.

BAD ACTOR: Was that an aside?

31

PLAYWRIGHT: No.

BAD ACTOR: I could hear you.

PLAYWRIGHT: You're not supposed to hear an aside.

BAD ACTOR: But I'm standing right here.

PLAYWRIGHT: Hearing an aside only enhances your new style of acting.

BAD ACTOR: Gosh, I'm learning something about acting every day. Even after these few minutes.

PLAYWRIGHT: Don't improve too much now, or we may have to replace you!

BAD ACTOR: No! You mean with a worse actor?!

PLAYWRIGHT: If we need to.

BAD ACTOR: Let me try again, okay?

PLAYWRIGHT: Don't destroy your raw talent with too much training.

BAD ACTOR: Just let me try this. (Strikes another theatrical pose) (with a hillbilly accent)  
“What light through yonder window breaks.  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.”  
That's Shakespeare.

PLAYWRIGHT: Is it? It's so . . . fresh I didn't recognize it.

BAD ACTOR: I did it with an accent.

PLAYWRIGHT: You certainly did.

BAD ACTOR: It has “yonder” in it, so I figured Romeo might be a Southern boy. It wasn't too good, was it?

PLAYWRIGHT: Don't worry.

BAD ACTOR: Why, thank you!

PLAYWRIGHT: Just don't tell anybody you're using a "hillbilly" accent. They may not like it.

BAD ACTOR: If you say so.

PLAYWRIGHT: Is there anything else?

BAD ACTOR: There is one more thing.

PLAYWRIGHT: Good Lord.

BAD ACTOR: I've also been cast in the small part of the dwarf.

PLAYWRIGHT: There are no small parts for dwarves!

BAD ACTOR: What?

PLAYWRIGHT: A little joke. Oops. No "little" jokes. Haven't they changed the word for "dwarves"? It's in the script.

BAD ACTOR: Oh, right. I play the part of the "little person."

PLAYWRIGHT: Who wouldn't want to be called a "little person" instead of a dwarf?!

BAD ACTOR: To me, "little person" sounds worse.

PLAYWRIGHT: No, never! Maybe next year, or the year after that. But not *now*, heavens!

BAD ACTOR: It's just a walk-on part with one line. They tried to find a small person, but they couldn't. Well, they did find a small person, but they said they wouldn't do it unless the part was bigger.

PLAYWRIGHT: So the "little person" wanted a bigger part?

BAD ACTOR: They did. So they double-cast me, and the problem I am having is how to play a "little person" when, as you can see, I'm a normal-size person.

PLAYWRIGHT: I can see your dilemma.

BAD ACTOR: Should I hunch down, like this? (Tries to look shorter)

PLAYWRIGHT: I don't think so.

BAD ACTOR: Oh. Well, should I play it on my knees, like this? (Gets on his knees, walks a bit)

PLAYWRIGHT: Probably not. I'm just guessing.

BAD ACTOR: The line before mine specifically refers to my "small stature." I've got to do something, don't I?

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm sure the playwright knew what he – she – was doing at the time the line was written.

BAD ACTOR: You can't help me with this?

PLAYWRIGHT: I've got it! I think I've got it! We will add a note in the program that you, a regular-size person, are playing the part of a dwarf – little person – because it is the purest embodiment of blind casting!

BAD ACTOR: Really?

PLAYWRIGHT: Absolutely. It's genius! Second only to the dwarf Juliet I once saw at a Fringe Festival in San Francisco.

BAD ACTOR: Sounds great. Sorry I missed that.

PLAYWRIGHT: (Shakes his finger) And it wasn't *funny* at all, not for a single second!

BAD ACTOR: Well, I'd better be going. We have a rehearsal. Are you coming to it?

PLAYWRIGHT: I don't think so. I'm exhausted.

BAD ACTOR: I hope I'm not the cause.

PLAYWRIGHT: I have discovered that if I'm not there, the less chance that someone will come up with a change of some kind.

BAD ACTOR: I like the changes we've made so far. The play is improving day by day.

PLAYWRIGHT: Is it?

BAD ACTOR: It had some pretty offensive lines in it at the beginning.

PLAYWRIGHT: And we can only trust that any remaining itty bitty thing that's "offensive" to any human being anywhere will be gone by the time we open, can't we?

BAD ACTOR: We wouldn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, would we?

PLAYWRIGHT: Why do I feel as if I'm wearing a straight jacket on my mind?

BAD ACTOR: Do you mind if I ask you a question?

PLAYWRIGHT: A question? What question?

BAD ACTOR: Did you write this play I'm in?

PLAYWRIGHT: What?

BAD ACTOR: Did you?

PLAYWRIGHT: They sent you, didn't they, to find me out?

BAD ACTOR: Well, did you?

PLAYWRIGHT: I swear on my mother's life I did not write the play! I am merely the go-between.

BAD ACTOR: No need to get so excited, Mr. Carter. I believe you wouldn't swear on your own mother's life if it weren't true, right? . . . Right?

PLAYWRIGHT: I'll see you around.

BAD ACTOR: Yes, see you around. (Exits)

(The Playwright grabs his head in distress)

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, my God, now I'm even lying on my mother's life! Damn, damn, damn, what do I have to do to get a goddamned play put on!?

LIGHTS OUT

## LIGHTS UP

(Enter the playwright's mother)

(Enter the Playwright, eating a snack, looking down at it)

MOTHER: There you are!

PLAYWRIGHT: (choking) Oh, Jesus! You startled me.

MOTHER: I've been looking everywhere for you.

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm right here.

MOTHER: I left several voice messages for you.

PLAYWRIGHT: I've been out of touch. I've been working.

MOTHER: As I have learned. I tracked you down.

PLAYWRIGHT: Did you go inside my apartment again?

MOTHER: I thought you could be dead!

PLAYWRIGHT: Well, I'm not dead. I'm working. Did you snoop?

MOTHER: When I went to find your dead body, I just happened to notice a copy of that play you said you were writing, all very mysterious.

PLAYWRIGHT: You didn't actually read it, I'm sure of that. You never do.

MOTHER: Let's not start that shit.

PLAYWRIGHT: You haven't been to see a play of mine ever.

MOTHER: Not true! I went to that little whatever you won when you was . . .

PLAYWRIGHT: Twelve. You have no been to a play of mine since I was twelve.

MOTHER: You know I don't like them plays. I just fall asleep. You want me to fall asleep at your plays?

PLAYWRIGHT: Not the way you snore.

MOTHER: So you should thank me for not going to see 'em.

PLAYWRIGHT: All right, all right, I'm grateful my own mother doesn't see my work. How's Pa?

MOTHER: You know very well your Pa has been dead for ten years.

PLAYWRIGHT: Really? I guess we weren't that close.

MOTHER: He never appreciated you, the way I do.

PLAYWRIGHT: True, but I have the theater! (Spreads his arms)

MOTHER: Yes, about that. On your desk was a letter from this theater company, something about winning a contest.

PLAYWRIGHT: I don't believe that letter was addressed to me. Or you.

MOTHER: That's right. It was addressed to some woman with a foreign-sounding name.

PLAYWRIGHT: But you read it anyway.

MOTHER: I was merely trying to find my missing son.

PLAYWRIGHT: It was addressed to Ms. Owuku, a good friend of mine.

MOTHER: Why would someone write to this Miss Owuku at your place?

PLAYWRIGHT: Ma, I'm a grown man.

MOTHER: Are you living in sin with some African woman?

PLAYWRIGHT: Of course not.

MOTHER: Why are you getting her mail then?

PLAYWRIGHT: It's a long story, Ma.

MOTHER: I want to ask you something, son. You can tell your ma.

PLAYWRIGHT: Ma!

MOTHER: Are you one of them transvestitties?

PLAYWRIGHT: Transvestites!

MOTHER: I thought so!

PLAYWRIGHT: I am neither a transvestite nor a transsexual. Or a trans anything!

MOTHER: Are you sure? I'm your ma. You can tell me.

PLAYWRIGHT: I'd think even you would notice if I were.

MOTHER: What is that supposed to mean?

PLAYWRIGHT: Never mind. Rest assured that my sexual identity is firmly in place.

MOTHER: Then why are you getting mail for this African transvestite?

PLAYWRIGHT: She's not a transvestite! She's not even African. I really don't want to go into this.

MOTHER: You're up to some funny business. Always was, always will be.

PLAYWRIGHT: Ma, how shall I say this politely? Back off.

MOTHER: You back off. Don't talk to your mother like that. Have some respect. In fact, fuck off!

PLAYWRIGHT: You have some respect! Don't read my mail!

MOTHER: That's not all I read, believe you me.

PLAYWRIGHT: You didn't!

38

MOTHER: I did!

PLAYWRIGHT: You what?

MOTHER: I read your damn play!

PLAYWRIGHT: I don't believe you. Nobody reads plays!

MOTHER: Well, I read it. And if there is no African woman, then I suspect you wrote it.

PLAYWRIGHT: The African woman wrote it. I am merely acting as a go-between, a liaison. Do you know what that is?

MOTHER: Yes, I know what that is. Fuck you!

PLAYWRIGHT: I will refrain from replying in kind. Say what you have to say, Ma. Everybody else around here does!

MOTHER: Now I didn't read the whole play.

PLAYWRIGHT: Of course not.

MOTHER: But I couldn't help noticing that there's a character in it who is called "Mother."

PLAYWRIGHT: I believe mothers are very common in plays. As in life!

MOTHER: Well, this particular mother sounded very familiar, from what I read.

PLAYWRIGHT: What exactly did you read?

MOTHER: Enough to know I didn't like it.

PLAYWRIGHT: Maybe you weren't supposed to like it. Maybe you weren't supposed to read it!

MOTHER: The mother sounded very crude.

PLAYWRIGHT: You could tell?

MOTHER: Yes, I could tell! What do you think I am, a goddamned hick?!

PLAYWRIGHT: How many times have you told me you went to the fifth grade down in the 'hollers' of Tennessee?

MOTHER: Well, I did. Third grade! I never learned to read right. You know that.

PLAYWRIGHT: And yet you managed to read my latest script – pardon me, Ms. Owuku's script – pouring over it as if you were a Ph.D. candidate writing a dissertation.

MOTHER: I don't know about all that, but I do know that it makes the mother in that play look dumb. And mean.

PLAYWRIGHT: Well, maybe, just maybe some mothers are dumb! And mean! And nosy!

MOTHER: So it *is* based on me!

PLAYWRIGHT: I never write about people I know.

MOTHER: What bullshit! I remember that play you wrote when you were a teenager, about your Pa. You made him out to be a country boob!

PLAYWRIGHT: He was a country boob! Not that I wrote about Pa in that play!

MOTHER: No wonder we didn't want to come to see your plays. We were afraid we'd see ourselves up there on the stage looking like idiots.

PLAYWRIGHT: Just holding the mirror up to Nature.

MOTHER: Don't go getting' all high falutin' on me with that sort of language. Talk like a real person!

PLAYWRIGHT: Ma, a writer uses the raw material of his life. That's what we do.

MOTHER: Well, you're not doin' it to me! Put somebody else in your fuckin' little play. Leave me out!

PLAYWRIGHT: You, Mother, are part of the raw material of my life. Some might say the rawest. I will use – Ms. Owuku will use – Fuck Ms. Owuku! – I will use any subject matter that comes into my life in any damn way I choose to! And that includes you! Not that this play includes you!

MOTHER: Make up your mind, boy. I'm either in your play or I'm not. You either wrote the play or you didn't. Which is it?

PLAYWRIGHT: I would think anyone who winds up in one of my plays as a character would be flattered.

MOTHER: Flattered?

PLAYWRIGHT: Because they were considered interesting enough to be in somebody's work of art, before paying customers. Yes, flattered.

MOTHER: Insulted. Shamed. Mocked. Held in Contempt. Those are more like it.

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm sorry if you think you're in some play by whoever, but you are there now – *if* you're there now – for all eternity. There you have it, Ma.

MOTHER: No, sonny boy, I don't have it. And I'm not having it. I want some re-writes.

PLAYWRIGHT: Oh, God!

MOTHER: I want that foul-mouthed, uneducated mother character re-written or the play is not going on no stage nohow!

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm not altering another word!

MOTHER: Make her refined, well-spoken, and kindly. Not dumb!

PLAYWRIGHT: She's not dumb. Just uneducated. Under-educated. She represents the under-represented under-educated.

MOTHER: I think she sounds dumb. It's very hurtful.

PLAYWRIGHT: Well, maybe, just maybe if certain people weren't so hurtful themselves they wouldn't be portrayed in a play so that *their* feelings are hurt. Has that ever crossed their mind?

MOTHER: I weren't never hurtful to you!

PLAYWRIGHT: You certainly were.

MOTHER: I loved you! And it was not easy because you were such a little prick as a kid.

PLAYWRIGHT: See! There's you in a nutshell! Give and take away. Give and take away. Take away and take away some more. No wonder I had to become a playwright – in order to get something back!

MOTHER: Oh, what shit! Poor you! You suffered so much, you delicate little flower, you!

PLAYWRIGHT: I guess you and Pa were making me “tougher,” or thought you were.

MOTHER: You certainly weren't going to survive in this world the way you were, all withdrawn and shy and everything upsettin' your little feelings!

PLAYWRIGHT: Well, you succeeded, or I did, because I'm not withdrawn or shy anymore.

MOTHER: And you're about as sensitive as a fuckin' urinal!

PLAYWRIGHT: Thank you. I'm glad to hear it. And to prove it, I am not changing another word in the play. Not another syllable!

MOTHER: You change that fuckin' mother or I'm getting' up on that stage and tellin' the audience what a prick you are for putting me on the stage like that!

PLAYWRIGHT: We'll outwait you.

MOTHER: No, you won't, I've got nothin' else to do.

PLAYWRIGHT: You can stop every single performance.

MOTHER: You wanna bet? I'll shout. I'll scream. Nobody will hear a word.

PLAYWRIGHT: Don't you think people will notice you shouting and screaming and swearing and think the playwright has a point?

MOTHER: Don't think you can talk me out of this. I'm not lettin' you plagiarize me!

PLAYWRIGHT: I believe you mean “defame” you. But “plagiarize” is good. Maybe that's the precise word after all. Yes, Ma, I plagiarized you – from life. There – I admit it! The character of the mother is absolutely based on you! I barely had to change a word, just made her African!

MOTHER: Aha! I knew it! You vicious, ungrateful son of a bitch!

PLAYWRIGHT: If I'm a son of a bitch, what does that make you, Ma?!

MOTHER: It makes me hate you, that's what it makes me! Always got to have the last little twist of words, don't you?! Always got to be so goddamned "clever," don't you?! Well, you're not that clever in the real world, sonny boy. And how do I know? Because I'm the real world, asshole, and you're not using me in your play. And that is the final word on that!

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

(The Dramaturg, Board Member #1, Board Member #2, and Bad Actor are sitting in judge-like chairs on a platform)

DRAMATURG: (looking off-stage) You may enter now.

(The Playwright enters, carrying a large bag with something inside it)

DRAMATURG: (insincerely) Mr. Carter, so glad you could come.

PLAYWRIGHT: Had to come for the prize didn't I? For Ms. Owuku's prize.

BOARD MEMBER #1: You can drop that charade, Mr. Carter. I think we all know what the score is on that matter.

BOARD MEMBER #2: Yes, thanks to you mother.

PLAYWRIGHT: And after I went and changed her part in the script. What a wonderful woman!

DRAMATURG: We'll leave it to you repair any damage to your relationship with you mom.

PLAYWRIGHT: I have to relationship with my "mom." Indeed, I have no mother now. I never had a mother. I just oozed out of some primordial goo.

BOARD MEMBER #2: We don't have time for your self-pity, Mr. Carter. We are here to inform you that you will not be awarded our prize –

BOARD MEMBER #1: – any prize –

BOARD MEMBER #2: – even though your play managed to find its way to our little festival.

BOARD MEMBER #1: You are aware of that, are you not?

PLAYWRIGHT: You mean I did it all for art?

DRAMATURG: Only you know your motivations, Mr. Carter. Ego, I suspect. We're just sorry you felt it necessary to involve us.

PLAYWRIGHT: So am I.

BOARD MEMBER #1: No prize for you or for the phantom, Ms. Okuwu.

PLAYWRIGHT: Owuku! Whatever!

DRAMATURG: You would have had to return the prize, if you had won it, but of course your play won nothing in the audience-favorite poll we ran. In fact, it came in dead last. May I read you some of their comments?

PLAYWRIGHT: No.

BOARD MEMBER #1: (reading them anyway) “Tepid.” “Boring.”

BOARD MEMBER #2: “Incoherent.”

DRAMATURG: And those are some of the positive ones! The reviews from the critics were worse. Have you seen them?

PLAYWRIGHT: Yes.

BOARD MEMBER #1: Well, let me remind you of what they said. The *Chronicle*, with the widest circulation, said, “A play so bad and so bland at the same time the playwright ought to consider joining the Foreign Legion and give up writing plays for all time.”

DRAMATURG: (taking out a review) And the *Times* said this: “Who the hell picked this tedious, lifeless, confused and forgettable play by the team of Owuku and Carter? I can't believe it took two people to concoct such a nothing piece of crap! If this

(cont'd.)

was supposed to be some sort of 'art piece' or 'non-literal ' folderol, it wasn't. I only remember it at all because I hit my head on the seat in front of me when I fell asleep." Did you read that one?

PLAYWRIGHT: I did, but you read it was so much more panache than I ever could.

BOARD MEMBER #1: Perhaps if you had taken our suggestions, things would not have turned out so badly for all concerned.

DRAMATURG: Exactly!

PLAYWRIGHT: I did take your suggestions. Every single one of them.

BAD ACTOR: You're not blaming them, I hope!

BOARD MEMBER #1: We improved your script.

DRAMATURG: We simply took out some offensive parts. It was your decision to change the mother character.

PLAYWRIGHT: I wanted my mother to still speak to me. For all the good it did. I – Oh, never mind. Ultimately, everything was my choice. My choice.

DRAMATURG: Here at Theater Theatre we always leave the final decisions to the playwright. We may suggest; however, we never re-write a script. We take great pride in that principle!

PLAYWRIGHT: I think this is the part where I get up and shake your hands – or is it kiss your hands? – and turn and walk out with my tail between my legs like a whipped . . . ferret?

BOARD MEMBER #2: Now, Mr. Carter –

PLAYWRIGHT: Or is this the part where I whip out a Kalashnikov and mow everybody down, and then I go and use it on my mother?

DRAMATURG: We trust that that is not meant as a threat, Mr. Carter.

45

BOARD MEMBER #1: Is it?

PLAYWRIGHT: (turning to the audience) Is it? (He takes a rifle out of his bag) Choose one, please, from the following three.

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

(The Playwright is holding his rifle, having fired it numerous times)

(The Dramaturg, Board Member #1, Board Member #2, Bad Actor, and Mother are draped around the stage, dead in different positions)

PLAYWRIGHT: You like this one? Please applaud if you do!

(The audience applauds, as much as it wishes)

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

(The Playwright is facing the “jury” of the living: Dramaturg, Board Member #1, Board Member #2, Bad Actor, AND his Mother)

(The Playwright aims his gun at them, moving it from one to the other. He finally puts the rifle down and crawls off the stage like a humiliated animal.)

LIGHT OUT

LIGHTS UP

(The Playwright is alone)

(The Playwright tries to put the rifle to his own head, then puts it on the floor with his chin resting on it)

PLAYWRIGHT: (to audience) Do you like this one? Applaud if you want this one. I chose to go into theater, didn't I?

(The audience applauds, perhaps its loudest)

(After a moment, the Mother comes out and helps arrange the rifle so that the Playwright can better shoot himself)

MOTHER: (to audience) This one! This one! (She applauds)

(The Playwright is still struggling to reach the trigger as the lights fade to black)

LIGHTS OUT

THE END