

# THE HIT

[This play was one of twelve selected in a contest and produced by the Attic Theater Ensemble,  
Los Angeles, 1997.]

## CHARACTERS:

DON, needy, somewhat sour, cautious, any age  
PATTY, somewhat overly energetic, any age  
BEA, very sociable but very changeable, any age  
NEIL, temperamental, crabby, any age

STYLE: Play for comedy. Use cordless phones.

(Lights up.)

PATTY (on telephone) Guess who called?

DON (on telephone) Who?

PATTY Ned Drecker! He saw our show last night.

DON And?

PATTY He loved it! He wants to move it to his theater.

DON Is that good?

PATTY Are you crazy? Drecker is the biggest producer in this town.

DON Well, Patty, I don't really know that much about the man. That's all I'm trying to say.  
I've heard —

PATTY Don, you've got to keep up. This is that proverbial golden goose we've all been  
waiting to screw.

DON Screw?

PATTY It's rent free! He'll do all the new publicity! And he'll work out a split with us!

DON How much?

PATTY We'll work that out later. Isn't this wonderful news?

DON I'm not so sure.

PATTY Don, why are you being so negative? *Egg on Their Faces* is a hit, despite all our  
worries about it. Why can't you seem to understand that?

DON Patty, perhaps you're getting a little too excited a little too soon.

PATTY Are you saying you don't want to be a part of this?

DON (doubtful) Ned Drecker wants the show exactly the way it is?

PATTY Okay, you're right. He does want a *few* changes.

DON See.

PATTY I was saving the bad news till later.

DON What's the bad news?

PATTY Now I'm only telling you what Ned Drecker said. It's not necessarily what I think. Are you ready?

DON He doesn't want to use *my* pieces?

PATTY Half right. He wants us to drop "Easter Was Lovely." He doesn't think the cast is right, and we don't have time to recast it before we re-open. Which is only three weeks from today!

DON (hurt, unbelieving) He wants to drop "Easter Was Lovely?"

PATTY Don, he admires the writing. But he thinks it's a little — how shall I say this? It's a little sappy.

DON Why? Just because I have the Easter Bunny lay a chocolate egg on stage? That's sappy? I'm always accused of being too negative, and as soon as I —

PATTY Don, we're moving uptown. Ned Drecker thinks we need to go sophisticated.

DON (hurt) "Easter Was Lovely" isn't sophisticated?

PATTY Listen, we think *Egg on Their Faces* this time around should be all comedy. Goddamn it, people want to laugh!

DON It was supposed to be a mix before. That's what we said. Suddenly it's all comedy? If Ned Drecker liked it so much, why does he want to change it? And just who are "we" that's making all these changes?

PATTY (manipulatively) Did I mention that Ned just loves your other piece, and he wants us to end with it? "The Dyslexic Nun" is getting the biggest laughs, you know that.

DON Is he dropping anything else? By any chance, is he dropping one of *yours*?

PATTY I only have one piece in the whole evening!

DON But you directed two and you're acting in two others.

PATTY Don, do I sense some resentment here?

DON I'm just asking what else is being cut besides my piece. Am I the *only* one being singled out?

PATTY Of course not. Ned also wants us to cut out two of Bea's pieces.

DON That'll leave her only one.

PATTY Ned said "Hillbilly Clowns in Heat" eluded him.

DON It's eludes me too.

PATTY And he said he was simply baffled by "Catacombs of Daly City." [or "Catacombs of Any Local Community that Will Get a Laugh"] He's not into talking corpses.

DON Well, maybe it was the lighting.

PATTY Fuck the lighting. Don, I was wondering if you could call Bea and tell her that we have to drop two of her pieces.

DON Why me?

PATTY She and I haven't been getting along ever since I started acting in that third piece of hers, even though I think I'm doing a fantastic job . . . don't you?

DON (not convincingly) Of course.

PATTY You don't think I'm doing a fantastic job?

DON You're doing great. I think you're doing the most that can be done with that piece.

PATTY I know you've never been crazy about "Dangling Modifier," but we've made it work. And Ned Drecker liked it. Or at least he said he could live with it. Actually he wants to drop the sucker, but I persuaded him to keep it. Bea would never forgive us if we dropped all three of her pieces. So, since I've done all this with Ned, why don't you call Bea and tell her in the sweetest way you can that we're using only one of her fucking pieces now.

DON She'll have a fit. Bea's nice, but as soon as you cross her about her work, look out!

PATTY Don, you've got to do this — for Theater Meaningful. I've got a zillion other things on my plate. A brush-up rehearsal for "Dangling Modifier." I'm adding a wimple for "The Dyslexic Nun." The new set. Did I mention I'm building us a new set?

DON So busy!

PATTY Well, I don't see you knocking yourself out to do these things!

DON All right, all right, Patty. I'll see what I can do about Bea.

PATTY Great!

(They hang up.)

DON (dials) Hello, Bea?

BEA (on her phone) Yes.

DON This is Don.

BEA (very sweetly) Hi, Don. Gee, it's good to hear from you. Didn't you think we had a splendid opening! I really, really have enjoyed working with you guys. How about a big hug? (She sends a big hug over the phone.) Kiss, kiss!

DON Hug, hug, kiss, kiss back. I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, Bea.

BEA I heard.

DON You heard?

BEA Patty just called me.

DON But she *just* asked me to call you.

BEA She couldn't wait.

DON And how much exactly did she tell you?

BEA (irritated) That Ned Drecker wants to cut "Hillbilly Clowns in Heat"!

DON And how do you feel about that?

BEA Over my dead body!

DON Well, they're cutting one of *my* pieces, Bea!

BEA Well, it's not working as well as it should, Don. You must know that. It seems like something from the Fifties.

DON And you think all *yours* are working? You think "Hillbilly Clowns" is working?

BEA (icily) "Hillbilly Clowns in Heat" is just fine the way it is.

DON I see. I don't suppose Patty mentioned "Catacombs of Daly City" and what Ned wants.

BEA She said he wants to tweak it a little bit.

DON Tweak it?

BEA That's my understanding. Is there something else?

DON No, not if Patty didn't say so. As we all know, Patty has taken over and seems to be running things now.

BEA Sometimes I'd like to slap that woman. You know what she told me today? That now she wants to *play* both parts in "Dangling Modifier" — the customer and the bartender. What can she be thinking!

DON She gets caught up in all that enthusiasm, I suppose.

BEA Well, she's not taking over my play.

DON Did you tell her that?

BEA How could I? You know how Patty gets when she's thwarted. . . . Could you possibly tell her? Or maybe *I'll* tell her! One of these days I'm *going* to tell her — but good! Do you know how hard I worked on those plays? I work shopped them at seven different writers' conferences. My second husband left me when I was writing "Catacombs of Daly City" because he said I was neglecting him. And I *was*! I'm not going to surrender those plays after all I've been through! And certainly not to Patty!

DON (rolling his eyes) I see.

BEA In fact, I was thinking of maybe adding a fourth play when we move uptown. I have this terrific little piece based on Hittite myth. (very sweetly) Does that sound like a good idea to you?

DON Hittite myth? Don't you think that might be a bit obscure?

BEA (tough as nails) Well, the bill needs some weight, Don! I didn't go into theater to do froth!

DON Bea —

BEA (hostilely) So you don't like my idea? You got something *better*? Huh?

DON It's not that I don't like the idea. It's just that —

BEA What if I do the Hittites as clowns? Fright wigs, red noses. (very sweetly) How would *that* be, Don?

DON I'm not so sure about that.

BEA (impatiently) Just in case that bastard drops "Hillbilly Clowns in Heat." That way we could still have something with clowns in it. The show needs something with *clowns*! It's supposed to be a *comedy* for Lord's sake, Don.

DON Do you really want to use four of your plays, Bea? There are only ten in the whole evening as it is.

BEA (sweetly) But my plays are crucial to the whole feeling of *Egg on Their Faces*!

DON What makes you think I want "Easter Was Lovely" dropped? Why can't we recast "Easter Was Lovely" with clowns! Patty said there was no time to recast *my* play, but suddenly we're talking about recasting *other people's* plays!

BEA Now don't be resistant, Don.

DON Bea, I've got to tell you something.

BEA What?

DON There's been talk of more than just tweaking your plays. There's talk of . . . dropping two of them.

BEA *What!* Patty didn't tell me that. As one of the four founding members of Theater Meaningful, don't you think I should be consulted on this? Have you spoken to Neil about this?

DON No, I haven't spoken to Neil about this.

BEA I'll just bet! Are you three plotting behind my back? Nobody seems to be touching Neil's piece. It's a *piece* all right — of shit. It's just my two they want to drop. Well, if you think I'm going to stand by and let this happen, you've all got another think coming!

DON If they're not dropping yours, then they're not dropping mine either. I'll call you later, Bea. I've got to go now. My cat's choking on something. I've got to burp her. I'll get back to you.

(He hangs up, then dials again.)

NEIL (answering) Hello.

DON Neil, this is Don.

NEIL (coldly) It's about time you called.

DON We've got some problems with the move to the new theater. Bea doesn't want to drop her skirts and in fact wants to add another one.

NEIL I heard.

DON You did?

NEIL Yeah, Patty called me.

DON How did she know? I just talked to Bea a *minute* ago.

NEIL I don't know, but Patty just called.

DON What did she say?

NEIL That Bea is very unhappy.

DON To say the least.

NEIL Well, I'm not too happy myself.

DON Oh?

NEIL Yeah, Patty told me that Ned Drecker thinks my piece is too slow.

DON Well, maybe it is a little slow.

NEIL (defensively) It's not slow! It's thoughtful! Have you ever heard of thoughtful?!

DON Maybe if the actors learned their lines a little better.

NEIL I've told and told the director that. She won't listen to me. I must tell you — I'm thinking seriously of withdrawing "The Mysterious Pencil." She's simply not doing it the way I wanted. She cast that awful Delilah Crudwell in it when I specifically said I *loathe* her acting! And the way she's changed the script! She's added a pencil with an eraser to my first scene when I specifically said *no eraser!*

DON You were invited to the rehearsals, Neil. Why didn't you go?

NEIL I can't be bothered with rehearsals. I'm not interested in the minutiae of the theater. But I am demanding that certain changes be made. That eraser is to be gone by the time we get to Ned Drecker's theater. And the same goes for the way Delilah Crudwell faces upstage when my script emphatically says that she must face *downstage* when she throws up!

DON Those are director's choices, Neil. That's not changing the script. I believe Delilah couldn't throw up if she was facing the audience.

NEIL (challengingly) Do you want to use my script when we move uptown or not?

DON Of course we want to.

NEIL Naturally you would. It's my piece that makes the evening, if I must say so myself. Despite what the director and the actors have done to it! So are my demands going to be met or are they not?

DON Why don't I get back to you? After I talk to Bea and Patty.

NEIL Now I'm not trying to be difficult about this.

DON I can see that, Neil. Bye for now. (Hangs up, dials.)

PATTY (picking up phone) What?

DON It's about Neil.

PATTY I already heard.

DON Why do I even *bother* to call anybody?

PATTY What is it, Don? I'm sort of busy. I'm cutting some lines out of your remaining script.

DON You're *what*? I believe you're supposed to consult with the playwright on things like that.

PATTY I know, but that gets in the way. They're good cuts, believe me. You don't need those lines.

DON You know, Patty, there's a cut in your script that might be a —

PATTY Is that why you're calling, Don?

DON No.

PATTY (harshly) Then could you get to the goddamn point?

DON (exasperated but patient) So what do you think about Neil threatening to withdraw his play?

PATTY Fuck him!

DON Patty, about your language —

PATTY I'm telling you what I think. Fuck him. Believe me, we can live without Neil's little play. As a matter of fact, I've been expanding my script. It's perfect now.

DON What? Bea's working on a new one, did you know that?

PATTY A fourth piece? She didn't tell me that.

DON You mean there's actually something going on that you don't have a finger in?

PATTY Don, can I help it if I'm brilliant?

DON Yeah, you can probably help it.

PATTY Look, I've got Ned Drecker on the other line. He wants us to have a firm line-up of the pieces by tomorrow night. Do you think we have that?

DON I don't know what we have yet. I'll get back to you.

(He hangs up, dials.)

BEA (picking up) Hello.

DON Bea, do you still want to add a fourth piece?

BEA I'm almost finished with it.

DON Ned Drecker needs to know by tomorrow night.

BEA     Yeah, I heard.

DON /  
BEA     (together) Patty told me.

DON     Well, if you don't get it finished, I'd like to have a new piece of mine put in to replace "Easter Was Lovely."

BEA     Well, I don't know, Don. Do you really want to do that? I've got a fifth piece that would fit in perfectly right where "Easter Was Lovely" used to be.

DON     A fifth piece?

BEA     But mine are so short.

DON     Bea, I have only one piece in the whole show!

BEA     Well, Patty is planning on expanding her piece. And she's asked a couple of friends to submit their pieces. And Neil called and said if he pulls his play he has *another* one he'd like us to substitute for it. He'll direct it himself this time. That doesn't leave a whole lot of room, Don.

DON     Well, Bea, we could always drop some of your four! Your *five*!

BEA     I can't believe you're being this selfish, Don. You've been so nice up to now. I don't know what this is going to do to our friendship.

DON     I thought if I cooperated with everybody, maybe "Easter Was Lovely" wouldn't be dropped. I can see that I made a mistake.

BEA     I guess you did.

DON     I'll get back to you, Bea. (Hangs up, dials.)

NEIL    (picking up) Yes?

DON     Did you tell Bea you want to add a new script and direct it?

NEIL    You got a problem with that?

DON     Yes, I have a problem with that. I thought you were pulling your script and didn't want anything more to do with us?

NEIL    I've been thinking it over. This new show could really take off. Bigger audiences. Major reviews. I'm willing to *leave in* the one piece if you take the new one too. How does that sound? Sounds very fair to me!

DON     Neil, you're driving me crazy!

NEIL    You don't sound the least bit grateful.

DON I'll — I'll get back to you, Neil. (Hangs up. DON freezes.)

NEIL (dials) Hello, Bea? This is Neil.

BEA (comes onstage with her cordless phone) Hi, Neil! It's so good to hear from you! (Freezes.)

DON This is a nightmare! (He dials.)

PATTY (answering) Yes?

DON Patty, we've got to talk.

PATTY Wait. I'm on the other line with Bea. She just called. I'll be right back. (Pushes button.) Bea, I've expanded my piece. It's marvelous. I know it's running long now, but it's got a certain festive charm it didn't have before.

BEA Sounds terrific. I finished my fifth piece too!

PATTY Wonderful! Just a second, Bea. (Pushes for the other line) Don, you still there?

DON I am.

PATTY Don, we've got to do something about that woman. Bea wants us to do all *five* of her pieces.

DON What are we going to do?

PATTY Hang on. (DON freezes. PATTY pushes for other line.) Bea?

BEA I'm here.

PATTY We've got a little space problem on the program.

BEA So?

PATTY So why don't we see if we can get Don to drop his remaining piece.

BEA Do you think he will?

PATTY He's a crybaby. Let me see. (BEA freezes. PATTY pushes for other line.) Don? You poor thing, you still there?

DON (unfreezing) I'm here.

PATTY We've got to get Bea to drop some of her pieces. What do you suggest?

DON (getting another call) Hold on, Patty. I've got a call. (PATTY freezes. He pushes button.) Yes?

NEIL Don, it's Neil.

DON What's up?

NEIL I've finished my new piece. I think it'll make a great companion for the other one.

DON I see. . . . We've got a little problem, Neil.

NEIL What's that?

DON We've got to get Patty or Bea to drop some of their stuff. Maybe all of it. Any suggestions?

NEIL Tell them it's no good. They'll be insulted and withdraw.

DON I don't think that'll work. They've got egos out to here.

NEIL Isn't that the truth! Maybe we could put the names of the pieces in a hat and just draw out ten.

DON Yours might not get drawn that way.

NEIL How about assuming mine are in and drawing for the rest?

DON Think, Neil, think! (They both think hard. Both freeze.)

PATTY (Pushes button) Bea, are you still there?

BEA (unfreezing) I'm here. I'm on the other line with Neil, but go ahead.

PATTY Thanks for being so patient. I'm trying to persuade Don to drop his piece.

BEA What's he say?

PATTY The bastard's not cooperating.

BEA We could kneecap him.

PATTY We could. But do you think that'll work?

BEA That's true. It never does any good to kneecap a writer. They just sit and write. How about breaking his wrists? (disgusted) But Don's script is already finished, I suppose.

DON (unfreezing) Any thoughts, Neil?

NEIL What if we hire professional goons and have Bea and Patty wiped out and then we lose all copies of their scripts?

DON The actors still have their copies; they could work from those. Besides, we need Patty to act and direct.

NEIL Damn! That's right! . . . This is hard! Let me try something.

DON What?

NEIL Hang on. (Pushes for other line.) Bea babe, are you still there?

BEA (Pushes button.) I'm here!

NEIL Sorry to keep you waiting. We've got to do something about that scheming Don and Patty.

BEA I know. They're trying to hog the whole show.

NEIL What if we poison Don's cat and he dies of grief?

BEA Then we could take the dead cat and leave it where Patty will sit on it when she's acting, and then her allergies will —

NEIL No, I've got it!

BEA What?

NEIL We need a meeting! In person!

(All hold their telephones like guns move and face off in person, as if a four-way duel.)

DON (acknowledging each) Hello, Bea! . . . Neil! . . . Patty!

PATTY Don! . . . Neil! . . . Bea!

BEA Patty! . . . Don! . . . Neil!

NEIL Bea! . . . Patty! . . . Don!

DON I have my new script right here. (Produces it.)

PATTY It's too long.

DON You haven't even looked at it yet!

BEA It would take forever to get it ready.

DON No longer than your five pieces. And Patty's expanded piece. And Neil's new piece! They're all going to need getting ready!

BEA I brought mine along. (Produces her scripts.)

NEIL I brought my new one, and out of the kindness of my heart I'm going to let you keep doing my other one too. Say what you will about me, I'm the kind who doesn't know how to how to hold a grudge. (Produces both of his scripts.)

PATTY And here's mine. (Produces a huge tome of a script)

OTHER  
THREE (reacting to the size of her script) PATTY!

PATTY I can memorize it in an hour. Take it or leave it. I've worked my butt off on this show!  
You guys owe me!

DON We're doing this one puny little script! (holding his out) I will not settle for less!

BEA No, these! (Holds them out.)

NEIL These! (Holds them out.)

(They start threatening each other with their scripts, slapping each other, tearing pages out, flinging them, wadding up the others' pages to make script-balls, and so on. Ad libs as necessary. It should build so that they all look utterly ridiculous, reaching a peak of comic anger and desperation, pounding each other with scripts, getting each other down on the floor, etc.)

(Suddenly a telephone rings. They all stop and look at the cordless phones lined up in a row, not certain which one is ringing. Finally PATTY picks up a phone.)

PATTY What? (No answer.) (Picks up a second phone.) Hello? . . . Oh, hi! (to the others, covering the mouthpiece) It's Ned Drecker. (to NED) We were just talking about you. I think we're just about ready with all our scripts . . . Really? . . . You *didn't*? (The others are listening intently.) Right, that must be a real disappointment. . . . No, that's okay. If you didn't get the money, you didn't get the money. We understand. I'm sure we'll be fine . . . What? You got to *go*? Oh, I see. Well, good-bye, Ned. . . . (somewhat stunned) Yeah, see you around. Thanks for calling.

(PATTY hangs up. All four look as though they realize how absurd they have been acting.)

PATTY (to the others, pointing to the torn scripts, etc.) Now I bet you three thought I was really serious about all this, *didn't you?*

DON Well, I know *I* was just joking!

BEA /  
NEIL (together) *Me too!*

PATTY It was just a big joke we were all playing on each other!

(Everybody laughs, nods too hard, grins too much — big, shit-eating grins.)

DON We'll have to do this again sometime!

PATTY It's been just wonderful working with you, Don. (Hugs him.)

DON (as phony as she is, hugging her) Patty! (They kiss cheeks in that showbiz way.)

PATTY . . . And Bea! (Hugs her.)

BEA     Patty! (They kiss cheeks.)

PATTY   Neil!

NEIL     Patty! (Hugs, kisses.)

(They all start to form one big huggy group therapy circle, looking deep into each other's eyes.)

(The lights fade.)

(We hear one offstage telephone ring.)

PATTY   (in the dark) *I'll* get it!

BLACKOUT

Copyright 1996