

PRODUCING WITH POPPY

— a one-act monologue

CHARACTERS: (1)

POPPY, a “producer,” female, any age, with cellphone

(Can also be played by a male — change name to POPSY and adjust lines as necessary.)

POPPY

(to audience)

Hi there! I’m sorry I’ve been so busy with this new production we haven’t had a chance to talk. You know how much I always love hearing about what you’re doing —

(Cordless telephone rings)

Excuse me. (picking up) . . . Yes, this is Poppy. Who’s this? Raoul! I didn’t recognize your voice. Did we get the theater to extend? . . . We did! Wonderful! You’re fabulous, Raoul. . . . Of course we’ll be using your new piece — just as soon as you rehearse it. . . . Of course. I don’t know how I’d manage without you. . . . Okay, keep me up to date. (Hangs up) (to audience) Raoul’s such a nice guy. Doesn’t mind running around fetching this, that, and the other. Not much of an actor or writer, but I suppose we have to do his new piece. After all, in this world it’s tit for tat.

(Telephone rings.)

Yes? (irritated) . . . What do you want? . . . Well, Rupert, that’s just too bad. We’re dropping it. . . . I’m sorry. We’re dropping it. . . . Well, you’ve been outvoted, that’s all. Raoul and I have decided that “Virgin Birth” isn’t working. . . . It’s not my fault it didn’t get rehearsed! Yes, I know Raoul was supposed to rehearse it with the new cast and he didn’t. So blame him. . . . That’s not true. That’s not true. I did not promise to use Raoul’s new piece instead of yours. That’s simply not true. Rupert . . . Rupert, you’re being hysterical. I’m not going to talk to you if you don’t calm down. Rupert . . . Rupert! (Hangs up on him.)

(to audience)

Playwrights! Egos as big as elephant turds! I never liked his piece from the beginning. I had to go with it because Rupert’s such a manipulative crybaby.

(Telephone rings.)

Yes? Oh, Ilka, it’s you. I thought it might be Rupert again. He’s being such a whiny prick. Yes, I told him his piece is out. . . . Well, you’re an appeaser. I tell things the way they are. . . . No, I’m not saying being an appeaser is a bad thing. I’m just saying that somebody has to make hard decisions around here. . . . I know it used to be three out of four votes, but you dropped out, Ilka. You gave up your vote. So Raoul and I have decided that Rupert’s piece has to go. . . . I’m sorry, but now Raoul and I are two out of three votes. That’s a majority in my book. Come on, “Virgin Birth” wasn’t that good. . . . So it worked last night. A fluke! We’re going to replace it. . . . Well,

Raoul wants me to use his new piece, and I've got this monologue about a senior citizen trying to get pregnant that I wrote some time ago — "Old Eggs." But then you know that piece. It's hilarious. . . . Mildly amusing? Bad taste? Well, fuck you, Ilka. What do you know. And there's also this terrific piece called "Suck My Talent." We could put that in. Biff could do it. I'll call him right now. I'll get back to you. (Hangs up.)

(to audience)

Ilka! Always going on about people's feelings! If people have feelings, they shouldn't go into the theater!

(Dials.)

Hello, Biff? Poppy. . . . Fine. Biff, how would you like to do "Suck My Talent"? You'd be terrific in it. . . . I thought so. Now, it's about nine pages long, remember. Can you learn it by next weekend? . . . Good! Terrific, Biff. You're a very valuable member of this company. Did I ever tell you that? . . . Why, thank you, Biff. You're a sweetheart. I've got to go now. *Ciao!* (Hangs up.)

(to audience)

Biff's got the hots for me. He's sort of cute in a nerdy sort of way. But I'm not giving him any, of course. Neither tat nor tit.

(Dials.)

Raoul? Poppy. What do you think about Biff doing "Suck My Talent" to replace Rupert's piece? . . . Really? . . . Yeah, I hadn't thought of that. . . . What a good idea, Raoul. Why didn't I think of that? It was written for a man [woman], though. . . . Yeah, that's true. And, yeah, I probably could memorize it a lot faster than Biff could. Besides, I'm a much better actor. . . . You're absolutely right. It would be a disservice to the piece—and to the show — to let Biff do "Suck My Talent." Raoul, would you mind calling Biff and telling him he's out — in a nice way. . . . Oh, find some excuse. Offer him something else. He's got some little audition piece he does. We'll squeeze that in. . . . Well, Raoul, you want your new piece in, don't you? . . . Then call Biff. Pretty please. If I call him, he'll say it's personal. . . . Well, you've got to pull your weight around this theater company, Raoul. Aren't you capable of that? Can I tell you something in all honesty? . . . You're a little soft, Raoul. You are! People push you around. When it comes to your work, you've got to stand up for what you believe in. It's called integrity, Raoul. . . . You will? Great! Let me know what Biff says, okay? . . . Great. Bye! (Hangs up.)

(to audience)

Raoul is such a sweetheart! He'll know what to tell Biff.

(Telephone rings.)

Yes? Oh, hi, Mort. No, I can't talk now. . . . I realize that, but I can't talk now. . . . Yes, we're going to your factory tonight. Yes, I'll help with the taxes! Jesus! I said I would. So I will. . . . Mort, don't start on that now, please. I've got a lot of things on my mind with the show. The least you can do is not add to my problems, all right? . . . I love you too. But I got to go. (Hangs up.)

(to audience)

That man! He is so sweet, but do I really want him? Why do all these men keep begging me to marry them! Oh, I suppose I boss Mort around a bit, but he must like it or he wouldn't stay. Now some men might feel their masculinity was being undermined because they have a girlfriend who tells them what to do every minute of their lives, but, really, if I don't spell it out for dear old Mort, the guy just doesn't seem to get it. But he does a great job at that factory of his. Boy, can that man knit a sweater! But when it comes to making real decisions he's nowhere. I must say I truly admire the way he just grins and grins in that goofy way of his when I —

(Telephone rings.)

Biff? What's up? Raoul did what? . . . He doesn't want you to do "Suck My Talent." Did he say why not? . . . Well, I tried to talk Raoul out of it, Biff, but he insisted. Of course you're perfect for the role. But you do have a problem remembering your lines, you have to admit that. . . . Who's going to be doing "Suck My Talent"? Oh, we haven't decided for sure that it's even in. Listen, Biff, I've got to go. Somebody's coming by to audition for a replacement. . . . Yeah, Preston is leaving after next week. . . . I'll get back to you, Biff. (Hangs up.)

(to audience)

Oh, god, Raoul didn't handle that well at all! Maybe he isn't right for this theater company after all. Now I'll have to hurt Biff's feelings, I suppose. Well, I'm doing "Suck My Talent" and that's all there is to it! Why should Biff ruin it! And when am I ever going to find the time to rehearse my "Old Eggs"!

(Telephone rings.)

Yes? Oh, Ilka, it's you. For somebody who's dropped out, you certainly call a lot. . . . Sorry. What is it? . . . What? Of course I'm doing "Suck My Talent." How did you find out? . . . Raoul told you. . . . You think I'll put an edge on the part? Well, nobody asked you, Ilka. . . . (with an edge) I don't have an edge, what are you talking about! . . . You're just saying that because we dropped your pieces. . . . Ilka, you know how much I admire you and your work and how much I appreciate all your advice on my scripts over the years—No, Ilka, I'm not trying to change the subject. Listen, I've got to go now. I'm on the other line. . . . Yes, of course I'll take into consideration what you've said. Bye.

(to audience)

Who the fuck does she think she is! Telling me that I have an edge (irritably) I don't have a fucking edge!

(Dials.)

Raoul? Poppy. Do you think I'll put an edge on "Suck My Talent"? . . . That's what Ilka says . . . You're right. She's just jealous because we dropped two of her dumb-ass pieces. . . . You're right. I'll be terrific in the part. . . . Yes, Raoul, we'll use your new piece! Don't worry about it! . . . No, I'm not getting irritable. No, I'm not taking on too much! I've got to go now, Raoul. (Hangs up.)

(Telephone rings.)

(irritably) What is it? . . . Oh, Rupert. What is it this time? . . . Yes, I know you founded the theater company. Yes, I know you're crippled—handicapped. . . . No, I have not turned Raoul against you. You did that when you wrote that satirical piece about all of us. You disrupted the company, Rupert. Not Raoul and me. . . . Huh uh. . . . Huh uh. Well, Rupert, you've still got one of your pieces in the show. If I were you, I'd accept that you've been outmaneuvered and . . . I don't see you making any major decisions, do I? That sounds pretty outmaneuvered to me. . . . Why are you crying? Would you please stop crying! I've got to go, Rupert. (Hangs up.)

(to audience)

He really shouldn't have written that piece about me. He made me seem like a monster, when I'm just taking care of things. Somebody's got to do it! An edge? Like hell I've got an edge! And Rupert thinking I'd laugh — laugh for god's sake!—at the nasty things he put in that play about me! Who the fuck does he think he is! He shat on me, and after all I've done for this goddamn company! No wonder I threw up. No wonder I threw the fucking script at him. Doesn't he realize how sensitive I am, for god's sake!

(Dials.)

Hello, Albert? This is Poppy, from *Fin de Siecle* Theatre Company. I'm afraid we're not going to be using you after all. . . . No, I'm afraid not . . . I realize you only had a few days to learn your lines, but the point is you didn't learn them, did you? So we're going back to Joe, who's agreed to continue in the part after all. . . . Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry too that it didn't work out. But thanks for auditioning. I've got to go now, Albert. . . . Yeah, maybe some other time. (Hangs up.) Butt-licker.

(to audience)

Don't look at me like that. Do you see any of these other morons making decisions around here? Somebody got to do it! Decency? What's decency got to do with anything? I'm doing *art* here!

(Telephone rings.)

Yeah? . . . Biff? What is it? . . . Then drop out! Do you think I give a fuck what you do? . . . Biff, watch your language. I don't have to listen to shit like that! We'll replace you. That's what. Raoul can play your part. . . . Yeah, fuck you too, loser! (Hangs up.)

(Telephone rings.)

. . . Raoul, I'm glad you called. Biff's being totally unprofessional. He's dropping out. . . . That's what I was wondering too. Can you take over his role? I'll coach you. Great! Raoul, you're a godsend to this theater company. I won't forget this. Can you hold on, Raoul? I've got another call. (Goes to other line.) Yes? . . . Oh, Ilka, what's up? . . . No, I don't want to lose your friendship over this. I guess we never should have worked together. . . . I know it was a dream of ours we always had. . . . Yeah, I'm real sorry too that it turned out this way. . . . Dinner at your place? Certainly. Maybe later in the run. Thanks, Ilka. You're a jewel. See you later. (Goes to other line.) That was Ilka. God, what a kiss-ass she is! But she makes a great polenta. So, Raoul, do you have a copy of the script so you can replace Biff? . . . Yes, Raoul, yes! I've told you a hundred times, we're doing your new piece! We'll rehearse it starting tomorrow. Hold a minute, would you? I have another call. (Goes to other line.) Yes, Rupert? So take your goddamned Louis the Fifteenth chairs! You think we can't find other chairs? . . . What? You're dropping your other

piece? . . . Is that your trump card? . . . Well, I've got news for you, asshole. I could give a flying piss if you withdraw your other piece. Raoul and I have a few pieces of our own we can insert in less time than it takes you to fart out one of your stupid little nothing plays! . . . Yeah? Well, you can stick it up your gay ass for all I care. And stick your Louis the Fifteenth chairs up there too! (Cuts him off.) Raoul? I'm back. That was Rupert. He's completely out of the show now. So there's definitely room for your new piece. . . . Maybe we can call Biff and sweet-talk him into coming back. All it'll take is a few compliments. God, these actors! Hold on, Raoul. I've got another call. (Goes to other line.) I'm here! . . . Mort, I told you not to call today. Don't you listen to anything I say? . . . Well, I'm terribly sorry about your fucking factory. I'm all broken up that two knitting machines are down! By the way, you left those little chunks of camembert on the kitchen counter again, after I expressly asked you to put them in the omelet. And you expect me to marry you, to have your children? What kind of kids do you think they'd be — goofy, that's what. Listen, Mort, I've got rehearsals late tonight. I meant to tell you. I won't be home till after midnight, probably. . . . Yeah, I'm sorry too. But I've got to whip Raoul's new piece into shape. It's going to mean rewriting the entire thing. The guy has no talent, but he must bring out the nurturing side of me. (meditatively, to herself) I wonder if there's some way I can get out of doing Raoul's new piece. Maybe if I start criticizing it little by little, he'll withdraw it? And then maybe I could add a couple more of my new pieces. Actually I have ten pieces now that I think about it. Why not? I mean, why shouldn't it be "An Evening with Poppy"? I've earned it, for god's sake!(to MORT) Are you still there, Mort? . . . I just had a brainstorm. . . . Never mind what it is. You eat that camembert, you hear. You haven't looked too good lately. . . . I love you too. Got to go now. . . . Yeah. . . . Bye.

(to audience)

I wonder sometimes about the brainpower there. Oh, well, he's good sex — if I don't look too closely. But I haven't got time for sex these days. I suppose he'll get cranky if I cut him off. Men! I guess I could give him a little armpit now and then. (Touches hers.) I mean, it's hairy and it's sweaty — Mort'll never know the difference! Well, got to go. Nice talking to you. We've got to get together more often, what d'you say? When are you free? . . . Next week? It's a date. Excuse me. Got a call to make.

(Dials.)

Raoul, this is Poppy. . . . Great. You've done great. I can't tell you how much I owe you. Why, thank you. It's been marvelous working with you too, Raoul. (Laughs.) Oh, you're too kind! But, Raoul, I do have a few thoughts about your new piece. Have you got a minute?

LIGHTS OUT