

AUDITION HELL

By Jeff Dunne

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jeff@bearcreations.org

CHARACTERS

JENNY	An actor auditioning for a part.
PHIL	Another actor auditioning for a part.
ANGELO	A playwright setting out to direct his own play.
PAMELA	A friend of Angelo who agreed to stage manage.

SETTING

A theater.

SCENE

(The lights come up on a theater setting. Angelo, the writer/director, is sitting in the front audience row, along with Pamela, the stage manager.)

PAMELA

Alright, next can we have... *(referring to a piece of paper...)* Jenny Pompay... Pompana... Jenny P, and Phil Wrightson.

(Jenny and Phil enter.)

JENNY

It's pronounced—

PAMELA

Alright, just take the stage in the middle where it's lit. Good. You've had a chance to look over the script, so—

PHIL

Actually—

PAMELA

Unless you have any questions...

PHIL

I didn't actually get a copy of the script.

(Pamela and Angelo have a whispered exchange.)

ANGELO

That's okay, just read from hers. Are you ready?

JENNY

I didn't get one either.

(Another whispered exchange, and then...)

PAMELA

Alright, you can use these, but we need them back after.

(Jenny and Phil go over and get the scripts.)

Sure.

PHIL

Yep!

JENNY

ANGELO

Since you haven't read the play, here's the gist. Fred—

Phil.

PHIL

ANGELO

You'll be reading for Captain Montequé, who is returning from the Civil War to find that his wife, Lady Pomphrey, is now pregnant with another man's child. Jessica—

Jenny.

JENNY

You'll be reading Mrs. Pomphrey.

ANGELO

Okay.

JENNY

ANGELO

She's kind of feisty, but play her however you think the lines read. Okay, are you ready?

Um...

PHIL

PAMELA

Make it fast. We have a schedule to keep.

PHIL

Uh, sure. You said he's a French captain. So is this—

ANGELO

He's not French. He's American. It's the American Civil War.

PHIL

Right. Okay. Got it. Thanks.

ANGELO

Annd go.

(They start to read, and immediately are struck by how awkward the lines are, so the reading is rather stilted.)

JENNY

Oh, Jacques. My brave, fearless warrior, it is so good to see you. You are home from the war. The Civil War. I hope it was... civil.

PHIL

Yes, Ms. Pomphrey. It is so good to be back home. I have missed the children, and you as well. *(He breaks back to his natural voice.)* Sorry, but you did say that he's American? And that they're married?

ANGELO

Yes. Continue.

PHIL

I just ask because, well, because his first name sounds very French, and why does he call her Ms. Pomphrey?

ANGELO

Oh. That's just a typo. It should be Mrs. Pomphrey. Continue.

(Phil and Jenny share a "yeaaahhhh, okay" look, but then continue.)

PHIL

I have missed the children, and you as well, my wife. While I was in the Civil War, I took upon myself an ingot of shrapnel, and now my fighting days are sadly and laboriously over. Over, I say.

JENNY

Oh, dear, dear Jacques. That is the—

ANGELO

Stop stop stop! It's pronounced "Jack-quez". Okay, from that line.

JENNY

Oh, dear, dear... Jack-quez. That is the most horrible news. I surely hope you were not wounded in the leg.

PHIL

No. I was hit in the sternum by a...

(Phil stops, and he and Jenny share a momentary look of disbelief before he continues.)

By a fragmentation grenade. Why do you so inquire?

JENNY

You see, the village water supply has been was destroyed in the fighting. *(Breaks to look at the director.)* Sorry, let me back up. *(Back into character.)* You see, the village water supply was destroyed in the—

PAMELA

What are you doing? Don't rewrite the script. The line is "has been was destroyed".

ANGELO

Actually, I think it sounds better like she did it.

PAMELA

Really? Okay. Keep it. Go on.

JENNY

Uh... You see, the village water supply has been was destroyed in the fighting. Now we need you to help us carry water until the repairs are enacted. *(Breaking...)* Enacted?

ANGELO

That's how they talked back then. Keep going.

PHIL

Real quick, is this the actual script for the play, or just sides for auditioning.

ANGELO

Both.

PHIL

This... Yeah. Okay. Uh, thanks.

PAMELA

Keep reading.

PHIL

(Now making no attempt to read the lines in any kind of compelling way...)

I'm afraid that my water-carrying days are *(Break)* Sorry. My water caring days are over.

JENNY

(Also now reading in an emotionless monotone...)

But, Anton...

(Jenny looks over at Pamela and Angelo, and they point to Phil, then motion to continue.)

But Anton, everyone in the village is counting on you. Whatever will we do?

PHIL

Frankly, my dear, I don't give a... *(He squints at the page.)* Dram. Not a single dram.

JENNY

But Jacqu— Jackquez Anton Monteque...

(Jenny and Phil share a non-verbal "ah, got it" look.)

I can't bear the shame.

PAMELA

Okay, that's good. Thank you.

JENNY

(Relieved that it's over and ready to leave.)

Sure.

(Jenny and Phil start to walk off.)

PHIL

You want to grab a bite at—

ANGELO

Where are you going?

(They stop.)

JENNY

Didn't you just say we were finished?

PAMELA

I said it was good. We liked it.

ANGELO

A lot.

PAMELA

The emotions really came through.

PHIL

They did?

ANGELO

Oh yeah. Very moving. So, I see on your forms that you aren't available on Tuesdays. We wanted to rehearse on Tuesdays. Would you be able to change your schedule?

PHIL

Uhh....

JENNY

No. I'm sorry, I have to take care of my grandmother on Tuesday evenings.

PAMELA

You can't just skip out for a few hours?

JENNY

(Utterly shocked at the request.)

No. I... No.

ANGELO

And you, uh... *(checks a form)* Phil.

PHIL

Phil.

ANGELO

Huh. The H looks like a B. Anyway, you can't do Tuesdays either?

PHIL

Sorry. Well, sometimes that's just how it goes. Sorry about that.

PAMELA

No, no. Wait. We could probably shift things around, can't we Angelo?

ANGELO

I think we can find a way around this.

PAMELA

Absolutely. Now, what time *are* you two free on Tuesdays?

PHIL

I really can't—

PAMELA

I'm thinking that if we push back the start time to, say, 11:30 pm, would that work?

(Jenny and Phil exchange looks of disbelief.)

We really think you'd be a great fit for these roles, so we want to do whatever it takes to give them to you. If 11:30 doesn't work, what about doing a double rehearsal on Friday evenings?

JENNY

I don't—

ANGELO

You know what, you wrote on the form that you're free on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. I think we can make that work.

JENNY

I wouldn't want you to go to any trouble. Really. I mean, if the schedules don't mesh—

PAMELA

Nonsense. We're flexible.

ANGELO

And you obviously get these characters. It's like you were born to play these parts. Weren't they total naturals?

PAMELA

Completely.

PHIL

I'm just not sure I'm right for—

ANGELO

Let me ask you a question. I get the sense that you're feeling a little... hesitant. Am I right?

PHIL

Well...

ANGELO

What if I were to give in and let you play the Captain as French. Would you be okay then?

PHIL

Honestly, I just think—

ANGELO

Is it something else? Do you have some kind of issue with the script? Jessica clearly liked it, so what is it that's bothering you?

JENNY

It's Jenny. And I—

ANGELO

Then why'd you write down 'Jessica' on the form?

JENNY

I didn't.

PAMELA

You most certainly did. Look.

(Pamela holds it up to her.)

JENNY

That's not my form.

(Angelo finds the right one, and then waves it in the air.)

ANGELO

Found it! Jennifer. Jenny. I see you've done a lot of acting around here. It definitely shows.

JENNY

Thank you. Anyway, we don't want to mess up your schedule.

ANGELO

Don't talk nonsense. You two are clearly made for these parts, so I don't see why we'd waste time auditioning anyone else.

(Jenny and Phil exchange "I can't believe this" looks.)

Jenny, Fred...

PHIL

Phil.

ANGELO

Let me explain something to you. We work with a lot of theaters in the area. *A lot of theaters.*

PAMELA

And not just work with. We sit on boards too.

ANGELO

A lot of them.

PAMELA

And honestly, word gets around. If the community gets the sense that you're difficult to work with, it could be tough to get cast in other shows.

JENNY

Are you threatening us?

PAMELA

Of course not. I'm just saying that it doesn't reflect well on you.

PHIL

What, exactly, doesn't reflect well?

ANGELO

Accepting a part, and then cancelling out on the show.

JENNY

Wait. What are you talking about, we didn't—

PAMELA

You obviously are trying to refuse the roles, and I think the least you could do is be honest with us about why.

(Jenny and Phil look at each other, unsure what to say at first. Finally...)

PHIL

Look, I'm sorry. To be completely honest, I'm just not feeling it with the script.

ANGELO

I already said you could play the character as French. What more do you want?

PHIL

I guess... It's just that...

JENNY

I realize that you must really like this script, since you picked it to direct, but...

PHIL

It's just...

JENNY

It kind of...

PHIL AND JENNY

Stinks.

ANGELO

Stinks?

PHIL

Yeah. I mean, the dialog is totally unnatural, and the characters are so...

JENNY

They're really two dimensional. And all the anachronistic stuff.

ANGELO

What in the world are you talking about?

PHIL

Like, the grenades. They didn't have frag grenades in the Civil War. Hell, they didn't have *any* kind of grenades.

JENNY

We don't mean this to be an insult or anything. I mean, I'm sure you're a great director, but sometimes the script just doesn't give you the material to work with, you know?

ANGELO

I wrote this script.

(There's a long, painful silence.)

PHIL

I think what Jenny means is—

JENNY

What Phil means—

PHIL

What we're saying is that the script has a lot of potential, but...

ANGELO

But?

JENNY

But that we're not really... We don't feel...

PHIL

We think it might be better if...

ANGELO

If?

(Phil and Jenny look at each other again. They are both clearly at a total loss. Then suddenly Jenny points behind them.)

JENNY

Look! A duck!

ANGELO AND PAMELA

What?

PHIL

(Now pointing too...)

My god, it's huge!

(Angelo and Pamela turn to look, and Jenny and Phil run off the stage, leaving a moment before Angelo and Pamela turn back to see that they are gone.)

ANGELO

Do you think...

PAMELA

Don't even. It's a fantastic script. It's not our fault if they can't appreciate it.

ANGELO

It really is, isn't it?

PAMELA

Of course, it is. And the audience is going to love it.

(Angelo and Pamela look down at the table, and then simultaneously yell out...)

ANGELO AND PAMELA

Next!

(Lights out.)