

Writer's Lament

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LIGHTS UP

TAYLOR is sitting on a stool on an otherwise bare stage

TAYLOR:

I'm gripping on a scene in my latest play. I won't bore you the details. Everyone knows how to write, they teach it in school, and there's nothing worse than someone telling you about something you already know how to do yourself. It IS different, what I do and what you probably do, though. Writing plays is different than writing TPS reports or grocery lists or essays on the North American Elk. I could talk about the GENIUS of writing. But then I'd sound pretentious, and then I'm boring AND pretentious and I'm speaking to an empty room.

I've played to a lot of empty rooms. I'm a writer, but I'm also an actor. Mostly because I can't get anyone else to act in my plays. Well, wait, that's a lie. I Could get Someone, the world is full of actors. This guy, I don't remember his name and it's not really important, he wasn't Einstein or anything, but you know what, we'll give him a name anyway. I think people like it better when everyone in a story has a name, makes the mind have to work less to keep up. You sir, what's your name? (name)? That's a good name. (name) Strong, masculine. (name)

His name was Harry, and he once said that there are two things everyone thinks they can do. Coach football and run a bar. I'd like to add one more onto the list, most people also think they can act. I'm not saying they're wrong, but there are definitely tiers. There's Richard Burton and then there's Richard Fenderman. You've never heard of Ricahrd Fenderman, now have you? Well that's because Richard Fenderman's just another name that I made up, but the point is the same. If I wanted to get an actor, or even actors for my work, I could. But I don't, cause I'm cheap.

(pause)

No, I'm not cheap, that's a lie, I'm... frugal? No, that's not it, I'm investing. I'm investing for the future. I am investing for my future happiness. I really should have started sooner in life.

So I write small plays with small me on a small stage with one, lousy, small stool. Look at this stool. I hate this stool. I've done five shows now with just me and this stool. Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis did fourteen movies together before they broke up. If I have to do nine more plays with this stool one of us is going out a window. But, it's the only piece of furniture I can afford to take out of my house and leave in a theatre for a month. I tried to

have a bigger set, brought in a plant, that died. Brought a lamp, tripped over it once and nearly broke my neck.

(pause)

So it's just me, and the stool. And we've done five shows together. They've been good shows, too. "An earnest work with comic timing, in need of polish around the edges. A fine minimalist piece in the tradition of Beckett," is what one critic said. I like that review, except for the minimalist part. I'm not a minimalist, I'm just cheap. If I had the money I'd have a bar, a vase, a pool table, Lay-z-boy and chorus of dancing girls throwing glitter into the air. But I don't, because I'm investing in my future.

Me and the stool. Two more shows together, hopefully, if my investing works out right. The stool and I. (begins singing) Shall we dance, bum-bum-bum. On a bright cloud of music shall we (hums tune) ... I've written my own musical. Two actually. Two musicals, three full plays and a puppet show for children. They're all in a metal box on my desk, near the window. If a fire breaks out in my apartment, out the window they go with a note tied to the box to produce them if I don't make it out alive. After two more of the stool shows, pending my demise in this hypothetical fire, I'm going to start producing them myself. Well, I'm going to start auditioning them. They all have two things in common, they are all "earnest works with comic timing" and they all require a female lead. (remembering) A blond, blue eyed, comes up to here on you in flat feet, voice like distant thunder, female lead.

(pause)

I met her at a party. She was wearing a big floppy hat and had a big crescent moon between her legs. I should have mentioned it was a costume party. Sorry, I'm always doing that. "I always go, she was blond with a big floppy hat and a moon between her legs." Then people stare at me like I'm crazy and I have to say "oh, sorry, did I not mention it was a costume party? Cause it was." Cause it was. I was dressed like the Mad Hatter. Mad Hatter and The High Life Girl. That's almost an Elton John song. I didn't know anyone at the party, it was being thrown by this woman who lives on my floor. We'll call her Alice because she was dressed just like Alice in Wonderland. I loaned her three eggs at 2 in the morning the week before and as payment she invited me to her costume party. I told her I didn't have a costume, but Alice said she had just the thing. "Just the thing" turned out to be an oversized top hat, a polka dot bowtie, a plastic tea cup and a too small suit coat. I'd rather Alice just gave me three eggs.

So I was standing by the drink table trying not to look too uncomfortable when she came up. Big floppy hat and big crescent moon. She asked me if there was any rum left and when I said I wasn't sure she asked if I would just share my tea then. It took me a second to get it and then I laughed, and then she laughed and like that, thirty minutes go by. I tell her I'm a writer and she tells me she's an actress. I tell her that's a novel profession and she says she's a writer every week when she crafts her latest grocery list. She says her feet

are killing her in her heels, I offer to keep them in my hat. She says her name is Jillian. We talked about... I don't even remember, but we talked and we were saying things. Important things. Capital T things. And just as I was about to invite her back to my apartment, where there was a bottle of rum, her friend got sick. Cupid had me lined up in his sights and Fate sends a vomit comet to ruin his aim. Well she had to go, and I had to stay, and just as the courage was starting to rise up to my brain to ask for her number, her third friend, dressed like the White Rabbit, grabs her by the arm and ft-ft-ft, she's gone. (stares off stage as if he can see her leaving again)

I woke up the next morning with her on my mind. But I attributed that to a thirty-minute conversation and an empty bed. Then I woke up the next morning and she was still there. And the next morning. A full week went by and The High Life Girl had set up camp in my brain. I mean she was moving around furniture and picking out window treatments. And I finally realize I've got to see her again. So I take another three eggs over to Alie and ask her, who was the High Life Girl? Who? The High Life Girl. Who? Jillian. I'm sorry? The girl with the big floppy hat and the moon between her legs. Ohhh. A friend of a friend. But she can't remember what friend, or if she's ever seen Jillian around before. I've been bringing Alice eggs every week since then hoping she'll suddenly remember. She keeps taking the eggs but her memory isn't getting any better.

I've also been visiting coffee shops looking for her. Jillian said sometimes after an audition or a rehearsal she likes to unwind and have a cup of coffee at a little place called Cup of... something. She said it during the party, but the music swelled at that point and I couldn't hear her, so I just said "uh-huh" like I had. I never thought it would be so important to me. It turns out, however, that there are 27 different coffee shops in this city called Cup of... something. Cup of Joe, Cup of Coffee, Cup of Cream and Sugar, Cup of the World, Cup of Joe Too... 27 different stores and that's not counting the suburbs. I was stopping in at 5 different stores a day at one point, but I started having uncontrolled muscle twitches because of all the caffeine and had to cut back. Even now with two a day it takes almost two full weeks to make a loop. I worry that I'm endlessly circling her, like spokes on a tire. Always moving at the same pace, but never getting any closer.

So all this time I've been writing. Two musicals, three full plays and a children's puppet show. I wrote them all for her. For her to audition for. Because she's an actress and I'm a writer and I'm hoping that's how a writer finds an actress when cartons of eggs and coffee shops aren't enough. Two musicals, three full plays and a children's puppet show. And if I haven't found her by then, I'll write four more musicals, six full plays, two children's puppet shows and a vaudeville show that will be well reviewed but poorly attended. But first I need the money to put on these shows. And that's why the stool and I have two more shows together. Because I'm investing. I'm investing for my future happiness.

(pause)

You know Einstein said, and this is important cause it's Einstein, he said that $E=mc^2$. We

take that for granted today, but think about it. In the entire world, in all of human history, one man and one man alone realized that energy and matter are basically the same thing. That's what $E=mc^2$ means. I've been thinking about it and I'd like to take it a step further. Now I'm not Einstein, but I'd like to think that that means we're all interchangeable. We're all just piles of energy cooled and formed that could just as easily be re-heated and then cooled and formed in another way. This stool? (waves hand over it) Could be a chair? (again) Or a potted plant. This painting of the ship could be a painting of Ireland. It doesn't have to be a painting at all, (waves hand over painting) it could Be a boat, (again) or a bar, (again) or a chorus of dancing girls. With the right twist I Could Be Einstein. Or Harry. Or Alice. With the right twist-

TAYLOR looks at stool, steps back, waves both hands over it and closes his eyes. When he opens them he looks at the stool and smiles

TAYLOR:

(softly) Hello Jillian. My name is Taylor. I'm writing a play that I'd very much like you to be a part of. Shall we dance?

LIGHTS DIM as "Shall We Dance" from "The King and I" plays