

Betty Andrews—In her 40's. An inspector for the National Endowment for the Arts. A forbidding appearance. Bright red hair.

Bart Frances—A pleasant youth. Dresses in a motorcycle jacket and torn jeans.

Wayne Wellacre—In his 30's, in search of a new career in acting, no training, less talent, affable, eager to please.

SETTING: A mid-sized city in the Midwest.

Bart opens

ACT I

The stage and a portion of the auditorium of a mid-western regional theatre. The stage is thrust-style and is presently occupied by a unit set suggesting Dickens' London. M.J., the Stage manager, is preparing her table for the day's rehearsal. SHE sings to herself.

(WAYNE enters, nervously. HE carries a laptop word processor.)

WAYNE. Good morning. Hi. Am I too late?

M.J. Can I help you?

WAYNE. Is this the Soapbox Playhouse?

M.J. Yes.

WAYNE. I had an audition but I think I must be late.

M.J. With Zorah?

WAYNE. I don't know. *(Takes out brochure.)* Oh, yeah. Yeah With Zorah Bloch.

M.J. We're rehearsing now.

WAYNE. Yeah. I knew I was late.

M.J. I didn't know she had an appointment.

WAYNE. Well, it wasn't confirmed. I sent a postcard that I was going to be here. But ...

M.J. I don't think it's on her schedule.

WAYNE. I'm only here for the day so I was hoping she could work me in.

M.J. We're rehearsing now. We're just on a short break.

WAYNE. Oh, thanks. That's great. Are you an actress?

M.J. Only during periods of extreme necessity.

WAYNE. (*HE's on stage now.*) 'Cause I could see you've got on your costume.

M.J. Well actually these are my clothes. But you're right. I have been pressed into the service of this epic. I play the female population of London.

WAYNE. (*Impressed.*) Oh.

M.J. But mostly I'm the stage manager. You're going to have to clear off now.

WAYNE. I'll get right down. I just wanted to see how it feels.

M.J. Uh-huh. How's it feel?

WAYNE. Great. Big. But great.

M.J. This is big?

WAYNE. Bigger than my apartment.

M.J. Listen, this is a bad time ...

WAYNE. (*HE turns his back to the auditorium, then quickly wheels around, hump-backed, imitating the limp and withered hand of Richard the Third.*)

"Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York."

Bart whistles
(*HE stops, savouring it.*)

M.J. You know this is a professional company.

WAYNE. I'm a professional. Or I was. I'd gotten about as far as I could go in data processing. I was good. I just wasn't feeling very fulfilled. So I'm following my bliss now.

M.J. (*HE's in the way.*) You'll have to clear off now.

WAYNE. (*Following her.*) You know Joseph Campbell? He's the guy who thought up *Star Wars*? You know, the movie?

M.J. Yeah.

WAYNE. Well, he didn't actually think it up, but he was a big influence on the people who did. Anyway, I was taking this potentiality seminar and we read this Joseph Campbell book about creation myths?

M.J. Yeah.

WAYNE. How there's all these ancient stories locked away inside us that can tell us how to lead our lives.

M.J. Oh?

WAYNE. So you just have to sort of "follow your bliss."—It's kind of like "use the force" only not so violent. Anyway, that's what I'm doing. I'm following my bliss. (*Holding up his P.C.*) And I'm keeping a record of my experiences on the path.

M.J. Ok. But you have to be a union member to work here.

WAYNE. A union ... Oh. I get you. I get you. You have to be a union ... Oh God, why don't they ever give you a warning? Why don't they give you some kind of a ... you know, warning. There should be some kind of a warning. In the brochure here.

M.J. I think maybe you're just supposed to know that.

WAYNE. So what do I do now? I'm only in town for the day.

M.J. Hardly enough time to become professional.

WAYNE. Yeah. Well ... thanks. I appreciate your help.

WAYNE. (*Jumping up on stage.*) "Hey, lady. I like the way you move. I just had to tell you that. My engine's been kickin' over hard ever since I laid eyes on you."

Bart react

M.J. Beg pardon?

WAYNE. That's from *Tijuana Truck Stop* by Terry Allen Anthony. That's my contemporary audition. You need two.

M.J. I know.

WAYNE. For contrast.

M.J. Yeah. Bye now.

WAYNE. (*As HE goes.*) Is there another theatre in town?

M.J. There's the lesbian theatre over at the Methodist Center.

WAYNE. Oh ... Do they ever use men?

M.J. You mean ...

WAYNE. On stage?

M.J. You'd have to ask.

(*ZORAH enters with LUTHER, a heavy set 10-year-old.*)

WAYNE. Ok. Thanks.

ZORAH. (*To Wayne.*) For Christ sakes, it's about time! The computer is *upstairs*. And as far as I'm concerned you can take the stupid thing back.

M.J. (*Hustling WAYNE out.*) No, this is not the computer guy. Mistaken identity.

WAYNE. Miss Bloch?

M.J. We're starting now.

(*M.J. shows WAYNE the door. HE exits.*)

ZORAH. Who was that?

M.J. I think I just saved you from a very painful experience.

ZORAH. Slightly creepy guy.

M.J. You don't know the half of it. Luther, you should be getting ready.

LUTHER. I don't come on for four more scenes.

ZORAH. Where were we?

M.J. The knocker.

ZORAH. The knocker. That's as far as we've gotten?

M.J. Yeah. (*Offering Zorah a jar of chocolate kisses from her desk.*) Have a kiss.

ZORAH. Get those out of here.

M.J. Can't. The actors expect it. Sort of my own little theatre tradition.

ZORAH. How can you eat those and stay so thin?

M.J. This is *all* I eat.

LUTHER. Wow. You must be a complete grease bag by now. (*Puts his hand in kisses' jar.*)

M.J. You want a ride home tonight? Keep it up.

LUTHER. Just one?

M.J. No.

ZORAH. Luther dear, your mother would be very angry with us if she thought you were eating candy at rehearsals.

LUTHER. But it's traditional.

M.J. Backstage. Now.

LUTHER. (*Going.*) We're nowhere near my scene.

ZORAH. (*To M.J.*) Why are we moving so slowly?

M.J. Well ...

ZORAH. (*With exaggerated concern.*) It's not like we have to stop to figure anything out. What's the difference this year?

M.J. Hmm. Let me see. Could it be Larry?

ZORAH. All right, no need for your withering irony.

M.J. Was I being ironic? I'm so ashamed.