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a.k.a. Eat The Runt
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American Whup-Ass by Justin Warner

5 Males, 1 Female (with doubling)

Synopsis: The re-election campaign of Nevada Senator and former UNLV football star Wayne “Wall of Pain” Kight has hit some serious snags. His wife and campaign manager have been caught in a dalliance in the campaign bus, which his opponent, retired wrestler General Mayhem, mocks along with Kight’s attempt to save Nevada from a planned toxic waste dump. His poll numbers are slipping and life as he knows it is coming to an end; can accepting Mayhem’s challenge of an election-eve wrestling match at Caesar’s Palace save him? With the public clamoring for full contact, legislator-on-legislator wrestling action, winning re-election may cost him not only a few bumps and bruises, but also his relationship with his daughter and his dignity.

Big Baby by Joe Keyes

1 Male, 2 Females
No Intermission

Synopsis: BIG BABY unfurls in a cramped Midwestern apartment shared by Kile and his diminutive, gray-haired mother, June . This is a couple with colossal issues, and they wear them like comfortable old shoes. Mom is a staunch, churchgoing Catholic who endured an abusive marriage, and constantly fawns over and coddles her grown son. Kile is a scary bundle of pent-up energy and frustration who paces like a caged animal, stays medicated on a bevy of drugs, and frequently gets physical or argues vociferously over the merest trifle. When Nancy, a recovering heroin addict turned dominatrix, moves in next door, Kile avails himself of her services and finds them ironically therapeutic. But Kile's blossoming friendship with Nancy rankles June, who soon pushes Kile to the outermost limits of endurance.

**a.k.a.
Eat
The
Runt**

**a play by
Robert Riechel Jr.**

FOR MY FATHER

ROBERT RIECHEL

82628—52509

the last play he ever saw

AKA: Eat the Runt was first presented in a Los Angeles production at the Hudson Guild Theater in Hollywood, Ca., opening on October 30, 2008, with the following cast:

BUCK LONE	Robert Riechel, Jr.
THE MAN	Peter Leake
HAMMER	Victoria Engelmayer

Directed by Robert Riechel Jr, set design by Adam Haas Hunter; costumes by Ashley Hasenyeger; lighting & sound design by Matt Richter. The production was produced by Living Edge Theater Works in association with The Red Bark Corporation. Kimberly Reeder producer.

Characters

Buck Lone

The Man

Hammer—buck's girlfriend

Place

Basement apartment somewhere in fresno, california

Time

Current. It's the foggy season.

A.K.A. EAT THE RUNT

(The action of this play takes place in one room. An apartment. The apartment is in the basement of a larger building. Sparsely furnished. There is a table that doubles for eating and working. Chairs surround. A computer sits on top. On the table an assortment of items, all neatly placed: a legal pad; pencils and pens; a folder; newspaper; ashtray; coffee cup; two plastic baggies; beer cans; cigarettes; TV/CD clickers. Books are stacked and scattered all about the apartment. There's a small kitchen with a tiny picture window; the only place that light flows through. There is a refrigerator. On it's door, a taped newspaper. A framed poster of Samuel Beckett hangs prominently in the room. Artsy paintings etc. occupy wall space. To the right of the kitchen, a door that leads to the bedroom. There is a low bookcase filled with books adjacent to the bedroom door. On top, a roll of duct tape and a CD/Ipod station player. A comfortable, stylish reading chair is stationed near the entrance steps. Reading lamp and side table accompany. A small old school T.V. is near by. Piles of newspapers are placed neatly around the apartment. They are all the same, the exact same edition. From outside and above the front door of the apartment, one can always hear the smash of approaching footsteps. Then, down into the unit through the front door onto the landing and a few short steps down into the space. Note: All three characters in this play are well put together. Clean. Not bums. Their physical appearances belie their language skills and education. Production note: Over the course of the eight scenes that make up this story, the set should slowly begin to mirror the emotion in the actors. The room begins to fall apart.)

Scene: ONE

(In the dark. Sound: A cat meowing. Loudly. It scratches on a window. We can see the cat, barely, in the upstage right kitchen window. Sound: The slamming of doors and heavy footsteps from above and outside the apartment. As they approach, the hurried sound of hard breathing. Grunting.

Lights snap up.

The apartment door flies open, cat screeches and runs away as BUCK LONE enters. He drags a man in with him. THE MAN has a pillowcase over his head and his hands are taped. He's wearing pajamas. No shoes. The bottoms are soaking wet from his pissing in them. BUCK hurries THE MAN into the unit, down the entrance steps and roughly slams him, face first, onto the floor.)

BUCK: Get down! Down! Floor, floor...on the floor...(BUCK kicks THE MAN in rhythm.) and don't!... (Kick.) ...think !...(Kick.)... moving! (As he crosses to the bedroom.) THINK YOU CAN FUCK ME LIKE THAT...

(He jerks the bedroom door open and disappears. A moment later he re-enters with a roll of duct tape. He crosses to THE MAN, lifts him to the chair, shoves him down, and begins wrapping him up.)

BUCK: (Cont.) ...like that...uh-huh...fuck me...no, no... I think not...yes...

(Roughly, wrapping faster.)

BUCK: (Cont.) I think not at all...yes. Yes. Fuck.

(Wrapping faster.)

BUCK: (Cont.) I have but this one life. (Wrapping in rhythm.) And. I. Will. Be. Heard.

(BUCK finishes wrapping THE MAN. He stands looking, just staring. Winded. BUCK cocks his arm back ready to strike. THE MAN whimpers.)

BUCK: I should smack you man. Smack. I should. Yes. Smack you. Hard. Yes. I should. But I am not a man that uses *force*...I am a man of words. Uh huh, a man of words. A wordsmith. W O R D –BUCK: (Cont.) S M I T H. (Beat.) Fuck all. But, how'd someone like you ever know that? Can you *read*? Uh? *Even*? Call yourself one thing and you are something else. For Christ.

(Cell phone rings. BUCK digs into his pants pocket. He answers.)

BUCK: (Cont.) Uh? (Beat.) *Hammer!* Yes, yes, I got his ass. He's right here all buckled down like the good little boy he's about to become. Good and safe. (Beat.) No. NO! Just watch the fog. Yes, of course I am. (Beat.) Get here.

(He snaps phone closed. A moment.)

BUCK: You will repent.

(THE MAN whimpers.)

(Blackout.)

Scene: TWO

(Lights up. Minutes later. Same.)

(BUCK'S rips the taped newspaper off the refrigerator door. As he reads, he gets visibly upset. He trembles almost.)

BUCK: The world. *Oh Lord.* The world is-

(He picks up the remote control, aims it at the stereo, he clicks.

Music: "A Summer Place," circa 1964. The Percy Faith Orchestra.)

BUCK: *(Reacting to the music.) Ahhhhh... God. (Pause. Then, pointing at the newspaper.)* You see here? You see this right here. This here, *all of this* ... YOU caused. You caused it. You did it.

(THE MAN squirms in the chair. He moans. BUCK crosses to the framed poster of Samuel Beckett. He stands looking at it for a moment.)

BUCK: *(Whispering, with reverence.)* Sammy, k, ok, k, I'm, uhh,... how would you play this from here? Am I doing this, smartly?

(The door swings open and HAMMER, BUCK'S girlfriend of four years, enters. She stops.)

HAMMER: *(Joyous.)* YES! You got him. You did it. Baby you did. BABY! You got him. Yes!!

BUCK: *(Pointing.)* Yes.

HAMMER: So there the prick sits.

BUCK: Yes.

HAMMER: Right there!

BUCK: There, right there, yes-

HAMMER: Yes! *(Beat.)* You talking to that poster again? Oh my Bucky.

BUCK: *(Crossing to THE MAN.)* Come, come, come... come let's see. Lets pull bag.

HAMMER: Oh...my...God! Yes! *(She flies down steps. Stopping.)* Oh, he, oh...you scared the piss right out of him.

BUCK: Pissed his pants.

(HAMMER jumping and singing like a 5-year old.)

HAMMER: *He pissed his pants...He pissed his pants...He PISSED his pants!!*

BUCK: Uh-huh.

HAMMER (*Stopping, serious.*) Did you like the violence? Of it.

BUCK: I am a man of words. I snuck up on him like a snake.

(*Beat.*)

HAMMER: I'm going to pour acid on his nuts.

BUCK: (*To himself. Shaking his head.*) What he did-

HAMMER: Oh yes.

BUCK: You're liken this.

HAMMER: Look, don't go all sissy on me here. Yes? Yes, I do like it but for not the sick reason you may be thinking.

BUCK: No, no I-

HAMMER: For *you* I do this thing.

(*Moment.*)

BUCK: For *art* we do this thing.

HAMMER: Oh *God*, yes, yes ...art.

(*They kiss. THE MAN squirms. BUCK crosses to the newspaper, grabs it, and crosses back to THE MAN.*)

BUCK: (*Pointing at the paper.*) Why! Why was it?

HAMMER: (*Joins in with even more fervor.*) Yeah. Why. Why ass. YOU'RE AN ASSHOLE...

(*HAMMER grabs the newspaper from BUCK and shakes it at THE MAN.*)

HAMMER: (*Cont.*)...his heart... his soul...was buried into ...of this-

(*HAMMER whacks THE MAN with the newspaper. BUCK crosses to THE MAN, yanks the bag off his head. THE MAN breaths like a horse. Pause. They both stare. BUCK rips the tape off.*)

THE MAN: AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

(*Moment. Drool pours from THE MAN'S mouth.*)

HAMMER: *(Staring. Quiet.)* My God, look at him. *(Beat.)* He is real.

(HAMMER crosses quickly to THE MAN and smacks him on the head, hard with her open hand.)

THE MAN: Ooooh...OUCH! Ohhhh...ahhhh...

(Tape is hanging off THE MAN'S face. HAMMER rips the rest off.)

THE MAN: *(Cont.)* Ahhhhhhh... Arrggggg...Christ...Ahhhh... Christ...Ohhhh...What the...ok, ok, oh, Christ ohhh... *(Silence, but for breathing.)* What is all of this? What's happening? I'm, I'm not... just...I am asking that you please don't hurt me. And that for whatever or why ever you've done this thing, I just want you to know that I am in full cooperation here. I am complying. I am making clear that I am going to do whatever it is that you ask of me. *(Beat.)* Please why are you doing this? I've got nothing. I've zero money, no IRA. Look, I've got one hundred-twenty seven dollars and fifty cents in the bank account. You're welcome to it. I don't even own a bicycle. I pissed my pants. *(THE MAN whimpers. BUCK snaps the newspaper open in THE MAN'S face. He points to an article.)* What is that? What are you going to... *(Beat.)* Is *that*? No, no, no. Is *this*? *(Pause.)* Why am I here!? Oh my God. No. Is that what all this is about? What's happening!? That. That's what this is about. *(Moment.)* Oh my God you're that guy. For *that* you ripped me from my bed. *Kidnapped me.* Sleeping. You must be crazy. Why? Why? Huh? What, why...?

(THE MAN suddenly yanks and pulls at the tape. He tries to stand up, to escape, shuffling in vain. HAMMER AND BUCK violently drag him back. BUCK wraps his arm around THE MAN'S neck choking him as HAMMER grabs tape and tapes his legs down further. BUCK ad-libs: "Get the tape", "Tape him down", "Strong", etc.)

THE MAN: *(Cont.)* Ahhhh...ss-s-sh... ARRRGGGG...Ok, ok, I see that you're what you are, here now. I can see. Ok, right sure. Ok. I'm going to go ahead and play this thing out. It's for what I wrote? That you do this thing is it? Well...I'll give you this: That, what I wrote, what I put down there in that newspaper that you wave...is a was... *true.* All of it. Every word of it. That thing that I witnessed three nights ago, that *thing* that you created was, it hurts to even consider it anything other than what is. Is. Shit. Shit. Is what. Kill me. If you want. Torture me if you need be. I don't care, but that's fact. Sucked. *You do this.* Sitting in that theater was the worst event of my half lived life so far. You do this thing all because I gave you a bad review? *(Beat.)* You can't write.

(BUCK & HAMMER stand staring. BUCK drops the paper in a daze.)

BUCK: The only good critic...is a dead critic.

(Lights snap down.)

Scene: THREE

(Lights up. Same. Later.)

(Sound: A cat meows loudly. We can see the cat in the small window over the kitchen. It wants in. HAMMER stands on a chair reaching up to the window mock pawing back at the cat. She has a beer in her hand. THE MAN squirms slightly. Scared.)

BUCK: *(Offstage, from the bedroom.)* I'm going to kill that little fucker.

HAMMER: *(To cat.)* Oh, oh, ya little sweet precious. Peace to the little animals.

BUCK: *(Offstage.)* Little fucker. Screaming.

HAMMER: And I'm talking 'bout your little animal. Ha!

BUCK: *(Offstage.)* It's begging! I hate beggars.

HAMMER: *(Sipping beer.)* Ya think cats like beer?

(BUCK enters with a bat in his hands. Cat screeches.)

BUCK: Cats are whores.

THE MAN: I like beer.

(Beat. HAMMER and BUCK look at THE MAN.)

BUCK: Ya like beer?

(THE MAN shakes his head: YES.)

BUCK: *(Cont. Pointing the bat in THE MAN'S face.)* Ya like beer and get *shit* is what.

(BUCK moves a step closer, points the bat directly at THE MAN'S face then throws the bat down. BUCK grabs a newspaper.)

BUCK: *(Cont.)* This right here, what you *did*, what you *did* in this paper, in this publication, will be the end of whatever chance I had in this life you... fucker.

(Beat.)

THE MAN: Uh? This life ...?

(Beat.)

BUCK: What?

THE MAN: Do you mean this life of being alive?

BUCK: Shut up! No.

THE MAN: No, no. Sure. No. Right. I...I'm just trying... *our breathing* life?

BUCK: No, eff! No. Yes! Yes, this life. Life. Yes. The life an artist. The life of the theater you prick. You destroyer of art.

THE MAN: Well--

BUCK: Well hell! Yes sure. Yes. Maybe this *whole* breathing life... life... thing... too. Cuzz without the theater...I've nothing. I've dick.

HAMMER: Oh, hun buns, you've lotsa' things.

BUCK: LIKE?

HAMMER: *(Like she doesn't hear.)* Plus, that's only your *very first try* at this new thing. This writing plays ...or that.

(Beat. THE MAN'S head follows this dialogue.)

BUCK: Like?

HAMMER: Well-

BUCK: I'm here.

HAMMER: I see you.

BUCK: I'm listening.

HAMMER: I know.

BUCK: Well. What I'm good at?

HAMMER: Well, baby cakes, your good at ...ME.

(Beat.)

BUCK: My life is over.

(Moment.)

THE MAN: It's only over if you write another play.

(BUCK drops the paper, walks over to THE MAN, grabs his throat, and chokes him. Hard.)

BUCK: *Who are you? Why did you get born? Why are you here...?*

(HAMMER charges BUCK and pulls him off.)

THE MAN: *(Choking.)* I'm here because you kidnapped me!

(BUCK charges. HAMMER pulls him back.)

HAMMER: You'll kill him! NO! NO! That's not the deal here. That's not in this plan. Not-

BUCK: He was born to this earth just to get me!

(THE MAN coughs and squirms in the chair.)

HAMMER: Not now! Not in the plan now.

BUCK: To ruin my world! That's why he was born.

HAMMER: Hunny my lover, you're not a killer. Not a man who kills things.

BUCK: No, no you're right.

HAMMER: You're a man of peace. A peace man.

THE MAN: *(Still squirming, choking.)* Coulda' fooled me.

(BUCK starts for THE MAN, HAMMER pulls him back.)

HAMMER: *(To BUCK, quietly.)* We can't get what we want, what we have to have, that way-

(HAMMER stops, grabs a chair and pulls it close to THE MAN. She sits.)

HAMMER: *(Cont.)* Now you see him, he's messed up, he's an animal right now. I think if we can reason together, maybe we can change the outcome of this whole business here. We all can have ... what we want.

THE MAN: Ok.

HAMMER: I can tell you're smart, that you're a wise man. I saw a spark of it in that review, as misguided as it was.

THE MAN: I, I, well-

HAMMER: (*Cuts him off.*) See there. Yes, sure. I can see in your eyes right now that you're going to do the right thing and make good on that terrible lack of judgment about hunny's play. You're readers, *in fact, the world*, deserves to see, to be, to be...*a witness to...* this man's work. His...*art*.

THE MAN: Wow...you shoulda' written his play.

(*Hammer smiles.*)

BUCK: Well she didn't did she. I wrote it...

HAMMER: (*To THE MAN as she pulls chair back to the table.*) That's right sweet pea.

BUCK: ...and you are going to re-write your review.

HAMMER: (*To herself. Like it's genius.*) My good Christ.

THE MAN: Huh?

BUCK: You *will* write a retraction.

THE MAN: Excuse me?

BUCK: Yes!

THE MAN: Re?...what?

BUCK: That's right.

THE MAN: (*Shaking his head.*) A retraction...?

BUCK: Yes.

THE MAN: ...Retraction??

BUCK: Yes.

THE MAN: I wrote a theater review buddy...

BUCK: Oh?

THE MAN: ...not an op-ed piece!

BUCK: Your point?

THE MAN: IT'S *THE FRESNO BEE!*

BUCK: YES!

THE MAN: NOT *THE NEW YORK TIMES*! What's wrong with you two people?!

BUCK: There must be a start. A first.

THE MAN: A first? *First* learn to write. (*Beat.*) Then kill yourself. (*Beat.*) Then kill me.

(*BUCK stands staring at THE MAN. HAMMER chuckles loudly under her breathe.*)

BUCK: You think this is somehow funny?

HAMMER: No.

BUCK: Somehow...humorous?

THE MAN: It's humorous all right. Because this here, what you've done here, it's a capital crime. It's humorous. It's a capital crime... and that *is* humorous.

BUCK: No one's never gonna notice. No one's going to know anything. Never not ever.

THE MAN: How do ya figure that?

BUCK: Because.

THE MAN: Because? *My God.*

BUCK: Yes. Yes. Because, uh huh, yes, cuzz, you are going to do what you have to do. Do the thing *you* need to do to make it *right*...

HAMMER: (*Joining BUCK. Gently.*) Make it right.

BUCK: ...that's why. And no one gets hurt and-

THE MAN: Let me tell you, say to you this: your ass is in a world of hurt. You know it. I know it. And *she* for sure knows it.

(*HAMMER doesn't know that at all.*)

BUCK: Look at this guy, all tied down and giving me lip like he's got some kinna angle on this.

HAMMER: That's right lover.

BUCK: He's got nothing here.

HAMMER: (*To THE MAN.*) Hater of art.

BUCK: (*To HAMMER.*) I know you're with me on this.

HAMMER: Oh, damned right that I am.

BUCK: I know that you are...and I thank you for that confidence.

HAMMER: Always.

BUCK: *See.* She gets it.

(Beat.)

THE MAN: What she gets is twenty-five to life.

(Beat.)

THE MAN: *(Cont.)* And you get the chair. Or life. It's a pick 'um.

(Moment.)

BUCK: *(He crosses and grabs the retraction folder.)* I've done the writing; the retraction. I'm, I've got it right here and you are going to sign it. Then we're even and you can get free.

(Beat.)

THE MAN: Ok. I'll sign that.

BUCK: *(A bit stunned.)* You will?

THE MAN: Sure. Bring it.

(BUCK crosses to THE MAN, hands him the retraction. He reads.)

BUCK: *(Suddenly upbeat.)* See Baby...see that! What did I say. What words did I say. I'll tell you what!

HAMMER: *(Jumping. Happy.)* God. I do love you Baby. GOD!

BUCK: I love you too. Me too Hunny lover. Me too!

(THE MAN chuckles as he reads. Buck and Hammer celebrate by kissing and generally mauling each other 'round the room.)

THE MAN: Oh, I'm happy. Happy to sign this. I think you've done some real heavy lifting here. Some good solid thinking and you're right, I won't say one word about what has taken place today. Nothing about how you broke into my home and pulled me outta bed by gun-point. I wont. How she cracked my head. I won't say a word. Because you're starting to grow on me. And you're wife or girlfriend or whatever, has really grown on me. Too. So, I will sign this paper you wrote with no intention of doing anything other than sit here till they come for me. *(Beat.)* Oh, and for you too.

(HAMMER stops.)

HAMMER: You used a gun!?

BUCK: *(Quick beat, to THE MAN.)* What?

HAMMER: Gun?

BUCK: *(To HAMMER, snapping.)* Yes, yes, *I used a gun.*

HAMMER: An evil gun?!

BUCK: *(Realizing.)* Oh, Christ.

HAMMER: And your word?

BUCK: No, no, it wasn't a gun, it was a cucumber that I put in my jacket pocket and made it look like a gun. *Oh shit you know what I mean. (Looks at THE MAN.)* Why would you say that? That someone will come and all of that?

HAMMER: *(Comes back.)* Yeah, why would-

THE MAN: Oh, that's the simple part. Think about it. *(Beat.)* Go on. I'll give you a minute to think on it.

(A moment. BUCK and HAMMER stand like children, waiting.)

THE MAN: *(Cont.)* No guessing. *(Quick beat.)* Even? *(Looks at them both. To BUCK.)* Have you ever been arrested?

BUCK: Yes.

THE MAN: Right. *(Beat.)* Did you happen to wear gloves while breaking into my home, kidnapping me and ripping me from my bed?

(BUCK dumbfounded.)

THE MAN: *(Cont.)* Right. Ever watch Bewitched?

HAMMER: Love that.

THE MAN: Me too! Ya know, Gladys's Crance, the nosey next-door neighbor?

HAMMER: Sure.

THE MAN: *(Over the top.)* I've got *three* just like her! *(Back too normal.)* But the main reason; They'll come pounding into that door when they read this so called, "*retraction*", because they'll know that I DIDN'T WRITE IT. They'll track it right back to you because any-

one one who saw that play of yours, *all ten of them*, will know that you're the only person in the world that could have written this, "retraction", that's how bad this is. Coinciding perfectly with how meticulously horrible your, *don't even know what to call it*, your play...that *thing*... was. The same person had to write both. Not me. A Gordian Knot this isn't.

(BUCK and HAMMER stand, stunned.)

BUCK: Ok. Ok. I-

HAMMER: What.

BUCK: What. What, you think you can sit there and make me think a thing that's not true. Not true! Not in even the least?

HAMMER: Yes. Right!

BUCK: *That's rich*. I have to laugh. I have to laugh at you. *I'm saying sure*. I have to chuckle at a man like you who doesn't *feel* the work...

HAMMER: Power words Baby-

BUCK: ...doesn't see the art right in front of you. *Yes of course*. Right in front of your nose, in front of your own eyes.

HAMMER: Me so too!

BUCK: *(Powering on.)* Think you can use your words over my words to get you out? To get you free from your deed of destruction?

THE MAN: Well-

BUCK: WELL SHUT THE FUCK UP!

(THE MAN tries to speak.)

BUCK: *(Cont.)* Shut your mouth.

(THE MAN tries again.)

BUCK: *(Cont.)* You shut up.

(And again.)

BUCK: *(Cont.)* You shut that mouth! You're not the one in control here.

HAMMER: Yes, Hunny Baby... that's you.

BUCK: I have to think. *(Beat.)* I'm thinking now, so as to not kill this man here.

HAMMER: You use your power thoughts Hunny.

BUCK: So I can get what I need from this man. *(Moment.)* Where's that blow?

HAMMER: Purse.

THE MAN: Blow?

(The cat comes back to the window. It meows softly, and then builds. BUCK digs through HAMMER'S purse, pulls out a vile of cocaine and takes a massive snort.)

BUCK: God. Good Goddamned. Nother.

THE MAN: Is it...1980?

(BUCK takes another huge blast.)

BUCK: Ahhhhh...Good...God-damned-it. POW.

(The cat is now screaming to be let in. BUCK grabs the nearest glass and rifles it at the window. The glass explodes, sending shards everywhere. BUCK picks up any of the newspapers and sits. He opens the paper and starts to read the review.)

BUCK: *(Cont. Reading the review.)* "Last night I had the supreme misfortune to be witness to something I never could have imagined in my lifetime. Or ten lifetimes. A work of theater so intimately strained, so fraudulently executed, so uniformly unbearable as to put to rest any idea of talent, that I, along with the nine or so other cursed souls, who for three hours and thirty-three minutes, would have been more comfortable stuck, body upon filthy body, our broken limbs twisted and ripped, skin to burning skin, piled one on top the other so tightly squeezed that the smell of our putrid compensated for air. This curse would have been like a vacation in Christ's own heavenly spa, than to have to sit watching one more moment of this banal monstrosity of so-called theater. And I get a free ticket mind you. If you haven't stopped reading this review quite yet, the name of this singular piece of crap, "Jesus Was An Alien Too", written by a one Mr. Buckminster Lone. *(Moment. To Hammer.)* Get the tape and tape his mouth down.

HAMMER: Done.

(BUCK throws the paper down and moves around the room.)

BUCK: Tape it down. Shut.

(HAMMER starts taping. BUCK finds the bat.)

THE MAN: No! No! Wait...wait-

HAMMER: Oh, for hell.

THE MAN: I have a slight confession to make. I need to make it.

HAMMER: *(To herself.)* Sissy...men.

THE MAN: It's a small thing but I want you to know what it is.

BUCK: *(To HAMMER.)* Stop. *(To THE MAN.)* Talk.

THE MAN: Ok, sure. Well. Well, I, I really don't, I don't write many reviews. It was that I love theater so they asked me if I might have time to fit it in, ya know, fit it in from my regular writing at the paper. And because there aren't many plays done here in this culture rotten little town, I said sure, ya know, *why not*. Ok. I think, I, I really think I can make a difference in the mindset of the masses and then *maybe-*

BUCK: Ok, ok, on with it!

(Beat.)

THE MAN: Death Notices.

BUCK: Come again?

THE MAN: The obits.

HAMMER: The whaa, huh?

THE MAN: Obituaries.

BUCK: The whats?

THE MAN: When you die, I write your life story. That's my real job.

(Beat.)

BUCK: Ah...huh? You do. You can't be. Tell me what?

THE MAN: Birth and weddings. I'm that guy. Too.

BUCK: Are you telling me that...what you're saying...that you don't even work? That what you do is write these reviews for fucking fun?
HUH?

THE MAN: No. No! Yes. Yes. I'm saying that. I have something else to say too—

BUCK: (*Cuts him off.*) That you just type? Type, type away? Hit at the keys in some worldly way about the theater? When me life is on the line...that my work-

HAMMER: (*Overlapping.*) I think that's it. That's what he's trying to say.

THE MAN: NO. No, you're not getting it...you're not-

BUCK: (*Cuts him off.*) That you come into my house and lie to me. Lie to the world?

THE MAN: Fresno.

BUCK: Huh?

THE MAN: It's Fresno. Not the world. Fresno.

BUCK: (*Drops the bat.*) SHUT THE FUCK UP!

THE MAN: Yep.

BUCK: I am a patient man. I am a new man... of *letters*. A man that has tried is *whole life* to lead it the way that maybe some men might think not so...formidable. Not so...exciting. I got things done. I accomplished life. I worked my fingers off with my ol' man. I went to church. I believed in things. Simple things. I didn't mutter around. I had conviction buddy. I worked. I kept the sex down till twenty-four years old. I kept it locked down. Hell, my Christian girlfriend for six years and I hardly kissed. We wanted to wait. I'd drive all the way down to Biola Bible College every flipping weekend just to see her, and I'd sleep in the car in the parking lot. So as not to be tempted. Sex ya know. Sex. I didn't even touch my own self for that whole six years. Ever done that?!

THE MAN: No. HAMMER: No.

BUCK: (*Powering on.*) I put my own money in the bank. I was a saver buddy. I *was* saved. I said yes to the *simple things*. Simple is not spiritual in this life pal. I tell you what. At a point, at some point, a man has just got...he must... hear his own voice. See, cuzz, I never heard nothing. Ever not never. I just kinna walked in circles my whole life doing what I thought was the things I had to, yes. Ok. But for this. This...creation I made. It came deep. See. You hearing? It's not a *play*. A *drama*. It's my soul. It's my heart man buried on that page.

It's all I've got in this world. I came out for the very first time in my life with this brilliant work. I put it out there with, "*Jesus Was An Alien Too.*" I put it out there. My ego. My fucking manhood I did. Everything. I put it out there for the world to taste. For the world to see this new talent I have. This way of seeing things. I put it *all* on the line with that work. You cunt. And with my words, my very own words, words, words...words...*words...I* did it. And then *you* a F-ing, little F-ing little man. *A little man. A man of nothingness. A scrawny little man. Thinned lipped little person...* with one hour of typing brought my world, this whole new world that I'm trying to create, to a halt. To a stop! This can not happen! A FUCKING OBITUARY WRITER!

(Pause.)

THE MAN: I write the happy stuff too, the weddings and the babies.

(THE MAN doesn't move. HAMMER'S frozen. BUCK circles like an animal. Breathing hard and pounding on his leg. BUCK crosses to the bat, picks it up and charges THE MAN.)

HAMMER: NO! Oh no! NO! Not this way. Not like thisss...NO!
Not this way-

(HAMMER jumps in front of THE MAN, hands up.)

HAMMER: *(Cont.)* This is not the thing...!

BUCK: Not till three nights ago missy!

HAMMER: ...this is not it! This is not *you*...don't...don't-

(BUCK raises the bat. He is going to smash THE MAN with it. HAMMER now lays across THE MAN, fully protecting him. BUCK throws the bat down and circles again. He stops. BUCK crosses to the table, picks up his play, opens it and reads. As he reads THE MAN reacts with ad-libs. Peppering the following (slowly) with: "Oh, God. No.", "Not again.", "Oh God, no, not, not this piece of shit again", etc.)

BUCK: *(Like a preacher.)* MY CHARACTER JOHNNY SAYS IN ACT 1, SCENE 3: "Lori, my love, I saw you there. You thought I wasn't looking at you when you thought I was home. And the sun above us was asleep. Alone. You left me for that other man. We were soul people. We were perfect. Our plans. But I was. Home there. I saw it all. I saw you take that man, your friend, and do that awful, horrible thing to him. What was it that you did. And then the sun rose up. Why? Why, Lori sweet did you do that? It? How could you do that? *(Fading off.)* You said that is was love that made you-

(BUCK stops, slowly drops the script to the floor, wipes the sweat off his face and smiles. Suddenly, he crosses in front of THE MAN, lifts his leg and viciously stomps THE MAN'S bare foot with the heel of his boot.)

THE MAN: *(Letting out a death scream.)* ARGGHHHHHH!

(BUCK crosses to his jacket, grabs it, and heads out the door. MUSIC pounds in. HAMMER grabs the nearest roll of duct tape, stands over the MAN, snaps the tape strong and in one motion, masks and covers his screaming mouth.)

(Blackout.)

Scene: FOUR

(Lights up. Later. Same.)

(It's quiet. We see THE MAN, mouth again taped shut. He has passed out. His toes are covered in blood. Paper pieces surround the chair and floor. Their edges bloodied. He now has bloody cuts on his face and hands. Sound: Toilet flushing. THE MAN wakes up. HAMMER enters from the bedroom. She zips up her pants as she comes into the room. She carries an ace bandage. She crosses to the fridge, pulls out an ice pack, crosses back to the table, grabs a chair and moves toward THE MAN. She positions the chair, pulls THE MAN'S leg up and begins to triage his foot with the bandage, ice pack etc. THE MAN ad-libs to the pain. She bends over, her ass near his face. THE MAN, taped down and through the pain, can't help but crane to look at her.)

HAMMER: *(Sees him looking. She continues triaging.)* Oh, Ah! So you're a looker are you? Like to look? Gezzz. Pig. Critic.

(THE MAN shakes his head: NO. HAMMER roughly lifts his leg and slams it down on the chair. THE MAN yells through his taped mouth.)

THE MAN: ARRGGGGGGHHH-

HAMMER: All men are pigs 'cept for Buck.

(She rips the tape off.)

THE MAN: AgrrrrARRRGGGG-

HAMMER: Shut up! Shut up! Christ. Shut the hell up.

THE MAN: Yes, yes, you're right you're...I'll keep from screaming.

HAMMER: Just cuz we're way down here in the basement of this place doesn't mean people above can't hear us. Christ. How 'bout some thought to that, uh?

(HAMMER crosses to her purse, pulls out some cocaine, and pours it on the table. She chops.)

HAMMER: *(Cont. Seeing the man staring again.)* What'ca looking at this time? Never seen a woman bent over before. It's ass, you slob.

THE MAN: *(Interested.)* What are ya crunching coke?

HAMMER: Oh Christ, get in the game.

(She snorts a line. She begins to ramble.)

HAMMER: *(Cont. Dream like.)* I love Buck. I love him *because* he's an *artist*. I love artists. I guess some people may say I'm like those groupie girls loving rock stars. Rock stars, artists. Same thing. You see, Buck Lone *is* an artist. I knew it the first time I saw him... well, *heard* him. I was walking down the street and I heard this voice...this voice coming from inside the Rodger Rocka Dinner Theater downtown. It was the words that...I just found myself moving through the doors and into the place. Heck, I'd never even been inside a theater in my life, well, 'cept Alice And Wonderland when I was a kid. And he was sitting there. Just sitting in this light-

THE MAN: *(Cuts in. Dispassionately.)* Spotlight.

HAMMER: Yes. The spotlight. Up there all by hisself, reading from his work. His play. And the people were sitting in the the seats just staring, mesmerized by-

THE MAN: *(Cuts her off.)* Words.

HAMMER: Yes! I knew at that moment ...

THE MAN: Yeah, you said that.

HAMMER: ...who I wanted. Who he was, inside ya know? That's what I saw. And that is my artist man. *(Beat.)* Till you fucked us that is.

THE MAN: He's no longer an artist huh? Because I gave him a bad review?

HAMMER: No. No. Don't. Don't you. Don't. Do that. Don't try to get out of this thing by mixing the words 'round. I'm no dummy here.

THE MAN: Then why did you kidnap me?