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*The Balancing of the Budget*

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### ATROCIOUS TRADITIONS

By Erica Griffin

#### Featuring:

##### INBRED

1 Male, 2 Females

**Synopsis:** Catch (30's), an aspiring musician, is playing in a cover band in Boulder City, Nevada. When a strange but beautiful, and very drunk young groupie named Alice (20's) brings him home to an off-road shack near the base of Hoover Dam, Catch suddenly finds himself caught in a strange reality... a reality where a mentally retarded girl named Daphne (20's) is routinely abused by her sister Alice in order to make sense of their parents incestuous love affair and double suicides. Catch faces his own insecurities as his passion for Alice fizzles and his compassion for Daphne grows.

##### INTACT

2 Males, 1 Female

**Synopsis:** Mavis (40's), an artist, has almost finished her nude portrait of Riot (20's), a model, in her Las Vegas garage/art studio, but has run into a problem now that he has disrobed completely. When she calls her son Lyle (20's), who works in the costume shop at UNLV, in for a second opinion, Lyle is instantly attracted to Riot. Of course Lyle hasn't taken his meds, and when Mavis wants to go out and celebrate with Riot, Lyle's attraction takes a fatal turn... he comes up with an artistic solution of his own.

# **The Balancing of the Budget**

**A one-act play by**

**Matt Henderson**

**Characters:**

WILLY, a 54-year-old homeless man who's been laid off from his construction job

JOAN FLAT, an 18-year-old girl making millions from her kitschy bad singing

MAX, a very angry revolutionary hell-bent on the destruction of Joan Flat

**Setting:** A bus stop, present day

*The Balancing of the Budget* was first produced by Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company (Mark Clayton Southers – Artistic Director) as part of the Theatre Festival in Black and White in Pittsburgh, PA November 25-December 4, 2011. The production was directed by Michael Jackson and stage managed by Darnell Kinsel with the following cast:

JOAN                      Xazrianna Walker

WILLY                    Lamont Robinson

MAX                      Connor McCanlus

## THE BALANCING OF THE BUDGET

*(A very sad middle-aged man is sitting on a bench at a bus stop. He stares into space, contemplating the unbearable disappointment that has become his life. A very scared young woman who could be anything from 14-20 enters, wearing sunglasses and a large hat that obscures her face. She looks around to see if anyone who seems remotely threatening is in the immediate vicinity, realizes the coast is clear, and sits. She notices the man and does not acknowledge him at first. However, it soon becomes clear that she is so terrified of the nightmare that has become her life that she has to reach out to another human being for comfort.)*

JOAN: Hi there.

WILLY: Hello.

JOAN: You haven't seen people carrying any sort of remotely violent-looking weapons around, have you?

WILLY: No, not really.

JOAN: Oh. What do you mean, "not really"?!

WILLY: I don't know.

JOAN: Oh. *(Long pause.)* I'm talking about people carrying knives, or guns, or old laptops, or a hardcover copy of the longest Harry Potter book, or old batteries that are leaking acid. Really anything that could potentially be lethal or even harmful in any way. Just to clarify.

WILLY: Oh.

JOAN: I mean. **HAVE YOU SEEN ANYONE LIKE THAT?! I'M SO SORRY FOR SHOUTING, I'M JUST KIND OF HYSTERICAL.**

WILLY: No, not really.

JOAN: Oh. Okay. That's good. *(Long pause.)* If you do, will you let me know?

WILLY: I guess.

JOAN: Oh. Well. What will you do, if you see someone like that?

WILLY: What do you mean?

JOAN: Will you give me a hand-signal, or something? To warn me?

WILLY: I guess.

JOAN: Oh. *(Long pause.)* WHAT KIND OF HAND-SIGNAL?!  
SORRY.

*(WILLY sits a long time, giving barely any indication that he's heard what she said. Finally, he gives a noncommittal sort of wave that could just as easily be him swatting at a fly.)*

JOAN: Oh. Thank you.

WILLY: Yeah.

JOAN: Are you all right? You seem sort of...sad.

WILLY: Yeah.

JOAN: Oh. So you're going to give me this hand-signal *(repeats the hand-signal)* when you see a dangerous person nearby, right?

*(WILLY gives a barely perceptible nod.)*

JOAN: Good. I mean, I'm sorry, I've just been, I shouldn't be telling you this, but I've been receiving a lot of death threats lately, and I shouldn't even be telling you that. But I've been receiving a lot of death threats lately.

WILLY: Oh.

JOAN: Yeah. People have been threatening to kill me.

WILLY: Oh.

JOAN: Yeah. (*Long pause.*) Believe me, I have no desire whatsoever to talk to you, but you're the only person I've met in the past twenty minutes who hasn't spat in my face or come at me threateningly with a weapon, so that's why I'm talking to you.

WILLY: Oh.

JOAN: (*sighs*) What time is it?

WILLY: It's tough out there.

JOAN: What?

WILLY: It's tough. People can't get work. That's why they're a little on edge.

JOAN: Oh. I'm not exactly sure that's why they're threatening *me*, though.

WILLY: Why wouldn't they threaten you? You're extremely young, and you have so much life ahead of you. If things don't go your way now, there's a very high probability they will get better eventually. You have hope. If I wasn't so sad, I'd bash your head in with a monkey wrench right now.

JOAN: Oh. But you're too sad to do that, right?

WILLY: Right.

JOAN: Good.

WILLY: I wish people would threaten my life.

JOAN: Oh, I wish I never made that stupid video in the first place! Who in their right mind plans to go viral?! I know I don't! Oh, I shouldn't be telling you this, but seeing as you're too sad to do anything, and I shouldn't be telling you this, but I'm Joan Flat, (*taking off her sunglasses and hat*) I'm the girl who made that Youtube video where I'm singing "Tomorrow" from *Annie*, and everyone made fun of me because I'm really off-key and wearing a tacky hat, not a tastefully subtle one like this one, and now I have a record deal because

I'm so popular and I make millions of dollars and everyone hates me and I can't even set foot outside my own house without being in danger! OH GOD, I HATE MY LIFE! *(She starts to cry.)*

WILLY: You're just lucky I just lost my job and had my house foreclosed on and my wife left me and took the kids and I am now homeless and have no will to live, or I would attempt to kill you.

JOAN: I know, and I really appreciate that, but still, you don't know how bad this hurts! Everyone at school told me to kill myself, even my teachers! My parents have entered the witness protection program and refuse to speak to me! Is my singing really that bad?

WILLY: Yes.

JOAN: Well, at any rate, thank you for not trying to kill me.

WILLY: You're welcome, I guess.

JOAN: Really, you have no idea how much guilt I feel, do you have any idea how much money I've made from people buying my single on iTunes just so they could play it ironically at parties? I could probably fund your entire retirement!

WILLY: Yes.

JOAN: I shouldn't have told you.

*(MAX, a revolutionary-type in a bandanna and carrying a rifle, enters. JOAN sloppily pulls her hat and sunglasses back on at a jaunty angle. MAX, being bloodthirsty, doesn't really notice this.)*

MAX: Hey, have either one of you seen Joan Flat anywhere around these parts? I'm hunting her.

JOAN: *(muttering to WILLY)* You didn't do the hand-signal. *(aloud to MAX, in a bad British accent)* No, my dear, I'm afraid we haven't seen her anywhere in this vicinity. I do hope to catch her someday, though. The horrid little child makes so much money for having no talent whatsoever.

MAX: (*pointing the rifle at her*) She's MINE, lady!

JOAN: (*putting her hands up*) Oh, how silly of me, of course you can have her. I'm sure you want to see her dead much more than I do, I can see you look way more bloodthirsty.

MAX: THANK YOU.

(*He exits. JOAN takes her sunglasses and hat off and fixes the flower on the hat.*)

JOAN: That was close.

WILLY: Not close enough.

JOAN: I know, some days I wish someone would just kill me already so all of this could be over with.

WILLY: Yeah, I've been there.

JOAN: I mean, it sucks 'cause I'm only 18, I could live for like, 60 more years still. WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH ALL THAT TIME?!

(*MAX enters suddenly. JOAN throws the hat and sunglasses back on.*)

MAX: Did you call me?

JOAN: (*doing bad British accent*) Oh, no dear, I was merely shouting to my friend here, I was asking him what time it was.

MAX: Oh. Well don't call me unless it's important. And by important, I mean not unless you see Joan Flat. I've been assigned to cover this territory by the Society of Joan Flat Assassins.

JOAN: Right-o, cheerio, pip-pip.

(*MAX makes a violent revolutionary type of grunt and exits again.*)

JOAN: Who would think that law and order would completely disintegrate in the face of an annoying Youtube video? My God, I can't live like this!

WILLY: Well, why don't you just give yourself up? Accept the inevitable?

JOAN: ? You mean...? Just allow someone to shoot me?

WILLY: It's what I would do, if people wanted to shoot me. Unfortunately, no one does.

JOAN: Oh, but that's...that's kind of quitting, isn't it?

WILLY: So? What's wrong with that? If life quits on you, it's only fair that you quit on it.

JOAN: But—that's—good God, all I did was sing off-key.

WILLY: I never said you did anything to deserve it. It's just the way things are.

JOAN: ...I don't like you.

WILLY: I don't either.

JOAN: Yes—well—WHERE'S THE DAMN BUS ALREADY?

*(MAX rushes back on.)*

MAX: WHERE IS SHE?! DID YOU FIND HER?!

*(JOAN opens her mouth to speak, but WILLY speaks first.)*

WILLY: Yep, she's right here, she's in dis—

JOAN: IN DA BUSHES! *(affecting an entirely different accent)* SHE EEZ IN DA BUSHES, WAY OVER DERRR! *(points to far away bushes across the street)* GO NOW, JU MUST CATCH HER!

MAX: I HAVE YOU NOW, YOU RICH OFF-KEY BITCH!

*(He runs off to where JOAN is pointing.)*

JOAN: Have you lost your mind?!?!!

WILLY: I just wanted to know how badly you wanted to live.

JOAN: That's a hell of a way to find out!!!

WILLY: Yes, it is. So here's how it works. You're getting me my life back.

JOAN: Huh?

WILLY: 2 million dollars. Right now. Or I'm giving you away.

JOAN: 2 million? That's like, my entire earnings!

WILLY: You seem to be aware of the fact that you don't deserve them.

JOAN: I can't just do that, I'm completely on my own, how am I going to survive?

WILLY: How old are you?

JOAN: 18.

WILLY: How old am I?

JOAN: Um...I don't know...sixty—

WILLY: I'm 54, okay? Exactly three times your age. I need money more than you do.

JOAN: You can't just take it, though—

WILLY: YES, I CAN! MY JOB, MY HOUSE, MY FAMILY GOT TAKEN FROM ME! YOU CAN BEAR TO PART WITH SOME CASH!

(MAX enters.)

MAX: You called? Joan was too fast for me, she must have found a new cover by the time I got to the bushes.

WILLY: Sorry, our mistake. But I do have a feeling she's very close by. Closer than you think.

MAX: Well, she can't get very far. The transit authority is on our side too, we've advised them not to come to this bus stop ever since your little Flat sighting.

WILLY: Perfect. I really hope you find her soon.

MAX: I know she's around here somewhere. I can smell her. I can taste the flat notes in the air. *(does a weird movement with his tongue and sits beside JOAN)* To think, we may finally have justice this afternoon.

WILLY: Oh, to think.

JOAN: Cheerio.

MAX: Yes...*(stares at JOAN's hat, or perhaps he's staring at another thing just past the hat)* I'm getting a whiff of bad taste in fashion. Is that...do I spot a tacky hat like she was wearing in the video? DO I SPOT A TACKY HAT?! I THINK I DO! OH I'VE GOT YOU NOW! YOU CAN'T HIDE FROM ME WITH THOSE FEATHERS! *(stands and runs offstage)*

JOAN: Fine, 2 million dollars. Let me write you a check. *(gets out her checkbook and starts writing the check)*

WILLY: I want you to understand something. I'm not a bad person.

JOAN: Yes, very bad things have happened to you, so you have to go blackmailing people. What's your name?

WILLY: Willy...do you have to know? Just let me write it.

JOAN: No. I want to know your name.

WILLY: There's no reason to be vindictive.

JOAN: I'm not being vindictive, I just want to know your name. And if you have any daughters.

WILLY: One.

JOAN: That's great, I'm sure if she were in my position, you wouldn't have any problem with someone doing this to her.

WILLY: If she had that much money, she'd DO something with it! She'd take care of me.

JOAN: A noble cause, indeed.

WILLY: Besides, I wouldn't let her post something so embarrassing on YouTube. And she's smart enough to know she's not good enough to sing in public anyway.

JOAN: It sounds like you two have a wonderful relationship.

WILLY: WE DON'T RIGHT NOW, I'M HOMELESS!

JOAN: Oh, fine, you're right, if I'm 18 and without money and cut off from my parents and the rest of society, it'll just be character-building. At your age, it's devastating.

WILLY: Exactly my point.

JOAN: Actually, come to think of it, I probably haven't got much longer anyhow. Someone's bound to catch me soon and kill me. Might as well leave my money to a needy person.

WILLY: Well I can...protect you—

JOAN: You can't protect me. *(holds out the check to him)* Take it. Save yourself. You're old, you have a family, you matter. I don't.

WILLY: Um...*(takes the check)* thank you, Joan.

*(He gets up to leave.)*

JOAN: One last thing. I'm going to call that guy over now, and get it all over with. Would you mind staying with me in my last moments so I'm not alone?

WILLY: Uh...