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*Counselor*

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## Also Available from OWP

### 3boys

by Becca Schlossberg

3 Males

**Synopsis:** Sit. Stay - for 3boys, a twisted allegory about Lee, a young dog struggling to guard puppy Zip against the human ideals of obedience, devotion, and masculinity. But when alpha Comet returns, Lee learns that rebellion only comes back to bite them. The harshly poetic 40-minute piece uses canine physicality to portray human emotional violence.

### Does The Body Good

by Patrick Link

2 Males, 2 Females

**Synopsis:** A seductive housewife entices a young milkman his first day on the job. A depressed middle school teacher struggles to extract himself from a sexual affair with the precocious 8th grade girl who idolizes him. In *Does The Body Good* these two seemingly unrelated liaisons divide the stage into a distorted mirror image of the other, build on each other's intensity, and finally collide into a perfect storm of unfulfilled yearnings.

### Roberta Laughs

by Bekah Brunstetter

1 Senior Male, 1 Senior Female, 1 Teen Male

**Synopsis:** Roger doesn't know his Grandma Roberta very well - but he knows she's "wicked awesome." In an effort to impress the girls at school he's decided to take up the accordion, just as his Grandma played when she was his age. But when the fiercely independent Roberta suffers a debilitating stroke and is close to death - Roger takes action to know her better, even if it means getting to know her "boyfriend" Billy too.

# **Counselor**

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A Play in One Act

By Stephen Cedars

## **CHARACTERS**

MR. BRYCE, M, 40's. Well-groomed guidance counselor.

BRAD, M, 16. A high school boy.

\*\*CLARISSA, F, 16. A high-school girl.

CARLOS, M, 30's-50's. The school security guard.

\*\*SECRETARY, F. Only her voice is heard.

**\*\*NOTE: If producer wishes, the play can be performed without Clarissa by using an alternate opening printed at the end of the script. Additionally, as the Secretary is only heard via loudspeaker from offstage, it would be acceptable to double-cast CLARISSA with SECRETARY, as was done in the original production. The actress would simply exit to an off-stage microphone for her next lines.**

## **SETTING**

A guidance counselor's office at a public high school near the Mexican border.

## **TIME**

The present.

*Counselor* was originally produced in April 2011 at the Manhattan Movement & Arts Center in New York City. It was produced as part of the Downtown Urban Theatre Festival. It was directed by Anthony Cerrato with the following cast:

MR. BRYCE

BRAD

CLARISSA / SECRETARY

CARLOS

S. Brian Jones

Dan Gershaw

Catherine Grace Clark

Will Manning

## COUNSELOR

*(Lights reveal MR. BRYCE sitting across his desk from CLARISSA.*

*He is carefully reviewing a file open before him on the desk, while making notes on a pad. She sits respectfully quiet but clearly anxious, twirling her hair and stealing glances at him. He looks up at her and smiles, then back at the file.*

*After a while: )*

CLARISSA: So?

MR. BRYCE: *(a smile)* Just a moment.

CLARISSA: OK.

*(He continues to write. She tries to peek over at his pad without rising from her chair, to no avail. In a flourish, he finishes.)*

MR. BRYCE: Well then. OK, we shouldn't have much more trouble then.

CLARISSA: Really?

MR. BRYCE: Well now, that doesn't mean you shouldn't learn from this, now -

CLARISSA: No, no, no, of course not, of course not. I just...Mr. Bryce...you don't know what this means, that you're not going to call my parents -

MR. BRYCE: Well Clarissa, you've expressed your gratitude -

CLARISSA: No, I know, but really, this is so great. Thank you.

MR. BRYCE: It's very difficult, being a high school girl. Life can be tough for you. Quite a lot of pressure, and it's hard to know the right thing sometimes.

CLARISSA: Totally - and like I said, I don't even care about her anymore, it's just like she hates me, and won't let it go.

MR. BRYCE: So you've said. Well, in the future, let's do what we can then, to try to turn the other cheek?

CLARISSA: Totally – like I said, I never even cared, just that she –

MR BRYCE: Even if she was the instigator, there are ways to ignore it, to be the bigger person.

CLARISSA: Totally.

MR. BRYCE: And you feel we've adequately discussed ways to do that?

CLARISSA: Yes sir, very much.

MR BRYCE: Well then.

*(He closes the file dramatically and stands.)*

MR. BRYCE: What say we get on with our day?

*(Clarissa stands to leave.)*

CLARISSA: Mr. Bryce, thank you so much, you don't understand.

MR. BRYCE: I suspect I do, Clarissa.

CLARISSA: Totally – that's not what I meant at all, just – thank you.

MR BRYCE: Quite welcome, dear.

*(They shake hands. She smiles and crosses to the door. She stops and looks back to him. She giggles and waves again.)*

MR. BRYCE: Bye now.

*(She exits, not closing the door fully behind her. He continues to stare after her. He sighs, very satisfied with his work. He puts away the girl's file in the cabinet behind him. He pages his SECRETARY through the speakerphone. Her voice is always heard over the speaker: )*

SECRETARY: Are you well sir?

MR. BRYCE: Yes, quite fine. There is another, I presume?

SECRETARY: Bradford Willis, sir.

MR. BRYCE: OK then. What grade level?

SECRETARY: Grade 10, sir.

MR. BRYCE: Has he gotten in some trouble?

SECRETARY: Not reported, no sir. Here on teacher recommendation.

MR. BRYCE: Whose recommendation?

SECRETARY: Mr. Hawkins, sir.

MR. BRYCE: Hm. No surprise there, now is it? *(Pause. He sighs.)*  
Excellent. Give it a minute then send him in.

SECRETARY: Yes sir.

*(He releases the button. He turns to the file cabinet, and locates a different file. He sits and reviews it. It is very thin compared to Clarissa's file. He takes one page out and is reading it when BRAD steps silently through the door. He stands quiet, watching the man.)*

MR. BRYCE: *(to himself)* Strange.

*(He looks up, sees Brad.)*

MR. BRYCE: *(startled)* Ah!

*(Pause. No reaction from Brad.)*

MR. BRYCE: Whoa, son!

BRAD: Sorry.

MR. BRYCE: Whoa. That was certainly a fright. My. *(Pause. He mutters to himself.)* Why don't you knock?

BRAD: I was told you were ready for me. (*Slight pause.*) I apologize if that was incorrect.

MR. BRYCE: No, it wasn't, it's just... (*Adopts a more professional demeanor.*) Oh, it's no matter. Does an old heart well, the occasional jolt. Well, come in, come in, have a seat.

(*He stands and offers his hand. Brad steps timidly forward and shakes short and quick. He sits. Mr. Bryce notes the oddity. He sits. He re-opens the folder.*)

MR. BRYCE: Hm. So. How are we today?

BRAD: Well, thank you.

MR. BRYCE: Good. That's wonderful. So. There's not much in your file, Bradford.

BRAD: Brad.

MR. BRYCE: Pardon?

BRAD: My name is Brad.

MR. BRYCE: Oh, of course, if you prefer Brad –

BRAD: I don't prefer it, it's actually my name.

MR. BRYCE: But our file has your name as Bradford.

BRAD: Does it?

(*Pause.*)

MR. BRYCE: Yes, it does.

BRAD: It's wrong then.

(*Pause.*)

MR. BRYCE: Well, I guess it must be. I'll make a note to that effect.

*(He scribbles something in the file. Brad has not taken his eyes from the man's face. Mr. Bryce looks up and notices as much.)*

MR. BRYCE: *(while writing)* A strange mistake, quite uncommon. I'll have it looked into.

*(He finishes writing. Brad smiles.)*

MR. BRYCE: OK then, Brad. You've been in school here for near two years now and neither I nor Dr. Lewis has yet to sit down with you. What can I help you with today?

BRAD: You don't have a PhD.

*(Slight pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: That's correct.

BRAD: May I ask why not?

MR. BRYCE: Well. Certainly. It was never my intention to pursue one.

BRAD: May I ask why not?

MR. BRYCE: You may. Although I must say that this is your time here, and there are other students, so we shouldn't waste too much time on me.

BRAD: I'm only curious. I'm a bit nervous, you know. It helps me to chatter a bit.

*(Mr. Bryce refers to a certificate hanging on the wall behind him.)*

MR. BRYCE: I understand. Well, I always intended to work in a school system, and looked forward to it for many years. While I respect and admire the tenuous process of doctorate study, I was, upon obtaining my licensure, quite eager to begin the work I do now.

BRAD: That makes sense.

MR. BRYCE: Yes. So –

BRAD: Is it ever a problem?

MR. BRYCE: My...what?

BRAD: That Dr. Lewis holds the higher degree.

*(Pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: Not that I'm aware of.

BRAD: I wonder if students or parents ever express displeasure when assigned to you, considering your colleague's higher qualifications.

MR. BRYCE: It's never been expressed to me.

*(Pause. Brad maintains his stare.)*

MR. BRYCE: But enough of this, Brad. We can certainly chat through the meeting if that's what you need but I'd rather we focus our attention on you, on why you're here today. How's that sound?

BRAD: Fine.

MR. BRYCE: Good. So what brings you in here today, then?

*(Slight pause. Brad looks away for the first time.)*

BRAD: I was hoping to talk.

MR. BRYCE: Certainly. That's why I'm here. What's on your mind?

BRAD: A lot.

MR. BRYCE: I see. *(Pause.)* I understand Mr. Hawkins recommended you come in.

BRAD: Hawkins is a dumbass.

MR. BRYCE: *(firm and professional)* Well now, I'd ask you please remember that **Mr.** Hawkins is a colleague of mine.

BRAD: Is he?

MR. BRYCE: And a friend.

BRAD: Is he really?

*(Slight pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: Yes, of course. You can be honest with me but let's aim to temper our tongue a bit, okay?

BRAD: I think I want to kill myself.

*(Pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: Oh. Well, Brad, suicide is a severe move. I don't want to patronize, but I feel I should say aloud that it is a final choice, one which can never be recalled. *(Pause.)* I know things can be bad. Life can be very difficult, the pressures intense. It often helps to talk about these things –

BRAD: *(with slight agitation)* That's why I'm here.

MR. BRYCE: I'm sorry.

BRAD: I came here to talk. About all the pressures. You don't have to tell me. I'm already here.

*(A slight, professional pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: I'm sorry, Brad. I didn't mean to offend you.

*(A longer, less professional pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: So then. I won't say anything. You talk to me.

*(Long pause. Brad looks up and stares directly at Mr. Bryce. He makes no move to speak.)*

MR. BRYCE: You can say whatever you feel.

*(Long pause.)*

BRAD: Are these tricks?

MR. BRYCE: Are what tricks?

BRAD: The silence. Is that a trick they taught you?

MR. BRYCE: I don't understand.

*(Brad motions to the certificate.)*

BRAD: Your certificate training. To talk with students, suicidal or hormonal or whatever. Did they teach you it was an effective strategy or something, to stay so silent?

MR. BRYCE: I was waiting for you to talk to me, that's all.

BRAD: It's a rotten trick.

MR. BRYCE: It wasn't a trick of any kind.

BRAD: If I'd already taken the pills, I might have died during those long silences, when you ought to have been dissuading me, telling me about beautiful things that might have made me want to puke the pills back up.

MR. BRYCE: Have you taken pills?

BRAD: No.

MR. BRYCE: Is that the way you imagine doing it?

*(Pause. Brad smiles and looks away.)*

MR. BRYCE: Is that how you imagine killing yourself, Brad? With pills?

BRAD: No. That'd be pretty unimaginative, don't you think?

MR. BRYCE: You want to know what I think?

BRAD: I did ask.

MR. BRYCE: I think suicide itself is a fairly unimaginative way to deal with complex problems, most of which have a solution if you're willing to work for it.

BRAD: Very clever, sir.

MR. BRYCE: So then, no pills. Tell me Brad, how it is you imagine it?

BRAD: Suicide?

MR. BRYCE: Yes.

BRAD: I don't.

*(Pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: You don't what?

BRAD: Imagine suicide. At all.

*(Pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: I'm afraid I don't –

BRAD: I don't think about suicide. I'm not a coward, Mr. Bryce.

MR. BRYCE: Bradford, I'm very –

BRAD: It's Brad.

MR. BRYCE: Brad, sorry. I'm concerned by this, Brad, I must be honest.

BRAD: I was just fucking with you.

MR. BRYCE: Excuse me?

BRAD: I was testing your credentials. Taking a peak at your resolve under pressure. A little spy game.

MR. BRYCE: I'm not amused by this.

BRAD: I'm sorry.

*(Mr. Bryce stands.)*

MR. BRYCE: I think you'd do best, young man, to –

BRAD: No, I am, I really am, I was only...it's just...I was scared... please. *(Pause.)* Some things have happened...I'm scared.

*(Pause. Mr. Bryce sits, resumes his professional demeanor.)*

MR. BRYCE: Scared of what?

*(Brad starts to speak. He says nothing. Pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: Brad. Look at me.

*(Pause. The boy obeys.)*

MR. BRYCE: Are you frightened, Brad? What are you frightened of?

BRAD: I was frightened...I was worried that perhaps I shouldn't have come to you –

MR. BRYCE: Why not? What frightened you?

BRAD: *(heavy)* I was worried...that you wouldn't be able to help me...that maybe you weren't qualified enough, what when the school keeps on staff an actual PhD. *(Pause.)* That you'd be a crackpot, with only... *(He motions to the certificate.)* ...certificate training or whatever. I mean...it isn't particularly impressive.

*(Slight pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: I think our time is up, Mr. Willis. *(He presses the phone button, pages the secretary.)* Ms. Wilson, will you please send in –

BRAD: How is your wife?

*(Slight pause.)*

MR. BRYCE: Excuse me?