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## Also Available from OWP

### **Killed A Man In Reno**

**by Robin Hack**

3 Males, 1 Female

**Synopsis:** Kurt and Julie Lawry travel to Reno, Nevada for a wild weekend. The biggest little city in the world doesn't have all the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas, but it is able to offer its own "unique" activities. As soon as Kurt and Julie arrive in their room, the trusty hotel concierge is at their service, offering to get show tickets, reserve gaming tables, make dinner reservations, or let them kill a man just to watch him die. *"It is what Reno, Nevada is famous for Mr. Lawry."*

### **Knuckleball**

**by William Whitehurst**

1 Male, 1 Female

**Synopsis:** In a moment of passion and intimacy, Ross proposes to his promiscuous lover Trish. She desperately wants to say yes, but cannot. But Ross won't take no for answer—she must either marry him or explain why she won't. She tells an extraordinary tale about who—and what—she really is. But is she telling the truth? And if she is, will the truth destroy these lovers, or save them? *Knuckleball* challenges us to rethink the nature and meaning of love in our contemporary world.

### **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.

# **Strutting and Fretting**

**A one-act play by**

**Matt Henderson**

**Characters:**

JIM, a 68-year-old aspiring actor

TRACY, a 55-year-old actress

GEORGE, a 47-year-old director

**Setting:** A dusty and dimly-lit stage, no specific time period

*Strutting and Fretting* was featured in the Underground Readings series at Terra Nova Theatre Group (William Cameron – Artistic Director) in Pittsburgh, PA on June 21, 2011. The reading was directed by Denise Pullen with the following cast:

JIM	Americus Rocco
TRACY	Ingrid Sonnichsen
GEORGE	Ken Bolden

*Strutting and Fretting* was first produced by Cup-A-Jo Productions (Joanna Lowe – Artistic Director) at the Father Ryan Arts Center as part of the Pittsburgh New Works Festival in McKees Rocks, PA September 29-October 2, 2011. The production was directed by Todd Betker with the following cast:

JIM	Newt Pringle
TRACY	Heather Lynn Gray
GEORGE	Bradford Sadler

## STRUTTING & FRETTING

*(A very dusty stage. A badly painted cardboard set that is meant to represent the sky with misshapen clouds droops on the stage. Dim lighting reveals an actor dressed in a business suit that is much too big for him. He shifts his weight awkwardly and mutters the following line with no enthusiasm or any indication that he understands what he is saying.)*

JIM: Life is so short, and we must fill it with meaning while we can. To live life without knowledge or passion is to waste the most precious gift of all. Each of us is moving forward toward our inevitable death, and we must never forget this because it is what forces us to have meaning. Living one's life without meaning is simply intolerable. We must work and love without fear, because when life is gone it will have been too horrible to have lived without emotion, the fiery passions that define our existence. This speech is full of meaning. I am full of meaning.

*(TRACY enters, speaking with an untraceable accent that might not actually be an accent at all but merely the bad dialect work of an amateurish actor.)*

TRACY: Yes-a, we-a must have-a de meaning because it is de only ting we heff. Ze meaning is what gives us ze cour-aj, y'all. Yer just plain dumb if you go about laff not-a communicating in a meaningful way-a. Life's just not jolly good fun without meaning, mass-a. You agree with this, ja? No? Ay ay ay.

*(GEORGE enters from the audience.)*

GEORGE: Excellent, excellent! It's really coming along, guys. Really. It is. No question.

TRACY: *(speaking in a neutral American dialect)* How's my Canadian accent coming, George?

GEORGE: Good, good. Just keep working on it, it'll be okay.

TRACY: Oh, good. I've been working so hard on it.

JIM: How about me, George?

GEORGE: MUCH improved, Jim. Keep going.

JIM: Thanks.

TRACY: Yeah, I've been really impressed with you, Jim. You're really making sense of that speech.

JIM: Thank you so much.

TRACY: I mean, especially considering the strangeness of this material. I mean, this bizarre concept that life is short and that it ends at some point.

GEORGE: Yes, it's an absurdist play.

TRACY: Oh, wow. Absurdist. You know so much about theatre, George.

GEORGE: Yeah, I majored in it in college and got a master's degree in it. Someday I hope to make a living in it.

JIM: Ohhhh wow! Are you gonna go off to New York?

GEORGE: Someday, definitely. When the time is right. But not right now, I'm only 47.

TRACY: Yeah, give it about 10 years.

JIM: Do you think I should go to New York? I've been thinking about it.

GEORGE: Oh, definitely. But only if you're a real actor. You really have to be a real actor to go to New York.

JIM: Yeah, I've been thinking about it, but I don't think I'm ready just yet. The way I figure it, I'm 68 now, I should probably spend about 30 years doing theatre here and learning my craft and then I'll be ready to pursue it full-time.

TRACY: I love New York. I live there, you know.

GEORGE: Really? Wow!! I had no idea. So you're a real actor, huh?

TRACY: Yeah. I live in New York. I'm just here right now because I love you guys so much. But I really live in New York.

JIM: Wow. So you're famous?

TRACY: Hello, I just told you I live in New York.

GEORGE: Wow, already famous at your age! You're only, what, 55?

TRACY: Yeah. I mean, it gets pretty hard sometimes, 'cause I'm not really allowed to just be a normal kid, you know?

GEORGE: Yeah.

TRACY: But I wouldn't trade it for anything. I live in New York.

JIM: Wow.

GEORGE: Amazing.

JIM: Should we get back to rehearsing? I had no idea I was acting with someone from New York. I've almost made it.

GEORGE: Let me know if you need anything, Tracy. Water or cucumber sandwiches or anything. You're from New York.

TRACY: Oh, please. I love nothing more than to slum it with you people.

JIM: Let's go on talking about New York, we have the whole rest of eternity to rehearse this play.

GEORGE: So, it's not that expensive to live there, right?

TRACY: Oh, no. I have a really nice little apartment that occasionally has hot water. It's really nice.

JIM: That just sounds so picturesque!

GEORGE: It just sounds darling!

TRACY: Oh, it is. Some days I even eat.

JIM: Wow, I can't believe you're even here.

GEORGE: We are so lucky to have you!

JIM: New York, New York, New York.

GEORGE: New York, New York, New York.

TRACY: You know you need unique New York.

JIM: Unique You Nork.

GEORGE: Unew Neek York.

TRACY: You know you neek uneed You Nork.

JIM: *(beginning to have an orgasm)* Oh, New York!

GEORGE: *(also beginning to have an orgasm)* Oh, New York!

TRACY: *(also beginning to have an orgasm)* New York, yes!

*(They begin to stamp their feet and run their fingers through their hair. TRACY and JIM sink to the floor and writhe around, in the throes of New York. GEORGE goes over to a wall and starts to hump it. They are all screaming "New York!" over and over again. TRACY and JIM build to a climax and finish their New York. They lie panting. GEORGE continues to hump the wall screaming.)*

GEORGE: NEW YORK!!! NEW YORK!!! OH GOD, NEW YORK!!!! NEW YORK, YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

NEWWWW YOOOORRRRK!!!!!!!!!!!!

*(GEORGE clutches his chest. He can't breathe. He bends over and then goes onto his hands and knees on the floor. He lies on his back, clutching his chest, struggling for air. Eventually, he stops moving and his body goes limp. TRACY and JIM stare at him, very confused.)*

TRACY: I guess he got tired.

JIM: Oh.

TRACY: Well, what'll we do now? We can't rehearse without the director.

JIM: I'll wake him up.

*(He goes over to GEORGE and shakes him. GEORGE does not respond.)*

TRACY: What's the matter with him?

JIM: I don't know, this is weird. George? George, wake up! *(He shakes him some more.)* GEORGE!

TRACY: He must be really tired.

JIM: Must be.

TRACY: Have you ever known anyone to just not wake up like that?

JIM: Never. This is such a bizarre phenomenon.

TRACY: What on earth can have happened to him? *(looks at him closer)* Oh my gosh! He's not doing that thingie where the air goes in and out of your mouth!

JIM: That's amazing! I never knew anyone who could just stop doing that!

TRACY: He's a freak of nature! I knew he was talented, but I had no idea he was *this* talented.

JIM: He's a magician.

TRACY: Do you think he can still hear us? Maybe this is some kind of experimental thing he's trying in rehearsal.

JIM: Oh yeah! It's just like the play where they keep talking about how life ends and stuff.

TRACY: Ohhhhh. So he's pretending to be a "dead" person.

JIM: This is so creepy.

TRACY: I know. Isn't it cool?

JIM: So what do you do with a "dead" person?

TRACY: I don't know, I think you just leave them there.

JIM: Okay.

*(They start to try to walk around, "minding their own business.")*

JIM: I've never done improv! Man, this is cool!

TRACY: But...what are we supposed to do now?

JIM: Maybe we should go back to the script?

TRACY: I guess. Uh, I think you had the next line.

JIM: Okay...*(returns to muttering lifelessly)* Life is meaningless when you carry on as if you are never going to die. As those we know pass on, death becomes ever more real with the passage of time.

TRACY: This is-a correct-a, and thereforrrre we must feel up each moment with de meaning. De meaning, she coomes from deescooverrrring what is-a essential about laff. What eez eet that geeves us that special lift? That joie de vivre? N'est-ce pas? Buenos noches?

JIM: Right.

TRACY: Yay-sa.

JIM: Yeah. *(speaking as his normal self)* Boy, I never realized...like, what is this play about?

TRACY: Laff.

JIM: You don't have to do the accent, I'm just being a normal person right now.

TRACY: Oh. Well, uh, I don't know, life and stuff and how people d...die and...

JIM: Wouldn't that be terrifying if that actually did happen and you didn't have all the time in the world to do what you want to do?

TRACY: Yeah, I guess that would be pretty freaky. I'm glad we don't have to worry about it.

JIM: I mean, how would you even know how much time you had left? And where would you go when you die?

TRACY: Holy crap, this is making my brain hurt.

JIM: Oh man, this sucks, it's so awful.

TRACY: But we don't have to worry about it. It's not real.

JIM: Yeah, it's all made up.

*(They look back at GEORGE.)*

TRACY: Boy, he's really trying to scare us, isn't he?

JIM: Yeah...

TRACY: I don't know if that's the best idea. I mean, I don't think it's a good idea to joke about something like death. Even if it isn't real. I think George should wake up now and stop pretending.

JIM: But what if he isn't joking?

TRACY: That's stupid, of course he's joking. George, this is enough now. Come on.

*(She goes over to GEORGE and nudges him with her foot. He doesn't move. She nudges harder.)*

TRACY: Come on now!!

*(She kicks him hard with her foot. He doesn't move.)*

JIM: Tracy, calm down.

TRACY: This is so mean of him, why would he want to scare us like this?! This isn't the way things are done in New York.

JIM: Tracy, do you know where your grandparents are right now?

TRACY: Sure, they're—um...they're...really, I saw them just the other day...

JIM: How long ago?

TRACY: I don't know...we all had dinner together, my parents and grandparents and I...that was um, last week, I think...or maybe 20 years ago...somewhere around then.

JIM: Hm.

TRACY: What are you "hm"ing about? We have to get George to stop jerking us around.

JIM: I think he's actually dead, Tracy.

TRACY: No, that's stupid. Whoever heard of death?

JIM: Now that we've been talking about it, it's started to ring a bell.

TRACY: Well, it hasn't rung any bells for me! I think it's all made up!

JIM: But look at him! (*points to GEORGE*)

TRACY: Oh, what does that prove? He's just sleeping or...going into hibernation or...something.

JIM: He's dead, Tracy.

TRACY: No, that's stupid. Whoever heard of death?

JIM: You said that.

TRACY: I did? Oh yeah, I did...oh...oh...oh shit. Death isn't made up, I just remembered.

JIM: Oh my God.

TRACY: What are we gonna do, Jim? I don't want to die!!

JIM: Neither do I!! We gotta do something!

TRACY: What?

JIM: I don't know! Think of something!

TRACY: Uhhhh...I seem to remember something about...eating fiber and...getting calcium and...exercising!

JIM: Yeah, let's exercise!

TRACY: Okay!

*(They start to do jumping jacks. They get tired very quickly.)*

TRACY: Oh God...I haven't done that in so long...I don't think I'm able to do it anymore...it's too late. Oh God, it's too late, Jim!

JIM: NO! THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING WE CAN DO!

TRACY: No, no, let's not get too worried just yet...if I remember death correctly, we still have a little bit of life left to go...I think they said Tina Turner stopped touring when she was 70-something.

JIM: That's not that far away for me! I'm 68!

TRACY: Well, that's not my fault! I'm only 55, you deal with your own problems!

JIM: No, don't leave me alone!!

TRACY: I can't do anything for you!

JIM: Oh God!! And I wanted to be a famous actor in New York!! *(He starts sobbing.)*

TRACY: I'm so sorry, Jim. But, um, if it makes you feel better, I might not be, um, as famous as you might, um, think I am.

JIM: Oh?

TRACY: Yeah, uh...I was only kind of cast in two shows off-off-off-off-off-Broadway when I was 46. And I haven't really done any shows since. So I kind of...work at...Walmart and kind of...live with my...parents now. Who might be dead, now that I think about it. Yeah, they are dead. But I never officially sold my apartment, so I also still technically live in New York.

JIM: Oh, well that's good. Maybe you'll go back someday.

TRACY: Someday?!! How much time do I have left?!! Ohhhh, this SUCKS!

JIM: Oh man, it really does.

TRACY: Shit.

JIM: Shit.

TRACY: I don't know what to do now.

JIM: Neither do I.

*(There is a long, sad silence.)*

TRACY: Hey...this might be a crazy idea...but do you think...we should still do things?

JIM: I don't know, Tracy. We might not be able to finish them. We're going to die.

TRACY: But still...I mean...even if we die before we get to finish stuff...we won't be around to be that upset about it, will we?

JIM: But it's just so pathetic. Old people doing things.

TRACY: Well, I guess we could just sit around and wait for death.

JIM: That's probably the most mature thing to do.

TRACY: Yeah.

*(Another long, sad silence.)*

JIM: On second thought, now I'm not so sure.

TRACY: Wanna finish rehearsing the play?

JIM: Yeah.

TRACY: Okay, let's do it from the top.

*(TRACY goes offstage. JIM stands in his original spot, but then sees that GEORGE is lying on the ground next to him. He respectfully moves to the side.)*

JIM: *(starting out muttering senselessly but gradually coming to grasp the meaning of what he is saying)* Life is so short, and we must fill it with meaning while we can. To live life without knowledge or passion is to waste the most precious gift of all. Each of us is moving forward toward our inevitable...death, and we must never forget this because it is what forces us to have...meaning. Living one's life without meaning is simply...intolerable. *(He starts to lose control of himself and starts to cry.)* We must work and love without fear, because when life is gone it will have been too horrible to have lived without emotion, the fiery passions that define our existence. This speech is full of...m-meaning. I...I am full of...of meaning.

*(TRACY enters, crying and sort of attempting to do her bad Canadian accent.)*

TRACY: Yes-a, we-a must have de...de meaning because it is de only ting we...we have. Ze meaning is what gives us ze...ze courage, y-y'all. Oh my God!! *(She blows her nose into her sleeve.)* I just can't deal with this, this is so maudlin!

JIM: It hurts too bad! It hits too close to home! *(turning to look at GEORGE's body)* George, why did you have to do this to us? Why did you write this awful manipulative maudlin play with no action? Why? WHY?!!

TRACY: DAMN YOU, GEORGE!! *(She kicks GEORGE's body.)*

JIM: You really shouldn't say that, you don't want to make things any worse for him.

TRACY: Oh. I mean, you were a good person deep down in your heart, George, despite the fact that you wrote a shitty play.

JIM: Maybe we should just write our own play that's just sort of inspired by the themes of the play George wrote.

TRACY: Ooo, good idea! But wait. We might die before we finish it.

JIM: So? Better that than perform this sentimental tripe.

TRACY: You have a point. But ohhhh, wait, this won't be in New York so it won't be real theatre.

JIM: We don't have time to worry about that! We're gonna die! Come on!

*(He grabs TRACY's hand and pulls her offstage where we hear them muttering a lot. After a bit, JIM and TRACY walk back out and see the audience for the first time.)*

TRACY: Hey! Where did they come from? Have they been here the whole time?

JIM: Oh, for crying out loud. Now it's all ruined.

TRACY: *(to audience)* We were going to write down what happened in the last 20 minutes and perform that as a play, but since you've already seen it, there's no point.

JIM: Oh, dammit. I guess we'll die without doing much of anything important.

TRACY: No, wait, there is a point. We just performed this whole play without knowing it.

JIM: ...That makes my brain hurt. *(He rubs his forehead and glimpses something on the set out of the corner of his eye.)* Wait a minute...

JIM (Cont'd): *(He goes upstage and pulls down the badly painted cardboard set to reveal...a very nicely painted cardboard set that represents the Empire State Building!)* This is too much.

TRACY: Are you telling me we've been in New York this entire time?

JIM: I don't know...it's hard to say...maybe New York isn't what we've made it out to be...maybe it's more a...

TRACY: A state of mind?

JIM: ...Oh wow...we didn't have to go anywhere to do what we wanted to do...we've been here the whole time...

TRACY: *(having an incredible spiritual epiphany)* Oh, New York.

JIM: *(also having an incredible spiritual epiphany)* Oh, New York.

TRACY: This is awesome!!!

JIM: We're famous!!! We've been famous all along!!!

*(They look at each other in pure bliss. They hug. They are crying, they are laughing. They jump up and down vigorously. They are overwhelmed.)*

TRACY: Oh, I can't breathe.

JIM: Neither can I.

*(They gasp and struggle for air. They fall to the ground. They writhe in pain. They reach out and hold each other's hands. They share a knowing look. After struggling for a while, their bodies eventually become limp, their hands linked. They are gone. Blackout.)*

## NOTES

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