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Traffic Jam

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Burying Mom

by Matt Fotis

1 Male, 1 Female (Playing multiple roles)

Synopsis: Bouncing between past and present, Paul is forced to negotiate the many layers of his relationship with his mom...or he can just bury her in the back yard. Paul's journey to put his mother to rest takes him across time and space, where he meets a bevy of unique women who exemplify various aspects of his mother's personality. Whether it be advice from his old high school guidance counselor turned cheap therapist, criticism gladly handed down from his annoyingly perfect sister, philosophy from a waitress with a passion for Rocky, or life lessons from his wake-obsessed grandmother one thing is certain – Paul's life won't ever be the same.

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.

Traffic Jam

A play in one act
By Jennifer Bogush

TRAFFIC JAM was originally produced at THE NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL, a production of THE PRESENT COMPANY.

The Original Cast was as follows:

Cassie—Jennifer Bogush

Gary—Jeff Branson

Death—Joe Tuttle

The action takes place in a hospital waiting room.

Time: The Present

Set Requirements: A few chairs.

Props: A scythe, soda cans, small alcohol bottles, a large purse, and magazines.

TRAFFIC JAM

SCENE 1: TRAFFIC JAM

(It is late afternoon in a hospital waiting room. Cassie, a train wreck, sits facing out. Near her, with his back to the audience, is her Brother.)

CASSIE: I'm not moving from this chair. And, I don't want to talk about it anymore. I don't know what you want me to say, you really want me to go in there and tell him, what, I love him? I don't know what that means. Let me get this straight, he's dying, so he gets off with a cancer pass, right? Everything's erased. Right? Not my problem. And, I'm not gonna go in there and spout this love shit for Mom's sake either, because I don't even think it's love she feels for him. Yeah, we have the same blood. Um, is that supposed to make me feel good? Because it makes me want to rip my eyeballs out! I can't sleep at night because of it. So, do you know what I do? I imagine cancer as little Ms. PacMans. Little Ms. PacMans with pink bows happily munching away at his flesh. I know. I'm super evil because it gives me piece of mind to know that he's on the table in there rotting from the inside out. I love that. I fucking love that! And, if I have to hear the myth of the drowning one more time, I'm gonna puke. How he pulled me out of the water! I don't remember it, so it didn't happen. And, even if it did happen, it wasn't me dying he was scared of, it was how the shit would have interfered with his life. Well, now this shit is interfering with my life. This is unbelievable. You just want me to keep the hamster wheel going. Right? To be a whore, basically. You want my body to go in there and mouth words I don't believe in. Right? Right. I am not moving from this chair.

(He exits as Gary, a handsome young man, enters a moment later, sits down and closes his eyes. Cassie bounces her leg in the air and chomps on her gum. After a moment, she taps the arm of the chair with her fingernails. Gary shoots her piercing glances, which she doesn't seem to see.)

CASSIE: I have a boyfriend.

GARY: Excuse me?

CASSIE: I see you staring at me, and I thought it would be kinder to inform you that I have a boyfriend. Before you make an ass of yourself.

(He stares at her.)

CASSIE: I don't know sign language, but I could draw you a diagram if you're slow. Or, I could kick you in the balls if that would help clarify things for you.

GARY: You were tapping.

CASSIE: Yeah, well, I'm bored. Humans weren't made to wait this long. Monkeys maybe. Fucking chimps with bananas. Guess I'm a chimp today. You, too. Tuesday is chimp day. Did you get the memo?

GARY: So, you either tap or talk. Is there a third choice?

CASSIE: Besides, what was staring gonna do?

GARY: Honestly?

CASSIE: No, let's skip to the end of our relationship, and you can lie to me. Like everyone else in my life.

GARY: I was "willing" you to stop tapping.

CASSIE: "Willing" me.

GARY: Yes.

CASSIE: Um, yeah, you're on the wrong floor. If you take a left, you can take the elevator up to six. I believe the crazies reside there.

GARY: Laugh away, but it works.

CASSIE: ... When?

GARY: What?

CASSIE: When does it work?

GARY: At the movies. No one ever sits in front of me. If I see anyone coming, I give them the "Death Stare."

CASSIE: This works.

GARY: Absolutely.

CASSIE: And, today?

GARY: The equipment must be defective. I'll have to send it out for repair.

CASSIE: Try it on that lady.

GARY: Which?

CASSIE: Over there! That babbling nurse.

(He tries.)

GARY: Nope. Not working. Definitely broken. Besides, what if she's relating some vital information about a patient, and then the patient dies because my powers prevented her from speaking?

CASSIE: If you had that kind of power, we'd be in business, now, wouldn't we?

GARY: What do you mean?

CASSIE: Oh, nothing. *(off of O.S. Nurse.)* Doesn't that bother you? That incessant talking?

GARY: Actually --

CASSIE: She's on depression medication because her father died five years ago. Five years ago! And on and on... That woman's like, what? Fifty? Yeah! I have a lot of faith in this place. I'll bet the nurses are all on meds, and the doctors are in the back fucking. Actually, this might work out nicely.

GARY: Maybe she needs them.

CASSIE: What? No. Addictions are for weak-minded people. Needs them! Grow up. Get a clue. Did the Jews have depression medication? No! They just fucking dealt with it.

GARY: Wow!

CASSIE: What? Are you Jewish?

GARY: No.

CASSIE: I mean, my father was a fucking bastard, but I dealt with it.

(He's speechless.)

CASSIE: I'm just joking. God! You're so serious! No, Daddy's great. He's on his way here to sit with the rest of us suckers and wait for the blessed event.

GARY: Is someone having a baby?

CASSIE: Aren't you cute? No. No births today. Only Death. Hopefully.

GARY: Wow!

CASSIE: I know, it's been like an hour and a half already. And you want to know why I've been tapping. What's your name?

GARY: Gary...

CASSIE: ... Okay. Not the curious type, I see.

(She tilts from side to side.)

CASSIE: God, my ass hurts! Does your ass hurt?

GARY: Yeah, a little. I guess.

CASSIE: Can you "will" us some cushions?

GARY: Defunct, I told you.

CASSIE: Right. Maybe that nurse can give me some pain pills, because the pain in my ass is unbearable.

(She gets up and stretches.)

GARY: *(re: Cassie's talking)* Mine too.

CASSIE: I mean, who the hell can sit in these? Well, I guess the majority of the 'Fat-Ass Nation' can. That should be our new name. Don't ya think? Not 'Land of the Free,' because that doesn't quite cover it, but, 'Fat-Ass Nation.' It must be nice to walk around with your own personal built-in cushions --

GARY: Yeah, I could use some to cover my ears --

CASSIE: Me? I'd love it. I know, right? Who am I kidding? People would give their first-born child for my body. And probably their second, too. 'Cuz I've got a great ass. Don't you think? *(points to her butt)* Look. Here. In this area. Uh-huh!

(She licks her finger, sticks it on her butt and makes a sizzling sound. Then, she sits down abruptly and folds her hands demurely across her lap.)

CASSIE: Ladies don't talk like that, I know. They'd be so ruffled at the school. I get that a lot.

GARY: You get what a lot?

CASSIE: You want a soda? I'm out of caffeine. Not a good thing, believe me.

GARY: I'm good. Don't you think maybe you've had enough?

CASSIE: Oh, you mean my energy?

GARY: If that's what you call it.

CASSIE: I'm gathering up my energy. I have something to take care of soon.

GARY: For work, you mean? What do you do? Are you in school?

CASSIE: What? No. What do you do?

GARY: Games, huh?

CASSIE: Always. Do you want to get a game of Hangman or something going?

GARY: I don't think so.

CASSIE: Bad taste, right? I get that a lot...

GARY: ... Architect.

CASSIE: Whatever are you talking about? Who goes off on tangents like that?

GARY: I'm an architect. You asked what I do.

CASSIE: Oh... Oooo -- Do you "will" buildings up?

GARY: No, my powers haven't fully developed yet. And then, of course, there are times like these when I have to deal with short-circuit problems. No, I just design them.

CASSIE: Interesting. Sexy. I don't really have a boyfriend.

GARY: All part of the game, right?

(He looks at his watch.)

CASSIE: Don't look at your watch. It doesn't help. Believe me.

GARY: So, what does help?

CASSIE: Honestly?

GARY: No, let's skip to the end of our relationship and you can lie to me.

CASSIE: Ooo... We don't know each other well enough for that yet. And, I'm not a slut. Give it at least another twenty minutes.

GARY: For what? Now, I'm intrigued.

CASSIE: Now, you're intrigued. What were you before?

GARY: A little annoyed.

CASSIE: Why?

GARY: Because you were tapping.

CASSIE: Right! I forgot. Tapping is the crime of the century. You really have no idea about the crime I'm about to commit.

GARY: What? You're interrupting my train of thought again.

CASSIE: Sorry. What was I interrupting before?

GARY: I was making a list. In my head. A mental list.

CASSIE: This where I'm supposed to ask of what, right?

GARY: Since you ask, all sorts of things. I'm a list maker.

CASSIE: Interesting, and not at all sexy. What did this list consist of before I so rudely interrupted?

GARY: It was for my dog, Charlie, but then it morphed into a list about you.

CASSIE: Me? I'm so unbelievably honored! What was it about?

GARY: I didn't start my list right away. First, I tried to "will" you to shut up.

CASSIE: Oh.

GARY: Then, I summoned up all of my powers and gave you the "Death Stare."

CASSIE: What does it look like?

GARY: You saw it.

CASSIE: No, I didn't

GARY: This one.

(He stares at her.)

CASSIE: That's the "Death Stare?" I thought you were undressing me with your eyes!

GARY: No. You won't know when I'm doing that. That move is real slick. But after the "Death Stare" didn't work, I started my list: Number one -- Must kill the tapping girl. Then, you started to speak, and I thought, "Oh, she speaks. This is not good." Number two -- Must "will" ass cushions to muffle the sound of her voice.

CASSIE: Whatever that means.

GARY: Number three -- Must kill the boyfriend.

CASSIE: That's so sweet.

GARY: Number four -- Drinks too much caffeine. Watch that one. Number five -- Keep her away from all kitchen knives.

CASSIE: I'll ignore that one.

GARY: Number Six -- She's starting to look --

CASSIE: Wait. What was that last one? When would you and I ever be near kitchen knives together? Oh, you mean when we start our relationship and move in together? That's why you wanted to kill my mythical boyfriend! That is so sweet. I could kiss you. I'm almost ready to tell you what we could do to pass the time...

GARY: Number Six -- I'm composing now. She's starting to look real good to me. Take her for a walk to see my car in the parking --

CASSIE: Ooo... What kind of car?

GARY: What?

CASSIE: What kind of car does a list-making architect have?

GARY: No, the real question is, what kind of car would you like to sit in with me?

CASSIE: Okay. I'm getting horny now. I really am. And is that appropriate? I don't think so. Bad taste. You've caught my bad taste, do you know that? I love it.

GARY: Do you?

CASSIE: Yup...

(She looks O.S.)

GARY: What is it?

CASSIE: False alarm. I just thought I saw who it is I've been waiting for. I know it's silly, but I am absolutely convinced he's stuck in traffic.

GARY: Who?

CASSIE: ... Death.

GARY: What?

CASSIE: Death. The Grim Reaper? Let's get a soda. I'm thirsty. Want to?

GARY: Okay.

CASSIE: Just not diet. I hate diet. It's watered down crap!

SCENE 2: RUM AND COKE

(A few moments later. Cassie and Gary enter drinking sodas.)

CASSIE: So, I said, "I could have had a seat if you weren't so fat!" And then, I ran like hell!

GARY: But, she was nice enough to offer you a seat.

CASSIE: Were you listening to any part of the story? Her fat, actually pooled over into the next seat, and what she offered me was the hump of the seat. The ridge! I love a good time like the next girl, but I don't have to get my kicks on the ridge of a seat in a subway car like some people! I hate fat people! I really do. I don't mind giving up a little space every now and then, but when I'm being squished in my seat because someone didn't have enough control to put down the Cheetos, is that really my problem? Speaking of which, I am so going to miss spin today, aren't I?

GARY: What?

CASSIE: Spin class. For my ass?

GARY: You look like you could miss a class or two.

CASSIE: Ooo, flirting are we? And then fat people, like my grandmother, actually have the nerve to suggest that I'm anorexic! Anorexic! I guess they forget from their fat vantage point what a normal human body looks like. Minus the rolls of fat, caused by lack of self-control. I carry a picture of her around in my wallet. *(pulls photo out)* So, when she starts in with me. I just go, "Bam!" *(shoves picture in Gary's face)* See? My grandmother when she was eighteen.

She forgot that she used to fit into a bikini. She was beautiful, wasn't she? Before she met my grandfather, and lost her whole life. Which is why I'm so damn gorgeous! I got my looks from him. The bastard.

GARY: Is that who's in there?

CASSIE: So, do you need another Coke? I'm buying. I know. I'm not supposed to use drinking language, like "I'm buying." At least, that's what they say at AA. But, seriously...

(She pulls out little alcohol bottles from her purse, and sits on the floor against the chairs.)

CASSIE: Let's have some rum and Coke!

GARY: Um.

CASSIE: Don't be a pussy.

GARY: No. It's not that.

CASSIE: So...?

GARY: Maybe we could take the rum and Coke to the car... If you want... Pass the time.

CASSIE: Oh, your car --

GARY: In the garage.

CASSIE: Of course...

GARY: Or, we could --

CASSIE: What?

GARY: Have some rum and Coke, and go later.

CASSIE: Okay.

GARY: I have some soda left. Want to share mine?

(She pours some rum in the can and they share.)

GARY: So, what's this about traffic? I was starting to think that freaky was looking good --

CASSIE: Freaky as in me.

GARY: Yeah, but now, I don't know, you just seem so angry.

CASSIE: It amazes me even that this tiny, svelte body can hold so much anger. I mean you're probably wondering, "What does she really have to be angry about? She's sexy, probably dynamite in bed --"

GARY: That's exactly what I was thinking --

CASSIE: I don't know. Education? No. Love life? Definitely a "no." Maybe, that I had to leave school and pay \$15 for parking. Maybe family crap that never fucking ends! Well, if I'm lucky it will end today. Maybe the Grim Reaper could move his frigging ass and get here before visiting hours are up. Is that too much to ask? That you do your job?

GARY: Don't ask me. I just got fired.

CASSIE: You'd think I was at Starbucks having someone behind the counter ignore me as I order a latte. Hello! You have a death to attend to on the fourth floor ICU! Could you do your job? God! I would drag this chair into his room, and sit and watch forever for him to take his final bow. My ass would delight in that! And then, drinks for everybody! On me! They'd love that in AA. What are you thinking?

GARY: Honestly?

CASSIE: No. Remember, I enjoy lies. I live on them like diet pills.

GARY: I was thinking --

CASSIE: Yes --

GARY: I was wondering --

CASSIE: Speak to me.

GARY: What would happen to all of your energy if you weren't speaking. All of your anger.

CASSIE: You want me to stop talking? Okay, we're done here!

(She gets up to leave, but he pulls her back down.)

GARY: No, I was just thinking that if you didn't speak, you'd have no outlet for all of that energy. All of that violence.

CASSIE: Okay...

GARY: So, I was wondering if I could help relieve you of any of that pent-up energy...

CASSIE: Oh --

GARY: If you weren't talking.

CASSIE: I see.

GARY: Is there any way that I can help?

CASSIE: There's only one way you're thinking of.

GARY: Oh, no. There are multiple ways I'm thinking of.

CASSIE: Interesting.

GARY: I mean, you're going to miss step class and everything --

CASSIE: Spin.

GARY: What?

CASSIE: Spin class.

GARY: I thought that maybe you felt bad about not burning any calories. I'm thinking about you really.

(Death enters, crosses the stage and exits. Only Cassie sees Him.)

CASSIE: It's about time!

GARY: Oh, but I thought that we were talking --

CASSIE: No, not you -- I meant -- never mind.

(She moves to exit.)

GARY: Where are you -- ?

CASSIE: To see your car. Things look like they're about to be taken care of here. Do you want to show me, or what?

SCENE 3: AMAZON WOMEN

(An hour later, Cassie and Gary sit apart. Gary reads a magazine.)

CASSIE: I think I may be inherently pre-disposed to do something violent.

GARY: To me? I thought we had a good --

CASSIE: Not you, specifically. No.

GARY: Good.

(He continues reading.)

CASSIE: I just feel like I should have been raised by Amazon women, don't you?

GARY: What are -- ?

CASSIE: I think Amazon women eat their male young, actually, so that's not so good for you. But, it sounds great to me! Bare-breasted warriors, hanging all out. Snakes in their hair like Medusa. Women who know when it's time to help someone out of this world. I'll help him out of this world. Charge the hospital bed with my spear. Aim right for the face. Blood spurts everywhere! I would offer up his brains to the gods. I need to cleanse these women of his life. If I could make things clean and right, I would. If they don't put me in jail for too long. But, I think they would. The jury would regard him as a helpless old man. And, I'd get the chair. Uneducated, lower-class fucks! Pardon my French, but that's what you get with a so-called democracy. Do they have the death penalty here? If they cut off his morphine allotment, then there might be just a drop of justice in the world. I could live on a drop. Everyone says I eat like a bird anyway. I'm a hundred and two. Can you tell?

GARY: I thought I knocked all of the anger out of you. I think I made it worse! If you give me another couple of minutes, maybe we'll go to the garage again, and I could --

CASSIE: What? I'm not angry! I'm past anger. I am just deciding if I have to take care of somebody else's job.

GARY: Death, again?

CASSIE: Seriously, what the fuck is going on? I mean, how many deaths does this guy have to take care of in one day? If it was my job, I would be on top of it. You know, I say he, but I don't see why it can't be a she. Death should be a she. Isn't there anyone you'd like to kill?

GARY: Not at the moment, no.

CASSIE: Will you help me do it?

GARY: Do what? Are you insane?

CASSIE: Well, we know each other. Intimately now. In some cultures you would be considered my husband, so legally you'd have to take on all responsibility for my actions.

GARY: Which floor were crazies on again?