

Fifteen Minutes

A theatrical dressing room. A table and chair. Makeup for the evening's production is laid out on the table. Over the loudspeaker we hear the Stage Manager call, "15 minutes, please. The call is 15 minutes." The actress enters hurriedly and goes to the table. She wears a kimono over a slip. During the course of the piece she completes her makeup and dresses for the play she is doing. Though not actually present she looks into a mirror and thus directly toward the audience. She speaks to an unseen dressing room partner.

ACTRESS: Anyway, this guy, the director, actually used a buzzer. ZZZZZZZZZZZ. Really. He would sit there wearing a Yankee's baseball cap and push this buzzer after each laugh line for as long as he thought the laugh would last. Laugh line. ZZZZZZZZZZZ. This was to train us not to step on the laugh. Can you believe it? Really. Oh, he trained us, believe me. The show opens, there are no laughs, but we are waiting for the buzzer. A two-hour play lasted three hours while we paused for laughs that didn't exist. I aged seven years in a night. Directors! Last year I did Katrin in Mother Courage for this really dour, silent, unapproachable, East German woman. She sat on a camp stool, immovable, for hours during rehearsal. With her eyes closed yet. No reactions. Really. I felt like a radio show. Anyway, after a week she asks me out for a beer and suggests that we should sleep together to get in tune with the play. I tell her she wants to get in tune with the play she should sleep with the author. She says, 'My dear, Bertholt has been dead for thirty years!' I said, 'In that case you're perfect for each other.'

Scraps

The lights come up on a woman in a multi-colored patch-work costume. Red, blue, green, yellow. Even the head. Button eyes, yarn hair, pearls for teeth. It is the Patchwork Girl of Oz. She is using a stand-up vacuum cleaner. She turns it off and looks at the audience.

I spend more and more time in Oz. Since I've turned thirty-five. Since Suzanne is in high school. This is Scraps. I had a dressmaker do it. It's not the only one I have. I have Ozma, I have Dorothy, I have Glinda the Good Witch. I'm even beginning to go out in this stuff. The midnight Rocky Horror Show, St. Patrick's Day parades. I went down one night to a gay bar and they waived the cover charge. Always as Scraps. My face doesn't show. Jack doesn't even know I have the books. He sure as bell doesn't know I do this. You know about the Patchwork Girl? It's the seventh Oz book. She was made from a patchwork quilt by Dr. Pipt, the crooked magician, to be his servant. He sprinkled the "powder of life" on her. But what nobody realized is that Ojo had dumped a bunch of cleverness into the Patchwork Girl's head. Too much for her to be satisfied as a servant. So she set off for the Emerald City with Ojo and the Transparent Glass Cat with the ruby heart and pink brains and the Living Phonograph. They called her Scraps and sometimes Patches.

Clear Glass Marbles

A young woman is standing next to an end table with a lamp on it, holding a crystal bowl filled with ninety clear glass marbles.

LAURIE: The day my mother found out she was dying she asked me to go out and buy her these clear glass marbles. Dad and I hadn't even known she was ill which was nothing new. Whenever you asked my mother if she was ill, she would throw things at you, sesame buns, the editorial page, a handful of hair ribbons. 'Do not,' she would say, 'suggest things to suggestible people.' Anyway, I brought her the marbles and she counted ninety of them out and put them in this old cut-glass bowl which had been the sum total of great Aunt Helena's estate. Apparently, the doctor had given her three months and she set great store by doctors. She said she always believed them because they were the nearest thing to the Old Testament we had. 'I wouldn't give you two bits for these young smiley guys,' she'd say, 'I go for a good, stern-furrowed physician.' She wouldn't even have her teeth cleaned by a dentist under fifty. So she counted out ninety clear glass marbles and set them in the bowl on her bedside table. Then she went out and spent twelve hundred dollars on nightgowns. She said, 'In my family you are only dying when you take to your bed, and that, my darlings, is where I am going.' And she did.

Audition

An actress in her late twenties runs up on the stage. She is nervous. She shields her eyes against the light. She is dressed in a slightly bizarre and trendy style. She carries in her arms a cat on a leash.

Hi. Hey Hi. Wow. All Right. Nice Place. Nice, uh, nice theatre. Good Vibes. Yowsa me yesirree. Toy boat, toy boat, toy boat, toy boat. Now... Let's see here. For my... can you hear me? Can you? No? Yes? You are out there, right? (SHE puts the cat on the floor, her foot on the leash.) OK, so we're all here. Well, I mean, you're there and I'm here but we're all... forget it. Let's see... Audition, RAH! Get that part! OK, my name is... shit, I forgot my name. Right. This... this would be construed as craziness. My name is... I did, I forgot my name... my stage name... see I decided to use my new stage name for this audition...for uh, for luck, it was... it was very... look what d'you care, right? My human, world name is Mary Titfer. Titfer. You got it? Goodo! OK, can you hear me? All the way back? Loud and clear Captain Marvel? A-OK! ...Now, one more introduction and we're under way. The uh, the small person on my leash is my cat 'Tat'. My cat, 'Tat'. Get it? (Points to herself.) Titfer (Points to cat.) Tat. Right, you got it. Hey, we're waking up here. We're demonstrating consciousness. OK, OK, now you... the imperial you... have a part. I, Titfer need a part. We are thus in tune. Synchronicity. Soooooo...

Rodeo

A young woman in her late twenties sits working on a piece of tack. Beside her is a Lone Star beer in the can. As the lights come up we hear the last verse of a Tanya Tucker song or some other female country- western vocalist. She is wearing old worn jeans and boots plus a long-sleeved work shirt with the sleeves rolled up. She works until the song is over and then speaks.

BIG EIGHT: Shoot -Rodeo's just goin' to hell in a hand- basket. Rodeo used to be somethin'. I loved it. I did. Once Daddy an' a bunch of 'em was foolin' around with some old bronc over to our place and this ol' red nose named Cinch got bucked off and my Daddy hooted and said he had him a nine-year-old girl, namely me, wouldn't have no damn trouble cowboyin' that horse. Well, he put me on up there, stuck that ridin' rein in my hand, gimme a kiss and said, "Now there's only one thing t' remember Honey Love, if ya fall off you jest don't come home." Well I stayed up. You gotta stay on a bronc eight seconds. Otherwise the ride don't count. So from that day on my daddy called me Big Eight. Heck! That's all the name I got anymore... Big Eight. Used to be fer cowboys, the rodeo did. Do it in some open field, folks would pull their cars and pick-ups round it, sit on the hoods, some ranch hand'd bulldog him some rank steer and everybody'd wave their hats and call him by name. Ride us some buckin' stock, rope a few calves, git throwed off a bull and then we'd jest git us to a bar and tell each other lies about how good we were.

Twirler

A young woman stands center stage. She is dressed in a spangled, single-piece swimsuit, the kind that is specially made for baton twirlers. She holds a shining, silver baton in her hand.

APRIL: I started when I was six. Momma sawed off a broom handle, and Uncle Carbo slapped some sort of silver paint, well, grey really, on it and I went down in the basement and twirled. Later on, Momma hit the daily double on horses named Spin Dry and Silver Revolver and she said that was a sign so she gave me lessons at the Dainty Deb Dance Studio where the lady, Miss Aurelia, taught some twirling on the side. I won the Ohio Juniors title when I was six and the Midwest Young Adult Division three years later and then in high school I finished fourth in the nationals. Momma and I wore look-alike Statue of Liberty costumes that she had to send clear to Nebraska to get and Daddy was there in a T-shirt with my name, April. My first name is April and my last name is March. There were four thousand people there, and when they yelled my name golden balloons fell out of the ceiling. Nobody, not even Charlene Ann Morrison, ever finished fourth at my age. Oh, I've flown high and known tragedy both. My daddy says it's put spirit in my soul and steel in my heart. My left hand was crushed in a riding accident by a horse named Big Blood Red, and though I came back to twirl couldn't do it at the highest level. That was denied me by Big Blood Red who clipped my wings. You mustn't pity me though. Oh, by no means! Being denied showed me the way, showed me the glory that sits inside life where you can't see it.

LAMPS

The room is filled with lamps. Some are on tables. Some are floor lamps. There would have to be a minimum of a dozen. A woman of sixty-five, nicely dressed, stands among them. They are all on. There is no other theatrical illumination.

LILA: The older I become, the more I'm drawn to light. To radiance of all kinds. Both the light and the shadows, they fascinate me. Perhaps it's a sort of primitive fire syndrome or, I suppose, simply fear of the dark. I've rented his loft and filled it with lamps. I spend most evenings here. It is both eccentric and childlike, isn't it? I would prefer to think of it as a kind of playing. The hours fly. I draw enormous energy from it. And there's the actual heat of course. (SHE begins to move through the room.) I hope I'm not embarrassing you. May I show you? It's delightful to move at random, extending a hand, weaving in and through these pools of warmth. Each lamp gives its heat differently. Unique. And then in between, and there are many between, you can receive, feel, several sources at once. Any movement and the balance is changed. And then when you've exhausted these relationships, why you can change them, don't you see. I'm a little... a little frightened this will bore you... sharing this... it's so difficult to share our enthusiasms don't you think? Does light interest you? Do you respond to it? Night flying? Like costume jewelry on velvet. Wet neon.

Handler

A young woman in a simple, country-print dress: On the floor before her is a handmade wooden box about two feet long and eighteen inches high with a sliding wire screen top.

CARO: My Dada* was gonna do this tonight but the lord froze his face so he sent me. I learned this from my Dada and he learned it up from great Gran, who took it on from the Reverend Soloman Bracewood, who had him a mule ministry 'round these parts way back when. Dada taught Miss Ellie, my ma, and my brother Jamie... he was in it too, 'fore he went for Detroit. See, what I got in here is snakes. Lotta people don't like snakes. Gives it its nature, I guess. This here is water mocs. Jamie, he said they got the dirtiest, nastiest bite of f all... well, rattlers is yer biggest. Lotta venom. You milk you a rattler, you can half fill up a juice glass. Dada said Jamie should do rattlers, but he never. Did 'heads, copperheads. Now they're slower and safer but it aint such a good show. You know those dang snakes smell like cucumbers? Well, they do. Miss Ellie, she favored mocassins. Dada too... well, Dada he did all kinds, all ways. Your mocassin now, he's your good ol' boy snake. Flat out mean an' lots of get up n' go. Heck, they'll chase ya. They will. Ol' Dada he didn't like Miss Ellie doin' 'em. 'You lay off them mocs 'fore they lay you down.' Made Miss Ellie laugh. Lotta handlers think mocassins are slimy. Couldn't get me to touch one.

*pronounced "Dád-aw".

Dragons

A young woman, nine months pregnant, is lying on a hospital trolley waiting to be moved into the delivery room. We hear the sound of a heartbeat throughout.

MARTI: Dear St. Margaret, patron saint of childbirth, let me live, let my child live, and enough with the labor, ok, St. Margaret? I get the idea, you know what I mean? Ow. Ow. God, I must look like a drowned gerbil. I thought after 23 hours of this they either had to give you a C-section or a hairdresser. Ow. St. Margaret? Don't let Dr. Gussler gasp or faint or throw up or anything when he sees the baby. I mean he hasn't delivered a woman of a dragon lately and he is not ready for this! 'You must abort my, my dear lady. One must think of one's husband, one's lifestyle in these cases. An abnormal child will scar your psyche and spoil your dinner parties.' Creep! (A contraction starts. SHE begins to pant and blow.) Ow. Ow. I thought we just did this? Oh boy, hey St. Margaret, send Wally back from the coffee shop, OK ? Oh. Ow. Coming down. Coming down. Lawsa mercy. (Releases a breath.) Hey baby, you got the classical nine resemblances? Horns of a stag, head of camel, eyes of a demon, neck of a snake, belly of a clam, scales of a carp, claws of an eagle, soles of a tiger, ears of a cow? Wait'll Dr. Gussler tries to count your toes, huh? Will you cause the owls to cry and the horses to run mad? Sure, you betcha.

French Fries

An old woman in a straight-back chair holding a McDonald's cup. She is surrounded by several bundles of newspapers. She wears thick glasses that distort her eyes to the viewer.

ANNA MAE: If I had one wish in my life, why I'd like to live in McDonald's. Right there in the restaurant. 'Stead of in this old place. I'll come up to the brow of the hill, bow down with my troubles, hurtin' under my load and I'll see that yellow horseshoe, sort of like part of a rainbow, and it gives my old spirit a lift. Lord, I can sit in a McDonald's all day. I've done it too. Walked the seven miles with the sun just on its way, and then sat on the curb till five minutes of seven. First one there and and the last to leave. Just like some ol' french fry they forgot. I like the young people workin' there. Like a team of fine young horses when I was growin' up. All smilin'. Tell you what I really like though is the plastic. God gave us plastic so there wouldn't be no stains on his world. See, in the human world of the earth it all gets scratched, stained, tore up, faded down. Loses its shine. All of it does. In time. Well, God he gave us the idea of plastic so we'd know what the everlasting really was. See if there's plastic then there's surely eternity. It's God's hint.

Marks

A woman sits on a bar stool. She is in her early forties and attractive. She wears a plain, black cocktail dress. In every visible part of her body we see blue and red tattoos. The tattoos include twining snakes, demons, flowers, birds in flight, etc. The left side of her face bears a single scar about three inches long below the cheek. She holds and sips a glass of red wine.

ALAIN: Until I was thirty-five there was nothing out of the ordinary, nothing remarkable about my life. My days were very like one of those baroque string quartets. Soothing. Placid. Repetitive. School years without protest or excess. Prom years. Not so much as a single evening's anarchy. My uncle, a Connecticut lawyer, was heard on the eve of my nineteenth birthday to raise a toast which described me, in a positive way he thought, as 'unsurprising.' In college, an unexceptional college, I appreciated. Appreciated music. Appreciated art. I was, if memory serves, a major in a subject whose actual point or content now escapes me, cultural geography. Had I died at that time, perhaps of acute boredom let us say, in the school cafeteria, eating peas, it would have been agreed, by all who knew me that my epitaph should read 'She did as she was told.' Or blander yet, 'she did as she supposed she might be told.'