

UNPRODUCEABLE PLAYS

BY

John Patrick Bray

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SHAKESPEARE (One-act)

STRESS LIZARD (Ten-minute)

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VULTURE TAKES A DIVE (One-Act)

GENE MY HACK, MAN (Sketch)

BABY EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH (An Opera in Three Scenes)

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NOTE:

Some of these plays have actually been produced.

My thanks to Gene Kato and the Next Stage Press family for allowing me this opportunity. My thanks to those that have read, rejected, accepted, staged, or attempted to stage these works.

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BILLY JUNK

Characters:

BILLY JUNK, 20's-30's, a man with a dirty apartment

LARRY, 20's-30's, a man with a clean smile

MAGGIE, 20's-30's, a haunting presence

OTHER MAGGIE, 20's, Larry's younger sister who wishes she were
Lauren Bacall

ORSON, 50's, a medical doctor, father of LARRY and OTHER MAGGIE

Setting:

Billy's memory of the 1950's/Though other locations are suggested, it all
takes place in Billy's apartment

Notes:

This is my homage to Pulp Noir, the Beat Generation, George Lillo, and
William S. Shakespeare.

History:

Developmental Reading with Athens Playwrights' Workshop, autumn
2011, moderated by George Pate.

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BILLY JUNK

LIGHTS UP. An apartment in the Lower East Side. Some time ago. Sounds of traffic occasionally come through the window. But it's a middle-of-the-night traffic. Drunken voices. Cat calls. Bottles breaking. Orange neon light buzzes, blinking through the window as if a warning. BILLY JUNK sits at a small desk, hovering over an old tape recorder or Dictaphone. A bottle of scotch. Cigarette smolders in the ashtray. One glance around the room, and you can tell that this place is in dire need of an exterminator and probably smells like cat urine. Stacks of books. Hubcaps strewn about. Is it a junk shop or a man's apartment? BILLY regards a stack of books. He picks one up and flips through a few pages. It is a book of 18th Century plays. A saxophone plays as MAGGIE enters. Her mascara runs down her cheeks. Her hair is frazzled. She holds a shot glass on top of her head. She is on another plane. BILLY can't see her, but he knows she's there. He starts recording.

BILLY. This is Billy. Resident, Lower East Side. Used to live on Fourth Street. Now I'm here. (*He stops.*) To start with...to be, or...the hell with it. (*He stops. He takes a breath. A saxophone plays as MAGGIE enters. Her mascara runs down her cheeks. Her hair is frazzled. She holds a shot glass on top of her head. She is on another plane. BILLY can't see her, but he knows she's there.*) Sometimes, when I step up to use the John, I get performance anxiety. When that happens, I say 'let her go, Roy!' And it works. It works. (*He takes a breath.*) Okay. Let her go Roy. (*Into the recorder.*) This whole thing will come from memory.

MAGGIE. Memory.

BILLY. Which means that everything is jumbled. I don't know what day it is. One day, it's nineteen-fifty-three. Then, it's forty-three. Japan. Korea. Soldiers are somewhere. Somewhere in Asia. (*He darts a look at MAGGIE.*)

MAGGIE. (*Sings*) Memories are made of this.

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BILLY. One girl. One boy. [4F]

MAGGIE. One shot. (*Sound of a shot.*)

BILLY. Shot glass. (*Sound of glass breaking.*)

MAGGIE. One shot. (*Sound of a shot.*)

BILLY. An insult to the brain.

MAGGIE. He's going to miss the funeral.

BILLY. I have to miss it. I can't show my face. Not after...okay, it's coming back to me. (*LIGHTS CHANGE. BILLY regains energy. OTHER MAGGIE enters. She is young, but sultry. That is, she is attempting to BE sultry. Like she's watched Bogie and Bacall and has decided that this is how it works.*)

OTHER MAGGIE. You know how to whistle, don't you?

BILLY. How's that?

OTHER MAGGIE. Put your lips together... (*She leans into him.*) And blow. (*A moment. BILLY blows a raspberry.*)

OTHER MAGGIE. Jesus, Billy!

BILLY. Come on, it's funny! I just...it was funny. It was meant to be funny. Hey, I'm sorry. (*He pulls her closer.*) I'm sorry. (*She sits on his lap.*)

OTHER MAGGIE. You're supposed to take me to a picture.

BILLY. Ten cents. Who has that?

OTHER MAGGIE. I'm getting restless, Billy. You know? Restless.

BILLY. Yeah, I know.

OTHER MAGGIE. So. We can get married or go to the picture.

BILLY. Right. Picture wins. (*Beat.*) We don't have to get married, though. (*OTHER MAGGIE gives him a look.*) I mean, we could just...look at me, baby. I'm restless, too. (*She walks over to him and grabs him by the pants.*)

OTHER MAGGIE. Stick it in the fridge, and let it cool off. You know how to stick it in the fridge, don't you?

BILLY. Actually...no. (*She moves away.*)

OTHER MAGGIE. My brother's gonna be down there, at the theatre.

BILLY. Larry?

OTHER MAGGIE. He'll give us a dime.

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BILLY. I don't want Larry's dime. You don't know...you don't know where he got that dime.

OTHER MAGGIE. A dime's a dime. I want to see a picture. (*She starts to leave.*) See you later, maybe. (*BILLY tries to say something. She notices. He stops and waves awkwardly goodbye. She looks disappointed and exits. A moment. He goes to the fridge and opens it. Looks for a beer. A moment. He looks around. He unzips his pants and steps towards the fridge.*)

BILLY. Cold. (*LIGHTS CHANGE. Orange. BILLY zips up and grabs a beer. He wanders over to the recorder.*) Larry had his moments. I guess we all have our moments. (*MAGGIE sits in a corner. BILLY sees her, and then ignores her.*). Flashy smile and firm tummy. Christ, I hate him. (*LIGHTS CHANGE. It is earlier. BILLY moves to a stove and starts cooking eggs. LARRY enters.*)

LARRY. What is this?

BILLY. Hungry?

LARRY. Come on, Billy, the girls are getting antsy. (*BILLY pushes the eggs onto two dirty plates.*) I'm not hungry.

BILLY. No? (*LARRY considers. Relents. He goes to the fridge, grabs ketchup, and starts shaking out the bottle onto his plate.*)

LARRY. The girls are getting antsy, though.

BILLY. Yeah, yeah. (*BILLY starts eating. LARRY keeps shaking out the bottle.*)

LARRY. So? (*No response.*) I can loan you a dime, Billy.

BILLY. I have a dime. (*BILLY searches his pockets. Nothing. LARRY stops shaking out the bottle.*) I want all of it, Larry. Right now. I'll get you the money. (*LARRY puts down the ketchup bottle and moves away from the plate.*)

LARRY. Look, uh, Billy. I know you like the stuff. I know you do, but you're sweet on my sister. You know? She's young, and... I don't know how to say this, but...the kind of guy that hangs around my sister ain't the type of guy that's going to do this stuff.

BILLY. Didn't you say you have a girl waiting for me?

LARRY. Yeah, but girls are girls! That don't matter. You can fool around and still be a stout husband. But this? This is bad news.

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BILLY. Then why do you sell it?

LARRY. It's an honest living! But I don't touch the stuff, Billy. Never touch the stuff. Don't shit where you eat, and don't let your sister eat where your friend shits. *(Pause.)*

BILLY. Awkward.

LARRY. Listen, Billy. We'll go downstairs, have a time. The girl I got you? She's the Cats Whiskers. She's dying to say 'hello' to something. So. Forget my sister, plus, she's my sister. I mean, think of it. We look like each other.

BILLY. You make a beautiful woman, Larry. What you mean is, you want me to call it off with your sister. And this is your way of encouraging me.

LARRY. You can stay here. I got two arms. Eh? One for each girl. *(BILLY sits.)* Suit yourself, William Tell.

BILLY. You gonna eat your ketchup? *(LARRY scoffs. Turns away. Pauses. Goes back to the plate.)*

LARRY. Fork? *(BILLY hands him a fork – or something that looks like it could be used to convey food - from the desk. LARRY eats.)*

BILLY. I think I'm sick, Larry.

LARRY. Too much of that shit.

BILLY. I need more.

LARRY. We all have needs, Billy. My needs are bringing me to the car. *(He exits, still eating the ketchup. BILLY stands and doubles over.)*

MAGGIE. *(Remaining still, but her voice pleads.)* My Dad has money.

BILLY. No.

MAGGIE. He can take care of you at the hospital. He's a good man.

BILLY. No hospitals.

MAGGIE. A good doctor.

BILLY. Just...stones, I think.

MAGGIE. Oh, please, Billy! You need an operation! *(BILLY collapses. LIGHTS CHANGE. OTHER MAGGIE enters.)*

OTHER MAGGIE. No, Billy! Not again!

BILLY. It's fine! It's perfectly fine!

OTHER MAGGIE. Stand up. Come on, sailor. Get your land-legs under you.

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BILLY. I'm perfectly fine. (*She helps him into his chair.*)

OTHER MAGGIE. Christ, you're sweating.

BILLY. It's hot out there.

OTHER MAGGIE. January, Billy.

BILLY. Huh?

OTHER MAGGIE. It's never hot in January.

BILLY. Christ. I'm burning cold then.

OTHER MAGGIE. I'm making you tea. You got any? (*She looks in his cupboards. She takes out a syringe.*) Billy? (*Long pause.*) Oh...

BILLY. Don't start, don't start...

OTHER MAGGIE. Oh. (*Pause. She moves to the phone.*)

BILLY. What are you -?

OTHER MAGGIE. I need an ambulance. Quickly. My Dad will take care of you. He's a good man. A good doctor. You need an operation. (*LIGHTS go CRAZY. ORSON enters, wearing a white coat.*)

ORSON. How do you know this boy?

MAGGIE. He's just a boy.

ORSON. Are you seeing him? H'm? He one of your brother's little customers?

MAGGIE. Please...

ORSON. He'll be fine. They've passed.

MAGGIE. They?

ORSON. The stones. How often does he get these stones, do you know? (*Beat.*) Is he taking something...for the pain? (*ORSON gets down and pulls up BILLY'S sleeve a little. OTHER MAGGIE looks away. Beat.*) I'm going to say a prayer for him, and I'll say a prayer for your brother, and then I'll say a prayer for you. (*Beat.*) I can make a threat. I can lock you in your room. There are places I can take you. They'd show you how to behave. Electrocute you. Until you knew your place at the table. But I won't do that. Because I am a Christian, and a man who believes a doctor is as regal and responsible as a duke. I will pray for you. And hope. And if that doesn't work, then maybe I'll visit Billy and forget my Hippocratic oath. Because by that point you'd be lost to me anyway. (*LIGHTS CHANGE as ORSON and OTHER MAGGIE exit.*)

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BILLY. What the hell does someone have to do to get money around here?

MAGGIE. You can always become a thief. Zorro.

BILLY. Is that right?

MAGGIE. You are one, aren't you?

BILLY. No.

MAGGIE. You've got the stuff in your system right now, Billy. So. Where did it come from?

BILLY. I didn't have the money.

MAGGIE. You had the money.

BILLY. No.

MAGGIE. You've had a busy day.

BILLY. I never leave...

MAGGIE. Are you sure? (*MAGGIE looks at him. He looks at MAGGIE. She is still holding a shot glass on her head. BILLY looks away.*) A dime. A damn dime is all I wanted.

MAGGIE. (*As BILLY*). I get up from the hospital bed and collect my things. I make my way downstairs, and there I see him. About to get into his car. I wait in the shadows. I...can't remember what happened.

BILLY. I can't remember what happened.

MAGGIE. So... (*MAGGIE wanders over to the desk and picks up the book of 18th Century plays.*) I'm going to reenact a scene from George Lillo's *The London Merchant*. Watch the scene, and you'll remember, Billy. You'll remember. (*Reading.*) "A close walk in a Wood." (*ORSON enters, carrying a cane, wearing his stethoscope as if it were a large medal. BILLY rises and picks up a pistol.*)

ORSON. "If I was superstitious, I should fear some danger lurked unseen, or death were night. A heavy melancholy clouds my spirits. My imagination is filled with gashly forms of dreary graves and bodies changed by death. When the pale, lengthened visage attracts each weeping eye, and fill the musing soul, at once, with grief and horror, pity and aversion. I will indulge the thought. The wise man prepares himself for death, by making it familiar to his mind. When strong reflections hold the mirror near, and the living in the dead behold their future selves, how does

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each inordinate passion and desire cease, or sicken at the view? The mind scarce moves; the blood, curdling and chilled creeps slowly through the veins; fixed, still, and motionless like the solemn object of our thoughts we are almost at present what we must be hereafter; ‘til curiosity awakes the soul, and sets it on inquiry.”

BILLY. I can’t do this. (*BILLY drops his gun. ORSON hears it.*)

ORSON. “A man so near me, and masked!” (*ORSON draws a scalpel and assumes an attack stance.*)

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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