

MEAD AND STU CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

A one-act play

by Rom Watson

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Mead and Stu Conduct an Interview
Cast of Characters

STU

Aged 25-55, self-titled “entrepreneur”

MEAD

Aged 25-55, self-titled “entrepreneur”

DANE

Aged 30+, a famous actor, known for never giving interviews

TRUDY

Aged 50-60, Dane’s agent

EMILY

Aged 30+, Dane's ex-wife

Time: The present

Place: Los Angeles, California

DANE

Oh; you're one of those.

DANE leans over the table to sign in. STU enters behind DANE, who does not hear him. STU also wears a ski mask. In his hand he holds a white cloth. As he approaches DANE from behind, DANE straightens up and addresses MEAD. STU freezes.

DANE (CONT'D)

God it feels good to be in a theatre again. You know I haven't auditioned for a play in ten years?

MEAD

Yeah. I mean, no. I mean, that's a long time.

DANE

It sure is. I can't wait to get back on stage again.

DANE once again leans over the table to sign in. STU moves toward DANE, but then DANE again straightens up and talks to MEAD. STU again freezes.

DANE (CONT'D)

You know what I love about theatre?

MEAD

What?

DANE

The audience. There's nothing like acting in front of a live audience.

MEAD

Don't you get tired of saying the same lines over and over?

DANE

The play is the same, but the audience is different every night. So being in a play is like making love to a different woman every night. Would you get tired of that?

MEAD

I see your point.

DANE leans over the table and proceeds to write his name on the sign-in sheet. As he does so, STU puts the chloroformed cloth over

DANE's mouth and nose. MEAD and STU subdue him and sit him in a chair. They tie a rope around his feet, and use another rope to tie his hands. They blindfold him with a bandanna. Then they sit in the other two chairs and remove their ski masks.

MEAD

That went well. How did you get him to audition?

STU

I heard him talking to his agent. They always sit in my section. He told her he really wanted to do a play.

MEAD

You're a busboy. The entire restaurant is your section.

STU

Right. Which is how I overheard their conversation.

MEAD

But how did you know he'd audition for *us*?

STU

After they left the restaurant, I called his agent and set it up.

MEAD

Nice work.

STU

I don't know . . . maybe we should have gone with the bear gallstones idea after all.

MEAD

Oh come on. Getting an interview out of this guy has got to be easier than getting a gallstone out of a bear.

STU

But there are so many bears . . .

MEAD

That doesn't mean that all of them have gallstones.

STU

But Mead, \$12,000 *dollars*.

MEAD
Per gallstone?

STU
No, per bear.

MEAD
But what if that bear doesn't have any g--

STU
It's an average. Of course some bears are going to have more gallstones than other bears, but on the average you can get \$12,000.

MEAD
What do the Chinese *do* with the gallstones?

STU
Do? It's an herb to them, they use it for medicinal purposes.

MEAD
Stu, did you ever stop to think that if the Chinese are willing to pay \$12,000 for one harvest of this stuff, that it must be very very *difficult* to get?

STU
Difficult for them yes, but with our American know-how we could corner the market.

MEAD
(Skeptical.)
Uh-huh.

STU
Picture it. You, me, and a veterinarian. We form a mobile surgical unit, prowling the forests; we find a bear, and tranquilize him from a safe distance. The veterinarian opens up the bear, takes out the gallstones, sews him back up, and we release him into the wild, good as new. *Better* than new, because now he doesn't have *gallstones*.

MEAD
Where did you hear about this?

STU
On the radio.

MEAD
One of those talk shows where all kinds of cranks call up?

STU

N.P.R! N.P.R!

MEAD

(Somewhat impressed.)

N.P.R. . . .

STU

\$12,000 split three ways is \$4,000 apiece, and if we bag a bear a day--

MEAD

At the end of a month we'd have . . . a lot of money.

STU

Yeah. (Silence.) Are you sure nobody's going to bother us here?

MEAD

Relax. We've got the theatre all to ourselves.

STU

How long did your friend say we could use it?

MEAD

Amber told me nobody was going to be here until six-thirty. That's over three hours from now. We've got plenty of time to interview him.

DANE reacts. He sneaks a look at them but they don't notice.

STU

Which tabloid should we sell it to?

MEAD

The one that gives us the most money. They're all going to want it.

STU

Yeah.

MEAD

What are you going to do with your half of the money?

STU

I'm going to get rid of all my clothes and buy a complete new wardrobe. New socks, new underwear, new everything.

MEAD

What's wrong with the clothes you've got now?

STU

There's nothing wrong with them, but I gotta start wearing fancy clothes if I'm going to be dating movie stars.

MEAD

And what makes you think you're going to be dating movie stars?

STU

I've seen how they look at me when I clear their dirty dishes.

MEAD

Who?

STU

Jennifer Connelly, Jessica Alba, Charlize Theron . . .they'd all go out with me if I wore the right clothes.

MEAD

Uh-huh.

STU

And I won't be a busboy much longer. What are you going to do with your half of the money?

MEAD

Well, every time I go to the movies, no matter where I sit, right before the movie starts some big tall person sits right in front of me. I end up doing "this" the whole time.

MEAD leans his torso left right left right, as though trying to see around someone's head.

MEAD (CONT'D)

When we get the money, I'm going to hire a midget to go to the movies with me, and make him sit in the seat right in front of me.

The lights fade on MEAD and STU. When not lit, they remain frozen. Or perhaps they turn their backs to the audience and then freeze as the lights fade.

DANE

Trudy! (Silence.) I need your help, Trudy. Please.

TRUDY enters. She is only in DANE's mind
and cannot be seen by MEAD or STU.

TRUDY
Hello, dear.

DANE
Thank you, Trudy.

TRUDY
Poor Dane. Still hounded by the press.

DANE
Why can't they leave me alone?

TRUDY
You brought this on yourself you know.

DANE
Me?

TRUDY
Yes. By refusing to give interviews. If you gave interviews all the time, no one would care *what*
you had to say.

DANE
You want me to become a media slut, so everyone will get tired of me?

TRUDY
No, I'm saying that by making yourself unreachable, you've turned an interview with Dane
Stafford into the Holy Grail of journalism.

DANE
You think being tied to a chair is my fault?

TRUDY
This is what you get for wanting to do a play.

DANE
You're the one who got me this audition.

TRUDY
I was angry with you. I sent you to the first theatre audition that called.

DANE
Why were you angry with me?

TRUDY

Ten years I've worked for you, and suddenly you sabotage all my efforts by telling me you want to do a play.

DANE

I don't want to sabotage my career, I want to expand it.

TRUDY

Expand it right into the toilet. Next you'll want to do a porno. Or worse, Shakespeare.

DANE

I would love to do Shakespeare. I would love to do a comedy again. I need to get in touch with why I became an actor in the first place.

TRUDY

Then . . .take an acting class.

DANE

I don't want to act in a class; I want to ply my trade in front of paying audiences. Doing a play will be good for me.

TRUDY

How?

DANE

The last few films I've done have been drudgery. I need to do something creative.

TRUDY

Take up knitting. You can knit sweaters while you're waiting in your trailer.

DANE

Acting on a film set is no fun. Acting on stage is fun.

TRUDY

It's not supposed to be fun. It's your job.

DANE

If I'm going to work at a job I don't enjoy, I might as well go back to taking care of plants in office buildings.

TRUDY

You need a vacation.

DANE

I need a new start. A blank page. I want to disappear.

TRUDY

How are you going to disappear if you're on stage every night?

DANE

By becoming someone else. I'll grow a beard, shave my hairline back a couple of inches, play character roles . . .no one will recognize me.

TRUDY

Your face is too well known. How can you do theatre and not be seen?

DANE

By doing theatre in Los Angeles!

TRUDY

You should to talk to Emily.

DANE

No; I don't think so.

TRUDY

Oh come on, you told me your divorce was amicable. So did she, for that matter.

DANE

It was. I'm just . . .

TRUDY

Afraid she'll tell you what you don't want to hear?

Silence.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
(Calling offstage.)

Emily!

DANE

She's not going to show up for you. I'm the one who has to ask her.

TRUDY

Well?

DANE thinks for a moment, then makes a decision.

DANE

Emily! (Silence.) Emily, please. I need your help. (Silence.) Emily?

EMILY enters. She too is only in DANE's mind and cannot be seen by MEAD or STU. She sees TRUDY.

Am I interrupting?
EMILY

No, no, come in, dear. Maybe you can talk some sense into him.
TRUDY

Have I ever been able to do that?
EMILY

Your track record is better than mine.
TRUDY

EMILY pushes the blindfold up onto Dane's forehead.

Hello Emily.
DANE

Hello Dane.
EMILY

Can you believe this?
DANE

It's all part of being famous.
EMILY

Name one other actor who's been kidnapped.
DANE

I'm saying you can't be a well-known film actor without enduring a loss of privacy.
EMILY

Well, I know how to fix these guys.
DANE

What are you gonna to do?
EMILY

Refuse to talk them.
DANE

That's your solution?
EMILY

Yeah. It's a good one, too.
DANE

I see what you mean.
EMILY
(To TRUDY.)

Good luck, dear. Maybe he'll come to his senses. It was nice to see you, Emily.
TRUDY

TRUDY starts to exit.

You don't have to leave because of me.
EMILY

Oh no I'm leaving because of him. Let's talk in real life; call me, we'll have lunch. Bye.
TRUDY

TRUDY exits.

Dane?
EMILY

What.
DANE

Give them an interview so you can get out of here.
EMILY

I'd rather get a prostate exam than give an interview. It's less invasive.
DANE

Questions too penetrating for you?
EMILY

Ha. Ha.
DANE
(Sarcastic.)

What is so hard about answering a few questions?
EMILY

DANE

More than one journalist has *begged* me for an interview. I didn't cave in to them, so why should I give an interview to a couple of crooks?

EMILY

Because they have the upper hand. And you can't pretend to still be unconscious for much longer.

EMILY pulls the blindfold down to cover DANE's eyes. The lights rise on MEAD and STU.

STU

Did I tell you my idea for a new line of dolls?

MEAD

No.

STU

Well, I had this funny idea for a new line of dolls for little girls. "Crazy Bitch."

MEAD

"Crazy Bitch?"

STU

Yeah. You see, they're homeless dolls. One of them has its own little shopping cart, one of them has its own little dumpster that it hunts for food in, and one of them talks. Guess what she says when you pull the string?

MEAD

What?

STU

Gibberish!

STU laughs. MEAD doesn't get it.

MEAD

(Sarcastically.)

Is that the deluxe model?

STU

No, the deluxe model is a schizophrenic with Tourette's Syndrome.

STU laughs again. MEAD doesn't.

MEAD

Stu, I agreed that we should interview this guy, and I'm giving some serious thought to that idea about the bear gallstones. But I refuse to go along with you on these dolls. They're grotesque.

STU

Mead, I'm not suggesting we manufacture these dolls; it's a joke. A funny idea. Like on Saturday Night Live when they have those fake commercials?

MEAD

Oh! You saw this on Saturday Night Live?

STU

No, I made it up. I'm just saying wouldn't it be funny if it *were* on Saturday Night Live.

MEAD just stares at him.

STU (CONT'D)

Oh forget it. (Silence.) You don't smell very good.

MEAD

I know; it's the deodorant I use. It's a little stone about this big, and it's made of mineral salts. You just get it wet and rub it under your arms.

STU

So . . .why do you stink?

MEAD

It doesn't really work.

STU

Why do you use it?

MEAD

It's better for the environment. And it lasts a whole year.

STU

But if it doesn't work . . .why don't you just use a regular deodorant?

MEAD

Are you kidding? Do you know what regular deodorants contain? Aluminum. You know what aluminum causes, don't you? Alzheimer's. I'd rather stink than be a vegetable.

This makes sense to their logic, and they nod their heads in unison.

I'm hungry.

STU

What? You just ate.

MEAD

All I had was a sandwich. It wasn't very filling.

STU

You're always hungry. I can't believe you stopped for food on the way here.

MEAD

It was a drive-through. It took three minutes, tops.

STU

You almost made us late.

MEAD

We were not late.

STU

He might have left before we got here.

MEAD

We got here before Dane.

STU

I know, but . . .you don't stop for food on the way to a kidnapping.

MEAD

You didn't have to order onions rings and a chocolate shake.

STU

Well, we were already there . . .

MEAD

Yeah yeah yeah. (Slight pause.) And it's not a kidnapping.

STU

It's not?

MEAD

No. We're not asking anyone for a ransom.

STU

MEAD

Ohhh, right.

A few moments of silence. Then MEAD starts laughing.

STU (CONT'D)

What? (MEAD continues laughing.) *What?*

MEAD

"Crazy Bitch Dolls."

MEAD starts laughing again. STU stares at MEAD for a moment, then looks at his watch.

STU

It took you five minutes to get the joke?

MEAD

You didn't tell it right. (Silence.) It's like what Longfellow said in his "Theory of Experience."

STU

Huh?

MEAD

Well, it's kind of confusing, but, the way *I* understand it, the first time you experience something, you don't really experience it. It's too . . . new; and you can't grasp it. It isn't until the second time, when the same thing happens to you again, that you truly experience it.

STU thinks about this.

STU

That must be why spaghetti sauce tastes better the second day.

MEAD

Exactly. (MEAD notices DANE make a movement.) I think he's coming to.

STU crosses to DANE, leans over, puts his mouth close to DANE's ear and speaks to him.

STU

You're safe. You're okay. There's nothing to worry about. As soon as you've answered our questions, we're going to let you go. (Silence. Then, very slowly.) Can you hear me?

Silence.

MEAD

He's still drugged. He's probably hallucinating. That's one of the effects of adding strychnine to the chloroform. And even after he comes to, he won't be able to speak or move for a while.

STU

How did you know to mix strychnine with the chloroform?

MEAD

I learned about that in a mystery novel. One of those "books on tape." (He picks up a thermos.) You sure you don't want some coffee?

STU

Are you kidding? I can't stand that foul stuff. Why do people even drink coffee?

MEAD

Because it smells so good when you burp it up later.

The lights fade on MEAD and STU, and rise on DANE and EMILY. She pushes the blindfold up onto DANE's forehead.

DANE

I can handle these jokers.

EMILY

Aren't you worried they'll hurt you if you don't talk?

DANE

I could overpower them.

EMILY

Tied to a chair?

DANE

Well . . . I'll just have to wait them out.

EMILY

Dane, these men went to a lot of trouble to kidnap you.

DANE

Oh really? They seem awfully disorganized to me.

EMILY

Organized or not, they planned this. They've attached their hopes and dreams to this interview. They're not going to give up and go home just because you're shy.

DANE

I'm not shy. I'm a private person.

EMILY

And I married you anyway. Well, I have no one to blame but myself. I knew what I was getting into.

DANE

It wasn't that bad. Don't you think you might've given up too soon?

EMILY

I was the one who worked at our relationship.

DANE

I worked on it too. But . . . talking is hard. You always want to know what I'm feeling, and most of the time I don't *know* what I'm feeling. (Silence.) Why did you?

EMILY

What?

DANE

Marry me; what was it about me that you found attractive?

EMILY

You were distant. Just like my father. Of course at the time I had no idea that's what attracted me to you. It wasn't until after the divorce that it dawned on me. But the fact is, women are often attracted to men who remind them of their fathers and men are often attracted to women who remind them of their mothers.

DANE

No way.

EMILY

It's subconscious of course, people don't realize it. But think about it. Don't I embody many of your mother's characteristics?

DANE

No!

EMILY

She and I both played volleyball, we both love dogs . . .and beyond the superficial things, we have a very similar demeanor.

DANE

A lot of women --

EMILY

I'm athletic. I'm extroverted. I'm smart. And I call people out on their . . .stuff.

DANE thinks about this for a moment.

DANE

Oh my god! So I married my mother and you married your father?

EMILY

In a way. Sexual Selection does affect reproductive success; therefore it's part of Natural Selection.

DANE

Is this something you teach your students?

EMILY

No. It's easier to cut open dead frogs.

DANE

You don't want to tell them they're part of an ongoing cycle of dysfunction?

EMILY

It's not dysfunction. It's Darwin.

DANE

It's depressing.

EMILY

What was it that you found attractive about me?

DANE

You limit my damage.

EMILY

(She laughs.)

Limit your damage? How romantic.

DANE

I meant it as a compliment.

EMILY

Try again.

DANE

Well, . . .I meant that . . .you're my mirror. When I see myself through your eyes, I can see my faults and correct them. I love you for that.

EMILY

Then why didn't you talk to me?

DANE

I talked to you more than I ever talked to anyone!

EMILY

Yeah, but it still wasn't half as much as a normal person would talk.

DANE

Well I guess I've never been normal.

EMILY

You're just realizing this now?

DANE

No, after we divorced I did a lot of thinking, and it occurred to me that maybe I was born on the autism spectrum.

EMILY

Or maybe you were born on the self-absorbed spectrum.

DANE

No, I'm focused on the world around me, it's just that . . . silence has always been my shield.

EMILY

Shield? Against what? What are you afraid of?

She looks at DANE. He says nothing.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Dane, your shield has calcified into a cell. You want out of this prison? Lower your shield.

The lights fade on DANE and EMILY as she pulls the blindfold down to cover DANE's eyes. The lights rise on MEAD and STU. MEAD looks down at his shirt and notices a stain.

MEAD

Oh no. How did that . . . (A pause while he fingers his shirt.) Hmm, must have been the stain elves.

STU

The what?

MEAD

Stain elves.

STU

What are you talking about?

MEAD

Oh come on. Didn't your parents ever tell you about the stain elves?

STU shakes his head "no" in disbelief.

MEAD (CONT'D)

They're the elves that used to make shoes. Only when mass production hit the footwear industry, it left them with a lot of time on their hands. So now they leave stains. Any time you see a stain on the carpet, or on the tablecloth or on an item of clothing: if you don't remember putting it there, then it was probably put there by a stain elf during the night.

STU just stares at him.

MEAD (CONT'D)

You never heard of the stain elves?

STU shakes his head "no".

MEAD

Granted, they're not as popular as The Tooth Fairy, but one day, they will be. Mark my words.

STU

If you say so. How long before the chloroform wears off?

MEAD

Not too long. I didn't use very much. Why don't you try the smelling salts?

STU picks up the smelling salts and takes a whiff.

MEAD (CONT'D)

No; on *him*.

STU holds the smelling salts under DANE's nose. He reacts immediately.

STU

You're awake. Good. Dane, we're going to ask you some questions, and then we'll let you go. So tell us; what was it like working with Alec Baldwin?

Silence.

MEAD

We've seen you play the strong silent type on screen. We don't need to see this in real life.

DANE does not speak. MEAD is standing next to DANE, and he suddenly claps his hands together very loudly, right by DANE's ear. Startled, DANE involuntarily makes a sound.

DANE

Aahh!

MEAD

I got him to say something!

STU

He said "Aahh!" -- we can't sell that to the tabloids.

MEAD

Yeah, it is kinda short for an interview.

STU

Dane, the sooner you talk to us, the sooner we'll let you go.

Silence.

MEAD

We're not untying you until you give us an interview.

STU pulls MEAD aside.

STU (CONT'D)

Maybe we should tickle him.

MEAD

Why?

STU

To make him talk.

MEAD

This is a hard-hitting interview, not a slumber party.

STU

Well what are we going to do? It never occurred to me that he wouldn't talk to us. What's his problem? And I was so sure this interview was a great idea.

MEAD

Me too. But some ideas . . .they're like . . .well . . . like boogers. They seem huge when they're inside your head, but when you take them out and look at them, they're actually very tiny.

MEAD and STU contemplate this as the lights
fade on them and rise on DANE and EMILY.
She pushes his blindfold up.

EMILY

Why are you so stubborn? Is it just because you're a man?

DANE

Conversation is so . . .unpredictable. One of the reasons I like acting is because everything I say has already been mapped out. I don't have to worry about what to say, I simply memorize the lines. Maybe the only time people *like* me is when I'm playing someone else.

EMILY

When you're playing yourself you never let anyone get close to you. You know how, when you're sitting at a traffic light and you see some homeless person approaching, you look over your left shoulder and check to make sure that your car door is locked? Well when somebody starts to get close to you, or asks you a question: you do the same thing. You mentally check to make sure your door is locked.

DANE

My defenses have become second nature.

EMILY

Maybe if being my husband were an acting role, you would have been better at it.

DANE

Everything is easier when I'm someone else.

EMILY

Your kidnapers are not going to let you play someone else.

DANE

You really think they might hurt me?

She pulls the blindfold down. The lights rise on
MEAD and STU. MEAD is looking at a
magazine. Suddenly he throws the magazine at

DANE's chest. DANE is very startled, but says nothing.

MEAD

I can't stand it any longer! (MEAD approaches DANE menacingly.) I've lost my patience with you. How can you expect us to sit here and wait, hour after hour after hour? You can't keep this up forever. Sooner or later you're going to have to use the bathroom! And we're not untying you until you talk. Are you wearing Depends under those pants? No? Then you better start answering our questions!

STU

Mead. He's only been tied up for fifteen minutes.

MEAD

Oh.

STU

Maybe he's scared. Maybe the chloroform left him . . . confused. I'm sure that when he comes to his senses, he'll start talking.

MEAD

And if he doesn't?

STU

He'll have to wet his pants.

MEAD

I'm not changing his diaper.

STU

Hey! I just got an idea for another "Crazy Bitch" doll. A wino who pisses their pants.

MEAD

(To DANE.)

Are you a wino? Or just a big baby?

The lights fade on MEAD and STU.

EMILY

It's a good thing we never had children. You probably wouldn't have talked to them, either.

DANE

(Reaching for an excuse.)

Children are nothing but . . . little bundles of disease.

EMILY

Oh puleeze. You just didn't want the responsibility.

DANE

Well . . .

EMILY

Remember what happened with those two girls who asked for your autograph? You don't want a replay of that, do you?

DANE

I *gave* them my autograph.

EMILY

But you wouldn't talk to them. The autograph was just an excuse to approach you, and talk with you for a few minutes.

DANE

Why did they want that?

EMILY

People need conversation. Maybe you don't, but other people do.

Silence as DANE thinks.

DANE

I think you're right.

EMILY

How can you not like interacting with people?

DANE

I love interacting with people; I just don't understand why it has to be verbal.

EMILY

Why did you ever become an actor in the first place, if you're not willing to accept the responsibility that goes with it?

DANE

What responsibility?

EMILY

Of being famous. Of being someone that complete strangers admire. Of being a friend.

Silence as DANE thinks.

DANE

It was a blocking rehearsal.

EMILY

What was?

DANE

Why I became an actor. It was the first rehearsal for the first play I did in high school. Someone had to drop out and I got the part. Five actors, scripts in hand, entering, crossing, “go back and do it again,” “this time cross on the other side of the chair;” “remember, when we get into the theatre it’s going to be a thrust stage.” I didn’t become an actor because of the lights or the applause or the audience reaction, but because of that blocking rehearsal. Stopping, starting; all of us writing our blocking in our scripts, then erasing it when the blocking was changed.

EMILY

Sounds boring.

DANE

It felt completely natural to me, as though I’d been doing it my whole life. For the first time ever, I felt I was home. I was fifteen. (Pause while he thinks.) The theatre is only place I’ve ever felt at home.

EMILY

What did you like about it?

DANE

Being of service. Using my talents, making people laugh, being part of a family. Every performance was like walking a tightrope, knowing at any moment I might fall; knowing if I did fall the other actors were there to catch me. (Slight pause.) Telling a story that could open hearts. (Slight pause.) Shining my light on the character I was playing, and knowing that light would then shine on the audience.

The lights rise on MEAD and STU.

MEAD

Which one of us is going to make a food run?

STU

I’ll go. What are you hungry for?

MEAD

Something that isn’t fast. Or frozen. (Pointing to DANE.) I want to eat the kind of stuff he eats. I bet he doesn’t eat fast food.

STU

Once we get the money, you can eat at all the fancy restaurants you want.

MEAD

(To DANE.)

Once you talk to us, we won't ever have to eat fast food again. (Yelling.) Talk to us! (Silence.)
Stu, why won't he talk to us?

STU

Maybe he doesn't like us. (To DANE.) You don't have to like us, just talk to us.

Silence.

MEAD

What a jerk.

DANE shakes his head "no". MEAD and STU look at each other, registering that DANE has finally communicated to them.

MEAD (CONT'D)

So . . .you're not a jerk?

DANE shakes his head "no".

MEAD (CONT'D)

Well then maybe you're boring. Maybe you're afraid that if you start talking, we'll find out that you have nothing to say.

STU

Mead, he must have *something* to say: he's famous. How could somebody become a celebrity if they didn't have anything interesting to say?

MEAD

I guess you're right. He must be stuck-up.

DANE's shoulders droop in frustration.

STU

Let's shave his head.

MEAD

Why?

STU

We've got less than two hours left. We need to prove to him that we mean business.

MEAD

Stu, did you ever see him in that movie where he played an art forger?

STU

Yeah. So?

MEAD

He shaved his head for that role.

STU

Oh yeah. He looked pretty cool.

MEAD

Exactly. We can't force him to talk by threatening to make him look cool. What made you think of shaving his head?

STU

I saw this movie once, where they kidnapped a chauffeur and shaved his head.

MEAD

You said this wasn't a kidnapping.

STU

Right, I forgot. No ransom.

MEAD

We've got to threaten him with something really awful. (Silence.) Dane, if you don't talk to us, we're going to throw acid in your face.

STU

We don't have any acid.

MEAD

Stu, he didn't know that.

STU

Ohhh.

MEAD pulls STU aside.

MEAD

We don't have to carry out the threats, we just have to make him believe we will.

The lights fade on MEAD and STU. Emily pushes the blindfold up.

EMILY

So what is it about these guys that you won't talk to them?

DANE

It's not them, it's what they represent. They're just the latest example of what I've been dealing with my whole life. Being forced to let my guard down when I know the moment I do I'm going to be attacked.

EMILY

Were you bullied?

DANE

When I was a child I was bullied a lot, and I didn't know how to handle it until I studied Gandhi.

EMILY

Gandhi?

DANE

When I read about passive resistance, I knew immediately it was the best way to handle bullies.

EMILY

How old were you?

DANE

Twelve.

EMILY

You practiced passive resistance at twelve?

DANE

Yes, and it's more than just ignoring your attackers. It's about hunkering down, like a tortoise in its shell.

EMILY

(Choosing her words carefully.)

I'm sorry you had to live through that. But you're not twelve. You're a grown man.

DANE

So?

EMILY

So your manifesto of silence isn't working for you anymore.

DANE thinks about this.

DANE

Yeah. It's not, is it.

EMILY

It's time to stop reacting the same way you did when you were a kid.

DANE

(Reluctantly.)

You're right.

EMILY

Think of this kidnapping as an opportunity to respond like a grownup.

The lights fade on DANE and EMILY as they
rise on MEAD and STU.

STU

Mead; I've got it. I know what we should do with the money: we should open our own restaurant.

MEAD

A restaurant?

STU

Yes! But not just any restaurant; a restaurant that serves airplane food! That way people can eat their favorite airplane meals without having to fly.

MEAD

We could make the inside of the restaurant look just like the inside of a plane--

STU

And the waiters and waitresses could dress up like flight attendants!

MEAD

Wow! What a concept. (He gets an idea.) Or . . .we open a restaurant that serves hospital food.

STU

Ooohhh.

The lights fade on MEAD and STU, and rise on
DANE and EMILY.

EMILY

You know, you could use this situation to your advantage.

DANE

How?

EMILY

You always said you never got the chance to do comedy. Why don't you write one? I read that screenplay you wrote when we were married. It showed promise.

DANE

It never went anywhere. It's still sitting in a drawer.

EMILY

But it proved you can write. You want to do a comedy? Write one. Writers don't have to talk.

DANE

What would I write about?

EMILY

Everybody knows that "rule of thumb." You write what you know.

DANE

I did that with my screenplay. No one wanted to produce it.

EMILY

That's because when you wrote it, you didn't know very much.

DANE

And now?

EMILY

Now you know how it feels to be kidnapped by a couple of crooks who believe in stain elves and dream of removing gallstones from wild bears.

DANE

I could turn the spotlight on *them*.

EMILY

These guys have been handing you material on a silver platter. Write it down.

DANE

Hmmm . . . I've been looking to do something creative. I could write a play of my own.

EMILY

There you go.

DANE

I could write about these guys the way they're planning to write about me.

Turn the tables on them. EMILY

Yeah. DANE

And after you write it, you can produce it. EMILY

DANE thinks about this and nods.

I may not even press charges. DANE

Well, I don't know about that . . . EMILY

I'd like to keep seeing you, even after the chloroform wears off. DANE

That's what they all say. EMILY

I was wrong when I said the theatre was the only place I've ever felt at home. I feel at home with you. Emily . . . would you consider getting back together with me? DANE

Why don't you ask me? EMILY

I thought I just did. DANE

I mean the real me. EMILY

Would the real you say yes? DANE

Not unless you break your silence. EMILY

EMILY pulls the blindfold down and covers DANE's eyes. Then she kisses DANE. EMILY exits. MEAD and STU are just finishing a meal

of Mexican fast food. STU points to something on MEAD's plate.

STU

Is that a bug?

MEAD

No, it's a bean.

STU

It looks like a bug.

MEAD

I'm sure it's a bean.

STU

Maybe it's a bug, dressed up in a bean suit.

MEAD

A bug in a bean suit.

STU

Yeah, like a wolf in sheep's clothing.

MEAD

Why would a bug choose such a complicated disguise, zipping himself up into a bean suit?

STU

Camouflage.

MEAD

Uh huh.

MEAD stabs the item in question with his plastic fork and puts it in his mouth. He chews for a moment.

MEAD (CONT'D)

It's a bean.

STU

Well . . .you never can tell.

Silence.

I've decided to speak.

DANE

MEAD and STU stare at DANE, frozen.
Suddenly they both lunge for the tape recorder.
They fight over it briefly, but STU wrestles it
away from MEAD. STU looks at it, presses a
button or two, and thrusts it in front of DANE's
face. He then realizes that it's not working.

It's not recording!

STU

You have it on "pause."

MEAD
(Looking at the tape recorder.)

It says "on."

STU

It says the "pause" is on. If it's "paused," it's not recording. Turn it off and it will start.

MEAD

Turn it off and it will start?

STU

Excuse me? I've decided to speak.

DANE

What are you going to say?

MEAD

I don't know.

DANE

I like your sense of adventure.

STU

That's the nicest thing anyone's said to me all week.

DANE

They remove the blindfold and untie his hands
and feet. Then they sit on the floor in front of
Dane like little children.

STU

What made you change your mind?

DANE
(Lying.)

I have to use the bathroom. What kind of airplane food are you going to serve in your restaurant?

MEAD

I don't know. I've never actually been on a plane.

STU

Me neither. Though we were thinking about going to China. (To MEAD.) So do I push this button?

MEAD

No, you push that thing to the left.

STU

It's not moving.

MEAD

Your other left.

DANE

Give it to me!

DANE grabs the tape recorder away from STU and presses the correct buttons.

DANE (CONT'D)

There.

DANE gives them the tape recorder. As they interview DANE, the lights begin to slowly fade.

MEAD

Out of all the roles you've done, what is your favorite?

DANE

Polonius. I played it in college.

STU

Do you work from the outside in, or the inside out?

DANE

It depends on the role. Since every role is different, each role requires its own unique way of arriving at the truth.

MEAD

Have you ever had any plastic surgery?

DANE

No. (Silence.) Not yet, anyway.

MEAD

Is Dane Stafford your real name?

DANE

I'm not g-- . . .David. My real name is David Stafford.

STU

How old are you?

Silence. This one is hard for him.

DANE

Forty-two.

MEAD

Who are you sleeping with?

Blackout. End of play.