

# The Actors

a comedy in one act

by Alex Emerson Acuff

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*In loving memory of*

*Trey*

*AT RISE:* *Empty stage, white lighting, white backdrop. Ten seconds of silence. HARBO enters. He is a tall, slender man. He is wearing a blue bath robe and holding a toothbrush. HARBO seems lost, and out of place.*

HARBO. Hello?

(*Silence.*)

Hello!?

(*Silence.*)

Can anybody hear me?

(*A barber shop QUARTET enters.*)

QUARTET.

(*singing.*)

*Hello, hello, hello! Yes, we can hear you Harbo.*

HARBO.

(*delighted.*)

Wow, that's pretty good.

QUARTET.

(*singing.*)

*Thank you.*

HARBO.

(*laughing*)

That's great. Hey listen, I hope you don't mind me asking, but you think you guys could do me a huge favor?

BASS.

(*singing.*)

*What can we do for you? Just let us know.*

QUARTET.

(*singing.*)

*Let us know!*

HARBO.

Is there any way you could tell me where I am?

QUARTET.

(*singing.*)

*You're on the--*

HARBO.

(*angry.*)

No! I said *tell* me! Not, *sing* me. Can you please tell me where the hell I am?

(*The QUARTET looks sad and disturbed. They huddle together and begin whispering to each other. They go back to their regular formation, the tenor steps up. He is timid.*)

TENOR.

(*singing.*)

*Uh, it is standard procedure...and in our contracts...that we must sing everything we say to 'The Travelers'. It is our job and privilege to entertain you...and most importantly...keep you...*

QUARTET.

(*singing.*)

*Happy!*

HARBO.

What on earth are you talking about? Where am I traveling? Are you guys messing with me? Did Stan put you all up to this? That bastard. Oh man, I feel woozy. Listen guys, I'm tripping out or dreaming, or something... because I was just in my bathroom...brushing my teeth...five minutes ago, and now I'm here.

BASS.

Are you kidding me? Rookies on the job. He doesn't even know yet, code red!

HARBO.

(*confused.*)

What are you talking about?

(*Lighting shifts to red. Backdrop is now red.*)

TENOR.

This is just like every other stinkin' time I've worked with a union!

SOPRANO.

Don't go knocking the unions, mate. I like the unions; they provide benefits and good pay.

TENOR.

Yes, but they don't really care about us and they do a slack job. Selling tickets, that's all they care about in the end; bloody suits.

BASS.

Would you two shut up! William! Get out here! Pronto!

HARBO.

Can somebody please explain to me what is going on?

BASS.

(*annoyed.*)

William will explain everything.

(*The QUARTET exits, still muttering. WILLIAM enters and crosses to center.*)

WILLIAM.

Good evening, Harbo.

(*HARBO turns. He realizes he's looking at Shakespeare. He laughs hysterically.*)

HARBO. Holy crap! Hello out there! William Shakespeare! How are you this fine spring day?

WILLIAM. (*feminine.*)  
I'm fabulous, thanks for asking dear.

HARBO. No problem, you old bard, you.  
(*realizing.*)  
Oh my word, you know what it is? I just figured it out. It's those meds the doctor gave me for my ankle. Those crazy freakin' meds. That's what it is!

WILLIAM: It's not the meds, Harbo. Deep down you know that.

HARBO. Of course it's not, Shakes.

WILLIAM. Don't you see, Harbo? I am here to explain everything to you! I'm here to peel back your horizon and give you a glimpse of truth! To explain to you why we're *all* here! You see Harbo, the entire world is a stage, and each player has his time on that stage; but each player also has his exit, his bows, and his final curtain.

(*Pause.*)  
You have had your *final* curtain Harbo. Do you understand me?

(*Pause.*)

HARBO. Nope. Not really, I was never good at interpreting your work, I don't know why listening to you talk would be any different.

WILLIAM. (*with significance.*)  
You're dead, Harbo. You were in the bathroom when you slipped and fell, then hit your head on the edge of your bathtub. You passed away minutes later on your way to the hospital, from a blood clot in your brain. A marvelous and heroic death compared to some, I'll give you that one.

HARBO. I'm not dead.

WILLIAM. Still don't believe me? Feel the lump on your forehead.

(*He does.*)

HARBO. (*assuring himself.*)  
So, okay...okay...I hit my head. I was on my way to the hospital...I could be passed out at the hospital, and the meds they're giving me to help with the pain are making me trip out, and that's why I'm talking to Shakespeare! I'm high as a kite!

WILLIAM.

It's not the meds, dude! Your time on earth has passed, Harbo. You need to accept this fact. Eventually you'll realize the after-life is the better-life. All you must do now is wait, and be entertained.

HARBO.

What do you mean?

WILLIAM.

You see, the afterlife is much like the before life, you have to work and pay your debt to the creator. After a person is judged by a jury of his peers in heavenly court of law, that person either goes to hell and burns, or stays in heaven and works. You Harbo are being judged as we speak; that's where I come in, as well as the barbershop brothers from earlier. Talented group of gents...anyway, our jobs, or rather duties, deals with the only thing we know. Entertainment! While your soul awaits its final sentence, we get to show you a good time; make sure you're not restless, or turning into ghosts to go haunt the earthlings. So that's that, any questions?

*(Silence.)*

HARBO.

I'm not dead buddy! I'm just passed out, that's all!

*(sadly.)*

I can't be dead.

WILLIAM.

Magnificent, you're in denial. Okay, we got a code blue!

*(Lighting shifts to blue. Blue backdrop.)*

Hit the lights.

*(Blackout.)*

Actors! Places! And, lights up!

*(Lights up, a bed with a figure under the covers. A window panel is on the left. HARBO is standing on the right side of the bed.)*

Harbo! Get out of the scene! Come, sit over here.

*(WILLIAM ushers HARBO to a seat.)*

Alright...we now take you to a cold and windy night, November, nineteen seventy-two; a thirteen year old pubescent boy's room in the town of Pentuckaloo, Nebraska. And action!

*(ACTOR 1 flings off the covers, stands and walks to the window. He opens it, looks out, and then closes it. He runs back and jumps on the bed. ACTOR 2 enters wearing women's clothing, and knocks on the window. ACTOR 1 crosses, opens the window and lets ACTOR 2 in.)*

ACTOR 1.

Alright, be really quiet. My mom's asleep.

ACTOR 2:

*(whispering.)*

Okay.

WILLIAM. Scene! Clyde, how many times have I told you?! What do I have to do? Beat it through your head? Character comes from within, movement represents this character, and validated emotion is essential in the piece! I've told you this a hundred times, a thousand times, and still, you get it wrong!

ACTOR 2. It's one word, William! What am I supposed to do with one word?

WILLIAM. A great player can do more by saying less! How many times have I told you that one??!

ACTOR 2. You know what, I don't need this. And I definitely don't deserve your criticism. I quit!

(*ACTOR 2 exits. Silence.*)

WILLIAM. On a better note, Actor 1, great job! Fantastic use of projection, I could really tell that you were supporting your breath.

ACTOR 1. (*exits.*)  
Thank you, Will.

WILLIAM. So Harbo, do you believe me now?

HARBO. What, in God's name, was that supposed to make me believe? That I'm still hallucinating? Yes! That I'm dead? No.

(*exasperated.*)  
I just want this all to end.

WILLIAM. Oh, no. He's becoming restless! Code Green!  
(*Lighting shifts to green. Green backdrop.*)  
Surely, it's obvious to you now, Harbo. We just brilliantly re-created one of your fondest memories of childhood; the night you received your first kiss.

HARBO. (*unconfidently.*)  
Okay, so what? Lots of people get their first kiss by letting a girl sneak in through their window.

WILLIAM. Her name was Stacey.

HARBO. Last name?

WILLIAM. Robinson.

HARBO.           Lucky guess!

WILLIAM.       Try me.

HARBO.           Who'd I lose my virginity to?

(Pause.)

WILLIAM.       Stacey Robinson.

HARBO.           Dammit.

WILLIAM.       Do I need to keep going?

HARBO.           You don't know who I am.

WILLIAM.       When you were a kid you used to kill ants on the school playground because it was fun.

HARBO.           A lot of kids do that, man!

WILLIAM.       You're a Yankees fan and you've never attended a single game, you once ate a deer after killing it with your car, you only brush your teeth five times a week because you say toothpaste is too expensive. One of your beliefs is that the artificial value of money in society will always inflate, inversely hurting the economies of individual states and communities, you say, that's why they should go back to a gold standard. You also believe that a flying saucer with alien life forms landed in Roswell, New Mexico, and you believe Aliens might have built the Pyramids.

(Pause.)

HARBO.           Well...did they?

WILLIAM.       No. The Egyptians did.

HARBO.           But the Egyptians could have been aliens themselves...

WILLIAM.       They weren't aliens, Harbo. If you get into heaven, you can look it up for yourself. I promise you.

HARBO.           I still don't believe you.

WILLIAM.       How could I have known those things?

HARBO. You don't know me, man. I told you.

(*Pause.*)

WILLIAM. I know one thing. I know...that you know...what it's like to take another man's life. To see the light go dim in a man's eye. To watch him take his last breath—

HARBO. Stop!

(*Silence.*)

WILLIAM. Now you're life has been taken from you, Harbo.

(*Pause.*)

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The tides of the ocean have turned under your gravity. What is taken from the cosmos, *for* a man, must always be given back to the cosmos. You must come to peace with it, because to be honest with you; this might be the last harmonious moments of your entire existence.

HARBO. I don't believe I'm dead. I can't be.

WILLIAM. You get used to it.

HARBO. I doubt I ever will.

(*Pause.*)

So, what? I'm being judged right now?

WILLIAM. Yes. Don't worry, you should be fine. He's seen a lot worse.

HARBO. Who? God?

WILLIAM. Whatever you want to call him.

HARBO. I'm doomed.

WILLIAM. Nah! Like I said, he's seen a lot worse, Napoleon for example.

HARBO. True.

WILLIAM. Or the man with the tiny moustache.

HARBO. Also true, but still, I'm no saint. How do I know—

WILLIAM.

(*panicky.*)

Don't even worry about it, Harbo! It's time for you to just sit back, relax, and enjoy the rest of the show.

(*WILLIAM ushers him to his seat again.*)

Actors! Places!

(*to someone offstage.*)

Do we have Edwin?

(*Pause.*)

Well, where is he? I don't care if he's thirsty; we have a job to do!

(*WILLIAM crosses to HARBO.*)

So sorry about this, but it will be just a moment.

(*A STAGE MANAGER enters.*)

MANAGER.

Edwin is here.

WILLIAM.

Oh, Great! Thank you, Janice.

(*She exits.*)

Okay people! Places! Lights out!

(*Blackout.*)

Lights up!

(*Lights up.*)

Action!

(*EDWIN BOOTH enters. He is dressed in tights.*)

EDWIN.

To be, or not to be. That is not the question!

WILLIAM.

No, Edwin! That *is* the question.

EDWIN.

What is?

WILLIAM.

(*frustrated.*)

To be or not to be, that *is* the question.

EDWIN.

Oh, okay. I got it.

WILLIAM.

From the top!

EDWIN.

To be or not to be, that *is* the question.

(*He looks to WILLIAM for approval. WILLIAM nods.*)

Whether tis nobler in the mind, to be pinned by bows and arrows!

- WILLIAM. No! To suffer the *slings* and *arrows* of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of trouble, and by opposing, end them! Do you know the soliloquy at all, Edwin?
- EDWIN. Yeah, I know it. It's just been a long day. I didn't get much sleep last night—
- WILLIAM. I don't want to hear it, Edwin, you're not even alive anymore! It's not like you have that many problems to deal with! The Civil War is over! Get some sleep! Not to mention, you're supposed to be a professional actor; you should know your bloody lines! And if you think you'll continue to get special treatment from me, no, I'm not going to baby you, and be decent just because you're *Edwin Booth*, 'the famous actor who's so talented and handsome'. Give me a break!
- EDWIN. Oh, I'm so sorry William; I really do apologize for everybody loving me so much! Why don't you just come out to the world and admit that you're jealous!
- WILLIAM. Jealous!?
- HARBO. (*quietly.*) Hello? People?
- WILLIAM. Of what, may I ask?
- EDWIN. Come on, man. We both know. Your work was dying. People of my day were falling asleep and I woke them back up.
- WILLIAM. (*passive aggressive.*) You really don't want this to happen, Edwin.
- EDWIN. Oh, I think I do.
- WILLIAM. Oh, Edwin, you sexy little boy, you're so correct. I'm so jealous! I'm incredibly jealous, in fact, that your entire career, as an actor, was merely you reading beautiful poetry created by somebody other than yourself.  
 (Pause.) I wonder who that was, oh yeah, that's right. Me! You would be nothing without my plays, you bastard, and you know it!
- EDWIN. I don't need your plays! I never needed them! I don't even like half of them. 'Hamlet' is a snooze fest!
- WILLIAM. How dare you!

EDWIN. Oh, how brilliant, you just kill everyone in the end. Really creative.

WILLIAM. Stop!

EDWIN. ‘Romeo and Juliet’ is mediocre at best, if you enjoy two immature teenagers making out with each other for three and a half hours.

WILLIAM. Take it back!

EDWIN. Oh, hey, we just met and had a one night stand, and now we’re in love, how touching...

WILLIAM. You’re an animal!

EDWIN. And ‘Macbeth’! What kind of deranged maniac are you for writing that stinking piece of garbage?

*(WILLIAM tackles EDWIN and begins choking him.)*

WILLIAM. I’ll kill you!

EDWIN. I’m already dead!

*(The STAGE MANAGER enters.)*

MANAGER. Guys! Stop it! You’re both equally talented gentleman! Stop!

*(HARBO stands and crosses. He breaks them up.)*

HARBO. Break it up guys! Cut it out!

WILLIAM. He started it!

EDWIN. No, I didn’t.

WILLIAM. Yes, you did.

EDWIN. No, I didn’t.

WILLIAM. Yes, you—

MANAGER. Shut up! For Christ sake!

*(Small pause.)*

EDWIN. I don't need this. I left amateur hour a long time ago. If anybody needs me, I'll be in my dressing room.

(*EDWIN and the STAGE MANAGER exit.*)

WILLIAM. What a jerk.

HARBO. Yeah.

WILLIAM. (*realizing he's forgotten about Harbo.*)  
Oh yes, I'm sorry about all that, Harbo.

HARBO. It's okay.

WILLIAM. Most of that aggression between us goes back along way.

HARBO. I understand.

WILLIAM. He won't admit it, but he's just cranky because his brother shot the president. Regardless, I think we should be fine tomorrow.

(*Small pause.*)

Okay, so we've come to the section of the program where you get to select what kind of entertainment *you* would like to see.

(*Pause.*)

HARBO. (*sitting.*)  
I just want to sit here in silence.

WILLIAM. If silence is what you want, then silence is exactly what you'll get.  
Charlie!

HARBO. No! Please! I don't want any scenes of my life, or famous actors reading monologues. I just want to sit here alone with my thoughts.

WILLIAM. Can't do that, man. I have a job to do. I'm not getting on the big guy's bad side.

HARBO. (*sincere.*)  
I'm scared.

WILLIAM. Charlie!