

CRACKING UP

a one-act play by
Peter M. Floyd

© 2009 Peter M. Floyd

PARK STREET ANGEL

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

ANA

JOHNNY

MAN

AMANDA

The play takes place in the study of Rachel Danbury, a poet from the late 19th Century. Her home is now the Danbury museum, and the room is intended to suggest what it looked like when Rachel lived here. The room is plain in appearance. The furniture is all from the period, and consists of a few functional chairs, which have ropes tied between their arms to prevent people from sitting in them, and a writing desk, which perhaps has a small bottle of ink and a fountain pen on it.

At lights up, ANA is on stage alone. She is wearing a period dress, albeit one that is plain and unadorned. She is speaking into a cell phone.

ANA

Hello? Hey, it's Ana again. I really wish you'd pick up. Look, I understand why you might be angry with me right now-- you have every right to feel that way. But there are only so many ways I can tell you I'm sorry. And you know, when I say I'm sorry, you're supposed to forgive me. That's the way it works. That's why people are sorry. So they can be forgiven. And that makes-- that makes you the good person. The good person who's forgiving the one who did-- who did the wrong thing. So you feel better, and I feel better, and we can move on. Right? *(She sighs, and closes the phone.)* Shit.

JOHNNY enters. Like ANA, he is dressed in fairly plain 19th century garb.

JOHNNY

Hey, Ana! How's it going? Oh, look-- she's got the phone out! *That's* not period. Better put that away before the pigeons get here.

ANA

Oh, hey, Johnny. *(She puts the phone away in some portion of her costume.)* You're one to talk. Aren't you supposed to be in the drawing room?

PARK STREET ANGEL

JOHNNY

Nobody's there. It's dead today. I'm bored beyond all possible boringness.

ANA

If Mr. Lambert saw you here he'd kill you.

JOHNNY

Lambert can pucker up and kiss my left butt cheek. What's he gonna do, fire me? It'd be doing me a favor. This job sucks five ways to Sunday.

ANA

Well, I kinda like it here. It beats working at the 7-11.

JOHNNY

Well, at least at the 7-11 you don't have to dress up like Goofus McDoofus. I hate this stupid costume.

Brief, awkward pause.

ANA

Johnny, can I ask you a question?

JOHNNY (*eager*)

Yeah, absolutely!

ANA

If your girlfriend did something really, really horrible, like, say, ruined something you loved, how long would it take for you to forgive her?

JOHNNY (*taken aback*)

Well, uh... That's kind of hypothetical... I dunno, well, how bad a hypothetical girlfriend are we talking here? Are we talking about she hypothetically put a dent in my hypothetical Trans Am?

ANA

No, no, I mean something really...

JOHNNY

Watch it, pigeon at 9:00...

THE MAN has entered, holding a little plan of the house.

PARK STREET ANGEL

JOHNNY (*in a low voice, to Ana*)

What do you say, shall we take him together? He'll never know what hit him!

ANA

No, I'll take care of him. You better get to the drawing room.

JOHNNY

Okay, but if you need backup, just yell! (*He exits.*)

ANA gets into the character of a tour guide. She is reciting lines she has spoken many times before, trying to put some life into them.

ANA

Hello, and welcome to study! This is the room where Rachel Danbury wrote nearly all of her poems, at this desk. She would come in every morning at 7:30 sharp and sit here, gaze out the window, and write when inspiration took hold.

MAN

Study? Says her this is the kitchen.

ANA (her character momentarily derailed)

No, the kitchen's down on the first floor.

MAN

It says right here, "Second floor."

ANA

Oh, that. That's a printing error. (*She gets into character again.*) The Connecticut outdoors, Rachel once said, was her Muse: she'd see the violet lilacs in springtime, the red-cheeked apples in the summer, the dazzlingly orange leaves in the autumn, and the smooth, pristine whiteness of the snow-covered fields in wintertime.

MAN

So, this is the actual desk where she sat and wrote her stuff, huh?

ANA

That's right. Well, not her actual, actual desk. Her family sold that after she died. But this is from the same period, so it's very similar to what she would have used.

PARK STREET ANGEL

MAN

So, you're saying it's a fake desk? And what, are these fake chairs? Is this some kind of Museum of Fake-ology or something?

ANA

Well, the chairs were the property of the Danbury family...

MAN

I mean, honestly, what's the point of this place?

ANA

It's to show what Rachel Danbury's home was like, so you can experience her life for yourself...

MAN

I thought there would be more to it, more, I don't know... *(He looks vaguely around.)* Audio-visual displays or something. Like at the Museum of Science they have this lightning show that's really awesome.

ANA

Well, um, we don't have that, but I can play for you a recording of some of her poems...

ANA reaches behind the desk and pulls up a portable cassette player, and several cassette tapes.

She picks a cassette more or less at random, inserts it into the player, and hits play. We hear the voice of an actress reading one of Rachel Danbury's poems.

The reading should not be ridiculously badly performed, but it should not be very well done, either. We should get the impression of an actress of modest talent doing her best to give the lines a dramatic reading, while not really understanding their meaning.

VOICE ON TAPE

In night a deeper blackness comes to me
As if the shadow of a further shadow
That makes a mock of dreams and laughter
And through the chaos of immortal sleep
Splits hope from chance, and changes ring unending...

PARK STREET ANGEL

The reading continues under the next few lines of dialog.

MAN

I don't really get it.

ANA

Well, her poems were very personal, with the full meaning known only to her...

MAN

No, I mean poetry in general. I don't understand it. It's all words; there's never any meaning.

ANA

Oh. Well, perhaps if you gave them a chance, you might appreciate them. A volume of her complete works is available in the gift shop, as are these audio recordings, on cassette and CD. *(She turns off the tape.)*

MAN

Are there any shotglasses?

ANA

...I'm sorry?

MAN

Any Rachel Danbury shotglasses available in the gift shop?

ANA

No, we don't have shotglasses.

MAN

Really? Anytime I visit somewhere, I always pick up a shotglass as a souvenir. Museums, historic sites, football stadiums, you name it. I've even got one from the Vatican. It shows that I was there.

ANA

I see.

MAN

If there's no shotglass here, it's like there was no point to my coming at all.

PARK STREET ANGEL

ANA

Well, there is the opportunity to learn more about Rachel's life. It's a very interesting story.

MAN

Really? I thought she just lived here with her parents until she died. That sounds pretty dull.

ANA

No, not at all. She was engaged, you know, but her fiancé left her for another woman. It's kind of tragic and romantic. Her father wanted to sue the man for breach of promise, which is what they did those days, but she didn't want to. And she never set foot outside the bounds of her family's property ever again. From then on, her poems were the only thing in her life.

MAN

So that was that? She just lived here until she died? Doing nothing but sit around and write her poems... I bet she had a cat.

ANA (*sharply*)

What? A cat? Why do you say that?

MAN

Oh, come on... She wrote poems, she stayed in her room all the time, she never got married... That's so much the crazy cat lady type. I've got an aunt like that.

ANA (*becoming suddenly emotional*)

She didn't have a cat. Why should she have a cat? What kind of connection there would be between Rachel and cats?

MAN

Jeez, take it easy.

ANA

Rachel never owned a cat. For all we know, she never even liked cats. Why do people own cats, anyway? They're ridiculous. If you're going to have a pet, get a dog! Dogs are good. They're friendly, you can play games with them, whatever. But cats, they just slink around, getting in your way...

FOR FULL SCRIPT, CONTACT PMFLOYD01@GMAIL.COM