

THE CENTIPEDE KING

a play by  
Peter M. Floyd

© 2012 Peter M. Floyd

## PARK STREET ANGEL

### CAST OF CHARACTERS:

RACHEL - seen at 16 and at 30  
LILY - RACHEL's sister, 8 years old  
MOTHER - RACHEL's mother, early 40's  
EDDIE - a boy of 16  
THE CENTIPEDE KING

The actress playing Rachel should be an adult woman, not a teenager, to emphasize that the play depicts the memories of a grown woman regarding her younger days, and therefore is not an objective depiction of those days. The playwright also recommends that Lily be played by an actress of 10 - 12 years who can "play younger." The actor playing Eddie should also play the Centipede King.

The set consists of four acting spaces. Three of these are rooms in the family home as remembered by Rachel: the living room, Lily's bedroom and Rachel's bedroom. The fourth space, the furthest downstage, is a featureless area into which the adult Rachel steps to address the audience directly. Ideally, all of these sets remain on stage during the entire course of the play; as the action shifts from scene to scene, a different area is lit, with the rest of the stage in darkness. The result will be a kind of chiaroscuro affect, with each scene being performed in a bubble of light surrounded by blackness. This can be accomplished even in a small space by making the sets suggestive rather than detailed: a few items of furniture, and a partial wall.

PARK STREET ANGEL

*After the lights go down, the house remains in blackness for a longer than usual period of time, enough perhaps to get the audience restless. Then, faintly, a scuttling sound can be heard, like something with many legs moving across a wooden floor. Two red lights, like eyes, glow balefully in the dark, and then blink out.*

*Lights come up on the downstage area. RACHEL stands there. She is about thirty years of age, and is edgy and irritable. She speaks to an unseen listener in the audience.*

RACHEL

You know, I'm really not in the mood to talk about it. It, you know, the whole family thing. It doesn't accomplish anything. Like, I used to sort through all these details in my past, arrange them into patterns, like those tiles they used to make mosaics out of. But there's no intrinsic meaning. I mean, I hate to get all existential and shit, but I don't think life has any kind of design to it, and when you try to impose a design, you end up building castles, if you know what I mean. *Do you know what I mean? (Pause.)* Are you listening to me? I can't tell if you're listening or if you're just daydreaming. You could nod every now and then to let me know I'm not just babbling to myself. *(Pause.)* Okay, fine. Rachel's family life. I was a happy little pumpkin until the day I became an angst-filled House of Horrors. Yeah, that's just another way of saying I turned sixteen. Really, I was no different from any other girl. Sure, I was depressed, especially after Dad left, but show me a teenage girl who's not depressed. My point is that none of this had anything to do with anything I did; it was this weird shit that was happening at the time to Lily, which you think I'm just making up. Whatever. I was a good kid, mostly. I'm not saying I was a blessed angel; sure, there'd be times I'd get into a snit and make Mom's life miserable. But I was always nice to Lily.

*Lights come up abruptly on LILY's bedroom, the room of a somewhat precocious but in no way extraordinary eight-year-old girl. LILY lies on her quilt-covered bed, clutching a stuffed dog. On the bedroom walls are pictures of unicorns, elves and Smurfs.*

PARK STREET ANGEL

RACHEL

Well, mostly. I mean, we were sisters after all. *(As she talks, she crosses upstage, into LILY's room. She still addresses the audience as she picks up a book from a shelf, and sits on a beanbag chair next to LILY's bed. The downstage light fades out.)* But she was a good kid when she wasn't being a pain in the ass. I liked to hang out with her. And how many teenagers actually enjoy spending time with their little sisters?

*RACHEL begins to read from the book. She has become a sixteen-year-old girl. LILY listens attentively.*

RACHEL *(reading)*

"...It was not that I feared to look on things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be *nothing* to see. At length, with a wild desperation at heart, I quickly unclosed my eyes. My worst thoughts, then, were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me--"

*LILY looks down at the floor, and emits an alarmed, piercing scream. She jumps to her feet, standing on her bed.*

RACHEL

What?

LILY

Ewww!

RACHEL

What are you getting all screamy about? I haven't even gotten to the scary part yet.

LILY

I saw one. Another one. It just ran under the bed!

RACHEL

*(to herself)* Jesus. *(to LILY)* They're harmless. Don't worry about them.

LILY

They look so creepy! Rachel! Do something!

RACHEL

What do you want me to do? Give him a time-out?

PARK STREET ANGEL

LILY

*Rachel!*

RACHEL

What?

LILY

Just look under the bed. See if it's still there.

RACHEL

You know they don't actually bite you or poison you or anything, right?

LILY

I don't care. They're ugly and they have a million legs, and I don't want any of them under my bed.

RACHEL

Okay...

LILY

Now, will you look and see if it's still there? Please?

RACHEL

Ooooookay. *(She gets down on her knees, and picks up the edge of the quilt so that she can peer at the space underneath the bed. Pause.)*

LILY

Well?

RACHEL

...Wow.

LILY

*What?*

RACHEL

I've never seen anything like *that* before.

LILY *(panicking)*

What? What is it?

RACHEL

Oh, it's there all right. And it's got some friends with it, too.

PARK STREET ANGEL

LILY (*nearly hysteric*)

No! Don't! How many are there?

RACHEL

Hundreds! Thousands! It's like a centipede city down there! They're all just waiting for you to turn out the lights, and then they'll come swarming up under your blankets! (*Her hands become centipedes, crawling up LILY's body towards her face.*)

LILY (*crying and laughing at the same time*)

Stop it! Stop it! That's not funny! Did you really see any down there?

RACHEL

Of course I did; I just told you! And all these centipedes are just waiting to get you!

LILY (*clamping her hands over her ears*)

Shut up shut up shut up! You said they wouldn't hurt me!

RACHEL

No, they won't hurt you. They don't want to eat you! They're coming to make you their queen! Don't you want to be queen of the centipedes?

LILY

No! I'd rather be queen of the butterflies.

RACHEL

Oh, you wouldn't want that. Butterflies are stupid little things.

LILY

They are not!

RACHEL

They are. The three most stupid things in the world are butterflies, goldfish, and boys. You learn these things in high school.

LILY (*giggles*)

You just made that up.

PARK STREET ANGEL

RACHEL

But centipedes, now, they're smart. It's not easy to learn how to walk when you've got that many legs. It takes a centipede ten years just to learn how to walk.

LILY

Did they teach you *that* in high school?

RACHEL

That's right. Centipedes are wonderful creatures. Any girl would be proud to be their queen.

LILY

...What would I have to do to be queen?

RACHEL

Easy. When the centipedes come, they'll take you to a hole in the wall that leads to a magic path...

LILY

What hole? Where?

RACHEL

Well, you can't see it now, but at the stroke of midnight it opens up, a hole that's like a blacker blackness in the night. The centipedes will pick you up, and carry you out through the hole...

LILY

No, they won't! Rufus'll keep them away from me! *(She holds her stuffed dog in front of her like a shield.)*

RACHEL

No, he won't. Centipedes aren't afraid of little stuffed dogs. If he gets in their way, they'll rip him into tiny little bits...

LILY *(hugging Rufus protectively)*

No!

RACHEL

Okay, fine, they don't rip him up. They sing a lullaby, and Rufus goes to sleep. Good night, Rufus! *(She takes the dog from LILY, who lets go of it reluctantly, and sets it down sideways, as if it's asleep.)* And then the centipedes take you out through the hole. They lead you through a path

PARK STREET ANGEL

RACHEL (CONT)

leading through the Woods of Shadow. It's this creepy place, with monsters and ghosts and things.

LILY

I hate monsters!

RACHEL

But when you get through it, you come to the City of the Centipedes, where everything is light and beautiful and they make you queen.

LILY

Is it like the Emerald City?

RACHEL

It's a million, million times better than the Emerald City. And all of the centipedes will surround you and shower you with presents, and you'll be their queen forever.

LILY

Do I get to marry a prince?

RACHEL

You get to marry a *king*. The centipede king.

LILY

I don't want to marry a centipede.

RACHEL

This isn't just any centipede. This is the king. The king of the centipedes is eleven feet long, and has over a thousand legs!

LILY

Ew!

RACHEL

But, you know, he's pretty handsome for a centipede. He's like-- if Ricky Martin was a centipede, that's what he'd be like.

LILY

I hate Ricky Martin!



PARK STREET ANGEL

RACHEL

Whatever. I'm just saying you'd be lucky to have him for a husband.

LILY

I don't want to marry *him!* He's ugly!

RACHEL

Oh, don't say that! You don't tell the Centipede King he's ugly. You know what he'll do to you if you call him ugly?

LILY

No. Don't tell me! What?

RACHEL

He'll grab you with his thousand arms, and start squeezing, *squeezing...* (*RACHEL moves her own arms threateningly around LILY.*)

LILY

Quit it! Mom! *Mom!*

RACHEL

Mom can't save you from the Centipede King!

LILY

Quit it! Quit it! (*She starts punching RACHEL in the chest.*)

RACHEL

Ow!

LILY

Don't do that anymore!

RACHEL

Hey, it's okay. Jeez, lighten up a little.

LILY

Just shut up.

RACHEL

I didn't even see anything under your bed.

LILY

Just stop talking about it. I hate you.

PARK STREET ANGEL

RACHEL

You can't hate me. I'm too lovable.

LILY

You're not. You're... *hateable*.

RACHEL

Look, I'm sorry.

LILY

No, you're not.

RACHEL

Yes I am, kinda.

LILY

GO AWAY!

*LILY turns her back on RACHEL and buries herself inside her blankets. Almost instantly the light goes out. The downstage light has come on again. RACHEL, now 30 again, steps into it.*

RACHEL

I couldn't help provoking Lily. It's not like I hated her or anything; really, I loved her to pieces. But she was just so... I don't know, so pink and princessy, this total Twilight Sparkle. Someone like that, you just want to, you know, give them a poke and make 'em squirm. *(Pause.)* It's like I wanted her to come out of her crystal palace. I don't know. Looking back, I can see it was probably some kind of defense mechanism, with Mom and Dad you know... *(RACHEL puts her hands together, clenched into fists, and then violently moves them apart while making a raspberry sound, representing a split.)* We like, coped in totally different ways; she got all girly-girl, and me, well, I acted up. *(Pause.)* Are you gonna say anything? I feel like I'm just talking into the darkness here. *(Pause.)* Okay, so anyway, Dad's gone, and it's just me and Mom and Lily, and it's not pretty.

MOTHER *(from the darkness)*

Rachel!

RACHEL

It's like, picture this: Dad walks out the door, and he takes all the warmth in the place with him. And Mom slowly

PARK STREET ANGEL

RACHEL (CONT)

turns into a block of ice, this total glacier. Do you know what glaciers do? They slide down mountains, cutting down everything in their path -- trees, rocks, everything. And who's right in the path of Mom the Glacier? Me, that's who.

MOTHER

Rachel!

RACHEL (*sixteen again*)

What?

*Lights come up on a living room; there is a chair or two and a sofa. MOTHER is there. She is in her early forties, but gives the impression of someone much older.*

MOTHER

Where are you going?

RACHEL

Out.

MOTHER

Out where?

RACHEL

Me and Kaelee are gonna see a movie.

MOTHER

What movie?

RACHEL

I don't know. *Titanic*.

MOTHER

You're not a very good liar, Rachel.

RACHEL

I'm not lying!

MOTHER

You're going to see that boy.

RACHEL

What boy?

PARK STREET ANGEL

MOTHER

You know who I mean.

RACHEL

So what, I'm suddenly not allowed to go out on dates now?

MOTHER

I think you should stay home tonight.

RACHEL

Well, I think I should go out.

MOTHER

Rachel. Listen to me. This is a hard time for us. We've lost your father. He's not coming back. This family is hanging by a thread, Rachel. We need you here.

RACHEL

So, what, I don't get to go out ever again? This is bullshit.

MOTHER

Lily, don't use language like that.

RACHEL (*with the air of one who often has to correct her mother on this matter*)

Rachel, Mom. I'm Rachel.

MOTHER

Rachel. Do you think you can stop being a teenager just for a minute?

RACHEL

And do what? Just sit around here all night, and watch you mope and Lily play make-believe with her little stuffed doggies?

MOTHER

I want you to stop picking on your sister.

RACHEL

What? I don't pick on her.

MOTHER

She's a sensitive girl, you know. You're father's taking off has really shaken her up.

PARK STREET ANGEL

RACHEL

What do you mean, pick on her? God, I'm so nice to her it's sickening. Jeez, I read to her every night.

MOTHER

Yes, all those scary stories that keep her awake all night.

RACHEL

Hey, she likes listening to 'em. They're better than stupid girlie stories.

MOTHER

I don't think they're good for her.

RACHEL

So, I can't go out, and I can't read to Lily. What do you want me to do? Stand in the corner and be a fern? Here we go, Rachel the Fern. (*She pretends to be a fern.*) This how you want me?

MOTHER

Rachel, please.

RACHEL

God, no wonder Dad left.

*The lights shift; the room dims, and RACHEL, now 30, is caught in a shaft of light.*

RACHEL

Did I really say that? I have this memory of saying that, but I don't remember Mom responding. Or not responding, whatever. Maybe I just thought it. Memory's a funny thing.

*The lights shift back. RACHEL is again 16.*

MOTHER

You're not going out. Not tonight.

RACHEL

Come on, Mom, please. It's just me and Kaelee, I swear. No boys.

FOR FULL SCRIPT, CONTACT PMFLOYD01@GMAIL.COM