

the vegetarian
and her dead
daddy

by megan tabaque

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mtabaque@gmail.com
727-385-1483 (mobile)

CHARACTERS

ANNIE - 18 F; a dramatic vegetarian

DENNIS - 14 M; her skinny skateboarding brother

SETTING

An overgrown Burger King parking lot. Street lamp, dumpster, fire hydrant, and grease.

TIME

Right now!

(Low light on the lot. It is evening. Sound of an ancient van engine. Headlights flood the stage. Engine cuts. Enter ANNIE, wearing a Burger King Crown and wings made out of newspaper. She is late. She is nervous. She is looking for someone. An audience. She checks her watch. She checks her watch. She fuckin' hates her watch.)

ANNIE

(too loud)

Denny! Are you almost ready? Get that suit on! Come out of the van, we have to warm-up. Call everyone. I mean everyone! If no one comes to this shit, I'm gonna crap in that dumpster.

DENNIS

(from off)

Please don't.

ANNIE

We've worked too hard! I've eaten too many burgers. Why is no one here? Denny! Get all your loser skateboarder friends and their tight-jeaned asses into this lot!

(ANNIE goes the van offstage and drags on a travelers' trunk. It is covered in bumper stickers proclaiming her vegetarianism and hostility toward the fast food industry. She opens it. The trunk lid faces the audience. Carved into it are the words, "Chicken Breasts Kill!" She removes all of her props: a step ladder, old BK chicken sandwiches, bags of buns, a

half dozen lawn flamingos painted like chickens, and a miniature gong.)

DENNIS

It's a school night, Annie.

ANNIE

I don't care. I need eyes! I need ears! I need clapping palms. Butts on pavement. You get them here—tell 'em I'll French each one of—I don't care! Do you know how much of my soul is at stake here? Of humanity's collective soul?

DENNIS

Brad's mom said she doesn't want him around you anymore.

ANNIE

Brad's mom is an asshole.

DENNIS

Brad's mom says she doesn't want Brad around *me* anymore. Because of you, Annie!

ANNIE

Well then Brad's mom can suck on a genetically engineered chicken tender and die.

DENNIS

Steve has a chem-test tomorrow. Jonathan has mono. And Ken thinks you're a lesbian. You freak him out. Every time you talk to him he says he has to go to the confession. No one is coming,

DENNIS cont'

Annie. It's only me. God, this suit is made for a first grader. I can't do this.

ANNIE

You're my brother. You will do this. Or I'll tell mom that I caught you watching skin-o-max on your cable scrambler—

DENNIS

Annie!

ANNIE

—in tightie whities.

DENNIS

This costume is too small!

ANNIE

You promised me Denny. As a birthday present. Don't be a stupid ass Indian giver. Put it on and get them all here. Now.

DENNIS

You're a psycho! Why don't you leave for college like everyone else's sister? Ugh. The zipper is stuck.

(beat)

ANNIE

(into a cell phone)

Yeah, Owen. Man, where are you? Five minutes to go-time and it's a fuckin' wasteland, man. There's fuckin' tumbleweeds blowing by made of hamburger wrappers, dude. You gotta get everyone out here./ What? What emergency?/

ANNIE cont'

Will you ever pee again?/ What were you doing? I don't under-
frying what?

(beat)

What the hell, Owen? You know how I feel about those dick
poultry farmers. They're mad scientists! What do you think I'm
getting ready to do out here? It's a meat protest, Owen!
Starring poultry! You vegetarian traitor asshole! I hope the
emergency room gives you second hand AIDS. Choke on a hot dog,
dick! A BURNT one!

(hangs up)

Stupid jerk.

(beat)

Denny! Get into that suit and out of that van.

DENNIS

It's stuck! Annie, my thing's stuck in the thing.

ANNIE

Yoink it out, loser!

DENNIS

Annie, I want kids someday.

ANNIE

No you don't. You'll just fuck 'em up.

(on her phone again)

Mollzo. Yeah. Where are you? *(mocking)* Oh yeah? Oh yeah. Yeah
yeah yeah it's tonight! Of course it's tonight. You hit the
gong, I recite the-is that Owen? Are you with Owen?/ You bitch.
You too?/ A flare up?/ Grease fire of a thousand suns?/ What do

ANNIE cont'

you mean you're blind?/ Stop being dramatic. / How dare you!
After everything we read? The photos, the statistics, the inter-
species séances? How could you? / Then where's Todd?/ No! No I
don't want to talk to him. I'm hiring a whole 'nother set of
friends. I'm glad you all had a third degree burn party without
me. Get well never. And about next week. I hope *your* birthday
blows!

(hangs up)

Dammit! Dammit Dammit Dammit—

DENNIS

(still offstage)

Kay. It's on. I'm wearing it!

ANNIE

Let me see.

DENNIS

I'm not coming out.

ANNIE

Dude, there's no one here. No one's coming. Just let me see.

DENNIS

Nope. I'm an adult. This is embarrassing.

ANNIE

You're fourteen, ass. You're whole life is embarrassing.

(Phone rings)

Yeah, what?/ Oh, hi, Mom. We're fine. I guess we're going to run
another dress rehearsal. Hey, do you think—will you come and

ANNIE cont'

watch me?/ No one's here and I know I yelled at you about dinner yesterday—yeah, I know you cook with love. I'm a vegetarian now. I told you after the wake. Whatever. I'm sorry, okay? Please come?/ Yes. I love you. Yes. / I just hate chicken. And chicken farmers. And eggs. Cheese makes me kinda sick too. It's cow's milk, ya know? Like rotten breast milk. For baby cows. Not humans./ No. What? No, I don't think you're a cow. They just pump that stuff full of chemicals. It kills people, mom. People die. If dad didn't eat so many animal products he wouldn't have—No! It's double genocide! These animals are being brutally murdered and their poisoned carcasses are ground up and fed to us like slop. We're consuming death. Digesting corpses! We are the gastric coffins of creatures that were born to die. No wonder murder is what makes the news. It's what sustains us./ Mom? Are you listening?/ Owen's mom needed a kleenex? Where are you?/ Right. Emergency rooms are scary. Of course she's frightened, her son burned his nuts off./ Nothing. Never mind. I'll be fine. Yeah, thanks. Happy birthday to me./ By eleven. Promise. Okay. Love-you-bye.

(Hangs up. ANNIE throws her cell phone angrily into the dumpster and curses under her breath.)

Motherfuckers! What do I have to do? Burn my face off? *This* is an emergency. Why do they think this place was closed down? Huh? Someone knows. Someone is fighting it. This poison meat that you can order in a drive-thru execution! Fuckin' flame broiled chicken sandwiches! Who eats one of those everyday? Why would you eat one of those everyday! My stupid fat dead daddy. Screw you, Burger King! Screw you chicken dick farmers! And screw all of you emergency room lowlifes that I called friends. Why am I here all alone?

DENNIS

(offstage)

Annie, I'm ready. I think I'm ready. Are you ready?

(no response)

Annie? I can't believe I'm doing this for you I-

(Enter DENNIS in a plush chicken suit. It's tiny. It's really tiny. It's almost an egg it's so small. His bare legs stick out of it like real chicken legs. ANN is crying on the pavement.)

Hey, Annie, what happened? Is that your warm-up?

ANNIE

No, douchebag. I'm crying.

DENNIS

Why? When are your friends getting here? I want to get this over with.

ANNIE

They're not coming. Owen castrated himself so they're all in the hospital. All of them. Even mom. Our own mother doesn't want to come watch us save the world.

DENNIS

We're just reciting your poem, Annie.

ANNIE

We're not just reciting a poem! We're doing—great things. This was supposed to be great. And everyone would see and clap and know that I was someone special. And then they would tell

ANNIE cont'

someone else that I was something special. And then, maybe some guy in a semi-truck would pick that guy up on the highway and say "Hey, there was this really something-special-thing that happened in the Burger King lot once. You hear about it?" But there are no someones in this parking lot. Not even me. I'm nobody.

(beat)

Am I mediocre? Denny? Am I—no—I'm not mediocre. Am I? Am I mediocre, Denny? I don't know. I know. I am. I am. Jesus I am. Let's just go.

(DENNIS doesn't budge)

DENNIS

Are you kidding me? Are you freakin' kidding me? We are staying and we are doing this performance piece, or whatever, for the lightning bugs for all I care. I almost zipped my nutz off to get this thing on, Annie. My nuts! I think I bled a little. And I blew off Brad and Ken and Todd last weekend at the skate park so we could rehearse. And I stole those flamingo things of the Wilsons' lawn for you and then painted on the little yellow beaks with the tiny nail polish thing, which gave me a headache the entire next day. For you. All for you for you for you, Annie. And your just going to call if off? Happy Birthday, quitter!

ANNIE

There's no one here. It doesn't matter.

DENNIS

It matters to you, doesn't it?

ANNIE

I promised myself I wasn't going to be like this. If I was gonna stay here to take care of mom, I was going to lead a revolution. Not work the hostess stand at Applebee's forever. We're supposed to save the rest of them, Denny.

DENNIS

You can't save everyone.

ANNIE

Dad died, Den. He died because we didn't know about all the chemicals in the chicken. Everyday of his life he bought a Burger King flame broiled chicken sandwich. Everyday he sucked down all that greasy poison, smacked his lips, and loosened his huge belt. And no one knew. But now we do, and no one cares, because I'm too mediocre to listen to.

DENNIS

Annie, don't start.

ANNIE

I'm getting in the dumpster. I'm getting in the dumpster because that's where I belong. I'm garbage. I'm compacted fat regular garbage. I'm gonna throw myself away to be forgotten. Just like daddy.

(ANNIE gets up and climbs the step ladder into the dumpster)

DENNIS

Dad's dead because he OD-ed, Annie. Not because he ate chicken.

ANNIE

Shut-up. Just let the garbage truck come.

DENNIS

Cocaine, Annie. He used drugs too much. And so he died.

ANNIE

I read all the articles, Dennis! The chemicals injected into mass produced chicken and chicken feed are toxic. They stay in your body for ages and eat away at your insides until they don't look human anymore.

DENNIS

You don't look human anymore, Annie! The counselors already told us all the stuff. You gotta stop. You're not mediocre, okay? You're definitely not. Look at you. You're in a dumpster. Wearing wings made out of yesterday's newspaper. You wrote a poem. I don't know how to write poetry, Annie. I can't even read poetry. But I understand yours. And I like it. I like it enough to memorize it and repeat it and be your little chicken puppet boy for it. I know, for some reason, you want dad to be— this great man. This great thing that we lost. But he was just bad. He wasn't a good guy, Annie. And maybe that's why we sometimes feel like garbage. But it's not fair. Okay? Come out of the dumpster and let's do this thing. For no one. Who cares!

(ANNIE pokes her head out from the dumpster)

ANNIE

I'm sorry I couldn't take care of you, Denny.

DENNIS

Stop it! RECITE YOUR POEM! Say it! Start. Go.

(DENNIS runs and hits the mini-gong)

ANNIE

This piece is written in dishonor of Dennis Benjamin Sr. A man who died.

(beat)

The chicken is dead. The hen house is in flames. And rising from the ashes is the hatchling of the performance artist. The chicken sphinx of the 2000th year. Bocking. Bocking. Bocking with fear, with grief, with rage. A din of bocking. Infinite bocking!

(DENNIS bocks)

She is a shadow of her former chicken self. The white winged goddess that commercial demons flame broil and wrap in wax paper. Fatherless. The vegetarian. She shops organically. Eats root vegetables. Trying to discover the origins of her chicken corpse. Scarred breast tissue. Veins full of MSG and protein substitute. She keeps digging until she hits water.

(ANNIE takes a flamingo and crashes it into the hydrant. Water bursts forth and showers brother and sister.)

Wash your vegetables before you eat them. Kill your chickens so they can rise organically from the earth.

(ANNIE kills DENNIS with a gun she forms with her hand. He falls to the ground dead. She uses two burger buns and defibrillator paddles and revives DENNIS. He clucks with new life and stands up)

DENNIS

Have it your way, Burger Kings. Murder Kings. Killing things.
While the chicken sings. A lonely lonely sad song of chicken
dreams. That get stuck in the grill grate.

(A din of bocking. They crow.)

ANNIE

Scene.

end play.