

**IBSEN AT THE URBAN O**

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a ten-minute play  
by

**Waltrudis Buck**

**Contact Information**

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**Synopsis**

Can you afford morals in showbiz? Three ambitious people trying to manipulate their way to success face unexpected results.

**Characters**

Lynn                      early thirties, actor/director/producer of *The Urban O*, an off-off Broadway Company.

Johanna                aspiring actor, early twenties, great body, gorgeous hair.

Tom --                  director, early thirties, wonderful imagination, his one weakness – pretty women.

**Place:**                The Lower Eastside in Manhattan. A small, cluttered room off a loft space.

**Time:**                The present, a Friday, late afternoon.

## IBSEN AT THE URBAN O

AT RISE: LYNN enters, carrying two address wheels. She is followed by JOHANNA, who is balancing a box piled high with flyers and envelopes.

LYNN

You can work right here at this table.

JOHANNA

Great.

LYNN

Nice and cozy. Nice and intimate.

*(She grins at JOHANNA, sees TOM in the doorway, who has another box of flyers).*

Good luck. Tom, would you mind showing her what to do? I'll be in costumes. Peggy is having a nervous breakdown.

TOM

I guess I can spare a few minutes.

JOHANNA

Great. Thanks.

LYNN

No, thank you.

JOHANNA

I'm happy to help out. Really.

LYNN

I appreciate it. We're in a bind. If they don't go out tonight, we might as well forget it. Friday night, everybody disappears. All anybody ever wants to do in this company is act. Thanks Tom.

TOM

No problem.

*(LYNN exits.)*

JOHANNA

All of these? My God, how many are there?

TOM

It looks worse than it is. Why don't you start with this wheel. Do the ones with the red flags first. They're our patrons. Not too many of those. They get this insert. Don't put the insert in the others. Why don't you do the envelopes for these first and stuff them before you do the rest. It's more efficient. You won't get them mixed up.

JOHANNA

What you need is a computer. You could print out the labels in a few minutes.

TOM

What we need is a lot of things. I think it's a nice touch to have the envelopes addressed in longhand, a little more personal, don't you think? It's really nice of you to help out, Joanna.

JOHANNA

It's Johanna.

TOM

Excuse me?

JOHANNA

Johanna - with an h.

TOM

Oh, I see. I get it, Johanna. Pretty. Johanna.

JOANNA

Ever since I put the h in my name things have been happening.

TOM

Like what?

JOHANNA

Like this.

TOM

What do you mean?

JOHANNA

Like getting this audition. I guess a rose by any other name just isn't true in showbiz. I mean, look at me, here I am talking to Tom Gertzinger.

TOM

And it's a pleasure to talk to you too, Johhanna with an h.

JOHANNA

I'm not doing this to get a call-back, I want you to know that. I would hate for you to think I'm doing this to get a callback. I'm just glad to be able to help out, to contribute a little something to a place like this. You're doing such great work here. I have been admiring your work.

TOM

Really?

JOHANNA

Are you kidding? Some of the people who call themselves director these days. What you do with Ibsen is - breathtaking, breathtaking. I don't know how else to put it.

TOM

You saw The Wild Duck?

JOHANNA

Is this Mr. & Mrs. K. Hemley or Henley?

*(TOM pulls his chair closer. Their heads almost touch as he looks at the card on the wheel.)*

TOM

Hemley - m. Good old Harriet Hemley. That woman is loaded, you have no idea. I need to put a personal message in this one. I think I'd better look through this batch. See if any of them call for my special touch. By the way, you have lovely handwriting.

JOHANNA

Thanks. When I get a role, I want it to be on the merit of my work, and my work alone, especially Ibsen, especially this part. My God, I have been dying to play her for ... I can't tell you .... forever. I almost did play her once. It's just as well, I was much too immature, way over my head. But, I mean, if there is one single part I could choose. I had the feeling Lynn was disappointed with my reading.

TOM

What makes you think that?

JOHANNA

I didn't get started right. I didn't do the moment before. I just didn't do it. I don't know why. That one physical action that will catapult you into the action of the scene. You know? That beat where you establish the place, where you ground yourself so you're really in the moment. You just have to give yourself permission. I get so mad at myself when I don't do it. It's nerves, of course. And then it always takes a few beats to recover....

TOM

You did a great audition.

JOHANNA

Honest? You're not just saying that?

TOM

Look, I really can't talk about it. Nothing's decided ...

JOHANNA

Of course, of course, absolutely. Sorry. I understand. Sorry. How unprofessional of me. I didn't mean ...

TOM

So you saw The Wild Duck?

JOHANNA

Brilliant, absolutely brilliant what you did with it. Where did you find your Hedwig?

TOM

She was amazing, wasn't she? It's all in the casting. You cast right, half your work is done.

JOHANNA

I just know Lynn didn't like me.

TOM

She liked you, trust me. She was the one who insisted we call you in in the first place. She likes your work. She told me so.

LYNN

*(sticks her head in)*

How's it going?

TOM & JOHANNA

Great. Great.

LYNN

Good, keep up the good work.

*(exits)*

JOHANNA

I worry about my looks. Have you seen these? I think I'm going to stuff for a while. My fingers are getting crampy. Do you need to write in any of these?

TOM

Just the ones I put over here. What do you mean you worry about your looks? Nothing wrong

with your looks that I can see. What I worry about is that you will do one showcase with us and the soaps will snap you up. I'm trying to build a company here, have some cohesion.

JOHANNA

I'm not interested in doing soaps.

TOM

Sure!

JOHANNA

No, really, I want to do theatre. It's all I ever wanted, ever since I was ten years old. The money would be nice. Give me the freedom to do this. I meant, usually she is cast much more severe looking.

TOM

I think that's wrong. She should be voluptuous.

JOHANNA

Oh my God, you think so? I have longed to hear a director say that. She has to be voluptuous. The sexuality has to be there or there is no play.

TOM

Cold as ice on the outside, but - smoldering underneath, a sexuality that is being channeled into the wrong .... uh ... uh ...into the wrong ...

JOHANNA

.. channel.

TOM

No question about it.

*(He gets up and stretches.)*

JOHANNA

Would you believe if I told you that I once almost played her? I had the part. They had cast me. And then they changed their mind because of my hair.

TOM

Your hair is gorgeous.

JOHANNA

I have gorgeous hair. So sue me.

TOM

Because of Thea? That is so funny. That is hysterical. People get hung up on these external things that are so inconsequential. The thing that matters, that is paramount, that has to be understood, is an instinctual understanding of her psychological make-up. She has got to be ...

JOHANNA

.. alienated.

TOM

Yes, yes, yes! It's the key to the play: *alienation* in capital letters: her separateness, her detachment, her utter inability to come to terms with society's demands, to even want to come to terms with society's demands. If that isn't understood... And let me tell you, if there is one thing I understand it's alienation. Boy do I understand alienation. Sometimes I read the paper, I listen to the news, I think I'm from a different planet. What with the corruption, the pollution - both moral and physical - the internet, millionaires, the election fraud, Wall Street, everybody wanting to get a degree in *business*? What do these people want? I don't get it. What? It makes no sense to me whatsoever. What do they want from life? I don't even want to know the answer to that. You know I'm planning, hoping, longing, to do all of Ibsen, all his plays, the whole canon, including the one-acts. He is so apropos. But what I had in mind with this particular production – if Lynn would only let me - is a Shakespearean Ibsen.

JOHANNA

What do you mean Shakespearean?

TOM

For starters, cast a man as Hedda. I mean she is the epitome of the white alienated male, the 68% who voted for you-know-who. You have got to be alienated from life to vote for that man. Lynn doesn't get it. She won't hear of it. I think our theatre is the perfect venue. We're called *The Urban O*. She wants to play it safe. She wants to be the next Roundabout. Did you know they started in the basement of an A&P? I tell her it took them twenty years to get to Broadway. You have to have patience. But first and foremost, you have to have a vision. If you hope to create anything of value you have to have a vision. I have a vision.

JOHANNA

Ibsen-Gertzinger.

TOM

What?

JOHANNA

Ibsen-Gertzinger, like O'Neill-Quintero. You could spark a whole new appreciation for Ibsen. Revive all of his plays. What a fabulous idea. How many did he write? It might take years to do them all. The Master Builder. I could do Hilde before I'm too old. This is so inspiring. This is so fabulous. Listen, I wouldn't mind playing Thea in this one. I wouldn't mind playing the walk-on maid. I mean, just to be a part of it. This is so inspiring. You are inspiring.



TOM

I don't think I can convince Lynn. We're just not seeing eye to eye on anything lately. I can't blame her really. She sold her Deli, and the money is almost gone. The theatre just swallows up money, even a crummy place like this. I'm so sick of having to cut corners, having to compromise, bastardize my ideas. Here I am, pushing thirty. Not a dime to my name. I've always wanted children.

JOHANNA

She had a deli?

TOM

Yeah, up on 67<sup>th</sup>. right across from ABC. Her dad's. Did a great business from what I hear. Oh my God, look at the time. I have a catering job tonight. I've got to get out of here.

JOHANNA

Tom, don't give up. Don't give up on this. You can do this. It's the most wonderful idea.

She has gotten up and stands with her back to the audience looking at him. Suddenly she reaches up, takes his face in her hands and kisses him on the mouth. He is startled, looks at her for a moment, then kisses her back. JOHANNA responds. They get passionate. He is running his hands wildly through her hair, bending her over the table, when the door opens and LYNN stops aghast in the door frame. JOHANNA starts to fight him off, which TOM at first interprets as passion.

TOM

Oh baby.

JOHANNA

Stop it ... stop it .... get off me ... Will you get off me!

*(TOM reads JOHANNA's face, lets go of her and slowly turns around.)*

LYNN

You son-of-a-bitch! You goddamn son-of-a-bitch!

TOM

It's nothing. You don't understand. Let me explain.

LYNN

Explain what? I didn't see what I saw? It's all a mirage? Let me guess, you were discussing the play, you were making a directorial point ...

TOM

As a matter of fact ....

LYNN

Shut up! I've had it! I can't take it anymore. First Peggy. She quit. And now this. I want you out of here. Out! Now!

TOM

Lynn, sweetheart, you're overwrought. It's been a terrible day ....

LYNN

Don't you sweetheart me. This is it. I want you out of my theatre. I want you out of my life!

TOM

You're hysterical. Calm down. We can straighten this out. It's nothing. It's totally innocent.

JOHANNA

It's my fault. It's all my fault.

LYNN

Out! You goddamn fucking son-of-a-bitch! Out!

TOM

Alright, alright. We'll talk later. This is too ridiculous.  
(*He starts to leave.*)

LYNN

Hold it!

TOM

Yes?

LYNN

My keys. .... My keys! I want my keys.

TOM

Aren't we being a little melodramatic?

LYNN

My keys. Now!

TOM

You have no idea how ridiculous you're being. Here are your goddamn keys. Jesus!  
(*He throws her a bunch of keys*)

LYNN

The theatre keys!

TOM

Are you out of your mind? Are you out of your cotton-picking mind? You can't be serious!

LYNN

You better believe I'm serious. I want you out of my theatre. I don't ever want to see your lecherous face in here again. Don't you ever set foot in here again!

TOM

This is ridiculous. You need me. This company needs me. This company is nothing without me. Nothing! You're blowing this all out of proportion.

LYNN

My keys! You son-of-a-bitch! My keys!

TOM

Here are you're fucking keys. Jesus fucking Christ!  
*(Throws her the keys, exits slamming the door.)*

LYNN

*(collects herself, looks JOHANNA up and down)*

That was quite a performance. "It's my fault. It's all my fault." Nice touch. I think I may have to revise my opinion. You may be a better actress than I thought. Very convincing. Congratulations!

JOHANNA

I feel terrible.

LYNN

Don't, it worked.

*(jingles the keys)*

I really can't afford to have the locks changed.

JOHANNA

That was awful. I didn't even mean ...Why didn't you just tell him? Why didn't you just fire him?

LYNN

I couldn't. It's complicated. We go back. It's complicated. What do you care? It worked out great. I'm rid of the jerk. How are we doing with the mailers? Can you stay and finish them?

JOHANNA

What did you mean I'm a better actress than you thought? You didn't like my audition?

LYNN

It was fine. No, really, it was fine. Considering you're all wrong for the part. And, of course, you're too young for Thea to my Hedda. You must know that. But don't you worry, there'll be other roles. We'll find you something juicy. Now that you're a member. Welcome to the Urban O. A warm welcome to our newest company member. I owe you.

JOHANNA

*(gathers up her things)*

You owe me nothing.

*(exits)*

LYNN is left alone on stage. The lights slowly fade on her still figure.

**end of play**

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