

EAT THE RUNT

by Avery Crozier

3/31/07

Playwrights Ink  
3425 West First Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90004  
(213) 385-4562  
tom.jacobson@sbcglobal.net

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

MERRITT, an interviewee

CHRIS, a grantwriter

JEAN, a human resources coordinator

ROYCE, a director of development

HOLLIS, a curator of modern art

SIDNEY, a trustee

PINKY, a museum director

NEW MERRITT, an interviewee

In the original production of *Eat the Runt* at Mefisto Theatre in New York, eight actors of a variety of ethnicities and genders each memorized all eight roles, and the audience cast the play each night. As this proved to be an effective way to explore the play's themes (with more than 40,000 possible variations), this version of the script incorporates the audience participation element.

Doubling (if desired to reduce the cast to five) may be as follows: ROYCE/SIDNEY and PINKY/JEAN/HOLLIS.

The action takes place in various places throughout an art museum. The time is the present.

SETTING: Some roller chairs, a small cafe table, and a desk, with perhaps some framed exhibition posters on the walls. A couple of entrances.

COSTUME NOTE: All characters wear business attire.

ACT ONE

CHRIS walks in with MERRITT. Both wear business attire. MERRITT looks nervous.

CHRIS

Now, I don't wanna scare you, but we usually call Human Resources the Anti-Personnel Department. And Jean is kinda the ultimate in rigid bureaucracy—didn't even want me to come get you at staff entrance cause you might—I dunno—sue us for harassment or something if I shook your hand too long. Official policy—in all the years I've never seen anyone in Human Resources smile. So don't be nervous. It's going to be a long day.

(JEAN appears, unsmiling.)

Jean, this is Merritt, the Grants Manager candidate.

JEAN

(Icily.)

Welcome.

CHRIS

I'll be back in a little bit to take Merritt to see Royce. Good luck.

(Disappears.)

JEAN

Have a seat.

(MERRITT starts to sit in a chair.)

Nnnn!

(Points. MERRITT sits in the other chair. JEAN hands MERRITT some forms.)

I don't need these done right away—just drop them off by lunchtime.

(JEAN sits and refers to a resume.)

All the way from California. Fundraising must be so easy there, with all that entertainment industry money floating around. You'll find it's nothing like Los Angeles here. The climate is a real deterrent for people from warmer places, so I hope you're serious about your candidacy.

The Development Department is obviously quite serious about you, flying you here, putting you up in luxury accommodations. In my opinion it's usually a waste of time—the museum's better off promoting from within. Good for morale. Cheaper, too.

(Sighs.)

But here we are. How are you?

MERRITT

My anus hurts. It's not hemorrhoids exactly, although I've had them before. When I was only thirteen I had one that thrombosed and the doctor had to lance it on an outpatient basis and there was so much blood the nurse had to leave the room cause she was gonna be sick. But like I said, it isn't hemorrhoids this time, probably some kinda non-specific rectalitis, some kinda infection, cause I can feel the lymph node right here—

(Rubs groin.)

MERRITT (Cont.)

—Swelling up like it does when my anus gets infected, which it does every now and then. I've just got a bad luck butt. This time I think it's from sitting all day on the plane after rather hyperbolic anal sex last night. Don't worry, I was safe and everything. Used a dildo. Can't be too careful these days. But it was one of those oversized ones so it loosened me up something awful. God, I hope I don't break wind during one of these interviews. That would be pretty embarrassing.

JEAN

(After staring for a long moment.)

I...I...have hemorrhoids, too. You poor thing! I know exactly how you feel.

They reach out to each other and scoot their roller chairs across the room to embrace. JEAN pats MERRITT comfortingly. After a moment CHRIS appears.

CHRIS

Tears, already?

JEAN

(Smiling broadly as they both stand.)

Not at all. I think Merritt will fit right in here at the museum.

CHRIS

Thanks, Jean.

(JEAN disappears as CHRIS leads MERRITT away.)

Looks like you made a good first impression. Jean usually hates everyone on sight. Job interviews are a lot like fundraising itself. Really just stage management—making sure the right people say the right things to the other right people at the right time.

MERRITT

I think I've got my lines down.

CHRIS

Good. Can I get you anything? Coffee or how about a danish?

MERRITT

Nice of you, but no thanks.

CHRIS

Just want you to be as comfortable as possible.

MERRITT

I really appreciate it. But I'm fine. I'm good at this stuff.

CHRIS

Your next appointment is Royce, who'd be your boss—

(Smiles.)

—If you get the job. My boss, too, for now.

(Points to self.)

Grants Coordinator, working for you—

(Points to MERRITT.)

—Grants Manager, working for Royce—

(ROYCE appears, carrying a bucket.)

—Director of Development.

ROYCE

(Shaking MERRITT'S hand.)

Thanks, Chris. Come back after we're done to take Merritt to Curatorial.

CHRIS

All right, but I'm in the middle of those trustee letters for your signature.

ROYCE

Which?

CHRIS

Trustee annual giving.

ROYCE

That's not your job.

CHRIS

Last Thursday you asked me—

ROYCE

Oh, yes. Aren't they almost done? We're late as it is.

CHRIS

This afternoon at three.

ROYCE

I need them by lunch. And make yourself generally available to take Merritt around.

(Touching MERRITT.)

Wouldn't want you getting lost and becoming part of the collection.

ROYCE (Cont.)

(To CHRIS.)

See you in a few.

CHRIS just stares a moment, then leaves. ROYCE gestures toward a chair.

ROYCE

Please.

(MERRITT sits.)

Sometimes the staff needs a little encouragement. I hope you're up to that.

(Pulls out a resume.)

In an absolute fit of optimism I already called your references. Everyone in LA speaks very highly of you, especially Randy Kanschat.

MERRITT

I try not to choose hostile references.

ROYCE

Randy's not your current boss.

MERRITT

Randy has been elevated to VP of External Affairs, but we're still friends.

ROYCE

External Affairs?

MERRITT

Any public contact with the museum.

ROYCE

I take it your current boss doesn't know you're interviewing.

MERRITT

I hope not.

ROYCE

We'll keep it *entre nous*.

MERRITT

Thank you.

ROYCE

Why would anyone want to leave Southern California? Beaches, sunshine, Disneyland.

MERRITT

Earthquakes, riots...Disneyland.

ROYCE

Don't you have attachments?

MERRITT

Attachments?

ROYCE

It's illegal to ask you this directly, but I notice no—  
(Touches ring finger.)

MERRITT

Oh. No, I'm not married.

ROYCE

But...involved?

MERRITT

I live with someone.

(ROYCE just smiles.)

Cory.

(ROYCE smiles.)

Who doesn't know I'm here, incidentally.

ROYCE

Really?

MERRITT

Cory's had some success in LA finally—acting. A bit of 99-seat theatre, two commercials this year, and a movie of the week starring Mary Tyler Moore.

ROYCE

Oh, good for her.

MERRITT

Her?

ROYCE

Mary. Haven't seen her in anything for a while.

MERRITT

*Flirting With Disaster.*

ROYCE

Oh. Pardon me.

MERRITT

The movie.

ROYCE

Oh. Yes. But that was years ago.

MERRITT

So it's a big deal. The MOW.

ROYCE

I can imagine.

MERRITT

I hadda sorta sneak out of town. Fictional funeral of a friend Cory doesn't know.

ROYCE

Oh, bad karma. What if the friend actually dies? What will you tell Cory when you have to go to the real funeral?

MERRITT

By then Cory may not care where I am.

ROYCE

Oh, so pessimistic. Or is that optimistic? Your resume is impressive. And as I said I've checked you out. But what do you consider your most recent success? What's given you the most gratification?

MERRITT

Besides being invited to this interview?

ROYCE

Oh, I'm easy. We're going to put you through the wringer today. Don't be too flattered just yet.

MERRITT

Wring me. I've been looking forward to it.

ROYCE

Interviews don't make you nervous? They make me tense, no matter which side of the table I'm on.

(Touches instep.)

I get a knot right here.

MERRITT

Is it there now?

ROYCE

Yes, and it's awful. Right at that place you can't get enough leverage to massage.

MERRITT

I can.

ROYCE

Only if you're an orangutan.

MERRITT

Yours. I can get enough leverage for yours. May I?

ROYCE

(Kicking off a shoe.)

Well...as long as we don't tell Inhuman Resources.

MERRITT

(Starts massaging ROYCE'S foot.)

You're very tight.

ROYCE

It's been said. Oooh.

MERRITT

Does that hurt?

ROYCE

Deliciously.

(Moving foot to MERRITT'S crotch.)

Harder.

MERRITT

(Rubbing with foot in crotch.)

You sure?

ROYCE

If I thought we could get away with it, I'd lie down on the floor right now.

MERRITT

Oh?

ROYCE

So you could walk on my back. You look like the perfect weight.

MERRITT

It's been said.

They grunt, moan and murmur as they chat,  
ROYCE'S foot pushing hard into MERRITT'S  
groin.

ROYCE

I hope you won't find our interview process too formal.

MERRITT

I'll survive. Interviews are inherently artificial.

ROYCE

Putting your best foot forward.

MERRITT

Yet you never know if you're getting to know the real person.

ROYCE

Only pieces.

MERRITT

Trying to make them cohere.

ROYCE

Trying to tear down a facade.

MERRITT

Searching for contradictions.

ROYCE

Patterns.

MERRITT

Exaggerations.

ROYCE

Truth.

MERRITT

It's all just personalities.

ROYCE

Compatibility.

MERRITT

Liking someone or not.

ROYCE

You're rough.

MERRITT

Sorry.

ROYCE

It's good rough. Almost a religious experience.  
(Licks front teeth as in the old Pearl Drops commercial.)

MERRITT

How much more time do we have?

ROYCE

(Looking at watch.)  
Fuck. You have to run over to Hollis.

MERRITT

The curator?

ROYCE

Yes, and you can't be late. You're on a strict schedule today so you can see everybody before lunch.

(Standing.)  
That was exquisite. I'm resurrected.

MERRITT

Deep tissue. Deeper later?

ROYCE

(Grabbing MERRITT for support while putting on shoe.)  
After you're hired. We do have to be careful. This is a wonderful museum and people here work very hard, but not everyone is a soft touch like me. You never know who might be out to get you.

MERRITT

Should I guess who? Is that part of the evaluation?

ROYCE

Our Grants Coordinator, for instance.

MERRITT

Really? Chris seems so nice, so helpful. Full of advice.

ROYCE

Chris was a candidate for your job. This job. Your almost job.

MERRITT

But is no longer a candidate?

ROYCE

Not a serious one. Not to me anyway. But I have a feeling Chris still harbors hopes. So take any advice with a grain of salt. A cube of salt. A salt lick. Sorry, I'm from the farm. You know what a salt lick is?

MERRITT

For the cows?

ROYCE

Oh, you know! I used to lick it sometimes when I was little.

MERRITT

Me, too. At my grandparents' farm.

ROYCE

So now we have a secret.

CHRIS

(Appearing.)  
Already?

ROYCE

Pardon?

CHRIS

Are you ready?

ROYCE

Yes, where've you been?

CHRIS

Proofing the trustee letters—

ROYCE

Hollis is waiting, and you know how that can be.

CHRIS

(To MERRITT.)

Shall we jog?

ROYCE

Thanks, Merritt. I'll re-connect with you after lunch.  
(Disappears.)

CHRIS

So. How'd it go with Royce?

MERRITT

Very well, I think.

CHRIS

(Surprised.)  
Really?

MERRITT

We seemed to bond.

CHRIS

No kidding. Royce is a tough—nut—to crack.

MERRITT

Guess I just had the right cracker. Royce even warned me not to trust you.  
(They both laugh. MERRITT stops laughing first.)  
Um...who's next? The scary curator?

CHRIS

Hollis isn't so bad. Just a little hostile to the Development Office. Never quite enough money for contemporary acquisitions. If you live through it, Hollis can take you to Sidney, our trustee.  
(Points.)  
Right through there.

CHRIS leaves. MERRITT heads in the direction CHRIS indicated and almost runs into HOLLIS, who is dressed in the latest fashion, wears sunglasses, and carries a mug of coffee.

HOLLIS

You look lost—you must be the Grants candidate.

MERRITT

(Shaking hands.)  
That's right. Merritt. Are you Hollis?

HOLLIS

(With a lot of energy, almost jittery.)

Pretty damn inconsiderate of them to make you find your appointments on your own.

MERRITT

I've been doing all right.

HOLLIS

(Offering a business card.)

Do you have a card?

MERRITT

(Searching.)

Sure.

HOLLIS

(Gestures to a seat.)

Want anything? They been pumping you full of coffee?

MERRITT

No, actually.

HOLLIS

And this is my last drop. I'm trying to ration. Sorry. Puts me right over the top.

MERRITT

I can't seem to find my wallet. I'll send you a card.

HOLLIS

Great. Well, let me tell you my problem. I don't understand why you're being interviewed.

MERRITT

I'm sorry?

MERRITT

You don't really want the job, do you?

MERRITT

I flew all the way from California.

HOLLIS

Sure you didn't just come out of obligation to Randy Kanschat?

MERRITT

You know Randy?

HOLLIS

No, but I know...things. Randy set this up, and you don't want to disappoint your mentor by declining the invitation.

MERRITT

Randy's just my reference.

HOLLIS

You can't move here. What about Cory?

MERRITT

You do your research.

HOLLIS

I don't like walking into an interview blind.

MERRITT

Your information is incomplete. I am intensely interested in this job. This is a great museum. Who wouldn't want to work here?

HOLLIS

(Laughs.)

*Your* information is incomplete. Think you're more qualified than Chris?

MERRITT

I don't know Chris' qualifications. Been here a long time, I know that.

HOLLIS

A hell of a long time. Damn good fundraiser. Got me lots of exhibition grants over the years.

MERRITT

That's my reputation as well.

HOLLIS

Everyone in the museum except Royce thinks Chris should get the job. Which is, of course, why Royce will hire someone else.

MERRITT

I take it you're not a fan.

HOLLIS

In Royce's view, fundraising is the world's oldest profession.

MERRITT

Ah.

HOLLIS  
Never wears underwear.

MERRITT  
I hadn't noticed.

HOLLIS  
It's *very* apparent.

MERRITT  
Um...back to my candidacy—

HOLLIS  
Oh, had we strayed?

MERRITT  
It is Royce's decision.

HOLLIS  
Unfortunately. But Royce is clever. This round robin interview gets buy-in from the rest of the staff. If you can charm us.

MERRITT  
Gosh, I like your hair.

HOLLIS  
(Laughs.)  
Enough of this bullshit. What do you know about the curatorial side of an art museum?

MERRITT  
As much as a grantwriter needs to.

HOLLIS  
Do you feel you can work within our structure?

MERRITT  
I open structures.

HOLLIS  
Aggressive. Nice. Saying what I want to hear. Think you've figured me out, my style?

MERRITT  
I saw your *Ghosts of Modernism* show.

HOLLIS

Uh-huh?

MERRITT

Good thesis. Some nice selections.

HOLLIS

Some? *Newsweek* called it authoritative.

MERRITT

Too authoritative for my taste. The text panels were so definitive. And the poor, deceived public thinks any opinion put forth by an art museum is absolute fact, cultural gospel.

HOLLIS

This is the fault of my didactic panels?

MERRITT

Your opinion was disguised as fact. If you'd been a bit more speculative in the wall panels, people would have felt their own arguments were invited, if not actually valued.

HOLLIS

You're suggesting we encourage the public to *think* about art?

MERRITT

It's a more engaging approach.

HOLLIS

Engaging? Sounds like battle.

MERRITT

You enjoy battle.

HOLLIS

You're quick but completely full of shit.

MERRITT

Thank you. That's my job.

HOLLIS

To lie?

MERRITT

If I'm to make you look good. All grant applications are, by nature, lies. They outline hopes—which are lies. Plans, dreams, not reality. By no means reality. You're selling the funder a bill of goods, padding the budget to include overhead and hidden administrative costs.

HOLLIS

Your entire profession is therefore unethical.

MERRITT

I support your profession with my lies.

HOLLIS

But how good are you?

MERRITT

Since we sat down I've told you several lies, twice as many half-truths, and embellished most of the rest. Or not—maybe this is the lie. Can you sort it out?

(HOLLIS shrugs.)

Grantwriting.

HOLLIS

(Standing.)

I think I know what I need to know. I'll take you to Sidney.

MERRITT

(Standing.)

A fair assessment—that proves my point. You think you know what you need to know. Enough to create your own narrative.

HOLLIS

(As they start walking.)

I can see why you're looking for a job.

MERRITT

Pure speculation. Just like everyone else, you're addicted to narrative. It's the curse of modern society.

HOLLIS

People have craved stories since before Gilgamesh.

MERRITT

These days our narratives are too fractured. MTV, the net. It's a struggle to figure out what's going on.

HOLLIS

We've adapted.

MERRITT

We just think we have. It puts us on edge, this sense of incompleteness, not knowing the end. We get insomnia, indigestion—some commit murder to compensate.

HOLLIS

Crap!

MERRITT

Most serial killers create narratives they can control. And they know their story will end not just with the deaths of their victims, but with their own capture, judgment and execution. A story with an ending, if not a happy one.

HOLLIS

(Shaking hands.)

Well, here's our happy ending—we must part. Sidney's right through there.

MERRITT

I take it you don't buy my theory.

HOLLIS

I don't buy shit.

MERRITT

Funny, I heard different from our curator of modern art.

HOLLIS

Valerie? If you take her seriously—

MERRITT

Not long after you were hired, hipster that you are, you developed a cocaine addiction that outstripped even your outrageous salary—

HOLLIS

What a bitch!

MERRITT

In order to pay for it you started taking kickbacks from dealers on some pretty crappy paintings you purchased for the museum—a lot of Kostabis if I'm not mistaken—

HOLLIS

You are mistaken—

MERRITT

But your debts kept piling up and you resorted to actually smuggling small art objects into the country from Europe and Japan—got caught once—

HOLLIS

What the fuck is she telling people? Who does she say this to?

MERRITT

Everybody.

(Peering.)

Is that Sidney? But that's nothing compared to what you finally did—

HOLLIS

What?

SIDNEY

(Appearing.)

Are you Merritt? I'm Sidney. I'm on the development committee of the board.

MERRITT

(Shaking hands.)

Pleasure.

HOLLIS

What did I do?!

MERRITT

I don't think you want me to—

(Gestures toward SIDNEY.)

—I need to talk to Sidney, and not about *that*—

HOLLIS

Here's my card.

MERRITT

(Refusing the card.)

You already gave me one.

HOLLIS

Call me or drop by as soon as—

MERRITT

Every minute is booked—

HOLLIS

When you get back to LA, then. From the airport, the plane!

MERRITT

I'll try.

HOLLIS disappears.

SIDNEY

You seem to have made quite an impression on Hollis.

MERRITT

(Suddenly with a rather nasal southern accent that continues throughout the scene.)  
You know how folks get when they want to hear the ending of a good story.

SIDNEY

I've been hearing good stories about you.

MERRITT

Not a word of truth, I guarantee.

SIDNEY

(Gesturing to a chair.)  
Something to drink? Soft drinks are all we have, I'm afraid. Which is no problem for me, because I don't drink. Alcohol.

MERRITT

Pity. A good rum-n-Coke would get me through these interviews right slick. Kidding.

SIDNEY

Good, good.  
(Takes two Cokes and hands one to MERRITT.)  
Plain Coke all right?

MERRITT

Thank you kindly.

SIDNEY

Where are you from? I didn't notice your accent at first.

MERRITT

Oklahoma. My people have been there since the Trail of Tears.

SIDNEY

You're Native American?

MERRITT

Part, anyway.

SIDNEY

What...tribe...er...nation?

MERRITT

Not sure. Probably more than one. Almost everybody black in Oklahoma has some Indian blood.

SIDNEY

Black?

MERRITT

African American.

SIDNEY

You're...African American?

MERRITT

Of course.

SIDNEY

Pardon me, but your features aren't particularly...African.

MERRITT

You want me to sing *Old Man River*?

SIDNEY

No, no, I'm sorry—it's just—never mind. Oklahoma. What's it like there?

MERRITT

Racist.

SIDNEY

I would imagine. The education system—

MERRITT

That's why I moved to California, because of prejudice.

SIDNEY

But—pardon me again—you can't have suffered too much from—discrimination—

MERRITT

Why not?

SIDNEY

Surely—even in Oklahoma—you can—for lack of a better word—pass. People wouldn't see you as—

MERRITT

Black?

SIDNEY

Well, yes.

MERRITT

I'm sure you mean that as a compliment—

SIDNEY

No, no! I'm not placing a value on—

MERRITT

Most people find racial issues very awkward. I live them every day.

SIDNEY

I'm sorry if I'm behaving awkwardly. I've dealt with prejudice in my life too, as you can imagine, so—

MERRITT

Really?

SIDNEY

Well, of course, even today some people—

MERRITT

Do you personally know any black people? Invite them over for drinks, dinner?

SIDNEY

I don't drink—but dinner, certainly!

MERRITT

Of course you do. Even when you don't know it.

SIDNEY

I suppose that's possible....

MERRITT

People of African descent are everywhere, even when you can't see us.

SIDNEY

Apparently.

MERRITT

You know about the five black U.S. presidents?

SIDNEY

Oh—now, come on—

MERRITT

Unimaginable, is it?

SIDNEY

Well, certainly...unlikely.

MERRITT

You seem to be operating with some fairly rigid definitions.

SIDNEY

I see, you don't mean *black* black. You mean some of them may have had a bit of African ancestry?

MERRITT

What kind of distinction are you trying to make? What is *black* black?

SIDNEY

We seem to be getting in a bit of a tangle here. I'm sure Royce intended for us to talk about your grantwriting abilities.

MERRITT

You don't believe me, do you?

SIDNEY

About what, exactly? I suppose a person can be—

MERRITT

Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Harding and Eisenhower.

SIDNEY

(After a moment.)

Eisenhower?

MERRITT

His wife *was* named Mamie.

SIDNEY

But he didn't seem—

(MERRITT just stares.)  
 I mean, there was nothing to suggest—  
 (MERRITT stares.)  
 He was German, wasn't he, or Dutch? By descent—

MERRITT  
 We're all descended from Eve, genetically speaking, that prehistoric woman in Africa—

SIDNEY  
 Then you could as easily say *everyone's* black!

MERRITT  
 Is that somehow offensive to you?

CHRIS  
 (Appearing.)  
 Sounds like you're having too much fun.

SIDNEY  
 Oh, Chris, so good to see you.

MERRITT  
 Am I talking to the Director next?

CHRIS  
 Pinky only has a few minutes, so we need to get over there.

SIDNEY  
 And I'm overdue for a committee meeting. Terrific to meet you, Merritt.

SIDNEY holds out a hand. MERRITT responds  
 with a soul handshake.

MERRITT  
 Thank you. This has been most enlightening.

SIDNEY  
 Indeed. Good-bye.  
 (Rushes off.)

CHRIS  
 (As they walk.)  
 How was that?

MERRITT  
 (Dropping the accent.)

Let me ask you this. I assume you like working here.

CHRIS

Of course.

MERRITT

Why?

CHRIS

The collection is incredible.

MERRITT

The art or the people?

CHRIS

Both. The people are great.

MERRITT

Some real characters.

CHRIS

Exactly. While the art is so...solid. So beautiful and perfect.

MERRITT

It's about contrast? Human frailty versus artistic purity?

CHRIS

Sort of. But art grows out of human imperfection. Artists aren't perfect either.

MERRITT

I keep expecting one of these bozos to poke an elbow through a painting.

CHRIS

They seem to like you.

MERRITT

Really? You've been getting feedback?

CHRIS

Some. Royce is hearing more, of course.

MERRITT

So I'm doing all right?

CHRIS

The Director's opinion is the make-or-break. Isn't sposed to be, but it is. No pressure.

PINKY

(Appears.)

Good morning. You must be Merritt.

CHRIS

I've got to pick someone else up at staff entrance, but I'll be back in ten or fifteen to take you to lunch.

MERRITT

Thanks, Chris.

(CHRIS disappears.)

Very nice to meet you finally. You have a wonderful museum, with terrific people working for you.

PINKY

That's good to hear. Please make yourself at home.

MERRITT

Thank—

(Starts to sit, stops suddenly, gasps quietly.)

Do you drive a dark green Mercedes?

PINKY

Yes, why?

MERRITT

Oh...never mind.

(Sits down.)

PINKY

Did you see it in staff parking? Is it all right?

MERRITT

No.

PINKY

What?

MERRITT

No, I didn't see it. It's all right.

PINKY

Good.

MERRITT

For now.

PINKY

Do you know something I don't about my car?

MERRITT

Not—

(Thinking hard.)

—Exactly. Just be very careful driving home.

(Smiles.)

Well. I'm so impressed with the changes you've made at the museum in the last fifteen years. I came here once or twice when I was little and found it scary.

PINKY

We've tried to make it more user-friendly, if I may indulge in jargon. Did you grow up around here?

MERRITT

No, I'm from New Orleans originally.

PINKY

You've done away with any accent.

MERRITT

Had to. A Southern accent makes a person sound, well, not very bright. No one's going to just hand you a job, a decent job, and if you sound like your own mother's cousin—

PINKY

I understand. We've all worked hard to get where we are.

MERRITT

But so many people think they shouldn't have to, have you noticed?

PINKY

How do you mean?

MERRITT

Affirmative action, most obviously. Why should people get special rights, a leg up, just cause they check off a certain box on a census form? You're not seriously considering the job at the Met?

PINKY

Excuse me, you sort of switched tracks on me there. The Metropolitan Museum of Art?

MERRITT

You don't want to go to New York.

PINKY

I don't know what you're talking about.

MERRITT

Perhaps I'm mistaken. I got kind of—for lack of a better word I'll call it an impression—that you were shortlisted for the directorship of the Met.

PINKY

I...really can't talk about that.

MERRITT

I understand. Sorry that just popped out. I was born with a caul and I see things sometimes.

PINKY

A call? Like to the ministry?

MERRITT

No, C-A-U-L, born with a veil, afterbirth actually, stuck to my face. In New Orleans they say that means you have special...abilities. Never mind. I'll try to block it out.

PINKY

You were saying? Affirmative action? I'm interested because it's something we're grappling with, especially on the board level.

MERRITT

It's ridiculous. The opposite of survival of the fittest. If the best person doesn't get the job, where are we all—as a species—headed?

PINKY

If you're the best person, I'm sure you'll get the job.

MERRITT

Oh, I'm not talking about myself. It's a pervasive problem, bigger than affirmative action, really. I don't wanna sound cold-hearted, but we as a society spend too much time guarding the rights of the unfit. And I'm not saying they should have any fewer rights than anyone else, but they certainly shouldn't have *more*.

PINKY

Were they showing *The Fountainhead* on the plane?

MERRITT

No. But see, there's an example. You'll judge me partly on my understanding of your joke, the cultural recognition of Ayn Rand's philosophy in the novel and the movie. My education and ability give me an advantage rather than some unrelated factor like ethnicity.

PINKY

Sounds like you think Ayn Rand doesn't go far enough.

MERRITT

Think of all the regulations we have in this country to protect stupid people. To ensure that they survive, reproduce, and contribute—disastrously—to the gene pool. The closest we've come to this kind of genetic crisis is the nineteenth century's preservation of hemophilia in the royal families of Europe.

PINKY

Are you suggesting—perhaps this is a suitable metaphor—that we let the hemophiliacs bleed to death?

MERRITT

Exactly. Why put big warning labels on cigarettes and let so-called victims sue tobacco companies? If they're dumb enough to start smoking, let them die. We don't need their dopey, suicidal genes. Better yet, increase the nicotine and carcinogens in cigarettes to hook them quicker and kill them before they have a chance to reproduce.

PINKY

Certainly an iconoclastic view.

MERRITT

It's just practical for the species. When my dog had puppies, she ate the runt. Why can't we have that much sense?

PINKY

A modest proposal.

MERRITT

(Laughs.)

See? See?! I'm enjoying this, aren't you? We've both read Jonathan Swift, we've both read Ayn Rand, we've both gotten more than a little physical with Royce—

(Gasps. Silence.)

Shit. I'm sorry. That caul again. I just saw you and Royce—you know—and the image shot from my brain to my mouth before I had time to stop it.

(Silence.)

Forget I said a thing. I should go—I'm sure you're intensely occupied with the affairs of the museum—I mean the *business* of the museum.

PINKY

Yes.

MERRITT

Sorry I blathered on and on about natural selection, but it is pretty important to me and, in fact, the whole human race, if anybody would pay attention. Think of the money we'd save and the advancement of humanity if we did away with drug rehabilitation and just let weak people OD, shut down suicide hotlines—

(Gasps.)

PINKY

My brother committed suicide when he was seventeen.

MERRITT

I know. I'm sorry.

PINKY

You'd better go.

ROYCE

(Bursting into the room.)

Pinky, we have a problem.

PINKY

I'd say so.

ROYCE

Hello, Merritt. I'm still not quite sure what's going on, but something very strange has happened, is happening, and I tried to keep it out of your hair but the timing's off and—

NEW MERRITT

(Off.)

All I need to do is confront—

CHRIS

(Bursting in.)

Royce, I tried to stop—

NEW MERRITT

(Following CHRIS.)

I'm really sorry to do this—

(Sees MERRITT.)

—But I was right.

PINKY

Royce, who is this?

NEW MERRITT

I'm Merritt. The candidate for the Grants Manager position.

MERRITT

No, you're not!

PINKY

(Gesturing toward MERRITT.)

Then who is this?

MERRITT

I'm Merritt!

NEW MERRITT

That's Cory.

MERRITT

No!

ROYCE

Cory you live with in Los Angeles? Who acts?

NEW MERRITT

Yes.

(To MERRITT.)

I can't believe you.

MERRITT

What are you doing? Royce, this is crazy.

NEW MERRITT

Cory doesn't want us to move from Los Angeles and didn't want me to even consider this job. And, apparently, when Royce called to invite me to interview, Cory took the call.

(To MERRITT.)

I take it your mysterious friend Scott I never heard of before is still alive and well and there's no funeral at all? Or maybe no Scott at all?

ROYCE

(To MERRITT.)

So you're not Merritt at all? You're just...acting?

MERRITT

I *am* Merritt. That's Cory! Who somehow found out about this interview—

NEW MERRITT

You should have erased the phone message.

MERRITT

—And came here to ruin my chances so you can keep me in L.A. while you pursue your so-called acting career!

PINKY

So...who's Merritt?

MERRITT AND NEW MERRITT

I am!

ROYCE

(After a moment.)

Okay, this is weird, but it's not that difficult. You're obviously not the same person. I can just call Randy Kanschat, who certainly knows what the real Merritt looks like.

CHRIS

Want me to do it? I've known Randy for years.

ROYCE

No, Chris, I can handle it.

PINKY

Can't we just cut them in half?

MERRITT

(After everyone just stares.)

Like Solomon and the baby! See, nobody gets classical references any more. Very good, Pinky.

NEW MERRITT

Royce is right—this is fairly simple. I'm Merritt and you're Cory. Let's see your driver's license.

ROYCE

Excellent. That'll prove it.

MERRITT

(Looks briefly for wallet.)

I...think I left my wallet in the hotel.

CHRIS

Convenient.

MERRITT

Or maybe it was stolen.

(To NEW MERRITT.)

You stole it! Give me back my wallet!

NEW MERRITT

(Taking out a wallet.)

This is *my* wallet.

(Taking out a driver's license.)

With *my* license. And *my* photograph.

They crowd around to view the license.

PINKY

(To NEW MERRITT.)

That's definitely you.

ROYCE

It is.

NEW MERRITT

And these are my credit cards, name embossed—social security, health plan, museum membership—

ROYCE

(To MERRITT.)

You must be out of your mind. To think you could successfully scam us.

CHRIS

Almost did.

MERRITT

I'm not scamming anybody—

(To NEW MERRITT.)

—You are! Why are you screwing me over like this? This is my perfect job! You could act right here! It's a great theatre town!

NEW MERRITT

Please stop acting. You're getting melodramatic.

MERRITT

Cory, this is hideous! You think after this we can keep living together? How can I stay with someone who'd go to such lengths—?!

(Grabbing the license.)

This is fake! The photo was inserted and relaminated! Don't fall for it!

NEW MERRITT

I think you'll find all the statistics match me, not you.

ROYCE

(Grabbing the license, reading it.)

It's true.

(To MERRITT.)

You're a very charming person, but you have to know when to stop.

PINKY

Do you think you can figure the rest of this out in someone else's office?

ROYCE

Of course, Pinky. Chris, call everyone back and reschedule appointments for the real Merritt for after lunch. Try to explain this to everyone as succinctly as possible.

NEW MERRITT

Will what Cory's done hurt my chances? I'm really sorry about this and I'm sure people are bound to be confused, even resentful—wasting their time and all.

MERRITT

You're the one wasting their time, putting them through all this again for nothing!

PINKY

Please be quiet. You're a fraud.

MERRITT

First of all, you're wrong. Cory's very clever, but I'm the real Merritt and I'll prove it to you somehow. Second, if you interview Cory this afternoon, I can't be responsible for what happens.

ROYCE

Please, you're exposed and desperate. You'll say anything. Chris, set up those interviews.

CHRIS

Do I take them both to lunch?

ROYCE, NEW MERRITT AND MERRITT

No!

PINKY

(To MERRITT.)

How can you threaten us? You repulse me.

MERRITT

I don't want to get hysterical. And I don't want to threaten you. But you're all being horribly—albeit it brilliantly—deceived, and there will be consequences.

(They all just stare as the lights dim, isolating MERRITT before going out completely.)  
I was born with a caul.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Lights up on NEW MERRITT and PINKY sitting.

PINKY

Have you ever seen *The Fountainhead*? With Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal?

NEW MERRITT

It's so over the top.

PINKY

The acting?

NEW MERRITT

Ayn Rand's theories.

PINKY

You don't agree with her?

NEW MERRITT

When I worked at the Howard Johnson's national reservation center one summer, I read all of *Atlas Shrugged* in the three-to-five second breaks I had between customer calls. Absolutely the best way to read that book. Although the guests—we weren't supposed to call them customers—often wondered why I was laughing.

PINKY

What was funny about it?

NEW MERRITT

Mostly—if you'll pardon me—the sex scenes. Only Anne Rice writes more absurdly virile characters. Magnificently superior specimens. So far from reality—guess that's what people want.

PINKY

Switching gears a bit, what do you think of Royce?

NEW MERRITT

We've only spoken briefly. You're my first interview.

PINKY

Ah. Of course. But no...impression thus far? Of Royce?

NEW MERRITT

Not really. Should I—?

PINKY

No. Good. Wouldn't want you forming any premature opinions. Growing up, did you often ride the streetcar named Desire?

NEW MERRITT

I'm sorry...?

PINKY

In New Orleans.

NEW MERRITT

You mean the play? By what's-his-name? Arthur Miller?

PINKY

You didn't grow up in New Orleans?

NEW MERRITT

No. Oklahoma. I went to New Orleans once for Mardi Gras. Got some beads.

PINKY

Do you find Royce attractive?

NEW MERRITT

I...suppose. In a very general way. Not the kind of person I'm specifically attracted to, but attractive to some people, I'm sure.

PINKY

To what kind of people?

NEW MERRITT

I'm sorry. I think I'm missing something—

PINKY

Never mind. Do you travel to New York on museum business?

NEW MERRITT

Now and then.

PINKY

Do you know anyone at the—  
(Affected accent.)  
Metropooooolitan Museum of Art?

NEW MERRITT

No, not really. I've been there, but, no.

PINKY

I love saying it that way—Metropoooooolitan Museum of Art. They all talk that way there, especially the outgoing director. Can you say it?

PINKY AND NEW MERRITT

Metropoooooolitan.

PINKY

Very good.

NEW MERRITT

I'll listen for it next time I'm there.

PINKY

Did you know their director was leaving?

NEW MERRITT

No, I hadn't heard. That's big news.

PINKY

Yes, indeed.

(Stares intently at NEW MERRITT for a moment.)

NEW MERRITT

It something wrong? Food on my teeth?

PINKY

Why don't you have an Oklahoma accent?

NEW MERRITT

Oh, you know. It makes a person sound stupid. Hicky.

PINKY

Aha!

NEW MERRITT

I'm sorry. You have relatives there? No offense.

PINKY

What's the gene pool like there in Oklahoma? Is that how everybody is? Hicky? Married to their cousins?

NEW MERRITT

It's very conservative, but not exactly Dogpatch.

PINKY

So you don't worry about the gene pool? It's our future after all—we should guard it carefully, shouldn't we?

NEW MERRITT

I don't have a strong opinion about the gene pool one way or the other.

PINKY

Oh. Good.

(Puts a hand behind back so NEW MERRITT can't see.)

How many fingers am I holding up?

NEW MERRITT

Um...three?

PINKY

Wrong. Four. How many now?

NEW MERRITT

Two?

PINKY

Wrong! Four again. What color am I thinking of?

NEW MERRITT

Green?

PINKY

No, red! Now?

NEW MERRITT

Red?

PINKY

No, green! Does that color mean anything to you?

NEW MERRITT

Green?

PINKY

Yes, green—dark, forest green? Does it conjure up any images in your mind?

NEW MERRITT

Trees? Grass? Algae?

PINKY

It doesn't make you want to go for a ride in a car?

NEW MERRITT

No!

PINKY

My car? My forest green Mercedes?!

NEW MERRITT

No, no, I'm sorry—I don't want to go for a ride in your car!

CHRIS

(Appearing.)

Sorry to interrupt, but our schedule's kind of foreshortened.

NEW MERRITT

Excellent.

(Standing to go.)

Is your trustee next?

CHRIS

Pinky?

PINKY

(Distractedly.)

Fine, fine.

CHRIS

(Sotto voce to PINKY.)

I called Randy Kanschat to get a physical description, but haven't heard back yet.

PINKY

Good, good. Keep us on track, Chris.

NEW MERRITT

(On the way out.)

Shall we go?

CHRIS

I'll take you to Sidney if you can wait outside just a minute.

(NEW MERRITT leaves.)

Thanks for rearranging your schedule for us, Pinky.

PINKY

This one knows nothing.

CHRIS

You prefer the other Merritt?

PINKY

Tell Royce I much prefer *this one*.

Lights fade out on PINKY and CHRIS. Up on NEW MERRITT waiting in a chair. After a moment SIDNEY comes in.

NEW MERRITT

(Jumping up, holds out hand.)  
Hello, I'm Merritt.

SIDNEY

(Holds up hand for high five.)  
Sidney.

Awkwardly, NEW MERRITT slaps SIDNEY'S hand.

NEW MERRITT

Oh, my.

SIDNEY

What? Did I do it wrong?

NEW MERRITT

You're—the One.

SIDNEY

I'm a trustee, if that's what you mean.

NEW MERRITT

I'm sorry. Never mind. I'll just have to—  
(Composes self.)  
I'm fine. How are you?

SIDNEY

Quite well. Now before we start, I'd like to clarify that I understand about discrimination.

NEW MERRITT

(After a moment.)  
Oh. Good. In the sense of circumspection and taste or—

SIDNEY

Ethnic discrimination. Prejudice. First hand experience.

NEW MERRITT

It's all around us, after all. Religious persecution, especially.

SIDNEY

I'm glad you understand.

NEW MERRITT

(Nodding.)  
*Underdog.*

SIDNEY

Underdog?

NEW MERRITT

It's almost too painful to discuss. Incredibly anti-Semitic.

SIDNEY

What is?

NEW MERRITT

Was. *Underdog*. The cartoon in the sixties.

SIDNEY

Oh, I didn't watch—

NEW MERRITT

The villain was Simon Bar Sinister—the evil genius. Remember what he looked like?

SIDNEY

No, I never—

NEW MERRITT

Coarse hair, thick black eyebrows, and a big hook nose.

SIDNEY

In a cartoon?

NEW MERRITT

And he was always plotting and inventing machines that threatened—  
(Looks expectantly at SIDNEY.)

SIDNEY

What?

NEW MERRITT

Polly *Purebred*. It was a recruitment cartoon for Hitler Youth!

SIDNEY

You might be reading too much into that—

NEW MERRITT

Why do you think you never see it on Nickelodeon?

SIDNEY

It's true I haven't seen—

NEW MERRITT

This is perfect! I'm trying to contain myself, but—

SIDNEY

What?

NEW MERRITT

You're why I came here. Why I was meant to come.

SIDNEY

You'll be seeing a number of people, as I understand it.

NEW MERRITT

When you touched my hand, I felt it.

SIDNEY

(Looking at hand.)

I had a cinnamon roll, but I washed—

NEW MERRITT

I am blessed!

SIDNEY

Um...this is a semi-government institution, so—

NEW MERRITT

(Pulling out a vial attached to a necklace.)

I wanna show you—

SIDNEY

—While religious freedom is certainly—

NEW MERRITT  
 (Proffering the vial.)  
 I got this in the Holy Land.

SIDNEY  
 What is it?

NEW MERRITT  
 The most holy relic of our Lord.

SIDNEY  
 I'd rather not—

NEW MERRITT  
 Touch it! God wants you to. You're meant to.

SIDNEY  
 No, I'm not that religious—

NEW MERRITT  
 Please!

SIDNEY  
 (Fingering the vial.)  
 All right, but I'd like to know—

NEW MERRITT  
 It's his foreskin.

SIDNEY  
 (Dropping the vial. NEW MERRITT catches it.)  
 Whose?

NEW MERRITT  
 The foreskin of Christ. And now you've blessed it!

SIDNEY  
 I have not!

NEW MERRITT  
 Just by touching it!  
 (Dropping to knees, taking SIDNEY'S hand.)  
 Thank you!

SIDNEY  
 I'm Jewish, goddammit!

NEW MERRITT

Exactly! You're the One! All faiths can now unite! And I shall be sanctified!  
(Gulps the contents of the vial.)

SIDNEY

No—don't!

NEW MERRITT

I believe in you!

(Rolls back head, begins speaking in tongues, with a death grip on SIDNEY.)  
Thumma raaytu samaan jadidah was ardan jadia lianna elsamaa eloula wa elarda eloula madata wa elbahr la joujad fe ma.

SIDNEY

Um...excuse me. Merritt?

NEW MERRITT

(Continues, as necessary, under dialogue as SIDNEY stretches toward the door.)

Wa ana johanna raayton elmadina elmonkadassa urshelim el jadida nezilatan mina elsamaa min inda ellah monhayaatan kaaronsin mouzanatim lirajonliha. Wa samiiton sawtan aziman mina elsamai kailan houwaza maskinon ellahi maa elanas wa houa sayaskunu meehum wa hum yakunun lahu shaaban was ellah nafsushu yakun maahum ilahan lahum. Wa sayansahu ella hulhu damaatin min onyounihum wa elemawton la yakounon fe ma baadon wa la yakounon huznon wa la surakhon wa la wajaon fe ma baadon lianna eloumoura eleonla kad madat. Wa kal el jalison ala elarsh ha ana asnaon kulla shayin jadidan. Wa kal be onktub fainna hathihi elakwal sadikaton wa aminaton. Thumma kal le kad tanna. Ana huwa elalefon wa elyaon elbedayaton wa elneheyaton. Ana outti elatshan min yanboni maa elhayati majjanan man yagheleb yareth kulla shay-in wa akounon lahu ilahan was huma yakunu le ibnan. Wa amma elkhaifun wa ghayron elmouminin wa elrajissom wa elkatiloun wa elzumat wa elsahara wa abadatu elawthan wa jamii elkathabati fanesibahum fe elbuhaurati elmutakkaditta binaren wakibritiu ellathi huwa elmawtou eltham. Thumma faa elayya wahidunmin elsabaati elmalaikati ellathiin maahum elsakaaton eljamatelmamlonon mina elsabii eldarabati elakhirati wa takallama maiikaiilan halluma faourika elarous imraata elkharouf. Wa thahabab be billrouhi ila jabaliu azimin alin wa arani elmadinata elazimata urshalim elmukaddassat nazilatan mina elsamai min indellahi laha majdu ellahi wa lamaanaha shibhu akrami hajarin kahajari bashbin ballouriyin wa kana laha souron azimon wa

NEW MERRITT (Cont.)

alilnwa kana laha ithua ashara baban wa ala elabinaki ithna asharanaalakan wa assmaon maktonbaton hiya assanaon assbatti bani israail elithany ashara. Mina elsharki thalthatu abwabi wa minaelshimali thalthatu abwabin wa mina eljanoubi thalthatu abwabi wa mina elgharbi thalthatu abwabi. Wa suru elmadinati kana lahuithne ashara assassan wa alayha assmaon roussouli elkharonfi elithuay ashara. Wa ellathi kana uatakallamon maii kana maahu kassabaton min thahibin likay yakissa elmadinata wa abwabaha wasouraha. Wa elmadinaton kanat mawdonaton wourabaatan toulaouha bikadri elardi. Fakassa elmadinata bil kassabati massafata

ithany ashara alfa ghalmatin. Eltonlon wa elardon wa elirtifaon montassawiyaton. Wa kassa souraha miaatan wa arbaan wa arbaiinathira-aan thiraa inssanin. Ayi elmalaku. Wa kana binaon sourihamin yashbin was elmadinatu thahabon hakkiyyim wa assassatu sourielmadinati muzzayyanaton bikulli hajar in karinin. Ellassasselwabu yashbon. Elthani yakuton azraku. Elthalith akikonabyadn. Elrabii zumouroudon thubabiyon. Elkhaminsu jazzakonakkikkii. Elsadisu akkikon ahmaron. Elsahin zabarjadon. Elthaninon zumurraudon silikkiion. Eltassiu yakkouton asfaron. Elashiru akkikon abhdaru. Elhaddiyu ashana asmanjounii. Elthani ashara jamashton. Wa elithua ashara babau ithnata asharata lonlon-atan kullu wahidin mina elabwabi kana min loulou-atinwahidatin wa suku elmadinati thahabon nakiyyon kazujajin shaffafin. Wa lam shayin huwa walhourouf haykaluha. Wa tamshi shou-onbon elmukjlissina binouriha wa moulonkon elardi yajionna bimajdihim wa karamatihim ilayha. Wa abambouha lan tonjhlak naharan li-anna laytan la yakounon hunak. Wa yajionna bimajdiel-oumami wa karamatihim ilayha. Wa lan yadkhulaha shay-ondanisson wa la ma yassnaou rajissan wa kathiban illa elmaktubbeena fe sifii hayati elkharonfi.

SIDNEY

(At the door.)

Hello, Chris? Thank god—I mean—I think we’re having a breakdown—

CHRIS

(Appearing.)

What’s going on?

SIDNEY

I don’t know. Some kind of born-again ecstasy thing.

CHRIS

What started it?

SIDNEY

Apparently consumption of a 2000 year-old foreskin.

(They watch NEW MERRITT speaking for a moment.)

I think, Chris, this is not the candidate for me. I have nothing against profound religious feeling—

CHRIS

So you’re more interested in...the first Merritt?

SIDNEY

We have no choice. Can you imagine if this happened in front of a donor?

(They look at NEW MERRITT, has a spasm while speaking and foams a little.)

CHRIS

Merritt? Merritt!

(Shakes MERRITT, freeing SIDNEY’S hand.)

Wake up, it’s the Rapture!

NEW MERRITT

What? Oh, gosh, I'm sorry.

CHRIS

(Helping NEW MERRITT stand.)

We have to go see a curator now.

NEW MERRITT

All right. Thanks.

(Taking SIDNEY'S hand, which SIDNEY gives only reluctantly.)

A great honor. And a great beginning.

SIDNEY

Thanks.

CHRIS and NEW MERRITT leave and SIDNEY collapses in a chair. After a moment SIDNEY picks up the relic vial from the floor and studies it. The original MERRITT comes in and gives SIDNEY a black power salute that SIDNEY awkwardly returns with a grateful smile. Lights out on MERRITT and SIDNEY and up on NEW MERRITT and CHRIS walking.

CHRIS

Uh...everything all right?

NEW MERRITT

Cory's certainly cut my work out for me. Pinky was a trip.

CHRIS

And...Sidney?

NEW MERRITT

Intense.

CHRIS

So you're hanging in there?

NEW MERRITT

I'm not gonna let anybody down.

CHRIS

It's only a job. If it doesn't work out, *la vida es sueno* sha-boom, sha-boom. Oh, here's Hollis. Get ready.

HOLLIS appears, looking tense but controlled.

NEW MERRITT

Don't you want it?

CHRIS

What? Hi, Hollis.

NEW MERRITT

I understand you're a candidate.

CHRIS

Oh, sort of.

HOLLIS

You should be.

CHRIS

Don't think I could handle the politics.

NEW MERRITT

Too nice for the job? I doubt that. I wouldn't be surprised if you're stabbing me in the back.  
(To HOLLIS.)

Sorry. You must be Hollis.

HOLLIS

Merritt? For real this time?

NEW MERRITT

For real.

HOLLIS looks to CHRIS for confirmation.

CHRIS

We're pretty sure this time. I've got a meeting but I'll be back to take Merritt to Royce.

HOLLIS nods. CHRIS departs. HOLLIS gestures to a chair and both HOLLIS and NEW MERRITT sit.

NEW MERRITT

I really appreciate everybody taking time to see me after what happened.

HOLLIS

So. You write grants.

NEW MERRITT

That's right.

HOLLIS

(Suddenly very jittery, more so than with MERRITT.)

Liar!

NEW MERRITT

Pardon?

HOLLIS

As a grantwriter, you're inherently a liar. Right?

NEW MERRITT

How do you mean? I don't deliberately deceive anyone with my proposals.

HOLLIS

Deception is the most modern art. And deceiving fools, especially rich fools, is practically a moral duty. How difficult is it to dribble a Pollock? Drench canvases with white paint and call them Rymans for god's sake? Andres Serrano taking pictures of his jizz flying across the room, that other asshole shooting paint out his butt—I hate that shit. But look what it's done for me. And for you.

NEW MERRITT

A curator who hates art.

HOLLIS

Just modern art.

NEW MERRITT

You know what?

(Whispers.)

Me, too.

HOLLIS

Then why are you here?

NEW MERRITT

Saint Wilgefortis.

HOLLIS

Who?

NEW MERRITT

You don't know her?

HOLLIS

I'm not Catholic.

NEW MERRITT

Me, either. But I love Wilgefortis. And you have an incredible Guido Reni painting of her.

HOLLIS

I don't get into the Renaissance galleries much.

NEW MERRITT

You might not recognize her even if you did.

HOLLIS

Why not?

NEW MERRITT

She's sort of in disguise. Wilgefortis was a virgin princess in the—I dunno—fifth century or something and wanted to become a nun. But her father wanted to marry her off to a neighboring prince to form an alliance. So the night before her wedding she prayed to Saint Peter for deliverance and woke up the next morning with a full beard.

HOLLIS

And the prince rejected her?

NEW MERRITT

Her father was so mad he had her crucified. She's also known as Saint Uncumber cause she's the patron saint of women who want to get rid of their husbands.

HOLLIS

The Guido Reni shows her crucified?

NEW MERRITT

Wearing a dark purple robe.

HOLLIS

I have seen that painting. It's beautiful. But I always thought it was Jesus.

NEW MERRITT

That's the cool part, art-historically speaking. I think she *is* Jesus.

HOLLIS

How do you mean?

NEW MERRITT

In a church in Lucca there's a statue that looks just like her—

HOLLIS

The Volto Santo! But that's an image of Christ.

NEW MERRITT

Exactly, but it isn't a traditional crucifixion because the Volto Santo Christ is *robed*. When the image was copied and found its way to northern Europe, no one knew what to make of it. Jesus wasn't supposed to be wearing a robe on the cross. That would be wrong. So instead—

HOLLIS

—The northern Europeans made up the legend of a bearded, female saint—!

NEW MERRITT

—Who was crucified. Out of pure rigidity, or desperation to believe. Then the legend came back to Italy and she was painted by Reni. That painting's an incredible metaphor for the relationship between human aspiration and self-deception.

HOLLIS

Are you sure you're just a grantwriter?

NEW MERRITT

It's Susan Caroselli's theory—one of your curators. But that's why I want to work here. I could stare at Wilgefortis for hours.

HOLLIS

You will if I have anything to do with it. A fundraiser with a passion for art!

CHRIS

(Appearing.)

I'm sorry, we've got to accelerate things a bit.

HOLLIS

That's all right. I know what I need to know.

(Shaking NEW MERRITT'S hand.)

Thanks for restoring a little of my faith in my profession.

NEW MERRITT

Best compliment I've had today.

CHRIS

Get ready for a contrast. The next interview's going to be your hardest.

HOLLIS

I thought I was supposed to be the tough one.

CHRIS

Apparently Royce took more than a shine to Cory.

NEW MERRITT

What does that mean?

CHRIS

You're not jealous?

NEW MERRITT

Huh-uh. Don't try that. You don't even know me.

ROYCE

(Appearing.)

Oh, good, Merritt. I was in the neighborhood and thought you might like a cup of coffee while we talk.

NEW MERRITT

Terrific.

ROYCE

That is, if you're done, Hollis.

HOLLIS

Sure.

ROYCE

Chris, do you know why Ed Tuchman called?

CHRIS

He needed a file for the lawsuit. I already sent it to him, but you might want to call.

ROYCE

Merritt's more important right now. Shall we?

NEW MERRITT

(To HOLLIS.)

Thanks again.

(Disappears with ROYCE)

HOLLIS

(After a moment.)

Looks like you've got a new boss. Unless Royce is an idiot.

CHRIS

That good, huh?

HOLLIS

Do you know our apocryphal Saint Wilgefortis?

CHRIS

That Reni painting in the stairwell?

HOLLIS

I was on the verge of telling Royce to get some sense and just promote you, but Merritt—this Merritt—is very smart.

CHRIS

Uh-oh.

HOLLIS

Why?

CHRIS

Pinky agrees with you, but Sidney thinks Merritt's anti-Semitic.

HOLLIS

Into saints is all.

CHRIS

Oh, it's a little more than that. If we don't hire the Merritt from this morning, Sidney's quitting the board.

HOLLIS

But the Merritt of this morning was a fake.

MERRITT

(Appearing.)

No, I'm not.

CHRIS

I asked you to wait in my office. Please!

HOLLIS

What are you doing here?

MERRITT

Saving my job. Cory's hoodwinking everyone. You, too?

HOLLIS

How'd you get past Security?

CHRIS

(To MERRITT.)

Don't make me regret this any more than I already do.

MERRITT

You're sabotaging me.

HOLLIS

Hardly, if Chris got you back in the building—

MERRITT

At least let me talk to Royce again.

CHRIS

Royce is with Merritt right now.

MERRITT

You mean Cory. All the better.

(Leaves.)

CHRIS

No, Merritt! Cory! They're not in Royce's office.

(Leaves.)

Lights out on HOLLIS and up on NEW MERRITT and ROYCE who arrive with cups of coffee and sit at a cafe table.

ROYCE

I've been dying for this coffee. And to find out about Cory.

NEW MERRITT

Are you hungry?

ROYCE

(Standing.)

Oh, you should have said. I'll get—

NEW MERRITT

No, I always keep snacks with me.  
(Pulling a baggie of cheese from a pocket.)  
Discreetly, of course.

ROYCE

Is that cheese?

NEW MERRITT

Have some.

ROYCE

Thanks, now that you mention it, I'm starving. And I'm a cheese fiend.  
(Tasting the cheese.)  
Mmmm. Well, let's get right to work.  
(Pulls out a piece of paper.)  
I've an extensive list of questions—

NEW MERRITT

Excuse me, before we start—

ROYCE

Yes?

NEW MERRITT

Is this interview process standard? Who designed it?

ROYCE

I did, with a little help from Chris. Have you enjoyed it?

NEW MERRITT

Not especially.

ROYCE

Good. That's not the point. It's about survival.

NEW MERRITT

No one asked me anything about my job. Nothing about government grants, foundation grants, even fundraising in general.

ROYCE

(Rattling the paper.)  
That's what this is. Shall we begin?

NEW MERRITT

Please.

ROYCE

(Eating more cheese.)

What was the absolute worst fundraising disaster you ever experienced?

NEW MERRITT

Wouldn't you rather hear about a triumph?

ROYCE

Everybody talks about those. I want to know how you handle a crisis.

NEW MERRITT

The worst?

ROYCE

That's right.

NEW MERRITT

Aside from this interview?

ROYCE

I'm terribly sorry things haven't gone as planned, but perhaps this will prove the best way to test your mettle.

NEW MERRITT

I was joking.

ROYCE

Oh. I wasn't. Now then, your biggest failure? A horrendous typo? A social faux pas with a major donor? A demanding corporate sponsor?

NEW MERRITT

I guess it would be *Inside the Israel Museum*.

ROYCE

(Almost too eager.)

What happened?

NEW MERRITT

The Jewish Community Foundation paid for a kosher reception for twelve hundred people. Unfortunately it was scheduled for a Saturday night.

ROYCE

So?

NEW MERRITT

The food had to be prepared before sundown on Friday so the caterers wouldn't violate the Sabbath. It was kept overnight in a refrigerator truck parked outside the museum. The weather was supposed to be hot, so the temperature inside the truck was kept low. Too low.

(ROYCE gasps, perhaps in pleasure.)

When the sun went down Saturday night, we discovered that everything, all the food, was frozen solid. There was ice everywhere, and the wine had exploded, so you couldn't tell ice from shattered glass. More than a thousand people were starving and the best we could do was frozen carrot sticks and guacamole that one of the Special Events girls partially melted with her blow drier.

ROYCE

What did you do?

NEW MERRITT

We laughed. One of the trustees and I played marbles with frozen cherry tomatoes on the museum plaza.

ROYCE

We've no patience with that kind of mistake here.

NEW MERRITT

You understand it wasn't my scheduling.

ROYCE

Of course. It never is. Now, Cory—

NEW MERRITT

Merritt.

ROYCE

Pardon?

NEW MERRITT

I'm Merritt. You saw Cory this morning.

ROYCE

Of course. So sorry. Now, *Merritt*—

NEW MERRITT

Do I seem short to you?

ROYCE

Not particularly. Why?

NEW MERRITT

Studies show short people are often discounted or even disrespected in job interviews.

ROYCE

I hope I haven't—

NEW MERRITT

I had to take growth hormones as a child.

ROYCE

Well, now you seem—

NEW MERRITT

When my mother was pregnant she ate a lot of cheap cuts of meat—chicken thighs, rump roast—the body parts where cows and chickens get their growth hormone injections. Apparently the hormones were passed on to me, and I went into early puberty.

ROYCE

How early?

NEW MERRITT

Seven—

ROYCE

You went into puberty when you were seven years old?

NEW MERRITT

Seven *months*. I grew pubic hair, breasts, even started menstruating.

ROYCE

You...menstruated?

NEW MERRITT

At seven months! And since puberty is the last big growth spurt, they had to give me hormones till I was a teenager so I wouldn't be tiny all my life.

ROYCE

You grew breasts?

NEW MERRITT

At seven months! Can you believe it? By the way, how's the cheese?

ROYCE

Quite good. A number of varieties here, aren't there?

NEW MERRITT

I'm glad you like it. It's all natural. We make it ourselves.

ROYCE

Really? You and *Cory* live on a farm?

NEW MERRITT

No, an apartment.

ROYCE

So you buy whole milk from a dairy?

NEW MERRITT

No, we like to know where it's been.

ROYCE

You keep a cow in your apartment?

NEW MERRITT

(Laughs.)

No.

ROYCE

(Munching away.)

So this is what? Goat cheese?

NEW MERRITT

Goats are too big. We'd get evicted. Even in Los Angeles.

ROYCE

It isn't pecorino.

NEW MERRITT

Oh, no, sheep—same deal. Zoning laws.

ROYCE

(Still chewing zestfully.)

What kind of milk do you use?

NEW MERRITT

A number of different kinds. You noticed the variety. We used to keep a pot-bellied pig—

ROYCE

(Stops chewing.)

I'm eating pig cheese?

NEW MERRITT

Oh, no.

ROYCE

Good.

NEW MERRITT

That was the first piece you finished. Then when our golden retriever's puppies were born dead—

ROYCE

You—milked—a dog?

NEW MERRITT

It was a little tricky, but nothing compared to the cat.

ROYCE

(Getting ready to spit out the cheese.)  
Please tell me I'm not eating cat cheese.

NEW MERRITT

No.

After a moment, ROYCE pulls out the very resistant cheese in a long, taffy-like string.

NEW MERRITT

That's human cheese.

ROYCE spits out the cheese and dangles it, not knowing where to put it.

NEW MERRITT

From breast milk. It turned out my sister's daughter would only eat those awful commercial products and we hate to waste anything. It aged slowly, but it was worth it. At least we think so. It's got an interesting consistency hasn't it?

ROYCE

(Non-committal.)  
Mmm.

NEW MERRITT

We're trying to figure out if there's a commercial market, but I bet the minute we try to sell it every mother in the country will decide home-made is better. Someone could make a mint with breast milk home cheesery kits. Another angle we thought of is celebrity breast milk. Angelina Jolie cheese. Pamela Anderson cheese. I bet Madonna beats 'em to the market—she's so business-savvy.

ROYCE

(After a moment.)

I believe we're finished. Let me drop you off in Human Resources.

NEW MERRITT

(As they start walking.)

May I ask you a few informal questions on the way?

ROYCE

Of course.

NEW MERRITT

What's your relationship to the person in this position?

ROYCE

I'm their superior.

NEW MERRITT

Would I have my own office? I get gas.

ROYCE

(JEAN appears.)

Ah. Here we are.

(Shaking hands with NEW MERRITT.)

Thank you for a fascinating day. We hope to make a decision within the next two months.

NEW MERRITT

It's been...lovely.

ROYCE

Jean, please process Cory's paperwork and call a taxi. Good-bye.

ROYCE leaves. NEW MERRITT turns to look at JEAN, who just smiles shyly at first. After a moment, JEAN produces a butt doughnut, the kind used by hemorrhoid sufferers, and offers it to NEW MERRITT with a smile. NEW MERRITT just stares. Lights out on NEW MERRITT and JEAN and up on ROYCE'S office, where ROYCE and the original MERRITT sit, talking.

MERRITT

I'm real.

ROYCE

Very.

MERRITT

I'm sure you could see that after this afternoon.

ROYCE

Cory was actually hostile to me, clearly tired of impersonating you. I'm sure the rest of the staff could perceive it. Sidney says Cory's straight out of *The Omen*.

(MERRITT giggles.)

This is funny?

MERRITT

You're going to figure out who I am by taking a poll.

ROYCE

The Director's the only one who counts.

(Into phone.)

Is Pinky there?

CHRIS

(Appearing.)

Royce, Merritt is—

(Sees MERRITT.)

Oh. The other Merritt is in personnel and this one is—already here.

ROYCE

(Into phone.)

No, I'll go up there.

(Hangs up.)

Chris, Pinky's with the Lannans in their gallery. I need to say hello to them and bring Pinky here. Can you entertain Merritt till I get back?

CHRIS

I guess. What about the other one?

ROYCE

Oh, have Personnel do whatever Personnel does. I'm sure everyone agrees with my selection.

CHRIS

(Extremely uncomfortable.)

Um...no.

ROYCE

They don't? Who—?

(Notices CHRIS indicating MERRITT is present.)  
Oh, it's all right. Merritt's a grown-up.

CHRIS

Jean and Sidney agree with you.

ROYCE

What about Pinky and Hollis?

CHRIS

They prefer the Merritt behind Door Number Two.

ROYCE

All the more reason for me to get Pinky alone. Call Personnel now and get rid of the other one.

(At the door.)

Excuse me.

(Disappears.)

CHRIS

(On the phone.)

Jean, hi, it's Chris. We're in Royce's office and wonder if you can send Merritt over. On the way? Perfect.

(Hangs up.)

PINKY

(Arriving with NEW MERRITT.)

Look who I found wandering the halls—

NEW MERRITT AND MERRITT

Cory!

PINKY

What are you doing here?

MERRITT

Royce hired me.

NEW MERRITT

What?

PINKY

Without consulting me?

CHRIS

Oh, no. Royce went to get you—I thought—

NEW MERRITT

This is horrifying.

PINKY

Not to be rude, but—no, I take that back—I’m perfectly comfortable being rude to you. Joyful, even. How can you imagine we’d want to hire you after the things you said to me this morning?

MERRITT

I’m not imagining anything. Royce made an offer and I accepted it. A generous offer.

NEW MERRITT

How much?

MERRITT

I’m not telling you.

NEW MERRITT

We live together!

MERRITT

Maybe.

NEW MERRITT

I love you. Isn’t that more important than a job?

NEW MERRITT kisses MERRITT passionately. MERRITT does not respond. Everyone else looks uncomfortable. NEW MERRITT breaks the kiss and looks hurt.

MERRITT

More important to *you*.

PINKY

Um...I’m sorry, but this conversation is drifting—rather, *careening*—into the personal, a realm entirely inappropriate for this venue.

CHRIS

But I think we’re getting somewhere. Back to the King Solomon metaphor—

MERRITT

Everyone here is so sophisticated!

CHRIS

(Indicating NEW MERRITT.)

This Merritt values love more than the job. Obviously enough to confess to being Cory.

(NEW MERRITT just stares.)

Right? Cory?

NEW MERRITT

(After a moment.)

My name is Merritt. That doesn't mean I don't love you, Cory. You're just acting icy to—I dunno—show me how cold you think I am for considering this job.

MERRITT

You can stop considering. I've been hired.

NEW MERRITT

Stop saying that!

MERRITT

Neener, neener, neener.

PINKY

And it's not true. Or if it is, I can unhire you. That's it—get out—you're fired.

MERRITT

It's Royce's decision.

NEW MERRITT

Pinky can fire Royce.

PINKY

That's right!

CHRIS

I don't think we need to go that far.

PINKY

We've gone so far I don't even know where we are by now.

NEW MERRITT

Maybe we need to go farther.

(To MERRITT.)

I heard what you said in Personnel about the dildo!

PINKY

Oh, dear.

MERRITT

Cory, shut up!

NEW MERRITT

You brought it up.

MERRITT

Pinky, you see—desperation! Do you want to hire someone like this?

NEW MERRITT

We never use dildos! Gross!

PINKY

Stop! Dildos or no.

(To MERRITT.)

You will never be hired by this museum as long as I live. Never.

MERRITT

You'd rather hire an impostor? An actor? Someone with absolutely no fundraising experience whatsoever?

(To NEW MERRITT.)

The only grant you can do is Cary Grant—and not very well, truth be told.

(To PINKY.)

You'd rather have someone who knows nothing than someone who knows too much?

PINKY

We're not obligated to hire either of you!

ROYCE

(Appearing.)

Pinky, there you are! I've been all over the museum.

PINKY

Royce, have you offered the job to this—this—person?

ROYCE

Of course not. I'd never act without consulting you.

They all turn to look at MERRITT.

MERRITT

I never said it was a *formal* offer.

PINKY

(Pushing NEW MERRITT forward.)

Royce, this is who you should hire.

ROYCE

Are we *actually* selecting a Grants Manager with both candidates *in the room*?

NEW MERRITT

Um...all three candidates.  
(Indicates CHRIS.)

ROYCE

Oh, no.

NEW MERRITT

I think we need to be clear about the competition.

PINKY

(To CHRIS.)  
You're a candidate?

ROYCE

Chris, you know I can't seriously—

CHRIS

No, of course not. I know how Development works.

MERRITT

So do I. But not everyone does.  
(To NEW MERRITT.)  
What's NEA stand for?

NEW MERRITT

National Education Association.

ROYCE, CHRIS and PINKY gasp.

MERRITT

Wrong!

NEW MERRITT

When did Julian Schnabel die?

MERRITT

Exactly? I dunno. Sometime during the war.

PINKY

Which war?

MERRITT

World War Two.

NEW MERRITT

Wrong! Frida Kahlo was married to who?

MERRITT

Senor Kahlo?

PINKY

(Raising a hand.)  
Diego Rivera!

MERRITT

What's the deadline for federal indemnity?

NEW MERRITT

June fifteenth.

ROYCE

Nope!

NEW MERRITT

What does Ganesh look like?

MERRITT

A river. A big dirty river—in China!

NEW MERRITT

Hardly!

MERRITT

What's a 501(c)3?

NEW MERRITT

A...new brand of Levi's?

CHRIS

(Counting off fingers.)

National Endowment for the Arts, Diego Rivera (Pinky was correct), October one and April one—twice a year (which makes that a trick question), Ganesh is an Indian god with an elephant's head—the remover of obstacles, a 501(c)3 is a nonprofit organization such as an art museum, and Julian Schnabel is—alas—still alive.

ROYCE

(Aghast, to both MERRITTS.)  
You don't know anything about art or fundraising.

PINKY

Neither of you.

NEW MERRITT

You know enough to steal my identity, but not enough to steal my job!

MERRITT

I don't know you at all. And you don't know me. I've got what Royce wants.

MERRITT kisses ROYCE as passionately as NEW MERRITT kissed MERRITT earlier.

PINKY

Now, here—!

ROYCE

Merritt, what are you—?

NEW MERRITT

You disgusting fuck!  
(Lunges at MERRITT.)

ROYCE

(Struggling to get away from MERRITT.)  
Just cause I believed in you—!

PINKY

(Lunging at MERRITT.)  
You psychic shit—!

MERRITT, NEW MERRITT, ROYCE and PINKY grapple during the following overlapping dialogue.

MERRITT

Assault! Is that how far you'll go to get a job?

ROYCE

(Pushing NEW MERRITT away.)  
Get off me, you apocalyptic asshole!

NEW MERRITT

And you're a shitty actor! You were horrible in *The Cherry Orchard*!

CHRIS picks up the phone as if answering it, even though it hasn't rung.

CHRIS  
Good afternoon, Development.

MERRITT  
You stunk in that Peter Sellars thing!

CHRIS  
Yes, just a moment.

PINKY  
You're both maniacs! Security!

CHRIS  
Merritt! Cory!

NEW MERRITT AND MERRITT  
(Turning toward CHRIS.)  
What?

CHRIS  
It's your agent.

Both MERRITT and NEW MERRITT lunge for the phone, fighting for it.

MERRITT  
I'm expecting a callback!

NEW MERRITT  
He hasn't called me in two months—!

MERRITT  
(Getting control of the phone.)  
Hello? Hello? Hell—  
(Both MERRITT and NEW MERRITT gasp—they're caught. Glares at CHRIS.)  
Dial tone.

NEW MERRITT  
It didn't even ring.

CHRIS, ROYCE and PINKY stare at MERRITT and NEW MERRITT, who look extremely sheepish.

PINKY

Thank you, Chris. At least someone has presence of mind.

ROYCE

Pinky, should I call security?

PINKY

A wee bit late, Royce. How did this get this far?

ROYCE

I—don't—understand. Merritt had an incredible resume—

NEW MERRITT AND MERRITT

I do!

PINKY

You can write anything on a piece of paper!

ROYCE

And a glowing reference from that Kanschit person—!

PINKY

If you worked for me, I'd lie just to get you to leave!

ROYCE

I'll check with Human Resources. There were a few other resumes that looked good—

PINKY

No! You're not putting us through this torture again.

(To CHRIS.)

You're hired, promoted, whatever.

(To ROYCE.)

No argument. Chris is the only competent person in your department.

CHRIS

But I don't *want* the job.

PINKY

Why not?

ROYCE

Pinky, this is outrageous.

PINKY

Is it salary? I can give you twice what's budgeted.

CHRIS

No, it's not—

ROYCE

Completely insulting. You're undermining me.

PINKY

Extra vacation, a museum credit card—

ROYCE

Pinky, if you force me to hire Chris—!

CHRIS

I still don't want it—

ROYCE

I'm tendering my resignation!

PINKY

Accepted!

CHRIS

I'll take it.  
(They all stare.)  
I'll take the job.

ROYCE

Pinky, you can't fire me.  
(Intimately, in PINKY'S ear.)  
I know too much.

PINKY

I didn't fire you. You resigned. In front of witnesses.  
(To MERRITT and NEW MERRITT.)  
Cory, Merritt, whatever your names are, get out of here. Go back to California and never come here again, even to look at the art.

MERRITT

(Leaving.)  
I hate art anyway.

NEW MERRITT

(Leaving.)

And who'd wanna work here? Everyone's insane.

PINKY

(Stopping CHRIS before CHRIS can speak.)

Thank me later. Make sure those two leave the building. Then I'll need to talk to you. I want you to take over the Development Department in an acting capacity.

(CHRIS goes.)

ROYCE

Pinky. What a lot of dramatics.

PINKY

I'll have Jean process your final check.

(ROYCE just stands there, open-mouthed.)

How could you?

ROYCE

I—I—I was deceived, just as you were—

PINKY

I certainly was.

ROYCE

They were very clever—

PINKY

How could you let that *impostor*—

(Struggling.)

—Touch you?

They stare at each other from across the room as the lights slowly dim. Lights come up on MERRITT and NEW MERRITT standing side by side under a streetlamp, looking grumpy. They are dressed for winter. Offstage, the sound of a champagne cork. After a moment, CHRIS appears, also dressed for winter. They look up at CHRIS. They all freeze, looking very serious. CHRIS pours a glass of champagne with great ceremony. Slowly MERRITT and NEW MERRITT start to grin. After a moment CHRIS grins, too. MERRITT and NEW MERRITT reveal champagne glasses. CHRIS fills them.

CHRIS

(Toasting.)

To apocryphal saints!

They raise their glasses and laugh uproariously.

THE END