

PUPPETEERLESS IN PENNSYLVANIA

a short comedy

by

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## PUPPETEERLESS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Characters

**Trish:** A hand puppet; her head is a peach pie. She is a savvy, enthusiastic “show person” with a friendly, informal manner, and she is also a determined writer.

**Greenfield:** A hand puppet; he is an elk. He is a vain but collegial stage actor with a formal, slightly pompous manner but the heart of a trouper.

A **Park Monitor:** Can be M or F.

*Note: The puppets need not and, perhaps, ought not have elaborate costumes. The dialogue will make it clear what they are, and the play will probably work best if the actors retain their human appearances, with just the token trappings of their puppet identities (e.g., antlers for **Greenfield**, an empty pie-tin “bonnet” for **Trish**) or, perhaps, not even that.*

Time: The Present

Place: Nay Aug Park, Scranton, Pennsylvania

(At center stage is a puppet theater, or a simple booth construction representing a puppet theater. As the lights come up, TRISH is situated behind the counter, visible only from the waist up. A few seconds later, GREENFIELD pops up beside her.)

TRISH

Oh, hello. You must be the new player.

GREENFIELD

(He is friendly, but a little formal in manner.)

Yes. How do you do? Greenfield's the name.

TRISH

Hi, Greenfield. I'm Trish. Welcome to the Nay Aug puppet theater. I hear you and I will be working together.

GREENFIELD

(Cordially)

Excellent. I shall look forward to it.

TRISH

(Looking him over)

So, uh, what are you supposed to be . . . some kind of deer, or something?

GREENFIELD

Well, one is never quite certain, but I *believe* I'm an elk. The children inevitably refer to me as a "moose," however. It used to irk me, but now I simply "roll with it," as current parlance would have it.

TRISH

Yep, that's what you have to do, in show business.

GREENFIELD

And it's a far preferable arrangement, as nobody likes an irked elk. In any event, I can see their point of view.

TRISH

You *do* have sort of a thick head, for an elk.

GREENFIELD

(Proudly)

Thank you for noticing.

TRISH

(Checking to ensure he's not offended)

Oh—I totally mean that as a compliment, of course.

GREENFIELD

Of course: it is most *certainly* a compliment. In fact, my agent thinks the breadth of my head has had much to do with my success as a puppet.

TRISH

Sure. You gotta give the public some face to look at. No kid wants to look at some narrow edge of a puppet face. I mean, where's the *theater* in that?

GREENFIELD

(With professional respect)

You, if I may say so, have a very good face as well.

TRISH

Aw, thanks. I guess it's supposed to be a pie.

GREENFIELD

So I surmised. Erm . . . apple?

TRISH

(Slightly miffed)

*Peach*, if you please.

GREENFIELD

(Quickly)

Oh, yes, how foolish of me. I beg your forgiveness.

TRISH

Hey, it's cool. I didn't mean to make a big deal out of it . . . it's just that I get that all the time.

(Beat)

But it's great to have you on board, Greenfield. I didn't think they'd be able to get me a new co-puppet so quickly. I figured I'd have a bunch more solo shows to sweat through before they lined somebody up.

GREENFIELD

Yes, it all came together with impeccable timing. The puppet show I'd been touring with happened to be on its last weekend when my agent received the call from your people. On Monday—once the terms had been agreed upon, naturally—I hopped into my box, and your boss sprang for UPS Three-Day Select, which I understand isn't too costly for a package that's mostly fake fur and stuffing. Er . . . I hope you'll pardon my anatomical frankness.

TRISH

(Grinning collegially)

No worries about *that*—hey, we're show people, right? And I'm thrilled that we have such a seamless transition. See, things really start to pick up here on Fridays, this time of year. Though attendance might not be too bad today, for a Thursday, with the weather so nice. My tax guy, who also does some work for the city, says

tourist revenues have tripled recently, thanks to *The Office*—and most of those tourists pass through this park.

GREENFIELD

Splendid. So this rôle I'm taking on . . .

(He pronounces *role* with a pretentious flair, rolling the *r* and giving full value to the long *o* sound.)

You had a retirement?

TRISH

(She sighs.)

Yeah, old Sheepdog. What a trouper!

GREENFIELD

A solid performer to work with, eh?

TRISH

The best. Now, he was totally old-school, you understand—he didn't even have any name other than "Sheepdog," as far as I know. And I bet every joke and bark and growl he did in this park, he'd done ten thousand times before. Not a risk taker, ol' S.D. But, wow, what a craftsdog. No matter how frayed his paws got with all the wear and tear, he had a sort of magical glow to him.

GREENFIELD

Aye, that's the sign of a true stage veteran, all right.

(With false humility)

I trust I shall *partially* fill his shoes.

(He looks down toward his feet—then, recalling he has none, he does a double-take to the audience.)

(To TRISH)

That is . . . you know what I mean.

(Beat)

And what manner of audience do you usually get here?

TRISH

(A little disparagingly)

Well, it's a *park* crowd, of course, and you know how that goes. The fidgety kids, the distracted and exhausted parents . . . The ice cream. Constant, constant ice cream.

(She is reminded of a sticky blob of melted ice cream that is still attached to her person, and she spends a moment trying to scrape it off. She soon gives up, with a shrug.)

Luckily for me, pie and ice cream are a pretty good combination.

(PARK MONITOR enters. As he/she approaches the puppet theater, TRISH and GREENFIELD go limp and lifeless. MONITOR seems a bit preoccupied as he/she inspects the puppet theater and examines TRISH and GREENFIELD, whom he/she treats as inanimate objects.)

## MONITOR

(Addressing unseen people whom we infer to be offstage, in the wings)

Hey, folks, I'm real sorry, but there's not going to be any puppet show this afternoon. The puppet lady just phoned our office from the expressway—she's had a fender bender, and she'll be tied up at the garage for who knows how long. If you wanna come back later, though, the evening show is at seven.

(He/she takes another quick look at the puppet equipment, then one at the sky, then a final glance at the puppets. To him/herself.)

Enh—it's not gonna rain. May as well just leave 'em, I guess.

(Exits.)

## TRISH

Now, isn't that typical. You bust your ass—

(She looks down GREENFIELD's body, as he did earlier) well, if you *had* an ass you'd have busted it—in order to get here in time for the afternoon show . . . and first thing that happens is we're canceled!

## GREENFIELD

That's showbiz, isn't it?

(He laughs tolerantly.)

## TRISH

No, Greenfield, I'm pissed about this. I mean, WTF . . . no afternoon puppet show? Just because the *puppeteer* can't make it?

## GREENFIELD

But we could hardly go on without her!

## TRISH

Says who?

## GREENFIELD

But my dear girl, what would we *do*? *Whence* our material?

(Stiffly)

I am *not* an improvisational comedian.

## TRISH

(A little shyly)

Um . . . *I* write a little . . .

## GREENFIELD

(Genuinely interested)

*Do you?* What sort of writing?

## TRISH

Oh, this and that. Lately I've been working on a mosaic novel.

(Even more shyly)

If . . . if you like, I could read you a bit.

GREENFIELD

Please do—that would be most agreeable.

TRISH

(Needing no further encouragement, she whips out a manuscript and proceeds with impassioned enthusiasm.)

This is from the first chapter, which is from the point of view of the rocking horse.

(She begins reading, with dramatic intensity.)

I was built for flattery. My ego is easily accessed from street level. *Stroke here*, says the sign. *Praise lapped up while you wait*.

Fittingly, they'd placed me by the full-length mirror in the nursery. Not facing it, but rather alongside it, so I could catch sidelong glances of myself at opportune moments.

(She reads the following sentence with particular emphasis; it is clear she is especially pleased with it.)

And I found the opportune moments to be many.

(No longer reading)

Well, it goes on like that for a while, but you get the idea.

GREENFIELD

Why, what captivating prose.

TRISH

Aw, gee, d'ya really think so?

GREENFIELD

Absolutely. I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it. No, I'm truly impressed, Trish. You know, I don't believe I've ever met a puppet author before. Certainly not one that was any good.

TRISH

Wow, thanks, Greenfield. So anyway, I was thinking maybe we could use that scene for the show today.

GREENFIELD

(Thoughtfully)

I see . . .

(He coughs discreetly.)

It's—it's a bit *introspective* though, don't you think?

TRISH

Oh, definitely. That's my favorite way to write—less emphasis on action, more on the protagonists' thoughts.

GREENFIELD

Undoubtedly a fine literary technique . . . but are you quite sure it's the right approach . . . for *this*?

(He gestures at the puppet setup and the park around it.)

TRISH

What do you mean?

GREENFIELD

It's just that, by my count, you have one very strong character . . . no dialogue . . . no real *action*, as you say.

TRISH

Well, sure, we'd have to adapt it a little. Like . . . I could be the rocking horse, and you could be . . . oh, I know! You could be the other rocking horse in the mirror.

(Less sure of herself now)

Or maybe the other way around, since I guess you look more like a horse than I do. And we could . . . I don't know . . .

(She is definitely losing confidence.)

I mean, it played really well at open mike. But maybe you're right—this is kind of different.

GREENFIELD

No no, wait, I think you were on to something just now, with the two rocking-horse rôles. Um . . . you *did* say I'd be portraying the *main* rocking horse, yes?

(MONITOR wanders in.)

GREENFIELD

(Quickly, to TRISH)

Allow me.

(To MONITOR, with a touch of "distinguished actor" arrogance)

You there.

(MONITOR looks around, wondering who has spoken.)

GREENFIELD

Over here.

(MONITOR turns toward the puppet theater, and jumps when he/she realizes the puppets are not dormant.)

GREENFIELD

Would you be so kind as to tell those good people that there *will*, in fact, be a performance this afternoon?

MONITOR

(Still a bit rattled)

I—I don't understand.



(Attempting to make sense of things)

Did the puppet lady phone you, or something?

TRISH

Don't be ridiculous. You know puppets can't talk on the phone.

(MONITOR does a bemused reaction "take" to the audience.)

GREENFIELD

And yet, the show must go on.

(With a nod to TRISH)

As professionals, it behooves us to see that it *will* go on. And I use the term *behooves* advisedly, being a hoofed animal myself.

TRISH

You said it, Greenfield.

(Importantly, to MONITOR)

So *we* will be filling in for the absent puppeteer. And, being a pie, I use the term *filling* advisedly.

(TRISH and GREENFIELD chuckle together at their tag-team wit.)

MONITOR

Gee, I don't know, guys . . .

TRISH

What's the issue?

(With an artist's contempt for business matters)

Is there a *guarantee* to pay, or something?

GREENFIELD

A guarantee? Balderdash. The venue is booked, the performance has been scheduled, and this silly park monitor is *turning people away*.

(To MONITOR)

We won't stand for it, I tell you. Now, hurry along and catch those lovely tourists before they leave the park. Let them know we'll be ready in twenty minutes—we have a few script revisions to attend to.

TRISH

Make that *ten* minutes.

MONITOR

But look . . . aren't you nervous about doing this without anyone . . . anyone . . . back *there*?

(He/she points behind the puppet theater.)

TRISH

Not a chance. We're fearless!

GREENFIELD

Peerless!

TRISH and GREENFIELD

(Together)

Puppeteerless!

(MONITOR, giving in, shrugs and then exits, in order to carry out their instructions. GREENFIELD rubs his paws with glee as TRISH begins hastily writing revisions on her script.)

GREENFIELD

(With relish)

My, this is exciting.

TRISH

(Exuberantly)

Hey, I really appreciate your taking a chance on my work. And after we get through this performance, drinks are on me, OK?

(She hesitates.)

Oh . . . unless you already have a date tonight?

GREENFIELD

No, tonight I'm—ahem—*stag*.

TRISH

(Laughing)

OK then, we're on. I'll just have to make sure I don't overdo it—and get *pie-eyed*.

(TRISH laughs uproariously at her own joke. GREENFIELD joins in her laughter, as the lights go down.)

(The End)