

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

(dialogue sample)

by

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CHARACTERS

GRIFF, male, late 20s - late 30s, a desperate man

NANCY, female, late 20s - late 30s, GRIFF's ex-wife

CORVE, male, late 20s - late 30s, GRIFF's best friend

CARLA, female, late 20s - late 30s, a kind of stage manager,
a kind of performer

SETTING

The stage is bare. A boom-box, two chairs and some small props are brought on during the course of the play.

At the beginning of the play, CARLA lays a tape line downstage-to-upstage, bisecting the space.

STAGE DIRECTIONS NOTE

In the stage directions, left means stage left, right means stage right.

PERFORMANCE NOTE

The actors should perform the play with casual ease -- they never try too hard in the "acted" scenes to evoke their environment. Inelegance is desirable. A familiar rapport with the audience is necessary, as well as a comfort in the presence of these strangers. It's as if the company is getting the show on its feet for the first time, for a group of friends, before production elements are brought in.

There is one aspect of performance that SHOULD NOT be played awkwardly: the actors positions on either side of the line. They should always be clear which side they're on. They should never be correcting themselves, as part of the staging.

(Bare stage. As the lights rise, CARLA secures one end of a roll of tape to the floor, down center. She walks to the rear, unrolling the tape, bisecting the stage. She straightens the tape, and it adheres to the floor. She exits left. A moment of empty space.)

GRIFF enters from stage right. He addresses us. The following is done fairly rapidly:)

GRIFF

Day.

(He crosses to stage left.)

Night.

(He crosses back to stage right.)

Cold.

(Crosses to stage left.)

Hot.

(Crosses right.)

Recession.

(Left.)

Recovery.

(Right.)

It's impossible to find a toilet paper that is both inexpensive and plush.

(Left.)

"Plush" brand toilet paper, one ninety-nine a six-pack.

(MORE)

(Right. He sings a few bars of Joplin's "The Entertainer.")

Left. He sings a few bars of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

Right.)

GRIFF (*cont'd*)

We're in a war engineered by nefarious billionaires who wish to create a security state.

(Left.)

We're in a war against medieval thugs, with the survival of civilization at stake.

(Right.)

It's the carbs.

(Left.)

It's the fat.

(CORVE enters right, startling GRIFF.)

CORVE

Griff, what the hell are you doing?

GRIFF (*to himself:*)

Amazing.

(To CORVE:) Hey man. I'm showing them the border.

CORVE

That was stupid.

(to the audience:) Okay, hi there. It's simple. Griff thinks there's a border in his life. Things on one side of the border are the opposite on the other. He's a little cuckoo. No, he's a lotta cuckoo.

(to GRIFF:) They think you're cuckoo. I swear there's no border. If you think there's a border -

(He crosses to the left. Without missing a beat:)

CORVE (*cont'd*)

- then I swear you gotta say so. Who cares what people think? I don't wanna hear anyone saying my buddy's cuckoo.

(CARLA enters left, with a boom-box.)

CARLA

Better get started, Griffin. We don't have much time.

(She places it left and exits left.)

GRIFF *(to audience:)*

Hi everybody. This will be a little rough tonight. Loose, under-rehearsed. Like a proposal. Or a funeral. This's the only way you can bear witness. My congregation!

(NANCY enters from right.)

NANCY

Griff, what's -

(to the audience:) Hi.

(to GRIFF:) Where's Carla? Who are these people?

GRIFF

Witnesses, honey. It's the only way to get things right.

(to audience:) This is Nancy, everybody. My wife.

NANCY

Sweetie, it's ex-wife.

(NANCY notices CORVE.)

NANCY *(cont'd)*

He-llo.

CORVE

Um, hey.

GRIFF

That's Corve, my best friend and also...well it's complicated.

CORVE

Know what's weird? I can't remember how I got here. I musta got wasted last night.

GRIFF

We're gonna explain everything. Together.

(CARLA enters with a cardboard box.)

GRIFF *(to audience:)*

That's Carla. She runs things here. This is her domain.

NANCY

I remember Carla asked me to help her...but I didn't know it was anything with Griffin.

CARLA

If I said we were putting on Griffin's show, would you have come? Duh.

GRIFF

It's my put-everything-and-everyone-back-together show.

NANCY

You and me back together? You know that's not possible.

CARLA (to NANCY:)

Just play along, for laughs.

NANCY (to CORVE:)

You don't mind playing along with this?

CORVE

What the hell, right? Couldn't hurt.

(CARLA places the cardboard box up center and exits left.)

GRIFF (to audience:)

This is my show about the border, and Nancy. I got the border, and lost her, both on one terrible, terrible night.

It started the night Nancy and I went to her favorite show.

CORVE (to audience:)

Carla performs this awesome midnight show, "Quantomedy" -

(He crosses right to help GRIFF carry in chairs.)

CORVE (cont'd)

It's this stupid friggin' show.

(GRIFF and NANCY sit in the chairs as if they are an audience.)

NANCY (to audience:)

It's a brilliant show. All right, Carla's concept is a little hard to understand the first time you see it...

(CARLA's show, "QUANTOMEDY": CARLA enters and hits play on the boom-box. Bombastic music! Interpretive dance! CARLA swims, she explodes, she makes love, she shoots herself in the head...She meows. She looks around, as if trying to find what's meowing. She

fetches the cardboard box. She opens it. There's a drawing of a cat inside. She puts the box on her head.

NANCY applauds. CARLA takes the box off her head.)

CARLA (to audience:)

These are just highlights from the piece.

CORVE (to audience:)

Yeah, the other hour and a half makes even less sense.

CARLA (to CORVE:)

Could you kill the music for me, please?

(CORVE crosses left to the boom-box.)

CARLA (cont'd, to audience:)

These are just highlights from the piece.

CORVE (to audience:)

You gotta check out the other hour-and-a-half, it's amazing!

(CARLA hands out flyers for "Quantometry" to the audience. CORVE returns right.)

GRIFF (to audience:)

The first part is like what you saw, but then, she does the whole thing again, except...

(CARLA does the same interpretive dance again, speaking the following text.)

CARLA

I turned on the CD that I stole from my friend. This dance is a series of microscopic stillnesses. I swam in the Pacific and tried to evolve cetaceously. I watched fireworks and thought of a war between colors. In your parents' bed we touched each other's membranes. I was dead but not until after I demonstrated it. I heard a cat. It yowled from this box. I opened this box.

(She does. This time, no cat. NANCY claps. CARLA stops her with a hand.)

CARLA (cont'd)

Why can't I have everything?

GRIFF

She had never said that before.

NANCY

It was like cold water thrown on me.

(CARLA puts the box on her head.)

GRIFF

Nancy was silent the entire drive home. Parked in our driveway, just to make conversation I said, "Carla never said that line before. 'Why can't I have everything?'" And there was an earth-shattering -

NANCY

Look, if you have to do this, let's actually do it.

GRIFF

Okay. Let's act now.

(GRIFF mimes a steering wheel.)

GRIFF *(cont'd, in the "scene":)*

Carla never said that line before. "Why can't I have everything?"

CARLA *(to audience:)*

There was an earth-shattering crack! The fabric of reality shook! But they thought it was just a semi hitting a pothole.

NANCY

This isn't working out.

GRIFF

What do you mean?

NANCY

Us. We're not working out. I want something else...

GRIFF

Not working out? What do you - ?

NANCY

We got married too soon. I told you it was too soon.

GRIFF

You said you were a little scared, but you didn't -

NANCY

I told you it was too soon.

GRIFF

You said you were scared.

NANCY

I said it was too soon.

GRIFF

I have it recorded in my brain. It was Corve's Oktoberfest party. By the sausage platters. I wore lederhosen.

CORVE *(to audience:)*

My parties always have awesome themes.

GRIFF

We were slow-dancing.

(CARLA hits "play" on the boom-box. "Lady In Red" by Chris de Burgh -- or something like that -- plays. GRIFF takes NANCY by the hand and acts out the following, on the border.)

GRIFF *(cont'd)*

I had just given you your gift -- the glass dolphin.

NANCY

It was beautiful, my glass dolphin.

GRIFF

I said -- it was impulsive -- "Nancy, please be my wife?"

NANCY *(to audience:)*

It was the first time we'd slow-danced.

GRIFF

You said, "I'm scared." I was like, "Why?"

NANCY *(to audience:)*

I looked at this gift of a glass dolphin and thought, "Could he really be the one?"

GRIFF

Then you said, "It's maybe too soon."

NANCY

No, I said, "It's too soon."

GRIFF

No, you said, "It's *maybe* too soon." It was uncharacteristically awkward grammar.

NANCY

I'm not going to argue over one word with you.

GRIFF

Just dance with me -

(He pulls her close. CARLA turns off the boom-box.)

CARLA

We don't have a lot of time.

(to CORVE:) C'mon, big fella, this is for just them.

CORVE

Just them? There's this whole goddamn audience.

CARLA

I got a half-rack of Bud and cable in the dressing room.

CORVE

Okay.

(CORVE and CARLA exit right.)

GRIFF *(to audience:)*

After the car, we were in our bedroom. She was packing. Me, stunned. Finally I ask her why.

(GRIFF pulls NANCY right.)

NANCY *(out of the "scene":)*

You want to bring this up in front of...?

(To the audience:) Cunnilingus. He's really terrible at it. He's really bad at all of it, but especially that. When Carla said what she had never said before, I had this vision of a future without even passable cunnilingus.

GRIFF

I'll read a "how-to" book.

NANCY

I told him where I was going.

(to GRIFF, in "scene":) I'm going to stay with Lindsey.

GRIFF *(to audience:)*

She went into the kitchen. I followed her...

(MORE)

(He pulls NANCY left.)

GRIFF (*cont'd*)

She was taking some food out of the fridge, like Lindsey didn't have. I said, "Like Lindsey doesn't have any food."

NANCY (*to audience:*)

I wasn't staying with Lindsey. I said Jennifer.

GRIFF (*to audience:*)

Then she asked if I wanted to have sex one more time.

NANCY (*to audience:*)

Now be fair. Who here *hasn't* had a breakup round?

GRIFF

I said, "Okay let's do it, but tell me how you like cunnilingus so I can do it right."

NANCY (*in the "scene":*)

How can I improve on perfection?

GRIFF

You said you were leaving me because I was so bad at cunnilingus.

NANCY

I said I *stayed* because you're so *good* at cunnilingus.

GRIFF

You said, "Cunnilingus. You're really terrible at it."

NANCY

I'm positive I never said -

GRIFF

I have that moment recorded in -

NANCY

You want to bring this up in front of...?!

(*To the audience:*) The problem is that...I'm indifferent to him. When Carla said what she had never said before, I had a vision of a future without love.

GRIFF (*to audience:*)

I went into the bedroom -- kinda mad, but also aroused -- she was right behind -

(*They cross right. To NANCY:*)

NANCY (*to GRIFF, in the "scene":*)
Sweetie, why do you think sex will change my mind? You're bad at it.

GRIFF
It was your idea.

NANCY
It would never be my idea.

GRIFF
We were standing -

(He crosses left. She follows.)

GRIFF (*cont'd*)
- right here. You said you wanted to have sex.

NANCY
Yes, quit being annoying and let's do it.

(They cross right.)

NANCY (*cont'd*)
Sweetie, I don't want to do it with you ever again.

GRIFF (*to audience:*)
And then...it sorta occurred to me.

(Pause.

He gently guides NANCY left.)

GRIFF (*cont'd*)
Do you want me?

NANCY
Yes.

(He guides her right.)

GRIFF
Do you want me?

NANCY
No.

(He guides her left.)

GRIFF
Do you love me?

NANCY

No.

(He guides her right.)

GRIFF

Do you love me?

NANCY

Yes.

(He lets her go.)

GRIFF examines the border, as if for the first time.)

GRIFF *(to audience:)*

I couldn't actually see it, but...the more aware of it you are, the more you can feel it -- the shift. It's like -- you know how you press two magnets together, and as you slide them across one another there's a little...push? There's this invisible, but undeniable...shift, from one pole to the other. You can stay on the push there for a second, but then you shift to one side. That's what it's like on the border. It runs right down the middle of our house, about a foot off our bedroom door, through the wall, out into the driveway...

NANCY *(to audience:)*

I tried to be gentle, when he started going on about this "border." I said, "Sweetie, the world isn't splitting in half. We are."

GRIFF

Yeah...I guess I freaked out a bit when you said that.

NANCY

Freaked out? You grabbed me.

(They go through the motions of their struggle, on the line.)

GRIFF

I wanted you to feel the border, the way I felt it.

NANCY

I was so mad at you, I started to whack at you.

GRIFF

Finally you slipped your wrist free.