

I Saw This in Paducah!**A ten minute play****Characters**

ALICE, female, white, 40+

BARB, female, white, 40+

ANNOUNCER

Voice of HARRIET TUBMAN

Time

An evening during the present time.

Location

A small community theatre in Amarillo, Texas

Synopsis: Alice and Barb are attending a ten-minute play festival in Amarillo. They love seeing World Premieres of ten-minute plays, but Barb realizes she has seen one of the plays before. This fact, and the play's subject matter, prove too much for Barb to endure.

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I Saw This in Paducah!

ALICE and BARB are seated in a theater.

ALICE

I just love having a friend who enjoys going to ten-minute play festivals as much as I do.

BARB

Me too! I'm never bored!

ALICE

By me?

BARB

By the plays! Even if you hate what's on stage, it's only ten minutes -

ALICE

Or you might love it -

BARB

But either way, it's over just like that!

ALICE

Right! And then on to the next!

BARB

And if something disturbs you or challenges you too much, you are not forced to think about it for more than ten minutes.

ALICE

But you can think about it afterwards.

BARB

But you don't HAVE to.

ALICE

Sometimes I like to!

BARB

And you never have to see those disturbing images again. Or feel those horrible feelings!

ALICE

Aren't there plays you WANT to see again?

BARB

It's a mute point, since we only go to WORLD PREMIERES!

ALICE

It's a *moot* point.

BARB

RIGHT!

ALICE

I love how homespun and unpretentious these festivals are.

BARB

So not like "the theeeee-uhh-tahhh."

ALICE

I know, right? Just Mom and Pop.

BARB

Not even! Mostly Mom OR Pop! Just a few martyrs keeping a 2500-year-old art form breathing.

ALICE

Remember that festival we saw where the only prop could be a pink scarf?

BARB

Right! Because the only thing the producer owned that they could part with was a pink scarf.

ALICE

Right! They were so poor they had nothing else. The theatre was so cold...

BARB

NO! It was so HOT! That was the Charlotte Ten By Nine By Eight by Fourteen in August!

ALICE

Oh, right! NO a/c. What was the cold one?

BARB

The cold one was in Grand Rapids in February. The BRRRRRRRRRRR Festival!

ALICE

Right! The theatre was so poor they had no heat.

BARB

No, they had heat. But the plays had to feature a snowball.

ALICE

Right! Which had to stay intact through all ten plays.

BARB

So no heat in the theatre! That was tense! Since the audience's body heat threatened to melt the snowball!

ALICE

It was tense! That one had the play about the white police officer who shot the young –

BARB

Don't bring that up!

ALICE

The kid had thrown a snowball, and the officer overreacted, and -

BARB

I remember, and I don't want to think about that one anymore.

ALICE

I think about it. Every time there's another news story about a person who gets –

BARB

I prefer to live in the moment, Alice. Savor the ten minutes you're in.

ALICE

But Barb, what's the point if you can't recollect?

BARB

I recollect that I did most of the driving to Grand Rapids.

ALICE

Because I had just driven the weekend before to Schenectady. Right?

BARB

Right.

ALICE

What was the one in Schenectady called? That was a cold one, too.

BARB

That was the theatre too poor to have heat.

ALICE

Right! Where you had to bring your own blanket...

BARB

And the audience had to take turns warming up the actors between plays.

ALICE

That was fun. That lovely young man....mmmmm..... He was the young professor in that play about the college student whose professor assumes that because she's African-Amer-

BARB

There's no point in rehashing that play. Or any play that we've already seen already.

ALICE

It got me thinking about how often people pre-judge, or even how I pre-judge people based on –

BARB

Some people brought comfortables instead of blankets. Which was wrong!

ALICE

They brought *comforters*.

BARB

Right! And we didn't even see Opening Night. We didn't even see opening weekend.

ALICE

I couldn't help getting the norovirus!

BARB

I'm not blaming you for that! It just would have been nice to have seen the candle.

ALICE

Right! It was the "Blanket and Candle" Plays.

BARB

Well, the candle was there for the first weekend. But they were so poor they didn't even have a real candle for the second weekend. They did our weekend with a paper candle.

ALICE

Right! They burned it all up.

BARB

They burned it DOWN.

ALICE

A candle burns UP.

BARB

A candle burns DOWN!

ALICE
I couldn't help getting the norovirus!

BARB
I am not driving the whole nineteen hours back home!

ALICE
This evening should be good. "The Twenty Dollar Bill Plays."

BARB
That's a boring title.

ALICE
She says after a nineteen-hour drive. (*reading from the program*) "Each play features a twenty dollar bill, in some meaningful way."

BARB
At least this theatre has twenty dollars to spend on a prop! Unless it's counterpunch.

ALICE
Counterfeit.

BARB
You look just like you did before the norovirus struck.

ALICE
What's the first play called?

BARB
"Andrew and Harriet."

ALICE
Ooh...I bet that's going to be about Andrew Jackson and Harriet Tubman. Because he's on the twenty-dollar bill and she's supposed to replace him.

BARB
WAIT!

ALICE
What?

BARB
I saw this in Paducah!

ALICE
Paducah?

BARB
At the ten by nine by three by two by four.

ALICE
I didn't go to that.

BARB
Because you objected to the concept. Ten plays, nine minutes, three actors, and a single two by four for the entire set.

ALICE
I can't be moved by a piece of wood.

BARB
And I had to eat at the Denny's in downtown Paducah all by myself.

ALICE
But you got to eat the whole banana split, so...

BARB
And then I went, sated, to the Paducah Playhouse and saw, among other things...ANDREW
AND HARRIET!

ALICE
Did you like it?

BARB
Doesn't matter! The rules of this contest are WORLD PREMIERES! One of these ten plays is
not a world premiere!!

ALICE
But did you like it? I mean, that was Paducah. But this...THIS is AMARILLO!

BARB
Paducah and Amarillo are in the same WORLD...

ALICE
I know, but how many people -

BARB
Rules matter!

ALICE

But how many people were at the show in Paducah?

BARB

That's not the point.

ALICE

I know, but it'll be the first time I've seen it, and if it's a good play...is it a good play?

BARB

It's STALE!

ALICE

How can it be stale?

BARB

Because it's been done! Old. Passé. Viejo. You would share my outrage had you come to Paducah!

ALICE

I couldn't bear the concept of a single two-by-four!

BARB

It had a beautiful grain!

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and Gentleman, welcome to Amarillo Little Theatre's Annual Festival of Ranchy Raunchy Shorts by Eight by Ten! First off is "Andrew and Harriet" by Rich Espey of Baltimore, Maryland.

ALICE

Oh, I think we saw a show by him in Ypsilanti? And maybe Albuquerque, too?

BARB

Stop the show! STOP THE SHOW! I saw this play in Paducah two weeks ago! This is NOT a World Premiere, and you promised that every show we would be seeing tonight is a World Premiere!

ANNOUNCER

You saw this two weeks ago?

BARB

In Paducah!

ANNOUNCER

What's it about?

BARB

What's it about?

ANNOUNCER

Yeah, if you saw it!

BARB

It's about Harriet Tubman confronting Andrew Jackson and explaining how she deserves to be on the twenty-dollar bill.

ALICE

Ooh, that sounds thought-provoking!

ANNOUNCER

Yeah, it's good. True, not a typical curtain-raiser, but -

BARB

I don't want to see it again! Harriet Tubman arguing that she deserves to be on the twenty dollar bill because Andrew Jackson was a ringleader of American violence and racism that legally sanctioned enslavement, torture, and genocide against communities of color, and claiming that same oppression persists to this day in the form of economic inequality in which white people have a three hundred year head start at wealth building, while people of color continue to pay the literal price for those centuries of disadvantage. Ugh!

ALICE

So Harriet Tubman replacing Andrew Jackson, while far from literal monetary reparations, would at least be a symbolic first step?

BARB

I've already had to sit through this diatribe once. Rich Espey has already had his say, and now he has tried to pull one over on you! Did you even Google? Did you? Announcer?

ANNOUNCER

We...we did Google. And it hadn't been performed when we accepted it.

BARB

But it WAS performed. In Paducah!

ANNOUNCER

We know. He emailed us and let us know. But we already cast it, and the cast was enjoying rehearsing it, and -

BARB

I've seen this!

ALICE

It sounds like something people should see. Right? Right? Right?

BARB

A hundred and sixty-four people saw it in Paducah two weeks ago!

ANNOUNCER

And we want people to see it in Amarillo.

BARB

Then I am leaving!

ALICE

What is so hard about listening to the truth for ten minutes about how the United States of America was founded on violence and racism which perpetuates today and continues to enrich white people and oppress people of color?

Long pause.

BARB

It's the principle of the thing. World. Premieres. Only. I'll be at Denny's. Eating a banana split.

BARB exits.

ALICE

I'm sorry about that. She's very particular, especially when it comes to ten-minute play festivals. We both are, actually. And, honestly, they really should be World Premieres if you say they're World Premieres. Rules matter. They count for something. We need order. We need things in their proper place. We need things to be as they always have been. There's too much challenging of things going on! All the hashtags and whatnot. I say...I say...Hashtag Rules And Order. Hashtag RULES AND ORDER! Right? Right???

ANNOUNCER

Are you going to leave, too? Because we are going to start.

ALICE leaves her seat and begins to exit.

ALICE

I'm going...

Is it a good play?

Is it?

ANNOUNCER

"Andrew and Harriet" by Rich Espey.

Images of Andrew Jackson and Harriet Tubman are displayed. The audience can see them for a full minute, in silence.

Voice of HARRIET TUBMAN

Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.

ALICE returns to her seat.

END OF PLAY