

THE OPTIMISM OF YOUTH

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A One Act Stage Play

by

Steven G. Jackson

## Cast of Characters

<u>Jennifer:</u>	Producer
<u>Ink Slinger:</u>	Optimistic Teenage Playwright
<u>Mythmaker Word Smith:</u>	Dour Teenage Playwright
<u>Gogh Between:</u>	Unscrupulous Agent
<u>Hack Thespian:</u>	Bad Actor
<u>Muse:</u>	Dog

## Scene

The theatre, with a desk and two chairs on each raised stage, and a love seat set in the back. A statue of a dog is next to a desk.

SETTING:                   The theatre, with a desk and a chair on each raised stage, and a love seat set in the back. A statue of a dog is next to a desk.

AT RISE:                   INK SLINGER and MYTHMAKER WORD SMITH are each seated at a table. Ink is next to the dog.

JENNIFER enters, followed by HACK THESPIAN.

HACK

Jennifer, you know you need me to star in this production.

JENNIFER

I already told you. Twenty-Four Hour Creative is fully cast.

HACK

But certainly you have room for your favorite actor. Imagine your audience seeing the name of Hack Thespian on the board outside. I've been a star in the show every year. You *need* me.

JENNIFER

(tries not to laugh)

You should have come to the actor auditions.

HACK

Me? Audition? You can't be serious. How pedestrian. Now, just point me to the correct play, and we can watch the glimmer in their eyes when they see me come to lift them from the bowels of despair.

JENNIFER

I can. Excuse me, I have two new writers to meet.

HACK

You haven't heard the last of this. I'll go over your head. I'll take this to the President of the Theatre. The mayor, if need be.

HACK exits in a huff. JENNIFER turns her attention to INK SLINGER and MYTHMAKER WORD SMITH.

JENNIFER

Excellent, you're both here. Welcome to 24 Hour Creative. I'm Jennifer, your producer. You two know why you're here, right?

INK

My mom said you wanted all teenage writers this year. That's really cool.

JENNIFER

We needed some fresh ideas. Some *optimism* that only our youth can provide.

MYTHMAKER

And we each have to write a play overnight? I'm not sure I can do that.

JENNIFER

Don't worry. We once had a playwright named Jackson. If he can do it, anyone can. Now, which one of you is Ink Slinger?

INK excitedly raises her hand.

JENNIFER (CONT)

And you must be Mythmaker Word Smith.

MYTHMAKER

(with no enthusiasm)

That's me.

JENNIFER

Your parents have agreed you can work here on the set all night as long as I stay to supervise.

INK

I'm so excited!

JENNIFER

Me, too. Is this your dog?

INK

His name is Muse. He's very well trained.

INK addresses Muse.

INK

Sit . . . Stay . . . Good dog.

JENNIFER

Does he do tricks?

INK

Oh, sure. Roll over.

Muse doesn't budge.

INK (CONT)

Shake.

INK gives Jennifer a perplexed look.

INK (CONT)

Sometimes he gets nervous around strangers.

JENNIFER

Hmm. Are you two ready to write?

MYTHMAKER

How do you get ready for writing a play in seven hours?

INK

It'll be fun.

MYTHMAKER

You're always optimistic. But that's not how reality works.

JENNIFER

It's an opportunity to show how creative you can be. I challenge all my writers to be like our beloved playwright, Bruce. His brilliance jumped off the page.

MYTHMAKER

The whole "write a play overnight" sounds like literary masochism.

INK

So what's the theme? We both like writing comedies, so hopefully you've got something funny for us.

JENNIFER

I want you to write a play about the existential dread associated with the rejection of all science and the absurdity of life.

MYTHMAKER

(astonished pause)

What? I don't even know what that means.

INK

That theme sounds like kind of a buzz kill.

JENNIFER

It's all part of the challenge. Now, I'll be back here on the sofa resting. Good luck, and have fun. Let me know if you need anything.

JENNIFER retreats to the love seat and lays down.

MYTHMAKER

I can't believe you talked me into this. What if I have nothing to say?

INK

You'll be fine.

MYTHMAKER

I doubt it. I'm going to look for caffeine. Then check out the props in the back. Maybe they'll inspire me.

MYTHMAKER exits. INK turns to Muse.

INK

I like to start with a good title, then name my characters, then fill in their story. What should I call this?

INK stares at the audience. After a few moments, JENNIFER snores, startling INK. The snores repeat, each time getting a stronger reaction from INK. MYTHMAKER returns.

MYTHMAKER

What do you think of a play about a magical casting couch that tells the casting director what role every actor should have.

INK

That's dumb. Besides, a casting couch isn't appropriate. Too many stories of abuse in Hollywood.

MYTHMAKER

Okay, instead of a couch, how about we use a tequila bottle. The color of the tequila changes when an actor drinks from it, telling the director which role to cast them in. I'll call it, "Tequila is my Favorite Color."

INK

What do you know about tequila?

MYTHMAKER

(indignant)

I read.

INK

We need to find something that ties to the theme, and won't offend anyone.

MYTHMAKER

Good luck with that. Everything offends someone these days.

INK

Keep thinking. Time's a wasting.

MYTHMAKER

What made you think we could write a play overnight?

INK

Stay positive. It'll come to us.

MYTHMAKER

(has an epiphany)

Wait a second. This time I think I'm really on to something. I need to check the prop room again.

MYTHMAKER exits.

INK

(to Muse)

It's time to step up, Muse. I can't let sourpuss get the best of me.

INK stares blankly at the audience. JENNIFER's snoring wakes herself up and, embarrassed, she comes to check on INK.

JENNIFER

How's the playwriting?

INK

I'm still searching for an idea.

JENNIFER

It's three o'clock. Was my optimism about my youth movement unrealistic?

INK

Totally realistic. I've got this.

MYTHMAKER returns wearing a conehead cap.

MYTHMAKER

Look what I found. My play will be called "Mr. Conehead Goes to Washington."

INK

You look ridiculous.

JENNIFER

How does that tie into our theme?

MYTHMAKER

It'll have an outsider being sent to Washington, including all the existential ingredients. Dread, the rejection of science, and absurdity.

JENNIFER

That'll work. Type it up.

GOGH BETWEEN and HACK THESPIAN enter and greet JENNIFER, who is not thrilled to see them. INK and MYTHMAKER work at their tables.

HACK

Lucky for you, I decided to give you another chance.

JENNIFER

Lucky? You mean bad luck?

HACK

I've graciously returned to save your production.

(points to GOGH)

You remember my agent, Gogh Between?

GOGH

That's spelled G-O-G-H, like the painter. The GH is silent. Now, my client roused me out of bed to negotiate with you. Can we get this done quickly? I've got much more important people to talk to today.

JENNIFER ignores them.

HACK

So, what leading role do you have for me? And what kind of compensation are you offering?

JENNIFER

(offended)

You know we all donate our time for this. To honor Bruce.

HACK

But, darling, I'm a *star*. Surely you will make an exception for me.

GOGH

We'll require top billing, of course. And a private dressing room filled with our choice of fine wines and caviar. Also, a percentage of the gate. Say, 50%?

JENNIFER ignores them.

GOGH

Okay, we can come down to 40%. But not a penny less.

JENNIFER glares at them.

HACK

Playing hard to get, are we?

JENNIFER goes back to ignoring them. GOGH BETWEEN and HACK THESPIAN huddle, then return their attention to JENNIFER.

GOGH

We're willing to cut the usual fee in half. Just for you. And we can waive the fine wines. This is a one time offer, and you must act now. Perhaps a nice spread is possible?

JENNIFER

You're not listening. I have no role for your client.

GOGH

You drive a hard bargain. I tell you what I'll do. Just for you. I want Hack's face on the billboard out front. Do that, and I will skip the rest of our demands. Final offer.

HACK

Jennifer, be realistic. I can make your production a hit. You know it, and I know it.

JENNIFER

I have plenty of exceptional writers, directors, and actors. We put on the best creative show in town, and I'm proud of every one of them.

HACK

Well, I can't believe my ears. Just for that, I *refuse* to be in your stupid show. Come, Gogh. And you better have something for me soon. My VISA payment is due next week.

GOGH BETWEEN and HACK THESPIAN exit.

INK

Who was that?

JENNIFER

Hack Thespian. Lousy actor. But you have to admire the blind optimism. Even as unrealistic as it is.

INK

(snaps her fingers)

That gives me an idea. We just studied Don Quixote in school. What was he? An unrealistic optimist. And, he came to understand the absurdity of his existence. We see examples just like him every day. Some people are justified in their optimism, and some people are kind of delusional. The delusional ones are optimistic, which is good, but it's not based on anything real, which is bad. I can write about that.

JENNIFER

And your play?

INK

"The Chef of La Mancha." About a pizza parlor owner who starts a quest for the impossible dream. The first pizza parlor to get a Michelin Star.

JENNIFER

I like it. This is going to be the best show yet. Thanks to you both.

HACK THESPIAN returns.

HACK

Excuse me, but my car got towed. Who knew they were serious about those parking signs? I know how beloved you are in this town. Do you think you can put in a good word for me with the mayor?

JENNIFER

(smiles)

I'll see what I can do.

HACK

Thanks. One more thing. I'm a little short right now, and I'd really like to see the show. Any chance you can comp me this one time?

JENNIFER

I think that makes three in a row, but, yeah, I'll tell the box office to hold a seat for you.

HACK

Thanks. It really is the best show in town.

HACK THESPIAN nods to JENNIFER and exits.

INK

I like being part of the best show in town. Can we come back and write next year?

MYTHMAKER

Yeah, can we?

JENNIFER

Once you get a taste of this event, you'll want to return every year. Twenty-four Hour Creative is like the Hotel California. You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave.

(FADE TO BLACK)