

HORST AND GRABEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNFINISHED MAN

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Jeffrey Gold

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**HORST AND GRABEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
UNFINISHED MAN**

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SYNOPSIS: In this short absurdist comedy, Horst, an everyman, is waiting for a bus in the middle of the desert. Graben, a manipulative social Darwinist, approaches Horst and attempts to convince him of the futility of his endeavor.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN)

HORST (m).....(Pronounced "Horst") is not a victim, but embodies small-town sensibilities. An everyman, he dresses in a nondescript way. He harbors nostalgia for nothing, save for the remains of his family: his daughter.

GRABEN (m).....(Pronounced "Grayben") approaches life as if it were a zero-sum game. If he knew the term and was honest in the self-diagnosis of his affliction, he'd call himself a social Darwinist. He dresses like a used-car salesman, wearing his best threads to impress a new broad on a lunch date.

TIME & PLACE

An expansive desert. Early evening.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play should be performed at a natural pace that accurately depicts the conversation of two strangers, including palpably awkward silences.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Reading at the American Express/Salt Lake Acting Company New Play Sounding Series, April 15, 2002. Kurt Proctor read Horst and Dan Larrinaga read Graben.

Reading at the Sawtooth Writers Conference in Stanley, Idaho, June 28, 2002. Jeffrey Gold read Horst and Jeff Metcalf read Graben.

Winner of the CrossCurrents Culture Unlimited National Five and Dime Playwriting Contest, January 2003. Produced March 14-29, 2003, at the Just Off Broadway Theatre, Kansas City, Missouri. Director: Steve Mathews. Ronda Mowbrey played Horst and Tarre Beach played Graben.

Winner in the 2003 Boca Raton Theatre Guild Short Play Reading Festival, Boca Raton, Florida. Staged reading at the Boca Raton Theatre Guild, April/May 2003. Director: Dena Nathanson.

Finalist in the 2003 Ten by Ten in the Triangle Playwriting Festival, North Carolina. Winner, Shorts in Winter Playwriting Competition, Theatre Orange, North Carolina, February 2004.

Full play history is available at www.jeffreygold.com.

AT RISE:

The stage lights are low and the lighting simulates the alpenglow of early twilight. An underscore of a foreboding, unsettling nature is heard. There are mountains in the far distance on a canvas that stretches the entire width of the stage. A lone man, HORST, stands next to a sign in the middle of the stage. HE stands there for some time. Then a voice offstage calls out to him:

GRABEN: *(Offstage.)* Hey there! *(HORST looks around. GRABEN continues from offstage.)* Hey! You! *(Comes onstage, out of breath.)* How's it goin'? *(Drops his possessions to the ground and reaches out a hand.)* Graben's the name.

HORST: *(Doesn't shake his hand.)* Horst.

GRABEN: Fancy meeting someone way out here.

Long beat while HE's rummaging through his stuff.

GRABEN: What're you doing out here?

HORST: Waiting for the bus.

GRABEN: *(Distracted, not paying attention.)* The what?

HORST: The bus.

GRABEN: What bus?

HORST: The bus.

GRABEN: What are you talking about?

HORST: Sign here says bus. I'm waiting for the bus.

GRABEN: You've got to be kidding me. Bus.

HORST: Sign says bus.

GRABEN: I know what the sign says. Ain't no buses around here.

HORST: Then why would there be a bus sign here?

GRABEN: I don't know. Just know there ain't no buses around here.

Sorry, fella.

HORST: I don't know why anyone would put a sign out here indicating a bus if there ain't no bus around here.

GRABEN: Lots of things in this world don't make any sense.

HORST: But to put a sign out here for a bus, when there is no bus, is just plain cruel.

GRABEN: It's a cruel world.

HORST: I don't believe you.

GRABEN: Believe what you want.

HORST: *(Beat.)* What are you doing around here?

GRABEN: Just getting from point A to point B.

HORST: Without a bus.

GRABEN: That's right. Without a bus.

HORST: Well, it should be coming along any time now.

GRABEN: Right. Do you see any tire tracks?

HORST: No.

GRABEN: There you have it: no tracks. No bus.

HORST: It doesn't make any sense to me.

GRABEN: Lots of things in this world don't make any sense.

HORST: I know. You already said that.

GRABEN: *(Beat.)* What do you do, Horst?

HORST: Not much right now. Unemployed.

GRABEN: Thought so.

HORST: Presumptuous, aren't you?

GRABEN: It's a judgment call. Don't take it personally.

HORST: Arrogant too.

GRABEN: You make it sound like an affliction.

A pregnant pause ensues. GRABEN approaches the sign and looks at it in a roundabout fashion.

GRABEN: *(Beat.)* Sign's pretty old.

HORST: Yeah. I noticed that.

GRABEN: You would think that if there was a bus company that they would at least maintain the sign.

HORST: *(Short beat, as if thinking.)* I'd rather have them use that money for the operation of buses.

GRABEN: I hear ya! *(Beatlet.)* Or just buses altogether. *(Short beat while HORST looks at him, irked.)* Where're you going?

HORST: Out of town.

GRABEN: From a small town?

HORST: Yeah. Small town.

GRABEN: First time?

HORST: Yeah.

GRABEN: I understand. *(Beat.)* Leaving?

HORST: No. I'm going to visit my daughter.

GRABEN: Dating age?

HORST: Not for long.

GRABEN: Getting married?

HORST: Yeah.

GRABEN: What about you?

HORST: Separated.

GRABEN: I've never seen those work out. (*HORST looks at him, perturbed.*) Kinda like a sexless marriage with tax benefits.

HORST: What about you?

GRABEN: Never been.

HORST: Never?

GRABEN: I don't see the point. Too one-sided for me.

A long beat in which they don't interact. HORST looks at his watch.

HORST: I hope the bus comes soon.

GRABEN: Look around you, Horst. Nothing for miles and miles. And still you think your ship is coming in.

HORST: The bus will come.

GRABEN: Yeah, right.

HORST: It will.

GRABEN: Let me be the first to shatter your little world, Horst. There is no bus coming here tonight or any other night.

HORST: And how do you know?

GRABEN: Simple economics, Horst. How many people do you think congregate around this bus stop on a daily basis?

HORST: I don't know. Two?

GRABEN: We are probably the first two people to be standing at this bus stop, Horst. Transportation occurs between centers of civilization. No roads, no civilization. Look, who's gonna invest in a bus company that puts bus signs out in the middle of the desert?

HORST: Nobody.

GRABEN: That's right! Nobody, except the fool who put it here.

HORST: So it's like a lie.

GRABEN: Not a lie, Horst. A hoax.

HORST: A cruel hoax.

GRABEN: Cruel only in this context.

HORST: Yeah. You're probably right.

GRABEN: No, Horst. I am right! You know that. You're just bitter that you were a fool to believe it.

HORST: I'm not a fool.

GRABEN: We've all been fools sometimes. The best way out is to admit it and move on.

HORST: Stop calling me a fool.

GRABEN: *(Beat.)* So what're you gonna do now?

HORST: I don't know.

GRABEN: Waiting out here is foolish. Especially after dark.

HORST: *(Redirecting.)* What're you gonna do?

GRABEN: I'm gonna rest a bit and then move on.

HORST: *(Beat.)* Hey, I'm sorry if I became a bit aggressive.

GRABEN: No harm, no foul, Horst.

HORST: No, really. I mean it.

GRABEN: I know, Horst.

HORST: Goodbye.

GRABEN: Goodbye, Horst.

HORST: *(Starts making his way offstage.)* I still can't believe I was taken in by this darn sign.

GRABEN: We all are sometimes, Horst.

HORST: Effective.

GRABEN: Effective until the truth be told.

HORST: True. All appearance and no substance.

GRABEN: You got it, Horst.

HORST: *(At the very edge of the stage.)* Signage galore.

GRABEN: *(Somewhat impatient with HORST's lingering.)* All around us.

HORST: All around us. *(Beat.)* Good-bye.

GRABEN: Good-bye, Horst. And watch the signs, Horst.

HORST: I will.

GRABEN: Not all of them are bad.

HORST: I'll be more careful next time.

GRABEN: I know you will be, Horst.

HORST has left the stage. *GRABEN* gathers up his belongings and waits. *HE* waits for some time. At some point, *HE* straightens himself a bit, looks at his watch, and puts on a tie. *HE* grabs his bags as the sound of a bus can be heard. The bus comes to a stop offstage. *GRABEN* steps forward and offstage. The bus pulls away. As the sound of the bus dies away, *HORST* comes running back onto the stage. *HORST* comes to a stop at center stage where *HE* catches his breath. Fade to Black. CURTAIN.

THE END

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