

ART IMITATES LIFE

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By Mike McCafferty

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SYNOPSIS: Art Danner is thrilled to be coming home for Thanksgiving, but when he returns, he's surprised to learn that his parents aren't so thrilled with him! Art has written a play about his parents in one of his college classes and inadvertently trapped his parents in that unfinished play for the past four weeks. While his parents are good sports, they'd like to leave the stage and go home, especially since his mom has to use the bathroom. Only problem? Art doesn't know how to do that. When he calls his stuffy professor for help and accidentally transports him to the stage, the fireworks really start. A wild, fun play about reality and theatre that makes you think - in between outbursts of hysterical laughter.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 MEN, 1 WOMAN)

- ART (m).....College student.
DAD (m).....His father.
MOM (f).....His mother.
MR. STEVENS (m).....His playwriting teacher.

AT RISE:

We see a typical living room somewhere in the Midwest. DAD is seated on an easy chair reading a newspaper while MOM is on a couch knitting. They are a typical American couple. After a rather pastoral moment, ART, their son and a college student, enters the house. They both rise to greet him.

ART: Mom! Dad! I'm home!

MOM: Well, hello, dear.

DAD: Good to see you, son!

ART: Thanks, Dad. Boy, it's great to come home for Thanksgiving.

I've missed this old house, and boy, did I miss your cooking, Ma!

MOM: How is school, dear?

ART: Great, couldn't be going better.

DAD: Classes going well?

ART: Well, I'd always like to do better, but then again, wouldn't we all?

MOM: Of course, dear.

DAD: How's that playwriting class going?

ART: Super. Mr. Stevens knows everything about the theatre. He's been helping me work on my play in his class.

DAD: Oh, so you are writing a play?

ART: Yes, sir. And boy, is it gonna be great!

MOM: Honey, you wouldn't happen to be using your father and I as characters in your play, would you?

ART: Uh, yes? How did you know? It was supposed to be a surprise but now that you ask, yes, you are two of my main characters. How did you find out?

MOM: Well dear, to be honest, we've known for quite some time now.

ART: You have? I don't understand.

MOM: Well, you see dear, it's like this...uh...

DAD: What your mother is trying to say is that we seem to be more than just characters in your play. Well, I know that this is embarrassing, but we seem to be in your play.

MOM: Trapped seems a little more like it.

ART: Trapped?

MOM: That's right, dear. You've written us into your play, and now we can't get out. Of course, we're flattered and all...

DAD: Oh sure, we're flattered as hell! Can't wait to tell the boys back at the office. But you see, the problem is that we've been stuck on stage in this mock-up of our living room for about four weeks now.

MOM: And there's no bathroom here...

DAD: ...that's right. There's no bathroom here, which has been hell on your mother, what with her weak bladder and all.

MOM: I really don't think I can hold it much longer, honey.

DAD: So now that you're back, maybe you can just show us the way out of here, or a least the bathroom for your mother, and we can get on with things.

MOM: Like our lives, for example.

ART: *(Long pause. Takes it all in slowly. Then starts to laugh.)* Ha, ha, ha! You guys really had me going there for a minute. Boy, it's nice to have parents with a great sense of humor.

MOM: Dear, we're not joking.

ART: You're not?

DAD: No, son.

MOM: Your father's not clever enough to come up with a joke like that.

DAD: She's right. And your mother never kids about going to the bathroom.

MOM: I really have to go.

ART: Are you serious? Do you really expect me to believe that somehow you've been trapped in a play for four weeks now? My God, insanity must run in the family!

MOM: Only on your father's side, dear.

ART: This is so incredible. I come home to my family, tired and homesick from college just to try to relax and get away from the stress of school a little. And what happens? My parents immediately start in on some sort of insane joke trying to convince me that this is really a set in some theatre? That's "Twilight Zone" stuff. Do you really expect me to believe that?

DAD: Now listen, son, I know this is hard to believe. I didn't believe it when we got here. But after four weeks of this, I'm pretty well convinced. And now I'm going to have to convince you.

ART: Dad, I'm sorry, but I don't believe any of this. I think that maybe you and Mom need some help.

DAD: Son, listen to me! Take a good look at the furniture. Does it look the same?

ART: Yes, Dad. It looks the same.

DAD: And the carpeting?

ART: Same as always.

DAD: How about the audience?

ART: Look, Dad, the furniture, rugs, and audience all look the same as when I left. I don't...wait a minute...Mom, is that new wallpaper?

MOM: No, dear, unless they sell wallpaper that blinks.

DAD: And how about all those lights up there?

ART: You...you didn't buy about eight rows of track lighting did you, Dad?

DAD: Son, they don't sell that wattage at the hardware store

ART: Dad, I think we're on stage.

DAD: Yes, son, we are.

MOM: He was always so smart. College has done wonders.

ART: Oh my God! We're on stage. We are on stage in a play that I wrote! My God, I've brought a play to life! This is incredible!

DAD: Your mother and I share your excitement, albeit with a little less enthusiasm.

ART: Wow! This is great! I never knew you could do this to plays! Boy, that Mr. Stevens is one great teacher.

DAD: Isn't he though? Let's go tell him in person. I've some things to talk to him about.

ART: Huh?

MOM: What your father's trying to nicely say is that while we're real happy about all this, we've been up here way too long, and if we don't get out of here soon we will go crazy.

ART: Well yeah, okay, sure...except...

DAD: Except what?

ART: I don't think I know how to get us out of here. I mean, the class isn't over, and Mr. Stevens never talked about this. It must be in one of his upcoming lectures. So...

DAD: So we're still trapped in this living hell. *(To MOM.)* This is your fault. You wanted him to go to college! Now look what they've taught him!

MOM: Dear, you didn't write any food into your play. We've been eating the seat cushions.

ART: Hey, I know! I could call Mr. Stevens at home! He teaches the class, he'll know how to get us out of here. *(Picks up phone, starts dialing.)*

DAD: Forget it, it's just a prop.

ART: It's ringing!

DAD: How come it works for him?

MOM: He's the author, dear.

Lights up on other section of stage with chair, table and phone. Mr. Stevens, an old-school Harvard playwriting teacher, stops reading and answers it.

MR. STEVENS: Hello?

ART: Mr. Stevens? It's me, Art Danner, from your beginning playwriting class?

MR. STEVENS: Why, yes! Hello, Arthur, what can I do for you?

ART: Mr. Stevens, I'm having a problem with your latest assignment.

MR. STEVENS: Ah yes, that play you wrote about family life. Well, Art, if I recall correctly, and I always do, it seems to me the problem you were having was creating a realistic setting for your characters. It just didn't seem real enough to me.

ART: Uh, well, I don't think that's a problem any longer.

MR. STEVENS: Well, then, what seems to be the problem?

ART: Well, as close as I can tell, my family and I are trapped in a production of my play and we can't get out.

MR. STEVENS: Are you now?

ART: Yes. We're on stage right now. I don't think that you've given your lecture about this stuff yet, but my parents have been here a long time. My mother really has to go to the bathroom, and if you could just tell me how to get out of the play, I'd appreciate it.

MR. STEVENS: Well, Arthur, I must admit, this is a new one. You students are coming up with cleverer jokes every year. Thank you for a good laugh, Arthur, and a happy Thanksgiving.

He hangs up. Lights on that side of the stage fade.

ART: He didn't believe me. He's not going to do anything. He thought it was a joke.

MOM: We heard.

ART: What? How?

MOM: Well, he was right over there, dear.

She points to spot where MR. STEVENS was seated. ART gapes in disbelief and calls back. Sure enough, the lights come back on.)

MR. STEVENS: Hello?

ART: Uh, **MR. STEVENS:** **MR. STEVENS:** Now look, Arthur, fun's fun, but this is going too far. Do you realize where I am?

ART: Yes, you're on stage about eight feet away from me.

MR. STEVENS slowly turns to face the audience.

MR. STEVENS: Good lord! *(He runs over to living room stage.)* What the hell is going on here?!

ART: It's like I said, sir, you're on stage with us.

MR. STEVENS: You cannot be serious.

ART: These are my parents.

DAD: Welcome to hell.

MOM: Can we offer you some seat cushion? It's fresh!

MR. STEVENS: How did I get here? I was at my house, talking to you.

ART: Uh, I think I brought you here when I called you.

MR. STEVENS: You...brought me here?

DAD: Hey look, buddy, the fault is yours. You're the one who teaches that playwriting class down there. Obviously, you didn't warn the students about the dangers of writing a play. From now on, you'd better start having them write ways out these plays.

MOM: Or at least bathrooms.

MR. STEVENS: Yes, of course, how foolish of me. Now, listen, all of you. I don't know if this is some sort of joke or if you're all just crazy. All I know is that you've somehow managed to drug me and drag me out to this theatre for some sort of disgusting little exhibition in front of all these people. So if you want me to play along, fine. You want to leave? Well, then I suggest you do as I am about to do and walk off this three foot ledge that is called the stage and walk right past the audience and out the door. *(Starts to walk.)*

DAD: I wouldn't do that...

MR. STEVENS suddenly slams into invisible wall and falls.

MR. STEVENS: What was that?

ART: I think that's what's called the fourth wall. See, the fourth wall is a wall between the actors and the audience, and its primary purpose is to create a barrier for...

MR. STEVENS: ...Yes, I know what it is, thank you. However, you idiot, if you had listened a little more in class you would have remembered that the fourth wall is merely a figurative wall.

MOM: Well, maybe they make stronger figuratives here!

MR. STEVENS: This is preposterous! *(He begins feeling the invisible wall.)* There has to be a hole in this somewhere. I... Good lord, I'm doing mime on stage! ARRGH! Damn you, Arthur Danner. Fine, then, I'll simply adhere to the convention of this preposterous situation and walk right out this door... *(He walks out the upstage door, closes it. He opens it and walks back in with one fluid motion.)* And right in this one. *(He looks around, stunned he's still here.)* That's it! I've had it! I've had enough of this! *(Speaks to lighting booth.)* Excuse me, stage manager? Mister or Madam Stage Manager? I am not a part of this show, as you can easily see. I'm much better written than this current cartoon episode, so if you would be so kind as to bring down these lights and let me slip offstage, I'd greatly appreciate it. Hello? Can you hear me? CAN ANYONE GET ME OFF THIS STAGE AND AWAY FROM THESE ANNOYING PEOPLE!!

MOM: Listen to him shout! Well, that's the way the French are.

MR. STEVENS: Well, Arthur, this is quite a little play you have constructed here.

ART: I tried to cover all the angles.

MR. STEVENS: Of escape, I presume. What inspired you: No Exit? Tell me, dear boy, how does this play end?

ART: Actually, I don't know. I haven't finished it yet.

MR. STEVENS: Oh, you haven't, have you? Did it occur to you that the reason your play is in limbo is possibly because you haven't finished writing it?

ART: Uh, yes, it did.

MR. STEVENS: And did it occur to you that by trying to end this play, in any way, shape, or form available to your limited faculties, you would not have needed to call on me and bring me out on this stage in front of all these people?

ART: It occurred to me...just now.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Danner, you're an aspiring writer. What do you think I'm going to ask next?

MOM: Oh, I know the answer!

MR. STEVENS: Even your mother knows. Think, dear boy.

ART: Uh, why didn't I finish the play.

MR. STEVENS: Perfect. You get an 'A.' Now, Art, tell me, please, why didn't you finish writing your play?

ART: Well, I guess I just couldn't think of a good final line.

MR. STEVENS: ...What?

ART: You always said that the ending line is the most important. So I didn't want to rush it.

DAD: So it's your fault again.

MR. STEVENS: I don't believe this. I think I'm going to throw up.

MOM: Have some seat cushion, it will sooth your stomach.

MR. STEVENS: So all this hinges on the fact that you were too concerned about writing a strong last line to your script, eh? Art, I want you to write this down at the end of your play. I want your last sentence to read... "I have a big hairy butt!"

ART: What?

MR. STEVENS: I have a big hairy butt!

DAD: Hey, that's your business...

ART: That doesn't make any sense...

MR. STEVENS: I know, write it down.

ART: But you always said...

MR. STEVENS: I don't care what I said, write it down.

ART: But...

MR. STEVENS: WRITE THE LINE DOWN! (*ART does so.*) Good. Now read the last monologue, the lights will go down, and we can leave.

ART: (*ART assumes character. Stirring music begins to play.*) 'Maybe we treat our world too seriously. Maybe our world, our reality, is just a sieve for other worlds and realities to pass through, and ours is made up of the leftover pieces. I don't know. Perhaps I never will. But of all the truths in this world, there is one that shines brighter and stronger for me than all the rest. And that one singular revelation, that one cosmic truth is that I HAVE A BIG HAIRY BUTT!' (*Lights begin to fade.*) I don't like it.

DAD: It's not so bad. Kinda has a poetic ring to it.

MOM: I really have to go to the bathroom.

MR. STEVENS: Arthur, if you ever feel inspired again at all...write a book!

CURTAIN.

THE END

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