



FORGERIES

By David Zarko

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forgeries

by David Zarko

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characters

KENNETH LIVINGSTON
an intense man in his early thirties

SHELDON WHITTIER
a patient man, slightly younger than Kenneth, with a brilliant smile

setting

The wings of the second stage in a brand new theatre.

time

Very early one morning.

synopsis

Kenneth, a character actor in a prominent regional theatre company, wakes up under a pile of old costumes not able to recall how he got there, or to have any clear idea of what transpired at all the night before. He struggles with this alone, until Sheldon, his artistic director who had fallen asleep under a pile of curtains, also awakes and joins him. They recreate the events of the previous evening using scripts, and come to a deeper understanding as to the nature of life.

forgeries

The play is set in the wings of a new theater. In the back we see bits of old scenery. In the foreground there is a large box of old scripts, a pile of stage drapes, a heap of discarded costumes, and boxes of hand props. The place is disorderly, as if all the junk from somewhere else were left here on the way to the dumpster. From under the pile of discarded costumes the actor speaks.

KENNETH

From The Sea Gull.

It started that very night, when my play was such a dreadful failure. Women won't forgive failure. I burnt the script, burnt it all, right to the very final piece. If only you knew how unhappy I am. That you are increasingly cold to me is frightful, incredible. It is as if I were to awake one day to see this lake dry, or seeping away, away into the earth. You say that you are too simple-minded to understand the likes of such a one as I. Oh, tell me now, what is there in me, really, to understand?

Chekhov. A translation of one of the great playwrights of all time and it sounds like a language lesson written by a first year biology major. I sucked in that role.

He talks to himself rapidly and with abandon, enjoying his words and the sounds he can make with them. Were someone else around he would be embarrassed to speak in this way. He's dressed casually, is slightly bruised on the face and has a loop of ties around his neck.

Oh, man. I feel like crap. Where the hell am I? This place isn't at all... familiar. *(yelling)* Anybody home? Echoes. What time is it, I wonder?

Checks his watch. It is missing.

Damn. Watch dropped off somewhere.

He rummages the costume pile looking for the watch.

The stage manager: "You'll be fined for not hanging these costumes." The director: "Richmond, go lay under that pile of old costumes, then when you kill Richard, jump out and just kind of let whatever sticks to you hang there..." The dramaturg: "Shakespeare as dirty laundry. A last a concept we can work with!" Head of Marketing: "No! Great gimmick! We'll caption the photo 'Old costumes for a new look at the Bard.' Terrific!" The Director: "No! It's not a gimmick! A profound philosophical statement!" Yes? "History is nothing but the same shit in old costumes! Think about it." He's right. That was a Rolex I lost! Cost me two weeks' goddamn pay! Shit!

He searches the costumes for his watch.

Rolex? Not on my salary. (*each phrase a different character*) Oh Bu-lov-a! Where are you? Goddamnit, girl, show your face, right now! I've no time for this. Hahah. Please be in here. I cannot lose that watch. TAG Heur. What's the hurry bud? What's Timex to him, or he to Bulgari...

From Hamlet, memorized.

*...that he should weep for her?
What would he do had he the motive and cue for passion
that I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
and cleave the general ear with horrid speech...*

(*a critic*) "...horridly delivered by Kenneth Livingston" – *moi* – "who proves himself to be, above all – or I should say, beneath it all – a self-indulgent snob." Just find the damn Cartier, Oris, iss, iss, iss, whatever, and go home. I bet there was like this awesome party. I got like totally drunk and flap, bzzz, out like a friggin' light. I am so totally a light weight. A kick-off for the brand new theater, party. The brand new, never been used before – at least not very well yet, but that's the director's fault, and the critics never know what they're talking about anyway, but we'll show them, the next play'll be great, and in the meantime we'll all screw around with the wardrobe assistants – theater. Party. I acted the fool and drunkenly strapped the Tissot, Seiko, Fortis thing onto the wrist of some ingenue, starlet, bimbo thing hoping she'd dump the staggeringly handsome and talented good-for-nothing she thinks she's in love with thing, for me, when really she's only attracted to his magnificent body, charm, athletic bearing, sonorous singing voice, abundant wit, wealth, and spiritual integrity. Thing. She'll learn.

Another attack on the pile of costumes.

A reckless orgy of diabolical proportions, a wallow in illusion so profound that we thought for a woolly, wistful age that we *could* have our cake and eat it too, that clichés *are* in the eye of the beholder, truth *is* born to be broken, subjugated, made a willing, happy servant of life as we believe it to be, and... We're talking about a cast party? No, the last thirty-odd years. Basically, my lifetime. That party was a one-night, concentrated relapse. My neck is sore. I lost my watch. I want to be home, in bed. Alone. Unconscious. A party? Am I making this up? A party for what? Opening party. What'd we open? This place. This theatre. We opened this new theatre with... (*grabbing a script at random*) *42nd Street!* A classical acting company learns to tap. Sound and fury signifying nothing. No, we opened with... (*another*) *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Ticking time tames turgid text tragically tangled together.

He dives into the box of scripts.

Billions of words. Spoken thousands of times by dozens of actors to hundreds of people on that single, solitary, stage. The Stage That Is No More. Bulldozer food. Maybe I'm depressed. Maybe I pine for the old place, the storefront with the dust and the art and the daring. Nice to have lights that don't catch fire, but something's missing. So, starting over, are we? And we opened with... tada!

He chooses a script at random.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolfe? Say, P/R will have ideas about this! "Everyone who wants to see it's seen it. So how 'bout – why don't you do this? Like flood the theatre, right at the end, like, to symbolize, like, baptism?" And the dramaturge. "I think we

should require the audience scan half page redactions of Virginia Woolfe's complete works before curtain. Then we quiz them on their smartphones.” And the community consultant. “What if Martha and George are actually a married couple and they actually act that way in the privacy of their own actual home? Because nobody comes to the theatre unless there's actually a personal hook.” And the board president. “People should attend simply to support the arts. Period. They don't need to like it.” Then if we do a play about baseball, they'll all be athletic supporters! The audience groans, rises as one to its feet, and they honor me with their immediate and enthusiastic exodus.

He plays out the following.

A opening night party. Cast party! Company bash. Woo-woo! What'd I do? I tried to seduce Molly MacIntyre as usual. Usual result. Flirted with Sheldon Whittier – he's got a smile that can stop time. I'm not saying that because he's the artistic director and happens to hold my entire creative life in the sweaty hollow of his left hand. No. Sheldon's smile could sell me a bridge. Or a Rolex on the street. Shelly has demeanor. Most people don't. I don't. I don't even know what demeanor is. Okay, so Molly, the party, and there I am flirting with Sheldon, and he excuses himself, *and* his demeanor (which he always takes with him), so he can mingle (like, he's the artistic director, duh.) I watch. He's good at mingling. I'm exhilarated with the very idea that such a one as he could co-exist in time and space with such a one as...

It was if I woke up and saw that the lake had been absorbed by the ground around it.

So, a party! Woo-woo! I get smashed. Woo! Get drunk! Woo-woo! I stagger off into this... *place*, this... stage left wing. “What is all this crap doing here? Why can't we be more orderly?” I escape the happy revelers to sleep...

From Hamlet, memorized.

*to sleep perchance to dream, aye there's the rub.
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
when we have shuffled off this mortal coil
must give us pause.*

Never play Hamlet when you're twenty-four. The really startling revelations arrive ten years later, and what good are they? No one but me knows I've had them. And that is soooo lonely. There are *thousands* of lines I've never understood. Just gotta open your mouth and hope. Omega? Breitling!

He resumes his search.

So what's the big deal about flirting? I can flirt. Um-nah and me, we got... got a... it's not like I'm deeply involved with her... With oom-nip. Shit. What's her name? Okay. Dark brown hair, fiery blue eyes... Yep. Okay. She knew I was a flirt when she met me. That's *how* she met me, right? Dark hair. Slim. A hint of lavender just under the skin. *She* flirts. Not as well, or as enthusiastically, as I do, but... Okay. Chestnut hair. More red than chestnut. Fair. Very fair.

Singing, from The Beggar's Opera.

*When the heart of a man is oppressed with cares,
then the mist is dispelled when a woman appears,
like the notes of a fiddle she sweetly, sweetly
raises our spirits and charms our ears.*

He discovers a remote lighting control.

Something here lies hidden.

He moves a slide, lights come up.

Like, look at this! It's like a total mess! Like, what's up with that?

He grabs a random prop.

This! This plastic-made-to-look-like-medieval-Scottish-bronze goblet. (*firmly*) I remember this goblet. This goblet was held by... what's his name as somebody's ghost. Years ago. Or last week. Sometime.

From Macbeth, he doesn't say character names, but changes delivery for each.

*MACBETH Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake
Thy gory locks at me.*

ROSS Gentlemen, rise, his highness is not well.

*LADY MACBETH Sit worthy friends. My lord is often thus.
And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.
The fit is momentary. Upon a thought
He will again be well. If much you note him
You will offend him, and extend his passion.
Feed, and regard him not.*

A reenactment of an interpretation of an imaginary supernatural event, I wasn't in the scene, don't recall the title, but I remember all the lines. Kra... Tar... Damn! Almost had her name! Slipped away like love from the lonely.

He rants, heaving things and yelling.

Who wears a goddamn watch anymore, anyway? Stupid! Get a smartphone, idiot. Idiot. Idiot. Idiot! To play the simpleton is not the same as playing stupid, stupid.

He waits for a revelation. None comes.

Always losing shit.

*He falls face down onto the heap of
costumes. He rolls over with a jolt.*

Black satin band, silver case, silver face with crimson glass at noon, four and eight. Black hands with silver inlay. Her name and my name on the reverse, bracketed with stars.

He plays the scene, both roles.

"Karen, for you." She blushes, she stammers, she gives all the outward signs of adoration. I weep with joy! – Well, okay, I tear-up a little bit. It's cool to tear up a little bit. Weeping is way over the top. "I... I..." (*pause*) I can't say the three little words. Now, it's too late. She'll think I'm manipulating, trying to bed her. So, um... "Karen, this watch is you! I saw it and said, I gotta get this watch for Karen! I don't care what it costs, I gotta see her wear it!" Not too shoddy for contemporary romance. Okay, not exactly a declaration of love. But at least the grammar is fashionably inane, take credit for that. Then – "No, really, that's sweet, very nice, but well, this is getting too serious, bo-diddly,

and well, if I accepted this it would be like... like taking a bribe." Declare your undying love, now! No. Not. Cool. Instead I laugh nervously (*he laughs nervously*) "It don't matter, like how can I be hurt? I thought maybe you'd like it. No biggie. Somebody else, maybe. Look! I'll wear it myself! Looks great don't it?" You are my heart, dancing. You are my soul, inventing stories for the ages. You are at the core of creation, inexplicably perfect. Bo-diddly. I looked it up. Diddly means "nothing." Bo is an intensifier. She calls me "less than nothing" and I think she's being affectionate. Karen! Karen. Karen. Brown hair, touch of red, fiery blue eyes. Witty Karen. Cruel Karen. "I like you, I really, really do. I adore you. You are my ideal man, but I can't." Crazy Karen. "You flirt with Sheldon." Okay. So? Wish *you* could?

*From A Midsummer Night's Dream,
memorized.*

*...these are the forgeries of jealousy,
and never since the middle summer's spring
met we...*

...but that we end up in dizzy circles of desire and fear. "Go away bo-diddly. You can't accept defeat, and I can't accept that. And take your watch with you." You cut me out without a *trace* of hesitation. We opened with *Summer and Smoke* and the tables were turned with a vengeance. You played Alma. Etherial. I lost myself in John. Sensual. The future opened before us filled with dissipation and despair. The critics tore me to shreds and I...

*He stops and looks around. He sees things
for the first time. He feels his neck, his face.
He finds the loop of ties. He sits.*

...hung myself?

*He panics and dives into the scripts looking
for something specific. He finds it. From A
Midsummer Night's Dream, read.*

*The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen,
man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his
heart to report what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to
write a ballad of this dream.*

Wake up, wake up, wake up! If you know you're dreaming, you're not. Right? It does work that way? Doesn't it?

*He spins around and falls onto the pile of
black drapes. The pile gives forth a loud
grunt, then shifts. A curtain is heaved
aside and a youngish man with a brilliant
smile and a stunning demeanor sits up. It's
Sheldon Whittier. He's wearing the watch.*

Shelly! What are you doing here?

SHELDON

These drapes are dusty. Bad idea.

He works up to a huge sneeze.