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COMMERCIALS

Comedy by
CONRAD DAVIDSON

Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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CONRAD E. DAVIDSON

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(COMMERCIALS)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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ABOUT THE PLAY

Do you ever get the feeling that television commercials dominate our lives? But suppose those sometimes weird people, animated cartoons, and puppets could step out of your TV screen and accost you personally?

Well, that's what happens to the Lady in this play. It's a frightening experience for her, but delightfully funny for the audience. And her solution to the problem is one that we might all consider taking.

This play also offers a rare opportunity for experimentation and creativity in designing costumes. The commercials can be real people holding the articles they are trying to sell. Or the actors may *be* the product, costumed to represent the article. Or they may be the kinds of creatures used in numerous TV commercials—a dancing raisin selling cereal, a cute teddy bear putting detergent in your washing machine, an animated candy bar . . . The possibilities and fun are endless. You can even add your own singing commercials and jingles if you wish.

The cast is variable; most roles may be played by males or females. Playing time is about 30 minutes.

COMMERCIALS

Cast of Characters

Lady, a hard worker who enjoys her moments of relaxation

Host, one of those TV personalities who has not quite made it and never will (male or female)

Guest, an overstuffed, lecture-series individual who likes to listen to the sound of his/her own voice

Detergent

Cereal

Perfume

Deodorant

Breath Spray

Candy

Dog Food

Aspirin



Commercials

Δ

Place: A living room

Time: Today

Δ

First produced by Jamestown, North Dakota, High School and later by Jamestown Performing Arts, Inc., a community theatre:

Lady.....	Deanna Steller
Host.....	Ruth Melheim
Guest.....	Scott Massine
Detergent.....	Joyce Floyd
Cereal.....	Mary Hill
Perfume.....	Francois Buchanan
Deodorant.....	Art DeMar
Breath Spray.....	Barb Berg
Candy.....	Pat Ebertz
Dog Food.....	Dan Lokomoen
Aspirin.....	Ruth Derheim

COMMERCIALS

[A living room. At Stage Left is a door leading to other rooms: kitchen, laundry room, etc. Left of Center is a couch, wide enough to seat three people. Right of Center is a very large TV; the screen is actually a framed space through which characters can move. The screen is far right and the control knobs are left of the screen.]

AT RISE: HOST and GUEST are discovered sitting inside the TV]

HOST. *[Addressing the audience]* Good evening, friends and other viewers. *[Titters, enjoying his/her own humor]* Our guest today is a nationally known theorist and author. She (He) has studied the attending social, psychological, physiological, and philosophical implications that co-exist with that phenomenon some consider to be a necessary evil—advertising. *[Turning to Guest]* Sooooo, what do you say? Let's start with the philosophical implications.

GUEST. *[Speaking in an animated, super-intellectual manner]* Basically, the philosophy of the TV commercial can be boiled down to three distinct theses. First, because man has limited reason, man must organize inter-subjective experience and re-align the old themes. Analysis in general must become aware of the object of knowledge or the absolute in specific.

HOST. *[After a short, dumb-founded pause]* Oh.

GUEST. Second . . . *[While the Guest speaks, LADY enters door Left, crosses to the couch, and falls into it]* . . . the human situation itself is put in question by the challenge of faith. This alarming threat comes from several quarters, critical philosophy and the advancing sciences being two. The complacent assumption on one hand that commercials reveal an established truth somehow guaranteed by common consent is challenged . . . *[LADY has risen, crossed to the TV, and turned down the volume. GUEST continues his/her monologue, although not as animated as before]*

LADY. *[Addressing the audience]* You know, after a hard day's work, I love a thought-provoking program. It's good to sit, relax the body, and allow TV to exercise the mind. *[Dead serious]* TV helps us become whole. This entire experience provides such illumination that we can easily approach the lofty and the exalted. And that's about the

most important thing you and I can do with our lives—aspire toward the sublime. *[Turns up volume, returns to couch and sits]*

HOST. *[With an undertone of thorough confusion]* That certainly makes a lot of sense. What is the third philosophical thesis?

GUEST. The third philosophical thesis states that the peril here requires persons involved to reflect on questions of human reality. *[LADY watches intently]* Man becomes a question unto himself and this question becomes the main preoccupation of the existentialist copywriter or, if you will, your typical ad man. That's about as simple as I can put it.

HOST. Thank you. So, to summarize . . . commercials can be very philosophical.

GUEST. That's what I said.

HOST. Before we move on to the artistic side of commercials, we must break for one. *[Titter]* A commercial, that is. Stay with us, please, we'll be back soon.

[As HOST and GUEST freeze, DETERGENT enters and crosses to center of TV screen. DETERGENT carries a box]

DETERGENT. Ladies of the audience, let me ask you a few questions.

LADY. *[Sitting back in the couch]* Fire away.

DETERGENT. Do you want to know how to wash away dirt and grease and grime?

LADY. Already know how.

DETERGENT. How to do the job in hot water or warm water or cold?

LADY. *[Reclining, with head at right end of couch]* Common knowledge.

DETERGENT. Are you embarrassed when your ultra-double-duty surgitator doesn't clean your clothes?

LADY. No.

DETERGENT. Or when your touch-control solid-state dual actuator fails to get even those large loads uniformly clean?

LADY. *[Sitting up]* Who cares?

DETERGENT. If you don't, you should.

LADY. Let's get back to the program.

DETERGENT. *[Steps through the screen into the living room and crosses few steps to Left]* Not until we get this matter settled, Lady.

LADY. *[Amused]* You stepped through the screen!

DETERGENT. Of course I did. Now tell me, Lady, you mean to say that you don't care if your touch-control solid-state dual actuator doesn't get your large loads uniformly clean?

LADY. *[Unable to control her amusement]* No, I don't care. This is some prank. Excuse me, my favorite talk show is ready to start again. *[Turns up volume]*

HOST. *[Breaking his/her freeze]* And so, ladies and gentlemen, buy detergent. It'll get even those large loads uniformly clean. *[As HOST and GUEST begin dialogue, DETERGENT pushes Lady aside and turns down the volume. HOST and GUEST continue talking, although inaudibly]*

DETERGENT. Wait. You don't think you need me, huh, Lady? You think your clothes are clean?

LADY. They are. This is silly.

DETERGENT. Let me take a closer look. *[Touches Lady's clothes]*

LADY. Don't be ridiculous. I'm ticklish.

DETERGENT. All I want to do is examine your clothes. This won't take long. *[Frisks Lady vigorously. LADY laughs]* Just as I thought. Pure dirt.

LADY. *[In mock disbelief]* Nooo. *[Sits on couch]*

DETERGENT. Embarrassing. What product do you use, Lady? *[Sits to Lady's left]* You sure aren't getting your money's worth.

LADY. I'm doing all right.

DETERGENT. Your friends must talk about you at coffees. And they've got a right to.

LADY. *[Rising and crossing to the TV]* This is crazy. Commercials don't come out of the screen.

DETERGENT. I'll bet your family doesn't compliment you about their clean clothes, do they? *[Stepping Center]* I'll bet your little darlings never say, "Thanks a bunch, Mommy, for getting rid of the static cling that so embarrasses me whenever I give oral reports in front of the class." They never say that, do they?

LADY. This is absolutely great. You'd make a fantastic stand-up comedian. I've never been so amused.

DETERGENT. This is not the least bit amusing. Detergent is a serious matter. I'd better check into this domestic situation right now, before any more serious damage can result to you. Where's your laundry room?

LADY. [*Pointing Left*] Through that door.

DETERGENT. I'll be back. So prepare your mind to accept some concrete comparison testing. Then you'll know it pays to be concerned whether your touch-control solid-state dual actuator gets your large loads uniformly clean. You'll care. [*Storms out Left*]

LADY. That was a pleasant diversion. But I bet I missed some enlightening dialogue from the program. [*Turns up volume and sits on couch*]

HOST. . . . convincing proof. The subtlety of commercial artistry is astounding. Almost subliminal. But we have to break away for a brief commercial again. Stay tuned, though, to hear our noted authority's comments on commercials as therapy.

[*HOST and GUEST freeze. CEREAL enters and crosses to center of TV screen. CEREAL carries a box*]

CEREAL. [*Speaking with a kiddy voice*] Hey there, Moms and Dads, Kiddies and Grandmas, have I got the cereal for you!

LADY. Hmmm, that makes me hungry.

CEREAL. It's new. Improved. Almost nutritional.

LADY. Think I'll step out for a minute. Get some junk food.

CEREAL. No, Lady, don't do that.

LADY. [*Stops in her tracks, turns to TV*] What's this?

CEREAL. Try cereal. It'll do the trick for you. Next time you get the craving for junk food, stop. Eat cereal.

LADY. At night? While watching TV?

CEREAL. Sure, Lady.

LADY. I can't, I'm conditioned, I only eat cereal in the morning. At night my body would reject it.

CEREAL. [*Stepping through the screen*] Not this cereal. [*Steps to Lady*] I'll tell you why. Thanks to the right combination of pure, natural sugar, combined with honey and maple syrup, here's a natural fiber bran cereal with the taste everyone in the family will crave. It's sickeningly sweeeet.

LADY. [*Starts toward door Left*] Think I'll get my junk food.

CEREAL. [*Stops LADY, keeping her Center*] Oh noooo. This cereal with its super-concentrated saccharine additive has a delicate flavor that comes on like a tank. It'll wake you up morning, noon, or night. Bam!

LADY. [*Challenging*] But is it healthy?

CEREAL. Healthy? This cereal is baked with a special process. With its hard sugar coating, the vitamins and minerals haven't a chance to escape. And the cereal never gets soggy. Stays crispy for hours. Start a bowl today, leave it, come back to it tomorrow. You'll never know the difference.

LADY. All right, I won't eat any junk food. But I'm not going to eat any cereal tonight either. [*Ushering CEREAL toward the TV*] So step back into the screen and I will get back to my talk show. Will you do that? Please?

CEREAL. No.

LADY. What do you propose to do, then?

CEREAL. Check out your kitchen cupboards to see if they're loaded with poison. Your eating habits are probably killing you, Lady. If I'm not mistaken, you're doomed.

LADY. [*Slightly irritated*] Kitchen's through that door. Mind you don't mess it up.

CEREAL. And you know what else? You never get coupons with junk food, do you? Huh? Do you? Noooo, you never do. At least with cereal, you might save a few pennies.

LADY. [*Ushering CEREAL toward door*] You wanted to see the kitchen? Through that door.

CEREAL. If your cupboards are filled with junk food like I think, I'm going to propose a new national law—force feeding of cereal to the mass public. [*Exits door Left*]

LADY. [*Returning to TV*] Good grief. All I wanted to do this evening was watch a quality TV program and exercise my mind. [*Turns up volume*]

HOST. . . . thought provoking, indeed. I never thought of commercials in that sense.

GUEST. To summarize, then. When we consider the commercial as therapy, we are dealing essentially with the treatment of disease or, in certain cases, the condition of being maladjusted. The commercial aids in furthering the restorations of the maladjusted to society. The commercial makes us well.

HOST. Before we hear your thoughts on the physiological implications of the commercial, let's hear a message about a problem that can plague us all—odor.

LADY. Not another commercial. [*Crosses to couch, lies down, head right*]

HOST. Please stay tuned. We'll be back soon. [*HOST and GUEST freeze*]

LADY. Time to rest the eyes a minute. [*She dozes off during the following*]

[The Fume Products—PERFUME, DEODORANT, and BREATH SPRAY—enter, centering themselves in the TV screen]

PERFUME, DEODORANT, & BREATH SPRAY. Hi there.

PERFUME. [*With a French accent*] I'm Perfume.

BREATH SPRAY. [*Speaks with an airy, aspirant quality*] I'm Breath Spray.

DEODORANT. [*Speaks with force*] I'm Deodorant. We're here to sing you a song.

PERFUME, DEODORANT, & BREATH SPRAY. [*Singing or chanting:*] Odor. Odor. Odor. Don't let it get you down.

Odor. Odor. Odor. It's strictly not uptown.

Odor. Odor . . .

PERFUME. Stop!

DEODORANT. What's the matter?

PERFUME. Don't you smell it?

BREATH SPRAY. What?

PERFUME. The stench.

BREATH SPRAY. Where?

PERFUME. [*Pointing out of the screen*] Out there. [*PERFUME, BREATH SPRAY, and DEODORANT step to the edge of the screen and sniff*]

DEODORANT. Ghastly.

BREATH SPRAY. Definitely an assault on the olfactory.

PERFUME. It's inhuman.

DEODORANT. What's the source?

BREATH SPRAY. Let's check. [*They step through the screen. PERFUME steps Right, DEODORANT steps Down Center, and BREATH SPRAY steps Left*]

PERFUME. It's permeated the whole room.

DEODORANT. Something in this room definitely reeks.

BREATH SPRAY. That's an understatement.

PERFUME. Spread out. Let's find this aromatic blemish.

DEODORANT. Definitely a problem for Fume Products.

PERFUME. Right. So search.

BREATH SPRAY. [*Crosses to right side of TV*] It's not by the TV.

PERFUME. [*Crosses behind and to left end of couch*] It's not behind the couch.

DEODORANT. [*Crosses to right end of couch*] Here it is. On the couch.

BREATH SPRAY. What is it? [*Crosses right of Deodorant*]

DEODORANT. It's the lady.

BREATH SPRAY. [*Leans over back of couch and opens Lady's mouth, sniffs*] That mouth is a bad one.

PERFUME. [*Sniffing Lady's neck*] Her neck smells of sweat.

DEODORANT. [*Lifting Lady's arm*] Get a whiff of this. [*All lean in and sniff*]

PERFUME. Disgusting.

BREATH SPRAY. Repulsive.

DEODORANT. Detestable.

PERFUME. Something has to be done.

PERFUME, DEODORANT, & BREATH SPRAY. Hey, Lady, wake up.

LADY. [*Slowly waking*] Hmmmmm? What? Who are you? [*Sits up*]

PERFUME. I'm Perfume.

BREATH SPRAY. I'm Breath Spray.

DEODORANT. I'm Deodorant.

LADY. Why are you here?

DEODORANT. Why? Because, Lady . . .

PERFUME, DEODORANT, & BREATH SPRAY. You stink.

DEODORANT. And we're here to improve your smell. Perfume, want to go first?

PERFUME. Gladly. This will be a labor of love. [*Crosses around left end of couch and sits next to Lady*] Lady, you need to take away that smell.

LADY. What smell?

PERFUME. The smell that emanates from your body.

LADY. I don't mind it.

PERFUME. Yes, you do. Your nose is just numb, that's all. It's the smell of kitchen sweat, the smell of household dust, the smell of . . .

LADY. Nobody ever complained before.

PERFUME. I'm exactly the product for you. Perfume. Here, some on the wrists, some on your neck . . .

LADY. I can do that, if you don't mind.

PERFUME. Some on your knees . . .

LADY. Oh no you don't. *[Rises and steps Center]*

PERFUME. Grab her, please. I'm not done. Put her on the couch. *[DEODORANT and BREATH SPRAY grab Lady, drag her to the couch, forcing her down. DEODORANT holds her arms at right, BREATH SPRAY holds her legs at left. PERFUME walks around and behind the couch, sprinkles perfume on her hair]*

LADY. Stop it, I say. Don't put any more of that stuff on me. Stop!

PERFUME. Just about done. *[Stops sprinkling and dumps entire contents of bottle on Lady]* There. A vast improvement. Who's next?

DEODORANT. *[Picks Lady up and ushers her Down Center]* I am. Okay, Lady, arms up.

LADY. Are you kidding?

DEODORANT. No, I'm not. All things in good measure. Arms up, please.

LADY. Forget it!

DEODORANT. Do we have to do this by force?

LADY. I'm not going to raise my arms! *[Holds arms tightly against her body]*

BREATH SPRAY. Oh yes you are. Come on, Perfume, grab an arm. *[PERFUME steps to Lady's right, BREATH SPRAY to her left. Each grabs an arm and stretches it straight out. DEODORANT steps above Lady]*

LADY. What are you doing?

DEODORANT. Eliminating odor from off the face of the earth and, in particular, from your armpits.

LADY. This is criminal, do you hear? Criminal!

DEODORANT. This won't take long. You'll thank us for it later. *[Sprays each armpit liberally. LADY struggles to free herself]*

LADY. Don't I have a choice in this matter? At least let me decide the amount.

DEODORANT. Done. Your turn, Breath Spray.

BREATH SPRAY. Good. Then our job here will be done. Okay, Lady, open up.

LADY. No no no!