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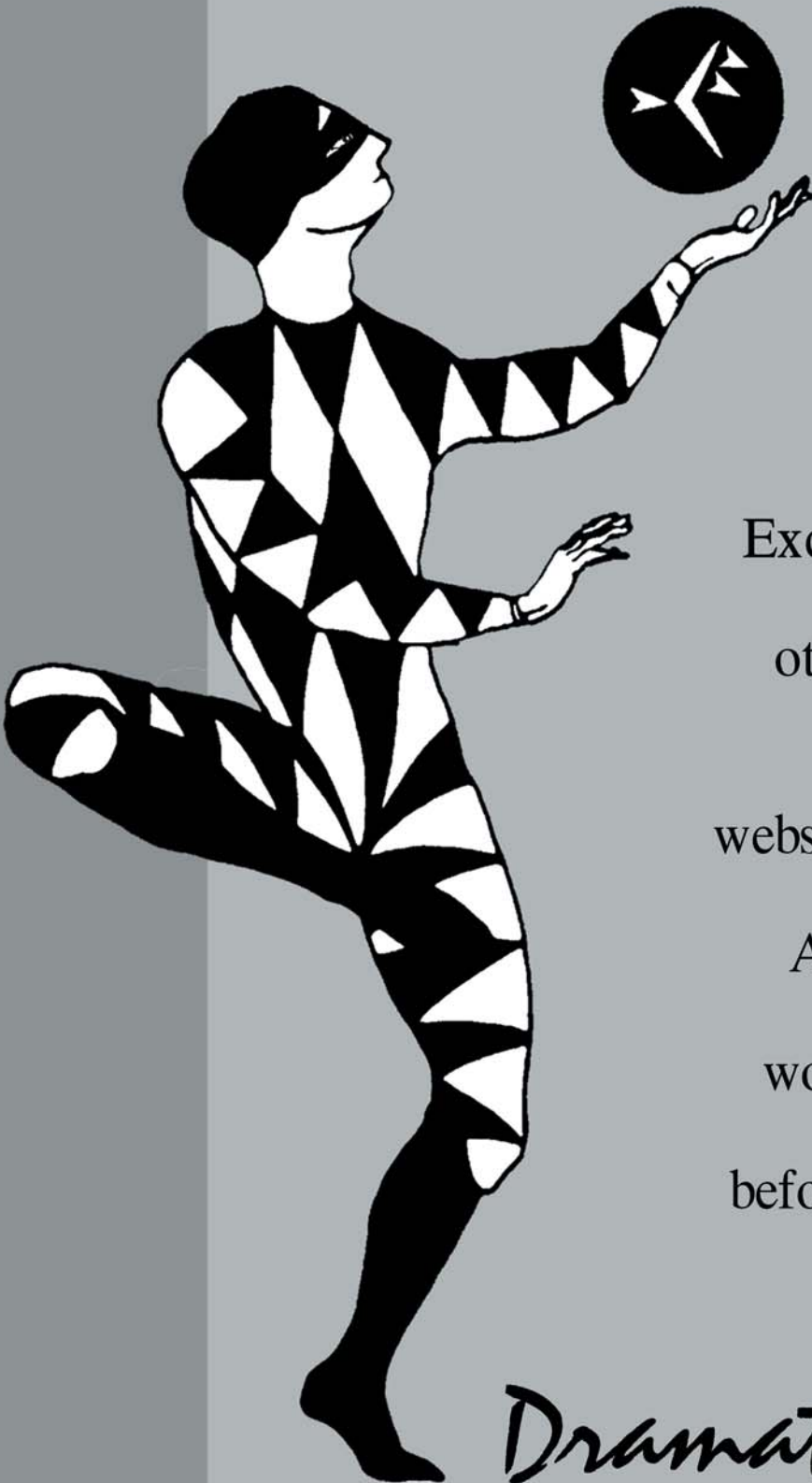
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Dramatic Publishing



Still Life with Iris

(Alternate Version)

A play by

STEVEN DIETZ

Featuring the stage illusions of Steffan Soule and Cooper Edens



Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Cast of Characters [4 women, 5 men. Pairings indicate actor doubling.]

Iris

Mom
Miss Overlook

Man/Mister Matternot
Thunder Bottler Two
Dad

Leaf Monitor
Annabel Lee

Thunder Bottler One
Mozart

Memory Mender
Rain Maker
Mister Otherguy
Ray

Elmer
His Most Excellent, Grotto Good
Third String

Hazel
Her Most Excellent, Gretta Good
Captain Also

Flower Painter
Bolt Bender
Mister Himtoo

Setting

The Land of Nocturno -- a fantastical world, whose inhabitants spend each night readying the "known" world for the next day. This is not, however, a land of night and darkness. Quite the opposite. It is a land of color and pragmatic magic. It exists in a place parallel to our days.

Great Island -- a magnificent and remote inland isle. This is the home of the Great Goods, the rulers of the people of Nocturno.

PastCoats

All of the inhabitants of Nocturno wear long, brightly-colored coats, decorated -- perhaps -- with a variety of small beads or other mementos. Each coat contains the past of the person wearing it -- and are known, therefore, as their "PastCoats."

Music

The music of Mozart -- in all its richness, variance and breadth -- underscores the play.

Transitions

The first line of every scene is intended to immediately follow the last line of the previous scene. This obviously requires a playing space that can quickly and simply represent a variety of locales. This also means that the first line of any scene can be played as an "entrance" by the speaking character, and that the required scenery not already in position can move into place after the scene has begun.

Note

There are two versions of Still Life with Iris. This version contains the major stage illusions which were presented as part of the premiere production at Seattle Children's Theatre. A second version, without these illusions, will premiere at Childsplay Theatre Company (Phoenix) in 1998. For a copy of this alternate version of the play, please contact the author's agent.

**And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze**

John Keats

Act One

(The MUSIC OF MOZART fills the theatre as the audience arrives. MUSIC BUILDS as the theatre darkens, and then plays UNDER as a shaft of light rises on ---

A tall sign. The sign reads: "WELCOME TO NOCTURNO." Attached to the sign are arrows pointing in various directions. Written on the arrows are the following destinations: "Cloud Factory", "Bird Assembly", "Plant Plant", "Rain Storage", "Fruit Coloring", "Fish School -- swimming classes nightly."

Standing beneath the sign -- his back to us -- is a MAN in dark, sombre attire. He wears dark gloves on his hands at all times. Unlike the residents of Nocturno, he is not wearing a PastCoat. He stands, reading the sign, as ---

IRIS enters. She looks at the MAN'S back for a moment, then speaks to him.)

IRIS

Are you curious or lost?

MAN

Pardon me?

(When the MAN turns, we see that he wears a weathered sort of toolbelt around his waist, containing numerous objects of practical need. The MAN himself has an oddly sinister bearing.)

IRIS

It's better to be curious than lost, don't you think? Which are you?

MAN

I'm new.

IRIS

Yes, I know. I can tell by your coat. Why have you come?

MAN

I'm looking for someone.

IRIS

Well, at this time of night, everyone's at work.

MAN

Doing what?

IRIS

You name it. Whatever you see in the world by day, it's made here by night. Like that fly on your nose ---

(The MAN swats the [unseen] bug away.)

That fly was assembled right here in Nocturno. We crank those out by the millions and teach every one of them to fly. Plus: no two are the same. Our Bug Sculptors are very proud of that.

MAN

(catching on)

Just like snowflakes, then -- no two alike?

IRIS

Actually -- and this is privileged information -- the snowflakes are made in pairs. But we separate them and load them into clouds bound for different locations. Don't spread that around.

MAN

I won't.

IRIS

So, you've never been here before?

MAN

Not that I remember.

IRIS

Oh, you'd remember. Unless you've got a tear in your coat. Who are you looking for?

(Lights expand to reveal ---

The Land of Nocturno, as ---

HAZEL and **ELMER** -- two kids similar in age to Iris --

rush on. **HAZEL** carries a large burlap sack which is marked: "Spots." **ELMER** carries a wooden box.)

HAZEL

I know you took them.

ELMER

I didn't take them.

HAZEL

Where did you put them?

ELMER

I didn't take them.

HAZEL

I bet you're hiding them.

ELMER

I DIDN'T TAKE THEM. Tell her, Iris ---

IRIS

What is it, Elmer?

HAZEL

(before ELMER can answer)

We're almost done with our chores -- all that's left is to put the spots on the Ladybugs --

(ELMER removes two large Ladybugs from the box.

They're each bright orange and about the size of a cantaloupe.

They are without spots.)

ELMER

But why do Ladybugs need spots, anyway? I think they look fine without them.

HAZEL

And I reach into the Spot Sack and it's filled with these ---

(HAZEL reaches into the sack and pulls out several long, black stripes -- like those found on a zebra.)

IRIS

Stripes.

ELMER

There must have been a mix-up.

HAZEL

We can't put stripes on the Ladybugs.

ELMER

Why not? And then we'll put the spots on the zebras.

HAZEL

(to IRIS)

You're lucky you don't have a brother. It's like this all the time.

ELMER

Can you help us, Iris? No one can find things like you can.

IRIS

I'll help you as soon as I ---

(She turns to the MAN. He interrupts her, saying ---)

MAN

Your name is Iris.

IRIS

Yes. Why?

(The FLOWER PAINTER enters. He wears a beret and has a palette and brushes on a strap over his shoulder. He goes directly to ELMER, HAZEL and IRIS, as, at the same instant ---)

The MEMORY MENDER enters, opposite, pushing a cart inscribed "Memory Mender" in large letters. The cart holds large spools of thread, extra-large buttons, scissors, etc. His hat looks like a thimble.

Upon their entrance, the MAN turns and leaves, with only the MEMORY MENDER seeing him go. The MEMORY MENDER calls out across the distance ---)

MEMORY MENDER

You there, sir -- let me take a look at that coat! Sir, did you hear me?

(--- but the MAN is gone.

The MEMORY MENDER remains at a distance, busying himself with the objects on his cart.)

FLOWER PAINTER

Elmer, Hazel -- are you finished with your chores?

HAZEL

We have a problem.

IRIS

The spots are missing.

ELMER

I didn't take them.

FLOWER PAINTER

Did you talk to the Spot Maker?

HAZEL

He sent them out, just like he always does.

FLOWER PAINTER

But, the world requires Ladybugs, and Ladybugs must have their spots ---

IRIS

Maybe you could paint them on.

(ELMER holds the Ladybugs out to the FLOWER PAINTER.)

FLOWER PAINTER

Out of the question. I'm a Flower Painter -- nothing more. I wouldn't know the first thing about painting spots on bugs.

ELMER

(happily)

I guess our chores are done ---

FLOWER PAINTER

It's not that simple, Elmer. Without us, the world would come to a standstill. If I abandoned my work, the flowers of the world would look like this ---

(He produces a large flower with a long stem. It is a dull grey.)

Instead of like this ---

(A FLOURISH OF MUSIC as he produces the same flower -- now bright yellow and red.)

Now, you are Spotters and you must do your work.

HAZEL

But we've looked everywhere ---

FLOWER PAINTER

I'm sure Iris can find them. She's like her Dad in that way. That man could find the moon on the blackest of nights.

ELMER

Then why has he never found his way back home?

HAZEL

(a reprimand)

Elmer ---

ELMER

He's been gone forever.

FLOWER PAINTER

No one knows why, Elmer, and I think it's better left ---

IRIS

Would you tell me if you knew?

(The FLOWER PAINTER stares at her.)

I was only a baby, then. Even my Mom won't tell me why he left.

FLOWER PAINTER

(calmly, definitively)

Because she doesn't know, Iris. No one does. It was the night of the Great Eclipse, and the moon was particularly hard to find. He went out to bring it

in . . . and he's never returned.

IRIS

There's an eclipse tomorrow.

FLOWER PAINTER

The first one since that night. I doubt we'll get to enjoy it, though ---

IRIS

Why not?

FLOWER PAINTER

The order just came and it's a big one.

HAZEL

An order for what?

FLOWER PAINTER

A storm.

ELMER

And it's a big one?

FLOWER PAINTER

Huge.

(he starts off, saying his farewell ---)

Now and again.

ELMER, HAZEL and IRIS

Now and again.

HAZEL

(gently, to IRIS)

Sorry about my brother. He says stupid things.

ELMER

I didn't mean ---

IRIS

It's not stupid. I think about it all the time, too.

ELMER

I know what would make you feel better, Iris.

HAZEL

Helping us find those spots.

ELMER

Better than that. An order has come and a storm must be assembled. Now: what does this mean to people like you and me?

IRIS

It means that somewhere in this town . . . right now . . . just waiting for us . . .
is a big . . . fresh . . . wet . . . batch of . . .

IRIS, HAZEL and ELMER

(a delicious whisper)

. . . rain.

(They sigh with delight.)

HAZEL

I bet the Rain Makers have been working non-stop ---

ELMER

And it's just sitting there, and no one's ---

HAZEL

Played in it, or ---

ELMER

Tasted it, or ---

IRIS

Race you there ---

(As they begin to rush off ---

They are stopped by the MEMORY MENDER, who pushes
his cart in their path. He is a cranky but caring man, adamant
about his work.)

MEMORY MENDER

Careful, now -- or you'll trip and and rip your coats. And if you rip your coats
I'll have to sew 'em back up for you. And you know why, don't you?

IRIS, ELMER, HAZEL

(they've heard this a million times)

Yes, we know why ---

MEMORY MENDER

(quickly, quizzing them)

Hazel, who are the rulers of Nocturno, our home?

HAZEL

The Great Goods.

MEMORY MENDER

Iris, where do the Great Goods live?

IRIS

Across the water, on Great Island.

MEMORY MENDER

And Elmer, how deep is the water that surrounds Great Island?

ELMER

Umm ---

IRIS

I know!

HAZEL

I know it, too!

ELMER

(sharp, to the girls)

So do I.

MEMORY MENDER

Well?

ELMER

It's -- umm ---

MEMORY MENDER

You knew it when I asked you last week.

ELMER

It's -- oh, I don't know. Why do I always get the hard questions?!

MEMORY MENDER

Let me see your coat.

(ELMER walks over to the MEMORY MENDER. The MEMORY MENDER discovers a tiny rip in the sleeve of ELMER'S PastCoat. He sews it back up as he speaks.)

See there. A little rip in your coat and your memory is harmed. It makes me crazy. You've got to take care of your Coat because your Coat holds your past. Every stitch, every pocket, every button and sleeve -- it's your whole life in there! Think you can just go out and get a past like you can get a glass of milk?! Think again.

(He is finished sewing Elmer's Coat.)

There we are. Now, Elmer, how deep is the water that surrounds Great Island?

ELMER

(touching the new stitches in his Coat)

Ninety-nine thousand and twenty-three feet.

MEMORY MENDER

Exactly. Now, don't trip and get a rip.

(to IRIS, referring to her coat)

Iris, have your Mom keep an eye on that button. It's getting loose.

IRIS

I will.

MEMORY MENDER

(taking IRIS aside)

And one thing more: The Fog Lifter is retiring today. After all these years, she can still set the Fog down in the morning -- but she just can't lift it, anymore. She'd like you to take her place, Iris.

IRIS

(honored)

Thank you.

MEMORY MENDER

Now and again.

IRIS, ELMER, HAZEL

Now and again.

(MUSIC, as ---

The MEMORY MENDER exits, pushing his cart, and lights shift to reveal ---

The LEAF MONITOR -- Hazel and Elmer's Mom -- standing near a tree. In addition to holding several large leaves in her hand, she also holds a clipboard. Near her are two large sacks, with leaves protruding out of the top. One is marked: "OLD." One is marked: "NEW."

IRIS, ELMER and HAZEL rush past her ---)

LEAF MONITOR

Hazel.

(HAZEL stops. ELMER and IRIS also stop, and stand behind her.)

Where are you going?

HAZEL

(innocently)

What, Mom?

LEAF MONITOR

You heard me. Where are you rushing off to? Did you finish your chores?

HAZEL

Why don't you ever ask Elmer that question?

LEAF MONITOR

Because you're the oldest.

ELMER

And you always will be.

(HAZEL glares at ELMER.)

LEAF MONITOR

I need you to help me balance these books. I keep checking and double-checking, but I'm still one leaf off.

ELMER

(quickly)

I didn't take it.

LEAF MONITOR

In all my years as the Leaf Monitor, I've never encountered this. We must be certain that for every new leaf we put on a tree, an old one falls.

(to HAZEL)

But, where could the missing one be?

(The THUNDER BOTTLERS enter, pushing a tall crate on wheels which is marked: "THUNDER". Stacked inside the crate are glass bottles, sealed with bright red lids. Other bottles in the crate are empty and unsealed. The men are busy bottling the thunder, as follows: They hold a bottle to their mouths. They make a huge, vocal sound of thunder into the bottle. Then they quickly seal up the bottle with a red lid and place it inside the crate. They repeat this, throughout the following.)

THUNDER BOTTLER ONE

How many is that?

THUNDER BOTTLER TWO

That's thirty-four thunders.

THUNDER BOTTLER ONE

And that's not enough?

THUNDER BOTTLER TWO

The order was for a forty thunder storm.

ELMER

I've never seen so much thunder.