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Eating Rhode Island

By

LAWRENCE THELEN

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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LAWRENCE THELEN

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Eating Rhode Island

CHARACTERS

DANNY ANDERSON: An average young man.

SARAH ANDERSON: His wife.

GOVERNOR MCGRUDER: The governor of Rhode Island.

HOWARD BOYAM: A television news anchor.

SYLVIA ICHIE: Another television news anchor.

SUGGESTED DOUBLING

The show requires just five actors; however, there are 28 additional characters in the play. Although more actors can be used, the following is a breakdown of each actor's assignment for the five-actor version.

GOVERNOR MCGRUDER should also portray:

Cowboy, Kevin Miniver, Masked gunman, Millard Clempt, Christopher Boyd, Theresa Pyle, Committee chairman, Ed Carnahan, Calvin Dibbit and Ken Blaimer.

HOWARD BOYAM should also portray:

Wilbur Nillis, Rocco Carpelli, Craig, Carl Wilcox, Chip Hipkins, Willie, Señor Gonzalez, Dr. Pierce and Produce man.

SYLVIA ICHIE should also portray:

Allison Freed, Mildred Cattle, Police officer, Jenny, Bea Asset, Susie Hipkins, Anna Dashall, Tabitha Wright and Woman in store.

STYLE OF THE SHOW

The style of the show is simple. Try to avoid slowing down the production with complicated costumes. Sometimes quick changes from one character to another happen with just a single line of dialogue, making full costume changes impractical. A hat, a wig or a sweater is sufficient. Let the actor change the character, not the costume. As far as scenery goes, try to avoid complicated, realistic set pieces. A bare stage with props is likely the most practical approach. Projected backgrounds might also work well. The show should run smoothly and seamlessly from one scene to the next. Let the actors make the magic, not the designers.

SETTING

TIME: Now.

PLACE: America.

Eating Rhode Island

AT RISE: *HOWARD BOYAM and SYLVIA ICHIE, two newscasters, are giving a news broadcast. The pace is quick but not frenetic. Appropriate “news music” accompanies lights up.*

HOWARD. Good evening. I’m Howard Boyam.

SYLVIA. And I’m Sylvia Ichie. And this is the Boyam/Ichie Report.

(Musical fanfare.)

HOWARD. News from the nation’s capital ...

(Musical fanfare.)

HOWARD *(cont’d)*. Congress today cleared the way for the president’s new Hawaiian Expansion Project by unanimous vote.

SYLVIA. That’s right, Howard. The president’s plan to collect all the nation’s garbage and create with it another Hawaiian Island will soon be a reality. This new island, located south-south-east of Oahu, should be completed within the year.

HOWARD. And the president added that as long as production is up and the economy stays strong, another island could be in the works within the next two years.

SYLVIA. In regional news ...

(Musical fanfare.)

SYLVIA *(cont’d)*. The school board for the state of Alabama today announced that one hundred percent of their high-school seniors this year passed that state’s proficiency exam.

HOWARD. Ironically, just last week Alabama had the worst students in the nation with only fourteen percent of students passing the exam. But once the state superintendent lowered the standards and had all those tests regraded, Alabama students became the smartest kids in the country. Congratulations, Alabama!

SYLVIA. On the international front ...

(Musical fanfare.)

SYLVIA *(cont'd)*. Scientists in South Africa today have concluded that the law requiring the spaying and neutering of all dogs and cats worldwide will actually result in the extinction of the two species within the next three years.

HOWARD. That's right, Sylvia. The law was enacted as an effort to cut down on unwanted pets. But Booka-Booka Ba-Lah-Lee, head of the Untied Nations, said today that a reversal of the law simply could not be ratified within the three-year timeframe due to the slow-moving legislative process within the United Nations.

SYLVIA. No more pussies—that's a real big shame. Back in this country, the stock market rallied today closing at an all time high on the news that the Coca-Cola Company has purchased the state of California.

HOWARD. Right, Sylvia. The government gave the go-ahead earlier today in an effort to raise money for its missile defense program, still twenty years behind schedule. A spokesman for Coke said that the Company plans to rename the state, appropriately enough, Coca-Cola. Let's go to Allison Freed live in Anaheim where residents there are upheated about the news. Allison.

(ALLISON FREED enters at the side of the stage with a microphone in her hand.)

ALLISON. Thanks, Howard. I'm standing here at the Anaheim Community Theatre where folks are planning to celebrate big with the opening of their latest production. Let's listen in ...

(A COWBOY enters, singing and dancing.)

COWBOY *(singing)*. "Coooooca-Cola where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain ..."

ALLISON. The residents here just couldn't be happier for, among other things, the company has promised to install Coke in all drinking fountains statewide. Back to you!

(ALLISON and the COWBOY exit.)

HOWARD. Well, isn't that novel? Stayed tuned—we'll be back right after this.

(News music accompanies lights down on the broadcast. Revealed are DANNY ANDERSON and his wife SARAH ANDERSON. They sit slumped on a sofa, wearing jeans and T-shirts, drinking beer while they watch the evening news. The pace is clearly slower. SARAH is noticeably pregnant. DANNY sits with a legal pad and pencil.)

SARAH *(mumbling to herself)*. Los Angeles, Coca-Cola ... San Francisco, Coca-Cola ... *(Shakes her head.)*

DANNY *(without enthusiasm)*. Hey, Sarah?

SARAH. Huh?

DANNY. Can you name a child an obscenity?

SARAH *(thinking about it)*. An obscenity ... ?

DANNY. I mean, not that I would, but could you? Is there some government agency that would step in and stop us?

SARAH (*dumbfounded by the conversation in which she's found herself*). You want to name our child an obscenity?

DANNY. No, I just want to know if we can.

SARAH (*thinking about it*). You mean like Shit? You want to name our kid Shit?

DANNY. For instance.

SARAH. Shit Anderson.

DANNY. Just for instance.

SARAH (*thinks*). No. I don't think you can do that.

DANNY (*thinking about it*). Hunh.

(Once satisfied, DANNY slowly crosses off an item on his pad of paper. The two sit in silence as the scene shifts back to the fast-paced news broadcast.)

SYLVIA. The state of Rhode Island today began something unique. As of 12:01 a.m., the state began charging convicts and other convicted felons room and board in all state penitentiaries. We have this report now from Wilbur Nillis. Wilbur.

(WILBUR NILLIS enters from the side with a microphone in hand.)

WILBUR. That's right, Sylvia. Officials here have decided that tax dollars should no longer be used to house those who choose to violate the law, and so have rescinded all state funding to the facilities, requiring inmates to, quote, "pay their way or starve to death." This is what Governor McGruder had to say at a press conference earlier today.

(GOVERNOR MCGRUDER enters from the other side of the stage.)

GOVERNOR. Recent reports seem to indicate that an increasing number of homeless and unemployed people are looking at the criminal justice system as an easy way to obtain free room and board. As I said during the campaign just two months ago, things here in Rhode Island, the “State of Common Sense,” simply have to change. This is one of those changes. Now if you commit a crime, no longer will the law-abiding citizens pay to give you clean sheets on your bed, free cable television, exercise equipment and all the leisure time you want. Not to mention three hot meals a day. Why? Because you broke the law? Not in Rhode Island. Not anymore! If you break the law that doesn’t abolish your responsibilities. You still have to pay. Some of these prisoners were living better than other law-abiding, minimum-wage citizens right here in Providence. Does that make sense to *you*? Well, it didn’t to me. Not in the “State of Common Sense!”

(The GOVERNOR exits. The scene shifts back to WILBUR, who is now accompanied by MILDRED CATTLE.)

WILBUR. Standing with me now is Mildred Cattle, who will be the first of those charged room and board in Rhode Island. What do you think of the new law, Mildred?

MILDRED. But I don’t have that kind of money. And I’m hungry.

WILBUR. I guess you shoulda thought about that before you killed that guy, huh? *(To the camera.)* This is Wilbur Nillis at the state penitentiary in Providence. Now back to you.

(WILBUR and MILDRED exit. The scene shifts back to DANNY and SARAH. They are in the exact positions as before. The pace is, once again, noticeably slower.)

DANNY. Hey, Sarah?

SARAH. Huh?

DANNY. What about a sound?

SARAH (*thinks for a moment*). Huh?

DANNY. You think you can name a kid a sound?

SARAH. A sound ... ?

DANNY. Yeah. Can you name your kid (*Coughs*) ... ?

SARAH. You want to name our kid a sound?

DANNY. I don't know. Just wondering if we can.

SARAH. You're asking me if it's all right to name a child (*Coughs*) ... ?

DANNY (*thinks about it*). Yeah.

SARAH. (*Coughs*), time for dinner ... (*Coughs*), clean your room. (*Looks at DANNY.*) No. I don't think you can do that.

(DANNY thinks about it. Finally.)

DANNY. Hunh.

(He crosses another item off his pad of paper. The scene shifts back to the news broadcast.)

HOWARD. Up in the far-flung state of Rhode Island today something novel took place. After just two days of negotiations with the medical profession's leadership, the state legislature has passed a bill banning medical insurance. Ouch.

SYLVIA. In its place, all doctors and nurses have been hired as employees of the state. They are, apparently, given quite a nice salary—in some cases, exceeding their previous pay—along with pension and welfare benefits. Citizens of Rhode Island now receive free healthcare twenty-four seven.

HOWARD. And how does the state plan to pay for this change in philosophy? Here's what Rhode Island Governor McGruder had to say at a press conference earlier this afternoon.

(The GOVERNOR appears at the side of the stage.)

GOVERNOR. Individual taxes will not be raised to pay for this benefit to our citizens. Instead, I've earmarked already-existing tax revenue for the project—revenue that was previously allocated for lawsuits against the insurance industry. The money's already there, but now instead of paying it to lawyers to clean up frivolous medical lawsuits, we're paying it directly to doctors so they can do their jobs better. *(Exits.)*

SYLVIA. They certainly have their own way of thinking up there in Rhode Island, don't they?

HOWARD. They sure do. Now, here's Kevin Miniver with the weather.

(Musical fanfare. KEVIN MINIVER enters.)

KEVIN. Good evening, folks. We're expecting forty days and forty nights of heavy rain nationwide, except in the state of Rhode Island where it should remain sunny and warm. Have a nice night.

(They exit. The scene shifts back to DANNY and SARAH.)

DANNY *(mostly to himself)*. Shit Anderson. No, no, Shithead Anderson. No, no, better still: Shithead *(Cough)* Anderson.

SARAH *(appalled)*. What are you doing?

DANNY. I just think if he's going to be recognized at all in this invisible, number-oriented world that we live in there has to be something unique about him.

SARAH. And a name's going to do that?

DANNY. No. Not entirely. But it's a start.

(They sit silently and think for a moment.)

SARAH. Danny?

DANNY. Hunh?

SARAH. Do you ever wonder if there's anything more?

DANNY. More?

SARAH. Do you ever wonder if this is all there is to life?
What does the future hold for us?

DANNY *(patting her belly)*. The future is right here in
mommy's tummy.

SARAH. Yeah, the future of mankind, I suppose, but I mean
us—*our* future. I feel like a spectator, not a participant.
There *must* be more, don't you think? Or is this all there
is? Do you suppose this is where we'll be fifty years
from now—sitting on a sofa in Texas, drinking beer and
watching TV with our son, Shit? I just feel as though we're
missing out on something—*real* life. I don't think this is
real life. It's out there ... somewhere. I know it is. Not the
life TV commercials say we should be living—the life that
wouldn't be complete without the shampoo that turns you
into a rock star and the microwavable dinners that lead to
a better sex life—but *real* life. It's not in here. *(Pointing to
the TV.)* Or in there. *(Looking to the future.)* It's out there ...
somewhere. Do you ever think about finding it?

DANNY. Sure I do—in my dreams. But then morning comes
and I wake up, and I put on my security guard uniform and
I go off to work. And I stand there. Then I come home from
work, take off my security guard uniform, open a beer and
sit here on the sofa with you and watch TV. That's our life.
That's our real life. With a job, a wife and a baby on the

way—I try not to think too much about major changes, or whether or not I'm happy, I just try to get through each day. But at least I'm here with you. You're my real life.

(They sit together silently and think for a moment, then sigh simultaneously. SARAH reaches over and takes DANNY's hand.)

SARAH. Adam.

DANNY. Hunh?

SARAH. Let's name our child Adam. It gives me hope ... for the future.

(They sit together quietly, comfortable for the moment with their life together. Then suddenly, a MASKED GUNMAN storms in, breaking the silence.)

GUNMAN. Gimme the money! Gimme all the money!

DANNY. What money? We don't have any money.

GUNMAN. The cash! Gimme the cash!

DANNY. We're lower middle class—we don't have any cash.

GUNMAN *(fumbling to read a scrap of paper he pulls from his pocket)*. Isn't this one-twenty Lincoln?

DANNY. No, this is one-twenty-eight Lincoln. One-twenty is next door.

GUNMAN. Shit!

(In his anger, the GUNMAN ransacks the house. A tussle ensues, during which SARAH is thrown to the ground. DANNY finally succeeds in throwing the GUNMAN out and goes to SARAH.)

SARAH. The baby. I've lost the baby.

(He cradles her in his arms.)

DANNY. We're gonna get out of here. You'll see. We'll go far away—together—somewhere we can start our real life. I promise.

(The lights slowly fade on them as the scene shifts back to HOWARD and SYLVIA. We see DANNY help SARAH to her feet and exit during the following.)

HOWARD. On the domestic front, a man was shot in the arm and a woman brutally beaten in a suburb of Texas late yesterday—a random act of violence that took the life of their unborn child.

SYLVIA. That's right, Howard. Officials said today that Sarah and Danny Anderson of Starbuck, Texas, are lucky to be alive following a gunman's failed attempt to steal their family fortune. The Andersons reportedly have no fortune, but do live next door to a bank, which officials are saying was the intended target.

HOWARD. In the wake of these events, the Andersons have decided to relocate, as a lot of people are doing nowadays, to the remote state of Rhode Island.

SYLVIA. A lot of people seem to be moving to Rhode Island, Howard. I wonder why? On the scientific front ...

(Musical fanfare.)

SYLVIA *(cont'd)*. Scientists in Alaska have made a startling discovery; continental drift has virtually come to a standstill.

HOWARD. That's right, Sylvia. Realizing that the earth's own natural lubricant is crude oil, the oil industry, which has been sucking crude *out* of the earth for these many

years, has begun pumping Crisco Oil into abandoned oil wells to reverse the trend. As one executive put it, quote, “We’d like to be in Australia for Christmas.”

SYLVIA. To pay for this, the oil industry has raised the price of gasoline by 285 percent. When asked why, an industry spokesman said, “We want all Americans to feel the same joy we’re experiencing at solving this world crisis.”

HOWARD. I’m feeling it. Are you?

SYLVIA. News from around the country ...

(Musical fanfare.)