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Dramatic Publishing

MIND GAMES: AN ANTHOLOGY

By
PAUL ELLIOTT



Dramatic Publishing

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MIND GAMES: AN ANTHOLOGY

THE PLAYS

Ledge, Ledger and the Legend	6
Mind Games	30
The Door	51

LEDGE, LEDGER AND THE LEGEND

CHARACTERS

PETE

J.M.

P.J.

PLACE: Outside ledge of a tall building.

TIME: The present.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Ledge (corner and two sides), window
(practical).

PETE: Wallet containing currency, wristwatch.

J.M.: Business card, chewing gum, receipt book and pen.

LEDGE, LEDGER AND THE LEGEND

SETTING: *The outside ledge of a rather old tall building. The ledge makes a corner about halfway across stage and disappears from view. PETE, a young man about twenty-five years old, is seen edging his way along the ledge. He is obviously distraught and this is his final desperate move.*

PETE. It's over, over. (*Almost losing balance.*) Ahhh! (*He sways momentarily and then clings desperately to the wall.*) OVER!

(*J.M. crawls through a window and onto the ledge.*)

J.M. Hey, buddy, hold on. Wait a minute.

PETE (*hysterically*). Don't come near me. I'll jump. I'm warning you.

J.M. (*stopping short*). Okay. Okay, don't get uptight. I'll stay right here. What's your name?

PETE. What do you care what my name is? Nobody cares. Nobody listens. Nobody ever listens. (*Pause.*) My... name is Peter Ruther—

J.M. (*interrupting*). You gonna jump from there?

PETE. Huh?

J.M. You don't want to jump from there.

PETE. Don't try to talk me out of it. It's no use. I've made up my mind. My life isn't worth living. It's over...over.

J.M. You sure you want to jump from *there*?

PETE. Yeah, sure, I'm sure. Everything is...

J.M. Okay, if you want to blow it.

PETE. Huh? Blow it?

J.M. What did you say your name was?

PETE. Pe—

J.M. You don't want to jump from *there*.

PETE. And why not?

J.M. Unless you move over about five feet, all you'll do is hit that fire escape down there. Break a few legs but nothing permanent.

PETE. Huh? (*Looking down.*) Oh, boy! Okay. I'll...I'll jump far out...give it a high arc.

J.M. You trying for the Olympics or suicide? Take my advice, freely given: Move toward the corner five more feet at least.

PETE. You think so? What do you know?

J.M. Look, I'm a professional at these things. It's my business. See, here's my card. (*Reaches toward PETE with card.*)

PETE. Ahah! Thought you'd trick me, didn't you? (*Mocking J.M.*) "Here's my card." I'm not that dumb. I'm gonna jump. Nobody's gonna stop me.

J.M. Who wants to stop you? Go ahead, jump. Make a fool of yourself. God, you amateurs are all alike: Touchy, touchy, touchy. First thing that goes wrong...

PETE (*screaming*). First thing?

J.M. All right, something goes wrong and bingo, you jump out of the first window available. Never consider the effects or consequences, not to mention the mess.

PETE. The mess?

J.M. Certainly the mess. Boy, you're dumb. You didn't expect to just go— (*Imitates soft whistling sound falling until:*) —“tinko.” You're gonna go— (*Imitates falling plane ending with:*) —“SPLAT!”

PETE. Well, what's the difference? What do I care?

J.M. You care, believe me, you care. Somewhere in that feeble mind, you care. (*Pause.*) Look, here's my card.

PETE (*drawing back*). You won't try to grab me?

J.M. Look, I'll just stick it on the wall here. (*Takes gum from mouth and uses it for adhesive.*) Trust me. I know what's best. (*J.M. backs away and PETE slides over toward card.*) Take you, for instance. You've probably been a failure all your life and now you're gonna screw up your suicide, too. Can't you amateurs do anything right? (*PETE is trying to turn around on the ledge so he can read the card still attached to the wall, loses balance and almost falls, regains control and flattens against wall, breathing heavily.*) Will you be careful? (*PETE still hasn't read card.*) Pull it off the wall. (*PETE fumbles around trying to find card and, locating it, tries to pull it off. Finally he succeeds and clutches it to his heart—a triumphant achievement.*)

PETE (*crooking neck, trying to read card held at chest level*). “J.M. Millirbout, SUICIDE TO GO. Money-back guarantee.”

J.M. Yep.

PETE. Is this some sort of gag?

J.M. No. (*With pride.*) I'm a specialist. Look, Joe...

PETE. Peter!

J.M. Peter. Look, Pete, you don't want to make a mess of this, the most climactic moment of your life, do you?

PETE. Why should I care? A— (*Imitating falling plane sound.*) —“splat” is a “splat.”

J.M. Oh, no, you’re dead wrong. There are “splats” and there are...“SPLATS.” It’s kinda like a last will or testament. You want to make people notice, say what a good job you did, say “Now that was a SPLAT,” don’t you? You want people to remember it, don’t you?

PETE. Why should I care whether people remember it or not? Why should I want people to notice?

J.M. Then what the devil are you doing out on this ledge?

PETE. I want to commit suicide. I want peace and...

J.M. And you don’t care whether anybody notices or not?

PETE. Well, no, I...

J.M. Why didn’t you just cram pills?

PETE. Well, I...

J.M. There’s poison.

PETE. I didn’t...

J.M. Step in front of a car?

PETE. Look, I...

J.M. Why? Why? Why this ledge? Because you wanted everybody to know. You wanted everybody to notice. I know your kind— (*Turning head in disgust.*) Amateur.

PETE. Wait, I wouldn’t...

J.M. You wanted everyone to see and feel sorry for you.

You wanted them to know just what they’d done to you.

PETE. That’s not true.

J.M. You’re a show-off. I’ll bet you even left a note.

PETE. Well... No, no, I didn’t.

J.M. Come on, where is it?

PETE. I didn’t...

J.M. Come on. In your apartment? Your car? You mailed it! To your mother? Girlfriend? Wife? Boss?

PETE. I didn't mail it.

J.M. Ahah, you wrote one. Where is it?

PETE (*dejected*). In my wallet.

J.M. See, what did I tell you. (*Disdainfully.*) Amateur. I know your type. Amateur. You can't fool old J.M.... Amateur... Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

PETE (*completely broken*). I'm sorry. (*Sobbing.*) I did wrong.

J.M. Wrong? You stupid amateur, for once you did right.

PETE (*brightening*). I did?

J.M. Sure! It's your life. If you want to make a point, make it.

PETE. Yeah!

J.M. Show the world.

PETE (*even brighter*). Yeah!

J.M. Let 'em know.

PETE (*exuberantly*). Yeah!

J.M. Go out with a bang, not with a thud.

PETE (*cheering*). Yeah, yeah, yeah.

J.M. Throw yourself off a building.

PETE. Yea... (*Looking down and almost gasping.*) ...h!

J.M. Splatter yourself all over kingdom come. (*No answer from PETE.*) Spread out down there. (*PETE is getting nauseated.*) Blend into the environment. (*Noticing PETE.*) Hey, what's wrong? Hey, Joe?

PETE. Peter.

J.M. Hey, Pete. You look white as a ghost.

PETE. Feeling kinda faint.

J.M. If you were any place else, I'd tell you to put your head between your legs but here that might not be too wise. What happened?

PETE. I just realized something very important. I'm afraid of heights.

J.M. Pete, baby, get hold of yourself. You've made it this far. You've got something to say. Now's the time to say it. (*PETE doesn't answer.*) Well, I'll be. If that doesn't just take the cake. Get me all the way up here and then chicken out. You're a real bust. (*Derisively.*) Big man. Gonna tell the world. You wouldn't even make last page at the rate you're going.

PETE. I'm sorry.

J.M. You certainly are! Oh, well, it probably wouldn't have worked anyway. You've already made a botch of it. Don't know why I even try with you amateurs. I just wanted to be helpful. Gimme my card back and I'll go.

PETE. I said I was sorry.

J.M. (*sarcastically*). Better get down off that ledge, little boy, you could hurt yourself.

PETE. I won't get down. I want to kill myself.

J.M. Well, at the rate you're going, you could slip and fall. Gimme my card back.

PETE. My card, my card, my card. Is that all you care about?

J.M. Those cards cost five bucks a gross. I'm not in this business for my health. Since you're not going to listen to the advice of experience, gimme back my card.

PETE. See! Nobody cares, nobody gives a...

J.M. You're one hundred percent right, buster. I'm a busy man and I haven't got all day. If you don't need me, there are millions of others who do.

PETE (*humbly*). Please don't go. I need you.

J.M. It'll cost you.

PETE. Doesn't everything?

MIND GAMES

CHARACTERS

DR. HARRIMAN (m) psychiatrist; 35-45;
caring, professional and very wealthy

KYLE the patient; 24 years old;
rather unkempt and lost in his own world

BETH Dr. Harriman's receptionist; 30s;
cold, efficient

ELIZABETH. Dr. Harriman's receptionist; 50s;
warm, caring and nurturing

MARIAN Dr. Harriman's beautiful, loving wife; 30s

* * * *

Mind Games premiered August 30, 2009, at the Santa Monica Black Box Theatre, Santa Monica, Calif., starring London's West End stars Miles Anderson and Bella Merlin with Broadway's Andrew Boyle, Darice Richman and Ashley Fondrevay. Original music and sound by Edward Auslender.

MIND GAMES

(IN DARKNESS, we hear first the sound of city traffic and then sounds of birds chirping. As the LIGHTS come up, we find ourselves in the inner office of DR. ROBERT HARRIMAN in his exclusive offices in Los Angeles.

The office is beautifully appointed with a sleek desk and chairs plus the requisite psychiatrist's couch, which would indicate that DR. HARRIMAN and his clientele must be extremely well off financially. The doctor is seated at his desk dictating notes on a previous patient into a recorder.)

DR. HARRIMAN. Notes on Case 2212 for transcription: dreams are obviously just a thinly veiled attempt at solving her own marital issues and the horse in question is becoming more and more fully recognizable as her neighbor's husband, the illusive uh... *(he checks his notes)* Stanley, or transference as "stallion." I would not be surprised if these dreams do not recur in one form or the other until she either meets said "Stanley" and discovers he's no more perfect than her own husband, which begs the question: where—at what stage of her development—did the idea of a horse being a perfect an-

imal come into being for this woman? (*There is a soft knock on the door.*) Come in.

(*BETH, DR. HARRIMAN's receptionist, an attractive, though rather officiously cold woman, steps into the office.*)

BETH. Your next appointment is here.

DR. HARRIMAN (*clicking off his recorder and taking a deep breath before taking out the disk and storing it in a file folder*). I guess it can't be avoided.

BETH (*laughing*). No. I'm afraid not.

DR. HARRIMAN. How does he look?

BETH. As opposed to what?

DR. HARRIMAN. You know what I mean.

BETH. Well, he's not wearing a dress if that's any indication.

DR. HARRIMAN. I guess that's a step in the right direction. I guess. Sober?

BETH (*indicates with her hands that she's not sure*). I don't get that close. He just makes me uncomfortable. It's like there's something always churning up inside there. And I don't really want to know what it is.

DR. HARRIMAN. Well, maybe I can get the churning to stop...I think that's the point. He's actually an interesting case and certainly a change in my day. Besides, Central West helps me when I need it. I couldn't really say no to the referral.

BETH. Well, in my opinion, you may find out that payback can be a bitch.

DR. HARRIMAN. Opinion noted.

BETH. You want me to send him in?

DR. HARRIMAN. Might as well. The sooner I start, the sooner we can get him out of here and you can start feeling comfortable again.

(BETH exits, closing the door. DR. HARRIMAN straightens his desk and takes out a new disk, putting it in his recorder. He also flips to a new page in his notebook.)

BETH reopens the door and holds it as KYLE enters. She then quietly exits, closing the door behind her.

KYLE is a surprisingly nice-looking young man, though a bit unkempt. He's dressed in jeans and T-shirt and stands for a moment inside the door, just looking around the office as though seeing it for the first time.)

DR. HARRIMAN. Well, come on in. Let's get started.

KYLE. Okay. *(But he doesn't move.)*

DR. HARRIMAN. Something wrong? *(When he doesn't answer.)* Kyle?

KYLE *(still looking around)*. No. I was just looking at your office.

DR. HARRIMAN. Hasn't changed.

KYLE. But I never noticed.

DR. HARRIMAN. What?

KYLE. Everything. How it's all so perfect.

DR. HARRIMAN. Well, thanks. I had a decorator.

KYLE. No, I didn't mean that.

DR. HARRIMAN. Oh. *(When KYLE doesn't elaborate.)*
You want to get started?

KYLE. I guess. Okay. (*He moves into one of the chairs opposite the desk.*)

DR. HARRIMAN. Don't you think you'd be more comfortable lying down?

KYLE. No.

DR. HARRIMAN. I mean, I really think...

KYLE. No. I'm fine.

DR. HARRIMAN (*a bit thrown off guard*). Okay, if that's how you feel. Uh... So how have you been this week?

KYLE. Whoa! Trick question.

DR. HARRIMAN. I'm sorry.

KYLE. Or maybe not. (*Almost to himself.*) Maybe that's the only question. The key.

DR. HARRIMAN. I'm not following this. I just asked how you were...

KYLE. I was fine. I mean, it didn't start out that way, but then...

DR. HARRIMAN. Did you think about what we talked about?

KYLE. Oh, yeah.

DR. HARRIMAN. And...

KYLE. And at first I thought it just a bunch of, you know, bullcrap. Sorry.

DR. HARRIMAN. That's okay. It's good to express an opinion. What was bullcrap?

KYLE. What you said.

DR. HARRIMAN. What particularly? I mean we talked about a lot of things. I gave you a complete list of things to think about.

KYLE. Oh, most of that was bullcrap, but that one thing. Whoa!

DR. HARRIMAN. So let's focus on that then. What thing was that?

KYLE. It really wasn't on your list.

DR. HARRIMAN. No?

KYLE. You just mentioned it as I was walking out.

DR. HARRIMAN. Okay? Kyle, come on, this is like pulling teeth. You said something I said struck a nerve, made you feel better, or at least that's what I'm gathering, but until you...

KYLE. You said I was doing all this to myself.

DR. HARRIMAN. Oh. Well, yes, I meant... We tend to create our own problems.

KYLE. Yeah. And I got to thinking, what if you're right? (*When DR. HARRIMAN doesn't respond.*) I mean, what if you're really right and I am doing all of this to myself? And then I have to ask why? And that leads to a hundred other questions and... Whoa. You know, the first couple of days, I just wanted to check it all.

DR. HARRIMAN. What do you mean by check it all?

KYLE. You know, check out.

DR. HARRIMAN. That's not a solution and if you're really feeling that way, I need to notify...

KYLE. No, it was just a couple of days. I mean, things really got hairy, but then I got to thinking, and I pulled out your list and like I said, it was a bunch of crap, but it was what you said when you handed it to me that finally hit.

DR. HARRIMAN. Well, I'm glad something "hit."

KYLE. At first I really didn't understand it. I mean I thought you were talking figuratively, and then suddenly I asked myself, What if? What if you meant "literally"? So I started testing it.

DR. HARRIMAN. What?

KYLE. It! What you said!

DR. HARRIMAN. And how did you, uh...do that?

KYLE. Oh, on little things at first. And then bigger. And then Whoa!!!! Holy crap. Dr. Harriman, you should have been there. It was amazing. (*Getting up and pacing.*) I was doing things I couldn't believe and then all of a sudden, kinda like a wave of realization sweeping over me, I knew, all of this, I really was doing to myself.

DR. HARRIMAN (*not sure he understands, but...*). That's wonderful. A real major break—

KYLE. You don't understand.

DR. HARRIMAN. Of course I do. But I'd understand it better if you'd just sit back down so we could talk calmly.

KYLE. I am calm.

DR. HARRIMAN. Well you seem pretty agitated to me.

KYLE. You would be too if you understood what I was saying.

DR. HARRIMAN. Kyle, how many times do I have to say I understood you. I'm a doctor. I listen. I understand.

KYLE. No, you don't understand.

DR. HARRIMAN. Excuse me but I am sitting right here. There is no one hard of hearing in this room. When you speak. I listen.

KYLE. And what did I say?

DR. HARRIMAN. You said all of this I really was doing to myself.

KYLE (*sitting back down*). Okay.

DR. HARRIMAN (*moving back into control*). That's much better. I'm here to help you. To listen. To understand. And to encourage you.

THE DOOR

CHARACTERS

GRACE late 50s, a once strong-willed woman
who needs to refind her strength

JUSTIN a good-looking, sometimes disrespectful
teenager—the one person who now needs
Grace’s strength the most

THE VOICE at the door (m or w) . . sympathetic authority

NOTE: Please see important notes from the playwright on
pages 67 and 68.

COMMENTS FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The Door was written to dramatically address a very real problem facing our country today. Hundreds of young people are being murdered each year just for being themselves. To help your drama department get this message across and maximize its impact, the play calls for the faces of many of these victims to be projected behind the grandmother (Grace) as she asks for new laws to be enacted at the end of the play. To technically help you, these pictures have already been created and are available to you as a powerpoint presentation, with one empty slide space at the beginning for you to insert the picture of the actor playing Justin in your production. The immediacy of seeing the face of your Justin, a character the audience has learned to love, followed by many of the real victims will greatly enhance the impact of your production.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

If your drama club does not have the computer or projection capabilities of doing a powerpoint presentation, you can have the actress playing Grace hold up a large picture of the actor playing Justin as she makes her final appeal; as she says to remember the others, have the many members of your drama club who have been seated throughout the audience, stand up one at a time, say the name and age of one of the victims and hold up a picture of that young person until you literally have dozens of pictures spread throughout the audience. Then the entire drama club cast can join Grace in repeating the final line of the play, "Please remember," as the lights go out. *Door*

Another way to intrigue the audience before they enter your theater space is to have the waiting area lined with either real doors or large 4' x 8' panels that look like closed doors. The programs they are handed as they enter the theater are also emblems of closed doors. Once the audience is inside the theater watching the play, each of the doors in the lobby can be turned around so that when the playgoers exit, they find that on the backside of these doors are the pictures of literally hundreds of students who have been murdered in the past years.

The powerpoint presentation, program designs and the artwork and directions for creating the 4' x 8' doors and all the necessary photographs to support your production are readily available for your use; simply contact GayAmericanHeroes.com. Attention: Scott Hall.

THE DOOR

(GRACE's living room—night.

Moonlight comes through the partially curtained windows revealing a room in disarray.

A sudden knocking is heard from some unseen door. A figure, GRACE, bolts upright on the sofa where she's been sleeping.)

GRACE (*groggily*). Don't answer that. Justin, don't answer that!

(JUSTIN'S VOICE is heard coming from the darkness.)

JUSTIN'S VOICE. I won't. But you're going to have to eventually.

GRACE. Well, not today.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. Tomorrow's a long way off.

GRACE. Suits me. (*The knocking stops.*) I'll answer it then.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. It's not going away. They're not going away.

GRACE. Well, they can wait. I'm trying to sleep.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. If you were trying to sleep, you'd be in bed.

GRACE. If I could have slept in bed, I would have, but I couldn't. So I came in here.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. And...

GRACE. It didn't help.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. Then why don't you give up and turn on the light.

GRACE. I never give up and I don't want to turn on the light. Why do you care one way or the other? Light or no light. What difference does it make to you?

JUSTIN'S VOICE. I can't see you.

GRACE. You don't have to see me. You know what I look like. The same, just older.

JUSTIN'S VOICE. Come on, Grace, stop playing games.

(GRACE clicks on the light beside the rumpled sofa where she's been lying in her bathrobe. The light reveals a once neat room in clutter and that JUSTIN is not just a voice. He's a young man of eighteen, curled up in the high wingback chair opposite her.)

GRACE *(turning on the light)*. Games? You think this is a game? Why in the hell do you think I'm sitting here in the dark? Because it's not a game. It's not pretend anymore.

JUSTIN. Let there be light.

GRACE *(looking at him, then looking away)*. Smartass.

JUSTIN. See. That wasn't so bad.

GRACE *(reaching for the light again)*. Okay, you see me. Enough.

JUSTIN. Leave it on. It gets easier. Once it's on, you can't just shut it off.

GRACE (*reaching for the light switch again*). You just watch me. I can do what I damn well please.

JUSTIN. But you won't cut the light off again.

GRACE. What the hell do you know? (*Her hand holds by the switch, but she doesn't cut the light off.*)

JUSTIN. You'd be surprised what I know. I know you. I'm all grown up.

GRACE. That'll never happen.

JUSTIN. Can't stay the same forever. Why are you doing this to yourself anyway? This isn't like you. You know that.

GRACE. Well things change.

JUSTIN. Not you.

GRACE. Even me.

JUSTIN (*mimicking the commercial*). I've fallen and I can't get up.

GRACE. I can get up. I just don't want to. (*Someone knocks on the door again. The sound comes from the direction of the audience. Angrily, to whomever is knocking.*) Go away. Leave me alone. I mean it. Stop knocking. (*The knocking stops.*)

JUSTIN. Oh come on, Gram. Your legs are not broken. There's nothing keeping you here except you.

GRACE. Well, I'm enough. I'll get up when I damn well want to.

JUSTIN. Why not now?

GRACE. Because I don't want to. That's why. So you can just leave me alone too. (*After a beat.*) No. I don't mean that. (*Another beat.*) It's just... What's the point?

JUSTIN. The point is, you wouldn't let me do this...hide away like this.

GRACE. Maybe I should have.

JUSTIN (*getting up and crossing behind her*). Never. (*Throwing open the drapes to look out.*) Look, it's all the same out there. Morning still comes. People still get up and go to work.

GRACE. Well, they don't know. They wouldn't see the end of the world if it smacked them in the face.

JUSTIN. It isn't the end of the world.

GRACE. Don't you tell me what it is or isn't the end of. Nothing's the same and you know it. And get away from that window. (*Just then urgent knocking is heard again, coming from the audience. GRACE wheels toward the sound.*) See. See what you've done. Just leave me alone and close those curtains.

JUSTIN. Why? Are you afraid someone's going to see? They don't have to see. They know. They knock. You don't answer. They know.

GRACE (*desperately*). Justin, please. Just close the curtains. Please.

JUSTIN (*after a beat*). No. (*Looking at his hands, as though realizing something.*) I can't.

GRACE (*getting up*). Then I'll close them myself.

JUSTIN. No. Gram, please.

GRACE. If I want them closed, I want them closed. It's my life. My house. (*But she doesn't close them, instead, turning away:*) And stop calling me Gram. You know how much I hate that. Makes me feel old. And you only do it to piss me off.

JUSTIN (*laughing softly*). Whatever it takes to get you off the sofa. (*An evangelist.*) It's a miracle. Gracie's legs are moving.

GRACE. Smartass. And I hate Gracie as much as Gram. It's Grace.

JUSTIN. Amazing Grace.

GRACE. You better damn well believe it.

JUSTIN. That's more like it.

GRACE. Like what?

JUSTIN. Like you. Ornery as hell.

GRACE. Should have left you out on the streets. That's what I should have done.

JUSTIN (*as Joan Crawford in Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*). But you didn't, Blanche. You didn't.

GRACE. Should have. And that was a piss-poor imitation of Joan Crawford in *Baby Jane*.

JUSTIN. So I don't do dead actresses. Want to hear my Cher?

GRACE. No, got enough of that when you were twelve.

JUSTIN (*mimicking her*). Cut that music down. Can't hear a body think. Should have just left a sniveling little shit like you on the streets.

GRACE. I've never called you a little shit.

JUSTIN. Yeah you did.

GRACE. Then you must have deserved it. Must have pissed me off.

JUSTIN (*laughing*). I tried. God knows, I tried. Royally.

GRACE (*smiling at the memory*). You sure did. Nothing but aggravation.

JUSTIN. Are you saying when you got me, you got a hell of a lot more than you bargained for?

GRACE. I didn't complain.

JUSTIN. What do you mean you didn't complain? You complained all the time.

GRACE. No I didn't. And if I did, it was only 'cause that's what I was supposed to do.