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Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

By

PAT MONTLEY

Dramatic Publishing Company

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Plays on Principle (which originally included seven of the ten plays here) was premiered at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore in 2019 as part of a bicentennial celebration. The production was funded by a Creativity Grant awarded to the playwright by the Maryland State Arts Council.

CAST:

Christine Demuth	Michelle Lee
Chris Edwards	Richard Peck
Flinn Leigh Eng	Vernon Rey
Melissa Feliciano	Molly Ruhlman
Layla Hodge	Owen Sahnnow
Timothy Johnson	Sally Wall

PRODUCTION:

Director	Pat Montley
Set, Sound & Lighting Designer	Daryl Beard
Stage Managers	Naomi Berkenbilt, Javier Jaramillo
Set Crew	Jim Houston, Scott Macleod, Richard Peck, Owen Sahnnow

For Sally
my best critic
and dearest

Madrigal in Black and White

CHARACTERS

LIZ: Mid-to-late 20s, white.

SHADOW LIZ: Older, white; Liz's uncensored, wisecracking alter ego.

CLEO: Mid-to-late 20s, Black.

SHADOW CLEO: Older, Black; Cleo's uncensored, wisecracking alter ego.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: The street in front of Liz's suburban house.

PRODUCTION NOTES: Liz and Cleo can be played realistically. But the performances of the shadows should be stylized. They are less the ominous Jungian "evil twin" than they are the sometimes humorous, always embarrassing, meddlesome aunt, urging the warnings of an earlier generation. Nonrealistic costumes and stylized movement might serve them best. The shadows generally talk to their respective persons, but the persons—although they hear these comments—speak only to each other. The "car" can be represented by a two-dimensional cutout frame or simply by chairs or black boxes.

Question: How can we move beyond racial stereotypes?

(At lights up, there is bright sunlight and the sound of a lawnmower. LIZ is [miming] mowing the lawn. CLEO

is sitting in the driver's seat of a car with headlights on. SHADOW CLEO is in the car with CLEO. SHADOW LIZ accompanies LIZ. LIZ stops mowing and crosses slowly toward the car, squinting into the sun, but within a few feet of it, stops abruptly.)

LIZ. Oh! Sorry. I didn't see anyone in the car. I, um ...

SHADOW LIZ. You didn't see her because she's Black.

LIZ. The sun! The sun was in my eyes.

SHADOW CLEO (*to CLEO*). You're invisible.

CLEO. The sun? (*Turns to look out the back window.*) Oh. The sun was ... in your eyes.

LIZ (*finishing the sentence with her*). In my eyes. Yes. (*Self-consciously pointing and squinting.*) West. (*Gesturing to the lawnmower she left behind.*) I was, uh, mowing the lawn and I ... saw the car sitting here.

SHADOW LIZ. A car you didn't recognize, in your *cul de sac*—

LIZ. And I wondered—

SHADOW LIZ. What it was doing in front of the Johnson's driveway.

LIZ. Why the lights were on.

CLEO. Oh. I didn't realize they were ... (*Turns lights off.*) Thanks.

SHADOW CLEO. Neighborhood Watch at work. They'll all sleep safer tonight.

LIZ. I was going to turn them off. I mean if no one was in the car. So the battery wouldn't ...

SHADOW CLEO. She was going to rifle the glove compartment for crack, then call the cops.

CLEO. Tricky business.

LIZ (*misunderstanding*). What? No, really. I was only thinking that the battery would—

CLEO. No, I didn't mean—I meant you always feel ... a *person* always feels—

SHADOW CLEO. A *Black* person always feels—

CLEO. You always feel funny about doing that to another person's car.

SHADOW LIZ. Doing what?

CLEO. Reaching in the window.

LIZ. Right! Or opening the door to turn off—

CLEO. Yeah. So you make a big deal of it. Or look around the parking lot for an accomplice so you can say, "Should we try to turn the lights out in that car before the battery—"

LIZ. Exactly! And you think the cops are going to pull up just as you put your hand on the switch.

(LIZ and CLEO laugh.)

SHADOW CLEO *(to LIZ)*. They wouldn't arrest *your* white ass, sweetheart.

SHADOW LIZ. So ask her what she's doing here.

SHADOW CLEO. Better tell her what you're doing here.

CLEO. I'm waiting for my brother. *(Gestures to the house next to LIZ's.)* He's in there.

LIZ. Oh.

SHADOW LIZ. Didn't know the Johnson's were having any work done.

SHADOW CLEO. She thinks he's robbing the place.

CLEO. His car's in the shop.

SHADOW CLEO. Tell her he's a financial adviser. American Express.

SHADOW LIZ. Wait. They did talk about getting a new roof. Remember they asked us about recommending—

CLEO. So I'm giving him a lift.

SHADOW LIZ. In the getaway car.

LIZ. Who says siblings can't be nice?

SHADOW LIZ. She's probably got twenty of them—raised by a single mother who worked herself to an early grave cleaning white women's houses with carcinogenic chemicals.

SHADOW CLEO. Tell her he's a doctor making a house call. (*Realizing no one would believe it.*) Nah. Forget that.

CLEO. I was just admiring ... your house.

SHADOW LIZ. Lock up the silver.

SHADOW CLEO. Good move. Now she'll go right in and lock up the silver.

LIZ. Did you want to come up on the porch while you wait? Maybe have a cold drink?

SHADOW CLEO. Your big break, girlfriend! Sit on the plantation veranda, sippin' mint juleps and watchin' the darkies pick cotton.

LIZ. I was just ready for one myself.

SHADOW LIZ. Calm down, sister. Next you'll be telling her your grandmother marched in Selma.

CLEO. I ... I brought some work to do. (*Lifts papers on her lap.*) But thanks. Thanks anyway.

SHADOW CLEO. Now you've gone and hurt Miz Scarlett's feelin's.

LIZ (*disappointed*). Oh. Sure.

SHADOW LIZ. Don't look so disappointed. It's embarrassing.

CLEO. I think I would like to stretch my legs though. (*Gets out of car.*)

SHADOW LIZ (*to LIZ*). Nice legs, eh? We need to spend more time in the sun, you know. Promise me.