



MY BARKING DOG

BY ERIC COBLE



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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MY BARKING DOG was commissioned and first produced by Cleveland Public Theatre (Raymond Bobgan, Executive Artistic Director). It was directed by Jeremy Paul, the scenic and lighting designs were by Scott C. Chapman, and the sound design was by Richard Ingraham. The cast was as follows:

MELINDA Heather Anderson Boll
TOBY Nick Koesters

CHARACTERS

MELINDA—a woman, 30s–40s.

TOBY—a man, 30s–40s.

PLACE

A major US city.

TIME

Now.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set and props are to be suggested and kept to a minimum for maximum flow between scenes. Rampant theatricality is encouraged in staging, if not in performance.

Update any technology references as needed.
And we should never, never see any animals.

MY BARKING DOG

In the darkness we hear a woman's voice from somewhere in the room. Then a man's. They seem to be moving around us, past us, through us...

WOMAN'S VOICE. People ask me:

MAN'S VOICE. If this is really how it ended.

WOMAN'S VOICE. People ask me:

MAN'S VOICE. If this is how it began. As if—

WOMAN'S VOICE. There was a thread holding the two together.

MAN'S VOICE. As if—

WOMAN'S VOICE. The jungle we're in now could be time-reversed from full arcing trees back into shoots, back into kernels wedged by dirty fingernails into hungry soil.

MAN'S VOICE. People ask me:

WOMAN'S VOICE. If it's true.

MAN'S VOICE. People ask me:

WOMAN'S VOICE. Can you tell it again.

MAN'S VOICE. As if *this* telling will make it all adhere.

WOMAN'S VOICE. As if *this* telling will make it find the comfortable places inside you.

MAN'S VOICE. As if *this* telling will finally get to the truth.

WOMAN'S VOICE. But the truth is:

MAN'S and WOMAN'S VOICE. What I'm telling you happened.

WOMAN'S VOICE. This is a true story.

MAN'S VOICE. It may not all be accurate—

WOMAN'S VOICE. But it's all true.

MAN'S and WOMAN'S VOICE. I was there.

Lights come up on a man and woman facing us. He wears a tie and dress shirt, slacks, dress shoes. She's in a nice blouse, skirt, sensible shoes.

This is Toby and Melinda.

They stand in their separate spaces: Melinda in a factory setting, going into a ritual of motion; Toby at home holding his invisible laptop like a divining rod, moving in a ritual pacing about his apartment.

TOBY and MELINDA. I was here.

Melinda feeds in a stack of invisible paper, enters a code on an invisible machine, waits, unwraps more paper, feeds it in, enters a code, as...

MELINDA. There's a stranger on my ID badge. Not a strange face, it's my face, actually what's strange is that it's *still* my face. I haven't changed my ID-badge photo since I had it taken fourteen years ago.

She holds it up to us.

See? This is how I looked my first day on the job and I look exactly the same today. My boss says it's the second strangest ID-badge-photo phenomenon he's ever seen. He called me Dorian Gray, but I reminded him my name is Melinda. The weirdest ID-badge story was Charlie Hooker who worked in Section Two, stocking paper. He was 25 when he started here, and he had his photo taken for his ID badge and everything was normal and a year later the boss decided Charlie looked different enough from his photo that he should have another picture taken. I guess working in Section Two makes you age faster or something.

So he got a new ID badge, everything was normal for a few months, and then he had to get another photo taken because he looked so much older than his ID badge. And that photo lasted a few weeks, then he had to take a new one because he looked so much older. And that ID badge lasted him three days before he looked nothing like it, so they took another photo and made another badge, but he kept aging so fast they had to keep updating his badge, it was every hour now, he would just step onto the factory floor and they'd call him back, in and out, in and out, running, then walking, then hobbling, all day that last day, new photo, new photo, new photo, we all

felt so bad, and then at five P.M.—right on the dot, end of shift—Charlie died.

His skin was almost dust when he collapsed.
They didn't take a picture of that.

I didn't go to the funeral. But we had a little company memorial a few days later with a little cake and pop and I guess people told stories that could remember him—I was on the night shift, so I missed all this, but in the break room when I came in, there were all his ID badges in a stack. And I picked them up...and I kind of made a flip-it book. You could flip through the pictures and watch him go from twenty-five years old to the edge of death in five seconds. I did that a few times, but then I got sad so I flipped him backwards and watched him come back to life.

But I look at my own photo...and I haven't changed a single little bit in fourteen years.

If I think about it, I think that's okay.

But I don't think about it much.

Toby walks in a ritual pattern, raising, lowering his computer, adjusting, turning, as:

TOBY. The two hardest things about being unemployed are looking for work and not looking for work. Not looking is hard because you feel like you *should* be looking—even if you're applying for ten, twelve jobs a week, every week for months and months and months and not even getting replies anymore—but maybe the perfect job just opened up now and you're missing it! But looking is hard because 1) I have a limited skill set, and 2) I have a crap computer. Or my computer isn't crap but my connection to the outside world is. The laptop was a hand-me-down from a friend in another city who knew I needed a computer and felt pity for me, which honestly, I didn't mind. But while he felt sorry for me, he didn't feel sorry enough to buy me a data plan month after month after month. So I scan for free wifi.

And someone around here has an unprotected connection.

And I don't mind stealing it.

When I'm feeling good, I think of myself as Robin Hood... when

I'm feeling down I think I'm a miserable petty child who can't even take care of himself.

But I dress every day like I'm going to work—I heard that's good for you... I never know when... I never know where...my connection will be...so I traverse my apartment with my dousing rod...searching the desert...for water...

MELINDA. (*Continuing to feed paper.*) Sometimes, when I'm down at the factory, I get Section Three all to myself. They don't really need many people, just one to make sure the machine is still printing and to feed in more paper. Especially big orders, especially at night. Don't tell anyone, because they might take it away if they knew?...but I *love* the night shift. And holidays. People think I'm doing them a favor by coming in, but I love to be in the plant when no one else is here. Just me and the VOOM-VOOM-VOOM-VOOM-VOOM-VOOM. It echoes in Section Three because of the very high ceilings.

Sometimes I like to think it's my cathedral. And the printers are the organ singing low serious notes, the kind that make you contemplate and feel small. But only small because there's something so much bigger than you.

Even if you can't see it.
Or touch it.

Sometimes I feel it through my shoes.

TOBY. (*Continuing his ritual pacing.*) I've gotten good connections crouching behind my television...lying on the floor of my bedroom closet...twisted like a snake around the garbage disposal beneath my kitchen sink...and yes, could I go to a coffee shop and use their wifi, yes, which entails buying a cup of coffee or a scone, which entails money I'm rapidly running out of, but yes, could I go to the library and use their computers, yes, but 1) I don't work well surrounded by crazy homeless people also on the free computers (partly because of the mumbling and humming and thumping, partly because it's like looking at my future), and 2) The last several times I *did* use the library computer, the person before me had left some blaring porn ad gyrating on my screen, and I couldn't make it

go away and I had to find a librarian, who says “WHY ARE YOU ORDERING BUTT PLUGS?,” and people are snickering, and I’m trying to explain, and he kicked me off the computer and everyone’s glaring at me and...I just don’t need that right now.

MELINDA. (*Feeding paper.*) Sometimes when I’m by myself in Section Three, we’ll be printing out booklets for CDs. The sheets come off in ten-by-tens and get sliced in Section Four and stapled in Section Five.

But sometimes I get to look at the CD booklets and they have the words of the songs, and I’ll read the words and it’s like a poem, but it’s only half a poem because I don’t know what the music sounds like. Sometimes, I think about someone who works in a CD-pressing factory, who stands watching all the CDs come out and maybe he listens to one, for quality control, and he loves the songs, but he can’t understand the lyrics, and maybe sometime we meet somewhere, by accident, and he sings me the music and I tell him the words. And we make a song for each other.

TOBY. (*Pacing.*) The hardest thing about being unemployed is that you get to know your neighbors. Better than you want to. Because I’m always here. I become the constant, the star around which everyone else orbits, and you get to expect at two P.M. Tuesdays and Thursdays, the college students above me get home—

He points up; sounds of a door and steps.

The fitter one gets in first, brings his bike up the steps out back, locks it, goes into the kitchen, opens the refrigerator, gets a beer, and sits in front of the TV watching ESPN. I know it’s a beer because in thirty-five minutes he’ll pee into the toilet and flush. His roommate comes home twenty-three minutes later because he walks home, and starts prepping dinner—he’s the chef—I know this because the weight of his footfalls and the low hum of the conversation. Can’t make out words, but they’re both funny. Or funny enough to make each other laugh every seventy-two seconds. I’ve timed it.

Something else you can do when you’re unemployed.

And below me is the working married couple, both have steady jobs—bastards—leave at seven-fifteen, share a car, home at six-seventeen,

MY BARKING DOG

by Eric Coble

1 man, 1 woman

Two lonely people's lives are pushed suddenly into the unforeseen when a starving coyote shows up at their apartment building. MY BARKING DOG is a truly unpredictable, gripping exploration of isolated urban lifestyles and a daring lament for the destruction of nature by man-made boundaries.

"MY BARKING DOG...shocks and surprises, and in a most brilliant and entertaining way. ...poetic, funny, gripping and stomach-churning, and sometimes all these things together."
—LA Weekly

"...smart, witty, theatre of absurd-esque. ...a streamlined, no-fat depiction of two lonely souls possibly finding their ultimate purpose in life."
—BroadwayWorld.com

"I only wish more American plays were this daring. ...by the last moments of the play, we're in a fever dream of a world, a demented fantasy in which Nature finally has its revenge on Culture. If you think you've guessed what I mean, I guarantee you're mistaken."
—CLTampa.com

"...MY BARKING DOG has plenty of bite. ...smart, edgy, visceral and socially relevant. ...funny as hell, something that few plays with a social message manage to be."
—TheBradentonTimes.com

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ISBN 978-0-8222-3964-2

