

Contemporary Scenes for Young Actors

Douglas M. Parker

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*For my nieces and nephews,
who have caused many scenes
of their own.*

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INTRODUCTION

Scenes are the most basic building block of any theatrical work that has a plot. And although not all scenes involve two or more actors, most scenes do. Put two or more actors together onstage and the possibility for almost any situation or emotion instantly comes alive – along with the possibility for every form of human relationship, from equal to unequal to evolving.

With that thought in mind, the thirty-four scenes contained in this book provide young actors with the material to explore a full spectrum of age-appropriate emotions and relationships, ranging from fear to friendship, love to loathing, and cooperation to competition – with moments of sadness, sympathy, silliness, envy, guilt, anger, and almost everything in between.

To help young actors get the most from their experience, the language used in every scene is typical everyday language, rather than the sometimes outdated or highly poetic language that is often found in books of scenes collected from older plays. This emphasis on contemporary language and situations allows the actors to focus directly on the scenes, emotions and characters, without being distracted by unfamiliar words or turns of phrase.

Who is This Book For?

This book was written both for young actors and for the teachers, directors and acting coaches who work with them. More specifically, the material in *Contemporary Scenes for Young Actors* was written to be performed by actors ranging from ages 8-16, with some of the scenes created for actors towards the upper end of that range and some for actors toward the lower end. The scenes are presented in no particular order, allowing every actor the freedom to choose the scenes that best meet with his or her individual tastes, needs, and desire for a challenge.

A Quick Word for Actors

To add flexibility, almost any role in any scene can be played by a male or female actor. Wherever this is not true, the details will be indicated both in the table of contents and in a small note just under the scene's title.

Similarly, while most of the scenes in the book were written for two actors, there are several scenes included that were written for three. The number of actors in each scene is indicated both in the table of contents and directly under scene's title.

When choosing a scene, feel free to explore at random – the individual pieces are presented in no particular order. The goal is simply to find a scene that works with your needs or that challenges your skills. In other words, you may purposely choose *not* to look for the roles or situations that are most like you or that come most easily. You may decide to deliberately choose a scene where the character is absolutely nothing like you or is experiencing an emotion that you are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with.

Finally, once you've chosen a scene, as you prepare, ask yourself a few basic questions: What is the setting? Who is your character? What is your character's relationship to the other character(s) in the scene? And, perhaps most importantly, what is your character feeling and how, when and why do those feelings change over the course of the scene?

Beyond that, just enjoy.

SCENES

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WOODCHUCKS

(Scene for three people.)

(This scene takes place on the first day of summer camp. At start, JESS is standing center, looking around at the buildings and grounds. After a few moments, QUINN enters holding a piece of paper.)

QUINN: Hey. Are you a woodchuck?

JESS: What?

QUINN: Are you a woodchuck?

JESS: Do I look like a woodchuck?

QUINN: How should I know? This is my first summer here.

JESS: What are you talking about?

QUINN: Didn't you get an orientation sheet? It says what cabin you're in.

(QUINN shows JESS the piece of paper.) See. I'm a woodchuck.

JESS: Oh, I didn't even look at it. *(JESS pulls out a folded up piece of paper and unfolds it.)* Ummm. Yeah, woodchuck.

QUINN: Cool. You ever gone to camp here before?

JESS: No.

QUINN: Yeah, me neither. But I heard they don't have a lot of candy, so I brought a whole backpack full, just in case.

JESS: Cool. I brought a bunch of firecrackers. Just in case.

QUINN: In case of what?

JESS: In case we need to set off some firecrackers in the middle of the night.

QUINN: Awesome!

(RORY enters.)

RORY: Hey are you guys beavers?

JESS & QUINN *(Together.)* Do we look like beavers?

RORY: How should I know? It's my first summer here. I'm actually a woodchuck, but someone said there were a bunch of beavers around.

JESS: You're a woodchuck?

RORY: Yeah.

QUINN: Us too!

RORY: Cool. (*RORY looks around a moment, hesitating.*) Don't tell anyone, but I brought my pet snake.

QUINN: Does he like candy?

RORY: He doesn't, but I do.

JESS: Firecrackers?

RORY: He doesn't, but I do. But you know what he *does* like? Hiding under the blankets in someone's bed and then scaring the life out of them!

QUINN: That sounds like a really cool snake.

RORY: Yeah, his name is Sneak. Sneak the Snake. I'll show him to you later. He's in my duffle bag.

JESS: (*To both.*) I got to tell you, I totally didn't want to come here.

QUINN: I told my mom going to summer camp was the dumbest idea ever.

(*RORY nods in agreement.*)

JESS: But you know, I got to say, it might actually be alright. I mean, if you get to be a woodchuck.

RORY: Yeah, cuz if you're not, what's the point?

QUINN: Maybe there's even some other decent woodchucks.

RORY: Yeah! . . . Where's the cabin, anyway?

QUINN: (*Looking at the piece of paper still in his hand.*) I think this thing has a map.

(*JESS and RORY crowd around and look at the paper in QUINN's hand.*)

JESS: Umm, I think it's right over there. (*JESS points.*)

RORY: No, that's the dining hall. I think it's over there. (*RORY points in a completely different direction.*)

QUINN: It doesn't matter, we'll find it. (*JESS, QUINN and RORY start to exit.*) Go woodchucks!

RORY: Yeah. Go woodchucks!

JESS: Totally. Woodchucks!

(*JESS, QUINN and RORY exit.*)

- END SCENE -

THE DOG

(*Scene for two people.*)

(*REESE is sitting alone on the floor, looking depressed. SAGE enters.*)

SAGE: What's wrong?

REESE: Nothing.

SAGE: (*Pressing the matter.*) What.

REESE: (*Angrily.*) Nothing!

SAGE: That's it? That's all you have to say?

REESE: That, and go away.

SAGE: Listen, I know.

REESE: You don't know anything.

SAGE: Sarah told me your parents are splitting up.

REESE: Sarah should learn to mind her own business.

SAGE: You want to talk?

REESE: Does it sound like I want to talk?

SAGE: Why do you always have to make it so hard?

REESE: Make what so hard?

SAGE: Make it so hard for people to be nice to you?

REESE: Is that what you're being? Nice?

SAGE: Trying. (*REESE shrugs. SAGE sits on the floor, next to Reese.*) Look, when my parents split up, no one wanted to talk about it. Not even them. I didn't have anybody to talk to.

REESE: It's not fair! I didn't do anything!

SAGE: Doesn't matter.

REESE: (*Angrily.*) It matters to me!

SAGE: No, I mean - it's not about doing something. You didn't do anything to make it happen and you couldn't have done anything to make it not happen. It's just . . . them.

REESE: You think so?

SAGE: I know so. It's like if you fight with your sister and the dog goes and hides. He thinks he did something, but he didn't. He didn't start the fight and nothing he does can stop the fight.

REESE: You're saying I'm the dog? (*Angrily.*) You're saying I'm the dog!?!?

SAGE: (*Thinks a moment, then gently.*) . . . You're the dog . . . We're both the dog. You don't get to pick who you are. You only get to be who you are.

REESE: Is that supposed to make me feel better?

SAGE: I don't know. Do you feel better?

REESE: A little.

SAGE: Yeah.

REESE: (*Standing up.*) You want to go get some fries?

SAGE: (*Standing up.*) I don't have any money.

REESE: It's OK. Since my parents aren't talking, they both gave me my allowance this week.

(*SAGE and REESE start to exit.*)

SAGE: Silver lining, right?

REESE: Yeah, silver lining.

(*Exit.*)

- END SCENE -

ART

(Scene for two people.)

(DREW and BLAIR enter, each carrying a camera or using the cameras on their phones. DREW enters enthusiastically, slightly ahead of BLAIR.)

DREW: Come on, we have to do sixteen outdoor photos each and then we're done.

BLAIR: Ugh, I hate this. This is so boring.

DREW: It's easy! (Looking up.) Look – that building has some pretty cool graffiti, right? (DREW takes a photo of the graffiti.)

BLAIR: Fine.

(BLAIR takes a photo of the graffiti. DREW looks at BLAIR disapprovingly for a moment.)

DREW: That cloud's pretty cool. (DREW takes a photo of the cloud.)

BLAIR: I guess. (BLAIR takes a photo of the cloud.)

DREW: No – you can't just keep taking the same pictures I take.

BLAIR: Who says?

DREW: You're supposed to, like, be relying on your own judgment.

BLAIR: Well, I judge that you've got good taste.

DREW: That's my cloud.

BLAIR: You can't just call a cloud.

DREW: Yes you can. I saw it first.

BLAIR: Nobody owns the clouds.

DREW: No, but I own the *picture* of the cloud.

BLAIR: Great. You own your picture, I'll own mine.

DREW: No - it doesn't work that way. We can't just show up with all pictures of the same things. We have to have our own different pictures.

BLAIR: He won't even notice.

DREW: Of course he'll notice! Both our last names start with S. Our pictures will be right next to each other on the wall.

BLAIR: I hate this class.

DREW: Then why did you take it?

BLAIR: Umm. Because you *asked* me to.

DREW: I only asked you 'cuz I thought I'd be fun.

BLAIR: It's not.

DREW: It *is!* And it's easy! Look - anything can be art. You just have to . . . to look for it. Graffiti can be art. Clouds can be art. Garbage can be art!

BLAIR: In this class it can.

DREW: I'm serious. Look at that garbage can. The way all the paper and bottles and everything is just pouring out of the top and piling up all around it - it's like a fountain. You take a picture, you call it "Fountain," and it's art.

BLAIR: (*Getting a little interested.*) You think so?

DREW: I know it!

BLAIR: (*Sullenly.*) Go ahead. I won't copy you.

DREW: No - it's for you.

BLAIR: (*Genuinely pleased.*) Really?

DREW: Yeah! (*BLAIR picks up the camera, looks at the garbage can through it, squints, circles around the can, squats, stands up, etc., looking for the perfect angle, then takes the photo.*) Lemme see.

(*BLAIR shows DREW the photo.*)

BLAIR: Art?

DREW: Art.

(BLAIR smiles.)

BLAIR: OK, but you can't keep calling everything first. You can't call the whole world.

DREW: Look, I'll make you a deal. I'll split it with you.

BLAIR: What?

DREW: We'll split the world. I'll photograph my half, you photograph your half.

BLAIR: OK - I call North America and South America. You can have the rest.

DREW: Why are you being such a pain?

BLAIR: I just want to make sure there's something good in my half.

DREW: Alright, tell you what. You take everything from the waist down, I'll take the waist up. That graffiti and that cloud is above the waist.

BLAIR: The head.

DREW: What?

BLAIR: I own everything to the top of my head.

DREW: Done. (*Suddenly looking up.*) Oh! Look at that pigeon. (*DREW takes a picture.*)

BLAIR: (*Looking down.*) Gum wrapper! (*BLAIR takes a picture.*)

(*DREW and BLAIR start to exit, still looking around and taking photographs – DREW looking up, BLAIR looking down.*)

DREW: That shadow on the building! (*DREW takes a picture.*)

BLAIR: Cigarette butt in the gutter! (*BLAIR takes a picture.*)

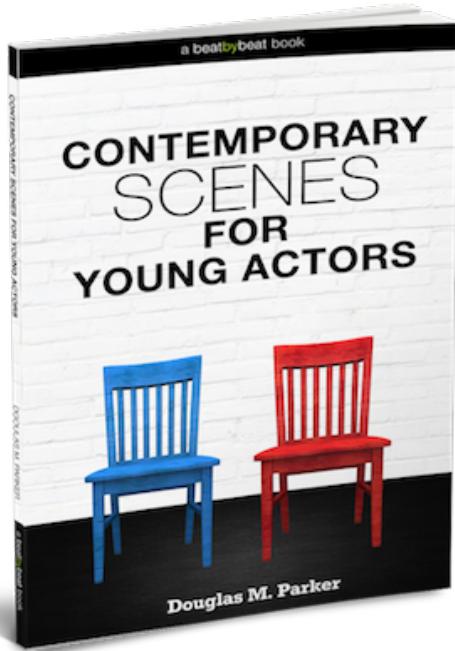
DREW: Are you just gonna take pictures of garbage all day?

BLAIR: Didn't anyone ever tell you? Garbage can be art.

(*DREW and BLAIR exit.*)

- END SCENE -

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