

**Go to the Chateau**  
**A play for an audience of two.**

**By Madeline ffitc**

**Characters**

**Smithy**

**Mailwoman**

**Courier**

**Phoebe** (*who everyone always greets with immense relief*)

**First Picnicker**

**Second Picnicker**

**Troubador band**

*(Troubador band can be made up of the Mailwoman and the two picnickers, later Smithy and Phoebe)*

***A Note on the Characters:** This play can be performed by six actors, with performers doubling as the heard-but-not-seen troubador band. Aside from Phoebe, the Mailwoman, and Smithy, the genders of the actors are not important. In general, the actors should play against type, so that instead of a male actor playing a female character specifically or vice versa, each performer plays an aggressive character trait that is unpredictably gendered. Visually appealing gendered accoutrements, such as vests, moustaches, gloves, hats, false eyelashes, parasols, and waistcoats may be distributed as if to a group of eager extraterrestrials. This world is peopled with an assertive, specific, and vigorous population.*

***A Note on the Text:** This play seeks to make use of the possibilities enjoyed by sticking strictly to written text, and also the opportunities arising from constrained improvisations. As such, the play is written to vassilate between sections of written dialogue, and sections of described scene. The sections of described scene, which I call "lazzis" are to be worked out by the actors and the director, and to be changed as needed with each performance. (My use here of the word "lazzi" is admittedly a loose interpretation of the old term). The lazzis can take any amount of time, but will probably run between one and five minutes. As these sections should be separated from usual stage directions, they will not be written in italics, but in plain text as if they were scripted dialogue.*

**Prologue: Lazzi of the bus stop.**

The play begins at a bus stop. The two audience members begin waiting at the bus stop. **Smithy** approaches and also begins waiting. **Smithy** is not acquainted with the two audience members, and is only allowed to interact with them as if they all just happen to be waiting for the bus together. The bus is late.

**End Lazzi.**

**Scene One:**

*The bus does not come.*

*Instead, a mail truck approaches.*

**The Mailwoman** gets out of the truck. As soon as she opens the door to the mail truck, mail spills out of the doors, sticks to her shoes, to the back of her pants, etc. **The Courier** also gets out of the truck, following **The Mailwoman** at a slight distance with a clipboard, pen, and stopwatch. He nods at the audience, and stands with them, watching the following scene. (from now on, **The Courier** will care for the audience, and stay near to them, and guide them.)

**The Mailwoman** and **Smithy** approach each other. The next two lines are spoken simultaneously, as if in a contest, and may be repeated, fragmented, and overlapped many times.

**SMITHY**

My mail has been arriving torn open, late, tearstained, or otherwise damaged!

**MAILWOMAN**

You said you loved me!

*Beat.*

**MW**(gestures to **Courier**)

You think men don't like me. Well, this man has been following me all day. He won't leave me alone. I don't even know who he his. That's devotion.

**SMITHY** (to **Courier**)

Who are you?

**COURIER** (to **MW**)

I'm from quality control. I've been assigned to your route today. Just pretend I'm not here.

*The next lines are delivered simultaneously, as before.*

**MW** (to **Smithy**)

Did you report me?

**SMITHY** (this time to **Courier**)

My mail has been arriving torn open, late, tearstained, or otherwise damaged!

*Beat.*

**MW** (to **Smithy**)

You want your mail? Here's your mail. Look, a package (*shoves it at him*). Who's it from? (*Slaps him across the face*).

**COURIER** (*looks at watch*)

You've received your mail on time, sir. As for this bus, has it ever been on time? (*to audience*) You might as well come with us. At this rate, you'll get there a lot faster. (*implicates audience in helping to clean up scattered mail. Ushers them into back seat of truck*).

**MW** (*to Smithy*)

You'll drive, of course. It's the least you can do.

**SMITHY**

I'll drive.

*They get in the car. Smithy turns on the car stereo. Teddy Pendergrast sings the funk song, "I don't love you anymore." Remarkably upbeat.*

**MW**

I'd like to get to know you better.

**SMITHY**

I'd like to get to know me better too.

**MW**

You said you loved me.

**SMITHY**

I don't love you anymore.

*turns off music. Courier gives an "All My Children" playing card to the audience. It reads, "Lust for Phoebe. Go to the Chateau".*

**SMITHY** (*hands audience his package from earlier*)

Open this for me, will you? I'm driving.

*Inside is a bouquet. Smithy pulls over as Phoebe waves from the corner. She has a large trunk in tow.*

**SMITHY**

Finally, it's her.

**MW**

Who?

*Smithy takes the bouquet from audience, gets out of car.*

**Lazzi of Smithy Greeting Phoebe.**

**Smithy** is overheard outside the car greeting **Phoebe** by name, presenting her with the bouquet, picking her up and twirling her around. She takes out a handkerchief, wipes his nose (they do this on the hood of the car, pressed up against the windshield). They groom each other. She feeds him a sandwich with the crusts cut off. They are aggressively affectionate with one another without ever kissing or embracing.  
*End Lazzi.*

**Lazzi of ushering Phoebe into the car, packing the trunk.**

**Smithy**, helpful, tries to fit everything in to the small car. He squishes **Phoebe** into the back, next to the audience. She is friendly, wind-blown, rosy cheeked “Oh, hi, thanks, thanks a lot, good to see you. Do you have enough room?” squeezes **MW**’s shoulder. “Hi, you must be... I’ve heard so much about you.” Wait a minute, there’s not enough room. **Smithy** wedges trunk into front passenger seat with **MW**, still not quite right. **Smithy** is doing all of this with great fervor. Finally, he pulls **MW** out of the front seat, puts **Phoebe** in her place, squeezes **MW** in back, fits trunk in on top of her. Doesn’t quite fit, pulls **MW** out of back seat again, puts trunk in the trunk of the car, shuts the back door, gets in the driver’s seat, and takes off. **Phoebe** in passenger seat, leaving **MW** on the sidewalk.

*End Lazzi.*

**PHOEBE**

Where are we going?

**COURIER** (*Points at card*)

To the Chateau.

**PHOEBE** (*to Smithy*)

Oh, you old thing. Don’t you know I’m just a simple girl?

**SMITHY**

Can someone navigate? There’s a map around here somewhere. Phoebe, look in the glove compartment. No, it’s back behind the seat, it’s back there, (*to audience*) can you get it?

*Courier helps the audience to find the map in the back seat, unfold it. It is a map that is unrecognizable, yet easily navigable. Audience navigates driver through fields and fairgrounds, finally to a park where a lavish picnic is set up, abandoned.*

**SMITHY** (*to audience*)

Alright, we don’t have all day. Me, I’m not hungry, but you must be destroyed by hunger.

**PHOEBE**

I’m not hungry either.

**SMITHY**

Oh, no, you artful little minx? Well, the two of you might as well go and eat. I'll wait here with Phoebe.

*Courier leads audience to picnic, about a hundred feet away into the park. They begin to eat. As soon as they are gone, **Phoebe** and **Smithy** go around to the back of the car, open the trunk of the car, take out **Phoebe's** trunk, laboriously haul it around to the sidewalk, open it, and began to sift through golden treasure and jewels. Also guns and other weapons. Also coon skin caps.*

*Presently, two other **picnickers** approach through the park with red checkered napkins tucked into their collars, and ask the two audience if they might join them. They sit down and begin to eat, but if they are addressed directly, they shush the audience, gesturing towards **Phoebe** and **Smithy**. If the audience looks at **Phoebe** and the **Smithy**, however, **Courier** snaps "don't look over there."*

**FIRST PICNICKER** (to *Second Picnicker*)

Have you ever stayed up until midnight before?

**SECOND PICNICKER**

No.

**FIRST**

What about on New Year's Eve?

***Courier** produces a stack of photos, hands them to the audience one at a time. The first one is of the two **picnickers** kissing under the mistletoe, as the clock on the wall behind them reads midnight.*

**SECOND**

Never have.

**FIRST**

What did you dress up as for Halloween last year?

***Courier** hands audience a photo of **second picnicker** dressed up as a pumpkin.*

**SECOND**

I didn't dress up. Why? What did you dress up as?

***Courier** shows audience photo of Tintin, the Herge comic strip character.*

**FIRST**

I went as Tintin.

*Beat.*

If you're like me, you had your first sexual stirring while watching the black and white movie of "Oliver Twist".

**SECOND**

The musical?

*Courier produces photo (or paraphernalia of some sort) of the cartoon version of Oliver and Co.*

**FIRST**

No, no, the black and white version from 1958. The Artful Dodger made me feel so empty and aching.

**COURIER**

You still long for him.

**SECOND**

He wasn't handsome so much as he had these marshmallowey cheeks.

**FIRST**

Yes, that's it. Why do you pretty much lie about most things?

**SECOND**

I don't think of it as lying while I'm doing it.

**COURIER** *(to audience)*

Yes, he does.

**SECOND**

Okay. It's because I'm angry with you but I don't feel I can discuss my feelings with you in a straightforward manner. However, I enjoy it when you discuss your feelings with me, as you just did about the Artful Dodger.

**FIRST** *(belches loudly)*

Well, I always tell the truth, as best I can.

Why don't you try it?

**SECOND**

Try to discuss my feelings with you?

**FIRST**

Try telling me the truth.

**SECOND**

I could do it.

**FIRST**

Then do it. It's easy.

**SECOND**

You go first.

**SECOND**

I just went. You said so yourself. About the Artful Dodger.

**SECOND (to the Courier)**

Okay, then you.

**COURIER**

If I must. I took a Wilderness First Aid Course some years back, where I constructed a splint out of tent poles for a one legged man. I constructed a splint for his peg leg. He was such a tiny man. He was only four feet five inches tall, with a full blond beard, and I caressed his peg leg, and he had a perfect little hard rubber foot like a woman's body.

**SECOND**

Like a dress maker's dummy?

**COURIER**

Yes, like a small violin, curved, like this.

*They throw grapes and chocolate and almonds and cherry tomatoes in their mouths, then take long slugs of water, then ahhh.*

**FIRST**

Now you.

**COURIER**

Yes, it's your turn.

**SECOND**

I told you. It's easy.

**FIRST**

Then do it.

**SECOND**

I saw a mermaid last year at the ocean. I was concerned with sea life. I saw a mermaid out there on the jetty, but it was scary.

**FIRST**

You didn't see a mermaid.

**SECOND**

A lot scarier than I thought it would be. It had these staring dead eyes. It smelled like feet. It was bloated and green. It's bottom half was all eaten away.

**COURIER**

I believe you, in a way. You must have seen a drowned woman.

**FIRST**

Did you stop?

**SECOND**

No. I just kept going.

*Smithy and Phoebe come across the park towards the picnic. Driver is ringing a huge alarm clock or bell or buzzer. Wild eyed.*

**SMITHY**

We don't have all day, Phoebe, I really wish you wouldn't.

**FIRST**

Phoebe!

**PHOEBE**

I didn't think I'd see you here! How long has it been?

**FIRST**

I don't think I've seen you since you got those wasp stings.

**SMITHY**

Wasp stings?

**PH**

Ouch, don't mention it

**FIRST**

You chopped into that wasp's nest, and those wasps swarmed around you and stung you on both your eyebrows.

**PH**

On both my eyebrows, yes that was the funniest thing about it.

**FIRST**

Yes, that was the funniest thing, one sting right in the middle of each eyebrow, and I just happened to come along just as you flung away the hatchet. Was it raining?

**PH**

It had just stopped raining, but I owe so much to you, you knew just what to do. (*To Smithy*) Well, of course he just took up a handful of dust, spit into it to make a paste of mud, and then plastered it over both my eyebrows.

**FIRST**

She looked like Groucho Marx. An impossibly cute Groucho Marx if can imagine that.

**PH**

It seemed to draw the poison right out. (*To Smithy*) Oh, don't look at me like that. It was long before I'd ever met you.

**FIRST** (*regarding Smithy*)

And who's this?

**PHOEBE**

This? Oh, this is Smithy. Would you believe it, I was just standing there with my trunk, I'd just come from the train, and Smithy, I haven't seen him in years, and he just swoops down with these, these absolute *blooms*, and he had the funniest little lady with him, some sort of delivery person, and, well, you know me, I was thrilled, so -

**COURIER**

From the bus, did you say?

**PH**

From the train. The bus - the bus never comes. I'd just come from the train.

**COURIER**

And you hadn't seen Smithy in years, you say?

**PH**

In years, yes. What's it to you?

**FIRST**

Well, Phoebe, where've you been?

**PHOEBE**

I've just come from the Chateau.

**FIRST** (*to Second*)

Do you know Phoebe?

*Courier produces photo of Second and Phoebe at the chateau together with trunk of jewels.*

**SECOND**

No, we've never met.

**PH**

No, I don't think we've met.

**SECOND**

Of course, your reputation precedes you.

**PH**

Yours too.

**SECOND**

And I'm glad you're alright.

**PH**

Thank you.

**FIRST**

Do you mean you're glad she's alright about the wasp stings?

**SECOND**

Yes, that's what I mean. The wasp stings.

**FIRST (To Phoebe)**

He has trouble telling the truth. He has a hell of a time with it.

**PHOEBE**

Really? Oh, you should try it.

*(tells the truth)*

Now you, Smithy. Go ahead.

*Smithy tells the truth*

**PH (to Second)**

Go ahead. Tell the truth.

**SECOND**

But I did tell the truth. I told the truth about the mermaid.

**PH**

You saw a mermaid? Was it scary?

**SECOND**

It was scary. A lot scarier than I thought it would be.

**PH**

Did you stop?

**SECOND**

I didn't stop. I just kept going.

**FIRST**

This is really making me sick. I can hardly put up with it.

**SMITHY**

We've got to get out of here, Phoebe. Let's go. Time to go.

*Smithy, Phoebe, the Courier, and the audience leave the **picnickers**. They all get back in the car. While the audience was at the picnic, a canvas scroll has been put up around the backseat. It is a lush landscape scene, and it locks the audience and the **Courier** into it, so that they cannot see into the front seat, or out the sides or the back of the car. They can only see the landscape that is painted all around them. It portrays a lake, surrounded by greenery.*

*Smithy and Phoebe are in the front seat, and **Phoebe** uses a flashlight to illuminate various parts of the landscape from behind, all the while reciting aloud an inventory of each thing that was in the trunk.*

*The **Courier** gives the audience two crystal glasses to put against the canvas to help them listen more closely. He records the list.*

**SMITHY**

So everything was there?

**PH**

Nothing out of place.

**SMITHY**

Well that's something at least. You never told me about those wasp stings.

**PH**

What did that funny little woman mean to you?

**SMITHY**

I barely knew her, and now I've already forgotten her. The one thing I remember is that she was not very good at delivering the mail. I know how you feel about manual labor, but I think you could take over her job and do it very well. I'm not saying that you're not too good for manual labor.

**PH**

I don't want to deliver the mail. I want to open the mail.

**SMITHY**

You can, Phoebe. You can open all the mail you want. I want that for you. I love you.

*Sound of opening mail.*

*They arrive, and park the car. The audience cannot see where. The **Troubador Band** is heard approaching. **Phoebe** and **Smithy** are silent. **Phoebe** starts humming along a bit. As the **Troubadors** comes closer, and pass in front of the car, **Phoebe** opens the passenger side door, and gets out to join them. Then **Smithy** gets out too. The audience can hear all this, and see the shadows of it, but cannot see it, as they are encased in canvas.*

*The **Courier** takes down the canvas between the front seat and the back seat, revealing that the driver's side and passenger's side window, as well as the windshield are covered with the very same canvas landscape, so that it is still a 360 view, albeit a slightly larger one.*

*The **Troubador Band** can be heard passing, and moving away and getting further into the distance, crunching away into the woods.*

*The **courier**, and the audience take down the canvas from all the windows of the car, and see that they have been driven to the real life version of the painted landscape.*

*The **Courier** hands the audience a telescope from the glove compartment. The **courier** ushers the audience out of the car. Each **Troubador Band** member has taken their place behind a different tree, and they all begin to play, quietly now, their tambourines. The **Courier** and the audience sit on the hood of the car, and the audience looks through the telescope out over the lake. On the far bank of the lake, through the telescope, they see the rotting mermaid.*

*End of the play.*