

The ELEVEN-MINUTE PLAY

ACT I

Scene: Interior of a cheesy but sincere sports pub somewhere in New England. There's a bar in the background but the action takes place at a large round table off to one side. The Dropkick Murphys can be heard indistinctly in the background.

DP: Five guys, at least two of whom have Sox caps on. All have beers in front of them. One of them is poking at a laptop.

Al:
... so we've got to come up with some ideas for getting money, that's all there is to it. We're broke, busted, stony. And no money, no trip to Vegas next month. I can't make it any more simple. Some way or another we've got to come up with seven thousand dollars.

Rich:
I already checked - my wife's car is worth \$5600. That would help, wouldn't it?

Al:
Yeah, except she drives it to work every day. Think she might miss it, dillweed?

Jack:
I got it! How about we sell our blood to somebody? They're always looking for blood bank donations. That's the way my brother-in-law Jimmy picks up a few bucks of what he calls "expendable income" before he goes to the dog track. He says it's painless and only takes a few minutes.

Al:
What do they pay?

Jack:
I guess it's like \$25 a pint.

Al:
... so how much blood would we have to sell to raise \$7000, do you think?

Jack
... uh .. a lot? But don't forget there's five of us. *(Crestfallen)* It wouldn't work, would it?

Bobby (poking excitedly at the laptop):
Hey, Al, I think I found something. There's this outfit down on the Cape that's willing to pay forty thousand dollars in prize money to anybody who can write an eleven-minute play that

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they like. (*mumbling as he reads website*) Jeez, I wish I had my glasses. But it looks like the rules are really simple. You can write about anything as long as it doesn't go past (*squinting*) ... looks like eleven minutes. And the payoff takes place two weeks before we're supposed to leave for Vegas! (*groans*) Crap - the connection broke. Guess I need a new battery in this thing. But I swear that's what this website said!

Rich (*in tones of disbelief*):
How much was that prize again?

Bobby:
Forty thousand total. First prize is twenty-five, second is ten, third is five.

Rich (*almost a whisper*)
Wow! (*counts on fingers*) That's a lot of money!

Bobby:
But the catch is that the entries have to be in the judges' hands by the end of next week.

Al:
That's terrific - easy money for sure (*with loud sarcasm*) FOR ALL THOSE OF US WHO HAVE WRITTEN PLAYS BEFORE! Hey Gene - you ever try anything like this? I mean you being gay and all, this sounds like it might be right up your alley, artsy and everything.

Gene:
Sorry, guys - I choreographed a ballet in high school, but that's as close as I've ever come to the stage.

Rich:
I had a few English courses over at the Community College. Plus I was in the middle of an online "Creative Writing" course but I had to stop to rebuild Charlie Hynes' transmission after the moron decided to drag-race his F-150 against that Cambodian Porsche up in Saugus. But maybe ...

Jack:
I played the Skull in King Lear one time in one of those little theater low budget productions my ex-wife was always involved in.

Al:
A Skull? How - and maybe more important, why - did you play a skull?

Jack:
Well, as usual money was tight for them, and their budget was too tight to buy a prop skull.

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So we worked it out that I'd hide under some dark covers and stick my head out just enough so that people would think my head was the Skull. It worked out pretty well except that Hamlet had to kneel down to talk to me during the Alas Poor Yorick speech. No picking up and talking to the skull in this production, more along the lines of lean over and chat with it. It was cool for a few weekends, until the night I sneezed ...

AI:
Look, none of this is helping. We need ideas and we need them fast. Today is Tuesday - let's meet here on Friday and everybody bring an idea for this eleven-minute play. We'll pick one scenario that looks good and go with it. Bobby, make sure you have new batteries in that machine of yours. Las Vegas, here we come!

(curtain)

ACT II

Scene and DP: as in Act I.

AI:
Okay, so the votes have been cast, and we've decided to go with Rich's idea. *(light clapping and "attaboys")* Rich, will you give us a recap?

Rich *(with commendable modesty):*
Certainly. *(after clearing throat, reads from sheet of paper)* The hero is a space commander who dresses in black and has trouble breathing and is working for a sinister entity called "The Evil Forces of Darkness". He has three daughters, two of whom are kind of ass-kissers and one of whom is not but she really loves him. There's also a troubled son who can't decide if he wants to be on the good side or the evil side, so he acts out by pretending to be an Italian kid which of course he isn't but he has a hot Puerto Rican girl friend. She's a little kinky and gets all excited when Sonny dresses up like a donkey. His best friend is a black dude from another town, who thinks his wife might be playing around. And all these people are desperately searching for some other guy who has awakened one morning thinking he's a cockroach but in reality has an ancient map that tells where the tablets containing the missing Commandments Eleven to Fifteen are buried. Donkey boy and the Honest Daughter - who are now heavily involved after the Puerto Rican chick runs off and marries a Scottish prince - find the tablets and sell them on e-Bay for incredible amounts of money and live happily ever after in another galaxy. *(takes a deep breath.)* And that's pretty much it.

Jack:
I believe that's what they call a "tour de force". Bravo!

Rich *(as the others express their admiration):*
Yeah, well, I figured I'd cover as many bases as possible since we don't actually know what

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these folks are looking for. Oh, and I threw in a few songs too. Actually they were written by my wife's nephew. I guess they're OK, but we don't have to include them. He said he'd understand if we had to drop them.

Al:
Okay, guys. Now we have the basic idea, courtesy of our very own Dramatis Personae here (*Rich blushes while the others chuckle*). And now we sit down over there in the corner and create the best goddam Eleven-Minute Play the world has ever seen. (*shivers*) I can almost hear those twenty-five thousand silver dollars landing on our doorsteps!

(curtain)

ACT III

Scene: as before but with suggestion of early morning sunshine coming in through one of the windows. DP as before but definitely not quite as chipper as when last seen. Hints of eye-bags and beard growth suggest that a long night has been spent in the creative process.

Bobby:
That's it, guys. I can't keep my eyes open. You can keep the laptop here but I've got to get a couple hours of z's before I go to work. (*yawns and stretches*) See you later. Text me when we come up with a game plan. (*glancing at wrist*) What time is it anyway? I can't even read my watch.

Rich (*with Shakespearian intonation*)
The moon is down. I have not heard the clock.

Bobby:
Huh?

Al (*also yawning and stretching*):
Same for me. (*reaches towards a box of donuts, extracts a Boston cream, examines it, opts instead for a jelly stick*) It was real nice of Dicey to let us stay here all night, even though the fumes from that polyurethane they're putting on the floor were starting to get to me.

Jack:
... and it was a big help that Bobby Morrissey's crew is doing the job. His brother is night sergeant this week, so you know we weren't going to get hassled by the cops for any after-hours violations. (*imitating bass cop-type voice, complete with 1930s Irish accent*) "And exactly fwhat are you lads doing here at four in the morning? Have yez no homes to go to?" (*new voice a la Mickey Rooney*) "Gee, officer - we're writing a play so we can make a lot of money and go to Las Vegas!" (*cop voice again*) "A likely story. Yez should all be ashamed,

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wives and kids and all. Now I'll need names and addresses ..." *(cellphone chips, Jack stands up quickly and retires to a corner to take call, heads for door)* Hey, see you guys later, okay? That was Jeannie on the phone. I told her last night I'd be late getting home but I guess I forgot the magic words "... or maybe not at all." She's pissed, big time. *(doing weak Frank from Gloucester imitation)* I'm outta here. Ciao!

Rich *(lifting weary head from cradling arms):*

I know we started out fast and furious, but did we actually get any work done?

Gene *(checking Bobby's laptop):*

Believe it or not, I see six ... seven ... ten pages of notes on here. Single spaced, yet. *(reads)* "Father, dear father, pay no attention to those other two, I pray you. They are not good daughters but mere ass-kissers who wish only to inherit the planets you own in the Zebulork 5 galaxy. Only I, Princess Laurie, truly love you." Then the father replies: "Begone, heartless Princess: Words can never say / what the heart will know one day / the grandeur of your kiss / is something I won't miss ..." *(stops in confusion)* Huh?

Rich *(rubbing temples dejectedly):*

What the hell is all that gibberish after "Heartless princess"?

Gene *(equally dejectedly):*

I guess we decided to keep your wife's nephew's songs in the show after all. I gotta ask, buddy - are the rest of his songs as cheesy as that one?

Rich *(groans):*

I don't know. Cripes, I hope not. I guess I should have read through them before I brought them over here ...

Al *(after gulping and nearly spitting out cold coffee):*

Read through a couple more pages before I get out of here.

Gene *(tapping at keyboard; stops; begins pounding table in silent hysterical laughter) (to himself)* god, no. Please. *(to others through gasps)* Tell me - were we drinking a lot last night?

Rich:

Uh - oh ... *(places head on table and begins what might be sobs)*

Al:

Uh ... drinking? No, couple or three beers each, and I think Bobby might have had a Jamie, but certainly no more than that. We were pretty well-behaved. Or it might have been a blackberry brandy but I think it was a Jamie.

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Gene:

Well, somehow we have a dance number in the show.

Al and Rich (*in simultaneous squeaks*):

A WHAT?

Gene (*head shaking in disbelief*):

A dance number. Think “Singin’ in the Rain” or “Oklahoma”. Agnes de Mille, Bob Fosse. (*looking away from Al's look of utter incomprehension and back intently at the laptop*). I swear to god I had nothing to do with this. Not my choreography. Not anybody’s. Where the hell did this come from?

Al (*as if from a great distance*):

I vaguely recall that around three-thirty or so, somebody - and honestly I don’t remember who - said that we needed to liven things up a little. I think we were working on the dialogue for the black dude and his cheating wife around then, but I can’t be sure. (*takes another gulp of coffee, makes retching sound*) I can’t be sure of anything right about now. I want to go home. Or someplace.

Rich:

I think you’re right. Things started getting a little heavy so we decided to throw in a bit of song and dance ...

Gene:

Yeah, but THIS? (*reads from laptop*) “Oh Assembled Representatives of the Evil Forces of Darkness, we of Planet Viagra Beta would like to present a musical entertainment for you.” Then there are the details: a dance number starting off with the two ass-kissing daughters, the confused son, and the Puerto Rican girlfriend. There’s a kind of Bavarian lederhosen number, then suddenly, for no reason at all, the girlfriend launches into “La Cucaracha”, which of course is the cue for Gregor the Cockroach Guy to make his appearance doing a solo buck-and-wing. The number closes with a march-off to “Battle Hymn of the Republic”. (*stunned silence for a few seconds. Gene speaks again, obviously making an effort to control himself*) Honest to god, guys - it’s all there on Bobby’s laptop if you don’t believe me. (*He leaps from the table with a shriek of laughter and stumbles howling towards the men’s room, banging on walls as he goes, leaving Al and Rich afraid to look at one another.*)

Rich (*in a voice intended to demonstrate a rational and calm demeanor*):

You know, Al, I’m beginning to wonder if this whole Drama-By-Committee thing is going to work out. I sure as hell don’t remember having any dance numbers in mind. It was a nice, straightforward plot line when it started, but now ...

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Al: *(in similar tone of voice)*

Look, Rich, I know how you feel. But what we have to remember is that some way, somehow, we've got to fill up eleven minutes or else we can kiss our trip to Vegas goodbye. And if filling eleven minutes means we need dance numbers and trained chimps and female impersonators, so be it. *(compassionately)* I'm really sorry if any of this violates your ... artisticness ... artistry ... artistude ... oh hell, you know what I'm trying to say. But this way everybody gets to take a little responsibility, for good or for bad. *(with renewed determination)* But dammit, one way or another - we're going to get to Vegas!

(curtain)

ACT IV

Scene: *a softball diamond, early evening. DP: Three players in matching tops and caps, two wearing gloves, one taking practice swings with a bat. Two occasionally glance at watches with increasing anxiety.*

Lou:

I swear to god, Timmy, that's what he told me: "We might be a little late tonight." I explain to him that the other league's gotta use our diamond after we finish because theirs is being re-sodded, so we can't screw around and go too late. And you know what he says? Listen - he says - with a straight face - "Yeah, but we're working on our play, and it's taking a lot of time." Of course I think he's talking about something to do with softball, so I tell him he can show up early tonight and practice whatever this play is until game time. He looks confused for a second, then he says, "Oh, it's not that kind of play. This is a drama. Like Shakespeare. All us guys are working on writing an eleven-minute play so we can win a lot of money and get to Las Vegas next month." Can you believe it? I nearly crapped myself. Then I wonder if he's pulling my leg, you know he's always been a great kidder, deadpan and all, you wouldn't know until it was too late that he was goofing around. But there was something in his eyes that made me think he wasn't kidding, not this time.

Timmy:

Now that you mention it, Mario stopped in Dicey's for a beer a couple days ago and Kevin the bartender mentioned something about the whole bunch of them doing an overnight trying to write this play. And Jimmy Morrissey's wife said something along the same lines to Moira at Mass last Sunday. Jeez, I'd give anything to see what they've come up with! *(nods and smiles from team-mates)* Hey, here's their van - game on, lads, game on! *(yelling across diamond)* Hey guys - did you bring Shakespeare with you? Bet he plays second base better than Bobby! *(guffaws from home team as Lou makes rude gesture)* Yeah, I have your Drama 101 right here! *(home team trots out to begin game)* Okay, let's do it! Beers on the losers - as usual!

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(curtain)

ACT V

Scene: an office, maybe school or library. Several chairs around a long table covered with papers. DP: Two men, two women; one man and one woman are seated; the other two could be looking out a window. A general air of disappointment pervades the scene; sighs and nervous coughs are heard. Finally Alice, the woman at the table, speaks.

Alice:

We've been doing this for five years, and this is the rarest gem of all. *(holds up a document.)* This is absolutely priceless. There are five names on the title page, so we would know that each one of them made a contribution. And they all signed it too. *(with faint smile)* I'm surprised they didn't have it notarized. *(shakes head sadly)* What a shame ...

Doris:

And when I called the team leader to verify it, he told me the whole story of how and why they put this together. We did the math, and it came to like forty-seven man-hours of work to create it. *(shakes head in disbelief)* I guess there's at least one marriage that's still touch-and-go, and I know for sure that one of them had a job promotion delayed if not outright cancelled when he showed up for work unshaven and two hours late one morning.

Donald *(quietly but firmly, still looking out the window)*

But rules are rules, friends. I don't know why they thought the play should be eleven minutes instead of ten, but that's really not our concern, is it?

Alice *(with a sigh and shake of the head):*

No, you're right - it isn't. And rules are rules. All these other contestants *(indicating papers on desk)* did exactly what we wanted. These poor guys - for whatever reason - did not.

Mike:

Have they been told about the disqualification?

Donald:

We emailed the team leader last night. He replied almost immediately saying that they understood. But there was something at the bottom of the email that I forgot about. *(turns from window, looks through papers on desk)* Here it is - "PS What would happen if we got rid of the dance routine? The way we figure it, that brings us back to ten minutes. Thank you."

Doris:

That's all well and good, but ... hey, wait a minute. The contest isn't officially over until midnight tonight, right? So if they send us an email with the shorter version, their entry still

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qualifies, right? *(general agreement from the others)*

Alice *(enthusiastically)*:

And our asking them to email us the shorter version isn't cheating or anything, because they're the ones who discovered the fix. We didn't suggest it - they came up with it themselves. Now all we have to do is see it in print to verify it. And then they're right here in the mix with all these other submissions, provided they get us the email in time.

Donald:

What are the chances of their not getting the email to us in time? *(laughter and nods; Doris starts humming a catchy tune as Donald dials cellphone to give Al good news)*

Mike:

Gee, Doris, that tune's familiar - what is it?

Doris:

"Viva Las Vegas". It was Elvis Night on TCM last night.

(curtain)

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