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“Avoid tame, colorless, hesitating, noncommittal language.”

—William Strunk

“Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar...
style *is* the writer.”

—E.B. White

“He’s off his chump, he is.
I don’t want no balmies teaching me.”

—Eliza Doolittle from
G.B. Shaw’s, *Pygmalion*

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I chose it to mean—neither more or less.”

“The question is,” said Alice,
“whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty,
“which is to be master—that is all.”

—Lewis Carroll,
Alice Through the Looking Glass

Cast of Characters

ALICE, a first-year college student

E.B. WHITE, a bespectacled, bewhiskered man of a bygone era.

VOICE OF STRUNK, a booming voice from somewhere above.

THE ENSEMBLE, six performers (minimum, with doubling) are needed to perform the following characters:

PROFESSOR	PASSIVITY
NOTES #1-30	DANGLING MODIFIER
AFFECT	SIGN
EFFECT	LEECHES 1-3
RIFF-RAFF 1-4	COMMAMATRIX
BORDER UNOFFICIAL	SESQUIPEDALIAN
NOT / [NOT]	RUN ON RED
NOT ONLY	RUN ON BLUE
BUT ALSO	TOWN CRIER
DRUNK	OWL
FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST	CROSSROADS SIGN
	UNINTENSE

Setting

Primarily, the play takes place in Effingham. It is a mythic, dangerous, antic world. Three dimensional letters, punctuation marks, and sentence fragments of all shapes and sizes are scattered about the area. The set must be mutable. Nothing is static in Effingham; everything is in a state of flux. To achieve this, the Ensemble should play with the set. The performers should constantly manipulate and invent new ways to use the letters as props and set pieces.

ALICE THREW THE LOOKING GLASS

A PARODY OF STRUNK & WHITE'S

THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE

by John Walch

ACT I

Scene 1

(A long, grim corridor.)

(Lights up on ALICE. The PROFESSOR stands with his back to the audience—it is an imposing, formidable back. Clapsed in his right hand is Alice's essay. ALICE cautiously approaches the PROFESSOR and tries to take her essay. The PROFESSOR grasps it tightly and then releases it with one booming word:

PROFESSOR. F.

The PROFESSOR is gone. ALICE is left alone with her essay, and all the professor's red NOTES in the margins.)

ALICE. F. I can't believe I failed again. *(Reading the beginning of her essay:)* "The very exemplary play that I saw on Saturday night April first at the University Theatre was the very radular play *Pygmalion* written by George Bernard Shaw the palatial Miss Janis Burns was starring as Eliza." ...Look at all these notes he wrote. It's like my essay is bleeding red ink... Don't fail me, Professor Kurts, please don't fail me. Oh...look at these notes ... I am so doomed... "The very exemplary play—"

(ALICE twists the paper to read the NOTES in the margins. Spot up on NOTE #1.)

NOTE #1. Simplify statement.

(Spot up on NOTE #2.)

NOTE #2. Avoid overstatement.

(Spot up on NOTE #3.)

NOTE #3. Avoid qualifiers like "very" and "so."

(Spots out on NOTES #1, #2, #3. ALICE turns the essay to read more NOTES.)

ALICE. “—that I saw on Saturday night April first—”

(Spots up on NOTES #4, #5, #6.)

NOTE #4. Nonrestrictive clauses require *which* instead of *that*.

NOTE #5. Set off nonrestrictive clauses by commas.

NOTE #6. Simplify by avoiding nonrestrictive clauses altogether.

(Spots out on NOTES #4, #5, #6.)

ALICE. Kurts, I wouldn't know a nonrestrictive clause if it came up and kissed me on the lips. How can I avoid them if I don't know what they are?

ALL NOTES. (From darkness:) Read required text, *The Elements of Style*.

ALICE. How do you expect me to learn to write by reading? It's like trying to learn to cook by eating. Now, what's wrong here? ...“—was the very radular play *Pygmalion* written by George Bernard Shaw—”

(Spots up on NOTES #7, #8, #9.)

NOTE #7. Write in the active voice.

NOTE #8. Avoid colloquialisms and slang like “radular.”

NOTE #9. Simplify by omitting needless opinions.

ALICE. But that's what this class is about: learning to state my opinions. That's what you said, wasn't it? “*Write what you believe, believe what you write.*” Well, I believe *Pygmalion* was written by George Bernard Shaw and that “the palatial Miss Janis Burns was starring as Eliza!”

(ALICE reads more NOTES. Spots up on NOTES #10, #11, #12.)

NOTE #10. Run-on sentence.

NOTE #11. *Palatial?* Is she really like a palace?

NOTE #12. You decorate your prose with the abandon with which a teenager decorates a basement apartment. You have no unifying style.

ALICE. Excuse me for being a teenager. Oh no...these notes are not really helping.

(As ALICE flips through the rest of her essay, the chorus of NOTES close in on her.)

NOTE #13. Put statements in positive form.

NOTE #14. Don't construct awkward adverbs.

NOTE #15. Work from a suitable design.

NOTE #16. Affect not effect.

NOTE #17. Elude not allude.

NOTE #18. Addition not edition!

NOTE #19. Use a colon.

NOTE #20. Use a comma.

NOTE #21. Use exclamations sparingly!

NOTE #22. See Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, rule number one.

NOTE #23. See Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, rule number fourteen.

NOTE #24. See Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, rule number five.

ALL NOTES. *(In chorus, singing perhaps:)* America's favorite book of grammatical and rhetorical niceties.

NOTE #25. Rework sentence.

NOTE #26. Rewrite paragraph.

NOTE #27. Revise paper!

NOTE #28. Brevity.

NOTE #29. CLARITY.

NOTE #30. SIMPLICITY!

ALL NOTES ADD UP TO THIS. Alice, unless you do serious revisions you will FAIL this paper and have to repeat this class.

ALICE. NOOO!!!!!!

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(A sterile college study center.)

(Two trashcans are at either side of the room. They both read: Recyclable Paper Only! No Trash! ALICE reads from The Elements of Style.)

ALICE. “Do not overwrite. Do not overstate. Do not affect a breezy manner.” Tell me what to write, not what I should not write. This stupid book is not helping a bit, Kurts!

(ALICE throws book in trashcan.)

VOICE FROM TRASHCAN (E.B.). Ouch!

ALICE. *(Taking a deep breath:)* Don’t worry...it’s only 4:32 in the morning, oh my God...oh my God. It’s 4:32 and I still have an F. I can’t take this class again. Okay. Calm down. Kurts said focus on one thing and write about it. So that’s all I got to do. Okay. *(Picks up essay, reads title:)* Title: “Wondering About Eliza—a Pygmalionesque essay.” First I talk about Eliza and the Pygmalion effect, then I discuss how Higgins sculpts Eliza into his own patriarchal vision, then I talk about how Eliza fulfills the Nietzschean concept of *Übermensch*, then I end with some thoughts about the actress playing Eliza. But it’s still only three pages not four. Maybe I can squish the margins more? No, no, it already looks anorexic... Eliza. Eliza. Eliza. I got it. Analyze Janis Burns’s performance as Eliza... *(Scribbles furiously on her essay:)* “Especially convincing was the excellent performance given by Janis Burns in the leading role of Eliza Doolittle, Henry Higgins’ inarticulate but headstrong student whom learns despite her lower class status to affect the air of a very aggrandized duchess.” —To affect the air. —To affect the air. Effect. Affect. To affect the air. —To effect the *error*. Effect? Affect? Oh, who

really cares? I'm so tired...rest your eyes for one minute. One minute only...

(ALICE puts her head down and rests her eyes. Slowly, AFFECT and EFFECT creep out of either trashcan. Maybe they're puppets, maybe they're people, maybe they're shadows of ALICE's imagination.)

EFFECT. I've finally worn her down and effected her brain.

AFFECT. I've had an agitating affect on her. Come, now's our chance. Let's get her assay.

(ALICE jerks awake.)

ALICE. Hello? Hello? Hello? Anybody there? Hello—

EFFECT. EFFECT!

ALICE. AHH!!

AFFECT. AND AFFECT!

ALICE. Affect. Effect. This paper is effecting my brain. I need more caffeine.

AFFECT. Affect is here to alleviate your academic ails.

EFFECT. Effect is here to ease your embroiled egghead.

ALICE. But...who are you?

AFFECT. I am Affect: acolyte of ambiguity.

EFFECT. I'm Effect: emissary of the esoteric.

ALICE. Wait, which is which?

AFFECT. Ah-ah-ah! We're not Whiches.

ALICE. But who is whom?

EFFECT. Don't entangle us with Who or Whom either.

AFFECT. We're neither. Affectively, we're alike on all accounts.

ALICE. Affectively or effectively?

EFFECT. Either is exceptable.

AFFECT. Both are acceptional.

ALICE. So it really doesn't matter which I use in my essay?

EFFECT. One letter, who cares?

ALICE. Professor Kurtz, that's who.

AFFECT. He's absurd. Let us fee your assay.

ALICE. You mean *see my essay*?

EFFECT. Remember, *Alice*: one little letter.

AFFECT. Who cares, right?

ALICE. Yeah. Who hares, tight!

EFFECT. That's the spirit!

AFFECT. Now your assay, if you please.

(ALICE gives them her essay. They secretly lick and nibble at it with accompanying "ah's," and "mmm's".)

ALICE. Why do you want my assay?

EFFECT. To examine it. Explore it. Extol it. Exhort, Exhibit, EXCISE, EXFOLIATE—

AFFECT. —AND—

EFFECT. —EAT IT!

(AFFECT shoots EFFECT a look.)

ALICE. You want to eat my essay?

AFFECT. No. No. No. We just want to admire your assay. Where we come from, there's an acute attraction to voices like yours.

ALICE. My professor says I haven't found my voice and won't until I master the rudiments of style.

EFFECT. How rude.

AFFECT. And crude.

EFFECT. He doesn't have a taste for the exotic.

AFFECT. Alice your voice accedes our wildest aspectsations.

EFFECT. Everyone in Effingham will exceed that your voice is engagingly enigmatic.

ALICE. What's Effingham?

EFFECT. Effingham is where we exist.

AFFECT. He calls it Effingham, I call it Affingham, but no matter, all the citizens of Affingham will find your essay most appetizing.

ALICE. Do you really think it's good?

AFFECT. It's palatially accessive.

ALICE. Palatially...that sounds so good.

EFFECT. With a voice like this, Effinghamites might even enounce you:

AFFECT. "Very Aggrandized Duchess."

ALICE. *Me?*

AFFECT. Ascentionally.

ALICE. A Very Aggrandized Duchess? *ME?*

EFFECT. Essent is simple in Effingham.

ALICE. I shouldn't simplify?

AFFECT. Only simpletons simplify.

ALICE. What about clarify?

EFFECT. Only clarinetists clarify.

ALICE. And brevity?

AFFECT. Is the soul of a twit.

(E.B. pops up from a trashcan, he's old as a cliché. The Elements of Style is imbedded in his skull like a hatchet. Blood drips from the fresh wound. As this occurs, EFFECT and AFFECT stealthily gather all of ALICE's essay and begin sneaking away.)

ALICE. AH!

E.B. Pardon me, but did you throw this book in the trash?

ALICE. Who are you?!

E.B. I am E.B. White, not Trotsky, E.B. White.

ALICE. My apologies. I ensure you I had no intention of harming you.

E.B. You mean assure, not ensure. And I assure you the most dangerous kind of intention is *in*attention.

ALICE. Don't start lecturing me.

E.B. (*Dislodging the book from his head:*) A long lecture is precisely what you need. Flip to page 45 in the "Little Book" and you'll find your effective problem clarified.

ALICE. I don't have an affective problem.

E.B. I'm afraid you do, my dear. And from what I see through my spectacles it is in its advanced stages.

ALICE. Maybe your specs are speckled.

E.B. Page 45 if you... Hmm? My blood is making the pages stick together.

ALICE. I don't need your little book. They say my essay is palatally good.

AFFECT. Absolutely!

EFFECT. Exactly!

(*AFFECT and EFFECT hop back in trashcan.*)

E.B. They are not to be heeded, Alice.

ALICE. They are going to make me a Very Aggrandized Duchess.

E.B. Trust me: a Very Aggrandized Duchess is a very bad thing in their confused world, Alice. Look! We've no more time to waste. They're stealing your voice!

ALICE. They're my friends, they wouldn't steal from me.

E.B. Alice, you're living dangerously—

ALICE. Maybe I pike giving languorously—

E.B. Listen to yourself! Your voice is slipping from you letter by letter. I've seen it so often. It starts with one little letter—a pebble at the top of a mountain. Then it starts rolling into words, sentences, paragraphs and before you know it you've got an avalanche of language crashing down on you. You don't know the danger that—

ALICE. But I know I can't wind my voice in your fiddle nook.

E.B. But my little book can help you find the voice that is in you.

ALICE. Try lippening to by voice: LEAF ME ABONE! GO!

(ALICE chases E.B. back down trashcan. AFFECT and EFFECT are now gone. ALICE breathes.)

ALICE. *(Searching desk:)* Hello? Hello? Effect? Affect? I'm ready to become a Very Aggrandized Duchess. Hello? Where's my— Oh no! My essay! *(Running to the trashcan and reaching inside it:)* Give it back! I need to turn it in by twelve noon. HELP!!

(ALICE dives into the trashcan after her essay. As her feet wiggle down, E.B. pops out of the other trashcan.)

E.B. Look, Alice, I'm sorry we got off on the wrong foot. I'm not a bad fellow. Remember I wrote that charming book about a spider and a pig falling in love. I was vexed about being brained by the Little Book, but all is forgiven. And look, I've got the pages separated—Alice?

(E.B. sees ALICE's feet wiggling down the trashcan.)

E.B. Oh, no. Alice wait! No! You don't want to go down there! People with much stronger voices than yours lose their way in the lamentable lexicon of Effingham and they are never heard from again! Damn! What to do, what to do?...

VOICE OF STRUNK. *(Booming from above:)* It's worse to be irresolute than it is to be wrong, E.B.

E.B. Pro— Professor Strunk?

VOICE OF STRUNK. It is I.

E.B. I haven't heard from you since I was in your English 8 class at Cornell.

VOICE OF STRUNK. Nonsense, E.B. You've heard from me all your life. Especially when you decided to revise and reprint *my* "Little Book."

E.B. It was an homage, a tribute, a monument built in the name of good grammar.

VOICE OF STRUNK. Don't use three words where one would suffice, E.B. Now, help that girl.

E.B. Yes, Professor Strunk, but what should I do?

VOICE OF STRUNK. Be decisive, be bold, E.B. Practice what you preach!

E.B. Yes, Professor Strunk. I will. Thank you, sir.

(Pause.)

VOICE OF STRUNK. GO!

(E.B. dives into the trashcan. As his feet wiggle down, the lights fade to black.)

End of Act I

ACT II
Scene 1

(The border of Effingham.)

(Saturated light. A skewed sense pervades the area. Several slides dump into the area. ALICE shoots down one of these slides.)

ALICE. HELLLLLLLLLLP!!

(Greeting her are BORDER RIFFRAFF who peddle wares and other things. ALICE tumbles onto the floor.)

ALICE. Ouch!!

(RIFFRAFF ONE approaches.)

RIFFRAFF ONE. Doses. Doses. Doses. Hey there, Darling, welcome to Effingham, traveling tap you out?

ALICE. Effingham?

RIFFRAFF ONE. That's right, Sweet Cakes, you are on location, and it's high time to get out of your catapult. A wee dose of what I got will shoot you over the moon.

ALICE. Who are you? Have you seen my essay?

RIFFRAFF ONE. Feed your head, be kind to your mind, Baby Doll. I got the most ridonkulus doses of the most colorful colloquialisms. Let me hook you up, all it cost is a chip off your essay.

ALICE. What are you talking about? I don't have my essay; I'm searching for my essay.

RIFFRAFF ONE. Shhhh. Deeznuts, Sweet Thing, we live on trash down here—scraps of rough drafts and sentence fraggies. Having a whole essay down here is like having an all day sucker in eternity, it's radular. Be chill and we'll split that monkey betwixt us.

ALICE. Where's Effect and Affect? Haven't they come through? I jumped down the trashcan *after* them.

RIFFRAFF ONE. You need to expand your mind, Sweet Knees. There's lots of overboard ways to arrive in Effingham.

ALICE. If there's more than one way to arrive, then there's got to be more than one way to leave.

RIFFRAFF ONE. Honey Child, hop out of that if/then mindset if you want to regulate down here, you dig? There are lots of ways to arrive, but only one way to step-out: the ladder to the sky.

ALICE. Fine. Just tell me where the ladder to the sky is and I'll—

RIFFRAFF ONE. You're not going to find the ladder in any one positch.

ALICE. But you just said there was only one exit.

RIFFRAFF ONE. Straight-up. The exit's not a location; it's a state of mind, you dig?

ALICE. No, I don't dig. Now stop pushing colloquialisms on me. Is there somebody in charge around here?

RIFFRAFF ONE. In charge? You mean like the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress?

(A crack of thunder. RIFFRAFF ONE makes some obligatory gesture of submission.)

RIFFRAFF ONE. She's got 1007 tongues, but no tongue of her own. You don't want to cross words with her, you feel me?

ALICE. Why, what will she do?

RIFFRAFF ONE. She's always on the prowl for another tongue, especially one as phat as yours?

ALICE. I'm not fat.

RIFFRAFF ONE. *Phat*, not fat, Baby Cat. If you pop one of these, you'd be on my wavelength and hip to my slanguage.

ALICE. I don't want to be on your wavelength.

RIFFRAFF ONE. Dag, Girlfirend, don't get all hung-up, my colloquialisms are off-the-hook.

ALICE. Please just stop.

RIFFRAFF ONE. No need to smack me down, you may as well go snag your official stamp from the Border Official.

ALICE. My official stamp?

RIFFRAFF ONE. Every dude and dudette needs an official stamp by the Border Official before lollygagging in Effingham.

ALICE. Which one is the Border Official?

RIFFRAFF ONE. Like the ladder to the sky, you got to find the former out for yourself. Now, keep it real, peace out.

(RIFFRAFF ONE recedes, RIFFRAFF TWO approaches.)

ALICE. Are you the Border Official?

RIFFRAFF TWO. I'm anything you want me to be, baby. I don't limit or define nothing.

(RIFFRAFF TWO kisses ALICE.)

ALICE. ECK!! BLECK!! Why'd you kiss me like that?!

RIFFRAFF TWO. Cause I want to lock tongues with you, which is to say I want to get inside you, baby.

(RIFFRAFF TWO's tongue flops on the stage.)

ALICE. Oh my God! Is that your tongue?

RIFFRAFF TWO. It ain't *pâte*!

ALICE. Are you—are you the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress?

(A crack of thunder. RIFFRAFF TWO makes same submissive gesture.)

RIFFRAFF TWO. Bite your pink, plump tongue, baby. That old Which's tongues, which are many, ain't half what my beautiful tongue is, when it's in its prime, my beautiful tongue roams anywhere it pleases. It is, with no exceptions, non-restricted, which is to say it's limitless. I'd do anything to lock tongues with you, whether you're ready or not.

ALICE. Right now you're licking my ankle, which is just below the shin, and it's disgusting.

RIFFRAFF TWO. Which is to say what, baby?

ALICE. Which is to say—STOP!

RIFFRAFF TWO. Uh. Baby? Baby? ...Ya standen on my buttiful tongue.

ALICE. Which is to say tell me where the Border Official is or else I'll—I'll cut your tongue out and give it to the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress.

RIFFRAFF TWO. No, please, baby. She don't deserve such a beautiful tongue when it's in its prime—

ALICE. Tell me!

RIFFRAFF TWO. Baby, I—I can't tell you which from that. It ain't in my nature.

ALICE. Then leave me alone.

RIFFRAFF TWO. I'll leave you alone, baby. I can taste trouble with the tip of my tongue.

(RIFFRAFF TWO recedes with mangled tongue. ALICE moves onward. RIFFRAFF THREE approaches.)

RIFFRAFF THREE. Psst. Psst. Little Miss Muffin. Over here. You want me to coin you a noun into a verb? Whaddaya chitchat? Any noun you can eye-ball, I will cul-de-sac into a verb. I gift it to you and all I word for in return is a piece of whatever you're shouldering across this border.

ALICE. Back off before I hammer you.

(THREE recedes. FOUR approaches and opens trench-coat.)

RIFFRAFF FOUR. Suffix? Prefix?

ALICE. AHH!!

RIFFRAFF FOUR. Does the deca-size of my kilo-suffixes give you a joltism of super-surprise?

ALICE. Get out of my way, you're not the Border Official.

RIFFRAFF FOUR. *(A real salesman:)* Not so fast, little girlhood. I see your necro-interest in my neologisms. Thinkish of it! You can co-fabricate your own proto-words and specialize your hypo-vocabulary in a hyper-second. What are your meta-needs? I got neo's, quasi's, macro's, semi's, hemi's, and on specialation today I have

the very popularized model-demi! On the counter-side, I got your basic -ly's, -ize's, -ity's, -ence's, -ances' and if you're looking for a suffix with mega-flair try one of my -logy's, -loquist's, -archy's, -mania's, -phobia's, -wise's—I got a whole-ish trench-coat full of sancto-surprises. Pricewise, I'm overly affordable. A tastement of whatever you're smugalizing in will finalize this crypto-transaction. Now, tellate to me the one you most belike.

ALICE. I don't belike any of them.

(The BORDER OFFICIAL blows whistle and approaches. A crowd of GAWKERS gradually forms around them.)

BORDER OFFICIAL. Is there an official pickle here?

ALICE. Finally somebody that makes some sense. You must be the Border Official.

BORDER OFFICIAL. Officially, I am the Border Official and I've just blown the official whistle.

ALICE. This...*person*...is flashing me with prefixes and I would like to lodge a complaint.

BORDER OFFICIAL. Peddling prefixes and suffixes near Effingham's official border is officially unofficial. Therefore, I must detain you for I am the official Border Official.

RIFFRAFF FOUR. Hypo-Christ. What about my verba-rights?

BORDER OFFICIAL. The official penalty for peddling prefixes under the nose of the Border Official is one pre-fab prefix.

ALICE. Aren't you going to arrest him?

BORDER OFFICIAL. Do you have an "Un" in there?

RIFFRAFF FOUR. Anything for youaphile. Here you are. One unused "Un."

BORDER OFFICIAL. Thank you. Now, I can officially *undetain* you. Be on your way.

ALICE. I can't believe this. Where's the justice?!

RIFFRAFF FOUR. *(Receding into the murmuring crowd:)* Semi-thanks to you and you, little misstify, I will see you in laterdom.

BORDER OFFICIAL. Okay folks, show's over. Nothing official to see here. Go about your unofficial business.

ALICE. What kind of Official are you?!

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. Sorry, but now I am the *Unofficial*.

ALICE. What?!

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. I was the only official Official in Effingham, but officially I had no official power. So now I'm officially the Unofficial.

ALICE. But what about my stamp?

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. Stamps were the official job of the Official as was blowing the official whistle and, occasionally, sending out an official epistle. But now, as the Unofficial, I only give out official stamps unofficially which makes them officially unofficial.

ALICE. Can't you just give one more official stamp? I need to search for my essay.

(The CROWD pricks up its ears and murmurs: "did she say essay? She's looking for an essay. Etc.")

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. You're looking for an essay?

ALICE. Yes, Effect and Affect stole my whole essay and I need an official stamp to go find them.

(CROWD whispers: "Effect and Affect have a whole essay, etc.")

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. Hmmm...well, you've officially put the Unofficial into a bit of a bristle. If I unofficially give you an official stamp, then will you give the Unofficial some gristle off that essay?

ALICE. Unofficially, I'll give you all the gristle.

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. Officially, we've got an unofficial deal. Now put out your right foot. And ready? And STAMP!

(The UNOFFICIAL stamps hard on ALICE's foot.)

ALICE. OWW!

(EFFECT and AFFECT shoot down another slide.)

EFFECT. YIPPEE, E, E!

AFFECT. A, A, A-RIVEDERCI!

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. Sound the unofficial whistle!

(Blows the unofficial whistle.)

BORDER UNOFFICIAL. INCOMING ESSAY!

(There is a burst of confusion. ALL converge on EFFECT and AFFECT as they tumble out of the slide.)

ALL. AN ESSAY! GIVE IT TO ME!

ALICE. NO! IT'S MY ESSAY!

(A mob develops. PEOPLE from all over Effingham join in the melee. Lots of general recorded shouting for the essay punctuated by these distinct live voices. Throughout this is the sound of tearing paper and lots of paper drifting in from the sky like a ticker-tape parade.)

ALICE. GIVE IT TO ME! GIVE ME MY ESSAY! THAT'S MY ESSAY!

AFFECT. APPREHEND IT! I ASSAY I—I—GET A PIECE!

EFFECT. EMBRACE IT! EMBRACE IT! EAT IT!

FIRST VOICE. I WANT MY NEO-SHARE! GIVE ME A MEGA-PIECE! ESSAY-ARCHY!

SECOND VOICE. A VERY ESSAY?! SO, SO EXCITING! GET A PRETTY PIECE!

THIRD VOICE. SACK IT! BAG YOUR OWN! KISS OFF!

FOURTH VOICE. DISSERTATION! COMPOSITION! EXPOSITION!

FIFTH VOICE. STURM AND DRANG! MEMENTO MORI! CAUSUS BELL!

SIXTH VOICE. NOT [NOT] MINE! NOT YOURS! NOT [NOT] BAD!

(One last sound of paper tearing. The MOB explodes and everyone but ALICE has a small piece of the torn essay. She chases after them)

as they dash off in all directions. Pause. ALICE limps around, alone.)

ALICE. Hello? Hello? Can I please have my essay back? Hello??? How do I get home? Where's that ladder to the sky?

(E.B. shoots down a slide. He does an impressive tumble and rolls to ALICE's feet.)

ALICE. Great, you again.

E.B. My! That was as hair-raising as the first big dip on a roller-coaster! I haven't had that much excitement since—oh...well, I suppose I shouldn't say more around your impressionable ears.

ALICE. I'm eighteen and I was just felt up by a nonrestrictive clause.

E.B. Oh my, is it possible? Are you my *that girl*?!

ALICE. You're as crazy as the rest of them.

E.B. No! No! Listen. When I made my first additions to Strunk's Little Book I remarked that the ear should help guide the writer in questions of omission. For example when to omit *that* from a sentence. Sometimes, as in: "He knew that she could do this," the *that* is properly omitted and leaves you with...

ALICE. *(Rolling her eyes:)* "He knew she could do this."

E.B. Exactly, but other times it's embarrassing, as in: "He felt that the girl could not do this." Omit the *that* and you have:

ALICE. "He felt the girl..." Eww.

E.B. See, clearly wrong! But my publisher disallowed my *that girl*. He found it too racy and thought it would create a disturbance in the class. I always regretted buckling under and cutting my *that girl* though. She had real pluck.

ALICE. Stop wasting my time with pointless antidotes—

E.B. You mean anecdotes.

ALICE. Whatever. I'm not your *that girl*.

E.B. Don't be surly, Alice. I know that, but I also know you can do this.

ALICE. I don't care if I fail. If I never have to write another stupid paper that's just fine by me.

E.B. Alice, it pains me to hear you say that. Let me help you find your voice.

ALICE. I'd rather you find me the ladder to the sky.

E.B. I can't find your ladder to the sky.

ALICE. Fine, then write my essay.

E.B. Alice, I can't write your essay, because then it would be my essay.

ALICE. But you could gift it to me and it would my paper.

E.B. Always be suspicious of nouns pressed into service as verbs, Alice. Now let's start at the source: what's the trouble?

ALICE. (*Sarcastic:*) Gee, I don't know, it might have a little something to do with the fact that—

E.B. Never use the expression "the fact that." Edit it out of everything you write. It's debilitating. Sorry. A pet-peeve. Continue.

ALICE. —*The fact that*, I've just watched my essay be torn to shreds and I have to turn it in tomorrow by twelve noon—

E.B. Just "noon" would suffice.

ALICE. —or fail the class and have to repeat it all over again!!

E.B. Listen, Alice—

ALICE. WHAT?!

E.B. —They ripped your essay so easily, because there wasn't anything holding it together. If you look in *The Elements of Style* you see Rule 12 clearly states: "Choose a suitable design and hold to it."

ALICE. I was writing all about Eliza.

E.B. You had a general subject and interesting ideas, but no particular thesis to investigate. I suggest you listen to your heart and—

ALICE. I suggest you start helping me or you are going to be smacked in the mouth.

E.B. “You are going to be smacked in the mouth,” sounds weak, indefinite, passive. Try instead: “Correct me one more time, and I’ll smack you.” Write in the active voice it’s more forcible—

(ALICE smacks E.B. His glasses go flying.)

ALICE. STOP LECTURING ME AND HELP ME!!

E.B. —AHH!! My spectacles!! Alice, please. I—I—I can’t see a thing without my—

(ALICE picks up his glasses.)

ALICE. Spectacles?

E.B. You found them? Oh good, they’re my special spectacles. They help me see things more clearly. I’m blind as a mole without them. You’ll have to hand them to me.

ALICE. I—I didn’t find them.

E.B. You sounded like you did.

ALICE. The truth is I didn’t.

E.B. Never begin a sentence with *the truth is*.

(ALICE puts the spectacles in her breast pocket and sneaks off.)

E.B. If you feel possessed of the truth simply state it. Do not give it advance billing. The same holds true for the expression *the fact is*, Alice... Alice...the truth is, my spectacles are—

(VOICE OF STRUNK booms in from above.)

VOICE OF STRUNK. She’s gone, E.B. get off your knees.

E.B. Yes, Professor Strunk, I see that.

VOICE OF STRUNK. Your old spectacles trick, eh?

E.B. Risky, I know, but sometimes you have to do something drastic, sir. I had to provoke a response.

VOICE OF STRUNK. I'll never understand your crazy methods, E.B. Just teach that girl grammar the old fashion way: drill, drill, drill.

E.B. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

VOICE OF STRUNK. Clichés, clichés, clichés! You're no Henry Higgins, E.B. A firm hand is all it takes.

E.B. I've found that self-discovery is always more affective than a grim lecture hall.

VOICE OF STRUNK. You mean effective, effective, effective!

E.B. Damn! I still get those mixed up.

VOICE OF STRUNK. Oh no. It's the blind leading the blind.

(The lights shift.)

Scene 2

(Elsewhere in Effingham.)

(Two people stand knotted back to back. Together they form NOT [NOT]. Primarily, its lines are said by the dominate side NOT. When they speak in tandem any dialogue that appears in brackets [] should be spoken by the submissive side [NOT]. The dominate side holds a scrap of Alice's essay. The submissive side, twists around trying to get a glance.)

[NOT]. I do not want to spend all day not seeing that girl's essay.

NOT. You'll just have to be not so impatient.

[NOT]. I'm not impatient. I'm just not happy being not unknotted to you.

NOT. Now, let's not sulk... Oh...all right, I will not read it to myself... But, do not interrupt. Ahem! *(Reading from essay:)* "Miss Burns did not miss a beat in her brilliant performance of Eliza. Not only was she not timid she was not too flashy when she needed to be sincere. In the last analysis—"

[NOT]. "In the last analysis" what?

NOT. The essay is not intact after that.

(ALICE enters. NOT [NOT] quickly hides essay.)

ALICE. Hello? Could you help me?

NOT [NOT]. I'm not [not] sure.

ALICE. Pardon?

NOT [NOT]. I'm [not] unsure.

ALICE. So you're not... oh, it doesn't really matter. My essay was ripped to pieces and I was wondering if maybe you could help me find it?

NOT [NOT]. I'll do my best not to [not] hinder you.

(ALICE tries to digest this for a second and then plunges forward.)

ALICE. Look, my name is Alice.

NOT [NOT]. I'm Not [Not] the person who makes negative assertions.

ALICE. ...If you're Not [Not] the person who makes negative assertions, does that mean that you *are* a negative person?

NOT [NOT]. Not at all, I'm just Not [Not] period.

ALICE. Can you just help me, okay?

NOT [NOT]. Not only will I try and be of assistance—

LITTLE VOICE. *(Recorded:)* —but also—

NOT [NOT]. I will not [not] try and be a hindrance.

(NOT ONLY suddenly appears—perhaps a tragic Southern Belle.)

NOT ONLY. Did I just hear my beautiful But Also?!

ALICE. Ah! Who are you?

NOT [NOT]. It's not [not], Not Only.

NOT ONLY. Not [Not], have you seen my little But Also?

NOT [NOT]. [Not] nope.

NOT ONLY. Oh, this is awful! Little But Also is still lost! Lost!

NOT [NOT]. We're not [not] sorry for you.

NOT ONLY. And I keep thinking I hear his little voice, so I keep searching and searching.

ALICE. Who's But Also?

NOT ONLY. But Also is my long lost love. If I ever find who stole him from me, I will cut out her tongue and happily give it to the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress.

(Crack of thunder. They all make the same obligatory gesture of submission.)

ALICE. But did But Also die?

NOT ONLY. But Also's disappearance was far more vague than death. I always thought we were a happy couple. But Also was one of the best providers of essays, because of his small size. And we had the most wonderful double dates with Both/And, Neither/Nor, and Either/Or. Then one day I came home and saw a note that said: "I am not unhappy, but I need not to be with you any longer. In search of *variation*. Do not wait up." That's all it said. **VARIATION!**

ALICE. There...there...don't cry... I'll find him for you.

NOT ONLY. You?

ALICE. I'm chasing down my essay and will keep an eye out for your But Also as well.

NOT ONLY. If you ever find him, Precious, I will lay down my life for you...but, but you'll never find him. He's only as big as your big toe... Oh, oh not only is my life ruined, but also...oh...

(NOT ONLY gets all choked up and wanders off, grieving.)

ALICE. Poor woman, how terrible.

NOT [NOT]. It's [not] anything unimportant.

ALICE. You're giving me a splitting headache.

NOT [NOT]. I'm [not] a little unhappy about that.

ALICE. Do you know anything about my essay!

NOT [NOT]. I do [not] know nothing.

ALICE. Oh drop it, why don't you!!

(ALICE storms off.)

NOT [NOT]. [Not] on your life.

(NOT pulls out the scrap of essay, nibbles off a few words and then tears off a tiny piece and gives it to [NOT]. Lights shift.)

Scene 3

(Elsewhere in Effingham.)

(A DRUNK lurches on after ALICE.)

DRUNK. Come on, sweet-pea, have a drink. Having a cocktail with me is like going to the heaven and eating your cake on Cloud Nine. What do you say we got looped and then go walk on a balance beam?

ALICE. No thanks.

DRUNK. Come on, I mix metaphorical cocktails sweet as vinegar and strong as sheep. Let me wet your whistle.

ALICE. I don't want a drink; I want to find my essay.

DRUNK. I'll mix you something that'll knock the socks clear off your hands. You'll forget all about that stupid essay. Now sit like a trained doggerel and give me jiff to concoct a little something I call the fog.

ALICE. The fog?

DRUNK. *(Mixing a drink, perhaps singing:)* All it takes is a dash, a dot, a splash, and a spot.

ALICE. Huh?

DRUNK. A drop, a dab, a pop, a slab. A rub and a dub, a chink and a plink, and why not the whole kitchen sink? The metaphorical fog goes down as smooth as a gravel road, open your trapdoor and I will unload.

(Opens ALICE's mouth and pours.)

DRUNK. Bombs away, kid!

ALICE. Oh... Oh... My head's swimming through sands in an hourglass like a ship in a bottle.

DRUNK. That's the stuff that'll put hair on your grandmother's upper-lip.

ALICE. Where am I?

DRUNK. You're home, sweat-pea.

ALICE. Where's home?

DRUNK. Home is where you hang your heart.

(DRUNK lurches off. ALICE stumbles around until she hits the FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST, who reads her essay.)

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. "*Ergo*, Eliza Doolittle, undoubtedly represents the Nietzschean concept of *ubermensch*." Ah *par excellence* this *ubermensch*.

ALICE. *(Reeling from the effects of the cocktail:)* Did you just say u-ub-ubermensch?

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *(Hiding essay:)* *Si, Senorita, for similis simili gaudet.*

ALICE. Come again?

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. Like takes pleasure in like.

ALICE. Where did that little guy go? He was such a good little guy, with the heart of a sad clown and the breath of a dying elephant. I loved that little guy. Where'd he go?

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *Je ne sais pas.*

ALICE. Am I in France?

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *Bon soir*, I am the Foreign Expressionist. *Homo sum humani nil a me alienum puto* is my motto.

ALICE. That's some impressive motto, you got their Otto. Wish I knew what it meant.

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. I am a man; I regard nothing that concerns man as foreign to my interests. *Quo vadis?*

ALICE. Huh?

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. Whither are you going?

ALICE. Whither the wind takes me, Otto. I was looking for my essay but I—I got a little tipsy-turvey—Did you say *ubermensch*?

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *Gesundheit!*

ALICE. No I said: *ubermensch!*

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *Gesundheit!*

ALICE. I swore I heard you say it. You got part of my essay, Otto?

(Note: FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST text appearing in [brackets] is not to be spoken, it is provided only for translation.)

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *La belle dame sans merci* [the beautiful lady without mercy] accuses me! *Mirabilia* [wonders] never cease!

ALICE. What?

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *Me defendendo* [in self-defense] I must protest this *malis* [evil]. *Noli me tangere* [touch me not] until you have *probandi* [proof], *enfant perdus* [lost child]!

ALICE. Speak in English!

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *NEIN!* I use foreign phrases *nolens volens* [willy-nilly] and I will not be silenced for *le style, c'est l'homme* [the style is the man]!

ALICE. Oh, leave me alone...I'm so, so tired. *(Singing:)* I had a little drinky 'bout an hour ago and—

(ALICE stumbles around looking for a place to rest.)

FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST. *(Sotto voce:)* Hah-hah-hah! I am *Ubermensch!*

(FOREIGN EXPRESSIONIST exits.)

ALICE. —and, and, and it went right to my— my— my—

(Lights shift.)

Scene 4

(Elsewhere in Effingham.)

(A light rises on PASSIVITY, who tries to get comfortable in a chair that resembles a small “h.” He is extremely pale and movement is burdensome. A SIGN dangles precariously overhead.)

PASSIVITY. Oh, it’s impossible for me to be comfortable. My bottom needs to be cushioned with a pillow.

ALICE. Hello? Is somebody there?

PASSIVITY. Please, I need to be helped. I have been sitting over here.

ALICE. Over where? I can’t see you?

PASSIVITY. Follow the sign and it will bring you to me.

ALICE. The sign?

(The SIGN whistles at ALICE. She reads:)

ALICE. AHEAD DANGER! ABOVE PASSIVITY! MODIFIERS DANGLING FROM SIGN, WITH CAUTION PROCEED.

PASSIVITY. Please. I need to be helped!

ALICE. Hold on, I’ll get there.

(SIGN begins to move. ALICE reads more.)

ALICE. TO AVOID INJURY, LOOK UP—

(ALICE looks up, the DANGLING MODIFIER SIGN breaks free and knocks ALICE out cold. SIGN gets up and walks away.)

SIGN. —NEVER OR YOU WILL BE KNOCKED COLD OUT.

PASSIVITY. Oh, no. How will I be helped now?

(Three LEECHES emerge and start picking at ALICE, trying to find a vein. They carry a piece of ALICE’s essay.)

LEECH ONE. That riot at the border was very exciting!

LEECH TWO. Pretty eye-popping. But now I've got a pretty big thirst to quench.

LEECH THREE. And it looks like this really, really unconscious person has already been bled totally dry.

PASSIVITY. (*Calling out, feebly:*) Qualifying Leeches! Over here is where I am sitting!

LEECH ONE. Look way, way, over there. Isn't it our rather, dear Passivity?

(*LEECHES cross to PASSIVITY. ALICE remains.*)

PASSIVITY. Hello, Leeches, is there a possibility of us making a deal? My bottom needs to be pillowed.

LEECH THREE. The usual little arrangement rather, dear Passivity?

PASSIVITY. Any thing is bound to be fine with me as long as my bottom is to be cushioned soon.

(*The LEECHES hook a tube into PASSIVITY's vein and drain his blood into a jar. Throughout the following, the jar fills with PASSIVITY's blood and he gets even paler.*)

LEECH ONE. Oh, Passivity, you really should have been at the very border today.

LEECH TWO. There was very exciting little riot where we salvaged a salivating little essay.

PASSIVITY. (*Dead-pan:*) A riot. Whoopee.

LEECH THREE. Listen to this really tasty little morsel. (*Reading from essay:*) "The very exemplary play that I saw on Saturday night April first at the University Theatre was the very radular play *Pygmalion* written by George Bernard Shaw the palatial Miss Janis Burns was starring as Eliza."

LEECH ONE. Very good Lord! We really have the very beginning little sentence!

PASSIVITY. (*Uninterested:*) The jar is filled with my blood, whenever you are ready.

(The LEECHES drink PASSIVITY's blood.)

LEECH ONE. Certainly tasty today. Certainly. Certainly.

LEECH TWO. So, really, good. Even a little bit thinner than yesterday's.

LEECH THREE. Rather, quite, so fine stuff, Passivity. Rather. Quite.

PASSIVITY. Your pleasure is most gratifying to me, but my bottom needs to be cushioned soon.

LEECH ONE. Very well. Quite fair. But we don't have a very fluffy pillow for you, Passivity.

PASSIVITY. But you promised—

LEECH TWO. Wait! We can't really risk carrying this rather invaluable little document around. We must hide it someplace where nobody will be able to really get to it.

LEECH THREE. Quite right, brother.

LEECH TWO. But what's the very safest spot around?

LEECH THREE. Passivity really needs a pillow, right?

(LEECH THREE indicates under PASSIVITY's bottom.)

LEECH ONE. So, really brilliant!

LEECH TWO. You are a very smart genius!

PASSIVITY. Wait. I am protesting. Are there any sharp points in that sentence?

LEECH ONE. Really relax, this is so, very pointless.

LEECH THREE. Can somebody kind of give me a very, little hand tipping him.

(With great effort the LEECHES tip PASSIVITY, LEECH THREE slides the scrap of ALICE's essay under him, and then they drop him. He lands with a thud. The LEECHES are exhausted.)

LEECHES. Whew!!

PASSIVITY. I would be more comfortable with a pillow, but this essay seems to be having a lot of cushioning.

LEECH THREE. A little reminder before we go, Passivity. Don't even move! Or else—

PASSIVITY. I can be trusted not to be moving.

(The LEECHES exit.)

PASSIVITY. Ugh ...Depending on those dirty little Leeches is something I am hating. They are making my skin crawl. Oh no...no...

(PASSIVITY tries to squirm and scratch his back.)

PASSIVITY. Now, I have an itch that needs to be scratched. Oh, no, no, please! Somebody needs to be helping me! I'm having an itching sensation! Please, I need to be helped!!

(PASSIVITY tries to itch as the lights shift.)

Scene 5

(Elsewhere in Effingham.)

(The COMMAMATRIX stands over ALICE.)

COMMAMATRIX. Sniff my independent clause my parenthetical expression and my participle phrase!

ALICE. OW! You're hurting—

COMMAMATRIX. Sniff smell snort them you little worm!

ALICE. Hold it! Hold it! Slow down, I don't know what you're saying—

COMMAMATRIX. Pause you want me to pause?

ALICE. Please.

COMMAMATRIX. How dare you stand up to the Commamatrix! you tiny slimy worm. No one tries to master me unless they're prepared for the beating of their life now on your knees and ask beg and pray for pardon before I sew up your mouth!

ALICE. Don't sew up my mouth!

COMMAMATRIX. Drop and give me eight nine and ten of those pleas you unpleasing pre-menopausal pygmy and I don't want to hear a single solitary pause in any of them or I'll pluck off your lips sew up your mouth and use your tongue as my love whip! Now drop and give me eight nine ten thousand and don't stop till I come back with my chest of eight-balls and chains!

(ALICE drops to her knees and prays. COMMAMATRIX exits.)

ALICE. Don't sew up my mouth don't sew up my mouth don't sew up my mouth don't sew up my mouth...

(ALICE continues praying. The SESQUIPEDALIAN enters holding an umbrella with the letter "J" as the handle and "X's" for the canopy. He reads a piece of paper:)

SESQUIPEDALIAN. "Because of the diversified range of accents that need mastering, the role of Eliza Doolittle can be very punctilious for the actor."

ALICE. *(Overlapping:)* Don't sew up my mouth don't sew up my mouth don't sew up my mouth...

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Ahhh...this punctilious is so bilious.

ALICE. Hold it right there, buddy!

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Infinitesimal juvenile never are you to designate me: *buddy*.

ALICE. Give me my essay, buddy!

(SESQUIPEDALIAN puts essay on point of umbrella and holds it air.)

SESQUIPEDALIAN. I am not your *wee little buddy*, I am the Sesquipedalian. My loquacity, circumlocution, and verbosity is unparalleled in the recognizable macrocosm.

ALICE. You like awfully long words.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Don't you delight in disseminating them hither and thither in an inchoate fashion?

ALICE. Occasionally, I put them in my essay for affect...or is it effect?

SESQUIPEDALIAN. That dyad gives me ulcerations as well. Now that the prolegomena is accomplished, acquaint me with your estimation of my bumbershoot?

ALICE. Your bumbershoot?

(SESQUIPEDALIAN pokes her with umbrella.)

ALICE. Ow! You mean your umbrella? It's terrible. It wouldn't keep out a drop of rain if it had to.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Perhaps, its aspiration is not to obstruct condensation globules from assailing my cerebral cortex.

ALICE. Are you saying that your umbrella is not supposed to keep rain drops from falling on your head?

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Boorishly phonated, yes. My bumbershoot is a quintessential accessory that pronounces to others my impressive disposition. Just as this tiara pronounces to the populace that you are a Very Aggrandized Duchess!

(SESQUIPEDALIAN pulls out a cardboard crown and puts it on ALICE's head. She starts to remove it.)

ALICE. It's just made out of cardboard, it's not even real—

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Ah-ah-ah, my Very Aggrandized Duchess. I wouldn't doff that diadem, the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress would be exceedingly enraged.

ALICE. Enraged?

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Exceedingly. To divest yourself of the coronet is to invite her instantaneous vengeance.

ALICE. But I don't want to be a Very Aggrandized Duchess, I just want to be me.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Very well, desquamate your regalia and be yourself, but know the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress will be on you quicker than you can say: punctilious.

(ALICE begins to remove crown. A crack of thunder. The VOICE of the EXCEPTIONALLY AGGRANDIZED DAMSEL IN DU-RESS booms from above.)

VOICE OF DAMSEL. Who dares doff the crown of a Very Aggrandized Duchess?

(ALICE quickly put the crown back on.)

ALICE. I'll just keep it on.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Sagacious, demoiselle.

ALICE. Now, could I have my essay back?

SESQUIPEDALIAN. This composition could not possibly be yours, my liege, for it contains the word punctilious—

ALICE. It's mine, I remember punctilious had a certain ring to it. Now hand it over!

SESQUIPEDALIAN. You'll have to be more distinct if the dissertation is the desideratum that you want restored, my Mikado. Now, demonstrate your erudition by familiarizing me with the definition of punctilious.

ALICE. What?

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Prove it or lose it, my Tsarina... Punctilious?

ALICE. Uh, punctilious means... I've forgotten what punctilious means.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. *(Popping essay into his fob pocket:)* Then this document assuredly is not yours, my Kaiserin. For who would scribe an assertion to which they do not know the import?

ALICE. Just because I've forgotten what a word means, doesn't mean the essay's not mine—

SESQUIPEDALIAN. When the befitting owner emanates I may condescend to bequeath it, but until then it is mine.

ALICE. It's not yours, you—

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Cheerio.

(The SESQUIPEDALIAN exits.)

ALICE. —you punctilious punk! COME BACK HERE! AHHH!

(ALICE starts to pursue, but suddenly there is gunfire and two people run on firing. One wears RED the other BLUE. ALICE ducks—caught in the crossfire. Throughout this ALICE tries to stand, but is grazed by bullets.)

ALICE. GUNFIRE!

RUN ON RED. In terms of—

ALICE. Help!

RUN ON BLUE. and in an attempt to—

RUN ON RED. thoroughly—

RUN ON BLUE. understand—

RUN ON RED. the real genius—

RUN ON BLUE. of Miss Burn's gift—

RUN ON RED. as a performer—

RUN ON BLUE. and as an actor—

ALICE. Somebody call the Unofficial!

RUN ON RED. I will try to analyze her craft—

ALICE. It's a run-on shooting!!

RUN ON BLUE. as an actor—

ALICE. Stop firing! PLEASE STOP! PLEASE STOP—

(ALICE gets shot in the chest. She falls to the ground. The RUN ONs run off continuing to fire.)

RUN ON RED. *(Off:)* one can't help—

RUN ON BLUE. *(Off:)* to notice—

(ALICE remains face to the ground. The TOWN CRIER enters.)

TOWN CRIER. 4:33 and all is well! 4:33 and all is well! Ah-hah! What have we here! The Very Aggrandized Duchess is dead! Killed by a run-on sentence! D! E! A! D! I exclaim! She's dead!

ALICE. *(Overlapping:)* Uh...who's yelling? Stop yelling!

TOWN CRIER. What! She speaks! My cries have woken the dead!

ALICE. You don't have to yell everything!

TOWN CRIER. WHY NOT!

ALICE. BECAUSE IF YOU YELL EVERYTHING THEN THERE'S NO POINT OF AN EXCLAMATION!... Oh, my head...

TOWN CRIER. Hung-over! Not Dead! SHE'S NOT DEAD! SHE'S NOT DEAD!! SHE'S NOT DEAD!!

(TOWN CRIER hops off exclaiming.)

ALICE. I thought I was dead... I got shot...but no blood...

(She feels where she got shot. It's her heart.)

ALICE. What stopped the bullet?

(ALICE pulls out the spectacles.)

ALICE. Spectacles?

(ALICE puts on the spectacles.)

ALICE. Oh...my... I can see... I can see.

(As ALICE peers through the glasses, the lights fade to black. If an intermission is desired, it should be taken here.)

End of Act II

ACT III
Scene 1

(The middle of somewhere.)

(A dark thicket of incomprehension. ALICE peers through spectacles trying to get her bearings. An OWL with mirror eyes sits on a high perch.)

OWL. Who! Whom! Who! Whom!

ALICE. *(Approaches mirror eyes:)* Curiouser and curiouser. Why hello, owl. Look at your pretty mirror eyes.

(OWL gives ALICE two looking glass eyes.)

ALICE. No, no, you don't have to give me your mirror eyes.

OWL. Who. Whom.

ALICE. Thank you, little Owl. Who are you?

OWL. Who. Whom.

ALICE. *(Looks at herself in the mirror eyes:)* Who am I?

OWL. Who. Whom.

ALICE. It's me, I think. Or is it I?

OWL. Who. Whom.

ALICE. I am myself. Alice... I think I'm Alice anyway. I am me. I am I? Who am I? Whom really knows?

OWL. Who. Whom.

ALICE. *(Still looking in mirrors:)* It is I. Alice. Me, myself, and I. I act, think, do. Me is acted upon, thought about, done to. And I know I'm not a Very Aggrandized Duchess. These spectacles help me see that, little owl. I see who I am. If I just took off this crown what would happen to me? How would the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress even know what I had done?

(ALICE cautiously removes crown. When it's a centimeter off her head, a loud clap of thunder. The VOICE of the EXCEPTIONALLY AGGRANDIZED DAMSEL IN DURESS booms from above.)

VOICE OF DAMSEL. Who dares doff the crown of a Very Aggrandized Duchess?

(ALICE quickly put the crown back on. The mirror eyes have shattered, and the OWL flies away. ALICE replaces crown.)

ALICE. Well, actually, it doesn't look so bad. It becomes me, I. Hey little owl, come back. I'm sorry I cracked your mirror eyes...your mirror me's...

OWL. *(Off:)* Who! Whom!

ALICE. *(Looking into broken mirrors:)* Who am I?... I'm not sure. I'm not sure, but I don't think this is me...I.

(ALICE throws the looking glass mirrors. A light rises on PASSIVITY sitting in the same spot as before. PASSIVITY tries to itch.)

PASSIVITY. I need to be helped... I have an itch that needs to be scratched... Very Aggrandized Duchess, over here is where I have been seated. Over here!... Oh, thank God, someone whom can finally be helping me.

ALICE. I tried to help you earlier, didn't I? Your name is Passivity right?

PASSIVITY. Passivity is the name I was given at birth. How did that knowledge become yours, my duchess?

ALICE. I—I'm not sure. But it must have something to do with these spectacles.

PASSIVITY. Very Aggrandized Duchess, I've no time to be speculating about spectacles. I have an itch that needs to be scratched. Can a deal be made between us? Tell me what there might be that you are wanting?

ALICE. Do you know where the ladder to the sky is?

PASSIVITY. Defining the exact location of the ladder to the sky is as impossible for me as it is anyone else. Is there anything obtainable you are wanting?

ALICE. Well, I want my essay back, but it doesn't look like you participated in the riot at the border.

PASSIVITY. No, but even as we have been speaking, I happen to have been sitting on part of an essay.

ALICE. You're sitting on part of *my* essay?

PASSIVITY. Are bells being rung when I say: "The very exemplary play—"

ALICE. That's the first line of my essay!

PASSIVITY. All of it is not had by me, but if the itch on my back is scratched by you, then whatever parts upon which I have sat will be given you by me. Now, please, in a hurry you must be.

ALICE. All right. All right. There.

(ALICE scratches PASSIVITY's back.)

PASSIVITY. Ah...oh yes, that is the spot that needs to be itched. Ah... You are being thanked by me. You are being thanked by me.

ALICE. Now, give me my essay.

PASSIVITY. Underneath me it is resting. By tipping me on my side, you should be able to wrestle it free.

(ALICE pushes against PASSIVITY. He doesn't budge.)

ALICE. I can't! Now get up! We made a deal. I scratched your back, now you have to scratch mine.

PASSIVITY. Moving and scratching are things I cannot be expected to be doing. Some days I am bled three times by the Qualifying Leeches.

ALICE. What Qualifying Leeches? Come on, get up!

(E.B. enters.)

E.B. Alice? Alice is that you?

ALICE. Yes, it's me. I.

E.B. There are so many non-distinct voices down here, I can't be sure without visual confirmation. All I can vaguely make out is a figure wearing something that looks like a, ah, dunce's cap.

ALICE. It is a beautiful tiara. You should get your eyes checked.

E.B. Yes, have you found my spectacles yet?

ALICE. Uh...no.

PASSIVITY. If you were seeing what I am seeing, believing that would be difficult.

E.B. Who's uttering those slumberous sentences?

ALICE. His name is Passivity and he's sitting on the beginning of my essay and he claims he can't move, because Leeches have drunk all his blood.

E.B. Passivity, eh? Leeches, hmmm... Alice, you say the beginning of your essay lies beneath this passive loaf of stale syntax?

PASSIVITY. Hey! Resentment is oozing out of me right now.

E.B. Alice, tell me how your essay begins.

ALICE. Ummm... The very exemplary play...um... I—I can't really remember the rest.

PASSIVITY. But I can. A Dictaphonic memory was a blessing upon my birth.

E.B. Then out with it.

PASSIVITY. (*Reciting:*) "The very exemplary play that I saw on Saturday night April first at the University Theatre was the very radular play *Pygmalion* written by George Bernard Shaw the palatial Miss Janis Burns was starring as Eliza."

(*Pause.*)

E.B. Alice, do you see anything cumbersome about your sentence?

ALICE. Sort of.

E.B. What?

ALICE. It's got a lot of...ummm...words like *very* and lots of other uh—

PASSIVITY. Qualifying Leeches.

E.B. Yes! And they're draining the sentence of its lifeblood. Anything else, Alice?

ALICE. Well, it just kind of lies there. I guess it's passive.

E.B. What can you do to fix it?

ALICE. Make it active and cut out the qualifiers.

E.B. Try it. Start by cutting the qualifiers; trim the gristle so you can see the bone.

ALICE. Could you repeat it?

PASSIVITY. The very exemplary play—

ALICE. The exemplary play—

E.B. *Exemplary* is a personal opinion that you have to earn, Alice. Tell us why it was exemplary, not just that it was. State facts; prove opinions.

ALICE. The play—

PASSIVITY. —that I saw on Saturday night April first—

ALICE. -that I saw on Saturday night April first—

E.B. One qualifies the other. Pick your preference and go with it.

ALICE. April first.

E.B. A good specific choice. What do we have so far?

PASSIVITY. The play that I saw on April first at the University Theatre was the very radular play *Pygmalion*—”

ALICE. Was the radular play *Pygmalion*—

E.B. Deeper cuts can be made, don't use slang in formal writing.

ALICE. Was the play *Pygmalion*—

E.B. Deeper still, we already know you went to the theatre and saw a play.

ALICE. Was *Pygmalion*—

PASSIVITY. —written by George Bernard Shaw—

E.B. (*Throwing his hands in the air:*) Okay, okay, I admire Shaw, but why in heaven's name does he need all those names? Why don't we abbreviate? I believe, he'll find he's in good company.

ALICE. —written by G.B. Shaw—

E.B. What do we have?

PASSIVITY. “The play that I saw on April first at the University Theatre was *Pygmalion* written by G. B. Shaw the palatial Miss Janis Burns was starring as Eliza.”

ALICE. Wait, that’s a run-on sentence.

E.B. Is it?

ALICE. It’s got two subjects fused together. It should stop after Shaw, right?

E.B. Good eyes, Alice! Now, let’s pump some blood in this sucker! Think action. And don’t be afraid to mix it up and give that nonrestrictive clause a good licking!

ALICE. On April first—

E.B. What did you see?

ALICE. I saw G.B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion*—

E.B. Where?

ALICE. —at the University Theatre.

E.B. Perfect!

ALICE. Perfect?

E.B. Spit it back to her.

PASSIVITY. On April first, I saw G.B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* at the University Theatre.

ALICE. But it’s so simple.

E.B. (*Gesturing for PASSIVITY to rise:*) As simple as—standing up.

PASSIVITY. Oh my god! I’m on my feet!

ALICE. (*Grabs essay:*) My essay!

PASSIVITY. Look at me! I can move and DANCE!

(*PASSIVITY grabs E.B. and they dance.*)

ALICE. I can't believe it!

PASSIVITY. I can't believe it!

ALICE. I can write!

PASSIVITY. Call me Activity!

ALICE. It really is my essay!

E.B. No, Alice. This is only the beginning of your essay! Henry Higgins eat your heart out!

(Lights shift.)

Scene 2

(A crossroads.)

(ALICE, ACTIVITY, and E.B. finish their dance and find themselves under a CROSSROADS SIGN with multiple arms pointing in different directions.)

ALICE. Let's go find the rest of my essay!

E.B. Wait, wait, wait, Alice! You can't find a destination without knowing the route.

ACTIVITY. We can do anything we like. I am a mover and a shaker.

ALICE. Yeah, we'll go on intuition.

E.B. Alice, you are at an important crossroads in the writing process. If you chase down all your sentences you will miss the forest for the trees. Now, tell me what all these signs say.

ALICE. *(Reading an arm on the CROSSROADS SIGN:)* One says:

CROSSROADS SIGN. Miss Burns's performance—ten paragraphs.

ALICE. And that points over there... This one says:

CROSSROADS SIGN. *Übermensch*—ocho paragraphs.

ALICE. It points in the other direction. This one:

CROSSROADS SIGN. Patriarchal vision—fifteen paragraphs.

ALICE. Points straight up in the sky. And this one:

CROSSROADS SIGN. The open ending.

ALICE. Points over there...and over there...and over there.

E.B. This time through you must choose the path you're going to pursue before you embark.

ALICE. But they're all good paths.

E.B. Alice, you're a bright student with lots of good ideas, but that doesn't mean they all belong in your paper. When rewriting, the writer must look unsentimentally at an idea and decide whether or not it furthers the overall argument. But before doing that, the writer must identify the overall argument. You have yet to commit to one thesis; you must pick a path.

ALICE. I—I don't know.

ACTIVITY. That patriarchy thing really gets my motor humming.

ALICE. I like that too.

E.B. It's not for Activity to decide, Alice! It's your choice, look at it carefully.

(She does, and the SIGN arm that reads "patriarchy" pokes ALICE.)

ALICE. Ow! It just poked me! Bad sign!

(ALICE slaps the SIGN arm. This angers the CROSSROADS SIGN, and all the SIGN arms begin pinching, prodding, and poking ALICE.)

ALICE. Oh no, now I've done it!

E.B. That's it, Alice, fight off all those misdirections—

ALICE. OW! Don't pinch me! Stop jabbing! And, hey, quit flipping me off! OUCH!

E.B. What's the direction you're most passionate about!

ALICE. This one! Miss Burns's performance!

E.B. Miss Burns's performance?

ALICE. *(Still fighting the SIGN:)* Yes! YES! I want to writer a paper that analyzes Miss Burns's performance!

(All the arms on the SIGN suddenly drop, except one.)

CROSSROADS SIGN. Miss Burns's performance—ten paragraphs.

E.B. There. Our path is now clear.

ALICE. But ten paragraphs sounds so far away. How will I ever get there?

E.B. One sentence at a time, Alice. One sentence at a time.

(The CROSSROADS SIGN exits, and beckons for them to follow. The RUN ONS enter—firing. ALICE, ACTIVITY, and E.B. dive for cover.)

RUN ON RED. In terms of—

RUN ON BLUE. and in an attempt to—

RUN ON RED. thoroughly—

RUN ON BLUE. understand—

RUN ON RED. the real genius—

RUN ON BLUE. of Miss Burns's gift—

E.B. Good lord, what's this?

ALICE. It's a run-on shooting!

E.B. Then run out there and put a stop to this run-on or we'll never get out of here alive.

ALICE. Last time I asked them to stop they shot—

ACTIVITY. Look out! Duck!

RUN ON RED. as a performer—

RUN ON BLUE. and as an actor—

E.B. You have to do more than ask them to stop. You've thrown two conflicting subjects into one sentence and they'll never stop feuding until you make peace.

ALICE. I can't just step-in and make peace—

E.B. You're the writer! You can do anything you want.

ALICE. But I'll get shot!

RUN ON RED. I will try to analyze her craft—

RUN ON BLUE. as an actor—

RUN ON RED. one can't help—

RUN ON BLUE. but notice—

E.B. A writer must enter boldly into the fray! Now make peace between these dueling subjects before they shoot us to pieces!

ALICE. Peace. Peace. Peace...

(ALICE begins singing Kumbayah and steps boldly between the RUN ONS. RUN ONS stop firing and approach ALICE, menacingly.)

RUN ON RED. Hey Very Aggrandized Duchess what you doing there—

RUN ON BLUE. if you ain't careful—

RUN ON RED. we'll blow your skull off—

ALICE. Aren't we all brothers and sisters deep down?

RUN ON RED. What are you talking about brothers—

RUN ON BLUE. We hate each other, we're not brothers—

ALICE. It's so much better to love than to hate. Why the fighting, why the blood shed?

RUN ON RED. I don't know, he's got half my sentence—

RUN ON BLUE. He's got half my sentence—

ALICE. So one sentence will become a death sentence for us all? Can't we all just get along?

RUN ON RED. No problem, once this punk gives up his sentence—

RUN ON BLUE. Once he gives up his sentence—

ALICE. But what if you each had your own sentence?

(RUN ONS scoff at the idea.)

ALICE. There's plenty to go around. Think how big that sentence is.

(RUN ONS put their guns to ALICE'S head.)

RUN ON RED. Stop trying to make sense let's waste her just for the fun—

RUN ON BLUE. —of killing and seeing her brains run all over the ground—

ALICE. Okay then. Go ahead, shoot me.

RUN ON RED. All right, get ready to meet your maker—

RUN ON BLUE. —and make your peace with my piece.

ALICE. I'm not afraid. Now go on, shoot me if you must...

RUN ON RED. All right, yo man, you shoot first—

RUN ON BLUE. You go, man, it was your idea—

ALICE. Come on, what are you, just a couple of sniveling subordinate clauses? Shoot me!

(RUN ONS prepare to shoot, then drop their guns and start weeping.)

RUN ON RED. I—I can't do it.

RUN ON BLUE. I want my mommy!

RUN ON RED. My daddy never loved me!

ALICE. All right. There, there. It'll be all right.

E.B. Good show, Alice!

ACTIVITY. That was so moving.

ALICE. Okay boys, give Activity the sentence you two have been fighting over; let's see how we can share.

RUN ON RED. Can you do that?

RUN ON BLUE. Is that even possible?

ALICE. Sure you just need to put a period somewhere in there. Activity, what do we have?

ACTIVITY. In terms of and in an attempt to thoroughly understand the real genius of Miss Burns's gift as a performer and as an actor I will try to analyze her craft as an actor—

ALICE. Period! Okay, Red. That's your half.

RUN ON RED. Sweet.

RUN ON BLUE. What about my half!

ALICE. We'll get to you, Blue, but first how do you guys feel like a little target practice?

RUN ON RED. Target practice?

RUN ON BLUE. With our guns and everything?

ALICE. Yeah, like at the carnival. Activity, set up Red's sentence.

E.B. Excellent idea, Alice! Put those guns of theirs to good use and shoot out all the qualifiers and nonrestrictive clauses.

RUN ON RED. Oh, like a shooting gallery?

RUN ON BLUE. With prizes and everything?

ALICE. All set, Activity?

ACTIVITY. Step right up, step right up! Be the first to win a cigar. I always wanted to be a carnie!

(Midway music begins. The sentence begins to scroll out like ducks at a shooting gallery.)

ALICE. Okay, Red, let's see how many of those qualifiers and clauses you can shoot out. Fire!

(RED spins and shoots, a burst of gunfire. Qualifiers and nonrestrictive clauses fall one by one. The smoke clears.)

ALICE. Give that man a cigar!

RUN ON RED. My pleasure, my lady.

E.B. What are we left with, Activity?

ACTIVITY. To thoroughly understand Miss Burns's gift as a performer I will analyze her craft as an actor.

(An alarm sounds.)

E.B. Oh joy! Alice, you've triggered the thesis alarm!

ALICE. The what?

E.B. The thesis alarm alerts the reader to your central idea and asserts the opinion you want to prove in the rest of your paper.

ALICE. How did I trigger that?

E.B. First you stated that Miss Burns was a gifted performer. Then you indicated you were going to prove this by analyzing her acting technique. The thesis sentence narrows your topic and asserts your attitude. It is the nail on which you hang the rest of your picture.

RUN ON RED. Hear that? I am the nail.

RUN ON BLUE. *(Raising gun:)* I knew this dividing thing was gonna rip me off!

ALICE. Hold on, hold on, now it's your turn. Activity, set up Blue's sentence.

(ACTIVITY sets up sentence.)

ACTIVITY. One can't help to notice Miss Burns's very keen ability with accents comes across in the very first scene among her and the actor playing Higgins—

ALICE. All right, Blue, show me your sharp-shooting skills. Knock out those clauses and qualifiers.

(BLUE spins gun impressively, tests the wind direction, twirls, and fires. Qualifiers and nonrestrictive clauses fall one by one. The smoke clears.)

RUN ON BLUE. Now that's what you call sharp-shooting

ALICE. Sure was, Activity, what's left?

ACTIVITY. Miss Burns's ability with accents comes across in the first scene.

E.B. And that's a sharp sounding topic sentence!

RUN ON BLUE. (*Pointing gun at E.B.:*) What'd you call me!?

E.B. (*Quickly:*) Topic sentences tell the reader the major focus of each paragraph. They also signal a new step in the development of the overall argument. They are the major support beams of the paper.

RUN ON BLUE. Hear that? I'm a beam.

RUN ON RED. I'm a nail.

RUN ON BLUE. Yeah, that's cool. I'm beam, you're a nail.

RUN ON RED. That is cool, cause like beams and nails are made for one another.

RUN ON BLUE. Yeah, man, they hold each other up.

RUN ON RED. Like true brothers!

RUN ON BLUE. My brother!

(They embrace and exit.)

E.B. You're on a roll, Alice, let's go nail down that next topic sentence.

(Lights shift.)

Scene 3

(Elsewhere.)

(ALICE, ACTIVITY, E.B. are lost. It's dark.)

ACTIVITY. Are you sure you know where we're going, Alice?

ALICE. No, Activity. I thought I did, but now I'm not so sure...

E.B. Based on what we have of the essay right now, does any of this territory look familiar to you?

ALICE. I just don't know. There's not any light to see. AH!! SOMETHING'S GOT ME! HELP!!

E.B. Alice are you all right? Ahh!!

ALICE. Let me go!

ACTIVITY. Keep your hands off her or I'll— Ahh!

(Suddenly, a bright light shines on ALICE. She is tied up.)

NOT [NOT]. Not [not]—

E.B. Who's there?

ALICE. Not [Not] again. Let me go! Untie me! Help Activity!

NOT [NOT]. He's [not] untied as well.

(Light shines on ACTIVITY, who is also tied up.)

ALICE. E.B.!

NOT [NOT]. [Not] untied too.

(Light shines on E.B., who is also tied up.)

NOT [NOT]. Now, if I do [Not] misunderstand, you have an essay that is [not] unsimilar to my essay about Miss Burns's [not] sucky performance. I do not want you to [not] give it to me.

ALICE. *Your* essay?

NOT [NOT]. *(Reading the scrap of her essay:)* "Miss Burns did [not] miss a beat in her brilliant performance of Eliza. [Not] only was she not timid she was [not] too flashy when she needed to be sincere. In the last analysis—"

E.B. Oh, Alice...your poor sentence is knotted up worse than a couple of teenagers at prom.

NOT [NOT]. It's not [not] pleasant.

E.B. Alice, we want to be told what is, not what is not. If every sentence admits doubt, your writing lacks authority. Hurry, get us out of these knots, before the blood supply is cut-off from our brains.

ACTIVITY. I would be trying to help, but a dizzy feeling is beginning to overtake meeeee.

(ACTIVITY passes out.)

ALICE. Activity, what's wrong?

E.B. Slipped back into bad habits. Good writing requires vigilance.

NOT [NOT]. Enough! I want to find out what is not [not] “in the last analysis.”

E.B. Get rid of “in the last analysis” it’s a bankrupt express-sioooooon.

(E.B. passes out. ALICE struggles with knots.)

ALICE. Make definite assertions... Miss Burns did not miss a beat in her brilliant performance as Eliza.

NOT [NOT]. Look, she’s trying to [not] stay tied by the [not] knots.

ALICE. She...did not miss a beat... Miss Burns played Eliza with precision.

(ALICE breaks free from one of the knots.)

NOT [NOT]. Oh my [knot!]

ALICE. Not only was she not timid she was not too flashy... She was not only not timid...not only not timid, but she was also not too flashy...but she was also...but also! But Also!

(ALICE breaks out of the knots. NOT ONLY suddenly appears with a burst of light.)

NOT ONLY. Did I just hear somebody say: But Also?

ALICE. I did!

NOT ONLY. You, duchess? What do you know about my little But Also?

ALICE. I know where he is! Not [Not] has him!

NOT [NOT]. Not [not] true!

NOT ONLY. Don’t toy with me, Duchess. I am a woman on the verge of a grammatical breakdown.

NOT [NOT]. She is not only [not] telling the truth-

LITTLE VOICE. *(Recorded:)* —but also

NOT ONLY. I just heard my little But Also!

NOT [NOT]. You’re not [not] hearing things, Not Only.

NOT ONLY. Do not tell me, Not [Not], what I did not hear. I'd know my little But Also's voice anywhere! Now tell me where you've hidden him before I tear you to shreds.

NOT [NOT]. Take it not [not] easy, Not Only.

LITTLE VOICE. *(Recorded:)* But Also!

NOT ONLY. There he is again!

ALICE. Not [Not] stole him! But Also's note was written by Not [Not]!!

NOT ONLY. *(Reciting letter:)* "I am not unhappy, but I need not to be with you any longer. In search of *variation*. Do not wait up." *You* stole him from me and forced him to scavenge essays for you. The charade is over Not [Not]! Give him to me!!

(NOT ONLY starts tearing NOT [NOT] apart.)

NOT [NOT]. Not [not] not [not] not [not] not...

(NOT ONLY finally separates NOT [NOT]. NOT and [NOT] run off in opposite directions.)

NOT. Forget me not!

[NOT]. Not!

BUT ALSO. *(Recorded:)* Not Only!

NOT ONLY. But Also! Where are you!

BUT ALSO. *(Recorded:)* I'm under a piece of paper that reads: "Miss Burns played Eliza with precision. When the scene demanded, she displayed not only vitality but also sincerity."

E.B. That sounds like a proper correlative expression!

NOT ONLY. Watch your step! Don't squash him under your big toe!

ACTIVITY. Over here! I've got him!

(ACTIVITY picks up the essay and BUT ALSO—a finger puppet. ACTIVITY gives the essay to ALICE and BUT ALSO to NOT ONLY.)

ALICE. It really is my essay!

NOT ONLY. Oh, little But Also! It's really you!

BUT ALSO. (*Recorded:*) Not Only! I missed you!

ACTIVITY. Reunions always make me cry.

NOT ONLY. (*To ALICE:*) My Duchess, how can we ever repay you?

ALICE. You can tell me where that Sesquipedalian is.

NOT ONLY. The Sesquipedalian?

(**BUT ALSO** *whispers to* **NOT ONLY.**)

NOT ONLY. But Also says that he's getting his intellect massaged by Unintense. Try that way.

ALICE. Thank you.

NOT ONLY / [BUT ALSO]. No. No, Not Only and [But Also] thank you.

(*E.B., ALICE, and ACTIVITY exit. Lights shift.*)

Scene 4

(*Elsewhere.*)

(*The UNINTENSE massages the SESQUIPEDALIAN's intellect. The SESQUIPEDALIAN's bumbershoot stands at the ready. ALICE sneaks on with entourage.*)

SESQUIPEDALIAN. I approve of the hypertension locality you're manipulating now, Unintense.

UNINTENSE. Easy did it or you will kinked up the working I'll already did. You'll be kicking back, while I unwound your mind. You think a lot all day and I thought you shall relaxed.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. You sure comprehend how to liberate the tense in all things, Unintense.

UNINTENSE. Shh... You can't always thought up long words to spoke. Just leave it go and said whatever came to your head.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. I can really utter anything around you?

UNINTENSE. That was what this will be all about. I won't told anyone. Now took a deep breather and tried and leave it go.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Here goes...tummy! Ahh...

UNINTENSE. That are it...leave it go.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Cute! Ahh...short words sound so silly, but feel so good!

UNINTENSE. Didn't stop there. Let it rolled...

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Fuzzy! Chubby! Chummy! Buzzy! Nutty! BUDDY!

ALICE. Did you just say *buddy*, buddy?!

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Infinitesimal juvenile, how dare you perforate this cloistered sanctuary! Egress before I cudgel you with my bumbershoot!

ALICE. Your bumbershoot's a big fat joke.

E.B. That's it, Alice. Insult him with short words, they pack more of a punch!

ALICE. I heard you say *buddy* with joy and I'm going to tell everybody! You'll be the laughing stock of Effingham before you can say punctilious!

SESQUIPEDALIAN. I'll never acknowledge that I ever articulated *buddy* with delectation!

ALICE. I have proof, you dolt.

UNINTENSE. Got out of here! You are ruined all the work I'll did!

E.B. Good lord, I'm tightening up! In summaries, stick to one tense, man!

UNINTENSE. Here, let me gave you a massage.

(UNINTENSE *grabs* E.B. *and massages him into submission.*)

E.B. I did not need a massaging!

SESQUIPEDALIAN. (*To ALICE:*) What attestation could you possibly possess, Pontiff?

ALICE. Activity?

ACTIVITY. I have a Dictaphonic memory: fuzzy, chubby, chummy, buzzy, nutty, buddy!

SESQUIPEDALIAN. All right, all right, I can't tolerate any more! What are your ultimatums, Sultana?

ALICE. First, I want you to use the word umbrella!

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Don't retain your inhalation!

ALICE. Activity?

ACTIVITY. Fuzzy, chubby, chummy—

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Avuncular! Avuncular!

ALICE. (*Indicating umbrella:*) Tell me what this is.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. It is my bububu—my b-b—my umbrella.

ALICE. Good. And now, I want my essay back, with the punctilious removed.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. "Because of the diversified range of accents that need mastering, the role of Eliza Doolittle can be very punctilious—

ALICE. Speak plainly, buddy, and don't start a sentence with *because* or *but*. Now make it short.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. Oh, all right... "The number of accents the actor needs to master makes Eliza a challenging role."

ALICE. You get that, Activity?

ACTIVITY. Every little word of it.

SESQUIPEDALIAN. This is an outrage. You're the most abysmal Very Aggrandized Duchess I've ever seen. I have three halves of a mind to report you to the Exceptionally Aggrandized Damsel in Duress.

ALICE. I am not a Very Aggrandized Duchess. I am just me. I am just me.

(ALICE removes the crown. A crack of thunder. The lights shift drastically and they rise on ALICE alone. Huge shadows loom over her. The VOICE of the EXCEPTIONALLY AGGRANDIZED DAMSEL IN DURESS booms from above. It is the voice of ALICE, recorded and distorted.)

VOICE OF DAMSEL. Who dares doff the crown of a Very Aggrandized Duchess?

ALICE. I do. Me. Alice.

VOICE OF DAMSEL. Fall to your knees and beg for your tongue.

ALICE. I'm not going to give you my tongue.

VOICE OF DAMSEL. You have failed the office of Very Aggrandized Duchess and now you must pay.

ALICE. I haven't failed.

VOICE OF DAMSEL. But you will fail. Again and again and again. You will fail.

ALICE. I'm not going to fail.

VOICE OF DAMSEL. Silence!

ALICE. I won't be silent.

VOICE OF DAMSEL. SILENCE!

ALICE. I won't be silent! I have something to say! I have something to say! I have something to say!

(The shadows disappear; the lights restore. E.B. and ACTIVITY are there.)

ACTIVITY. We know you have something to say.

E.B. Alice, nobody wants you to be silent.

ALICE. No, she did.

E.B. Who?

ALICE. The Damsel in Duress.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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