

"THE CONTEST"

BY

JIM REYLAND

East Lake High has formed a committee to review submissions for its fall art's festival. The festival features a contest for local East Lake playwrights with the winning play performed by the senior class. The judges are Myra Little, American History, Bucky Dozer shop and JV basketball, Ms. Julie Summertime cheerleading coordinator, Ben Keats from the English Department and moderator, Principle Larry Frank.

THE CAST

MYRA LITTLE, AMERICAN HISTORY. Thirty years a teacher, this matinee matron is part piano teacher, part wrestler.

BUCKY DOZER, SHOP AND JV COACH. A former jock, this shop coach is a rough around the edges unlikable sort.

BEN KEATS, ENGLISH TEACHER. Tall dark and handsome, this word peddler is every bit the ladies man.

MS. JULIE SUMMERTIME, CHEERLEADING COORDINATOR. A former Pom Pom herself, this blonde beauty is every freshman's dream.

LARRY FRANK, MODERATOR AND EAST LAKE HIGH'S PRINCIPLE. In possession of that "Round" look, this pocket protector is a combination of every square; want to be cool teacher you've ever snickered at.

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"THE CONTEST"

SETTING:

Early Saturday in an empty East Lake Kentucky High School auditorium. A table and chairs are set center stage.

SCENE:

The committee enters with a stack of white bound folders dropping them on the table and shaking hands as they are introduced.

LARRY

I see you've got your manuscripts. I trust everyone here knows each other? Bucky Dozer, Shop and JV coach. Ms. Julie Summertime, cheerleading coordinator. Ben Keats, the only High school English teacher ever to receive tenure. And of course Myra Little, a prominent part of our American History.

(GROUP IN UNISON)

Good morning Principal Frank.

LARRY (CONT'D)

On behalf of the entire faculty here at East Lake High, a big thank you for giving up your Saturday morning to help us with this years festival play contest. As you know, the money raised from our production goes to fund other East Lake arts' activities such as, "Picasso Frontier Days" and the annual Drama Club touch football game. Coach Dozer?

BUCKY

We're gonna put em out there and let em touch each other.

LARRY

Thank you coach. Myra, I believe you've got the first entry this morning?

MYRA

(Getting up)

Thank you Principal Frank. Uh Larry.

BEN

(Leaning over to JULIE)

That maneuver, where one's knee occupies the space behind one's head? I can't imagine.

JULIE

It takes a lot of practice, and some butter.

BEN

"Out of the darkness came the hands that reach through nature molding men and women." Alfred Lord Tennyson.

JULIE

Whatever!

(MYRA hits BUCKY, whose head is down on the table with the back of her hand. BUCKY jumps up and screams)

BUCKY

(Waking up)

Close the barn door Ma! Mule!

LARRY

Our first play in this years contest is the saga of Kentucky's greatest patriot and Sixteenth President of the United States. An epic yet motivating work entitled, "He was our Lincoln first!"

(Quiet applause)

It's sunrise on the Kentucky plateau, two boys are skipping rocks on a glassy pond.

BUCKY

Now where the hell are we gonna get a glassy pond?

LARRY

Coach please! Save your comments until the end of the presentation.

MYRA

Thank you Larry!

LARRY

(Keeping it going)

Skipping rocks across a glassy pond. Go on.

MYRA

(MYRA plays both parts)

"What's wrong Abe? Where are you going?" "Going to Indiana, then on to Illinois." "Why do you want to do that Abe? " "Well, they got politics there and soon they'll have pavement." "You coming back Abe?" "Someday. Here, you can throw my rock." "Thanks Abe.

(Calling after Abe)

Don't forget where you came from! Don't let em make a big deal out of you so you forget your Kentucky roots! Remember you were our Lincoln first!"

(MYRA closes script)

I love that! And I just think that there are a whole lot of people in Kentucky who are still mighty pissed off about that whole thing.

BUCKY

Epic my ass! That's motivating all right. I feel motivated to throw-up. "Kentucky, Land of Lincoln!" I hate it! Besides there ain't a single kid in the senior class looks anything like Abraham Lincoln.

MYRA

Ever heard of prosthetics? They've got prosthetics that could make you look like Abe Lincoln!

BEN

Excuse me but might we be into a budget issue, taken that suggestion?

(BUCKY takes a long look at MYRA puts his bum arm up onto the table, takes a pen and stabs it into his rubber hand. The committee is aghast)

MYRA

Show off!

BUCKY

Egghead!

MYRA

Jock!

LARRY

And what do you think Ms. Summertime?

BEN

"Whose tender locks do tremble every one?" Spencer, Edmund.
He's a friend.

JULIE

I agree with all of them.

LARRY

I mean about the play?

JULIE

Oh it was good.

MYRA

Thank you darling.

JULIE

But I was hoping to hear more about the private Abe. You know, why did he really split? If he could be a tree, what kind of tree would he be?

MYRA

Oh my dear, that's in our second act.

(The committee turns to her)

LARRY

And whose second act would that be?

MYRA

Uh, my niece Melba.

(Timid)

and her Aunty Myra.

(The committee drops their heads, disgusted)

BUCKY

Now I really hate it.

BEN

Well I'm afraid that disqualifies this play from the competition.

MYRA

Oh no!

(She starts a fake cry)

You can't!

BUCKY

Oh yes we can. Rule 621aa paragraph four.

(In MYRA'S face)

"Under no circumstances can a play suck!"

MYRA

(Stops crying and gets mad)

Why don't you just stick it rubber man!

LARRY

Professor Keats is correct; the sitting selection committee is not eligible for the contest. I'm sorry Myra.

MYRA

I'll file a protest.

(Under her breath)

Watch your back in the faculty lounge.

JULIE

If she can enter a play then I want to enter a play.

BUCKY

(Big Laugh)

But your make-up pencil broke and you couldn't finish it?

BUCKY

(The committee stops and looks at him. He continues with a medium Laugh)

We really don't need a "PORKY'S SIX"?

(Small laugh)

Kinko's ran out of pink paper?

LARRY

What's the play about Miss Summertime? Julie?

JULIE

It's about a troop of cheerleaders, in their summer uniforms.

(She models her uniform)

And they go on a canoe trip through the Panama Canal to overturn oppression and rescue orphans. I call it "Paddle us to Freedom. Oh please paddle us,

(Looks down at the paper)

home!"

BUCKY

Oh baby! I was right there with you and it was real.

JULIE

Swallow a softball and die dirt bag!

LARRY

OK! Well, moving along! Bucky why don't you present our second entry?

BUCKY

I got it here somewhere. Here we go. It's called "A Long Way Around the Barn." It's a basketball story. About a guy who starts out playing Donkey Basketball but then ends up playing for the Big Blue in the Final Four and they win, like in 96' and 98' not 97' when they lost.

MYRA

Well we won't need to audition for the ass!

BUCKY

Turn around and let me see.

(BUCKY slaps MYRA'S butt with his rubber hand.)

MYRA

Well I never . . .

BUCKY

It starts out this guy named "Lucky" gets trampled by an ass making a lay up.

LARRY

I love that "Amazing Animals" show.

BUCKY

No! It's "Donkey Basketball," you ride a donkey and you make the lay ups.

(Pointing at MYRA who is about to make a comment)

Shut your flap!

LARRY

Please continue Coach.

BUCKY

OK, so after he gets hurt, he goes back to college as a trainer. Only this one day he's wiping up some sweat and a ball rolls up. So he shoots it with his one good arm and the coach sees him and ask him to join the team. They go to

the Final Four and they win, like in 96' and 98' not 97' when they lost.

BEN

"Gay hope is his by fancy, less pleasing when possessed."

BUCKY

What did you call me?

BEN

"To each his suffering: all are men, condemned alike to groan." Thomas Gray don't you think?

BUCKY

No, I don't! And I ain't like that!

JULIE

He's not like that!

LARRY

Coach Dozer will now read a selection from "A Long Way Around the Barn."

(The committee responds with
quiet applause)

The scene is the dust-covered floor of a rural gym in a really rural part of the state. Go ahead Bucky.

BUCKY

(Clears throat)

That's it.

LARRY

Coach Dozer, "A Long Way Around the Barn." Here we go.

BUCKY

That's all.

LARRY

It's you Buck.

(Pause)

Buck Dozer everybody. Here he is . . .

(BUCKY gives a blank stare)

What's wrong Bucky?

BUCKY

That's all I got.

LARRY

(Under his breath to BUCKY)
What do you mean that's all you've got?

BUCKY
There ain't no more.

LARRY
Well didn't the author finish the play?

BUCKY
No, I did not.

(The committee drops their
heads, disgusted)
I was going to but in Shop class we started doing Mothers
Day wood burning and I forgot.

LARRY
You forgot? You forgot! Well did you remember the rule
about who is eligible for this competition?

BUCKY
I forgot that too.

MYRA
Rule 621bb paragraph five. "Under no circumstances can a
play be nonexistent!"

BUCKY
What's that mean?

MYRA
Look it up jock strap.

LARRY
You're telling this committee that there's nothing else
written on those pages?

BUCKY
About a couple a thousand games of hangman and right here
it says, Donkey Basketball, they go to the Final Four and
win, like in 96' and 98' not 97' when they lost. The end.

LARRY
Thank you Bucky.

BUCKY
It's OK.

BEN

"So having said, a while he stood, expecting high applause to fill his ears; when, contrary, he hears on all sides, a dismal universal hiss."

BUCKY

What is your problem man?

BEN

Milton. Paradise Lost. Sort of.

LARRY

OK! Moving along.

(Checking his watch)

My, we've been here, oh eight minutes and still no play for the festival. Ben, you want to jump in with something?

BEN

(BEN pulls a script from his breast pocket)

"There may be the muse does display her fluttering wings." Spencer, Eddy.

LARRY

What do ya have there Ben? Can you share it with the rest of the class?

BEN

It's not much really.

LARRY

We're willing to give it a try Ben.

BEN

It's the original story of a small town high school English teacher, inheritor of a stately but "Haunted" mansion.

BUCKY

Is this gonna suck or what? Dozer, Bucky!

BEN

(BEN crosses to the wings)

"You sir are not worth the dust which the rude wind does blow in your face," King Lear, Shakespeare, William.

(BEN is handed a large cape)

BUCKY

Oh yea!

BEN

Yea!

(Throwing the cape over his
shoulders with dramatic flair
he crosses to the center)

I call my play!

(Thunder)

"Death by Education."

(The committee drops their
heads, disgusted)

But before our hero may claim his prize, he must first
spend one night alone!

(Organ)

Inside the Haunted Mansion. Then write a paper about his
experience! It must be bound, indexed, footnoted,
completely referenced, upper and lowercase and double-
spaced. No less than fifteen hundred words, no more than
six mistakes.

BUCKY

I wouldn't give up that baby blue doublewide.

LARRY

The scene is the dirty, dusty, damp lower study of the
"Haunted" mansion. Candles are burning, lightning flashes .

.

(An organ stab is followed by
"Sorry" from backstage. The
lights dim)

A storm rages outside. Nigel is upset.

BEN

Damn, damn, damn!

(Writing furiously)

Not only must I stay in this depressing place, but the
power is out and my computer is without! Do the simple folk
know what that means?

(Organ)

No spell check! Bad luck but effective conflict don't you
think! I wrote that, Meeks, Ben, me!

BUCKY

If there's one thing I hate it's the big head!

BEN

(Melancholy)

But alas, the light does fade still I remain, confused and alone. A comfort too many convenient to none. Lines upon lines, pages turning pages, seeking at last an end to this miserable night. Oh yes, that was mine too. Like it? In search of silence be the roaring clock. An uncomfortable man in comfortable clothes.

(Turning to Julie)

Who wrote that?

JULIE

Let me guess, you?

BEN

Damn right!

(Builds to a dramatic close)

But I have not lost my faith with this lonely affair. I will not welcome despair as my temptress. Who else could have written that? For the dawn has spawned a new light. And if you dare to look through the darkness, into destiny's cold reveling eyes you too may discover.

(BEN strikes a pose, arms spread like a bat blocking the view of the committee)

MYRA

"Death"

(Organ stab)

"By Education!"

(Thunder clap)

BEN

Oh yea, I'm good!

(The stage goes completely dark. A scream is followed by a thud and an organ thriller. BEN drops his arms and stands back to reveal BUCKY face down with a large kitchen knife sticking out of his back. The lights come up and the cast looks at each other and exits uncomfortably, one by one leaving BUCKY behind)

LARRY

OK! Well! So it's unanimous then! This years festival play contest winner is obviously nonexistent. Congratulations Bucky! Thank you all for coming. See you in the cafeteria.

(After the last "Living" actor has exited, a voice backstage calls out "Curtain." The curtain lowers, then raises revealing the cast center stage. Flowers are handed to them from the audience and bows are taken. All the while, BUCKY remains behind them, face down, knife in the back dead. Moments later the cast exits again in triumph, leaving BUCKY as the curtain comes down)

THE END

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