



Dwayne Yancey

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

Animal Instinct

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Buzzards was first produced April 25-27, 1979 at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA. Directed by Dwayne Yancey.

BO: Phoef Sutton
COTTON: Steve Snyder

Lemmings was first produced January 23, 2004 at the No Shame Theatre, Mill Mountain Theatre, Roanoke, VA. Directed by Dwayne Yancey.

OLGA: Laura Tuggle Anderson
HELGA: Marycatherine Smith
INGRID: Kris Sorensen

Praying Mantis was first produced May 3-7, 2005 by Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, VA: Kristi Marie Morgan, director; Lauren Grace Jones, stage manager.

AMY: Misty Critzer
MICHAEL/JONATHAN: Justino Palacios
MOLLY: Christina Sayer
LEXIE: Jennifer L. Hall

Chicken was first produced April 25-27, 1979 at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA. Directed by Dwayne Yancey.

ONE: Steve Clark
TWO: Steve Snyder

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BLACK COMEDY/THEATRE OF THE ABSURD. Macabre, zany, sardonic, this collection of five short plays offers a unique look at death and all its horrifically comical trappings. In "Lemmings," three lemmings perched on a cliff off the coast of Norway discuss how to jump off—cannonball, head first, or swan dive. In "Chicken," two hungry people stare into an empty chicken coop and debate whether to cook and eat a nonexistent chicken. In "Praying Mantis," Amy bites the head off of her boyfriend and then seeks solace from her friends to assuage her guilt. In "Spiders," a group of arachnids plot revenge against humans and their most deadly spider-killing weapon—the daily newspaper. And in "Buzzards," two cowboys stranded in the desert watch as hungry buzzards circle above. The men must find a way to kill the birds before the buzzards make a quick meal of them.

Performance Time: Approximately 60-75 minutes.

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Lemmings

(3 F)

OLGA: Nervous rebel.

HELGA: Upholder of traditional values.

INGRID: Nerdy, concerned with technique.

Chicken

(2 Flexible)

ONE: The dumb one; dressed in rags.

TWO: The smarter one; dressed in rags.

Note: Can be played by same actors as in "Buzzards."

Praying Mantis

(2 M, 3 F, 1 Flexible, extras)

AMY: Has bitten off her boyfriend's head and feels very bad about it.

MOLLY: Amy's detail-obsessed friend; wears a bathrobe, curlers, and slippers; has a mess of kids.

LEXIE: Cool, calm, collected punkish sort who wears black, has lots of piercings and tattoos (specifically a red and yellow barbell on her stomach, plus spider web, heart, roses, barbed wire and Chinese symbols elsewhere on her body).

MICHAEL: Amy's boyfriend; non-speaking.

JONATHAN: Amy's new boyfriend.

BARTENDER: Non-speaking.

EXTRAS: As party-goers.

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Spiders

(4 M, 4 F)

TABITHA: Assertive.

ARIEL: Emotional.

REGINALD: Elder of the group; proper, reminiscent of a retired British army officer.

IAN: Rugged, a builder who admires architecture.

SOPHIE: Tabitha's teenage daughter.

NATASHA: Black widow spider; sexy, cool, and resolute, with a hint of exotic evil; dressed in black but slinky and sexy. She's also wearing something bright red on her front—either part of her costume, or a piece of jewelry.

GORDON: Natasha's boyfriend.

NIGEL: Non-speaking

Buzzards

(2 M)

BO: Cowboy.

COTTON: Cowboy.

Note: Can be played by same actors as in "Chicken."

Setting

Lemmings: On a cliff off the coast of Norway.

Chicken: Bare room except for a small table, two chairs, and an empty chicken coop.

Praying Mantis: Evening. Stage is split in half. Amy's living room is SL; Molly's living room is SR. Amy's living room has a sofa and end table; Molly's living room has a sofa and end table; party.

Spiders: Inside a house.

Buzzards: A desert.

Props/Special Effects

Chicken

Chicken coop
Table

2 Chairs

Praying Mantis

Sofa
End table
Headless corpse
3 Cell phones
Glass
Fake blood
Loud chomp

Loud chewing sounds
Gulp
Phone ringing
Kids fighting and screaming
Call-waiting beep
Dance music

Spiders

Ropes
Crumpled body
Tape measure
Pad of paper
Pencil
Cigarette

Black fingernail polish
Scream
Loud sound of swatting
newspaper
Music
Loud thud

Lemmings

"Were about to run off a cliff
headfirst into the ocean,
and you're asking
what's wrong?"

-Olga

Lemmings

(AT RISE: Olga, Ingrid, and Helga are at the back of the stage in the dark. When the lights come up, they run toward the front. Olga stops.)

OLGA: Wait!

(Ingrid and Helga stop.)

HELGA: What's wrong?

OLGA: What's wrong? We're about to run off a cliff headfirst into the ocean, and you're asking, what's wrong?

INGRID: Olga's got a point. We haven't rehearsed it at all.

HELGA: We're lemmings! This is what we do. Every so many years, whenever we get overpopulated, a bunch of us are supposed to run and jump off this cliff. We don't have to rehearse it. It just comes naturally. Now, come on. Let's start over. We need a good running start.

INGRID: We should at least synchronize it.

HELGA: Ingrid, we don't need to synchronize it. This isn't the Olympics.

OLGA: No, it's the North Sea and it looks pretty darned cold to me.

HELGA: We're lemmings! We have fur coats!

OLGA: It gives me goose bumps just thinking about it.

HELGA: You won't have to worry about goose bumps. Now, come on.

OLGA: And besides, it's a long way down there.

HELGA: How many times do I have to tell you? We're lemmings. L-E-M-M-I-N-G-S! When it comes time to jump, we ask, "How high!"

OLGA: Yeah, but that high?

HELGA: Oh, good grief.

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INGRID: So I was thinking of a swan dive. What were you thinking of, Helga?

HELGA: (*Exasperated.*) Does it matter?

INGRID: Well, of course it matters. Or do you think a back flip would be better?

HELGA: Whatever.

INGRID: Olga, can you do a swan dive? It's very graceful.

HELGA: Ingrid, will you stop it and come on?

INGRID: I find it very natural myself. But I understand if others might prefer a different technique.

OLGA: So why don't they call it a lemming dive?

HELGA: What?

OLGA: It's such a natural thing...why don't they call it a lemming dive?

INGRID: Well, you've got to admit, we lemmings aren't very graceful.

OLGA: What do you mean?

INGRID: I mean, well, we're just kind of pudgy and –

OLGA: Are you saying I'm fat?

INGRID: Oh, no, I'm not saying that.

HELGA: Who cares whether we're fat or not. We're about to jump off a cliff. It won't matter anyway. We'll get to the bottom whether we're fat or skinny, maybe not as fast, but who cares, anyway?

INGRID: Actually, that's not true.

HELGA: What?

INGRID: What you just said...the part about how the more something weighs, the faster it falls. That's not true. That's what Aristotle taught, but he was wrong.

HELGA: Well, who cares about Aristotle at a time like this? Now, please, you two, quit stalling and come on.

INGRID: You remember the story about Galileo at the Tower of Pisa?

OLGA: Was he a lemming?

INGRID: No, he was an Italian.

OLGA: So did he jump?

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INGRID: No, but he did these experiments dropping balls of different weights from the top of the tower. Like this, see? *(She holds out both hands, as if dropping balls, at the same time.)*
Bloop!

OLGA: Not bloop-bloop?

INGRID: Nope? Just bloop! See, Galileo proved that objects fall at the same speed, no matter what their weight is. It's basic Newtonian physics. Bloop!

OLGA: Hmm.

HELGA: There, does that make you happy now? We'll all hit the bottom at the same time, no matter how fat we are!

OLGA: So what kind of balls did he use? Soccer balls? Baseballs? Basketballs? Hockey balls?

HELGA: Hockey balls? There's no such thing as a hockey ball!

OLGA: Well, I didn't know. I'm not a sports fan. So what did he use?

INGRID: I don't know. Cannonballs, I guess.

HELGA: Are you ready now?

INGRID: You know, I've seen a lot of lemmings go over the cliff, and a lot of 'em are more like cannonballs.

HELGA: Ingrid!

INGRID: They grab their little legs like this— *(Demonstrates.)*

HELGA: Enough already!

INGRID: And then they go spinning 'round and 'round and 'round— *(Demonstrates.)*

HELGA: Ingrid!

INGRID: And then when they hit the bottom, they go— *(Demonstrates.)*

HELGA: Shut up!

INGRID: Sorry. Just trying to help.

HELGA: Thank you.

INGRID: But that's why I prefer the swan dive.

[End of Freeview]

Chicken

"Gots to eat chicken
or were gonna die."

—One

Chicken

(AT RISE: Two characters dressed in rags sit before a small table. An empty chicken coop is on the table.)

ONE: I says we kills it now and eats it 'fore's we starve. Grab it 'round its skinny little neck and twists it till it don't squawk no more. Then we plucks out its feathers and cuts it open to pull out all the slime and innards, then we boils it in a pot—

TWO: We ain't got no pots.

ONE: Or a pan. We could fry it—

TWO: Ain't no pans neither.

ONE: Fried chicken. I love fried chicken. Hear it cracklin' and poppin' and watch it movin' all around in the grease a-fyin', just like it was alive, 'cept it ain't, just a hunk of dead meat in there swimmin' 'round sizzlin'. Oh, boy, makes my mouth water just thinkin' 'bout it.

TWO: Ya ain't gonna fry it neither.

ONE: Ain't? I gots to have me my chicken. Gots to! Gonna starve! Gotta cook chicken and eat it! Eat, or starve! Aaargh!

(One lunges for the coop.)

TWO: Ya ain't gonna kill the chicken! Shut that coop! Get away from there! Keep your grimy hands to yourself. Ya want her to get out or something? Ain't never gonna catch her if she gets out.

ONE: Aaargh. Chicken. Eats. Or starve. Fried chicken. Aaargh. Fried chicken!

TWO: Go on, get away from the coop. Go on.

ONE: Aaargh. Chicken. Eats. Starve...

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TWO: Gonna disturb her with all that commotion. Get her all worked up and then she won't lay at all. Then what's we gonna do?

ONE: Chicken. Fried. Boiled. Baked. Ummm. Tasty, tasty chicken. Gots to eat chicken or we're gonna die. Kill chicken. Kill chicken or die.

TWO: Nice chicken. Come here, look at me, that's a girl. Nice chicken. We ain't gonna hurt you. Come here, cluck, cluck. Come on, cluck for me. Cluck, cluck. That's right. Cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck. Nice chicken.

ONE: We could fry her. Chop her up and eat her for supper. We could have a meal. You...and me...eat chicken. Meal? Fill stomach? Stop hurt? You can have drumstick, eh? Nice, tasty, juicy drumstick. Hmmm?

TWO: Ya ain't gonna kill her. Fill yer belly up and then what ya got? Nothing? No chicken! Nothing! Just some feathers and a stomach growlin' again in a couple hours. Only there ain't no more chicken 'cause you done ate it. Then ya really gonna starve. Shrivell up like an old dried carrot.

ONE: Aaargh!

TWO: Yes, you will! Just better let her keep on layin'. Ain't much but least it's something.

ONE: Eggs. Pshaw. Eggs no good. Hold 'em in your hands and crack 'em open. Can't eat shell. Ain't nothin' inside but gook, all wet and yellow and drippin'. Aaarggh. Don't want eggs. Been eatin' eggs. Still starvin'. Lissen, it growls. (*Sound of stomach growling.*) Don't want no more eggs. Gots to have meat! Bloody, tasty, chewy meat! Don't drink it like egg—grind it up with teeth! Meat, umm. Chicken meat. Kill chicken!

TWO: Eggs are good for ya. Lots of nutrition.

ONE: Lots of drip!

TWO: 'Sides, what ya gonna eat after ya eat the chicken? Can't eat the coop?

(*One bites the coop.*)

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ONE: No good. Taste like bones. Don't like bones. Break teeth. Like meat.

TWO: But there ain't gonna be no meat after ya eat the chicken.

ONE: Find some. Gots to have meat. Gots to.

(One sucks on own hand.)

TWO: But chicken's gonna be gone.

ONE: Fine some! Somewhere. Got to. Starve without meat.

TWO: Eggs ain't that bad. You can cook 'em—

ONE: Tired of waitin' on eggs. Tired of starvin'! I wanna eat chicken!

TWO: But then we'll—

ONE: I wanna eat chicken!

TWO: Lissen, I'll make ya a deal.

ONE: Don't want no deal. Don't wanna starve. Wanna eat. Wanna eat chicken!

TWO: I'll let ya eat the chicken, but first we gotta make a deal.

ONE: Umm? Aargh? *(One looks in the coop.)* Chicken good, good chicken. Boil it. Fry it. Umm. Can't decide. Might just pluck it and eat it raw! Aaargh! Yes, eats! Don't starve no more. Let's eat it now! Let's eat it raw.

TWO: Now hold on, here's my deal. I'm gonna let ya have the whole chicken.

ONE: Whole chicken? Legs? Wings? Breasts? Whole chicken?

TWO: Yeah, the whole chicken.

ONE: Aaargh! Eat good! Eat whole chicken!

TWO: But she's awful puny now.

ONE: Don't matter. Me hungry. Me starvin'.

TWO: But if you can wait just a few more days, you can really fatten her up till she's real nice and plump. You ain't gonna get that much hungrier, but she'll get a whole lot bigger. And then you'll have more chicken. And while she's

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fattenin' up, she'll lay some more eggs. Then I can eat the eggs, and you can eat the chicken.

ONE: But you said that before. Wait. Wait and starve!

[End of Freeview]

Praying Mantis

"My boyfriend is laying there dead
with his head eaten off
and now I've got to clean it up,
and all you can think to ask
is whether he was crunchy?"

—Amy

Praying Mantis

(AT RISE: The stage is dark. Amy and Michael are giggling and kissing on a couch.)

AMY: Oh, baby.

MICHAEL: How do you –? Oh, that tickles.

AMY: Uh-huh.

MICHAEL: Oh yeah... Ow! Oh, your teeth are sharp.

AMY: Uh-huh. *(We hear Michael scream, followed immediately by a loud chomp. Loud chewing sounds are heard and then a gulp. Lights up. Amy is on the couch. The form of a headless body can be seen beside her.)* Darn! I did it again. I hate it when I do that. Every time, too! I'm going to regret this in the morning. I can just tell, I'm going to regret this. Darn! *(She sighs, and leans over to the nightstand and begins searching for something.)* Where's the...? What's the...? Where did I put those...? Wait, a minute. I gave up smoking. What a time to give up smoking! Why'd I have to go and give up smoking? *(She opens a drawer and searches.)* Darn, and I'm out of chewing gum, too. Now what? I need more vices. No, fewer vices. No, more. Wait. Well, whatever...I need something. Well, may as well get up and fix some coffee. Caffeine. Caffeine will settle my nerves. *(She gets out of bed.)* Oh, geez. Oh, geez. Look at the mess. Oh, yuck. Now I'm going to have to Rug Doctor the couch. Why do I always do this? Why, oh why? I need to talk to somebody. I need to talk to Molly. *(She yells at the body.)* I sure can't talk to you, now can I? Yuck! *(Pause.)* Molly. I need to talk to Molly. She'll know what to do.

(Amy picks up the phone and dials. Sound of phone ringing. The lights come up on Molly, who looks at the caller ID and then answers the phone. She's wearing a bathrobe and curlers.)

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MOLLY: (*Into phone.*) So, how was he?
AMY: What do you mean, how was he?
MOLLY: You know what I mean, Amy. How was he?
AMY: You don't mean—?
MOLLY: Of course, I mean! What are girlfriends for if we can't share naughty little secrets?
AMY: I don't know. That's awfully personal.
MOLLY: Come on, it's not like it's something you haven't done before...once or twice, or 20 dozen. (*Molly giggles.*)
AMY: I know. It's just that, I don't know—
MOLLY: Oh come on, just spit it out. Was he crunchy, or not?
AMY: Crunchy?
MOLLY: Yeah, you know. Crunchy.
AMY: I can't believe you said that.
MOLLY: Why not? (*Sound of kids screaming and crying. She yells offstage.*) Will you kids hold it down in there? I'm on the phone! (*Into phone.*) Yeah, you know. Crunchy. Some girls like the crunchy ones.
AMY: Molly! I bit his head off!
MOLLY: Well, duh! Of course you did. That's the best part.
AMY: And you're asking me if he was crunchy?!
MOLLY: Well, yeah! I always thought Michael would be kind of crunchy. He just had that look about him, you know? Not that I ever had a chance to find out, of course.
AMY: My boyfriend is laying there dead—with his head eaten off—and now I've got to clean it up, and all you can think to ask is whether he was crunchy?
MOLLY: Yeah. What should I ask? Was he a screamer?
AMY: Molly!
MOLLY: Yeah, you know, did you take his head off in one clean bite or did you have to chew on it awhile?
AMY: I can't believe you.
MOLLY: You know, some girls like to tease a bit, make them suffer. I was never into that, mind you. Not that I haven't tried it, oh, once, or twice, or—
AMY: Molly!

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MOLLY: You know, my last boyfriend screamed a lot, too.

AMY: Look, I really don't want to know this!

MOLLY: He was one of the crunchy ones. But Victor—you remember Victor, don't you? Victor, bless his soul, he was just all mushy and gooey inside. No crunch to him at all, hardly.

AMY: Molly! I didn't call you to talk about crunchy or gooey!

MOLLY: All right, I know. Well, look at it this way, Amy. You won't go hungry for awhile. I hear the heads are full of protein.

AMY: Oh!

MOLLY: And, you know, it'll probably help clear up any zits you have, too.

AMY: I don't have zits!

MOLLY: (*Giggles.*) Neither do I, have you noticed?

AMY: Molly, it's not funny! I do this to every boyfriend! It just seems like when things get to a certain stage, when things are going really well, and we're like, you know—

MOLLY: Oh, I know!

AMY: Well, we get to that stage, and we're really into it, you know—

MOLLY: Uh-huh!

AMY: And it's like something in me just snaps, and I don't know...I just bite his head off!

MOLLY: Yeah, so?

AMY: Oh! You don't understand! I don't mean that I've done this a few times. I mean, I've done this to *every* boyfriend I've ever had.

MOLLY: Hey, boyfriends come, boyfriends go. You'll find another one.

AMY: But I don't want to find another one.

MOLLY: Give it time. You'll get over it.

AMY: But I liked the one I had!

MOLLY: So, tell me, was he crunchy?

AMY: Molly! You're not being very supportive!

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MOLLY: Sorry. I just don't see the point of getting all hot and bothered about it. Speaking of hot and bothered, tell me again about how you did it...how you took his head off, I mean.

AMY: I guess we just see this in very different ways.

MOLLY: So do you see it from the top? Or from the bottom?

AMY: I'm not going to answer that!

MOLLY: Well, you were the one who brought it up.

AMY: See, I'm not like you. I worry about my reputation.

MOLLY: Oh, I worry about my reputation too, Amy.

AMY: You do?

MOLLY: But who's going to tell? Certainly not what's-his-name, right?

AMY: Well, I—

(Sound of kids screaming and fighting.)

MOLLY: *(Yells offstage.)* Hey, I said, keep it down in there! Can't you tell I'm on the phone? *(Into phone.)* Now what was that? I missed the last thing you were saying.

AMY: Oh, you're no help! I've got to go.

MOLLY: All right, catch you later.

(Molly hangs up the phone and exits. Lights down SR. Amy hangs up the phone. She sits and frets. She looks over at the body.)

AMY: *(To headless corpse.)* And you're still there! Oh! What am I going to do? What am I going to do? Oh, why do I always do this? I'm going to hate myself in the morning. *(Pause. Thinking.)* Lexie, I'll call Lexie. She's always so cool and calm about everything.

(Lights down on Amy SL. Lights up on Lexie SR. She is on the phone with a male.)

LEXIE: (*Into phone, flirtatious.*) So yeah, I got another tattoo. No, I'm not going to tell you where. Let's put it this way: If I told you, I'd have to kill you. Just joking. I think my favorite is still the one on my tummy, though. Don't you think? (*She shows off the red and yellow tattoo on her tummy.*) I think that's my favorite. Sort of my own personal symbol. I mean, lots of people have spider webs and hearts and barbed wire and roses and those little Chinese symbols. (*She shows off one of each.*) I probably have a whole alphabet, if I knew how to read Chinese. (*Pause.*) Piercings? What about them? Well, you're just going to have to find out the hard way, now aren't you? Do you remember that girl Claudette? The one with the really short hair? She told me one time she had nine below the neck. Nine! I've tried counting...two, three...four! There's no way I can get to nine. Do you know how she got nine? I thought I was wild sometimes, but that Claudette, she's crazy! (*Pause.*) What? Me? No, I don't have anywhere close to nine. Well, not there anyway. The ears don't count, okay? We're just talking below the neck. Well, what do you think? All right, go ahead, try me. Okay...uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well, that's an easy one. Ummm, maybe. Umm, I'm not telling. No, I told you, I'm not telling. You'll just have to figure it out sometime. If you dare. Uh-huh. Speaking of dare...you gonna let me tie you up sometime? No, I mean really tie you up. Oh, I've got plenty of things to tie you up with. Some silk thread. Nice and tight. Oh, you'll be surprised how strong it is. I could wrap you up so tight in it you wouldn't be able to move. Do you think you'd like that? Oh, you say that now, but what about when I've teased you and let you lay there for, oh, a few hours. (*She giggles.*) Or a few days. (*She giggles.*) Until I'm good and ready to deal with you properly. (*Loud call-waiting beep is heard.*) Hang on, I've got another call coming in, but I'll get rid of it quick, I promise. (*She puts the caller on hold.*) Hello, you've reached Lexie's machine but Lexie's all tied up right now...

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AMY: Lexie! This is Amy!

LEXIE: ...and can't come to the phone, so...

AMY: Lexie! I know that's you!

LEXIE: ...please leave your name and number...

AMY: I really need to talk to you!

LEXIE: ...at the sound of the tone...

AMY: It's important!

LEXIE: ...and I'll call you back if I feel like it.

AMY: It's a crisis! *(Lexie makes the sound of an answering machine tone.)* Lexie! Don't do this to me! *(Lexie makes the sound of an answering machine tone. Exasperated.)* Oh, good grief! This is Amy. Talk to me, Lexie!

LEXIE: Your message has been left.

AMY: *(Screams.)* Lexie!

LEXIE: Oh, all right. Hang on just a second. Let me get rid of this guy I'm talking to. I left him hanging by a thread. *(She puts Amy on hold, returns to her original caller.)* Look, I've got to go. No, no, it's not you. I've just got to go. Come hang with me sometime, okay? I won't bite...too much. Bye. *(She returns to Amy.)* All right, I'm back. What's up?

AMY: Do you have to do that every time? That is, like, so annoying!

LEXIE: For you maybe. It's fun for me.

AMY: Look, I'm not in a mood to be toyed with tonight.

LEXIE: Neither was Jeremy. That's when I like to do it the most.

AMY: This is serious.

LEXIE: Oh, I'm deadly serious.

AMY: I wasn't interrupting anything, was I?

LEXIE: Nah, let him twist for awhile. It'll do him good. So what's the problem?

AMY: It's my latest boyfriend.

LEXIE: Oh, I don't do boyfriend troubles. You should know that. No boyfriends for me...too much hassle.

AMY: I ate him!

LEXIE: Well then, doesn't sound like he's a problem anymore.

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AMY: But you don't understand! I didn't want to!

LEXIE: Sounds like an eating disorder to me. You might be a compulsive eater, Amy. Have you ever thought about that?

AMY: It's not about eating.

LEXIE: No? So what is it about then? Hmmm. Because if it's not about eating, then it must be about sex, right?

AMY: It's not about sex!

LEXIE: Well, what's it about then? Power, maybe? Maybe you're subconsciously asserting your dominance over the weaker of the species? That's what they taught us in psychology class anyway. That whole dominance and submission thing.

AMY: I just don't want to do it anymore! But I do it every time!

LEXIE: Do what?

AMY: Eat my boyfriend's head off!

LEXIE: Well, then don't.

AMY: But it's like I can't help myself!

LEXIE: Then you need help, Amy.

[End of Freeview]

Spiders

Im telling you that that newspaper
over there
That's what we've got to fear...
It's death...
delivered daily."

-Tabitha

Spiders

(AT RISE: Darkness. We hear a scream and then a loud sound – a newspaper swatting something – which extinguishes the scream. Still in darkness, we hear voices from above.)

TABITHA: *(Offstage.)* What was that?

REGINALD: *(Offstage.)* Newspaper.

ARIEL: *(Offstage.)* I thought I heard someone scream. Did someone get hurt?

IAN: *(Offstage.)* Or maybe a shoe.

REGINALD: *(Offstage.)* No, I'm positive it was a newspaper.

ARIEL: *(Offstage.)* But who was screaming? Was anybody hurt?

TABITHA: *(Offstage.)* Well, isn't somebody going to go down to look?

ARIEL: *(Offstage.)* I just know somebody got hurt.

SOPHIE: *(Offstage.)* What's going on?

(Lights up. The stage is bare, except for a crumpled body. Ian descends on a rope, and runs over to the body. All of the characters are dressed in black.)

IAN: It's Nigel!

(Tabitha descends on a rope. She runs over and looks at the body. Reginald and Ariel descend right after her.)

ARIEL: Dear God. Is he – ?

TABITHA: Yes.

IAN: The bastards!

ARIEL: Oh God! Not another one!

REGINALD: It's always the ones you least expect, too.

(Sophie descends.)

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ARIEL: Poor Nigel!

IAN: He was usually so careful. I never knew him to venture out into daylight unless he had to.

SOPHIE: What's going on?

TABITHA: Go on home, Sophie. There's nothing you can do here.

REGINALD: I'm afraid we've had another...incident.

SOPHIE: Incident?

ARIEL: They killed Nigel!

SOPHIE: Nigel?

ARIEL: He was just walking across the floor and...bam...they killed him! For no good reason!

(Ian kneels over the body.)

IAN: Nigel, man! Nigel! He was my friend.

TABITHA: Go on now, Sophie, you don't need to see this.

(She tries to move Sophie away from the scene.)

ARIEL: They want to kill us all!

REGINALD: Now, now, Ariel. Come here. Uncle Reginald will take care of you.

(He tries to comfort Ariel. Ian shakes his fist at the sky.)

IAN: Damn you all!

REGINALD: These things happen. No one knows why.

ARIEL: But don't you see? These things happen all the time.

REGINALD: Such is the way of the world, I'm afraid.

SOPHIE: It didn't use to happen this much, did it?

ARIEL: First it was Edmund.

REGINALD: An unfortunate accident.

ARIEL: And then there was Louise.

REGINALD: Louise was old, and slow.

ARIEL: But that's still not a reason to kill her!

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REGINALD: We all miss Louise terribly. Especially me.
ARIEL: And what about Rodney? He wasn't old! Or slow!
Or Nigel? You can't tell me that was an accident.
REGINALD: There, there. We all feel these things, Ariel.
SOPHIE: I don't remember this many when I was little.
ARIEL: But they hate us! Why do they hate us?
REGINALD: They don't hate us, Ariel. We're just...different.
That's all.
TABITHA: No. Ariel's right. They hate us.
ARIEL: But why?
IAN: They hate us because we're talented.
TABITHA: They're jealous.
IAN: They hate us because we're artists.
TABITHA: Because we can do things they can't do.
IAN: Architects. Engineers.
REGINALD: They are a clumsy sort.
IAN: They hate our strength.
SOPHIE: I thought they hated us because we're small.
IAN: Our ingenuity –
SOPHIE: And because we're living in their house.
TABITHA: Look at them. They rage against the things they
don't understand.
IAN: It makes them feel they're important.
TABITHA: They want to control everything.

(Natasha descends.)

NATASHA: You're all wrong.
SOPHIE: Natasha!
TABITHA: You've come at a bad time, I'm afraid.
ARIEL: Did you hear? About Nigel? They killed him.
NATASHA: They hate us because we're spiders.
REGINALD: Phsawh.
NATASHA: It's true. We scare them.
ARIEL: Us? But how can we scare anybody?
SOPHIE: Is it because we, you know, look so –

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TABITHA: Sssssh!

(Natasha walks over to Nigel's body.)

NATASHA: Poor Nigel.

IAN: He could spin a web in nothing flat.

ARIEL: *(Speaking of Nigel.)* He was just minding his own business and they killed him!

IAN: He had this way of weaving these concentric patterns— perfectly spaced, too.

NATASHA: There's only one way to deal with this kind of thing.

ARIEL: What's that?

NATASHA: Kill them. Kill them all.

ARIEL: Oh, my God.

IAN: It'd serve 'em right, that's for sure.

REGINALD: Oh, we couldn't do that.

(Tabitha thinks.)

TABITHA: A pre-emptive strike...

REGINALD: It goes against our nature. We're peaceful creatures.

IAN: Maybe that's our problem, Reginald. We're too peaceful.

REGINALD: It would only provoke them.

ARIEL: Reginald's right. We wouldn't hurt a...oh, well, I guess that doesn't fit, does it?

NATASHA: Have it your way then. Maybe you like to live dangerously. Me, I like to take charge of my life.

TABITHA: There's danger no matter what we do.

REGINALD: Most of us aren't even capable of killing a human if we tried.

NATASHA: So has anyone seen my new boyfriend? He's supposed to come over for dinner tonight, and I haven't seen him. Males, they're so useless sometimes. They're only

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good for one thing. *(Pause. Thinks.)* Well, two, I suppose, if you count dinner. *(Natasha exits.)*

SOPHIE: New boyfriend? What happened to her old boyfriend?

TABITHA: We'll talk about that later, Sophie. You just run along now.

IAN: Come on, we can't leave Nigel here. Somebody help me.

REGINALD: I'll give you a hand.

IAN: Thanks, old boy.

REGINALD: Umm. Reminds me of when I was much younger, I was in the basement, all sorts of things there to be carried back and forth, believe you me.

(Ian and Reginald remove Nigel's body and exit.)

ARIEL: So now what do we do?

SOPHIE: What can we do?

ARIEL: You know they'll come back. They always do. If they catch us here – Shouldn't we be moving, too?

TABITHA: I'm thinking.

ARIEL: About what Natasha said?

SOPHIE: She wasn't serious, was she?

TABITHA: I think she was deadly serious.

ARIEL: But killing them? Wouldn't that make them mad? Provoke them...just like Reginald said?

SOPHIE: We're not poisonous, are we?

ARIEL: And wouldn't there just be more of them?

SOPHIE: Maybe we could tie them up...?

ARIEL: And I mean, we're not all like Natasha; it's easy for her to say –

SOPHIE: You know, show them we mean business.

ARIEL: But we've got to do something. We can't keep going like this!

(Ian and Reginald enter.)

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IAN: There, that's done.

REGINALD: We put him in the corner, and covered him up with dust.

IAN: It's very dusty in there.

REGINALD: A very proper resting place, if you ask me.

IAN: Nigel always liked the dark anyway.

TABITHA: (*Abruptly.*) Ian, what did they kill Edmund with?

IAN: What? Edmund? Oh, I don't remember –

SOPHIE: Which one was Edmund?

REGINALD: It was on the kitchen window, I remember that.

IAN: There's still a smudge, if you look close enough.

ARIEL: Oh, yuck!

SOPHIE: (*Horried.*) You mean...?!

IAN: I think about him every time I look at that window.

REGINALD: It must have been a newspaper. They'd have never used a shoe on the window.

TABITHA: And Louise was with a newspaper.

REGINALD: Poor Louise.

IAN: Courage, Reginald, courage.

ARIEL: And they killed Rodney with a newspaper!

TABITHA: And now Nigel.

REGINALD: (*Still thinking of Louise.*) I just hope it was so quick she never felt a thing.

IAN: What are you driving at, Tabitha?

TABITHA: I'm thinking about what Natasha said.

SOPHIE: You're not serious are you?

ARIEL: We've got to be serious about something, or they'll kill us all.

TABITHA: So there's only one thing we can do then.

IAN: What's that?

TABITHA: We can't kill them, of course.

REGINALD: I'm glad to see someone's still got their wits about them.

ARIEL: Natasha could! You know she could! And I bet she would, too, if we just asked her nicely!

REGINALD: Ariel! I'm surprised at you!

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IAN: Don't look at me. I'm not asking her anything.

SOPHIE: Why is it you have to ask her nicely? I mean, is there some special reason why you have to be polite with Natasha?

ARIEL: You better ask your mother, Sophie.

TABITHA: There'll be no killing.

REGINALD: Thank goodness.

TABITHA: At least not yet.

ARIEL: We kill flies. Why is it okay to kill flies and not humans? Aren't they all just pests?

TABITHA: The problem with killing them—even if we could—is there'll just be more that come along to replace them.

IAN: She's got a point there. These aren't the only humans who have lived here.

ARIEL: Yeah, but the others didn't hate us.

REGINALD: The trouble started with these new people.

TABITHA: Exactly.

SOPHIE: Why is that?

ARIEL: It's because they're evil, that's why.

REGINALD: Sometimes these things just go in cycles. Such is the way of the world, I'm afraid.

TABITHA: It's because these people have something the other occupants here didn't.

ARIEL: You mean the broom?

REGINALD: That's true. That one lady who lived here never cared what we did up in the corners of the ceiling.

IAN: Now, it doesn't even have to be a web—you spin even just a little strand, and bam, they knock it down just like that.

SOPHIE: Or maybe she means the stepstool? I notice they always get on the stepstool when they go after the corners.

TABITHA: Not the broom. The broom never killed anyone.

ARIEL: What about Miranda's leg? It broke Miranda's leg that one time! She never walked right after that.

TABITHA: A newspaper.

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ARIEL: Oh, my God! She's right.

TABITHA: Every morning, it shows up on the doorstep.

REGINALD: I hadn't thought about that.

SOPHIE: You mean not every human has a newspaper?

TABITHA: Think about it: Without the newspaper, they are powerless against us. You've never seen them use their bare hands, have you?

(The others shake their heads no.)

IAN: Sometimes they use a shoe.

TABITHA: Sometimes. That's true, Ian. Sometimes. But that's rare. It's been a long time since we've had anything like that happen around here.

REGINALD: There was Penelope.

TABITHA: Penelope was a long time ago.

SOPHIE: Who's Penelope?

REGINALD: Penelope made the mistake of walking across the floor in broad daylight. That's just how she was. You could never tell her anything.

SOPHIE: And they stepped on her?

ARIEL: Ewwww!

IAN: Right in front of the refrigerator.

ARIEL: Ewwww! I didn't need to hear that.

TABITHA: Whether it's a shoe, or a broom, or a newspaper, they always have to use something, right?

REGINALD: That's why I tell you youngsters, never go out on the floor in broad daylight.

TABITHA: And what these people are using is the newspaper...

(Tabitha continues to talk but others ignore her.)

REGINALD: *(To Sophie and Ariel.)* Promise me, you'll never go out on the floor in daylight.

SOPHIE: Oh, I promise!

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ARIEL: Not me! No way. Never. I only climb walls in the daylight.

(Ian notices Tabitha.)

IAN: Hey, can't you see, Tabitha's talking?

ARIEL: Sorry.

IAN: She's trying to tell us something. You go on, Tabitha.

TABITHA: That's right. I am trying to tell you something.

I'm telling you that that newspaper over there—that's what we've got to fear. That thing is nothing but a killing tool.

(Dramatic.) It's death...delivered daily.

ARIEL: Wow.

TABITHA: And if we don't do something about it, well, any one of us could be next. It could be you— *(Points at Ariel.)*

ARIEL: Oh!

TABITHA: Or you! *(Points at Ian.)*

IAN: Yeah.

TABITHA: Or you! *(Points at Reginald.)*

REGINALD: Such is the way of the world.

TABITHA: Or even you, Sophie.

SOPHIE: But I try to stay out of the way—

TABITHA: We all try to stay out of the way. You don't think

Nigel didn't try to stay out of the way? Or Edmund? Or Louise? Or Rodney? Maybe they saw the human who killed them, maybe they didn't. It doesn't matter, does it?

Because a human by himself is nothing to fear. But a human armed with a newspaper— *(She re-enacts a spider being crushed by a newspaper.)*

ARIEL: *(Horried.)* Oh!

TABITHA: *(Dramatic.)* They turn into killers...

IAN: So what should we do about this?

(Natasha enters, leading Gordon, her new boyfriend. She's holding onto his arm possessively; it's clear she's the one in charge.)

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NATASHA: I told you already what you should do—kill them all.

ARIEL: Hello, Natasha.

REGINALD: Good day, ma'am.

IAN: Hi.

TABITHA: You're back awfully early.

NATASHA: But if you don't want to listen to me, well, that's your business. I've got my own business to tend to.

REGINALD: It's not that we don't respect your opinion, Natasha.

NATASHA: Don't patronize me, Reginald. I know what you really think. But that's all right. I'm used to it by now. Besides, if you didn't insist on going out in broad daylight, you wouldn't have this trouble anyway.

ARIEL: But we can't just stay in the dark all the time!

NATASHA: Look at me, I like to stay in the dark, and I'm doing just fine, don't you think? Oh, that reminds me. I'm forgetting my manners. This is Gordon. Say hello, Gordon.

GORDON: Hello.

(The group murmurs a greeting to him.)

NATASHA: Gordon doesn't mind staying in the dark, do you Gordon?

GORDON: Umm, no.

IAN: *(Mutters to Reginald.)* It's a good thing, too.

NATASHA: I heard that, Ian. You're just jealous. Come on, Gordon. Let's give them something to be jealous about.

(Natasha and Gordon ascend on ropes and exit.)

ARIEL: Bye.

SOPHIE: See you later.

(Spiders wait until Natasha and Gordon are out of sight.)

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IAN: We might see Natasha later. We won't see Gordon.

TABITHA: Sssh.

SOPHIE: What's he mean by that?

TABITHA: Ssssh.

SOPHIE: Why is she ssshing everybody?

TABITHA: Ssssh.

REGINALD: Such is the way of the world.

SOPHIE: And what's that mean?

TABITHA/ARIEL/IAN/REGINALD: Ssssh!

SOPHIE: Geez.

IAN: So you were saying?

TABITHA: We need to do something about that newspaper.

ARIEL: But what?

TABITHA: What else?

REGINALD: It looks too heavy to carry. We're not ants, Tabitha.

TABITHA: Fools! Use your heads! We're spiders! What do we do best? *(She pulls out a rope from her costume, and demonstrates its strength. The others react, according to their character – Ian, approvingly; Reginald, reluctantly; Ariel, enthusiastically; Sophie, quizzically.)* We spin a web.

REGINALD: But the size of that newspaper...it would take us forever.

ARIEL: And then what do we do with it?

IAN: *(Visualizing this.)* Just like a fly.

TABITHA: Exactly, Ian. Just like a fly.

SOPHIE: You mean?

TABITHA: I mean, if we work together, we can keep them from getting their hands on the newspaper.

ARIEL: And they've only got two hands!

TABITHA: So what do you say? Are you with me?

[End of Freeview]

Buzzards

"Aint doin' ya no good
waggin' your tongue 'bout dyin'!"

—Bo

Buzzards

(AT RISE: Bo and Cotton sit back to back. Neither moves.)

BO: Won't be too much longer now.

COTTON: How ya figger?

BO: Look up there. *(Points.)*

COTTON: Yeah, I'm lookin'. What 'bout it?

BO: They ain't flyin' as fast. They're slowin' down. Watch 'em close.

COTTON: So's?

BO: They's dyin'.

COTTON: Yep. Same as us. Poor devils gonna die out here in the desert. 'Ceptin' they belong out here, and we don't. Gonna die out here without nobody knowin'.

BO: Aw, come on, Cotton.

COTTON: No funerals. No newspaper notices. No nothing. They just gonna find our bones, all dried and broken up where them buzzards done picked us clean.

BO: Now don't go talkin' like that, Cotton. Ain't doin' ya no good waggin' your tongue 'bout dyin'.

COTTON: It's true, though. We're out here dyin'.

BO: Sure it's true. But they is too.

COTTON: Only were goin' faster. They's used to it. They gonna wait us out and then pick us clean, if there's anything left to us then. We're out here starvin' away part of us and sweatin' away the rest of us.

BO: Naw. If we can hold on just a little bit longer, we're gonna have ourselves a feast fit for a king. How's that sound to ya, Cotton? How's that sound?

COTTON: How ya figger, Bo?

BO: They's gots to die sooner or later, and it's lookin' to me like it's gonna be sooner. And when one of 'em dies, and plops down right here beside us, we're gonna eat him!

COTTON: Bet they's sayin' the same thing up there.

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BO: Probably is. Ceptin' we're smarter. Ain't we, Cotton?

COTTON: I reckon.

BO: Course we is. Gots to be.

COTTON: I dunno. Seems they's about as dumb as we are.

Both out here waitin' on the other to die so's they can eat the other. Don't sound too smart to me... Say, Bo, how ya know they're gonna die anyway?

BO: Just look at 'em?

COTTON: Yup?

BO: They're slowin' down.

COTTON: We ain't exactly runnin' 'round like jackrabbits either.

BO: And don't they look awful scrawny to ya?

COTTON: Look pretty darn big to me. Bigger'n' I is.

BO: They's normally big. They grows that way. Some of them mothers got 9-foot wingspans.

COTTON: Dang!

BO: That's why we're gonna have ourselves a feast, buckaroo!

How'd you like to chow down on nine feet of buzzard wing? Ummm, ummm, ummm! Lotta eatin' there. Mind you, I didn't say good eatin', just lots of eatin'—but still, it's more than we've done lately.

COTTON: That's for sure.

BO: Now I grant you, though, they's still gettin' awful scrawny, for a buzzard.

COTTON: How come?

BO: (*Impatiently.*) I told ya! Cause they're dyin'!

COTTON: I don't wanna eat no sick ones.

BO: Naw. They ain't sick. They're just starvin'.

COTTON: Same as us. Poor devils. So why ya figger they're dyin'?

BO: Just look 'round ya. Ya seen anything movin'?

COTTON: Nope. Ain't seen nothin'. Seen a lizard 'bout three days ago. That was it. Or was it four?

BO: Ain't nothin' out here. Everything's dead. 'Cept us and them. That means there ain't nothin' left to die, so them

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fellas up there ain't got nothin' to eat, 'cept us. That's why they been circlin' us all this time.

COTTON: Waitin' on us to die.

BO: Only we're gonna outsmart 'em.

COTTON: Oughtta die first so we ain't gotta eat them things.

BO: Willpower, Cotton, willpower! All's we gotta do is hold out for a few days and one of them bastards is bound to die. Got to. He'll just drop dead right here in front of us, without us even havin' to move. Then we're gonna cook him up and eat him. Yeah, boy, won't that be good—eatin' again?

COTTON: They taste any good?

BO: Oh, you bet! Taste tangy, real strong and tangy. Kinda tough to chew on, though.

COTTON: Won't make ya sick, will it?

BO: Naw. Eaten plenty of 'em before.

COTTON: Ya have?

BO: Sure. They ain't the best tastin' critters in the world, but they'll do in a pinch. They'll do.

COTTON: Well, Bo, I'd say we certainly have ourselves in a pinch here.

BO: Yup, could say that. I'm countin' on them up there to pull us through.

COTTON: What if it don't work?

BO: It'll work.

COTTON: But how can ya be positive one of them critters is gonna die—just fall right outta the sky and land in our laps? Like magic or something?

BO: May not.

COTTON: Huh? But you said—

BO: That's just what I *hope's* gonna happen. May not, but then it ain't gotta. Gots me a plan B.

COTTON: What's your plan B?

BO: Well, all's we really needs is for one of them suckers to think we're goners. I mean already dead and gone and fit for buryin', and they'll come down here sniffin' us and all.

COTTON: Then what?

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BO: Then we grab him! Let him think yer deader n' a doornail, and he'll get right up on ya. Then ya grab him round the neck, so's he can't get away, and we beat the livin' daylights out of him.

COTTON: Smack him to smithereens!

BO: You bet! Then we—

COTTON: But won't he fight back?

BO: That's why we gotta surprise him! Otherwise, he might try to do us in. Peck us to death or something.

COTTON: Oww!

BO: But once we get 'im, we wring his neck like this...
(*Demonstrates.*) ...see?

COTTON: Uh-huh.

BO: Then we cook him and eat him. Eatin' sounds good, don't it?

COTTON: Yeah, boy. Can't wait to grab me a drumstick. They got drumsticks, don't they?

BO: Oh, yeah! Ones bigger'n you ever seen. Then we eat, yes sirree, eat better'n we have for a long time. Whatcha say?

COTTON: Say it sounds all right.

BO: Good!

COTTON: 'Ceptin' there's one thing that bothers me, Bo.

BO: What's that, Cotton?

COTTON: How we gonna cook him?

[End of Freeview]