

Blackknife Ranch

Cast of Characters:

Blackknife Ranch: Cast of 10 Characters, 4 females, 4 males, 2 non gender specific.

A Note from the Playwright:

The characters should be gender flipped. Each of the named male characters (highlighted in blue) should be played by women while each of the named female characters (highlighted in pink) should be played by men. The point is that the dialogue sounds traditionally feminine or masculine when read aloud, but the actor's physical appearance should be intentionally disjointed from this.

Character Descriptions:

Mr. Fred "Porky" Walters— he is a farmer in a small, rural corn-producing town, what many may call the stereotypical middle-aged "hick" white man. He is routinely very unclean, in part due to his work environment but also due to his general disregard for hygiene. He is poor, greedy, uneducated, and outspoken (especially in the event that he does not have the factual information deemed necessary to make a coherent argument). His character flaws are supplemented by his innocent yet dangerously charming sense of humor, which has often enabled him to wield greater power in a situation and to manipulate women.

He is deeply suspicious of others. He despises the very notion women that may betray his love and trust or that may (God forbid) reject his advances. He also has a seemingly irrational fear that men will seek to take his power and possessions from him. His material belongings (he includes his wife in this category) are essential to his understanding of his own identity.

Mrs. Catherine “Cat” Walters— she is PORKY’s wife and, in many ways, the exact opposite of PORKY. She is an introverted, loner type, and routinely distances herself emotionally from other people in an effort to keep from being hurt. She also goes by the name “Nahimana” (which is a Sioux Indian name that translates to “secret”) when speaking with TASHUNKA, the ranch hand. This was her birth name given to her by her mother, who was Sioux Indian. Her father, a white man, gave her the Americanized name “Catherine”, in an attempt to get Nahimana and her mother to assimilate. He was successful as Catherine’s mother is dead, and she has long forgotten many of her culture’s values and traditions. She has an extramarital affair with TASHUNKA.

Tashunka (which translates to “Horse” in English)— the new ranch hand employed by PORKY. He is of Native American (Sioux Indian) ancestry. The Sioux are renowned for their skill with horses. The way in which their culture celebrates the animal is demonstrated in TASHUNKA’s name and his occupation in life. He is generally reserved but can become increasingly argumentative and aggressive if provoked. He becomes a father figure and friend to DOUG and has a romantic relationship with CAT/NAHIMANA.

Carla Bull— a maternal, comforting figure and supporting, loving grandmother to DOUG SHEPHERD. She is old and wise but in a reserved, humble fashion. She lives on the edges of MR. WALTER’s farmland and works part time in the front office of the local high school, where DOUG and TASHUNKA attend school.

Doug Shepherd— a charismatic, intelligent, and lovable boy of 14. He occupies a rather stereotypical hero position as he is an orphan with a history shrouded in mystery. He is being

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

brought up by his grandmother, CARLA BULL, due to his mother being killed in a sudden, tragic accident when he was a toddler. He attends the local high school with TASHUNKA.

Charlotte Eeep— She is a 14-year-old attending the local high school with DOUG and TASHUNKA. She is the stereotypical “victim” type— dependent, immature, naïve, and easily influenced/led astray. She goes to join her childhood friend, CONNIE KEY, to work on PORKY’s farm when she falls in love with TASHUNKA and is abused dreadfully by PORKY, who takes out his anger surrounding his wife’s affair on her.

Connie Key— She is a 16-year old high school drop-out, who lives with her two-year old son in her father’s home. She works at PORKY’s ranch to pay rent to her father. Her father, DON KEY, is rumored to be emotionally and physically abusive, but he is never seen onstage. She is brash, unapologetically honest, and very matter-of-fact, all likely a product of her difficult circumstances. She is a foil to her childhood friend and confidant, CHARLOTTE EEEP.

Don Key-- Father of CONNIE KEY...

DETECTIVE #1: (preferably female) Stern

DETECTIVE #2: (preferably male, but can also be played by a female)

START OF PLAY

Scene One: Where’s Doug?

(Lights up on a bustling hospital hallway. Groups of doctors and nurses in scrubs are bustling through. This is the stereotypical hospital environment of controlled chaos, with clipboards and stethoscopes in tow. CARLA BULL enters, looking desperately for anyone who can help her.)

CARLA:

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
Doug, Doug, DOUG!!! Please! Has anyone seen—

DON:

Please, Carla, you have to calm down!

CARLA:

What the hell are you doing here, Don?

DON:

Carla, now of all times, we can be there for each other.

CARLA:

Oh, right. I was sorry to hear about Connie.

DON:

I'm sorry too. Connie, Cat, and Doug. Charlotte's here. She's lucky.

CARLA:

What happened?

(At this moment, a loud heart monitor is heard beeping faster and faster. CHARLOTTE's hospital bed is suddenly wheeled between CARLA and DON. They are in the center of the action in CHARLOTTE's hospital room.)

CARLA:

Don, this is awful. How did this happen?

DON:

The doctors say that she's waking up soon. I'm sure she'll tell you herself.

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(The heart monitor picks up again and a similar grouping of hospital staff rushes in once more,

except this time two ominous figures in suits enter also. They are two detectives, the stereotypical

criminal investigator types, with black suits and black fedoras.)

CHARLOTTE:

Where am I? Why am I—

CARLA:

Charlotte, dear, it's okay, it's all—

CHARLOTTE:

Where's Doug? Where's Doug? I need—

DETECTIVE #1:

(She is direct, confrontational.) Charlotte Eep? Ms. Eep, we need you to answer a few questions.

DON:

Sir, what right do you have to come in here harassing this poor young girl who's just—

DETECTIVE #2:

(with greater sensitivity) Please excuse my colleague. We mean no disrespect. *(He kneels down*

next to the hospital bed.) Charlotte, we want you to take your time. We understand that you are

processing a lot right now.

CHARLOTTE:

No, I'm ready. I'll tell you anything you want to know. I'm done being afraid. Just tell me one thing— is *he* dead?

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(At this point, the play begins. All of the events that occur are CHARLOTTE's testimony to the detectives. She assumes a position of a limited narrator that fills in the puzzle pieces of the mysterious serial killer case.)

Scene Two: High School is Hell

(Lights up on students arriving at a small, decrepit high school on the first day of the new school year. Some students have walked, some biked, and presumably some were dropped off in worn, grubby pickup trucks somewhere offstage. A car horn is heard, prompting an embarrassed outburst from DOUG.)

DOUG:

Grandma, seriously!!!

CHARLOTTE:

(on the phone) Connie, can I come by after—Wait, Doug's here... Oh stop the braying already, I totally don't have a *(whispered)* crush on him... Ssshhh, seriously!

CARLA:

Okay, okay, sweetie! You have a good day, sugar plum! *(CARLA waves goodbye and exits.)*

DOUG:

Grandma, I'm *fourteen*, please!

CHARLOTTE:

Connie, I've got to go. Doug's coming over. Oh shit, Doug is coming over!!! What do I—
(scrambling, afraid that she's about to screw this up) Hi, Doug. Hey, *Doug*, how was your—

DOUG:

Charlotte, who is that?

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
CHARLOTTE:

(Realizing that she still hasn't hung up the call) That was just, Connie, I— *(Back-to-back, overlapping conversation ensues.)*

DOUG:

(playful laughter) No, I know. I mean, who's *that*?

TASHUNKA:

Thanks for driving me down from the
ranch, Nahimana, I— I hope I didn't--

CHARLOTTE:

(Suddenly aware that DOUG is still waiting for an answer) Oh.

Apparently, he's from the reservation. Heard he's a new teacher...

Great. *(With a serious, reverent tone)* He's with Porky.

CAT:

Shhhhhhh... Not here. Nobody here knows about... *that*. Call me *Cat*, okay? *(She exits.)*

DOUG:

One of the untouchables then. Must be why Cat brought him. Wait here.

CHARLOTTE:

Doug, what are you doing?!? He's a *teacher*!

DOUG:

No, he's a ranch hand.

CHARLOTTE:

What? *(Powerless to stop him)* Doug, wait!

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
DOUG:

(Extending a hand) Hello, sir. Doug. Doug Wilson. *(Expectantly)*

TASHUNKA:

Mrs. Cartwright's room is this way? I just moved down here from the school on the res, and the school's asking me to fill in for her.

DOUG:

I can take you.

TASHUNKA:

No worries. Doug, you said?

DOUG:

Yes. It is. *(Probing)* You said you're from the reservation?

TASHUNKA:

Yes. Best be on my way. *(Under his breath, snickering to himself, the same way a horse might whinny)* Well, Doug, ain't you a card...

DOUG:

What did you just say?

TASHUNKA:

Look, kid, I really uh... *(sarcastically)* appreciate the help, but I'm the adult here. I think I can manage.

DOUG:

I know you work at the ranch.

TASHUNKA:

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(Trying to act unphased) Well then you must also know that I can handle myself.

DOUG:

(Growled through clenched jaw) Well, if you're such a free spirit, then I'll let you get going.

TASHUNKA:

Kids these days. All bark and no bite.

(DOUG, the image of a volatile teenager with patience finally spent, launches at TASHUNKA.

TASHUNKA scrambles to pull him off, accidentally shoving DOUG to the ground.)

CHARLOTTE:

Doug!!! *(reaching for phone and dialing speedily)* Connie, you've gotta get down here!

Scene Three: Ready to Rodeo?

(A crowd consisting of all of the named characters (apart from DON, CAT, and PORKY at the podium) and 20 to 30 some ensemble members is gathered on benches for the rodeo. Aside from the participants in the rodeo show, this assembled crowd constitutes the entire population of the town. This is a very small rural town. With the vastness of Porky's Blackknife Ranch, there is more square miles of land in this region than there are people. DON crosses downstage, speaking to the audience.)

DON:

The Walters Family been in this town 50 years. I ain't sure what our community could do without 'em. Put your hands together for Mr. Fred Walters here!

PORKY:

Oh, hush, no need for formality here, folks. It's Porky. *(Everyone laughs, there should always be a sense that the crowd is with him. He can do no wrong in their eyes.)* Thank y'all for coming

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss

out today. I like to think of this town as family. A tight-knit community I see at the bar, at the ranch, at church. Get a couple drinks with Don all the time, you know, laugh together. We're family. We're tradition. (*The crowd continually nods and "mhms" in approval. They are entranced by the figure that they most admire, all except CONNIE, who is looking off, disturbingly distant, and CHARLOTTE, who is probing her, trying to figure out what is wrong.*) We look out for each other. For the common folk like you and me. 'Cuz we ain't common. Not really. What we have in this town these days is really rare. We look out for our neighbors. We ain't spiteful, we ain't up our own ass. We done do nothing to hurt our community. And that's why we gotta keep our traditions. We won't let nobody get in the way, to change who we are and what we stand for. We are family. We are tradition. (*Thunderous applause from the crowd. Intentionally overdramatic, as if we are dealing with a brainwashing despot (which, perhaps, we are). Maybe even a few tears from the exasperated crowd.*) Why, thank y'all, folks, thank y'all all. I'd actually like to turn it over to someone very special. Y'all give it up for my wife. (*Applause, a few "woots". PORKY never fails to entice a crowd.*) Cat, would you like to say a few words? (*He says this out to the crowd, but, when she still hasn't moved, he throws his arm over her shoulder and pinches her cheek. This seems innocent enough until it becomes clear that this motion was only to pull her closer to the center of the podium to speak.*) Go ahead, the floor is yours.

DON:

One more time for Porky, folks! (*Thunderous applause.*) They're waiting for you, Cat.

CAT:

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(She looks to PORKY, eyeing him; she wasn't expecting this. After a gut-wrenching pregnant

pause, she speaks:) Hi... everyone. I, well, this just couldn't happen without y'all. We are really

glad y'all are here. Today. Here. For the... well, the show. *(Laughs nervously)* I didn't introduce

myself. I'm Cat. I'm... Porky's wife. He's really glad y'all are here. With us. Today. Well,

thanks y'all. Again. Bye now. *(Small, disjointing cacophony of clapping, but it is so awkward*

that DON feels he has to intervene.)

DON:

(Riling up the crowd.) Whoooooooooooo's ready for some BUCKING BRONCS?

CAT:

(As she steps down from the podium, trailing PORKY back to their seats.) Why did you

embarrass me like that? What the hell, Fred? Seriously, Fr--?

PORKY:

(Grabbing her arm forcefully while carefully assessing to make sure that he is not being

overheard.) Oh, it's you that's embarrassed is it?

(DON leaves the podium, with the crowd jovially chatting together in the background. His long,

clumsy strides catch them up.)

PORKY:

(Quickly replacing his demeanor, his façade is a clearly practiced motion.) Don, hi. Thanks for

the intro. Are the folks ready for one hell of a show?

DON:

Yes, sir. I came to you because the horses need turning out.

PORKY:

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

Of course. Broncs, ready to go, gotta prep the barrel racers. Work never stops around here, does it, Don? *(They chuckle together, then a beat of silence as PORKY redirects his gaze to CAT as DON attempts to clumsily shuffle back to his seat next to CONNIE.)*

PORKY:

Well, c'mon, Cat, you best be getting to this. *(CAT stands unmoving, unblinking. A pregnant pause as he assess her frozen store. He starts again, more sternly this time. There is no more mister nice guy now that the audience is far away and DON has left their vicinity completely.)*

You know I won't ask twice.

(CAT starts to leave, begrudgingly, toward the stables. She may have only taken five steps when she stops dead in her tracks. She sees PORKY, who eyes her disapprovingly, mouthing the words "No sass", as if she is merely a child in need of chastisement. She walks away faster this time, trying to hide her fear and the tears that have begun to stream slowly down her face.)

Scene Three: I Know What Your Name Means

(Stage is now largely empty apart from some mounting blocks and saddle stands, loosely suggesting a presently vacant stable, "backstage" at the rodeo. CAT is wiping away her tears.)

CAT:

You must be new around here?

TASHUNKA:

Everyone keeps saying that. *(Turning to face CAT, finding himself impressed and mystified)*

Yes... *(Gently, still enchanted)* Are you all right, ma'am?

CAT:

I'm fine. *(Beat of silence.)* I've come to err... turn out the barrel racers.

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
TASHUNKA:

That's okay, ma'am, I got it. (*Remembering himself*) Tashunka, nice to meet you. And you are?

CAT:

(*Stepping closer to him*) Just... *thinking*...

TASHUNKA:

Mysterious. I like it. Very... (*testing the waters*) *sexy*.

CAT:

(*Stepping even closer to him*) Are going for a ride or am I?

TASHUNKA:

Wow. That's pretty forward, don't you think? (*Beat of silence. TASHUNKA backtracks, thinking he crossed a line.*) I let them all out twenty minutes ago but—

CAT:

(*Putting a single finger to his lips*) Shhhh. You're already pretty bruised up, figured this wasn't your first rodeo.

TASHUNKA:

(*Probing*) But I don't even know your name...

CAT:

Nahimana. Now, come on, young stallion. (*A look of intense bewilderment from TASHUNKA.*)

Yes, I know what your name means. I'm one of you.

Scene Four: A Troubled Friendship

CHARLOTTE:

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(Under the pretense that they are in a “real” argument, for the first time.) Connie, I’m sorry I

won’t ask again.

CONNIE:

Yes, you will, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE:

I’ve just never seen you like that, okay? You were just so... so distant, and I wanted to make sure... *(With all the melodrama of a classically hormonal, naïve teenager)* Oh, I don’t know, I’m just so useless!

CONNIE:

(Playfully, changing her approach in order to hide the fact that she really doesn’t want to talk about her mood of negative contemplation earlier) Come on, I’m toooooooally messing with you, Lot!

CHARLOTTE:

(Trying to act mad but not being able to put on the façade successfully at all) Lot?!? Connie, that’s awful, please never call me that again! *(Busting out into an uncontrollable giggle)* Nope! I can’t do it!

CONNIE:

You wanna see little Timmy today? He’s growing so much all the time. It’s crazy.

CHARLOTTE:

Aw, yes!!! I’ve never really been a baby person, but just something about him... I don’t know how to say it.

CONNIE:

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
Yeah, he's pretty precious.

CHARLOTTE:

Is Little Timmy ever going to get to meet his daddy?

CONNIE:

You know I don't talk about that, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE:

But I'm a friend, pink promise I won't tell anyone! Pluuuhhheaseeeeeeeee!

CONNIE:

No.

CHARLOTTE:

Fine, then, just tell me what it's like. Please.

CONNIE:

What what's like? You know. You're literally over here all the time.

CHARLOTTE:

No, Connie. I mean... (*Whispered*) You know... (CONNIE *waits.*) *The sex.*

CONNIE:

No. That's worse. That's definitely worse.

CHARLOTTE:

Oh, come on... What is wrong with you today? I'm only asking...

CONNIE:

Wrong with *me*? Only *asking*? Sure, Charlotte, sure. I'm going to get Timmy, now. Can you please wait here and **STOP** asking questions.

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(CHARLOTTE *stares unblinkingly at her friend's face, then at the carpet. The "real" argument that she has always feared would break them apart has finally come. Blackout.*)

Scene Four: A Secret and A Proposition

(Walking "home from school" *esque scene. DOUG is walking with TASHUNKA to PORKY's barn, where TASHUNKA is headed to work.*)

DOUG:

I can't believe it, man. It ain't like that round here... I just—

TASHUNKA:

Seriously, you can't tell anyone. This is strictly after school hours business.

DOUG:

No kidding. (*A disapproving look from TASHUNKA.*) Tash, this shit will be happening in my dreams now! I can't get you and Cat out of my head that easy!!!

TASHUNKA:

Shut up! Christ, I knew that I shouldn't have told you anything.

DOUG:

Hey, don't take our Lord's name in vain.

TASHUNKA:

Your Lord's name in vain.

DOUG:

Right.

(TASHUNKA *begins to walk faster, leaving the path to head diagonally in the direction of the barn, thinking that the conversation has ended, his exposé complete.*)

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
DOUG:

Wait, hey, actually...

TASHUNKA:

(TASHUNKA *turns back to face* DOUG.) Yes?

DOUG:

I wanted to ask you actually... I've been meaning to at least...

TASHUNKA:

Let me guess, is this about Charlotte?

DOUG:

What the hell, man? What do you know about that?

TASHUNKA:

You're like her dog or something.

DOUG:

Okay, okay! Now what is that supposed to mean?

TASHUNKA:

What do you *want*, Doug?

DOUG:

Well, it's kind of embarrassing.

TASHUNKA:

Go on.

DOUG:

Obviously, you seem to have a way with women so—

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
TASHUNKA:

Jesus, Doug!

(DOUG *eyes him disapprovingly.*)

TASHUNKA:

Sorry. (DOUG *points upward, as a reminder*) Sorry... Jesus.

DOUG:

What are you sorry for?

TASHUNKA:

(*Playfully*) Hey now, I'm the grown-up here! (*Beginning again*) What I mean is... That's just...
(*searching for the words*) Totally not the same situation. I can't help you. (*Turning to leave.*)

DOUG:

No, no, hold on! One more thing?

TASHUNKA:

Seriously, Doug. I got to get to work! (*Pointing off in the direction of the barn.*)

DOUG:

Will you come to Church with me this Sunday?

TASHUNKA:

What...?

DOUG:

Please? (*No response.*) It's just a thing!! My grandma doesn't let me bring anyone home if they don't go to church. I'm sorry. You don't have to believe any of it, you know. You can think about anything, really. And then, grandma can cook us some nice—

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
TASHUNKA:

(*Simultaneously*) Doug. Doug! DOUG!!! Slow down. (*Beat.*) Please. I'm sorry. You know I can't.

DOUG:

But you don't have to believe, that's what I'm saying!

TASHUNKA:

Doug, listen. One God, many gods, no gods, it's all the same. Besides, I'm your *teacher*. But I can't... I can't sit there thinking for... How long is it?

DOUG:

I dunno, the priest is a little long sometimes, but, don't worry, I totally think we can get in and out in just over an hour if we're lucky as long as—

TASHUNKA:

An hour? Oh, hell no, Doug, hell no.

DOUG:

What is your problem? Do you hate Christians, is that it? Do you hate me?

TASHUNKA:

I don't want to spend an hour of my life sitting there looking at the woman I love sitting next to her husband, and there's absolutely nothing I can do about it! I don't want to sit there in agony pretending that I barely know the woman that I share my most intimate secrets with! And I *certainly* don't want to walk around and *chit chat* and make small talk with her husband! (*A breath.*) I work for him. I respect... *certain* things about the man. But I do not, I do not admire him. And I certainly don't make *small talk*, like some kind of (*spitting the word out*) Democrat.

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(TASHUNKA storms off, leaving DOUG aghast and completely speechless. End Scene.)

Scene Five Pt. 1: A Grand Procession

(We see members of the ENSEMBLE and each one of the main characters enter the church.

Most come in clusters or couples. If anyone enters alone, it should be met with a look of suspicion or disapproval. DON, the hellfire and brimstone preacher, is already at the front of the church with his podium when everyone enters. Three clusters of ENSEMBLE members enter first. Then, CARLA, DOUG, with TASHUNKA trailing behind. PORKY and CAT enter, and everyone in the church rises, as if in the presence of someone imbued with regal and divine power. TASHUNKA is late to stand up; PORKY notices. PORKY and CAT sit, followed by the rest of the congregation who sits in unison. DON opens his mouth to begin. He abruptly stops, scanning the pews. CHARLOTTE and CONNIE run in hand-in-hand, child-like. They are late. This is highly inappropriate, given that CONNIE is the preacher's daughter, and she is supposed to be a model citizen of the community. CHARLOTTE, child-like, drops CONNIE's hand and continues to run to a vacant spot in the pew behind PORKY and CAT. CONNIE, realizing herself, trails slowly, clumsily to join CHARLOTTE, but there is no room left on that row. CHARLOTTE sits. CONNIE joins TASHUNKA's side of the room. There could not have been a worse decision. CONNIE sits.)

Scene Five Pt. 2: Take Me to Church

(As DON begins his sermon, CHARLOTTE and CONNIE begin a text message conversation.)

CHARLOTTE:

Hey.

CONNIE:

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
Let's not.

CHARLOTTE:

C'mon. No one can see.

CONNIE:

Err... everyone can see. We came in late.

CHARLOTTE:

I'm sorry. I meant, the phones?

CHARLOTTE:

Where even are you?

CONNIE:

Reject side.

CHARLOTTE:

The what? Ohhhh, I see you. Town outcast side. Nice.

CONNIE:

Please shut up! This sermon will no doubt be about the rebellious preacher's daughter so please don't get me started.

(CONNIE *clicks her lock screen on and slides her phone into her pocket.*)

CHARLOTTE:

Okay.

(CONNIE *ignores the text buzz.* CHARLOTTE *sits there, clearly itching to say more.*)

DON:

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss

I will not turn my back on my church! That person, anyone that is against you; they may have mistreated me. But we FIGHT for the UNITY, FIGHT! For we are the people of God! “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” It’s a wonderful thing, a wonderful thing! “For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are *God’s*. [1]” Find God in you and be kind, folks! Let’s all get along w’ each other!

(TASHUNKA turns his head back to the back of CAT’s head, silently willing her to acknowledge his presence. TASHUNKA is interrupted by the ENSEMBLE.)

ENSEMBLE:

(Ad lib, etc.) Yes, sir! Amen, yes!

DON:

We have to look to Christ! We have to find Christ in ourselves! In Psalms 133:2, “it *is* like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments”. This is the image of the body of Christ. It unified him in the picture of the power of the Spirit of God!!! And God wants to do the same for each and every one of us! When we join up, the Holy Ghost is here! Here! But when we split up, the Holy Ghost just leaves. You want the presence of God in this Church?!? Then, you better get on with one another.

(TASHUNKA, snapped by into reality by the sudden group disturbance, abruptly looks down.)

ENSEMBLE:

(Ad lib, etc.) Yes, sir! Amen, yes!

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(PORKY *grins and gesticulates with the ENSEMBLE. Satisfied that he is distracted, CAT looks back to TASHUNKA.*)

DON:

That's why everybody should do some thinking about where you're going when you leave this world! You have to face this, you have to come to the facts, you are going to DIE!

(CAT *snaps her head back to face the front, startled by DON's outburst.*)

DON:

You are going to leave Planet Earth! One day, you will draw your last breath, your heart will beat its last time, there will be no more life left in your body! Where? Where?!? WHERE is your soul going?!? Are you prepared?!? I know you prepared your house; I know you prepared your income; I know you planned out your marriage, your children.

(*Simultaneously, CAT and TASHUNKA look to one another. TASHUNKA mouths the words "I love you" before CAT turns her head back to the front.*)

DON:

But you made no plans whatsoever for where you're headed when you leave this world. Hell is a place! It is a place! It existed before you were ever born! Before your father was born, before your grandfather was born, before your great grandfather was born, and before all his fathers before that! It's there, and it's gonna be there, and there is not one thing you can do to change that! (*Wiping his brow with his neatly folded ratty handkerchief*) But how do I stay out of Hell, Preacher? Good. Preacher, I don't want to go TO HELL. Good. That's a good thing. That worries me, Preacher. Real good, real good. HOW DO I NOT GO TO HELL, PREACHER? (*A*

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

dramatic, pregnant pause.) One name, one name. Given among men who must be saved. Only

one name, only one name. That's the name of Jesus! He's the Savior! Our Savior!

ENSEMBLE

(Ad lib, etc.) Praise the Lord! Praise Jesus! Amen!

CHARLOTTE:

This is exciting, pleaseee! *(Buzz.)* It's about *drumroll please*. *(Separate message, another buzz.) (Drumroll emoji, buzz. Confetti, buzz. She is really "bigging up" her immense excitement.)*

CONNIE:

(Sitting up in her seat, disturbed by all the buzzing and seeking to put an end to it immediately.)

DOUG.

CHARLOTTE:

Why do you always have to do that?

CONNIE:

Do what?

CHARLOTTE:

You ruin it!

DON:

I heard something, a couple towns over. A girl dead. A sixteen-year-old girl. Now we got a lotta sixteen-year-olds in here, a lotta seventeen, eighteen, nineteen-year-old girls. Sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, thirteen. These children. Another got killed just last week. A little boy. Barely high

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

school age. Riding a bicycle to school. Fourteen. Dead. So you see, in times like these, we gotta

stand by our children. We have to make sure they know about our Savior, Jesus Christ.

CONNIE:

(Still texting) Stop. Wait.

CHARLOTTE:

(Whispered, the game continues) Hey. I'm back. What?

CONNIE:

He's always doing this.

CHARLOTTE: Doing what?

CONNIE:

Don't you hear him?

CHARLOTTE:

Huh?

CONNIE:

He's talking about me.

CHARLOTTE:

What?

CONNIE:

Seriously. He is.

ENSEMBLE:

(to CHARLOTTE) Excuse me, miss, are you—?

(CHARLOTTE turns, concealing the cell phone.)

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
CONNIE:

It's nothing.

CHARLOTTE:

Love ya, gotta go. (*They sit in silence for a few moments.*)

DON:

We have to plan for ourselves. And we have to plan for them. And it's hard. But Hell is out there! Hell is all around us! But we can protect ourselves. We can protect our children. But we have to look to Jesus! We have to look to Jesus.

CHARLOTTE:

(*slightly too expressive for her surroundings*) I— (*reigning it back in*) just... don't understand?

CONNIE:

Just meet me afterwards, will you? Please?

(*They wait, full of anticipation. It feels like forever, but it is only a minute or less of stage time.*)

DON:

(*Looking down, in contemplative prayer*) Father, in Jesus name, I preached what you gave me, Lord. And you gave me this a long time ago. That's all I'm gonna say. I preach the Word. Now, Lord, use it for whatever purpose you intend to use it. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

ENSEMBLE

(*In unison*) Amen.

(*Groups of the ENSEMBLE churchgoers begin to rise and slowly proceed to the exit. Some may walk solemnly out while others may approach PORKY or DON to engage in polite conversation before exiting. PORKY and DON leave together.*)

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
CHARLOTTE:

Finally. (*Buzz.*) I'll come to you? (*Buzz.*) Or you're coming to me? (*Buzz.*) Me to you. (*Buzz.*)
You to me. (*Buzz.*) Y. (*Buzz.*) O. (*Buzz.*) U. (*Buzz.*) to (*Buzz.*) M. (*Buzz.*) E. (*Buzz.*) ? (*Buzz.*)

CONNIE:

Lol (*Buzz.*) I get it. (*Buzz.*)

CHARLOTTE:

Or (*Buzz.*) M. (*Buzz.*) E. (*Buzz.*) to (*Buzz.*)

CONNIE:

Stop, stop! (*Buzz.*) Lol (*Buzz.*) Okay, I get it. (*Buzz.*) At the back.

CHARLOTTE:

Cool, cool.

(CHARLOTTE and CONNIE cross to one another, meeting in the middle of the center aisles.

CAT is at the left pew, pretending to pick up Bibles while TASHUNKA looks up to notice this then puts his head back down, still in the right pew. CHARLOTTE and CONNIE cross down to the entrance of the church, at the back of the pews. CARLA and DOUG rise last.)

CARLA:

Doug, I'm going to find Mrs. Eep. Don't you want to talk to Miss Charlotte?

DOUG:

(Distracted, concerned by TASHUNKA, who remains seated, even now.) What, Gramma? *Oh.*

Maybe later, Gramma.

CARLA:

Okay. Your loss, sugar plum.

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
DOUG:

Gramma!

CARLA:

(As she exits:) I know, I know.

TASHUNKA:

(Head still glaring down at the floor) Doug, will you please go with her? I need... some time...
please?

DOUG:

Oh. Yeah. I'm sorry if I... No. Sure, sure... I'm going.

TASHUNKA:

(As DOUG exits, shaking his head.) It's not your fault. I just need to some time, sorry.

(TASHUNKA finally looks up. CAT does too. They meet eyes immediately from across the room. They smile at each other, unaware of CHARLOTTE and CONNIE, at the back of the room. CHARLOTTE and CONNIE talk normally, no longer texting.)

CHARLOTTE:

K, so who's first?

CONNIE:

Did you see that?

CHARLOTTE:

See what?

(CONNIE tries to gesture subtly in CAT's direction, but CAT looks up and notices.)

CONNIE:

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
I think we need to leave.

CHARLOTTE:

Why?

CONNIE:

(Quietly as she tries to usher CHARLOTTE out) Don't you see that's weird? That they are in there both alone?

CHARLOTTE:

Maybe we should stay and watch?

(CONNIE is not usually the type, but this idea intrigues her.)

CONNIE:

I know just the place.

(As CHARLOTTE and CONNIE sneak to the corner, there is a tortured look to TASHUNKA's eyes as CAT crosses to him, practically running to get to him, fear forgotten. TASHUNKA stands, and they embrace, silently. Lights slowly fade to black.)

Act Two, Time has Passed. CHARLOTTE's fragmented remembrance of what happens next

Scene Six: Where's Cat?

(Lights up on the door to CARLA's trailer. Upstage of the door are a dingy, old sofa and an equally as ancient coffee table with an old, farmhouse style lantern atop it, all of which remain in darkness as CARLA and TASHUNKA speak at the doorway. At the top of the scene, TASHUNKA approaches the door and begins knocking. CARLA begins to answer him from inside the house, but she does not open the door to let him in.)

TASHUNKA:

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
(*from behind the door*) Carla, Carla ! Cat and I got separated, I—

CARLA:

(*trying to embrace him with her words*) Hush, child, hush.

TASHUNKA:

Have you seen her? Please, Carla, I'm desperate. Aren't you going to let me in?

CARLA:

(*trying to remain lighthearted and calm and make a joke of it but betraying herself*) Aren't you going to calm down?

TASHUNKA:

Carla, something's wrong.

CARLA:

Everything's fine, sweetheart. Why don't you—

TASHUNKA:

No, Carla, let me in. (*A beat of silence.*) I'm sorry, Carla, I'm sorry. It's just you haven't cracked a joke, you haven't insulted me, and you haven't offered me your Southern cooking or even a step inside, I *know* something—

(*CARLA opens the door, defeated somewhat. She still stands in the doorway, however, guarding something elsewhere in the house from being discovered.*)

TASHUNKA:

Thank you. Now, do you have a telephone?

CARLA:

Please don't come in. I have tried my hardest, but I cannot—

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
TASHUNKA:

Carla, I ran here from the barn, please just tell me what you know, I—

CARLA:

(still avoiding direct eye contact) You're right. I haven't shown you my hospitality. Wait there.
I'll go get fetch you something to drink.

TASHUNKA:

Carla, you would tell me if she'd left me, right? If she didn't want to be with me anymore?

(CARLA stops in her tracks.)

TASHUNKA:

You are my last hope. *(CARLA's face falls.)*

CARLA:

I found her by the train tracks. *(As she says this, she steps aside to reveal Cat, dead, placed gently on the couch, wrapped in a blanket.)*

(TASHUNKA hugs CAT to his chest silently. He is beyond upset. He is frozen, unable to cry.)

CARLA:

She told me, "Porky's been the death of me. I couldn't escape him." I am *beyond* sorry. Child, I can't begin— I'm so sorry.

(TASHUNKA looks blankly at the wall until his stare becomes one of defiance and redemption. He gets up wordlessly and crosses the door, adamant in his pursuit.)

CARLA:

Child, where are you— *(sighing through her teeth).*

(TASHUNKA slams the door and runs offstage, full pelt.)

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

CARLA: Oh, Cat, you were right to want to leave this place. But why did you have to do it this way?

Scene Seven: Coming to a Bitter End

TASHUNKA:

You are a despicable—

PORKY:

Remember me however you want, boy. I have nothing now.

TASHUNKA:

Cat deserved better!

PORKY:

(Rehearsed, playing the victim) I'm not a monster. You think it was easy for me to kill her?

TASHUNKA:

But she— She... killed herself. She was by the train tracks.

PORKY:

(laughing maniacally) Train tracks? Boy, how stupid are you...

TASHUNKA:

But Carla said she stepped out in front of a train or something—

PORKY:

Oh, that old, withering bitch... She doesn't know anything. Did you even see the body, huh?

That's bullet holes, boy, not a damn train!

(TASHUNKA's face falls. He feigns recognition, feeling stupid that this could ever surprise him.)

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
TASHUNKA:

I knew it, I fucking knew all along, I—

PORKY:

Don't lie, boy. I was a king in this town. No one knew.

(TASHUNKA *lunges at PORKY, distraught and wanting vengeance.*)

PORKY:

(*Letting TASHUNKA push him to the ground without resistance.*) Never has a worker disappointed me more than you have.

TASHUNKA: (*shutting his eyes*) It's okay. Cat...

PORKY: Which is why I've decided to promote you. It's all yours now. (PORKY *exits the stage.*
A gunshot is heard. Blackout.)

Scene Eight: The Missing Pieces

(*At this point, the setting again returns to the hospital, to CHARLOTTE's hospital room. The time is now the present, and it is a resumption of the conversation from the first scene of the play. There is an air of hopelessness and a resignation in the room. CHARLOTTE has just finished explaining the latest piece of her knowledge in the unfolding story, when DETECTIVE #1 speaks:*)

DETECTIVE #1:

Right. (*Deep, aggravated sigh*) And Doug? Earlier, you started to say... (*waiting for a response*)
Where is he now?

CHARLOTTE:

(*mumbling slowly yet incomprehensibly*) But I... He's... How...

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
DETECTIVE #2:

It's okay, it's okay. Please tell us.

CHARLOTTE:

I— I— (*takes a deep breath, but it is a difficult motion that has clearly required practice*) I went to find Doug. So, I went to the barn.

(DETECTIVE #1 *takes out a smartphone and begins typing notes as DETECTIVE #2 speaks.*)

DETECTIVE #2:

(*gently*) Okay, Charlotte, that's good. What happened next?

CHARLOTTE:

No, no. I'm sorry. Forget it.

DETECTIVE #1:

Miss Eep. What do you mean? This is *important*.

CHARLOTTE:

(*She practices deeply inhaling once more, taking three or four clear inhales and exhales to help her through this time.*) What I mean is... I didn't go looking for Doug. We went together. It was sort of like a... date, I guess? I never really asked... and I guess I won't now...

DETECTIVE #1:

Miss Eep, we told you that all of the ranch hands at Blackknife were found dead, buried in a mass grave behind the stables, with the notable exception being a missing Native American man described as tall, mid-20s, and last sighted three days ago. What has any of this got to do with that?

DETECTIVE #2:

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

(In a formal tone much different from that of the Southern vernacular of this small, rural town.

He goes to comfort CHARLOTTE and carefully rephrase the brashness of his colleague.)

Charlotte, I'm not quite sure what you mean. Could you please explain more about that?

CHARLOTTE:

Well, we were at dinner, right? But he seemed *(gesticulating and then wincing)* really... *troubled* by something, you know? So he tells me that he has to go to the barn. Something about Tashunka running off earlier today. So I go with him. One minute we're together... But then... he leaves to go inside the barn and someone locks me out. I thought Doug was the only one who knew I was there! *(As she adds details, she begins to get lost in the emotionality of the story, losing her grip on reality and seeing the events again in real time, like post-traumatic stress disorder)* I didn't have a key. I shoved my whole weight into the barn doors, but I couldn't. I could hear voices. Two angry voices. Or three. Definitely men. I put my ear to the barn door. It got louder and louder. *(Completely losing her hold on reality)* I heard a gunshot! And then another! Someone was dead in there! *People* were dead in there! I screamed, I didn't know what to do. I was next, right? I was next! You have to protect me! He could still be coming! He could, he could! Help, please!!!

CARLA:

Hush, hush. It's okay. You're here now, honey.

DON:

I found her on the floor outside the barn. It looked like she was sleeping. When I saw Porky and Doug on the ground inside, I could only imagine what this young girl had been through. That's when I brought her here.

Hannah Rutt
4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)
Playwriting
Professor Elizabeth Doss
CHARLOTTE:

You said it's Porky? That he explains all of this.

DETECTIVE #2:

Yes, that's right, Charlotte. I'm sorry that we had to tell you in this way.

CHARLOTTE:

It's okay... (*In a naïve yet powerful moment of clarity*) I think he was just angry at the world. He killed the men because he feared that one day, they would take everything from him— his property, his fortune, his wife. So, in that way, one of them already had. The women, I don't know. Maybe they disappointed him? Or maybe he just envied what he couldn't have.

DETECTIVE #2:

Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE:

Yes?

DETECTIVE #2:

(*not usually one to ask probing questions and is somehow ironically nervous considering his profession*) No, no. I just mean. About what you said. About... Porky's wife?

CARLA:

(*Interjecting, voice still has the pang of recent loss and grief*) Well, Cat. She ain't her to tell us, bless her soul. But she's not with us anymore.

DETECTIVE #1:

(*Now typing furiously into her smartphone*) Did this happen recently?

(*The DETECTIVES begin to furiously whisper to one another as the lights fade to DON's*

Hannah Rutt

4/3/19-4/30/19 (April 2019)

Playwriting

Professor Elizabeth Doss

introduction of the Rodeo Opening Ceremony. Setting and crowd same as Scene Three.)

DON: If y'all could all stand for the National Anthem.

(DON and all of the ENSEMBLE gathered for the rodeo recite the U.S. National Anthem in unison. As they progress through the words, they somehow become menacing and threatening.)

All right, everyone. Welcome to the 7th Annual Blackknife Ranch Rodeo! Let the show begin.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY