

RM WRITES 2011

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Preface

As you began reading this sentence, you no doubt noticed the size of the A. If you haven't go back and take another look. It's huge. It's what's called a dropped capital. And it's at the front of many opening paragraphs. That's just one of the ways you can tell that this is a book.

Well, sort of. It's a collection of some writing I did during the last calendar year (2011). And it's been laid out in a format that can really only be described as 'book-like'. It's a promising thing.

The thing is: I do some writing, and I recently 'learned' how to 'layout' 'documents' in Adobe InDesign, so I thought I'd take this opportunity (year-end) to do a couple of things.

1. Compile some of my writing from the past year (2011).
2. Practice my InDesign skills, such as they are.

We've moved onto 2012, with 2011 - if any part of it still lingers - just a fast-fading memory. But still, I figured I'd finish this anyway. Enjoy.

Ryan

1 February 2012

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*The following extract was a memory from my Fringe experience of 2010. However the piece did not make it into my Ed Fringe memoir *When I Was Roman Around*, and I only remembered to write it up in 2011. I like it because it's just a nice story. I can't believe I forgot to write it earlier.*

An Edfringe Moment

I arrived at Fringe Central early – at around nine, as has become my custom. I was seated, coffee in one hand, stapler in the other, with a two sheets-worth of glowing reviews of *Roman Around* printed out on fortune cookie fortune-sized strips of paper, and a stack of flyers on the table in front of me.

While having your flyer adorned with bold pullquotes and five star reviews is preferable, if you'd already printed your flyers before the (three and four star) compliments came in, it is apparently accepted practice to just staple them to your flyers. I was not about to hide the nice things that have been said, and there's a meditative quality to the rhythmic papercutting and stapling that's a nice way to start the day – productive and relaxing.

And then I witnessed, and was drawn into, something that upon reflection was pretty amazing - and somehow emblematic of the hustled flurry and random encounters of Fringe-ness. It was also hilariously awkward.

Fringe Central was busy, as it always is, with Fringe staff, producers, journalists, performers and all manner of folks in various stages of panic or hustle. As I sat down I noticed the smartly-dressed journalist, about my age, sitting two tables over. He always seemed to be at Fringe Central when I was there, working his laptop and his phone, lining up shows to

see and emailing finished reviews to papers.

Not too far away on the other side of me was a middle-aged producer, sweat stains already creeping out from the armpits of his baby blue golf shirt. He too was working the phone lines. I sat stapling away on my stapler, letting their respective half-conversations flow around me – adding more sensory filling to my HOLY SHIT I'M AT THE EDINBURGH FRINGE experience.

After some minutes of overheard phone moments I realized that a single phone conversation being was formed from overheard snippets. Actually, it first entered my consciousness more subtly – their fractured halves aligning in what seemed like a remarkable coincidence.

“Hello,” the journalist answered his phone.

“Good morning,” I heard the producer say. I noticed the way the conversations seemed in sync, and then focused back on a tricky bit of stapling.

The voices then increased in volume, the journalist enunciating into his iPhone, “It’s kind difficult to hear you.”

From the producer, just to my right: “I’m sorry, is that better?” an edge creeping into his voice as he shifted in his seat.

By now, I had twigged that I was witnessing something special.

After a moment’s hesitation I stood up to inform the producer that the conversation he was having would be a lot easier if he put the phone down and addressed the gentleman sitting right in front of him. The producer though, confounded by the poor reception, was growing increasingly desperate. He had a reviewer on his hook and did Not. Want. To. Be. Distracted.

As I approached he made a studied attempt to look away and concentrate harder; he did everything but actually wave me away. I tapped him on the shoulder and waited. When he glanced up I pointed at the journalist the next table over. The journalist looked up. I said, loud enough for both to hear, “I think you guys are on the phone with one another.”

After jointly attempting to verify my claim over the phone, they hung up. Then they had an awkward conversation that I enjoyed as a background to my stapling, pleased that I had a personal stake in what was happening: not only had I facilitated a real-life Fringe Connection, I had been part of some bizarre alignment of circumstances and people that can only happen in Edinburgh, and only during the Fringe.



A shadowy and nameless west coast organization had a top-secret retreat in the summer of 2011. A reunion, of sorts. I was offered the opportunity to attend, but had to decline, because life doesn't always work to our advantage. However, I was still able to fulfill the request for "a demonstration, toast or tale." I sent along the tale 'Favouring the Brave', accompanied by the following note.

Gentlemen,

I have spent the better of my workday deliberating what to do for the formal presentation. I entertained the notion of doing a demonstration, and even briefly considered raising a toast before ultimately settling on a tale. In fact, once I remembered that I had this particular tale in my possession, I felt foolish for not thinking about it earlier.

I found this attached tale folded into a leather-bound copy of the 'Outliers' in the library at Keble College in Oxfordshire some years ago.

I don't know too much of its provenance, and it was difficult to read initially, as both the ink and the parchment had faded. But with the help of an avuncular watchmaker I was able to get it transcribed. It is a tale that, more than anything else that I can ascertain, speaks of life and tradition in this land that I find myself dwelling in.

Anyway, I thought it would be churlish not to share it with you men, least of all on this upcoming weekend when there are formal presentations and much manlancery to be done.

If one of you good sirs would be so kind as to share this, at the appropriate period of formal presentations, on my behalf, I'd be really grateful.

Regards,

Ryan

Favouring the Brave

Archduke Godfrey Vaughan of Teleshire wiped his tiny hands on his flanks, streaking his breeches with dirt and sweat. His horse Dartanian flared its muscular nostrils and stamped impatiently. The nobleman patted the horse's side coolly; not entirely without affection, but his mind was focused on the task at hand. The Archduke, a distant sixty-seventh in line to the throne (and even that calculation included some genealogical flights of speculation), was racing to stop Penelope Redrose, the young peasant girl for whom he improbably carried a torch, from marrying the earnest Edward Fielding, a tavern-hand and part-time bard. The spoiling of true love was a task he would often trust to some henchman or other, but today he was feeling energetic. Stopping only every so often to oppress a worker, the Archduke made steady progress across his lands towards the village of Tunbridge.

Other than the tweeting of some songbirds and the trickle of a nearby stream, the only other sound was the wheezing of Nathaniel, his comically fat manservant. Nathaniel's poor horsemanship prevented him from ever being truly comfortable while be-steeded – and his hereditary glandular disorder really underscored the point. The gentle rhythm of Nathaniel's laboured breaths carried Godfrey's mind back to his heavy oaken breakfast table. It had been there, only that morning, where he had shot the messenger who had delivered the distressing news of the impending nuptials. It seemed like a fortnight had passed since that carefree time, but it had really only been three hourglasses worth of sand. Four at most.

Above them, the sun climbed to its highest point, unobstructed by the dense clouds common to both the harvest season and this historical time period. The Archduke finished wiping his lily-white hands and pivoted

in the saddle to look at his trusty servant, who shot him square between the eyes with a blunderbuss. The bang startled the horse; yet even as the Archduke's body slumped on top of him, a rivulet of blood washing skull fragments and bits of brain from the wound, Dartanian remained steadfast. The horse was imperturbable, for which it had commanded a handsome price two years ago at the village fayre.

Nathaniel dismounted Maypole Dreams, his own grey horse, and gently pushed Godfrey's corpse out of the ornate saddle. The still-warm nobleman landed with a thud in the earth, his lifeless eyes a mixture of wonder and pain. The corpulent manservant gave a solemn nod of respect to his master, and cast a glance skyward to honour the fallen messenger; there would be no more bloodshed, at least not today.

Nathaniel slapped a meaty hand down on Dartanian's haunches and watched as the mighty horse thundered off into the nearby woods, saddle finally empty. He then remounted his old grey mare, and sidled off in the direction of adventure and possibly true love.

EPILOGUE

Nathaniel eventually worked his way up the ranks to become a moderately successful freelance treasure-and-bounty hunter. His feats were few, and his successes modest, but his occasions for joy and laughter were plenty. He also got himself into some scrapes, yet always managed to escape in the nick of time. It is not known what happened to Penelope and Edward, but widely believed that they did marry, and comfortably lived out their days in relative good humour in a hamlet in northern Pembrokeshire.



In August I did another week-long run at the Edinburgh Fringe. This time though, I did two shows: Roman Around and Marbles. In that short span I saw 20 shows, performed in 18 and overall really felt the tilt of the Fringe: it was exhilarating and exhausting. It is a testament to the artistic fortitude of those hardy souls who do entire runs, and some people do entire runs year on year. I did not, and it's a good thing too, because in the short time I had there I did manage to freak out at least once. Looking back on the experience, I realized I wasn't the only Marble to lose his shit. In the below blog post from 18 August, I compare the two freakouts.

Marbles Anger Management

The Edinburgh Fringe experience is known to be a supremely taxing endurance test. In just one short week in the pressure cooker both Dave and I had highlight-reel rants at the unsuspecting.

DAVE ENRAGED

Dave is one of the mellowest guys I know. He's also a pretty straight-shooter, as when, at the Meet the Media event, he finished his explanation of our show with the plain-spoken inquiry "Did you even give a fuck about anything I just said?" The critic was apparently taken well aback by his honesty. She did not review our show.

Dave's willingness to swear at the unsuspecting really hit a high mid-week. During his 'Manual of Style' show Conor O'Toole goes through audience-donated flyers and criticizes their font choices. Rob and I were sitting in the front row, and when he asked for some flyers I duly offered him a stack.

After some cutting remarks about a few of the flyers, Conor plucked

the Marbles flyer out and mocked the 'pre-stressed font', before making some disparaging comments about improv in general.

After the show, while Rob and I were thanking Conor, Dave (who designed our flyers) thundered down from the back row and launched into a brief - but loud and filthy - fuck-filled tirade, before storming off. The last we saw of him was two upraised fingers as he was yanked backwards through the doorway by his girlfriend. There was no lack of commitment on any level.

Rob and I could not stop laughing all the way down the stairs. It was, without question, one of my favorite performances of the festival, cleverly blurring the line between truth, art and anger. I'm still not sure how pissed off he was at the critique, though there's no question that it provided a great outlet to vent some frustrations.

RYAN LASHES OUT

The very next day I ended up doing, as usual, Roman Around, followed immediately by Marbles. That afternoon Dave, Rob and I battled rap act Sanity Valve, before having a freestyle session with them. Both sessions were on the Royal Mile, and attracted quite a crowd. After that I felt 'done' performance-wise. However, I had agreed to be in the improv pub quiz Fingers on Buzzards that evening. My state of mind was 'fraught' to the point of 'almost completely undone'.

The show itself went fine, if not spectacularly, until, as we were walking towards the finish, we made a pitstop at an unscheduled finale.

In the middle of a straightforward and meaningless improv game I interrupted proceedings to shout and swear at the audience for their

slipshod and vindictive scoring. I called them all out collectively and then team by team, before threatening to leave with the old comedy chestnut "fuck all a y'all! I'm fucking outta here!" The bit killed, though I suspect it may have been ever-so-slightly terrifying for those of a delicate disposition.

I was gently cajoled back and finished the show without further incident. It may well have been my finest performance of the festival, as I too managed to blur the line between truth, art, and anger.

Afterwards I chalked the moment up to subverting the format of an improv show (which I think was an informed and intelligent choice), coupled with the need for there to be some sort of climax in the hour. But equally as important was the need to let off some steam. Mission accomplished!

ROB KEEPS COOL

Rob did not lose his shit at all during the festival. I think this can be attributed to his character-inspired catchphrase "Spare me," which he used frequently when he was tired of some bullshit or other. In retrospect there's no question that it helped him maintain a detached air of equanimity.



I put this play together for a contest (they do seem to be really good for inspiring completion of writing projects). I love the thrill of potential glory, and really need the external pressure, as any deadlines I give myself tend to come with far-too-flexible end dates. Plus seeking out contest entries also provides me plenty of productive procrastination time. So contest entry is pretty much a no-brainer.

In this, as in most contests, I did not win. But the play is complete, and short, and I like it, so I guess, in a way, I did win.

All's Wells

CHARACTERS:

Will Phelps

Penelope Farrington

Scene 1

Lights up. A table and two chairs are centre stage. Downstage on either side of the stage are Will And Penelope, in simple spotlights. Where necessary, quick snatches of music play during the blackouts. Either eastern-influenced chillout or easy rock would work best, depending on the transition.

WILL: At a certain point in your life, playing the field becomes either sleazy, or pathetic. I guess that's because, while dating lots of girls seems appealing in theory, in practice, it requires you to get beyond the first date. And, it's pretty rare that I get past that hurdle. I mean I have in the past. A few times. Back in high school I had girlfriends even. Sometimes, it would last for months.

But now, now I'm in the real world, and the fact is, the dating pool in

Tunbridge Wells is not that deep. It's a small field.

Lights down stage left, lights up stage right.

PENELOPE: It's not that I don't love Tunbridge Wells, I do. But there is so much out there, anywhere really.

Uni honestly changed me. Totally. After I graduated I took a few months to find something more. I travelled. (India: two months, Thailand: six weeks, Singapore: 38-hour layover). And it changed me. Even more. So, like, double. Uni was like an introduction to the world, and ideas. Reading history and photography... it was like 'whoa.' Then seeing the world. And now, being home. Things seem so... basic.

Lights down stage right, lights up stage left.

WILL: Sure I've got friends here, the same ones I've always had – Alex, James, Dave and even Mel and Bobby. But you know, how much time do I want to spend with the people who never left? (*Pause*) Besides myself, obviously.

Me? Well, I could go. But the thing is, if I wanted to swim in a bigger pool, I'd still be the same-sized fish. So I don't know, doing the maths it just seems more likely that I'd get eaten.

Lights down stage left, lights up stage right.

PENELOPE: I don't want to be pigeonholed, like, I'm not just about photography and history. I make an amazing authentic vegan curry, I've been to pop-up art galleries in Shoreditch... and I don't know. It's hard to explain to people who haven't experienced life. There's so much out (*gestures broadly*) there.

Blackout.

Scene 2

Lights back up on the centre stage. Will is facing the audience. He's talking on his mobile.

WILL: Yeah. Uh huh. I'll make sure that those jerseys are cleaned for tomorrow. No problem. (Hand over mouthpiece). Just a coffee. (Pause) Huh? (Pause) Okay, sure, make it a double and... a blueberry one of those. (*Points. Then back on phone*) Alright, see you tomorrow.

Blackout.

Scene 3

Lights up. Will is seated at the table. He notices Penelope at the front ordering.

PENELOPE: I'll just have a chai tea. Do you do it from a powder? (Pause) Hmm. Okay, whatever, that'll be fine.

Will stands up and approaches.

WILL: Wow. Hi. I can't believe it's you. Penelope? I haven't seen you in forever! My god.

PENELOPE: Uh, yeah... I know..

WILL: So, where have you been? Last I heard you were going to India.

PENELOPE: Yeah, I went. And Thailand. (Pause) And Singapore. It was amazing. I thought uni changed me – and it did, but then I experienced true cultural diversity.

WILL: Namast. (*bows*)

PENELOPE: Namaste (*waves*)

WILL: Right, namaste.

PENELOPE: Not so much stress on the last syllable.

WILL: But? Oh, I see. Okay.

PENELOPE: I don't remember your name.

WILL: Will. Will Phelps.

PENELOPE: Ummmm.

WILL: We both had Mr Bartleby.

PENELOPE: Sure.

WILL: You were the year ahead.

PENELOPE: (*Laughs*) Okay.

WILL: I remember because you always had a piece of your hair dyed. (*Touches a piece of his hair*) This piece. I had no distinguishing features. Except my anonymity - I was pretty average. Still am. Although I'm not as skinny as I was back then, and I wear lenses.

Oh, is that your coffee? Would you like to join me? Sorry, am I still talking? I guess I am. If you say something then I'll stop.

Pause.

PENELOPE: Why not?

WILL: Why not what?

PENELOPE: Why not join you for coffee?

WILL: Uh. Um, I can't think of any reasons – not if you can't.

PENELOPE: Great. It's settled.

Blackout.

Scene 4

Lights up. Both WILL and PENELOPE are in their spotlights.

WILL: (to audience) I don't know. Honestly. It just, well sometimes it clicks. Even for me. I mean this one time I was out clubbing, and I met a girl (who incidentally wasn't very drunk) and everything I said she laughed her head off like I was Michael fucking McIntyre. Then she stuck her tongue in my mouth. We made out a little bit. She gave me her number, but I didn't call her, because frankly, if someone likes me that much off the bat, they've got problems.

PENELOPE: (to audience) I has no idea who the heck he was, but he was sweet so I thought, alright, Will, I'll have coffee with you. Plus, he's kinda cute, and you know, travelling really changes a person. It's not kindness so much, as being open to new experiences and helping those who are less... I'm not sure if the word I'm looking for is 'lucky' or 'worldly', I don't know... just help those who have seen and done less than you. Still... Life is there for the plucking. Like a ripe fruit.

Blackout.

Scene 5

Lights up at table.

PENELOPE: And, India... just being there, it was like Slumdog Millionaire. I mean, no dancing or anything, but still, it was really moving. Powerful. Not the whole time, obviously. Some of it was so boring. I

brought books to read, but some of those were boring too.

WILL: It sounds incredible.

PENELOPE: It was.

WILL: What else did you do?

PENELOPE: Well, I walked a lot. I also did some yoga. I'm really flexible.

WILL: Wow.

PENELOPE: But it's also a spiritual thing. Mental, emotional... It's total.

WILL: I don't get out of T. Wells very much. Wait! Actually I went camping in Wales last summer.

PENELOPE: Fun.

WILL: Yeah, and I also went on a stag do to Amsterdam a couple of months ago. It was crazy! I mean, not just the magic mushrooms and strippers, but also..., the scenery. And the people. So Dutch!

PENELOPE: Huh. That sounds nice.

WILL: I mean I guess it's not the same kind of travelling, but we rented some bikes for an afternoon, rode around Vondelpark.

PENELOPE: Oh yeah, neat...

WILL: I also went to the Anne Frank house. Man that was depressing. Jews and Nazis. Not a good combo.

Pause.

PENELOPE: So, what do you do now?

WILL: I run an auto parts shop. It sounds boring, and it is. But my dad got sick a couple of years ago, and I started going down there to help out

more. I've always been into fixing up old cars. When I was ten we put a brand new engine into a Fiat. Eventually I took over the running of the shop. Now I feel good about it. It's kinda my own kingdom.

PENELOPE: A kingdom?

WILL: Sure it sounds silly, but I really dig it. Not on a day to day level, but as a concept. Plus I've been coaching a local team of 10-12 year-olds.

PENELOPE: Really? That sounds like, noble.

WILL: You think? No, it's just fun. I get to boss them around. I make them do lots of press ups. And cry.

PENELOPE: That's horrible.

WILL: I don't cry. They do.

PENELOPE: That's what I thought you meant.

WILL: Oh. Well, either way, I was joking. I don't really make them cry, obviously. It's just for fun.

Beat.

I mean there's one kid, Blaine, and he cries a lot, but he's got other issues, outside of his lack of man-marking ability.

PENELOPE: Phew.

WILL: We won all of west Kent when I was 11. It was one of the greatest feelings of my life.

PENELOPE: Congratulations.

WILL: My dad was an amazing coach. We were just a ragtag group of plucky kids, but he made us into a team.

PENELOPE: Like father, like son.

WILL: I don't know about that.

Beat.

We're actually having a game tomorrow afternoon. Against Crowborough. Would you like to, I don't know, come watch?

PENELOPE: Actually I'm busy tomorrow afternoon.

WILL: Oh right. Of course. Forget it.

PENELOPE: But maybe we could do dinner afterwards.

WILL: Yeah? You think? Yeah!

Blackout.

Scene 6

Scene identical – Will and Penelope seated at a table, 28 hours later.

PENELOPE: That was amazing!

WILL: Well, as far as dessert goes, you can't beat Cheesecake Paradise!

PENELOPE: Seriously, the Death by Chocolate? Mmmmm. That's something you don't find at a yoga retreat in the foothills of India.

WILL: No, I guess not. But you can find it here, at home.

PENELOPE: Yeah, that's true.

PENELOPE: I really can't believe you coach all those kids. You must be exhausted.

WILL: I can't believe you came by. What a surprise.

PENELOPE: You looked good. Stressed, but good. Handsome. *(She touches his arm affectionately, and slightly suggestively.)*

WILL: It's such a good release.

PENELOPE: It's good to get all sweaty.

WILL: It's something I'm passionate about.

PENELOPE: You wanna get out of here?

WILL: (*Calling*) Bill please.

Blackout.

Scene 7

Will and Penelope are downstage, on their spotlights on either side of the stage.

WILL: Things were really good. I don't know, sometimes I feel like a magic man. I mean, not really, but occasionally, yeah. And there was a real connection. And from me admiring her from afar for so long to sitting across from her at Nando's – and then again at Cheescake Paradise – that's well, that was the kinda good news I don't get very often. In fact, I very rarely get news of any kind.

PENELOPE: It's really just about having fun. Seize the day, it's there - the world, life... and it's, I don't know. I think that bottle of wine... I was a bit squiffy, and I thought, why not?

WILL: I thought it was going well, that maybe I'd actually get to see her again sometime soon. I was not expecting... I mean...

Penelope crosses stage and begins making out with Will.

WILL: Whoa, this is... you know sudden.

PENELOPE: You looked so cute with that whistle!

WILL: Nice flat you've got.

PENELOPE: You too.

He lies down, she straddles him.

PENELOPE: Let me show you a little something I picked up in yoga.

She takes her sweater off. Blackout. Short musical interlude.

Scene 8

Lights up. Both of them lying in bed.

PENELOPE: Whoa. That was tantric.

WILL: Yeah, it sure was.

PENELOPE: Let's go again.

WILL: OK.

Blackout. Shorter musical interlude.

Scene 9

Lights up. Both of them in their spotlights in various stages of undress, Will looks dishevelled and exhausted.

WILL: It's not usual that a guy has a problem getting going more than once. Not for me - on the rare occasions that I've been able to get past convincing someone to let me go once. But after twice, I was sore. Penelope though, she seemed to really love it.

PENELOPE: Regular orgasms, like the ones I used to have, aren't even close to what is achievable. Circular breathing, and a little bit of clit manipulation, those are the secrets. Guys can do the heavy lifting, but it

never hurts to help yourself along.

WILL: I'm not great with disappointment. I'm a people pleaser. At least that's what my therapist says. And I think she's right. When my dad got sick, I realized that it was something that came naturally, something I was good at. I just never realized my generous nature meant that I was such a fucking ace in the sack. But yeah, I like helping people out

PENELOPE: Yeah, Will was great, he's got the right equipment, that's for sure. And he was so focused on me. It was pretty good. Not amazing, but that's not really something you can say, "How was it?" "Oh, decent." No, that's not really how it goes.

Blackout.

Scene 10

Lights up. Both of them lying in bed.

PENELOPE: Mmph. That was spectacular.

WILL: Yeah, it sure was.

PENELOPE: Let's go again. Whoa.

WILL: (sighs) OK.

Blackout.

Scene 11

Lights up. Sitting at table (in Penelope's kitchen), having a coffee.

WILL: I feel like all we do is spend time in bed – not that I'm complaining, but it's been days since we've been out.

PENELOPE: It would be great to have a night out. Do a pub crawl in Camden!

WILL: Not as good as right here. And we don't even need to crawl! I've been to London, I've been pub crawling, but there's no need – there's no better pub than The Grove.

PENELOPE: Ha! The Grove! I haven't been there for years. My god!

WILL: It has not changed a bit. It will be just as you remember, just a little bit more weathered.

PENELOPE: OK, sounds like fun.

Blackout.

Scene 12

Standing at the bar, drinks in hand.

PENELOPE: This is exactly as I remember it.

WILL: Great no?

PENELOPE: It's alright.

WILL: I used to come here with my Dad. He would bring me here when I was a boy, for an OJ after practice.

PENELOPE: Yeah, it was my first pub too.

WILL: I love it here.

PENELOPE: I used to love it here. Well, 'like' it. I used to like it. It's just, now...

WILL: No, I get it. It's not much, but it's special. Sunday roasts. Pub quiz.

PENELOPE: I don't know. I guess. (Pause) So, what's next?

WILL: For me? Not much. Auto parts is auto parts.

PENELOPE: No, for you, really you.

WILL: Well, there's the team. These kid's are going to get older, as they do. I'll get a new batch. The vets will help me teach the system to the newbies.

PENELOPE: That's good and all, but... You're young, don't you want to see the world?

WILL: I'm not being funny, but I've got the internet. (Pause) And I've got everything I want here.

PENELOPE: But this place is... don't you find it stifling?

WILL: It was good enough for my dad to settle here, it's good enough for me. Plus, those auto parts aren't going to order and install themselves.

PENELOPE: I guess not.

Beat.

So, uh, I'm moving back to London.

WILL: Cool! You love it there.

PENELOPE: Yeah. It's something.

WILL: And we can still see each other, it's not so far.

Beat.

Oh. We won't be seeing each other, will we?

PENELOPE: I don't think so, not really.

WILL: Oh.

PENELOPE: Don't take it hard.

WILL: Actually, it's kind of a relief.

Penelope raises an eyebrow. Blackout

Scene 13

Each are in their respective spotlights.

WILL: Pen is amazing, she's a great girl. But I don't know... A little bit flaky. Plus, the sex was exhausting. How long could I keep that up? No idea, but man!

PENELOPE: Staying here is not an option. I've still got lots to see, and do, and discover. Not sure London's the place either; maybe I'll try Alaska... or Bali! Haven't made up my mind yet, but the important thing is to never stop searching.

WILL: To be honest, I'd hate to have to do the long-distance thing. Driving 40 miles into London every other weekend sounds like a bit of a nightmare. I mean, between parking and stuff? Ugh. Besides, the kids have a tournament in a couple weeks.

They turn to look at each other. Penelope smiles and waves, then turns and exits. Will exhales. Blackout.

END



In its full manifestation, the improv duo Marbles, with which I perform fairly often, includes not just the two actors, but also a keyboardist. By 'keyboardist' I really mean 'Funk Overlord'. Rob is an absolute wizard on the musical bits and our collaboration evolved into a musical comedy night, called 'Beats, Rhymes & Mirth', of which we had a few iterations in 2011.

The third edition took place in June. For this one we assembled a band, rehearsed and actually played a show. The show opened with the BRM anthem, which gave both Dave and I the chance to spit hot lyrics over a live band. We even worked out a call and response chorus, and there were visuals that went with the lyrics and everything. It was pretty amazing. Below is my verse.



Beats, Rhymes & Mirth Anthem

We look like nice guys, but I'm rotten, he's vicious/
No jean jackets but got the punk rock ethos/
Get you moving up and down like you're doing sit ups/
Let's cross beats rhymes and mirth off of your wishlist/
Lots of ideas, many are far-fetched/
Still stay focused, keeping our eyes on the target/
Aiming for the good times, music and laughter/

It's all right here: these are greener pastures/
Barefoot in the dirt, soil so fertile/
Push limits like walking through turnstiles/
We keep it free-flowing – loosey goosey/
But no actual geese we're anti-animal cruelty/
The music's on, we lit the lights/
Let's get things started it's time to get hype/
Feel the rhythms, the crashing of surf/
Tonight's the night: it's beats rhymes and mirth/



In the fall there was a sketch writing contest for a comedy fest. So I wrote a sketch. It was not selected, but I kind of like it anyway. It also flagged up the fact that I should probably sharpen up my sketch chops with a few more bits of writing. Provided the right contests come up, I'm sure I'll find the chance.

As for Barbershop: it seems a like a nice surreal little piece. I've never heard it out loud, but I think with the right pacing it could be a lot of fun. At least for the actors.

Barbershop

1. INT. OFFICE RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

TERRY is sitting in the barber's chair. He has male pattern baldness. CARLOS is busy preparing the scissors and towels.

CARLOS

How are you today Mr. Terry?

TERRY

I got a bloodclot in my leg,
my daughter's dropped out
of university and the dog's
vet bills have maxed out the
credit card, but you know...
can't complain.

Terry shakes his head as Carlos gives him a shoulder rub.

CARLOS

So, the usual Mr Terry? A
little off the top, clean up
around the sides.

Ryan Millar

TERRY

As always, you do your thing,
though the Big Man might have
beaten you to the punch.

CARLOS

Oh, I can always find a little
bit. I'm a true professional.

TERRY

That you are.

CARLOS

That I am!

Carlos shaves Terry's neck.

TERRY

How's business?

CARLOS

Same old, same old, taxes are
up, custom is down.

TERRY

People always need to get
their hair cut.

CARLOS

Oh you'd think so Mr Terry,
but the more things change,
the more people change their
barber. Business is very bad.

Beat.

TERRY

(Embarrassed)

It's your banter.

CARLOS

I have a good rapport with
the customers!

TERRY

It's stagnant.

CARLOS

What you saying? We have the
same chat every month, for
years.

TERRY

Exactly!

CARLOS

You love it.

TERRY

Not exactly. You say "How are
you today Mr. Terry?"

CARLOS

And you say some complaining,
and then "but you know me, I
can't complain."

TERRY

Then you ask "a little off
the top?"

CARLOS

And you are bald, so you say
no.

The next comes simultaneously.

CARLOS

And then I say "I can always
find a little."

TERRY

And then you say "I can
always find a little."

Terry continues

TERRY

And then I ask about business
and it goes like that for
half an hour!

CARLOS

It's comfort. A rhythm.

TERRY

It's too much, I want out.

CARLOS

You can't leave. I would miss
you too much.

TERRY

I need a change.

CARLOS

Then we make a new script.

TERRY

We did. And now it's also
tired, especially this part
where you say-

This next line is done simultaneously

CARLOS

But this new script is both
familiar and spontaneous-
feeling.

TERRY

"But this new script is both
familiar and spontaneous-
feeling."

Beat.

CARLOS

So now you are saying we need
a new script?

Carlos and Terry eye each other for a moment.

TERRY

You know damn well we do...

Carlos joins in for the last few words.

TERRY (CONT'D)

...if this relationship is to
continue.

CARLOS

...if this relationship is to
continue.

They fire off rapidly, simultaneously and overlapping.

TERRY

Familiarity breeds contempt.

CARLOS

Familiarity breeds contempt.

TERRY

You've broken an unspoken
bond.

CARLOS

You've broken an unspoken
bond.

TERRY

I can't take any more of this

CARLOS

You're not welcome in here
anymore.

TERRY

I won't darken your doorway
again.

CARLOS

Don't darken my doorway
again.

TERRY

I don't need this shit.

CARLOS

Get the hell out of here!

TERRY

Fuck you Carlos, you prick!

CARLOS

Fuck off Mr. Terry, you sono-
fabitch!

Terry stands up and storms out. Throwing his
towel and a £20 note on the floor as he does.

TERRY

Keep the change!

CARLOS

I am keeping the change!

TERRY

I won't be in next month, I'm
on holiday.

CARLOS

Fine! I will make a note...
My love to Dorothy.

END

★

Another blogpost, this one written upon discovering that my attempts to be funny and charming do not always have the desired effect. In fact, sometimes they have the completely opposite effect.

I'm not a dick, really

In the past couple days I've twice been reminded of a bitter truth: I'm a total prick.

Not really, obviously. In fact I'm a friendly, outgoing, considerate, compassionate, pleasant, heartwarming, deadly handsome and impossibly modest person. I'm also hilarious.

However, that doesn't always read to a stranger. In fact, in my efforts to be charming and funny, which I do almost ceaselessly, I've managed to come off as a right prick.

On back-to-back days. On the first occasion I was out with Marbles to have cake and discuss our next project. The cake shop was empty when we showed up at around 5:30. Politely considerate of the wishes of the staff we inquired if they would soon be closing. After first assuring us they would be happy to stay open as long as we were there, the waiter embarked on some banter-ish comments about ways that he would indicate when they were ready to close - putting up chairs, banging dishes etc.

We were all enjoying a light chuckle when I told him: "Actually, that would be great. I respond really well to passive aggression."

There was an awkward pause. And then he walked off. It was clear that my response - somehow - went too far. It was not as funny as I imagined, and my tone sounded mildly threatening. My quip also introduced an unexpected neologism and unpleasant psychological condition into a conversation about cake.

What can I say? I got caught up in the chat of the moment.

The second occasion was the very next day. I was shopping at Boots. I needed some floss; I go through a lot of floss. On my trip to the floss aisle I was waylaid by a '3 for 2' sale of men's beauty products. Now I'm aware that men shouldn't have beauty products, they should be 'handsomeness tools', but nonetheless I stopped, and after minutes of agonizing deliberation I selected for purchase some moisturizer, some aftershave, and some other product which I don't remember, but may one day prove useful.

I then continued on to the floss aisle. A shop assistant, who had noticed me lingering at the Men's Sexiness Aisle, looked at me and asked

"Did you know that those products are on sale?"

"That's why I have three of them." I smarmed.

My response was meant to be a warm affirmation with a hint of thanks, but as soon as the words escaped my lips I realized that I actually sounded like a patronizing cunt. I was probably just as stunned as she was.

I turned away to avoid making further eye contact, quickly grabbed some floss and headed for the tills.

How could my words, so quickly formed in my mind as instruments of good-natured and light-hearted bonding and bonhomie, turn so acid when they reach shared air?

Thankfully, I've discovered the answer: it's not because I'm a dick, it's because I'm perpetually misunderstood. Yep, that's it. And this is fantastic news. I can now continue to act like a total dickhole (even if unintentionally), and cultivate an air of victimization. I can work on my non-verbal cues for: "Sorry if I'm a dick, but it's not my fault! The world just doesn't get me."

I think I'll start with a peacoat and a notebook, maybe add in some rapid blinking and a furrowed brow, and then just see how I go.

There. I don't know how all the strangers I'm rude to will take it, but I already feel better.

