

Self-Inflicted
by
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*Self-Inflicted*CHARACTERS

TRENTON Harried. Mid-30s
 ANGELA Practical. Mid-30s

SETTING

Dining room of their house. The dining table has a long table cloth.

TIME

The present.

*A tight spot rises on TRENTON, seated, his shirt off.
 ANGELA stands behind him, applying alcohol to his back
 with cotton balls. He speaks to the audience, she takes
 no notice.*

TRENTON

Hi. I wake up. Here I am. My shirt off... in the living room. My... partner... Angela... is causing me pain. How did I get here? (*looks around room*) Here. Hm. I once had a five minute conversation with a friend who'd woke me up that got accidentally recorded by my answering machine. When I got that message, it was like listening to myself for the first time... that was a long time ago. So this confusion I'm having, that I'm telling you about... it's not even something new... wait... what's that... it's.. pain!

The lights shoot up to full and he turns to ANGELA.

Okay, ow... ow!

ANGELA

Shh. Keep still. Almost done... Band Aid time.

She applies two Band Aids to his upper shoulders.

TRENTON

I don't really believe in sanitizing wounds. That's you. I never had cotton balls or rubbing alcohol when I was a bachelor.

ANGELA

You're lucky to have survived until I found you.

TRENTON

That's true.

ANGELA

They look like fingernail cuts. Little curves.

TRENTON

Oh. *(pause)* Wait, you don't think... I mean... nobody has ever really wanted me but you.

ANGELA

I think you did it.

TRENTON

But—

ANGELA

No, I mean cut yourself. With you own nails. You having an affair?

TRENTON

I'm not!

ANGELA

And I didn't do it, so that's the answer – they're self-inflicted.

TRENTON

Hm... I don't remember doing it.

He puts on his shirt.

ANGELA

So why are you attacking yourself, muffin? Not happy?

TRENTON

No, I'm happy.

ANGELA

Are you sure? You don't seem happy. You seem stressed.

TRENTON

Just about the mystery wounds, that's all.

ANGELA

You were stressed before them.

TRENTON

Really?

ANGELA

Really.

There's some stress at work. TRENTON

Some? ANGELA

There's a lot of stress a work. TRENTON

Tell me about it. ANGELA

It doesn't matter, Angela. It's doesn't mean anything. TRENTON

Trenton— ANGELA

It doesn't matter. TRENTON

Maybe you should wear mittens to protect yourself while you sleep. ANGELA

Shut up. TRENTON

Seriously. ANGELA

Seriously... shut up. I'm not going to be like one of those cats they make wear the reverse witch hats to keep them from biting themselves. I seem to have survived the first attack, let's see if it gets worse... TRENTON

The lights fade to a single spot downstage and ominous music rises. ANGELA comes into the spotlight.

ANGELA
I'm never going to date someone based on their good intentions again. It's like being a Red Sox fan... yeah, it felt good once they finally won the World Series, but feeling like a winner once in hundred years? That's just too much time spent following losers. I met Trenton at his company's picnic. I was there on a blind date with this horrible little man in sales... and Trenton was just so... uncomfortable with everyone there... he seemed like a man I could keep at home. Safe, and, to his credit, smart. But really, unintended misery is still misery.

She returns back to the main part of the stage as the lights rise. TRENTON is sitting at the table. There is a huge gash on his forehead that she starts stitching up. Note: it's all right for this wound to be stagey and fake, realism isn't required or necessarily suggested.

ANGELA

This is a huge gash. How the hell did you not wake up in the middle of doing this to yourself?

TRENTON

No idea.

ANGELA

You really should go to the hospital.

TRENTON

No, please. Those places scare me.

ANGELA

They actually know what they're doing. I'm just faking here... this is going to leave a scar. *(pause)* How is work going now? *(pause)* Trenton?

TRENTON

It's horrible. A little piece of my soul dies every day I go in. Don't...

ANGELA

What?

TRENTON

Don't... need me to tell you about it. You're my yang, work's the yin. You're the light and goodness, it's the sucking blackness. I guess I have to have both, but they don't have to meet.

ANGELA

I think you've missed the point of Eastern spiritualism.

TRENTON

I haven't missed it. I've just drawn my own conclusions.

ANGELA

Oh. I'm going above and beyond the call of duty here, Trenton. We haven't been dating so long that I should have to be your nurse. That's normally reserved for people who get married and grow old together... all right. This is going to hurt a lot.

She removes the end of the thread from his forehead with her teeth.

TRENTON

Holy crap! Ow! Ow! You weren't shitting me. Crap! Ow!

ANGELA

I don't know why you always think that I'm lying to you.

TRENTON

I need to... lie down.

ANGELA

Use the floor. I'll get you a towel for a pillow.

*She keeps talking while going off and getting the towel.
He mostly just stares ahead, dazed, trying to follow what she's saying.*

The sheets are in the wash, and if you get bloodstains on the mattress, that's the end of it. I think my night shirt's also ruined. I'll wash it and see, but it's probably done. Glad I wasn't wearing my favorite.

She reenters and puts a folded towel on the ground.

Here you go.

TRENTON essentially collapses, his head landing on the towel.

TRENTON

Okaygoodyeslikeit.

ANGELA

Woah, are you all right? *(pause)* Trenton?

TRENTON

What? Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, fine, fine, I'm fine.

ANGELA

You don't sound fine.

TRENTON

Just resting my eyes. I'm up. I'll get up.

ANGELA
You don't have to get up.

TRENTON
Yeah, work, gotta go in.

ANGELA
It's Saturday, Trenton.

TRENTON
Right, that's true. Just a few things to do around the office... not a full day.

ANGELA
You can't go in to work, you've lost a lot of blood.

TRENTON
No hospital!

ANGELA
No hospital.

TRENTON
Just let me rest. I'll be fine.

ANGELA
All right.

TRENTON
Go away.

ANGELA
(*pause*) All right, you're welcome.

She exits. He lies for a moment, then rolls on his back with great effort. .

TRENTON
Uh-huh. That's right. I'm coming. I'm coming.

He tries to stand, but doesn't really get close on two tries.

All right. Sucks. Sucky sucky suck. Okay, got bitchy, now I need help. Hate that. (*pause*)
ANGELA!!!

ANGELA
(*entering*) What??

TRENTON

I need you... I need a hand up.

She stares at him, then turns to the audience

ANGELA

(to audience) Would you help him?

TRENTON

I need a hand here! Angela? Help me. You're not going to? All right... but, Christ, really, you're not going to help me out here? Okay, fine, I'll get up on my own.

He endeavors to get up. It's not pretty, with lots of groaning and confusion. He collapses back down.

ANGELA

(to audience) Won't he feel better if he does it on his own?

TRENTON

I have to go to work, Angela. I'll be fine, once I get up, once I'm standing, once... look, I see what you're doing... I don't know why you're doing it, but I see that you're not helping me. I see that, and I don't appreciate it. I'm getting up.

More convolutions. He ends up lying on his stomach.

ANGELA

(to audience) He should get used to not having any help.

TRENTON

Baby steps. I'm almost up. You don't think I can do it, do you? You're wrong. Just going to rest a little while here, and then pow, I'll be up. You could just help, it'd be faster. No? What'd you do, take a vow of silence? Come on, Angela... fine, fine, that's just fine.

ANGELA

(to audience) I think I hate him.

He does an ugly push up and gets to his knees.

TRENTON

Oh yeah, that's it! That's what I call momentum. Once I start rolling, there's no stopping me. I just keep going... aaargh!!!

With great effort he rises to his feet. ANGELA crosses to him and pushes him to the ground. She fusses around him, making him as comfortable as possible on the floor.

ANGELA

That's it. Just lie down. You can't walk or stand up, or think clearly. You need to not obsess about work so much. It'll be the death of you.

He struggles to rise again.

Stay down, Trenton. Stay down. I'll take care of you, but you have to help me.

TRENTON

But I've got to go in!

ANGELA

Sometimes we can't do things that we've got to do, and that's got to be good enough for the people who need us to do them. Do you want me to call the office?

TRENTON

There's no one else there. It's Saturday.

ANGELA

That's right, it is, so just lie there. Get better.

TRENTON

(pause) You're so good to me.

ANGELA

I try...

She walks downstage and the lights on the rest of the stage fade away.

But what's the point! It's not like he HAS something for me. No time, no emotion... nothing! He's like some bear trap that's snapped on my leg and I can't get away from him without gnawing it off... and the guilt! His needs! I... I'm a bitch. I'm a bad person. I'll try harder. I'll make this work. I can do it.

The lights rise, revealing TRENTON's living head on the kitchen table. The rest of his headless body lies next to the table. ANGELA sees him and...

Aaaaaahhhhhh!!!

TRENTON

Angela! There you are. I was getting worried. How was your mother? You know... you and I... we haven't been apart for more than a day in months... I missed you.

ANGELA

What is, what has, are you, what... huh.

TRENTON

Are you all right?

ANGELA

What happened to you?

TRENTON

What? Oh... that. I had another one of my little night accidents.

ANGELA

Christ!

TRENTON

It's not as bad as it looks.

ANGELA

Oh really!

TRENTON

Very little blood! None on the sheets, just a little on my pillow case.

ANGELA

I don't see how you got... your... HEAD... to the table.

TRENTON

Walked, silly.

ANGELA

You are going to the hospital. You can't live this way. I can't live this way.

TRENTON

No hospital! No doctors! I'm not crazy... you think I'm crazy.

ANGELA

I think you're sick. Very sick. You need help. But I can't, I'm not going to be the one to give it to you.

TRENTON

What I need is for you to calm down. I'm fine! What I need is for you to get off my back. I'm under a lot of pressure right now, and you're the one person I need to understand that.

ANGELA
Oh, Trenton... I'm leaving.

TRENTON
So soon?

ANGELA
What? No, you're not getting it. I'm leaving you. I'm not coming back.

TRENTON
I'm not getting you here... you're saying...

ANGELA
That I'm leaving you.

TRENTON
Because of a few, small—

ANGELA
Because of your job. I don't even know what you do, because you won't talk to me about it. You manage something, you have a boss, and you don't like it. That's what I know. Tell me more. Let me in.

TRENTON
It's really not that important.

ANGELA
Lie to me. Tell me you can't talk about it because it's classified, it's top secret. You want nothing more than to share it with me, but it would put me in danger.

TRENTON
Hah. No, that's silly. Nothing like that. It's just not very interesting.

ANGELA
Good bye, Trenton.

TRENTON
No, please.

ANGELA
I'll come back later for my things. No, I want my toiletries now.

She exits. TRENTON speaks in a barely audible voice.

TRENTON

Stay. Stay, you have to. My job... it can't matter to you. It can't have any part of you. It's already taken the best of me. My best. I don't even know what I do. It's meaningless. I shuffle paper. I call people who care even less than I do about what I'm calling about, which I don't really understand. Do I sell widgets? Buy widgets? Market widgets? Train others to buy, sell and market widgets? I don't know. I just know I'm always behind, and it's always getting worse, and I just have to keep moving as fast as I can and hope that no one notices...

She returns with a small toiletries bag. He looks at her.

ANGELA

I'll call you, Trenton.

TRENTON

I'll try to answer.

She leaves.

Okay, body, time to get up... come on, get up... come here to me... please come here... don't make me... um... please get up. We need to get our head on straight and get to the office... come here... come here... come here

The lights fade out. End of play.