

DOOR NUMBER THREE

By Martin Heavisides

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *For quite some time this was only a (vaguely dream based) response to a prompt for a play without dialogue, but then I began thinking about how this situation might further unfold, and discovered it would be a tale of wild libido, converse between the worlds of the living and dead, the driving engine of language and action and how it takes on a life outside what could easily be predicted. Also that it would end at a satisfactory/unsatisfactory point, poised on actions to come that the mind is free to imagine but which tantalize the creator with the possibility of their realization. I do have a file titled Door Number Three Full Length, but so far nothing of the second act has emerged. Perhaps it's best it doesn't. It might be behind Door Number Four. (Spacing is playwright's own.)*

DOOR NUMBER THREE

Scene i Three Door Monte

Sound of soft rain falling.

A man stirs awake in a bed stage right and slips out of his side, leaving a slumbering woman there. He walks to stage centre where he contemplates three closed doors.

He opens the first of them, behind which is a roaring tiger, which he contains by closing the door in instant alarm. (Possibly the image of tiger and open door, enlarged, appears on the backdrop wall so it's more immediately visible to the audience.)

Pacing and visibly nervous, he contemplates the doors. Curiosity overwhelming him at last, he opens the second door, behind which lurks a man with fierce red eyes who lunges at him. He pushes the door almost shut but the man behind it pushes furiously also. After a struggle, finally he gets it fully shut. (Evidently some sort of enchantment prevents the door being opened by the knob on the other side. These may be doors with only one way knobs. Whatever, there must be an illogical explanation.)

(Possibly the image of man behind opened door, and the struggle between the two for mastery of the door, shows on the backdrop wall as above.)

Thoroughly winded and visibly shaking, the man teeters off wings right. After a few seconds, returns, more steady, with a beer can in one hand. Contemplates doors a long while, until curiosity prevails once more. Opens third door, behind which a woman in thigh length negligee beckons with extended arms and tantalizing fingers. (Possibly the image etc.) He sets down beer can and begins to come thither in some agitation. Just before stepping in, he suddenly slams the door shut as he sees the woman from earlier approaching, in his peripheral vision. The nightgown his bedmate wears is less provocative, more functional, possibly flannel or just an overlarge t-shirt. She beckons with both hands and, sighing, he reaches out to take one of them and let her lead him back to bed. Rain increasing. He holds three fingers up and winks at audience behind the woman's back. Bed in darkness after they slide in on either side, rain, wind and peals of thunder grow to a briefly sustained crescendo then taper off to the same sound of

soft rain as at the beginning. After an interval, the man emerges out of the darkness once more and again approaches the doors.

He looks at the first door, then over his shoulder at the audience, shaking his head, a light shiver passing through him

He looks at the second door, then over his shoulder at the audience, a much more pronounced shiver passing through him.

He looks at the third door, then over his shoulder at the audience, nodding vigorously. Strides to the door, grasps the knob aggressively and throws it wide open. Thunderclap. Before he can react, the red-eyed man springs at him, knocks him to the ground and begins throttling him, accompanied by heavy rain, gusting wind, peals of thunder. Finishing at last, the thrashing and struggles of the man under him subdued into dead stillness, the red-eyed man, grabbing the beer can the other had set down, rises to his feet and walks across to the bed (still in darkness) stage right.

BLACKOUT

Scene ii Ambiguous Pleasures

Woman stirs in bed at the embrace and sudden assault of her unknown lover.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Walt! Is that you?

INSPECTOR QUINCE

(Thrusting aggressively—words keeping time)

No! name no—name I recoll-ect maybe cer!tainly not Walt! Ab!nor!mal!ly! pantywaist—
pigeonwaist—milktoastfriedinbutterscotchNAME! WALT!

Spits off to the side of the bed without moderating his thrust

Marry a Walt with his substandard entry

Not enough breath left to speak,, his moans and hers mingle. Climax.

and possession.

They settle into a close, tender embrace.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

If it is Walt you *must* be possessed. If not I must be dreaming. I'll wake beside a puddling stain on the sheets. Where did Walt go then? I think he was after a glass of milk and a sandwich.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

He was after forbidden pleasure I've snatched out of his lickerous mouth and tasted withal in his stead.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

He was going for a drink? I don't forbid him that but I'm stern if he does it too much with his ulcer. But how did you get in, assuming you're not my husband suddenly at full throttle early honeymoon force?

INSPECTOR QUINCE

My force diminishes not with use and familiarity, outperforming husbands of every description with visible ease. I came through door number three.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Never heard it called *that* before—o! I see what you mean. The three doors, they're back in our living room. I really must be dreaming them, or not. I've never been sure if the doors with their mingled marvels and perils were dreams, waking dreams actualized in life or who knows what when analysed in the cold logical light of brilliant day. But then where's dear dotting Walter Black my erstwhile hub? If he went through one of those doors I'll throttle him when he gets back.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

No need, it's already accomplished. Dead he lies on the tacky carpet by door number three, asphyxiate he breathes no more. Breath is the first thing we draw in life and the last. He's drawn his last breath.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Strangled and slain on the carpet by a new sudden lover who's assailed me jiggle and spinny with artful ambiguous pleasures! I'd better be dreaming then, too much to deal with, police, investigations, hair samples on the carpet and DNA leading God knows where otherwise.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

I catch the glimmer of a reason that need not much trouble you. Troubles not me, I'm too clever by far for the law—too clever for my own good, some on the force say.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

I can't make head or tail of what you just said.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

Tail I make with ferocious abandon—with gracious abandon yield head.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

I have the right name for a widow at least.

Quince has slid beneath the sheet, his head obtruding in gentle motion about her midparts.

A merry widow it seems.

BLACKOUT

Scene iii Where's the Crime?

Lights up on living room, three doors no longer in evidence, a rectangle of police tape around the body of Walter Black, inside which three latex-gloved assistants busily collect evidence—samples of various kinds, photographs from several angles.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

Tragically was he within inches of the vehicle that might have sped him hence when overtaken by assailant with powerful hands, not at all gentle and caressing, powerful upper arm and upper body muscles our natural surmise from evidence of futile struggle by your puny husband.

ASSISTANT 1(*taking flashbulb photo*)

More tragically still—or is that more dramatic irony? I'll Google it later—one of the tires was punctured.

ASSISTANT 2

bagging samples taken from fingernails)

He'd have been SOL trying to flee in that useless three tire wonder as some unknown vandal had rendered it. Accessory before the fact if we had any way of tracking him, even if completely unwittingly. Assault a person's transportation in a situation of likely peril. . .

ASSISTANT 3

(taking up what looks like the measure of a shoeprint in mud)

What he could have been up to in a neighbourhood so sketchy—! Some—not me of course, that’s not in our determination as officers of the law—might say he got what he deserved.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Inspector—*(aside, to him alone)* what’s this about a body strangled in an alley? We’re in my living room. It’s right in front of us. I’m in my housecoat!

INSPECTOR QUINCE*(aside)*

To our eyes the picture is thus, Erntrude, but fogged by perspective tricks I learnt many years distant in the Orient, these manipulable colleagues perceive the crime scene as an alley in a part of town good reputable citizens never venture because of personal cowardice mainly.

ENTRUDE BLACK*(aside)*

Many years ago in the Orient? You expect me to believe that on your say-so?

INSPECTOR QUINCE*(aside)*

I have no reason to lie to you. Beside you, yes, but it’s a question trickier than you can suspect. Ago or to come I’m not at liberty to say, not in the usual sense of a secret but of a riddle unsolved and perhaps unsolvable. Do we live in one time line or many? Do they see you in this place or that? In a housecoat or a black pencil dress that hugs the figure so close they strain to contain the race of their pulse and maintain professional distance, decorum after all they have a job to do.

ERNTRUDE BLACK(*aside*)

Two of them are women!

INSPECTOR QUINCE(*aside*)

Nevertheless—in one case at least I'm positive and in the other, just possibly half half.

ERNTRUDE BLACK(*aside, smiling*)

So they go on about their duties, furtively undressing me with their eyes? With much less to undress than is usual for me in public if the outfit you describe's what I'm really wearing. And you see?

INSPECTOR QUINCE(*aside*)

Both scenes are present to my eye, otherwise how could I maintain both illusions at once?

ERNTRUDE BLACK(*aside*)

Both? What I'm seeing is an illusion too? I knew it, I haven't woken up yet.

INSPECTOR QUINCE(*aside*)

Have any of us at any time in our lives first to last? At best for sliver-thin glimmers. These subtleties they apprehend better in the Orient.

ASSISTANT 1

We've done our work Inspector.

ASSISTANT 2

Ambulance is on its way to pack this one off to the morgue.

ASSISTANT 3

This will stay up awhile—still going over particulars with the newly bereaved Inspector? There's a police vehicle available to chariot her home.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

I'll see to transport personally once I've mapped securely a timeline of events as they occur to the victim's widow, in fits and starts it seems against the shock still battering fast on her system, battering wide awake her sleep-craving eyes.

ASSISTANTS

Right then we're off.

ASSISTANT 1

Don't have a clue what that was about.

Exuent. Quince and Ertrude Black melt into a passionate kiss as Walter Black's head stirs and lifts.

WALTER BLACK

So. Didn't even wait for the first nail in the coffin.

Watches the two walk off into the blackness where the bed would be.

I don't have to put up with this just because I'm. . . What am I exactly? Wasn't what I was expecting.

A sport jacket and housecoat are tossed into the light from bedroom area.

I have a good mind to wreak vengeance on my vicious murder *and* the disloyal once-wife who's

Flannel nightgown, shirt and tie are tossed in next.

Bedding him if my senses don't deceive me. Never thought I'd have senses still. He's going to enter without even leaving off his pants, zipper down and in without so much as a

Pants and underpants next.

by your leave. Well if I'm this much present I might just be able to come up with a comprehensive scheme of slow ceremonial revenge such as I never would have pictured myself capable of life. Perhaps not. Perhaps death completes me.

Notices three doors have reappeared.

But first—

Cautiously opens door number two, behind which is the same woman as in scene i. She grabs his tie and tugs him to her.

ANGELINE PITFALL

I'll help you the way you wanted first, and then we'll plot our revenge. I crave it as much as you on both of them. That son of a bitch is mine, not hers. And now you. Ah, well. I'll have to make the most of it.

Tugs him to the other side of the door and slams it.

Scene iv Urgent Love

WALTER BLACK

I never thought this was possible either.

ANGELINE PITFALL

You've never heard of resurrection in the flesh? You're in need of religious instruction, that's plain, and I'm custom design for seminary instruction.

Noise of ambulance comes up low behind this, then rises in pitch to a crescendo before suddenly cutting out. Two EMS attendants (played by two of the earlier Assistants) run in with a stretcher on wheels, take down police tape enough to get at 'body' which they mime lifting and placing on stretcher, covering with blanket that, once in place, shows the outlines of a body underneath. One of them re-attaches the tape.

ATTENDANT 2

I'm not sure we should have removed that in the first place.

ATTENDANT 1

And we were supposed to get our customer onto the stretcher and out of here how? I won't tell if you won't.

Exuent at either end of stretcher. Wings left, siren starts up again, full blast, then by degrees diminishes as if with distance. Slowly rising beneath the ambulance noise and now superseding it, the sound of urgent lovemaking from the dark space where we know the bed is past the living room, and from behind door number two, suddenly climaxed by the roar of a tiger. Whisper sound of large padding feet.

WALTER BLACK

What was he doing here?

ANGELINE PITFALL

She if you want to know the truth. Likes to watch is the nearest I can figure. Don't worry, she's been recently fed. A police commissioner I believe. *(After a silence.)* Kidding. Walter—you didn't just finish?

WALTER BLACK

Considering I'm technically incorporeal. . . I think I lasted pretty good. Anyway I don't usually have a sudden tiger roaring at me.

ANGELINE PITFALL

Well you better get used to it. Our revenge could take some time to unfold, and in the meantime who else do I have to fall back on?

WALTER BLACK

I think we should get married. Do dead people do that?

Scene v Good Sweet Furry Pussy

Angeline enters the room through door number three and the doors vanish behind her.

ANGELINE PITFALL

More to the point—do live people ever?

Looks on as Entrude enters the light from the right side, in a sleek thigh-length negligee now—the two outfits almost match. Erntrued, who hasn't seen Angeline, stretches in every direction and hugs herself. Testing the muscles at her side, she pivots and at last sees Angeline.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Who are you? How did you get in here?

ANGELINE PITFALL

Door number 3 most recently. I don't need to ask where you came from. He's probably fast asleep now. *(Loud snoring.)* You'll have to get used to that, not that you'll have much time. That's my man you bedded and I'll punish him for disloyalty and you for *lese majeste* as soon as I figure out the best means to accomplish it. Slow and painful goes without saying. If it proves mortal, I wouldn't be surprised. I've already counted coup in a small way, bedding your husband behind door number 2.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Ex-husband. I was in the living room and also in a disreputable alley where his body was found, that's what Inspector Quince said anyway. I heard the ambulance drive away with his remains.

ANGELINE PITFALL

He's calling himself Inspector Quince this round is he? Are you in the habit of sleeping with your husbands' murderers?

ERNTRUDE BLACK

That hasn't been proved and I'm pretty sure it won't be. Anyway by whatever circumstantial means dear Walt is dead and you don't get any more ex than that. It usually interferes with what you say happened between the two of you as well.

ANGELINE PITFALL

It was more than that affected his performance, but I'm positive he'll come up to the mark with the right mix of discipline and TLFC.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Lucky you. (*Yawns.*) If I wasn't so sleepy I might even be jealous.

Snoring out.

I think I came out ahead in the trade.

ANGELINE PITFALL

You're very much mistaken if you think there's been any sort of trade or ever could be with the likes of you. My man goes through women like you as if they were cotton swabs, the same way I put on lesser men. Men and women of the ordinary sort are both a little insubstantial compared to what we are to one another. Still. He promised that was all over with and he'll pay, I promise you he'll pay, if you turn our collateral damage I won't weep any splashy tears. I'll taste your blood.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

I'll sop up yours like soup. With coarse grained bread most likely.

Quince enters wearing a black robe spackled with gold stars.

ANGELINE PITFALL

I like the attitude. It means I needn't show mercy—kill you quickly without pain.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Bring it on, door number three if you've got the nerve.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

Ladies! Flattered as a man needs must be at such competition for his amatory favours, I'd have no millimeter of flesh cut or even bruised upon my poor account! not when the prize is in reach of both equally take! grasp! it's a short walk to a bed capacious for all. At point where I weary if you yet sleep not, then may you strive flesh against flesh, aggression against aggression until you puddle in moaning delight before my aroused, nay hypercharged eyes and superior member.

Walter Black, seemingly from nowhere, has appeared among them, looks behind him

WALTER BLACK

Where'd the door go?

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Did I hear that right? He wants us, expects us, to . . . ?

Walter clears throat. Qunice suddenly sees him with a look of hatred.

ANGELINE PITFALL

He does get off on watching, and it is a real temptation. Postpone all-out vengeance awhile in favour of furious enjoyment of flesh melting happily in salt, savoury surrender

WALTER BLACK

Just out of curiosity, are you two. . . alive? I ask because I'm still getting used to all those strange new developments. My wife I know still is, unless his cock's as deadly inside someone as his hands are around a fellow's throat.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Ex. Till death do us part is all I vowed. If only there'd been an escape clause for boredom.

She stands eye to eye with Angeline. Their hostility hasn't so much diminished as taken on an erotic charge.

WALTER BLACK

Bit much, and in our own bed too—adding insult to fatality.

Quince stands eyeball to eyeball with him, glaring.

What are you going to do, big fella—kill me? Think it'll take any better this time?

Erntrude suddenly embraces Angelina and dips her, bending to meet her in a 45 degree angle and a kiss.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

Can but essay once more in quest of a result more firm.

ANGELINE PITFALL

(returned to standing position)

My Quince will be pissed off he didn't see that.

They rush into the dark area where the bed is. Quince, about to lunge, draws back when Walter pulls from the pocket of his silk housecoat a butter knife. He stares at it in disbelief.

WALTER BLACK

I could have sworn it was a butcher knife I grabbed. Uh-oh.

But Quince's reaction is disproportionate for a man of his bold rage confronted with a butter knife. He backs away slowly, eyeing Walter warily for sudden movements. Seeing though still not comprehending his sudden advantage, Walter makes a lunge. Quince extents arms, framing the space in front of him with two raised index fingers.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

This is not over and done however you arm yourself uncivilly. I shall return!

Bolts through door number three which has reappeared with the others. Roar, then throaty purr greets him from somewhere behind the doors.

Good girl, let me ruffle thy head and scratch the back of thine ears for renewed fortune, who's a good sweet furry pussy!

WALTER BLACK

Oh great! He's got the tiger on his side. I'd better prepare for whatever's coming but how?

INSPECTOR QUINCE

Ye-es! Ye-es! *You* wouldn't run away from any butcher knife wizz a ten inch blade, woulds oo girl? Woulds oo girl?

Meantime Angeline and Erntrude, over there in the pitchin blacken, have been engaged, at varying noise levels in serious heavy petting. (Underneath which is the continuous sound of happy purring.)

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Your Quince! We may tangle over that before very long.

ANGELINE PITFALL

We be tangled, more than I suspected we might.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

Right now I think I'll fuck you.

WALTER BLACK

Those two are getting cozy.

Pockets butter knife.

ANGELINE PITFALL

I surrender, officer. Take me.

WALTER BLACK

I think it would be appropriate to join in.

ERNTRUDE BLACK

I'll have to figure out how exactly I do that as a woman.

Subvocal whispering.

Really? REAL-LY??? I can do that. Show you who's boss.

Overlapping giggles from the two women.

WALTER BLACK(*hesitating*)

Later I think. When I've worked out a little more what's going on with me. Were those throttling hands less manful than they seemed or he imagined or I did?

ERNTRUDE BLACK

I can always kill you later when you least expect it.

ANGELINE PITFALL

Brave talk across a pillow! We'll see who kills who.

A succession of waves rise, crest, recede, repeat, of concupiscence in the dark. Purring from behind doors. Are the doors still there? At the moment no. From behind where the doors would be then: a rumbling prr-prr-prrr.

WALTER BLACK

I think I'll astonish everyone by the time this is through, I've already astonished myself. You'll hear from me girls, and feel me too and it won't be a forgettable experience. First. . .

Exit wings right.

Scene vi Look at Me

Inspector Quince re-enters the living room through door number three or mysteriously appears at the point where door number three would be, we'll leave that riddle to the set designer and whoever's in charge of blocking. He strides Down Stage Centre and addresses the audience directly. (Purring, probably of the tiger in her sleep, very low, and also the soft snoring of the two women.)

INSPECTOR QUINCE

A ten inch blade at that close distance and knowing the feeble wrist for thrusting of my puny foe, I cringe, I backstep warily, I flee! flee to the comforting soft fur of puss, so much of it so warm to the touch and responsive, tickle 'neath the chin for days if you want to, hear that great girl in her sleep? all three of them now and I not there to voy the two my loves in their maiden voyage on conquest bed! Somebody will pay for that, somebody I thought had been paid in deadliest coin once for all! So easy to reach out and snap the wrist, leave the fool to contemplate the dangle of a hand nevermore to grip, stretch forth my hand to grab from the floor a fearful weapon, useless in his hand now but not in mine! To gut! To flense! at leisure, see if he can resuret in *that* butchered form a second time and mmuch good it do him! Blood and fat dribbling at every point skinned.

WALTER BLACK(*Down Stage Left*)

He still thinks this

Holds up butter knife.

is a butcher knife with a ten inch blade rising proud out of its haft, exactly as it seemed to me when I hastily grabb'd it.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

The identity I had to take on, to save new love from prying eyes of suspicion official on discovery of corpse in living room (myself too, but 'twould be trivial: as if law merely human could touch me with its fingers) that's responsible for all sudden indecision, what might I a lesser being be taken for cowardly fleeing. Identity's unstable in its reflex as quarks or subatomic particles in their sudden instant leaps. Have to shuck it pronto, without identity fixed I'm a

known quantity, fearless in every circumstance I chance to meet. Sole expectation an exploding star. Better part of valour to flee if there's room enough, you have the speed. Light speed ironically to flee a bath of incomprehensibly heat-driven light.

WALTER BLACK

Bet he doesn't meet those very often.

ANGELINE PITFALL/ERNTRUDE BLACK

Come sink here your ten inches to the haft!

ERNTRUDE BLACK

If you can. When we awaken.

ANGELINE PITFALL

If you dare. *(As if whispering.)* I didn't notice he had that much in his pants.

ERNTRUDE BLACK *(as if whispering)*

Ages since he's put it all the way in.

Light snoring up again.

WALTER BLACK

If he believes it's a butcher knife, why wouldn't he believe it's a gun?

Turns to face Quince directly, pointing butter knife at him.

Over here, Quince!

INSPECTOR QUINCE

Unregistered I wager and probably you've little knowledge in your fingers. . . slack. . . how the trigger presses but any fool could see from here it's a hair trigger! Easy on the hammer, cautious.

WALTER BLACK

Why? You're a big target, there are six shots in this baby even if I miss with one or two. You murdered me.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

A failure of. . . courtesy on such small acquaintance (*swallows*) I admit.

WALTER BLACK(*aside*)

But if I fire my weapon will it strike him as if by real bullets? Could get sticky if it doesn't. (*To Quince.*) Never mind the flowery apologies, what's done is done. Usually retaliation's impossible in a situation like this, but I feel up for it and unless you're too dead already I stand about ready to taste vengeance to the full.

Holds butter knife in front of him, cocks it.

I'd as soon kill you as look at you.

INSPECTOR QUINCE

Look at me.

Eyes locked, the two start to walk toward each other as lights fade to BLACKOUT.

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Martin Heavisides is the author of eleven full length plays, one, Empty Bowl, published in The Linnet's Wings and given a live reading by Living Theatre in New York), four one acts and a good number of ten minute plays; short stories, flash fiction, poetry, which has been published in Sein Und Werden, The Linnet's Wings, FRiGG, Mad Hatter's Review, Pure Slush, Journal of Compressed Creativity among other highly discerning publications. He has published one novella length collection of interlinked flash fiction and poetry, Undermind. He is becoming a regular at Storefront Theatre's Sing for Your Supper.*