

EAT THE RUNT

Avery Crozier

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56 E 81st St., NY NY 10028-0202

212 772-8334 fax: 212 772-8358

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Avery Crozier's *EAT THE RUNT* was honored in the 2001 Top 10 Off Broadway Plays listing by the *New York Daily News*. In 1996 Avery was one of the writers for *Endangered Species*, a monologue play presented at the Interact Theater in North Hollywood as part of its Interactivity festival. In *PISHTACO* and *WALKING TO BUCHENWALD*, Avery's second and third full-length plays, Avery once again exploits the temporal nature of theater with non-gender-specific roles that can be cast male or female.

CHARACTERS & SETTING

MERRITT, *an interviewee*

CHRIS, *a grantwriter*

JEAN, *a human resources coordinator*

ROYCE, *a director of development*

HOLLIS, *a curator of modern art*

SIDNEY, *a trustee*

PINKY, *a museum director*

NEW MERRITT, *an interviewee*

In the original production, eight actors of a variety of ethnicities and genders each memorized all eight roles, and the audience cast the play each night. As this proved to be an effective way to explore the play's themes (with more than 40,000 possible variations), this version of the script incorporates the audience participation element.

Doubling (if desired to reduce the cast to five) may be as follows: ROYCE/SIDNEY and PINKY/JEAN/HOLLIS.

The action takes place in various places throughout an art museum. The time is the present.

Some roller chairs, a small cafe table, and a desk, with perhaps some framed exhibition posters on the walls. A couple of entrances.

Costume note: All characters wear business attire.

Originally produced in New York by Mefiso Theater Company.

ACT ONE

(CHRIS *walks in with* MERRITT. *Both wear business attire. MERRITT looks nervous.*)

CHRIS: Now, I don't wanna scare you, but we usually call Human Resources the Anti-Personnel Department. And Jean is kinda the ultimate in rigid bureaucracy—didn't even want me to come get you at staff entrance cause you might—I dunno—sue us for harassment or something if I shook your hand too long. Official policy—in all the years I've never seen anyone in Human Resources smile. So don't be nervous. It's going to be a long day.

(JEAN *appears, unsmiling.*)

CHRIS: Jean, this is Merritt, the Grants Manager candidate.

JEAN: (*Icily*) Welcome.

CHRIS: I'll be back in a little bit to take Merritt to see Royce. Good luck. (*Disappears*)

JEAN: Have a seat.

(MERRITT *starts to sit in a chair.*)

JEAN: Nnnn! (*Points. MERRITT sits in the other chair. JEAN hands MERRITT some forms.*) I don't need these done right away—just drop them off by lunchtime. (*Sits and refers to a resume*) All the way from California. Fundraising must be so easy there, with all that entertainment industry money floating around. You'll find it's nothing

like Los Angeles here. The climate is a real deterrent for people from warmer places, so I hope you're serious about your candidacy. The Development Department is obviously quite serious about you, flying you here, putting you up in luxury accommodations. In my opinion it's usually a waste of time—the museum's better off promoting from within. Good for morale. Cheaper, too. *(Sighs)* But here we are. How are you?

MERRITT: My anus hurts. It's not hemorrhoids exactly, although I've had them before. When I was only thirteen I had one that thrombosed and the doctor had to lance it on an outpatient basis and there was so much blood the nurse had to leave the room cause she was gonna be sick. But like I said, it isn't hemorrhoids this time, probably some kinda non-specific rectalitis, some kinda infection, cause I can feel the lymph node right here— *(Rubs groin)* —swelling up like it does when my anus gets infected, which it does every now and then. I've just got a bad luck butt. This time I think it's from sitting all day on the plane after rather hyperbolic anal sex last night. Don't worry, I was safe and everything. Used a dildo. Can't be too careful these days. But it was one of those oversized ones so it loosened me up something awful. God, I hope I don't break wind during one of these interviews. That would be pretty embarrassing.

JEAN: *(After staring for a long moment)* I...I...have hemorrhoids, too. You poor thing! I know exactly how you feel.

(They reach out to each other and scoot their roller chairs across the room to embrace. JEAN pats MERRITT comfortingly. After a moment CHRIS appears.)

CHRIS: Tears, already?

JEAN: *(Smiling broadly as they both stand)* Not at all. I think Merritt will fit right in here at the museum.

CHRIS: Thanks, Jean.

(JEAN *disappears as CHRIS leads MERRITT away.*)

CHRIS: Looks like you made a good first impression. Jean usually hates everyone on sight. Job interviews are a lot like fundraising itself. Really just stage management—making sure the right people say the right things to the other right people at the right time.

MERRITT: I think I've got my lines down.

CHRIS: Good. Can I get you anything? Coffee or how about a danish?

MERRITT: Nice of you, but no thanks.

CHRIS: Just want you to be as comfortable as possible.

MERRITT: I really appreciate it. But I'm fine. I'm good at this stuff.

CHRIS: Your next appointment is Royce, who'd be your boss— (*Smiles*) —If you get the job. My boss, too, for now. (*Points to self*) Grants Coordinator, working for you— (*Points to MERRITT*) —Grants Manager, working for Royce—

(ROYCE *appears, carrying a bucket.*)

CHRIS: —Director of Development.

ROYCE: (*Shaking MERRITT's hand*) Thanks, Chris. Come back after we're done to take Merritt to Curatorial.

CHRIS: All right, but I'm in the middle of those trustee letters for your signature.

ROYCE: Which?

CHRIS: Trustee annual giving.

ROYCE: That's not your job.

CHRIS: Last Thursday you asked me—

ROYCE: Oh, yes. Aren't they almost done? We're late as it is.

CHRIS: This afternoon at three.

ROYCE: I need them by lunch. And make yourself generally available to take Merritt around. (*Touching MERRITT*) Wouldn't want you getting lost and becoming part of the collection. (*To CHRIS*) See you in a few.

(*CHRIS just stares a moment, then leaves. ROYCE gestures toward a chair.*)

ROYCE: Please.

(*MERRITT sits.*)

ROYCE: Sometimes the staff needs a little encouragement. I hope you're up to that. (*Pulls out a resume*) In an absolute fit of optimism I already called your references. Everyone in L A speaks very highly of you, especially Randy Kanschat.

MERRITT: I try not to choose hostile references.

ROYCE: Randy's not your current boss.

MERRITT: Randy has been elevated to V P of External Affairs, but we're still friends.

ROYCE: External Affairs?

MERRITT: Any public contact with the museum.

ROYCE: I take it your current boss doesn't know you're interviewing.

MERRITT: I hope not.

ROYCE: We'll keep it *entre nous*.

MERRITT: Thank you.

ROYCE: Why would anyone want to leave Southern California? Beaches, sunshine, Disneyland.

MERRITT: Earthquakes, wildfires...Disneyland.

ROYCE: Don't you have attachments?

MERRITT: Attachments?

ROYCE: It's illegal to ask you this directly, but I notice no— (*Touches ring finger*)

MERRITT: Oh. No, I'm not married.

ROYCE: But...involved?

MERRITT: I live with someone.

(*ROYCE just smiles.*)

MERRITT: Cory.

(*ROYCE smiles.*)

MERRITT: Who doesn't know I'm here, incidentally.

ROYCE: Really?

MERRITT: Cory's had some success in L A finally— acting. A bit of ninety-nine-seat theater, two commercials this year, and a movie of the week starring Mary Tyler Moore.

ROYCE: Oh, good for her.

MERRITT: Her?

ROYCE: Mary. Haven't seen her in anything for a while.

MERRITT: *Flirting With Disaster.*

ROYCE: Oh. Pardon me.

MERRITT: The movie.

ROYCE: Oh. Yes. But that was years ago.

MERRITT: So it's a big deal. The MOW.

ROYCE: I can imagine.

MERRITT: I hadda sorta sneak out of town. Fictional funeral of a friend Cory doesn't know.

ROYCE: Oh, bad karma. What if the friend actually dies? What will you tell Cory when you have to go to the real funeral?

MERRITT: By then Cory may not care where I am.

ROYCE: Oh, so pessimistic. Or is that optimistic? Your resume is impressive. And as I said I've checked you out. But what do you consider your most recent success? What's given you the most gratification?

MERRITT: Besides being invited to this interview?

ROYCE: Oh, I'm easy. We're going to put you through the wringer today. Don't be too flattered just yet.

MERRITT: Wring me. I've been looking forward to it.

ROYCE: Interviews don't make you nervous? They make me tense, no matter which side of the table I'm on. (*Touches instep*) I get a knot right here.

MERRITT: Is it there now?

ROYCE: Yes, and it's awful. Right at that place you can't get enough leverage to massage.

MERRITT: I can.

ROYCE: Only if you're an orangutan.

MERRITT: Yours. I can get enough leverage for yours. May I?

ROYCE: (*Kicking off a shoe*) Well...as long as we don't tell Inhuman Resources.

MERRITT: (*Starts massaging ROYCE's foot*) You're very tight.

ROYCE: It's been said. Oooh.

MERRITT: Does that hurt?

ROYCE: Deliciously. (*Moving foot to MERRITT's crotch*) Harder.

MERRITT: (*Rubbing with foot in crotch*) You sure?

ROYCE: If I thought we could get away with it, I'd lie down on the floor right now.

MERRITT: Oh?

ROYCE: So you could walk on my back. You look like the perfect weight.

MERRITT: It's been said.

(*They grunt, moan and murmur as they chat, ROYCE's foot pushing hard into MERRITT's groin.*)

ROYCE: I hope you won't find our interview process too formal.

MERRITT: I'll survive. Interviews are inherently artificial.

ROYCE: Putting your best foot forward.

MERRITT: Yet you never know if you're getting to know the real person.

ROYCE: Only pieces.

MERRITT: Trying to make them cohere.

ROYCE: Trying to tear down a facade.

MERRITT: Searching for contradictions.

ROYCE: Patterns.

MERRITT: Exaggerations.

ROYCE: Truth.

MERRITT: It's all just personalities.

ROYCE: Compatibility.

MERRITT: Liking someone or not.

ROYCE: You're rough.

MERRITT: Sorry.

ROYCE: It's good rough. Almost a religious experience.
(*Licks front teeth as in the old Pearl Drops commercial*)

MERRITT: How much more time do we have?

ROYCE: (*Looking at watch*) Fuck. You have to run over to Hollis.

MERRITT: The curator?

ROYCE: Yes, and you can't be late. You're on a strict schedule today so you can see everybody before lunch.
(*Standing*) That was exquisite. I'm resurrected.

MERRITT: Deep tissue. Deeper later?

ROYCE: (*Grabbing MERRITT for support while putting on shoe.*) After you're hired. We do have to be careful. This is a wonderful museum and people here work very hard, but not everyone is a soft touch like me. You never know who might be out to get you.

MERRITT: Should I guess who? Is that part of the evaluation?

ROYCE: Our Grants Coordinator, for instance.

MERRITT: Really? Chris seems so nice, so helpful. Full of advice.

ROYCE: Chris was a candidate for your job. This job. Your almost job.

MERRITT: But is no longer a candidate?

ROYCE: Not a serious one. Not to me anyway. But I have a feeling Chris still harbors hopes. So take any advice with a grain of salt. A cube of salt. A salt lick. Sorry, I'm from the farm. You know what a salt lick is?

MERRITT: For the cows?

ROYCE: Oh, you know! I used to lick it sometimes when I was little.

MERRITT: Me, too. At my grandparents' farm.

ROYCE: So now we have a secret.

CHRIS: (*Appearing*) Already?

ROYCE: Pardon?

CHRIS: Are you ready?

ROYCE: Yes, where've you been?

CHRIS: Proofing the trustee letters—

ROYCE: Hollis is waiting, and you know how that can be.

CHRIS: (*To MERRITT*) Shall we jog?

ROYCE: Thanks, Merritt. I'll re-connect with you after lunch. (*Disappears*)

CHRIS: So. How'd it go with Royce?

MERRITT: Very well, I think.

CHRIS: (*Surprised*) Really?

MERRITT: We seemed to bond.

CHRIS: No kidding. Royce is a tough—nut—to crack.

MERRITT: Guess I just had the right cracker. Royce even warned me not to trust you.

(*They both laugh. MERRITT stops laughing first.*)

MERRITT: Um...who's next? The scary curator?

CHRIS: Hollis isn't so bad. Just a little hostile to the Development Office. Never quite enough money for contemporary acquisitions. If you live through it, Hollis can take you to Sidney, our trustee. (*Points*) Right through there.

(CHRIS *leaves.*)