

# N o r m a l c y

by Ben Hauck

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## Normalcy

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PLAYWRIGHT	male; aged 25-30
PERSON	oldest female in the ensemble
ARMORED KNIGHT	gender and age not important behind the armor
AIRLINE PERSON	female; younger than the PERSON
TVOJP	either the real thing or another actor; recorded or live voice

[A PERSON sits reading a magazine in the lobby of Port Columbus, with a small carry-on suitcase beside her. A PLAYWRIGHT enters toting a backpack and sits two seats away. His backpack falls next to him. The PERSON does nothing to look, simply absorbed in her magazine.]

[The PLAYWRIGHT looks anxious. He fiddles with items in his pants—a tissue and chapstick in his left pocket, both of which he uses, somewhat messily. To his left, the PERSON stays absorbed in her reading, not noticing.]

PLAYWRIGHT

[After a pause:] Ec-Excuse me. *Hi.*

PERSON

Hn?

PLAYWRIGHT

Hi. Can I just share something?

PERSON

[Neutral:] Sure.

PLAYWRIGHT

I'm a wreck. I—I just—I'm a playwright, and I just finished watching rehearsals for my play. AND I MEAN they *mean well*, but they're just not getting it—it's kinda one of those loopy plays that makes your mind swim—Do you watch plays?

PERSON

Um, sure.

PLAYWRIGHT

First, I get there, they'd been rehearsing, and I learn that the actress they cast has quit the show. An ingenue type. She quits because she got some gig in New York City and is moving there. They had to cast the oldest woman in the cast as her—it doesn't work. It just doesn't work.

PERSON

Where?

PLAYWRIGHT

Catco. For this shorts festival called “Airport! The Shorts Festival.” Had to submit a play that takes place in the departure lounge of *here*: Port Columbus, CMH. [Takes it in:] So this is what it looks like? Ha! To tell the truth, I’ve been through here a few times, but I never stopped to notice. Other than it was almost always dead. [Chuckles to self:] Haha, I got lucky, my play is dead-on!

You headed to LaGuardia?

PERSON

Um. Yes.

PLAYWRIGHT

I live in New York. Well, Queens. Astoria. When the whole World Trade Center thing happened, I hadn’t written my entry. I’d mulled it over for a while before everything went down, thinking someday I’d just take the Em Sixty bus over to LaGuardia, flash my ID and say I had an e-ticket, and sit at one of the gates, taking notes as people bicker about their flights. *Boom*, surely I’d have a play there. Well, then the whole World Trade Center thing happened: I hadn’t been to Columbus since before that, and here I was supposed to write a play that takes place in Port Columbus but with all this new airport security rigmarole and cancellations, It was supposed to take place in the present, but I had no idea what the present was like in Port Columbus. I’ve been here a few times, but, I mean, when you say present, at least when it comes to airports and such, There’s “Present *Pre* Nine-Eleven” and there’s “Present *Post* Nine-Eleven.” And the *Pre* Nine-Eleven is *history*. It’s not present. How do you write a play about a place that has essentially changed, or so you think, since you were last there, and keep it “present”?

PERSON

Yeah.

PLAYWRIGHT

Well, I wrote this play in the midst of it all, finally had an idea, it’s called “Normalcy.” Kinda a self-reflexive piece.

Where are you headed?

PERSON

I’m moving to New York.

PLAYWRIGHT

Yeah?

PERSON

Yeah.

[Pause.]

PLAYWRIGHT

Where?

PERSON

Well, I'm gonna crash at a friend's place for a bit, but I just got a job out there.

PLAYWRIGHT

Really? Congratulations, what do you do?

PERSON

It's nothing exciting. Things.

PLAYWRIGHT

Really? Now you have me intrigued. What do you do?

PERSON

It's a . . . It's an acting job.

PLAYWRIGHT

You're an actor?!

[Pause.]

CONGRATULATIONS! That's awesome!

PERSON

Yeah, I suppose it is.

PLAYWRIGHT

Why didn't you wanna tell me that? I'm a playwright, you know.

PERSON

I don't know you. You seemed disturbed.

PLAYWRIGHT

*"Disturbed."* Ha-ha.

[Pause.]

I take it you've heard of Catco then?

PERSON

Of course.

PLAYWRIGHT

Lemme tell you something: I don't like it. Geoffrey Nelson is a raging egomaniac. Jonathan Putnam couldn't direct a play if God himself came down and showed him how to do it. Deaf-mute *blind people* can direct better than him.

PERSON

Really? You think?

PLAYWRIGHT

Listen: Jonathan Putnam is directing my play. They go ahead and choose it for their shorts festival, I'm completely honored. I get to rehearsals. This *actress* drops out right before I get there: That's Red Flag Number One. Then, they show me what they've done so far with the blocking and scenework, and they make the lead character sound like a complete dipshit. Not only that, the woman he's talking to it makes no sense because she's older so it loses its sexual tension, AND, get this: he wants me to do *rewrites* on top of all these changes. Jonathan Putnam. You'd think he's Sir Laurence Olivier ...

PERSON

I actually respect Jonathan Putnam.

PLAYWRIGHT

... *I mean, I went to school!* So you know him.

PERSON

Yes.

PLAYWRIGHT

Well, he's fine. But you've never worked with him as I have. I fly into the city and at rehearsals, *immediately* he says he thinks my play's too talky. It needs action or something. So Ha Ha Ha. This naturally offends me. Talky's okay by me, right?

[An ARMORED KNIGHT, covered from head to toe in metal and carrying two broadswords, enters from the departure gate and tosses the PLAYWRIGHT one of the swords, which he catches. The PLAYWRIGHT continues talking with undivided attention while dueling with the ARMORED KNIGHT.]

So to piss him off, I've included some senseless violence. Really pointless things, just to show him wrong.

[The PLAYWRIGHT and the ARMORED KNIGHT continue battling, the PLAYWRIGHT with effortless concentration on his conversation. But he defends himself successfully with his broadsword fighting expertise.]

And I argue it. I'm a born arguer, cuz I don't like to lose. I tell him that the violence is the symbolic incarnation of the fear people have developed as a result of the terrorist

attacks vis-à-vis flying, and it's an escapist release to have that fear lash out in the name of itself onstage.

[The ARMORED KNIGHT loses his balance on a strike by the PLAYWRIGHT, but regains it.]

And I tell him it's "Brechtian" too, and throw in some Dionysus references. You shoulda seen the face of the new actress in the play: She didn't know what was going on!

[The PLAYWRIGHT kicks the ARMORED KNIGHT in the chest and he trajects through the departure gate, exiting. The PLAYWRIGHT lays his broadsword against the seats.]

[Pause.]

PERSON

I don't get it.

PLAYWRIGHT

The point is, If you suggest rewrites to me, you *really* don't understand the material you're dealing with. *Look harder.*

PERSON

Well, with all due respect, you don't have the perspective on something like another person's eye.

PLAYWRIGHT

But another person's eye isn't as into it as mine is.

PERSON

But another person's eye is what's going to ultimately see it. If it makes sense to you and no one else, if your point isn't clear to others, then why stage it at all?

PLAYWRIGHT

Well yeah, yeah. I guess. But that's not operating here. He wanted to cut the part that has the airline person behind the check-in counter [She appears from below, in dark sunglasses ...] playing "Great Balls of Fire" on a keyboard.

AIRLINE PERSON

[Rocking out on the piano, Singing:] "*You shake my nerves and you rattle my brain!*"  
[Plays the next riff. Then she disappears below.]

PLAYWRIGHT

That's critical to the piece. If he cut that, it's like, it's like cutting the foreskin off a baby.

PERSON

And what significance does it have to the play?

PLAYWRIGHT

*A lot. A lot.* Putnam's not directing just my play, but the other ones too ... *Jeez.* Things aren't looking good. I'm thinking of changing my name on this.

PERSON

Oh, come on. Catco's not bad. They're only the best theater in Central Ohio, with the best patrons who are avid, open-minded arts supporters. I may be leaving for New York City, but I'm sure *damn* gonna miss Catco.

PLAYWRIGHT

Catco. Cat-*Co*. What kind of name is that?

PERSON

Contemporary Am—

PLAYWRIGHT

[Changing topic:] Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh: I'm in the festival. I should be happy. But I'm not. I'm irked, I'm pissed. I'm *pissed off* at that actor for dropping out.

PERSON

[Pause.]

PLAYWRIGHT

I *shoulda* written a play on terrorism. Yeah, that would have action. I wonder what the other people wrote. Probably all fear-of-flying plays. No, that's why I wrote *my* play, to be different. It's not on fear-of-flying, but *something else*.

PERSON

You sound *bitter*. You should be happy. A theater chose your work. To stage. So someone made a decision? To drop out? *Ride with it*. Make it work. You haven't published it yet, Now's the time to make your play work with the actors you *do* have. If you don't, it's only going to make your script look bad. Not Jonathan Putnam: *You*. *Your* script. All this baggage you're carrying no-pun-intended, it's gonna infect the cast, it's gonna infect your rewrites, it's going to ruin them.

PLAYWRIGHT

Alright. Lemme tell you something. What's your name?

PERSON

I'm [The name of the *youngest* actress in the ensemble (NAME)].

PLAYWRIGHT

Nice to meet you. I'm Ben. You know what, cut the crap. I Hate The Cast. They gave no life to the characters. I mean the lead I told you looked like a dipshit, and the girl-

older-woman, I mean no matter how convincing a portrayal, I wanted to just shout out from the top row of the theater, “*YOU’RE TOO OLD, YOU OLD BAG!*” I’m sorry, but that’s the truth.

PERSON

[Pause.]

[The PERSON turns away, slowly.]

PLAYWRIGHT

I mean, *really*.

[The PERSON begins to cry, her feelings apparently hurt.]

PLAYWRIGHT

Oh. Oh. Are you okay? Did I say something?

[The PERSON continues crying. The PLAYWRIGHT gets out his dirty tissue.]

PLAYWRIGHT

Here’s—Here’s a—

PERSON

*NO*—No—I’m. I’m just sensitive. I’m insecure.

PLAYWRIGHT

Insecure? About what?

PERSON

About *Acting*.

[Pause.]

PLAYWRIGHT

About acting.

PERSON

It’s just that you try *SO HARD* to get a role right, from the memorizing to the blocking to the dealing with other people onstage who aren’t listening to you, from notes you get that contradict themselves, from your questioning if you’re any good, and then you get a playwright who thinks you suck no matter what you do—.

PLAYWRIGHT

Playwrights don’t think that.

PERSON



I WANT TO SUCCEED!  
*ACTING'S HARD!*  
SEE? I'M *CRYING*, AREN'T I?  
*It's hard!*

PLAYWRIGHT

Look, (NAME), you're young, you're what, twenty-six, twenty-seven—

PERSON

—I'm [The actress's real age (AGE) ...45? 60?]!

PLAYWRIGHT

—You're—You're (AGE) ...?

PERSON

I can't continue this. [Up:] Jon? [To the audience:] I'm sorry. [Up:] Jon??

THE VOICE OF JONATHAN PUTNAM

Yees?

PERSON

I can't work like this!

PLAYWRIGHT

Perhaps some music will help.

[He snaps his fingers and the AIRLINE PERSON appears and does the same riff of "Great Balls of Fire" as before.]

PERSON

NO!! He's insulting everything I do! I just said my age! There's no sexual tension in this! It doesn't make any sense!! *It's all about his talking about himself and all how better he is than everyone else!*

PLAYWRIGHT

Come on—You're turning to *Jonathan Putnam*. What advice can he give you?

[He tosses her the broadsword and the ARMORED KNIGHT re-enters from the departure gate. The AIRLINE PERSON disappears behind the counter again.]

PERSON

[Screams.] *JON! JON!*

[They swordfight.]

TVOJP

Yees?

PERSON

Help me!!!

[She battles aggressively.]

TVOJP

Hmmm. Seems you were moving to New York City.

PERSON

YES??

TVOJP

You up and quit the Shorts Festival just before the playwright got to Catco.

PERSON

I got a gig! I got a gig!

TVOJP

Hmmm . . .

PERSON

*My big break!!*

TVOJP

Hmmm . . . We're going to miss you.

[They battle aggressively. The PERSON screams, then in three smites, she causes the ARMORED KNIGHT to lose his balance. Once he regains it, she kicks him in the chest and trajects him into the departure gate, again exiting.]

[Long pause.]

PLAYWRIGHT

Hi.

[Pause.]

PLAYWRIGHT

Now *symbolically speaking*, you've just kicked the thing you fear back into the plane, right where you're headed.

PERSON

[Forcefully:] *OH*, I supposed you were gonna say *that it was a symbolic incarnation of the fear people have developed as a result of the terrorist attacks vis-à-vis flying, and it's an escapist release to have that fear lash out in the name of itself onstage.*

PLAYWRIGHT

You're going to stay right here. Right here in Columbus. Columbus O-Hi-Dad,-I'm-Not-Moving-To-New-York-City-After-All-O.

PERSON

No, I'm moving to *New York*.

PLAYWRIGHT

Jon?

TVOJP

Yees?

PLAYWRIGHT

She's *NOT WORKING!* First off, She's supposed to stay now.

PERSON

Oh I'm flying alright. I'm gonna get on that plane. But I'm also staying here. Isn't that right, Jon?

TVOJP

Yees.

PLAYWRIGHT

Jon? Jon? Wait! She's—THIS CONFUSES THE PLAY! She's—And I wrote it that she's supposed to start hitting on me before I leave! You call this *DIRECTION??*

PERSON

[Seductively:] Hiii.

[Pause.]

PLAYWRIGHT

[Nearly spellbound:] Why hello there ...

[The PERSON turns seductive.]

PERSON

I'm going to stay in Columbus. Columbus O-Hi-Dad,-I'm-Not-Moving-To-New-York-City-After-All-O.

[She closes in on the PLAYWRIGHT.]

PLAYWRIGHT

There you gooo ...

TVOJP

Yees ...

PERSON

[In close:] I think I'm gonna do a play at Catco. The Shorts Festival. I hear they're missing an actress . . . An ingenue . . .

PLAYWRIGHT

[Of her seducing:] Hell Yes!

PERSON

Ben?

PLAYWRIGHT

(NAME)?

[She kisses him passionately.]

[The AIRLINE PERSON pops up again, sans sunglasses. She picks up the intercom microphone.]

AIRLINE PERSON

Flight Sixty-Six Ninety-Nine with nonstop service to New York LaGuardia is now boarding. Please have your tickets ready as we board ALL passengers, ALL passengers boarding Flight Sixty-Six, Ninety-Nine.

PLAYWRIGHT

That's us.

PERSON

[Still seductive:] Nooo. That's you.

PLAYWRIGHT

No, you're perfect. You can stay with me.

PERSON

Jonathan Putnam needs me. I can do the role.

PLAYWRIGHT

They're doing fine with the play, honest.

PERSON

No, you said it's bad, you hate the actors.

PLAYWRIGHT

I was *frustrated*, I didn't mean it.

AIRLINE PERSON

Sir?

PLAYWRIGHT

[To AIRLINE PERSON:] Wait. [To PERSON:] It's just a play. It'll entertain them anyway. That audience likes A Tuna Christmas. I'm lonely, it's lonely in New York.

PERSON

I need to stay.

PLAYWRIGHT

If you stay, I'll do rewrites.

PERSON

You don't like rewrites.

PLAYWRIGHT

I'll write you as an old bag.

PERSON

I can play any role.

PLAYWRIGHT

*I'll kill off your character.*

PERSON

There are other plays in the festival. You'll muck up your play. Your *play* will look bad, remember?, Not the actors.

PLAYWRIGHT

MY PLAY IS GENIUS.

PERSON

Not without me—

AIRLINE PERSON

Sir? Final call for boarding.

[Beat.]

PLAYWRIGHT

(NAME)—

[The PERSON suddenly slaps him, *hard*.]

[Pause.]

PERSON

[Waving with cocktease condescension:] Byyye.

[The PLAYWRIGHT stands glaring for a moment at PR, then abruptly turns, grabs his backpack and maintains eye contact with the PERSON as he leaves.]

[The PERSON sighs, dropping her seductive act. She turns to pick up her small suitcase and her magazine. Suddenly the ARMORED KNIGHT emerges with broadsword, walking a direct path to the PERSON. She screams; he smites her while the AIRLINE PERSON watches. A clap of loud thunder and a flash of lightning correspond with the smiting. When the PERSON falls to the floor limply, the ARMORED KNIGHT just stands there.]

[The AIRLINE PERSON puts on her sunglasses and plays, fully rocked out:]

AIRLINE PERSON

[Singing:]

*You shake my nerves and you rattle my brain.*

*Too much love drives a man insane.*

*You broke my will, but what a thrill ...*

*Goodness gracious, Great Balls of Fire!*

[Blackout.]