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From the Selected Works of Jared Brown

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George and Irene

Jared Brown, *Illinois Wesleyan University*



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GEORGE AND IRENE

a one-act play by

Jared Brown

Music by Charles Vanden Eynden

Lyrics by Jared Brown

Accompaniment arranged and performed by Todd Tucker

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GEORGE AND IRENE

a one-act play by Jared Brown

(The set is the same as the one used for Menage á trois)

(George is sprawled in his chair, an unlit cigar in his mouth, reading a magazine. Irene is using an old-fashioned carpet sweeper)

IRENE

Geez, George. You'd think you could move your feet when I'm doin' the sweepin' up, wouldn't ya?

GEORGE

Leave me be, Irene. I got a right to put my feet anywhere I want, ya know. I guess nobody ever told ya, but this is my house, too, ya know.

IRENE

Yeah, well then, why doncha bring in some money every now and then, you slob?

GEORGE

Who you callin' a slob?

IRENE

You, that's who.

GEORGE

You better watch yer mouth or I'm gonna haul off and slug ya.

IRENE

Yeah? You try it, Buster, and I'll bean you with the carpet sweeper.

GEORGE

You and what army?

IRENE

The Russian army, whatdya think, you stupid idjit.

GEORGE

I s'pose you think Mao Tse Tung himself is gonna come in and give you a hand, doncha?

IRENE

Mao Tse Tung! Geez, you *are* a stupid idjit. He ain't no Russian.

GEORGE

Yeah? What is he then?

IRENE

Japanese, you stupid idjit.

GEORGE

Okay, Irene, that's enough with the stupid idjit business. Just shut yer trap and lemme read my magazine.

IRENE

Yeah, you and yer magazine. Whatcha readin', anyway?

GEORGE

Whaddya think? *Guns and Ammo*.

IRENE

Lissen, George, would it hurtcha to move your big feet? Do I gotta give you a lesson in etiquette?

GEORGE

Give *me* a lesson, you pea-brained broad! Ain'tcha got any couth?

IRENE

Who you callin' uncouth?

GEORGE

I'll give ya three guesses. Now why doncha get yer big rear end outa my face?

IRENE

Okay, that's it, Buster. I've had it up to here with you.

GEORGE

Yeah? Whatcha gonna do, Irene? I mean, I ast you, whatcha gonna do?

(He stands up, makes a fist and threatens to hit her. Blackout)

(Lights come up to reveal George seated in his chair, reading the London Observer. He has an unlit pipe in his mouth. Irene is at the desk, writing with a fountain pen on an envelope. Each has perfect posture and projects refinement)

GEORGE

Do you need assistance, my sweet Irene? *(pronounced "Irénée")*

IRENE

Assistance, my darling George? Of what kind?

GEORGE

Addressing those invitations to our Sunday morning at-home.

IRENE

Why, George dear, how thoughtful of you. But no, my dove, I have things well in hand. You could tell me what's in the *Observer*, however.

GEORGE

Oh, simply the usual nonsense. News of the ascendance of Sir Geoffrey to a peerage.

IRENE

Geoffrey? Not Geoffrey McSwain, surely.

GEORGE

Sir Geoffrey McSwain, indeed.

IRENE

Don't tell me you've been overlooked again, my pigeon.

GEORGE

(turns the page) I don't see my name listed, sweetheart.

IRENE

Ah, well, surely you'll be recognized next year, my love.

GEORGE

I share your belief, old girl, and I thank you for your perspicacity.

IRENE

If only the queen could see the man I see. A man of breeding, of elegance, of brilliant intelligence and sensitivity.

GEORGE

You flatter me, my darling.

IRENE

Tush, I haven't begun. A man whose every word, every action reveal him to be of a superior species.

GEORGE

And married to such a beautiful helpmeet. Glorious in every respect.

IRENE

(blushing) Oh, George, now *you* flatter *me*.

GEORGE

The least I can do, my hummingbird.

IRENE

My wise old owl.

GEORGE

My turtle dove.

IRENE

(stands and goes to him) Give me a kiss, adored one.

GEORGE

I should like nothing better, Irene darling, but I fear that my breath may reek of the odor of my pipe tobacco.

IRENE

Darling George, kiss me before you drive me mad.

GEORGE

(rises) Oh, if only I could resist you, my poppet, but I cannot.

IRENE

George.

GEORGE

Irene.

(Both lean in from the waist. Without touching one another, they exchange the briefest and daintiest little kiss possible. Blackout)

(Lights up on George, a young man in his 20s, seated at the desk, holding an unlit cigarette.)

GEORGE

Say, Irene, can you come give me a hand?

IRENE

(entering; she, too, is in her 20s) What's up, George?

GEORGE

I just don't know how we're going to get the money for the next mortgage payment, baby.

IRENE

Gosh, George, I thought you said there was just enough in the checking account.

GEORGE

I thought so – but that was before I sent a check to your mom.

IRENE

Mom? I don't get you.

GEORGE

Well, she called and said she needed fifty dollars for your pop's birthday present this Friday. So I thought, what the heck, I'll send her the fifty.

IRENE

Oh, George. You're a sweet guy, you really are, but what are *we* going to do if we can't pay the mortgage?

GEORGE

(breaks into song)

I know it seems we're in a pickle
Our bank account is nearly gone
We've barely got a wooden nickel
And that's not all, I could go on.

IRENE

You sent a check for Pop on Friday
But now I'm asking this of you,
When is it your day, George, or my day?
When will our dreams, our dreams come true?

IRENE AND GEORGE

(together, singing up-tempo)

We've got to dance the lowdown blues away
We've got to sing a joyful song
We've got to make the world a grand old place again

And let our voices ring as we join the happy throng

Let's not let our troubles get us down
Let's just bid our cares goodbye
Let's go strolling down life's avenue
With a smile, a wink

GEORGE

Oh me

IRENE

Oh my

GEORGE

If you'll be happy, I'll be happy

GEORGE AND IRENE

We'll be lucky, too
We'll find the roses, not the thorns
And if you hear us,
If you see us,
Please believe us

IRENE

(spoken) Oh, *please* believe us

GEORGE AND IRENE

The happiest of all
As we're dancing down the hall
In summer, spring or fall
Will be –

GEORGE

Not me

IRENE

Nor me

GEORGE AND IRENE

Buuuut --- *You!!!*

(The song ends with a big finish. Maybe George and Irene are each on one knee, or maybe Irene is sitting on George's knee. Blackout)

(The lights come up on George, standing and pacing nervously. Irene stands calmly, as a third character, Walter McGinniss, sits at the desk. The acting style, throughout this scene, is done in soap-opera fashion)

McGINNISS

Irene. I've come all the way from my office at Treadway Company in order to see you.

IRENE

It's a privilege to see you, Mr. McGinniss. It's not every day that we see a chief executive officer here at the Irene Deveraux Advertising Agency.

(George clears his throat)

IRENE

Oh, yes. Mr. McGinniss, do you remember George, the head of our creative division?

McGINNISS

I do. And do you remember when I signed that contract with you exactly one year ago?

IRENE

Of course. That was a good day for all of us.

McGINNISS

A good day for you and for the Irene Deveraux Agency, I'm sure. But not quite so good for the Treadway Company. I received a report yesterday from our accountant. Do you know how much our sales have grown since we put your ad campaign into effect? Six percent.

GEORGE

Congratulations. Six percent in less than a year. That's not bad at all.

McGINNISS

(*Pounding his fist on the desk*) When you're anticipating a hundred percent, it's bad. It's terrible, in fact.

GEORGE

A hundred percent? I think that's an unrealistic expectation.

McGINNISS

Don't try to weasel out of this, young man. Perhaps you've forgotten that you guaranteed – *guaranteed*, I emphasize – that our sales would double within a year if I signed your infernal contract.

IRENE

George! I hope you didn't commit our agency to such a risky proposition.

McGINNISS

Not as such, as it were. However, this young man vowed that if our sales don't double in a year, *he* – personally, and out of his own funds – would make up the difference.

IRENE

And he will, Walter. How much is the difference between the amount you expected to make and the amount you've actually taken in?

McGINNISS

Seventeen million dollars, more or less.

IRENE

George, how do you propose to deal with this?

GEORGE

I – uh – I'd like to have a word with you, Irene.

McGINNISS

You two talk it over as much as you like. But within a week I'll be expecting a check for approximately seventeen million dollars.

IRENE

You'll have it, Walter. The agency – or, rather, *George* will have a check cut for you.

McGINNISS

I thought you might try to back out of this, Irene. I'm pleased to see that you're standing by your word.

IRENE

Of course.

McGINNISS

Well, I'll be off, then. You can expect to hear from me soon. (*He exits*)

IRENE

All right, George. Now you know what you're dealing with.

GEORGE

Seventeen million dollars? Where on God's green earth would I get seventeen million dollars?

IRENE

I have no idea. But it's really not my concern. You offered to take full responsibility and Walter McGinniss, the president and chief executive officer of the Treadway Company, accepted your offer. Now it's time for you to take the consequences.

GEORGE

Seventeen million dollars! But I'm only paid two hundred dollars a week. Suppose I explain this to Mr. McGinniss. Do you think he'd accept a few thou?

IRENE

No. I think he'd accept exactly what his accountant says you owe him.

GEORGE

(*Standing and pacing*) Irene, Irene Deveraux, we're close personal friends, aren't we? If we are, then, for goodness' sakes, won't the agency help me out? I'd do anything you asked me to. Go on half salary. Forego my bonus. Whatever you wanted.

IRENE

No, George. This is your obligation. The agency has nothing to do with it. Don't you know what a contract means, George? You didn't sign a document saying the agency would be responsible for your promise to double McGinniss's profits within a year. You said *you* would be responsible.

GEORGE

You know, it almost seems as if you're enjoying my humiliation.

IRENE

Perhaps that's because I am.

GEORGE

You are? Why? What did I ever do to deserve this?

IRENE

Perhaps *you* don't know that *I* know you've been robbing us for more than three years now. A little here, a little there – and you've done pretty well for yourself.

GEORGE

Robbing you? What are you saying?

IRENE

When I realized that the contract you signed with McGinniss was about to come due, I had Frank Munter – the agency's accountant, if you'll recall – look over the deal to see if there was any way out. Imagine my surprise when he told me not only that the deal was iron-clad, but that he had looked at all the contracts you had drawn up for the last three years. And you had provided yourself with a nice little commission on every one. Eighty thousand here, a hundred thousand there – it all adds up.

GEORGE

I deserved those commissions! Without me, the agency would never have closed those deals.

IRENE

No, George. You get a salary and a bonus. I never agreed to give you a commission.

GEORGE

Oh, Lord, Irene, you know that that goes on all the time. I don't know of an advertising agency in New York that doesn't provide commissions.

IRENE

This one doesn't. It never has.

GEORGE

Then –

IRENE

Yes, George, it's the federal prison at Wormwood for you.

GEORGE

But –

IRENE

Don't worry, George. I'll come visit you – every ten years or so. (*She laughs maniacally*)

GEORGE

Irene – you're *insane*!

IRENE

Insane, yes, you've driven me insane with your devastating good looks, your devilish smile and your devil-may-care attitude for the past eight years. You never gave me a second look, did you? But now look who has the upper hand.

GEORGE

(*Dropping to one knee*) Irene, I beg you.

IRENE

Begging will get you nowhere, George. I know it must be painful, but now you know that I, a successful businesswoman, have no heart, no pity, and you, you who never gave me a second look, are doomed – *doomed!* – to a life of misery.

GEORGE

Geez. If I knew this was going to happen, I would have asked you out years ago.

IRENE

Too late, I'm afraid. I'm leaving you now, George. I'll send the police in as soon as they arrive.

(She walks to the door and exits, her head held high. George's head is bowed in shame. Blackout. Lights come up to reveal the distinguished British couple. George is holding a pipe. Irene emits a long and highly theatrical laugh. After a while George joins in.)

GEORGE

What's so amusing, darling?

IRENE

Why, pet, do I appear to you to be amused?

GEORGE

Well, you do seem to be in an astonishingly gleeful mood, my little squirrel.

IRENE

(now gives a brief, untheatrical laugh – as the actress, not as Irene) Squirrel?

GEORGE

Oh, sorry. My dove.

IRENE

My starling.

GEORGE

My grackle.

IRENE

(switching suddenly to her first character) Who you callin' a grackle, ya stupid idjit?

GEORGE

(drops his pipe on the desk and picks up the cigar) I'm gonna bust up your choppers, Irene. I mean you're gonna be squashed like a bug on a watermelon.

IRENE

(slight pause. She can't think of the correct line, so she switches character once again) Oh, you silly goose, what shall we wear to Muriel's party?

GEORGE

What?

IRENE

Muriel's party, my sweet – uh – avocado.

GEORGE

Sweet avocado?

IRENE

(after she sees that he's completely lost, she switches character) You've gone too far this time, George Randall. Yes, I'll admit that I counted on you to invent the finest advertising campaigns in the history of New York City, and I'll even admit that you're the finest creative director the Deveraux Agency has ever had, but –

GEORGE

(Thinks he knows which scene he's in, but not too sure. He picks up the pipe) But? But what, you extraordinarily delectable creature?

IRENE

(Fairly long pause) So ya think yer gonna squash me, do ya? I could call my brother, Maxie, ya know.

GEORGE

(Totally thrown) Maxie?

IRENE

Yeah. Maxie. *(Trying to help him)* The mobster, ya remember. From Chicaga, Illinois.

GEORGE

(Not in character) Oh, *that* Maxie.

(An awkward pause)

IRENE

You've gone too far this time, George Randall. Yes, I'll admit that I counted on you to invent the finest advertising campaigns in the history of New York City, and I'll even admit that you're the finest creative director the Deveraux Agency has ever had, but –

GEORGE

(Not in character) Oh, I get it. *(Sets the pipe down)*

IRENE

(Trying valiantly to maintain a character, any character) Have you gotten it, then, sweetheart? And have you opened it? Have you allowed it to breathe? Does it have the smoothest bouquet you've ever imbibed?

GEORGE

(picks the pipe up, but can't think of the line. He sets the pipe down again) Irene Deveraux, you twisted woman, what ever made you think I could want an evil creature such as yourself?

IRENE

(Now she's lost) Uh – don't say another word, you foul – inspirapator!

GEORGE

(On the verge of breaking up) Inspirapator?

IRENE

Wait, wait. *(She calls into the wings)* Mr. McGinnis! Walter McGinnis! Are you still in the building?

(George and Irene wait, frozen in position, as they hope for a response)

McGINNIS

(From the wings) Yes, I'm behind the – uh – flat.

IRENE

You mean you're waiting for the elevator?

McGINNIS

(From the wings) Yes, yes, the elevator, that's it.

IRENE

Would you come back for a moment, Walter?

McGINNIS

(After a moment, he comes rushing on stage) What can I – do – for – you, Irene Deveraux?

IRENE

Did you bring a copy of the – uh – contract?

McGINNIS

(not in character) The contract? No. Why? I left my contract at home – in the dresser.

IRENE

No, no, I mean a copy of George's proposal.

McGINNIS

Proposal?

IRENE

The proposal he wrote for the Treadway Company! The book! It contains words!

McGINNIS

(Finally figures out what she wants; he pulls a copy of the script out of his back pocket)
Ohhh. I just happen to – uh – have it with me.

IRENE

Would you turn to page thirty-seven, please?

(McGinnis feverishly turns the pages until he finds his place. Then he gives Irene a dumbfounded look)

And what do you see there, Walter McGinnis, at the top of page thirty-seven?

McGINNIS

“Don’t be a turtle.”

GEORGE

Oh, okay, thanks. *(He begins to sing. McGinnis exits)*

Don’t be a turtle
Turtles are fertile
And we only want one another

IRENE

I love you so dearly
And I can see clearly
It’s too soon to be a mother.

GEORGE AND IRENE

Parenthood is grand
And one day, hand in hand
We’ll walk into the land
Of little babies

GEORGE

But first, my sweet Irene
Well, you know what I mean
I’m so jealous that I’m green
So my talk is full of buts and maybes

IRENE

I feel that way, too
(She forgets the lyric) Ba doodle oodle oo

GEORGE

(Helping her out)
Through sun and stormy weather

We'll make our way together
I'm not ready for fatherhood
It's too much of a bother, wouldn't
 n't you agree?

GEORGE AND IRENE

For now, we'll never be lonely

GEORGE

You're mine and I am yours only

GEORGE AND IRENE

Just you –

IRENE

(spoken) Just you!

GEORGE

We're two

IRENE

(spoken) We're two!

GEORGE

Not three

IRENE

(spoken) Not three

GEORGE AND IRENE

Just you –

IRENE

Just we –

GEORGE AND IRENE

and just meeee!!!

(They wind up in their usual position – each with one knee on the stage floor or Irene sitting on George’s knee. But there’s no blackout, so they have to hold the pose interminably)

IRENE

(finally) Oh, Mr. McGinniss, are you still there?

McGINNIS

(Runs on stage, looking desperately through the script) What is it, Miss – uh – Deveraux?

IRENE

Could you turn off the lights on your way out?

McGINNIS

The lights?

IRENE

If you would, Mr. McGinnis.

McGINNIS

But – uh – *(whispering)* the electrician’s gone out for lunch.

IRENE

Ah.

GEORGE

Ah.

IRENE

Ah. So . . . What. Do. We. Do. Now?

McGINNIS

Let’s see. *(flips through the script)* The dance!

IRENE

(Not in character) Ah-ha! *(In character)* Darling George, I would be privileged if you would consent to be my partner in the waltz.

GEORGE

My sweet Irene (*pronounced Irénee*). I could not be more honored, rosebud. A-one-two-three, one-two-three. *(And they begin dancing in a small circle, to the accompaniment of a waltz)* May I say that you are looking particularly elegant tonight, my dove.

IRENE

And you, George, possess the je ne sais quois that only you, my darling, appear to possess in such glorious profusion.

GEORGE

You delectable flower bud.

IRENE

You adorable but always gentle soul.

(Now the waltz begins to play faster. As a consequence, George and Irene begin dancing in a wider circle, making them go faster)

IRENE

Oh, dear. Is it my imagination, or has the music accelerated ever so slightly, my peach?

GEORGE

Ha ha ha ha. Hold on with all your might, Irene dear. Here we go!

(The dance is slightly faster now, and George and Irene are beginning to have difficulty breathing regularly)

IRENE

(not in character; she calls into the wings) Hey, what's going on with the music?

McGINNIS

(Enters) I don't know what's going on. Something wrong with the tape recorder, I guess. (Exits)

(George and Irene dance in a wider circle. As the frenzied dance no longer seems to lend itself to the refined characters they've been playing, they abruptly switch)

IRENE

(Melodramatically) You've gone too far this time, George Randall. Yes, I'll admit that I counted on you to invent the finest advertising campaigns in the history of New York City, and I'll even admit that you're the finest creative director the Deveraux Agency has ever had, but –

GEORGE

Irene – you're *insane*!

IRENE

Insane, yes, you've driven me insane (*pause to collect her breath*) with your devastating good looks, your devilish smile and your (*pause to collect her breath*) devil-may-care attitude for the past eight years. You never gave me a second look, did you? But now (*she's almost completely out of breath*) look who has the upper hand. (*She's barely made it to the end of the speech. Out of character:*) Whew!

(The music accelerates once again. The circle grows wider, the dancers accommodate the widened circle by dancing faster)

GEORGE

Gosh, Irene, I'd like to sing a song (*breathlessly*) but I don't seem to have any (*pause to get his breath*) breath left.

IRENE

Gee, George, and I was (*pants*) looking forward to singing it (*pants*) with you.

GEORGE

(*Out of character, yells into the wings*) Hey, slow it down, will ya?

(*But the music speeds up again and the dancers go faster*)

IRENE

Hey, ya lousy bum, ya stepped on my foot.

GEORGE

Whaddya mean, lousy bum? One of these days, Irene (*pants*), yer gonna get on my noives.

IRENE

Whatcha talkin' about, ya boob? (*Pants*) You ain't got no noives I've ever seen. (*Pants*) Come on, come on, show me yer noives.

GEORGE

What a stupid jerk. (*Pants*) Ya can't just take out yer noives, didn'cha know that? (*Pants*)

McGINNIS

(*Enters and shouts out*) The electrician's back from lunch! Maybe he can slow down the music. (*Stage-whispers the next line to them*) "You've gone too far . . ." (*Exits*)

(*Instead, the music plays faster and George and Irene struggle to keep up*)

IRENE

You've gone too far this time, George Randall. (*Pants*) Yes, I'll admit that I counted on you to invent (*Pants*) the finest advertising campaigns in the history of New York City, and I'll even admit that you're the (*pant*) finest creative director the Deveraux Agency has ever had, but –

GEORGE

Irene – you're (*pant – pant – pant*) insane!

IRENE

(*Out of character*) I can't go on.

GEORGE

(*Ditto*) I'm exhausted.

IRENE

Won't this music ever stop?

GEORGE

Won't this play ever be over?

IRENE

I'd like to meet the guy who wrote this play. (*pant*) I'd like to break his (*pant*) neck.

GEORGE

I'd moider da bum.

IRENE

I'd give him a kick right where it'd hurt the most.

GEORGE

Irene – (*pant*)

IRENE

Yes, George? (*pant*)

(They both collapse on to their backs on the floor. The music stops abruptly. McGinnis enters from the wings)

McGINNIS

It's all right! He fixed the tape recorder! And now (*assuming the character of Walter McGinnis*) I'll be glad to turn off the lights, Irene Deveraux! But I'll be back to pick up my seventeen million dollars within the hour, young man.

(As he exits, the lights black out. End of play)

