

ROADKILL CONFIDENTIAL
a noir-ish meditation on brutality
by Sheila Callaghan

copyright © 2010

Seth Glewen
The Gersh Agency
41 Madison Ave
33rd Floor
New York, NY 10010
212-634-8124 phone

ROADKILL CONFIDENTIAL

by Sheila Callaghan

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

TREVOR – female, mid 30's, furtive and glamorous

WILLIAM / TV ANNOUNCER / DOCTOR – male, mid-late 40's, balding, dorky, well-meaning

RANDY / FRIZZY HAIRE D MAN – male, 14, wiry and manic

MELANIE – female, late 20's-early 30's, bubbly and shrill

FBI MAN – male, 30's-40's, cool, level, mysterious, jaded

PLACE:

A small New England county, upstate New York.

A road.

A dark nondescript room.

TIME:

The end of fall, moving into the winter.

NOTES:

The setting should not be real, or naturalistic.

It should not be a set for the piece to play within but rather something against which the piece can resonate: more installation than set.

An ellipsis is set within parenthesis is used to indicate a gesture or some sort of vocal sound appropriate to the character and the situation. It is not a realistic sound, however.

The installation will begin as something simple, but will transform throughout the play, perhaps during the transitions at the hands of Trevor, until ultimately the entire playing space and beyond is one enormous diorama.

PLEASE NOTE: Trevor is onstage for the entire duration. When not specifically noted, she is working and watching television, and reacting to it all. She is especially present on stage whenever FBI guy is talking, whether lit specially, or in her own realm of movement and expression.

All scene titles are projected.

ROADKILL CONFIDENTIAL
by Sheila Callaghan

FBI MAN

You could say it all began a month ago

But that's not where I'll start
I'll start *before* it started

On a radiant Tuesday morning
In the lazy days of late spring

Trevor was contemplating her next project.
She didn't know what form it would take
Nor how much time
Nor even what material
She only knew
It was to be brutal.

TREVOR is in her studio, watching TV news, as she does
throughout the play.

Who is Trevor, you ask?

She might have been my greatest triumph.
But she was my demise.
So to speak.

TREVOR flips the channels. Lots of violence. She settles
on one station. A TV ANNOUNCER'S VOICE IS
HEARD.

TV ANNOUNCER

And in sadder news
A child has died in the Berkshires this week
Seven-year-old Callie Stewart touched a wild bunny
Outside her home in Austerlitz
The animal was infected with a rare bacterial disease
Causing Callie to perish within mere days.
The name of the disease is being withheld
For reasons of national security

But let it be known, Berkshire residents
The bunny has been detained.

You are in no danger.

TREVOR is suddenly in her car, driving.

THUMP. Squeal of tires. She pulls over.

She has hit a bunny accidentally. She stares at it. Emotion: compassion revulsion fascination etc.

She retrieves a camera and photographs it dying. Then— she gets an idea. She puts on a pair of work-gloves.

FBI MAN

Jump cut.

Five months later

Trevor's in bed with a frizzy haired man

ONE MONTH AGO: RUBBER FACE

TREVOR is in her studio, now in bed with her lover, a frizzy-haired man. They are frozen.

The FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN is playing with TREVOR's face.

Everything around them is covered in tarps.

Trevor is staring at a flickering TV with the sound off. She wears a tie and white shirt.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Rubber-face

TREVOR

I'm trying to think of way to tell you to stop that
Without using the words "aggravating" or "retarded"

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Ha!

Sorry.

I'll make coffee?

Should I make coffee?

He finds a piece of paper.

What is this?

He reads.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN (cont)

Friendly Fire
The Roadside Explosives
Mortar Rounds
The Drive Bys
The Ethnic Cleanse
Checkpoint Fuckyou

TREVOR

Band names

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Who's in a band?

TREVOR

No one
I couldn't sleep.
Nightmares
My hands were like this the whole time

He flips the paper over and reads.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

"Thanks for the help. You're a swell kid. Sorry it didn't work out. With Affection,
Trevor."

TREVOR

That's from yesterday
I thought you were leaving much sooner

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

What did you eat for lunch yesterday

TREVOR

Why?

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Because sometimes what you eat
Like eating badly affects your dreams
The shattering of one's self-image

TREVOR

You're much cuter when you're focused on pleasing me

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

I need a little break
My jaw hurts

TREVOR

All right
I'll tell you what I dreamed, then

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Please

TREVOR

I was the keeper of the marvel

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Wow.
You aren't ordinary.

TREVOR

I know.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN kisses TREVOR. He is about to
turn off the TV.

TREVOR

Don't touch that.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Okay
I'm so happy to be here--

TREVOR

What about my coffee?

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Right.
Sorry.

He stands.

Ow.

TREVOR

Your back
Poor thing
I have advil

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

They were heavier than I thought
Are you using more wood, or

TREVOR

Metal

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Oh my gosh
I can't wait to see them
This is so huge for me, Trevor

TREVOR

I know, baby

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

I mean the first time I
Your opening at the Whitney

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

I mean visceral and dark but um with
Like this brutal intimacy
And so fucking beautiful
I'd never / seen anything

TREVOR

Okay why not drive back to campus
And yammer from the comfort of your dorm room

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Oh.
But just a second ago—

TREVOR

I changed my mind.
Go now.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Okay.
Um.
Need me to move anything else?

TREVOR

No thank you.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Okay.

(...)

Want a sandwich

I can get you a sandwich

TREVOR

Good lord.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Could I just see one of them?

I won't take a picture or anything

See?

Here's my cell phone

I'll leave it / over there

TREVOR

You're about to make me into someone

Who demonstrates incredibly bad romantic judgment

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Well I helped you and everything

And we did have pretty okay sex

TREVOR

Okay.

a) No one sees these until they're done, not even my husband

b) Dignity, maybe? and

c) Goodbye. Truly.

He hesitates.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

(...)

I fucked up.

I peeked beneath the tarp

TREVOR

When

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Just for second

I saw fur

Did you touch it?
TREVOR

Just for a second
I couldn't help / myself
FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

You touched it
TREVOR

Hardly, it was more like a
FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

With the gloves on?
TREVOR

I took them off
FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Oh God
TREVOR

Just for a second
FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

You idiot
I said not to touch it
TREVOR

I know
FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

I said "don't touch the art"
TREVOR

Nothing broke or
FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

"hold the base by the straps"
TREVOR

The glue / was
FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Why did you touch it
TREVOR

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

DRY, okay
I didn't even SEE anything
I just FELT it

TREVOR

Oh God

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Trevor

TREVOR

Oh God

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Trevor
I'm sorry
Please

TREVOR

(...)

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

What was the exact crime
Let me understand

TREVOR

Get out.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN

Trevor, I'm a--
Please don't be mad
I'm not like those freaks on the lawn with the camcorders
I'm a fan Trevor but I'm not disgusting
I'm not
I'm not

****SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL AND VIOLENT AND
DRAMATIC HAPPENS TO TREVOR HERE. FRIZZY-
HAIRD MAN DOES NOT HEAR OR SEE HER.
MAYBE HE HAS DISAPPEARED, OR IS FROZEN.**

TREVOR drives home from her studio. She wears special
gloves.

She hits several small animals along the way. THUMP.
THUMP. THUMP.

Each one she hits she stops and retrieves, with compassion
and horror. Some of the animals are still alive.

It is a dance; the Hit Animal Dance.

It is funny.

Meanwhile....

FBI MAN

Later that night
I got a disturbing phone call

He gets a phone call. He answers it.

Yello.
(...)
Uh-huhm.
(...)
Uh-huhm.
(...)
Uh-huhm.
(...)
Uh-huhm.
(...)
Uh-huhm.
(...)
I'm there.

He hangs up.

Hospital upstate.
A matter of national security

And so it begins.

THIS COULD BE THAT

The FBI MAN stands next to a DOCTOR

They both stand over the corpse of the FRIZZY-HAIRED
MAN.

The FBI MAN reads from a small piece of paper in a plastic bag, which he handles with rubber gloves and tongs.

The DOCTOR is very, very nervous. He keeps looking over his shoulder.

FBI MAN

The Drive Bys
The Ethnic Cleanse
Checkpoint Fuckyou

DOCTOR

Was in his back pocket
Admitted this morning
Dizziness, fatigue, fever
We assumed it was a severe pleuropneumonic infection
Dangerous but not enough to, um
But then we found that paper
So we did some tests
By the time we figured it out, well
(...)
Rapid diagnostic testing is not widely available for this
x

FBI MAN

Uh-huhm

He revolves around the body, examining it, like a dance.

DOCTOR

We are so glad you are here
The disease is called "tularemia"
"Rabbit disease"
S-sm-smaller mammals act as reservoir hosts
Prairie dogs, hares, muskrats, squirrels, voles
Humans can contract it several ways
Through ticks or flies or mosquitoes
Or by handling the meat and skins of infected animals

FBI MAN

Uh-huhm

DOCTOR

Or um
From food or water that has been contaminated
Or through the air
If um, sprayed

FBI MAN

Uh-huhm

DOCTOR

Um

Symptoms include:

Rapid onset

Sudden fever

Headaches

Muscle aches

Diarrhea

Joint pain

Dry cough

Progressive weakness

It's one of the m-m-most infective bacteria known to m-m-man

What, um, what

FBI MAN

It was used by the Russians during World War II

Before that by the Japanese against Manchuria

The US developed strains of the disease in the 50's

Part of their biological warfare program

Terminated in the early 60's

When used as a weapon

The defense department classifies this

As a category 8 agent

DOCTOR

Wow

Um

FBI MAN

The disease cannot be spread from person to person

It infects through mucous membranes, the gastrointestinal tract, the lungs

The skin

DOCTOR

We have no vaccine

Everyone is so paranoid around here

We sent the receptionist home

The nurses think we moved him to CPU

FBI MAN

Good

DOCTOR

This
Of course this could be a single incident
Like Austerlitz
The little girl
Um
This could be that
If it weren't for the note

The FBI MAN takes off his Ray Bans and leans into the FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN, to inspect him more closely.

We see he has a long scar across one eye.

A beat.

DOCTOR

He was twenty-one
He was a student

The FBI man returns his glasses to his face and looks at the back of the letter.

FBI MAN

"With affection
Trevor"

The DOCTOR disappears.

The FBI man is in a spotlight, thinking. A dramatic moment for him. Maybe music.

He opens his cellphone. Dials a few numbers. Into the receiver:

FBI MAN

It's time.
How soon can you get it to me?
Perfect.

To us.

I won't lie
I'm at my best
When the fate of the nation is at hand

Domestic situations however are not my specialty
International was always my bag

He opens a trunk of costumes.

He dons an exterminator's outfit, "Bugs B-gone", and a cap.

Like any good agent
I adapt.

Voila.
Upstate New York.
Mission?
Discover whether or not target is knowingly utilizing
A classified biological weapon
For the threat toward and/or destruction of human life

So I motored up to Albany
Got myself a shitty, heatless efficiency
the heart of the Hudson Valley
And readied myself for the ride

Meanwhile....

PRUNE CEDARWOOD

WILLIAM , MELANIE, TREVOR, and RANDY are all
seated at dinner.

MELANIE is a little giddy and tipsy
She is dressed elegantly.

TREVOR is unreadable, but slightly on edge.

RANDY eats in complete silence. He wears headphones.

WILLIAM
(sipping wine)

Prune
Cedarwood
Um

MELANIE
As a rule I'm not a red wine person but this

WILLIAM
The fellow recommended it /
A little oaky, but

MELANIE
Mmmmm
Okay
Should we toast?

WILLIAM
To...

MELANIE
Trevor's new series?

TREVOR
Well that's swell of you Melanie
But how can you toast to something you can't possibly grasp?

Slight beat.

Having not seen it, of course.

MELANIE
Oh I know!
To the first of many neighborly dinners!
Thank you for having me, Trevor

TREVOR
Well you just kind of stopped by--

MELANIE
But you didn't have to let me in!

TREVOR
That is absolutely true.
Cheers.

They drink. The doorbell rings.

WILLIAM
Well gosh, now who could that be?

TREVOR gets it. It's the FBI man in his exterminator's
outfit.

Exterminator
TREVOR

Keep eating
I'll find my way around
FBI MAN

No one looks at him.

He winks theatrically at us, then begins to inspect the house. He surreptitiously scrutinizes door hinges and vents.

Do you have vermin?
MELANIE

Just bugs
Flies mostly.
TREVOR

'Tis the season!
Right?
WILLIAM

My studio in the woods is filled with 'em
They buzz around in circles like drunken pilots
They know they're supposed to be dying
Their bodies tell them so
But it's not cold enough to knock them out
So they kinda just flail around in a hazy purgatorio
until their engines peter out
Pretty soon my window sill will be covered
in a writhing pile of half-dead insects.
TREVOR

Melanie finally notices Randy.

He certainly does enjoy his forks!
(...)
Ohhhh!
A lyric just popped into my head.
MELANIE

Red redwiiiiiiiiine
Goes to my heeeeeaaaad
Makes me forget that I'm

No no wait it goes:
Red redwiiiiiiiine
Stay close to me
Don't let me be alone
Just mrahmrahngarahnga

And then there's a rap, I can't remember

MELANIE

Didn't you two used to make wine?
When Trevor first moved in?

(to Trevor)

I remember you on your knees picking grapes outside
You were so young!
I asked what you what you were doing
You said "we're making wine"
But my brain heard "we're making love"
I was so ashamed--

WILLIAM

(suddenly remembering)

Ah!

Rapping.

Red red wine you mek me feel so fine
You keep me rockin' all of the time

MELANIE

(delighted)

Yes!

RANDY

Dad.

WILLIAM

(feeling a little foolish but going for it)

Red red wine you mek me feel so grand
I feel a million dollar when yajusin ma 'and

MELANIE

It's like a code!
Keep going!

WILLIAM

(uncertain)
Red red wine you mek me feel so sad
Any time I see ya go it mek me feel bad

RANDY
Dad! I'm eating!

WILLIAM
(uncertain)
Red red wine you mek me feel so fine
Monkey back and moosaban a sweet ep line

MELANIE
WHAT?!

WILLIAM
(getting into it)
Red red wine you give me oleeba-zing
Oleeba-zing mek me do me own ting

MELANIE
(applauding)
Yay!

WILLIAM
I'm sweating!

MELANIE
That was AMA/ ZING

WILLIAM
(out of breath)
We used to
in grad school
we'd play it over and over
ah

MELANIE
Do you need some / water?

WILLIAM
I have the spins
I'm okay

MELANIE pours him some water.

They all freeze.

Spotlight on the FBI MAN.

FBI MAN

Indulge me a moment

He removes a tiny platinum box from his jacket pocket and smiles broadly.

He opens the lid and carefully dips his pinkie into the box. He shows us something practically invisible on the tip of his finger.

See this?

He walks into the audience. He confides in us. He whispers to us, cajoles us. Flirts.

Too small?

Could be nothing, even?

A grain of sand, a flake of paprika?

A freckle?

Pin prick from a tailoring misadventure?

Ball-point pen mark?

Insect dropping?

Rat ovum?

I could go on....

Well it isn't nothing

Not by a longshot

What you don't see here

Is a two hundred MILLION dollar piece of surveillance equipment

He scrutinizes his pinkie.

Quadruple the signal-to-noise ratio and lux sensitivity of any previous machine close to its class

double the TVL and an optional ten thousand frames per second

thermal/infrared sensor fusion

multi-spectral nighttime imaging

360 degree non-angular field of view

rapid scan frequency

an UNLIMITED operation temperature— records data whether you're at the north pole or the gates of hell

half-mile operating distance

AND
Ninety-eight percent accurate color reproduction

You know how many of these exist in the world?
You're looking at it
Sui generis.
Version one-point-zero.
Classified top secret hush-hush sub-rosa.

You know who they give this to?
No one.
It's never been used.
Tested only twice by the husband-wife team who developed it
Stowed in a platinum box in a crystal drawer in a steel vault in an iron bunker
Dug a hundred miles down into the deep dark molten heart of the earth
Where it was kept for precisely twenty weeks
After which time it was removed
And placed directly into my care.
Three hours ago.

He places it carefully into the platinum box.

Why give it to me, you ask?
I seem like an ordinary fellow.
Hygienic but not suspiciously so
Decent taste in footwear
Marginally fit on a good day
A sheen of competence akin to a mid-level executive

I am not an opera
I am not a threat
I'm a block of clay-shaped clay
I could even be you

So.

Why is it me holding this tiny precious box?

The simple answer?
Because I'm a patriot.

He drops his trousers. Beneath, he wears American flag
boxer shorts.

I realize I have not given myself a proper introduction.
I'll do so via an oblique anecdote

These under-wears were a gift from a lady-friend
Who, it turns out, was too much lady
And not enough friend.

One pair from a set of five.
On the day she bought them
She had gotten her hair permed
She asked me to smell it
I did
pressed my face into her new curls
the chemicals burned my eyes, nose, and throat
I stayed there for a very long time
Burning
Because my loyalty to her was unwavering and bottomless
And the pain was but a small consequence.

A beat.

Precisely forty-seven weeks after the perm
I was called away for my job
Far away

When I returned, I was a few parts short
A fingernail
A toe

He removes his glasses.

An eye.

A beat.

I told my lady friend how I had spent my time away
But ladies don't like to hear such things
Ladies prefer to imagine their sojourning mates, oh,
Doused in sunshine
sipping fruity drinks...

Not suspended from ceilings
Beaten with chains
Shocked with batons
Or injected with drugs.

He pulls up his trousers.

My position often requires long bouts of reflection
Which, at this point, led me to two conclusions:

One:

As unwaveringly loyal as I was to my lady friend
I am precisely five hundred times more loyal to my job.

And two:

He places his glasses back onto his head.

I am bottomless.

I spent seven years in the sacred mountains of Japan
Eating soybean paste and loquats
Studying the ancient martial art of Koryū
Re-acquainting myself with myself
They said they needed to *ease* me back in
Fine, I said
Just give me what you got
And I'll show you what I am.

He retrieves the tiny box again and peeks inside.

Did I mention this is water-proof?

The scene unfreezes and FBI MAN continues to work.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!
Contact the author (sheila.callaghan@gmail.com)
to read more.