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WE ARE NOT THESE HANDS

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WE ARE NOT THESE HANDS

by Sheila Callaghan

BELLY— young woman, early teens (15 years), tough, hard, street-smart, incredibly dirty

MOTH— young woman, early teens (15 years), bright, sweet, a little bit manipulative

LEATHER— man, age 35-45, manic and odd

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Punctuation is used to indicate delivery. Where no punctuation is indicated, delivery may be determined by the actor or director.

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue. When the stroke is not immediately followed by text, the next line should occur on the last syllable of the word before the slash— not an overlap but a concise interruption.

NOTE FOR ACTORS:

While Belly and Moth's language seems infantile and they are described as young-looking, it is important not to have them come off like children, and their language should not sound like baby-talk. They are street-kids; cagey, jaded, and under-educated. The delivery of their language should reflect this.

Although Leather's language is halting, his delivery should not be. His speech is rhythmic, so it should not come off as a stutter but rather a rolling river of words with rocks here and there.

SETTING:

Three spaces: one in the center of the room with six outdated computer screens and keyboards assembled haphazardly, power cords tangled and desks lopsided and mismatched, lights blinking. Each screen will display the titles of the scenes and various bits of text and scattered images throughout the play.

The images should include (but not be limited to) the following, in random order: pornography, video games, breasts, celebrities, brand names, electronics, sex toys, corporate logos, weather, clothing, tooth decay, chat rooms, Flash animations, vacation destinations, muscled abs, etc. They may be displayed in a frantic feedback loop, or as static images, or both.

The text should appear as though it is being typed in real time, letter by letter, and should be presented as simply as possible to indicate a computer and a document.

The second space surrounds the knot of computer screens. It is sooty and bleak: dead trees with blackened trunks, wicker carts with broken wheels, cinderblocks, various bits of ripped cloth and garbage on a dirt road. Several shoddy, hand-painted wooden signs are stuck in the ground and point to the computers. They read "INTERNET".

The third space is located to one side, away from the computers and off the road. It has a crappy dresser and several rickety bunk beds.

The set should not be static, as the feeling of change should be present throughout the play. It should feel as though it is moving, or changing.

ONE: THE LIES BEHIND YOUR EYES

BELLY is sitting by herself staring at the computers. She is sucking on an old grey banana peel very slowly. She is incredibly dirty, and has no shoes. She is also missing a few teeth.

Text on the screens: "According to my research, a sustained economic growth of eight to ten per cent is anticipated over the next two decades. (!!) This province's market has surged ahead so quickly, experts say, by converting much of its economy to an 'unfettered' and 'possibly faulty version' of capitalism (CITATION NEEDED). The theory of the"

After a few moments, MOTH runs in. She also dirty, but less so than BELLY. Her hands are covered in black soot. She catches her breath, then approaches BELLY.

MOTH
(a greeting)

Scuzzer...

Scuzzer... BELLY

Scuzzer-lover... MOTH

They do some sort of elaborate handshake.

What Angelfoot doin' today? MOTH (cont.)

Got the bang bang goin... BELLY

BANG BANG! MOTH

TWO gun-girls today... big black boots up to here, little camel shorts... BELLY

They watch.

Cavity got the titties up? MOTH

Yeah. BELLY

Who he got? MOTH

Bowleg. She onna bed now. BELLY

Lookit them titties! How she walk? MOTH

She not. Jes' lie there, rubbin'.... A'fore you come she kneelin' onna table with a hooey in her whatchit. BELLY

Mercy... MOTH

They watch.

Rutpig got hisself a new lady-talk....

BELLY

Yeah? How far he get?

MOTH

One leg movin'.... other start soon....

BELLY

Where Booger? Booger never late...

MOTH

BELLY points.

Oh. Hate when they switch machines. He too far away now.

MOTH (cont.)

S'pose...

BELLY

A beat. MOTH is bored. She does something to amuse herself. It doesn't work. She is despondent.

Things sure isn't the same since the school blew up.

MOTH

A beat.

Wanner know what I think? I think they knowed it would blow up... Otherwised, why they had us making firecrackers in the lunchroom?

BELLY

Scuzzers.

MOTH

Anus-eaters.

BELLY

Coochie-flappers.

MOTH

CAPITALISTS.

BELLY

MOTH smells her hands and shudders. BELLY examines MOTH's dirty hands.

BELLY (cont.)

You gotter drug 'em in the road til it come off. I drug and drug and it come off.

MOTH

Lookit! Rutpig other leg shakin...

BELLY

He gone for it...

MOTH

Go Rutpig... go rutpig...

They both begin chanting "go rutpig" for a few moments, shaking their legs, until the inevitable happens. They react. Then...

BELLY

Let's get inside, Mothie! Could get us a man talk. Jes' for fun.

MOTH

We got no coins, Bell. Asides, why they gone let TWO crazy kinkers in?

BELLY

Could try... we not try.... jes' sit out here, watchin'...

MOTH

You seen Cavity. He walk like water. He don't got the wild-angry peepers like us. He half-lidded, like he seen it all. Even Rut-pig half-lidded.

BELLY

I can be half-lidded

MOTH

Different for girls. Need more than half-lids. Gotter wear the sex clothes.

BELLY

How you know about the sex-clothes

MOTH

My Mummer got the sex clothes. From back when she work the Cooch club. Cavity always lookin' at the sex-clothes. Angelfoot with the bang-bang, all his gun-girls got the sex clothes

BELLY

The gun-girls isn't REAL, Moth, they is made up of tiny dots of colored light

MOTH

But still... lookit what covers the little dot-titties

They peer into the café.

BELLY

Huh. I got the sex clothes. Mine got fancy glitter-bits sewed in. Mine got little lights that spin around. My boots is REAL. Made of real skin. An' my camel shorts is MINE, not my old Momma's.

MOTH

Where you got it

BELLY

Prezzies. From Ma and Loopy and Crumbs and Dust. Send stuff every week. Big blue boxes with skinny gold ribbons and a million stamps.

Beat. MOTH knows she's lying but does not say anything.

BELLY knows that MOTH knows.

BELLY grows morose. She watches the café.
MOTH watches BELLY.

MOTH

Something go down at Maidenhouse last night?

BELLY

No.

MOTH

You get slapped up by one a' the bigger girls?

BELLY

No.

MOTH

Needle try to take your tooth powder again?

BELLY

Nobody done nothing at Maidenhouse.

MOTH

Someone talk rank about your Pa bein' a Capitalist?

A beat.

BELLY
(quietly)

Yeah.

A beat.

MOTH

They all scuzzers anyhow....

BELLY

He weren't no Capitalist!

MOTH

I know...

A beat. BELLY sucks on her banana peel, sulking.

BELLY

You wanner know somethin'?

MOTH

Yeah

BELLY

When I were four. I were a sentinel. I standed at the end of Big Road and I weared black boots that shined like they was wet and I carried around a machete strapped to my hip in a brown leather holder and I weared a bright red piece of silk wrapped around my forehead. I were seven feet high then. And I were a mens. And when kids run up to me I never smacked 'em, specially when they was crying and covered in white ash from when the school blowed up.

MOTH

I know, Belly.

A beat. They watch the café. They notice something, then in unison they begin fake-picking their noses and chanting "go booger, go booger" until the inevitable wipe happens.

A beat.

BELLY (cont.)

Let's try tonight.

I thought the man-talk was for fun.

BELLY

Yeah. Yeah.

An uncomfortable beat. They finish their bananas.

BELLY (cont.)

Flasher got her earlobe cutted off. Came at her with the machete. SHING! Blood everywhere.

MOTH

Why?

BELLY

Prolly flappin' her cooch around. You know how she do. Flappin' that cooch around like a wet tuna.

She demonstrates, making wet-tuna sounds.

MOTH

What happened to the earlobe?

BELLY

Dunno. Found her on the lawn lookin' for it in the dead grass.

MOTH

Scuzzers.

They continue to watch inside the café. Suddenly, BELLY gasps. LEATHER enters.

BELLY

Lookit!

MOTH

New guy.

BELLY

Pretty clean-lookin.

MOTH

Leather bag... lookit all them coins he put in!

BELLY

Where he got so many?

MOTH

Maybe he stealed.

BELLY

No way he stealed. Get his hand chopped off. Got my hand chopped off 'cause I stealed a banana from Kicker when I were nine. Came at me with the machete. SHING! Blood everywhere. It growed back.

MOTH

Hands doesn't get growed back.

BELLY

Do.

They watch.

BELLY (cont.)

He a REAL mens.

MOTH

Mummer tell me go for the mens. Boys get you babies, mens get you homes.

BELLY

What we call him?

MOTH

Leather.

BELLY

Leather.

MOTH

Leather got a bunch of PAPERS with him...

BELLY

Leather gonna use him PAPERS in the CAFÉ

They giggle and watch, continuing to hold hands. Then they begin chanting "go Leather, go Leather" and mimicking him adjusting his papers.

Text on the screens: "The theory of expansion, according to said experts, is not based on any grandiose economic premise, but on one simple idea: giving the ruling force the courage to let its people make money on ideas— which will

eventually be turned into tangible goods and thus stimulate a thriving economy. (note: I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THIS MEANS)"

TWO: NOT TO SAY HE ISN'T A DOOR

LEATHER appears in another space. He is clean-looking and weary. He clutches a leather bag and speaks into a hand-held tape recorder.

The insides of his ears are black.

LEATHER

It isn't it isn't it isn't. Okay. Just, and the noise, the the bling bling bling bling bling bling bling bling bling and me sitting there as though work were actually something that could, that that could be DONE. That I could DO. But. And and the PEOPLE, and the PORN, porn everywhere. So highly illegal. But then I, then so is the café I'm I imagine. But. You know THREE people threw up on the bus to the cafe tonight? Bad shocks, or . Or maybe the appalling diets of the, which would explain the the teeth, but. So they just leaned over and spewed right there, right in the aisle. Forty minute bus ride, Mother. And people SMOKING ON THE BUS. I mean I just. And the police here have KNIVES. HUGE ones. And they're EVERYWHERE, which makes no, I mean this is a time of peace, right? And people spit here, they spit everywhere, hawk and spit. On floors. I mean floors of BUILDINGS, Mother. Hhuh.

And my hostel? Shutters on the windows that don't even LATCH. And no mirrors, like ANYWHERE. And and of course no heat, and I asked the boy for extra blankets and he he just.

Banging from outside. LEATHER covers the microphone of the recorder.

LEATHER (cont.)

ONE. SECOND. PLEASE.

Banging stops. Back to the recorder.

LEATHER (cont.)

Sorry, I'm in the, I'm in one of those, one of those. Things. Anyway. Yeah. So. Ahhh. Forget it. Oh the bathrooms, or I don't suppose you can even CALL them, tst, there's no bath. And toilets? No. A TROUGH, Mother. With these little cinderblock walls that come up to your knees and a trough that you STRADDLE, okay, you squat over, over the trough in a straddle and let it, let whatever, dangle from you until you, and, and NO toilet paper, and of course if someone is squatting in the stall next to you they can just watch your stuff float by beneath them, and you PRAY that the bucket next to you is filled with enough water to wash it away. Because if it isn't. Well. I mean I mean. How much could plumbing actually cost? What is this whole, okay preserving antiquity is swell and all but DO PEOPLE REALLY NEED TO SEE MY POOP?

Banging again from outside.

LEATHER (cont.)

You know. Working here isn't. Easy. Eating here isn't easy. Nothing. Not that I thought it would be, but. Again. No negativity. Because, because the sun is shining and the, I haven't been robbed and I'm I don't have dysentery, so. I think. I think I'm gonna cry.

He shuts off his recorder and begins to cry. After a moment he pulls himself together and takes a deep breath.

He rewinds the tape and begins again. His demeanor shifts dramatically. He is hyper-cheery.

So, alright, and HELLO and by the way, things are MUCH better today. Oh I'm in the broom closet of the opera house across the street from my hostel and so you might hear some, some banging occasionally because I think someone REALLY needs a broom. Heh.

So anyway. I found this stuff, this kind of resinous kind of sticky waxy stuff that comes in packages, like these sticks wrapped in plastic, and so that stuff I'm not sure what it's for but it's but I've been sticking it in my ears to block the noise at night and it's been working like a dream. Although it's heck to try and get it off my fingers. But what, right like this is a FASHION SHOW, or. Heh heh. NO. That's what, remember? When I'd get all dandied up for school, shoes spotless and those little striped ties, and you'd roll your eyes and say, "Darling, this is NOT a fashion show." Heh. Well mother, I've uh come quite a, quite a long way.

He notices a spot on his shoe. He licks his thumb and wipes his shoe, oblivious.

But anyway. My work at the café today? Pages and pages of stuff. This is big, mother. It's going to be. BIG. No more abject poverty, ha-ha. No more ignominy, no more begging. All those snot-nosed little brothers of yours will be asking ME for chump change. And I'll LAUGH IN THEIR FACES just like they did to me. Ha-ha.

He squints at his papers in the dim light.

No light... and of course a lot of it is, it seems to be, huh, difficult to read... my hand cramps up so fast, then I've got like a, like a CLAW HAND, and then I'm trying to write stuff out and it's like OW, and uh of course they wouldn't yeah, have anything as efficient as a pr, a WORKING PRINTER at the, at the. So. Anyway. I'm about to, to recite my findings onto the tape, Mother, so if you aren't interested in my research then I suggest you fast forward. Okay. I'm about to start. Okay. Ready? And. Fast forward... NOW.

He struggles to decipher his notes.

Okay, date, 4 March, time, 23 hundred, and um, place, 24th meridian, heh heh. No. First item. Source: illegible. Uuummmmm. A. Compilation. Of. Of sources. Accompanied by my own insights. To be determined at a later. Um. So. Ba ba ba ba ba OH! Ahh, no, no, that's... gum. Um..... okay, here. Yada yada yada, god this isn't even MINE, where did... free ten minute foot massage?.... Okay. Okay. So. A society, an entire nnnnnnnnnation, at at... where's the rest... Ah Ha! And the question remains. The question.... re... maaaaaaains...

He flips through his papers, lost.

To be determined at a later date.

He shoves his papers back into his briefcase.

Okay, Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother Mother and I'm back. You, ah. Yeah. In case you bothered to sit through that. Turns out I didn't do as much, as much work as, as I'd. Huh. Well I suppose it's still. And I haven't even talked to any of the, the natives yet. Except the boy at the, and you know how that went. Oh and that prostitute. But that was just a blowjob, really. So.

Oh! You know. I. Had a. You were in a dream of mine this morning. No it wasn't a a dream really, it was a, a, a memory-type? Thing? I think we were in the old house.

Anyway, you NEVER yelled, Mother, you weren't a yeller, but. This one morning you were yelling, at the maid. There was blood on the, a lot of blood, on your bed sheet. "What is this? Gracielle! What is this?" Remember? I was, I was confused because Gracielle had been with me all morning, she made waffles with whipped-cream faces but their mouths were straight lines and, and I asked "why aren't they smiling?" and she said "because they're bored." But, but so, anyway so you were yelling in the hall, and I I I said, "Mother, Gracielle was making waffles." And you. I think then you realized it was your blood. And you said. Quietly, you said. "Oh." And closed your bedroom door.

I was twelve I think? And I, and one day much later we were drinking cappuccinos in the sunroom and you, you told me I had lost a sister.

You know I never, um. Until this morning, I never connected the two, the two moments.

A beat.

Okay. Signing off now. Misses and kisses, my beloved Mumster. Mooch mooch mooch.

He pops the tape out, and pops another tape into the recorder. Presses play. A very old recording of a forties crooner-type begins to play.

LEATHER listens a bit, and then he begins to dance.

Banging is heard. He ignores it.

THREE: WE FALTER ON THE VERGE OF A VERGE

BELLY and MOTH are outside the cafe. They are dressed part-clown, part-whore, part pop-star. Their make-up is wild and grotesque, and their hair is huge. They look completely awkward and uncomfortable, BELLY especially.

They check each other's make-up and steel themselves, then sneak inside the café.

Video games, techno music, rock and roll, modems connecting, spacebars clicking, keyboards typing, error bells dinging, and other shrill computer noises of our generation flood the air.

Leather is typing.

Text on the screens: "As one notable scholar (CITE!!) puts it, 'the psychology of desire transforms an idea into an asset.' The term 'psychology of desire' is particularly poignant to me at this moment, as I have immersed myself in said culture for an unspecified period of time and therefore I have witnessed an overwhelming _____. (note: COMPLETE THIS THOUGHT)"

LEATHER is reading from a computer screen. The insides of his ears are still blackened. A cup of coffee sits by his elbow.

He is typing furiously.

Slowly, and on tiptoe, BELLY and MOTH move into view behind LEATHER. They are attached to each other and their eyes are huge and wild, looking around.

LEATHER senses a presence behind him. He turns slowly, and sees the girls. He stares at them a moment, then turns back around and tries to continue working.

BELLY and MOTH begin moving their mouths weirdly, in a parody of seduction. LEATHER again senses them and turns around.

LEATHER

Good Lord. Okay. I, I I'm not sure what that, what that, what you're doing, there? With the. But it's clear that you want. Something. From me and. And although I have no doubt that, that you may think that is, um. EFFECTIVE, or uh uh COMMUNICATIVE, but. I have to, I just have to tell you that. Um. I am I'm at an utter, a a complete and utter loss.

MOTH

We seen you come in this morning. We peeper through the window. We peeper every day. Right Belly?

BELLY is too terrified to talk. She simply stares wide-eyed and closes her mouth.

LEATHER

Is she. Is she.

MOTH

She jes' hinkey. The lights and all. Bell? You hinkey?

BELLY

Unnnaaagggkk.

LEATHER

She doesn't look very. Um.

MOTH

She not ated since one banana last night.

LEATHER

Not what?

MOTH

Her tummy angry.

LEATHER

What? I don't under.

MOTH

Tummy angry. Need shiners. Bananas?

LEATHER

I have, uh, a half a sandwich?

He reaches into his bag and pulls out a sandwich.
He hands it to BELLY. She takes one tiny bite and
then shoves the rest down the front of her pants.

MOTH

She not always get feeded at Maidenhouse. The bigger girls take her stuff.

LEATHER

Yes, well. That was my dinner, so.

BELLY digs into her pants to hand the sandwich
back to LEATHER.

LEATHER (cont.)

No! No, it's it's. Keep it.

BELLY shoves the sandwich back into her pants.

A beat.

LEATHER (cont.)

Well. If you don't mind. I'll just.

He turns back around to do work. BELLY and
MOTH remain behind him, staring. He senses them
and turns around.

LEATHER (cont.)

Truly, now. You want what, coins? Okay, I don't believe in, in begging. Okay because it does
nothing for your economy if I'm, if I give you ladies money for for drugs or. Or candy or.
Make-up or, or whatever it, it is. You. So.

MOTH

Are you a real mens?

LEATHER

What? Okay, parents? Do, do either of you have, any?

MOTH

I got a mummer and a Unkie. They home. Belly Ma tooked Crumbs 'cross the river when Belly
were little. Loopy an' Dust already there. Her Pa supposed to bring her later a-cause she the
youngest. But he. He didn't. Cause he got. Bell, what's that word, the big one?

BELLY

Tooked.

MOTH

No, the big one.

BELLY

Tooked. He got tooked away by mens in black shiny boots an' machetes strapped to their hips an' red silk around their foreheads.

MOTH

IMPRISONATED.

BELLY
(quietly)

Yeah.

A beat. LEATHER digs into his pocket and gives BELLY and MOTH two coins each. They stare at the coins in awe.

LEATHER

Now, go. Play a. Look, someone just got up over there. Go on.

BELLY runs off with the coins. MOTH hangs back, staring at LEATHER.

LEATHER (cont.)
(to himself)

Unbe-unbelievable. With the, I'm like huh? Crisis, but I mean.... Hooo. Lu-GOO-brious.

MOTH

You talk funny.

Startled, he whirls around.

LEATHER

Ha! Mmmnnggg. I'm. Ahhhh. I'm not from around here.

MOTH

You from 'cross the river?

LEATHER

Yes.

MOTH is enraptured. She is silent for a bit, then the coffee mug catches her eye.

MOTH

Is that cafe? REAL cafe?

LEATHER

Coffee, yes. Bit watery, actually. And they don't have, they don't have cream. Or sugar.

MOTH stares at it, bug-eyed. He hands the cup to her. She takes it reverently.

He notices her filthy hands.

LEATHER (cont.)

Goodness. Your hands.

MOTH

So?

LEATHER

What is it?

MOTH

Gunpowder. From packin' firecrackers.

LEATHER

It doesn't come off?

MOTH

You gotter drug your hands inna road. Belly drug and drug and hers come off. But I not drug. Like it. Remind me of stuff.

She smells her hands.

LEATHER

Soap, maybe?

MOTH

"Soap-maybe." "Goodness".

She giggles.

LEATHER

Pardon?

MOTH

Look like you kin use soap-maybe in your what-what's.

LEATHER

My what?

MOTH points to LEATHER's ears. He begins wiping at them frantically.

LEATHER (cont.)

Drat... No mirrors... thought I got it all...

MOTH continues to giggle.

LEATHER (cont.)

Oh yeah, look at the old guy, with the with the dirty ears, ha ha...

MOTH laughs harder. LEATHER joins her in spite of himself.

LEATHER (cont.)

Oh yeah, isn't he just a a a fountain of fopishness, a a a monument of of misfortune...

MOTH
(in hysterics)

A doody-eared dipshit!!

LEATHER
(slightly less amused)

Yes, that too. D-don't spill...

MOTH nods, suddenly serious. She regards her coffee solemnly. She takes a long, luscious sip of it, eyes closed.

LEATHER watches her curiously.

LEATHER

You've. Never had coffee.

MOTH

No.

She drinks again.

LEATHER

You're very young, aren't you? I mean, you, you, you're very young.

Not so many. MOTH

How, I mean, mind if I, how old... LEATHER

Ten plus five. MOTH

Goodness. LEATHER

What? MOTH

You seem so. Little? LEATHER

Oh. MOTH
(disappointed)

I mean, that's not a, a bad thing, per se... LEATHER

What 'bout now? MOTH

MOTH begins to do that seductive thing with her lips.

Um, okay. Yes, you you look much older, now. LEATHER

Sex clothes help too. That's how we get inside. MOTH

What's the point of. If you have no coins. You can't DO anything, here. Can't get a machine, can't get a a a coffee. LEATHER

I know MOTH

So...? LEATHER

MOTH shrugs.

MOTH

Jes'. Jes' wanner be inside.

She closes her eyes and takes another deep, long, luscious sip of coffee.

LEATHER

That's. Um. You can finish that.

She does. LEATHER watches her. At some point, she makes eye contact with him; a subtle, kind invitation. She hands him the coffee cup, then lifts her other hand and strokes his fingers.

LEATHER (cont.)

Um. You. Have, have you ever, um. Had sex be, before?

MOTH

Yes.

LEATHER (cont.)

Do, do you think you might. Want to? With me? I I mean, we don't HAVE to of course, I just, I thought, you know, with the, uh uh, although that might not be, huh.

MOTH

You wanner put your wonk in my tootie.

LEATHER

Um, y-yes. Among among other things.

MOTH

Now?

LEATHER

Well, not. I have a place.

MOTH

Okay. Lemme tell Belly.

LEATHER
(relieved)

Excellent.

MOTH looks around for BELLY but can't find her.

MOTH (cont.)

Where she go'ed?

LEATHER

Her coins probably ran out.

MOTH
(knowing better)

Oh. Prolly.

LEATHER gathers his papers anxiously, frantically.
He is beeming.

LEATHER

Well. I just. Hoo. This is, this is. I didn't expect to come here today and find. I don't normally. But I said to myself, "Take a chance." Because one must, to to take chances in this life. And you, you seem so. So kind? There's not much, I haven't found. This place has not been kind to me. Yet. Until now. So. I thank you. I thank you for this. But I don't know um. Your. Your.

MOTH

Moth.

LEATHER

Moth. A little moth. Well. Shall we?

He extends his arm. She doesn't know what to do with it. She extends hers as well. LEATHER laughs out loud.

LEATHER (cont.)

Very well.

He takes her arm. They exit.

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