
[BLACKGAARD'S PLACE. THE FIRST CLASS. THE SCENE BEGINS WITH THE PERPLEXING SOUND OF THE CLASS DOING MOUTH EXERCISES: "BRRRRR"S AND "AH-AH-AH-AH" AND "HMMMM"S. IN ATTENDANCE ARE: JACK, CONNIE, EUGENE AND CHARLES -- ALONG WITH SHANNON. BLACKGAARD IS GOING ABOUT THIS CLASS WITH FEIGNED PLEASANTRY THROUGH CLENCHED TEETH.]

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Very good, class. Those mouth exercises will help you to speak clearly and *project* your voice. Your acting will be of no use if your words are not as sweet whispers in the back row of the balcony.

CHARLES:

Why will we be whispering in the back row of the balcony, Mr. Blackgaard? Shouldn't we be on stage?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

A figure of speech, Charles. Speak so you'll be heard.

CHARLES:

(MUMBLES) Yes, sir.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

What?

CHARLES:

(LOUDER) Yes, sir.

SHANNON:

I *always* speak clearly, Mr. Blackgaard. Being a cheerleader has taught me the importance of that.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Very good, Shannon. Now --

SHANNON:

And when I played the part of Katie Crabapple in my second grade production of --

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes, Shannon. We're all confident in your ability to talk loudly. Now, class, our next exercise will be to help you develop another important tool of acting: the act of *becoming*.

CONNIE:

Becoming what?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Precisely the question that must be asked. Becoming *what*? Your *character*, of course. Since this is our first class together, we shall begin with the basics. For the next few minutes, I'd like you to think of -- then become -- an inanimate object.

JACK:

A what?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Become something that doesn't move or talk -- a rock or a tree.

CHARLES:

Is that why we'll have to whisper to the back row?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

No, Charles.

EUGENE:

Pardon me, Mr. Blackgaard, but technically speaking, a tree isn't inanimate. It moves as it grows and spreads it's appendages.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

I stand corrected. I want you to become *things* -- that's all. *Things*. Since you're so interested in trees, Eugene. Why don't you become one?

EUGENE:

A tree? Er, precisely what kind of tree were you thinking: deciduous, coniferous, perhaps a -
- ?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Be a tree, Eugene. A tree blowing gently in the wind.

EUGENE:

Of course. But what is my motivation? Is the tree blowing gently because it is old and beaten by decades of weather or is it --

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Forget the wind. You're standing perfectly still --

EUGENE:

But why would -- ?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

With your bark tightly covering
your *mouth*.

EUGENE:

(THROUGH TIGHT LIPS) Yes, sir.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Now, unless there are *other*
questions ... *become* something!

[THERE IS A RUSTLE AS THE CLASS TRIES TO DECIDE, THEN TAKE THEIR
POSITIONS. A BRIEF NOTE OF "TIME PASSAGE" MUSIC IS HEARD,
THEN:]

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(CLAPS HIS HANDS) Very good,
class. I think that's all for
today. Jack -- your imitation of
a house with a two-car garage
having a pizza delivered was most
... imaginative. Connie, I
appreciated your attempt at being
a broken milkshake dispenser.
Charles, your large dirt clod was
unforgettable. Shannon --

SHANNON:

Yes, sir?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Your appearance as a rose pedal
was without compare.

SHANNON:

Thank you. You know, I played an
entire rose *bush* in my first grade
prod --

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes, thank you.

EUGENE:

(CLEARS THROAT) And what about me, sir?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Eugene. Yes. Your tree. The words escape me.

EUGENE:

Thank you.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Well, then, I suppose this is as good a time as any to announce that the ultimate goal of this class -- apart from making you better actors -- is to put together a production of some sort to be performed for the public.

[AUDIBLE AFFIRMATIVE RESPONSES FROM THE CLASS.]

CHARLES:

You mean, like, get up in front of people and perform?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Of course. A *recital*, if you will.

CONNIE:

What will we be performing?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

I haven't decided yet. I'll know by our next class. All right? I see by the gaggle of parents

gathering at the door that we're
over our time. Dismissed!

[SHUFFLING SOUNDS, CASUAL CONVERSATION, ETC., AS THE CLASS
GATHERS THEIR THINGS TO GO. THE WAITING PARENTS ENTER.
CHARLES' MOTHER GO TO HIM, AS DOES SHANNON'S FATHER -- RICHARD
EVERETT.]

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

Charles! How as it, son?

CHARLES:

Okay, I guess. Where's Dad?

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

Working late at the factory. Mr.
Blackgaard?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes?

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

I'm Maureen Thompson, Charles'
Mom. Thank you very much for
allowing him in your class.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

It was my ... pleasure. And I
have no doubt that when Charles
gets up on stage, people will say
to themselves ... "Now *that's*
Charles!"

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

Do you think so? Oh, isn't that
exciting, Charles?

CHARLES:

I guess.

MAUREEN THOMPSON:

Well, it's nice to meet you.

RICHARD EVERETT:

(APPROACHING) Blackgaard!

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes?

RICHARD EVERETT:

Richard Everett here. Shannon's my daughter. How did my little pumpkin do?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Pumpkin? I thought she was trying to be a rose.

RICHARD EVERETT:

What?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Nothing.

RICHARD EVERETT:

Talented little gal, isn't she? She'll be a star in no time at all, I'm sure.

SHANNON:

Daddy! It'll take a *little* time.

RICHARD EVERETT:

Not with my baby. Tell you what, Sugarplum, you do a good job in this class -- make your ol' Dad proud -- and there might be a small present at the end of it for you.

SHANNON:

Daddy!

RICHARD EVERETT:

Perhaps that *pool* you wanted in
the back yard?

SHANNON:

Olympic size?

RICHARD EVERETT:

Don't push it.

SHANNON:

Oh, *thank* you, Daddy!

[EVERETT'S PAGER GOES OFF.]

RICHARD EVERETT:

Oh, you'll have to excuse us. I'm
being paged. (TO SHANNON) Come
on, Shannon, I can make the call
from the car. (THEY GO)

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(AS THEY GO) Tah-tah.

JACK:

Mr. Blackgaard?

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Yes, Jack?

JACK:

I have to go deliver some pizzas,
but I wanted to thank you for
teaching this class.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

I'm sure it'll be an experience
for all of us.

JACK:

I hope so! See ya later!

[CONNIE AND EUGENE APPROACH]

EUGENE:

Mr. Blackgaard, before I go I'd
like to express my surprise that
this class was as enjoyable as it
was.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

Er, thanks.

CONNIE:

Yeah -- me, too. I know when you
first came to town that I said you
crawled out from under a rock and
should be tarred, feathered and
driven from town on a rail, but I
think my opinion is changing.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

So glad to hear it.

CONNIE:

See ya next time.

EUGENE:

Farewell.

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(CHUCKLES PLEASANTLY) Goodbye ...
goodbye ...

[HE CLOSES THE DOOR AFTER THEM]

R.EDWIN BLACKGAARD:

(CHUCKLE TURNS INTO A GROWL INTO A
ROAR) Shakespeare!