

Excerpts from “Giving up the Dream”
A play in two acts.

Characters:

Thomas

Charlotte

Sal

Denise

Sandy

Morris

ACT 1, SCENE 1

(We open on a dark stage. As quietly as possible, Thomas enters in the dark, carrying a typewriter. He walks to the center of the stage where a simple desk and chair sit facing the audience. He drops the typewriter onto the desk, a second or two after, a single spotlight turns on and shines on Thomas and the desk. He glares at the tech booth for a moment.)

THOMAS:

(Frustrated) It's okay... You'll get it next time.

(He let out a long sigh and then sits down at the desk. He opens a drawer and takes out some sheets of paper, and begins to place them in the typewriter)

THOMAS:

I don't know what to write. It's not that I can't write, I just don't know what to say. It's not for a lack of effort. I've done everything I can. I just feel like I'm at the end of my rope. *(He shakes his head)* who else has this issue? No no no... let me rephrase... We all have issues in our jobs, but who else has a job where the very task of putting a pen to paper is so... gargantuan? What other job has a word for when you can't do your job? I'm sorry... but I've never heard of a person having lawyer's block, have you? *(beat)* I'm not joking around, you know? This is serious to me. I don't know what else to do!

(He pauses, and takes a moment to collect himself)

THOMAS:

Sorry. I'm probably getting ahead of myself. Hi. I'm Thomas. This is my desk, and my apartment. I know there isn't much to it, but it's enough for me, at least. This is my play, and mine alone. Don't let any playbill tell you otherwise.

(He walks to the front of the desk and leans against it)

THOMAS:

The way I see it is if I can't write a good story, at least I can tell my story, and you're a sorry enough audience to go and see this thing. Even a writer with no stories has a story unfolding before his own eyes, and the best part is, if I'm telling my own story, I can tell it however I want.

(Thomas claps his hands twice, and nothing happens. He glares up at the tech booth. He claps again and then the spotlight goes out, and the stage is illuminated by disco lighting, some sort of nifty music plays in the background)

THOMAS:

(He claps again, and the lights go back to normal) You get the idea. These are the perks of being a writer. There aren't very many perks, though. It's mostly just drawbacks. There's no money, so instead of the disco ball of my dreams I get this.

(A stagehand runs out and places a cheap lamp with no shade on the side of the desk.)

THOMAS:

Being a writer is so much more than the money though, it's also the people, but in the worst way. It's expectations, and criticism, and disappointment, so much disappointment.

(A siren is heard, along with flashing red lights, the phrase "whiny bullshit alert" repeats over and over)

THOMAS:

Oh shit, not this again. *(Yelling at the booth to no avail)* Can you please stop??? Ugh, well, that's my internal monologue up there. That's who I've been yelling at this whole time. Despite its best efforts. It can't stop me from writing. Over the years I've amassed quite a collection.

(He pulls out a stack of scripts from a drawer and drops them on the desk)

THOMAS:

You'd think if I wrote all these plays, I'd have a Pulitzer prize by now. If I told you I had a Pulitzer price I bet you'd all believe me... But I don't. Every play I've written ends up going nowhere, but I won't let it stop me. It's always—

(Suddenly the lights come up on the left side of the stage, Sal sits on a desk, smoking a cigar that he lit with a dollar bill, Thomas walks over to him and sits across from him)

SAL:

—too much substance, not enough flair. You understand?

THOMAS:

No... I don't—

SAL:

—You ever see Hamilton?

THOMAS:

Hamilton... no—

SAL:

—Well, you're missing out! Now that's a damn good show. Damn good show, that one. I had a chance to bankroll Hamilton, you know. I just didn't want to have that many immigrants in a show. I mean, what is this? West Side Story... It's awful.

(beat, he stares off into the distance)

THOMAS:

So, you want me to be more like Hamilton?

SAL:

Well, no, but yes. Be original, but not so original that it makes people think, okay?

(another beat, Thomas is uncomfortable)

SAL:

Here, let me explain. Everyone wants to sing along to the raps in Hamilton, but no one wants to think about the people of color playing slave-owners, ya hear?

THOMAS:

... right, I was just hoping to be a bit more like Samuel Beckett than Lin Manuel Miranda

SAL:

Oh, spare me that shit. Do you know how boring *Waiting for Godot* is? Do you think anyone would go to see that show aside from theater professors or nerdy kids? *(the two look at the audience for a moment)*

THOMAS:

No, I guess you're right. I'll have to make some more edits.

SAL:

(Having a realization) Wait a minute... I'm onto something!

THOMAS:

What?

SAL:

Waiting for God-hoe!

THOMAS:

I'm sorry?

SAL:

Think about it for a minute? What to the millennials love these days more than sexual liberation?

THOMAS:

I uhhh...

SAL:

Listen, the two of them pop out wearing cock rings, and the waiting part is....

THOMAS:

Is...

(Sal raises his eyebrows)

THOMAS:

Oh, gross.

SAL:

Oh, come on, don't tell me you're so uptight that you've never worn a cock ring before!

(Thomas pauses for a moment and turns to the audience, the lights switch to the disco lighting once again)

THOMAS:

(To the audience, melodramatically) You see what I get put through. Now here's the real question. Sal, are you wearing a... ring right now?

SAL:

(Slyly) Yes.

THOMAS:

Just wondering, thanks.

(Disco lighting stops, Thomas turns back to Sal)

THOMAS:

Well thank you for the advice, Sal. It really means the world to me.

SAL:

Anytime, kid. You've got spunk you just gotta figure out how to market it.

THOMAS:

You know we're the same age, right Sal?

SAL:

What? Yeah sure.

(The spotlight shifts back to center stage where Thomas lazily tosses his script on the desk and sits down, distressed)

THOMAS:

I can't fucking stand that guy. If he weren't the only agent who could find me work, then I'd have left him long ago. He's right, though. I'm going about this all wrong. I can't be writing for myself; I have to write for the audience. I have to write for... MY audience... Why don't you just tell me what you want to hear?

(He looks around the audience as if he is asking for ideas.)

THOMAS:

This isn't a fucking lecture hall, people. Stop acting like you're in class. Anyone have ideas? Shout them out, please!

(He listens to the ideas of the audience all at once, trying to make sense of them all)

THOMAS:

(motioning for everyone to stop) No no no, I can't hear a thing you say if you all speak at once. I don't know why I thought otherwise. You know... never mind. Here goes nothing.

(He starts typing, after writing for a few moments, Charlotte enters, clearly in a good mood. She carries a bag of groceries with her)

CHARLOTTE:

You'll never guess what happened today

THOMAS:

Did you get the promotion?

CHARLOTTE:

(excited) I did! How about you? How did your meeting with Saul go?

THOMAS:

Sal, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE:

Oh, right. Well?

THOMAS:

He said it wasn't enough like Hamilton.

CHARLOTTE:

Oh well that is a good show. I'm sorry though Thomas.

(she places the groceries down on the desk and turns away to hang her coat offstage, the groceries spill over the typewriter)

CHARLOTTE:

Oh, Thomas I'm so sorry! Let me get that for you.

THOMAS:

It's really okay Char, I haven't been having much luck anyway.

CHARLOTTE:

Same old writer's block?

THOMAS:

The very same.

CHARLOTTE:

Oh, that's okay, I'm sure it'll come along eventually.

(Charlotte freezes onstage, Thomas walks downstage to the center. Lights down, with a single spotlight on Thomas, with disco lights)

THOMAS:

She says that. She always says that, but it's so much easier said than done. Yeah, it'll come along eventually but I could very well be dead by the time it comes. I just need something to flush out the bad ideas...what I need... *(disco lights suddenly come off)* what I need is a laxative!

CHARLOTTE:

(Suddenly unfreezing) A laxative? Why didn't you say anything? I could've gotten them at the store!

THOMAS:

Oh... no... It's fine.

(Charlotte shakes her head, naturally unaware of Thomas's internal monologue)

CHARLOTTE:

(Putting the groceries away) You know, for a writer, I've almost never seen you actually sit down and write.

THOMAS:

It's not that easy, you know.

CHARLOTTE:

(Turning to face him) Oh right, because I'm sure you've had things so hard. You know I know mom supported you, but I don't think she'd want to see you like this.

(Lights come up on the side of the stage, Thomas and Charlotte's mother, Denise, lies in a hospital bed, disco lights on)

DENISE:

Thomas I just know that you'll do it in the end, you hear? I don't care how long it takes but I'm just sure you can do it.

(Thomas gets up and walks into the spotlight in front of Denise)

THOMAS:

(Motioning to stop) No! I don't want to think about this right now. You can't just put a light on when I'M not ready, you understand?

(Thomas returns to the center spotlight as if nothing happened, disco lights off)

CHARLOTTE:

Don't be upset Thomas. At least you have your reading tonight, right? Even if Saul—

THOMAS:

—Sal

CHARLOTTE:

Even if Sal doesn't want to see it, someone else might and they might like it! He isn't your only option, you know.

THOMAS:

Yes, I suppose you're right. I've just been at this long enough to know what my avenues are.

CHARLOTTE:

Avenues?

THOMAS:

Oh, you know, my points of entry. How I can actually get a script in someone's hands.

CHARLOTTE:

Ah, right.

THOMAS:

It's all about who you know.

CHARLOTTE:

And who do you know?

THOMAS:

I know Sal.

CHARLOTTE:

You know Sal, right.

(Beat)

CHARLOTTE:

Has “Sal” been finding you any work recently?

THOMAS:

He booked me the reading tonight.

CHARLOTTE:

Is it paid?

THOMAS:

No

CHARLOTTE:

Then how do you plan on paying rent this month, or the electric bill?

THOMAS:

I’m... not sure

CHARLOTTE:

Do you need me to cover it again, Tom?

THOMAS:

Could you? I really think I could take off after this reading, Sal’s got some really great ideas for my script that could really help it take off!

CHARLOTTE:

It’s fine but we really can’t keep doing this—

THOMAS:

—Listen, I’m gonna be late if I wait much longer, so I have to go.

CHARLOTTE:

Okay Thomas, but I think it’s important that we have a talk about this—

THOMAS:

—Yeah definitely, see you there!

(Thomas exits)

CHARLOTTE:

Goddamnit, Thomas.

(Blackout)

Act 1, Scene 2

(Lights up on the side of the stage, the sounds of a city street are heard, Sandy and Morris enter, Sandy lights a cigarette and offers it to Morris, then lights one for herself. Thomas enters shortly after. He addresses the audience directly while the two of them chat)

THOMAS:

See this is my least favorite part of the job. You'd think I'd love it, but I don't. If anything, the criticism scares me. This is one of the few moments in life where it is not only socially acceptable to lie, but it's even encouraged. I'll never know what they actually think of it. Here, look at this. *(Thomas turns around and addresses Sandy and Morris, without approaching them, the disco lights turn on)* Hey Sandy!

(Sandy and Morris both turn towards Thomas)

SANDY:

Yeah Thomas?

THOMAS:

What'd you think of the show?

SANDY:

I really liked it!

THOMAS:

No like, what'd you actually think? I'm trying to prove a point to the audience.

SANDY:

Oh um... I...

MORRIS:

(Jumping in) It was a bit long.

SANDY:

Yeah... We sort of liked that one production of *Rent* a lot more.

MORRIS:

Which one?

SANDY:

Oh, you know, the one where—

THOMAS:

— Okay thanks guys, that's all I needed to hear. *(He goes back to addressing the audience)* Anyway, you get the idea.

(He walks up to Sandy and Morris, this time they notice him more naturally, disco lights off)

THOMAS:

Guys! Thank you so much for coming out!

SANDY & MORRIS:

(Ad lib) Of course! Don't mention it! etc...

THOMAS:

So what'd you think of it?

SANDY & MORRIS:

(Ad lib-ed again, stumbling over each other's words) Oh we really liked it! Yeah, it was super good! I especially liked that one part... etc...

THOMAS:

Oh, right. Well, I'm glad you liked it.

SANDY:

Of course, we're happy to do it really.

(There's a long, awkward beat. Thomas might glance towards the audience)

THOMAS:

So... did you have a favorite part?

(Sandy and Morris look at each other)

MORRIS:

We really liked the part where the main character addressed the audience. It really put us on the spot!

SANDY:

Yeah, it felt like we were watching The Blue Man Group!

MORRIS:

Or Stomp!

SANDY:

(Turning to Morris) But Morris, they don't interact with the audience in Stomp.

MORRIS:

But they play the drums, that's gotta be worth something.

SANDY:

But that's not why it reminds us of Tommy's play—

THOMAS:

—It's fine, guys, really don't worry about it.

MORRIS:

So, do you think this could be your big break, Tom?

THOMAS:

I mean, probably not.

SANDY:

But why? It was so fun.

THOMAS:

Sal said it wasn't enough like Hamilton.

MORRIS:

Well, we can't all be Hamilton.

SANDY:

That's true.

(There's an awkward beat)

MORRIS:

So, I got us reservations at that Vietnamese place for 9:00, we should really get going if we don't want to be late.

SANDY:

Oh yes that sounds lovely.

THOMAS:

I might have to take a rain check, actually.

SANDY:

Are you sure, Thomas? We'd really love to have you

THOMAS:

I mean I should really try to get some work done.

MORRIS:

Okay, well, if you're sure.

THOMAS:

I really appreciate it; I just don't know if I'm feeling it today.

SANDY:

You'll just have to come with us next time. See ya, Thomas!

MORRIS:

Bye Thomas!

THOMAS:

Take care, you two!

(Thomas turns to address the audience, disco lights come up)

THOMAS:

Everyone's a critic, right?

(A siren goes off once again, the same "edgy bullshit alert," Thomas exits)

(BLACKOUT)

Act 1, Scene 3

(Charlotte enters, Thomas is hunched at his desk, there's a bottle of liquor next to him and a paper cup)

THOMAS:

Oh, hey Charlotte, how are you

CHARLOTTE:

I'm fine Thomas. Look, I need to talk to you.

THOMAS:

Sure, I didn't see you after the reading earlier. Did you hate it so much that you had to leave early?

CHARLOTTE:

I was there. I loved it, I really did, but—

THOMAS:

—There's a but? Why would there be a but?

CHARLOTTE:

Thomas... I—

THOMAS:

— Did you even appreciate it?

CHARLOTTE:

I did, but—

THOMAS:

—Sandy and Morris didn't appreciate it. Can you believe that? They were more focused on *Rent* and what kind of Vietnamese food they were going to get after.

CHARLOTTE:

They both work. They were probably hungry.

THOMAS:

Well, it's not my fault they work. I shouldn't have to accommodate them when they come to see MY work.

(He tries to pour himself another drink, but Charlotte stops him)

CHARLOTTE:

Are you sure you should be doing that?

THOMAS:

Yeah. I should. Eugene O'Neill did it and he wrote masterpieces.

CHARLOTTE:

But you're not Eugene O'Neill, Thomas.

THOMAS:

Not yet I'm not! *(He points at her as he says this, spilling his drink on Charlotte's clothes)*

CHARLOTTE:

(Taken aback) See this is what I'm saying!

THOMAS:

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

CHARLOTTE:

You aren't serious, Thomas. It's not going to happen!

THOMAS:

What's not going to happen?

CHARLOTTE:

You... you aren't going to make it.

THOMAS:

(sobered by what Charlotte said) You can't... you can't say that to me.

CHARLOTTE:

I'm sorry Thomas, but I just don't see this working out for you.

THOMAS:

You don't know that.

CHARLOTTE:

(Leaning against the desk, so as to be at Thomas's level) You're right, I don't, but I—

THOMAS:

—You don't know shit about me!

(Thomas rises to be across the desk from Charlotte, the two lock eyes for a beat)

CHARLOTTE:

(Slowly, deliberately) I know more about you than you think. For years I've stood by your side, supported you, and picked you back up every fucking time YOU knocked yourself down. Do you know what kind of toll that's taken on me?

THOMAS:

I never asked for that! I've never asked for any of that.

CHARLOTTE:

Oh no YOU didn't but you can bet mom did!

THOMAS:

Don't you bring her into this!

CHARLOTTE:

Look I know it's hard and I know you never got over it, but you have to face the roses sooner or later.

THOMAS:

You know she never would've wanted that. You can turn your back on her, but I won't.

CHARLOTTE:

You have some fucking nerve, you know that? You can't keep living in the fucking pages of your scripts anymore, Thomas. There's a real world here that you're neglecting, and it hurts me to see you like that.

THOMAS:

You can't get inside my head like that. You have no right.

CHARLOTTE:

(Taking a deep breath) Fine. You're right. I've said all I can say though. I'm leaving.

(Charlotte goes to leave)

THOMAS:

I don't know what to say.

(Charlotte sighs and exits)

THOMAS:

(He sits on the side of the desk and addresses the audience) Now I really don't know what to say.

(The disco lights come on, but Thomas shakes them off, instead the stage is flooded with red lighting, with hardcore punk music playing in the background)

THOMAS:

Wait, yes, I do. What gives her the right?

(He gets up, bringing the bottle with him, he addresses the audience sloppily, preferably spilling a bit of alcohol on the front row)

THOMAS

I'm a WRITER. I'm a PLAYWRIGHT. She doesn't know me, only I know me. She's not in my head. Only I'm in my head. Well, I guess you all are here with me but I'M DRIVING THE BUS. I could write so much more than what I've written, she just doesn't know it. I'll get Sal. We'll write the next great play. He's got some great ideas, right? *(he waits for the audience to respond)* right???

(He storms off, blackout)