

# ANALYZING



ILLUSTRATION: WILLIAM JOHNSTON

# THE SCRIPT

*How an actor reads a play*

FIRST OF TWO PARTS

BY BRUCE MILLER

**W**HEN I WAS A KID, fantasizing about what it might be like to be an actor, I always had this image of being handed a script by some big director, taking a few moments to look the dialogue over, and then confidently striding over to where the camera was set up. Moments later, I'd be offered a contract by the director based simply on what he had just seen from the other side of the lens. My brilliance and charisma could not be denied. All it took was a quick familiarization with the material and my talent did the rest.

Maybe you have had similar fantasies, or maybe that is actually how you operate as an actor. Your instincts are so sharp and accurate that you don't need to spend much time with the script before you're ready to use it, or even transcend it. The script, for you, is merely the catalyst that sets off a powerful chemical reaction between you and your audience. If this is you, my sincerest congratulations. Unfortunately, however, most of us don't work that way.

I sometimes wonder what Elia Kazan saw at Marlon Brando's audition for *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and how different the audition was from what Stanley looked and sounded like by opening night on Broadway. Did Brando conjure up hints in that audition of what the final product was to become? And if he did, was it because he was having a lucky day? Or did ac-

tually bring some good, well thought out choices that contributed to the clarity of the character and action of the play to the audition with him?

Actually, whether it was instinct or analytical skill that allowed Brando to nail the audition, the fact is that there would be literally thousands of choices for him to make between the time he was cast and the first performance for an audience weeks later. As it happened they were choices that would secure his place in the history of American acting. It probably didn't hurt that he had Elia Kazan, one of the country's greatest directors of theatre and film, to guide him, to challenge him, and to flatter him into that legendary performance.

Most of us will not be working with a Kazan or a Brando anytime soon. And there is never a guarantee that the people we end up working with will be able to elevate our game simply by virtue of the fact of how good they are. So, if we are not necessarily going to succeed through our natural, spontaneous brilliance, or the brilliance of those who surround us, then what exactly will we have to do to produce the goods for our audience? The answer starts with what so many fine actors have learned to do: analyze a script effectively. When you understand the script, you can be certain that the choices you make will be clear and exciting and will serve the story you are telling.

## **Telling the story**

When you think about the character you will be playing, do you think of that character in terms of how she serves the script she is in, or do you think of her as a separate entity who happens to function within the play? If it is the latter, you will need to adjust your thinking. The fact is that your character was written by the playwright to help tell his story. Every character in a play makes a contribution to that telling. That is a character's primary function. Many actors, especially untrained ones, mistakenly believe that a play's story is there to provide a framework for their characters. This kind of thinking can ruin a play.

The story is what holds a play together. The story consists of the characters, action, dialogue, and the manner in which it is told (which can be further subdivided into the story's tone and narrative viewpoint). No individual ingredient can ever be more important than the combination of the parts. No one ever eats a cake for the eggs that are in it, and very few people will come to see a play just to watch an individual character. Characters in the context of a play's action are why an audience is willing to sit and watch. And few characters and fewer performances are so compelling, so absorbing, or so amusing that an audience will commit to watching them for two hours unless the ques-

tion “what is going to happen next” is somehow a part of the quotient.

If you read a play and can't find the story to hang your choices on, there is either a problem with the play or with your reading of it. If the play you're working on is one that has been successfully produced, then you know where the problem lies.

Money is tight in the professional theatre and rehearsal periods are short. Actors, therefore, must be able to prepare on their own. They must come to rehearsals with the goods in hand. The rehearsal schedule is unlikely to provide the actor time for improvisation, trial and error, and extended exploration. You will have to be able to do those things on your own.

You will need to learn how to read like an actor—carefully and actively. You will need to learn to ask the questions that will tease the essential answers out of the script. If you begin with the premise that everything the playwright wrote into her script is there for a reason, you will be in the right frame of mind to take everything you see on the printed page as a clue to help you do your job as an actor effectively.

### The elements

Some of the things you will have to think about, certainly at the beginning stages of your analysis, include the following:

- *The given circumstances.* The who, what, when, and where of the play. The more specifically you define them, the more specific your choices will become. Choices that are specific are more likely to be clear and compelling than generalized ones.
- *Story.* The narrative that unfolds when character, plot, and dialogue are combined, producing a particular effect, feeling, idea, or all three.
- *Arc or throughline.* A map of the journey a character makes through a story. It can be literal or figurative in that it marks the changes a character undergoes during the course of the action and provides moments that are dramatic and revealing.

- *Conflict.* The engine of drama, created when the opposing forces that make a story interesting square off.

- *Objective.* What the character needs and pursues at all times, resulting from the conflict the playwright creates.

- *Moments.* Specific islands of import in the story's progression or arc; places in the script where moments can be made, revealed, and/or portrayed dramatically. Victories, defeats, and discoveries are often made there.

- *Physical actions.* The things the actor chooses to do physically to make thought and feelings clear.

We'll take a look at all these items more closely a bit later, but for now let's just work on an overview.

On the following pages you will find the complete text of *Eukiah*, a ten-minute play by Lanford Wilson. This spare two-character play consists primarily of dialogue between a man and a boy in a barn. In a few short minutes we come to know both of them well enough to feel a tremendous emotional response by the time the play is over. How the playwright accomplishes all this in so small a box is actually quite miraculous.

It is the job of the actors playing Butch and Eukiah to figure out how to make that miracle happen for an audience. Before an actor can make any decisions about character and action, it will be necessary to read and understand the entire play and how the pieces work together.

Without any further information from me then, read the play and see what you can learn about its given circumstances (the who, what, when, and where of the script) and its action. Just use what you find in the script and see what you can come up with. As you read, take the time to underline, highlight, or jot down phrases that give you clues.

Once you have a list, go back over it, and think about the significance of each clue you have chosen to make a note of. We'll compare notes after you have completed your investigation. Read the play as many times as you want or need to. Remember, multiple, careful readings are essential to an ac-

tor trying to accumulate necessary information. Consider yourself a detective investigating a case.

### After you've read the play

If you didn't compile your own list, examine the one below and see if you can determine why I included the items I did. If you have compiled a list, compare yours to the one that follows and see if you can figure out why there are differences. There are no right or wrongs here, only pieces of information that will help us understand the characters and the story, and later, to make choices—choices that will help tell the story effectively.

Here is my list:

*The present.*

*A long-abandoned private airplane hangar.*

*A streak of light from a crack in the roof stripes the floor.*

*He is a young, powerful, charming man, everybody's best friend.*

*He is also menacing.*

*Nothing he says is introspective.*

*Everything is for a purpose.*

*During the indicated beats of silence he listens: for Eukiah to answer, for the sound of breathing, for the least indication of where Eukiah is.*

*The play is a seduction.*

*"Barry saw you run in here."*

*"You're doin' it again... you're jumping to these weird conclusions just like some half-wit."*

*"You're gettin' to where nobody can joke around you..."*

*"We talked about that before, remember?"*

*"You thinkin' you heard Barry say something..."*

*"Have you ever known me to lie to you?"*

*He might walk around a bit.*

*"... this old hangar sure seen better days..."*

*"Just like everything else on this place, huh?"*

*"Been pretty much a losing proposition..."*

*"Ol' Mac had some winners, I guess, about twenty years ago."*

# EUKIAH

*A short play by Lanford Wilson*

## Characters

BUTCH  
*A horse farm hand*

EUKIAH  
*A boy*

*The present. A dark empty stage represents a long-abandoned private airplane hangar. The space is vast and almost entirely dark. A streak of light from a crack in the roof stripes the floor.*

*Butch walks into the light. He is a young, powerful, charming man; everybody's best friend. He is also menacing. Nothing he says is introspective. Everything is for a purpose. During the indicated beats of silence he listens: for Eukiah to answer, for the sound of breathing, for the least indication of where Eukiah is. The play is a seduction.*

*Voices have a slight echo in here.*

**BUTCH:** Eukiah?

*(Beat.)*

Eukiah?

*(Beat.)*

Barry saw you run in here, so I know you're here. You're doin' it again, Eukiah, you're jumping to these weird conclusions you jump to just like some half-wit. You don't wanna be called a half-wit, you gotta stop actin' like a half-wit, don't ya? You're gettin' to where nobody can joke around you, ya know that? What kind of fun is a person like that to be around, huh? One you can't joke around? We talked about that before, remember?

*(Beat.)*

Eukiah? What are you thinkin'? You thinkin' you heard Barry say something, you thought he meant it, didn't you? What did you think you heard? Huh? What'd you think he meant?

Eukiah?

*(Beat.)*

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You're gonna have to talk to me, I can't talk to myself here.  
*(Beat.)*

Have you ever known me to lie to you? Eukiah? Have you ever known that?

*(Pause. He might walk around a bit.)*

Okay. Boy, this old hangar sure seen better days, hasn't it? Just like everything else on this place, huh? Been pretty much a losing proposition since I've known it, though. Probably you too, hasn't it? Hell, I don't think they have the wherewithall anymore, give even one of those ol' barns a swab a paint. You think? Might paint 'em pink, whattaya think? Or candy stripes. Red and white. Peppermint. You'd like that.

*(Beat.)*

This'll remind you of old Mac's heyday, though, won't it? Private airplane hangar. Talk about echoes, this is an echo of the past, huh? Ol' Mac had some winners, I guess, about twenty years ago. That must have been the life, huh? Private planes, keep 'em in your private hangar. You got your luncheons with the dukes and duchesses. Winner's Circle damn near every race. If they wasn't raised by Ol' Mac or their sire or dam one wasn't raised by Ol' Mac, I don't imagine anybody'd bother to bet on 'em, do you? Boy that's all gone, huh? Planes and limos and all, dukes and duchesses—good lookin' horses, though. Damn shame we can't enter 'em in a beauty contest somewhere. I know, you're attached to 'em, but I'll tell you they make damn expensive pets.

What was you? Out by the paddock when Barry was talkin' to me? You think you overheard something, is that it? What do you think you heard? You want to talk about it? I know you'd rather talk to me than talk to Barry, huh? Eukiah?

*(Pause.)*

Is this where you come? When you run off all temperamental and sulking? Pretty nasty old place to play in. Echoes good though. Gotta keep awful quiet if you're trying to be secret like you always do in a place like this.

Why do you do that? You got any idea? I'm serious, now. Run off like that. They're waitin' supper on you, I guess you know. You know how happy they're gonna be about it, too.

*(Beat.)*

Eukiah? What was it you think you heard, honey? What? Was it about the horses? Cause I thought I told you never trust anything anybody says if it's about horses.

**EUKIAH:** *(Still unseen.)* I heard what Barry said. You said you would, too.

*(Butch relaxes some, smiles.)*

**BUTCH:** Where the dickens have you got to? There's so much echo in here I can't tell where you are. You back in those oil drums? You haven't crawled up in the rafters have you? Watch

yourself. We don't want you gettin' hurt. I don't think those horses would eat their oats at all, anybody gave 'em to 'em 'cept you. I think they'd flat out go on strike. Don't you figure?

**EUKIAH:** They wouldn't drink, you couldn't get 'em to.

**BUTCH:** Don't I know it. Pot-A-Gold, for sure. You're the only one to get him to do anything. I think he'd just dehydrate. He'd blow away, you wasn't leadin' him. We could lead him to water but we couldn't make him to drink, isn't that right?

*(Beat.)*

What are you hiding about? Nobody's gonna hurt you. Don't I always take up for you? You get the weirdest ideas. What do you think you heard Barry say?

**EUKIAH:** He's gonna burn the horses.

**BUTCH:** What? Oh, man. You are just crazy sometimes, these things you dream up. Who is? Barry? What would he wanna do something crazy like that for?

**EUKIAH:** I heard you talkin'.

**BUTCH:** Can you answer me that? Why would he even dream of doin' something like that?

**EUKIAH:** For the insurance.

**BUTCH:** No, Eukiah. just come on to supper, now, I got a date tonight, I can't mess around with you anymore. You really are a half-wit. I'm sorry, but if you think Barry'd do something like that, I'm sorry, that's just flat out half-witted thinkin'. It's not even funny The way you talk, you yak all day to anybody around, no idea what you're saying half the time; anybody heard something like that there wouldn't be no work for me or you or anybody else around here, 'cause they'd just lock us all up.

**EUKIAH:** You said you would.

**BUTCH:** I would? I would what?

**EUKIAH:** You said it was about time somebody did somethin'.

**BUTCH:** Eukiah, come out here. I can see you over by that old buggy, my eyes got used to the dark. There ain't no sense in hiding anymore.

*(Beat.)*

Come on out, damnit, so we can go to supper. I'm not going to play with you anymore. Come on. Well, just answer me one thing. How's burnin' 'em up gonna be any better than maybe splittin' a hoof or somethin' like that? Come on, crazy. The least little thing happens to make a horse not run, it's the same as if he had to be destroyed, you ought to know that.

*(Eukiah is just visible now. He is maybe sixteen years old. He is slow and soft; he has the mentality of an eight-year-old.)*

**EUKIAH:** Yeah, but they already took Pot-A-Gold and Flashy and that gray one, the speckled one, off. They already sold 'em.

**BUTCH:** Which one do you call Flashy, you mean Go Carmen? The filly? And Old Ironside? Why would they do that?

**EUKIAH:** Cause they're the best ones. Then they put three no good horses in their stalls, so nobody would know. And

they're gonna burn 'em and nobody can tell they ain't the horses they're supposed to be, Butchy.

**BUTCH:** Nobody could run Pot-A-Gold somewhere else, Euky. You know those numbers they tattoo in his mouth? That's gonna identify him no matter where he goes, anybody'll know that's Pot-A-Gold.

**EUKIAH:** Some other country. They wouldn't care.

**BUTCH:** Anywhere on earth.

**EUKIAH:** They got some plan where it'll work, 'cause I heard 'em.

**BUTCH:** I don't know what you think you heard, but you're really acting half-witted here.

**EUKIAH:** Don't call me—

**BUTCH:** Well, I'm sorry, but what would you call it? A person can't burn down a barn full of horses, Euky. What a horrible thing to think. No wonder you get scared, you scare yourself thinking things like that. Those horses are valued, hell I don't even know, millions of dollars probably. Insurance inspectors come around, they take a place apart. You tell me, how would somebody get away with a trick like that?

**EUKIAH:** What was you talkin' about then?

**BUTCH:** I don't even know. Where it was you heard what you thought you heard. You're too fast for me. You'll just have to go into supper and ask Mac what Barry was talking about, won't you? Would that make you feel better? Instead of jumpin' to your weird conclusions. Now, can you get that out of your head? Huh? So we can go eat and I can take a bath and go on my date? Is that all right with you? Then I'll come back and tell you all about it. Got a date with Mary, you'd like to hear about that, wouldn't you?

*(Eukiah begins to grin.)*

Yes? That's okay with you, is it?

**EUKIAH:** I guess. *(He moves into the light, closer to Butch.)*

**BUTCH:** You guess. You're just going to have to trust me, Eukiah, nobody needs money that bad. Not even on this place. I don't even think nobody could get away tryin' to pull something like that.

*(He puts his arm around Eukiah's neck and they start to move off but Butch has Eukiah in a head lock. He speaks with the strain of exertion.)*

Not unless they was some half-wit on the place that got his neck broke being kicked in the head and got burned up in the fire.

*(Eukiah goes to his knees. Butch bears down on his neck; it breaks with a dull snap. He lets Eukiah slump to the floor. Butch is breathing hard, standing over Eukiah's body.)*

I thought I told you. Never trust anything anybody says if it's about horses.

## Blackout

*Lanford Wilson's many plays include Fifth of July, Lemon Sky, The Mound Builders, The Hot L Baltimore, Burn This, Redwood Curtain, and Talley's Folly, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.*

"Winner's Circle damn near every race."

"Boy that's all gone, bub?"

"... good lookin' horses, though. Damn shame we can't enter 'em in a beauty contest somewhere."

"I know, you're attached to 'em..."

"What was you? Out by the paddock when Barry was talkin' to me?"

"You think you overheard something, is that it?"

"I know you'd rather talk to me than talk to Barry, bub?"

"Run off like that."

"They're waitin' supper on you..."

"What was it you think you heard, honey? What? Was it about the horses? Cause I thought I told you never trust anything anybody says if it's about horses."

"I don't think those horses would eat their oats at all, anybody gave 'em to 'em 'cept you."

"They wouldn't drink, you couldn't get 'em to."

"Don't I always take up for you?"

"He's gonna burn the horses."

"For the insurance."

"I got a date tonight."

"... no idea what you're saying half the time..."

"How's burnin' 'em up gonna be any better than maybe splittin' a hoof or something like that?"

He is maybe sixteen years old.

He is slow and soft; he has the mentality of an eight-year-old.

"Yeah, but they already took Pot-A-Gold and Flashy and that gray one, the speckled one, off. They already sold 'em."

"And they're gonna burn 'em and nobody can tell they ain't the horses they're supposed to be, Butchy."

"Those horses are valued, hell I don't even know, millions of dollars probably."

He puts his arm around Eukiah's neck...

... Butch has Eukiah in a bead lock.

Eukiah goes to his knees. Butch bears down on his neck; it breaks with a dull snap. He lets Eukiah slump to the floor.

### Asking questions, and answering them

What do the items on the lists tell us about Eukiah and Butch? About their relationship? About their history together? About their lives currently? About their feelings toward each other? About their values? What do they tell us about the current situation? About their needs? What changes occur during the course of the play regarding these issues and any other important ones? Do the characters seem different at the end of the play than they did at the beginning? How so? How and why did these changes occur? Did the characters really change, or was it your perception of them? What is the difference and why might that distinction be important to telling the story well? Look at these changes closely and try to determine what they tell us about the story, and about the characters. What is the tone of the piece? Is it funny? Dramatic? A combination? And so on.

Notice that my clues came from both the dialogue and from the stage directions. It is fair and wise to use everything available for your analysis. Actions that are either implied or explicitly described in a script can be every bit as useful for analysis as dialogue.

My list could have been far longer. In fact, *Eukiah* is so packed with information that I might have included everything in the script. The fact is everything in a good script is there for a reason.

We can sometimes learn about a play's story and its characters through what the author tells us directly through commentary and stage direction. This is certainly true with *Eukiah*, where the playwright tells us quite a bit directly in his staging notes at the top of the play. More often, however, we learn through what the characters say, what other characters say about them, and through what they do, implied but not necessarily stated by the playwright. Sometimes we must look beyond the literal meaning of what is said, and figure out what the clues tell us through implication. One of the

things we know about Butch by the time we've finished reading the play once is that at least some of his statements to Eukiah are untrue. Which ones? Why is Butch lying to Eukiah? Answering those questions, and constructing our own version of the truth about what's going on at the horse farm, is going to be an important part of the work of analyzing this script. (It is usually best when analyzing a script, by the way, to assume that a character is being truthful unless you know, from the evidence of the text, that he is lying. Otherwise you can make yourself crazy by questioning the veracity of every line. In Butch's case, however, there's no doubt.)

Note also the implication in the repeated references by Butch concerning Eukiah's intelligence. You might ask yourself what these repeated references do to Eukiah and for Butch. The answer will give you clues as to the story's progression.

It will be a worthwhile exercise to note, from my list above or from your own, which clues refer to Butch, which to Eukiah, and which ones give us information about the progressive action of the story. You might want to rearrange your list into those categories. Once you do, you may discover that seeing these clues listed together will begin to provide a nice composite of character and a suggested map of the sequential movement in the story.

### Your version of the story

All right, now that you have collected your information and have begun to weigh its significance, study your clue sheet and try to figure out what it all adds up to. String together all of the evidence and actually make a composite of the story and characters. This will give you a map for later, when you will perform a more detailed examination of the action of the play. See if you can put what you have learned into a few paragraphs that will get to the essence of who Butch and Eukiah are and the action contained in the play as you understand it. When you have finished, compare your composite to this one that I've prepared:

*The play takes place in an abandoned bangar on a horse farm, once highly successful but now fallen on hard times. Butch, a hand on the farm, is trying to coax Eukiah, a slightly dim-witted sixteen-year-old, out of hiding. Eukiah loves the horses he tends and is afraid for them. He has overheard Butch and another hand talk about a plot to set fire to the barn and destroy the unsold and near worthless horses for insurance money. Unrecognizable after being burnt, these horses would be reported as more expensive horses that have already been sold.*

*The action of the play, described by the playwright as a seduction, consists of Butch first locating Eukiah, then drawing him into a conversation intended to slowly lure him out of hiding. Butch's cunning personality only becomes apparent to the audience as the play unfolds. The same is true for Eukiah: it is only as the play progresses that we realize that he is no match intellectually for the conniving Butch. The action is centered on slowly discovering who the adversaries are, and how they will or won't get what they want. During the course of the play Butch uses a series of tactics including insult, praise, affection, and logic to draw Eukiah out of hiding. The playwright indicates the physical progression of Eukiah as well by suggesting the places in the script where Eukiah begins to move out of safety and toward his adversary—thus suggesting the physical step-by-step arc of Eukiah's movement toward doom.*

How does your composite compare to the one above? If yours is far different from mine, re-examine the clue list on page 24 and your own, and see if you missed anything important that would bring you closer to the synopsis I have composed. Remember, the point is to use specifics from the script to draw conclusions about the story and characters. Everything stated in the description above is drawn from specific pieces of information that are either contained in dialogue or suggested through ac-

tions. The process involves examining everything that is said and done and figuring out what it all adds up to. Where there are apparent contradictions—like for example the conflict between Butch's assurances to Eukiah and his actions at the end of the play—you must resolve them in a way that makes a coherent story.

Each word and action a playwright provides means something. Otherwise it wouldn't be there. Your job is to do the necessary detective work, because eventually, it will be your responsibility to tell the story onstage, moment by moment, with all the clarity and punch you can give it.

### **The arc of story**

It is always essential to keep in mind that a story consists of characters performing actions in a sequence. A story has a beginning, middle, and end with a central conflict or conflicts that will insure that the journey is an interesting one. The characters who go on this narrative journey will be different at the end than they were at the beginning because the journey they go on somehow changes them. This is apparent in *Eukiah*. As new information is revealed, our perceptions change, even as the characters' perceptions of each other evolve. The sequence of actions that the character undertakes (or that happen to him) is called the character's arc or throughline.

A story also produces a desired effect on its audience if told correctly. Knowing what that effect might be (or at least having an opinion about it) will help shape your work. What do you think the audience should be feeling by the end of *Eukiah*? Should their feelings change during the journey? What are they at the beginning? Where, why, and how do they change? How do you know this?

The story will most likely also have a point that becomes clear as a result of the good telling. This point is often referred to as the play's *spine*, and all the elements of the story should work to support the spine. Does there seem to be a point to the story that unfolds above? What do you think the audi-

ence should be thinking about at the end of the play? Is there an issue that the play seems to be presenting for consideration? Does the playwright seem to have an attitude about that issue? Why do you think so? Knowing what this issue is and what the author is saying about it will help you make choices later on when you are called upon to do so.

A story also has a tone or mood that will help make it work effectively. What is the tone of the story above? Is it serious or comedic? A combination? Obviously, *Eukiah* is a serious play. It ends with an extremely dramatic action that leaves the audience with major feelings. Is surprise one of them? Should it be? Why? There is also some humor in the play. It will be important for you to know when and where it is supposed to be funny in order for you to help produce the desired effects, yet not compromise the overall effect of the play.

With all this in mind, could you take me on the journey of the story found in *Eukiah*? By focusing on the action of the story, could you relate it in a step-by-step chronological way? It is very important that you be able to do this.

There are only two actors on stage in *Eukiah*, so the storytelling gears will be equally shared by each of them. If those actors are going to be able to tell the story effectively, they will need to know the moment-by-moment events—the momentary stories that occur when action combines with reaction. A good clear story is produced when these moments occur in cause-and-effect sequences, one leading to the next. As an actor you must always play actions if you are going to reveal the story clearly and sequentially. If you concern yourself only with the emotions involved, you are far less likely to be able to do this primary task.

Keep in mind that actions are controllable and repeatable. They are also clear. Any emotional expression, no matter how deeply felt, is communicated to others more by its accompanying actions than any direct commu-

nication of the emotion itself. You are angry. You put your fist through a wall. It is the action and the manner in which you do it that communicates your anger, not the emotion directly. As an actor, if you rely on emotion to tell your story, you may be heartfelt and believable, but there is no guarantee that your work will communicate the character's journey to the audience. For that reason, our focus will be on actions. Emotions invariably follow a well-executed action, by the way. Put your fist through a wall with intensity, commit to the action, and a feeling indistinguishable from anger is likely to accompany it.

So, find the actions and play them. The action in a story is like a set of dominoes stacked in a row and ready to be knocked over. Once it has begun, one action leads to another in a cause-and-effect dynamic from the beginning of a script to its end. This juggernaut of action is a train any actor can ride to success. However, each of the cause-and-effect actions provided by the playwright will need to be clearly defined in your preparation if they are to be clearly executed once you are putting the play on its feet. If you can define these moments of action during your analysis, you will later be able to shape them clearly and fully when you need to perform them.

### **Drawing a map**

Take a few moments now and see if you can map out the action of the play, event by event. Finding the step-by-step action is harder than you might think. In *Eukiah* there is both psychological and physical action—the effects of the character's words and how they say them, and the things they actually do physically. The characters in *Eukiah* give and take, moment by moment. Some of the action is direct and clear, but some of it must be interpreted through implication. You will need to examine what the supplied physical action means in terms of the developing story, and you will need to examine all the dialogue very closely. Though some of the dialogue is literal, at times it must be dis-

sected in terms of context and in terms of what the character is really meaning subtextually, or under the surface of what is said.

Let's start with the play's simple sequence of action. Read through the play again, and jot down a chronological list as you go through the play of all the things that happen, noting how each event triggers the next. You might find it easier to see this cause-and-effect relationship if you start at the end of the play and work backwards to the beginning. It is always easier to retrace your steps from the end of a maze than it is to get there. You are likely to find this to be the case with charting the action of a play as well.

Once you have finished your chart or score of the action, you will better understand the progression of the play and how all the pieces work together. You will have a map that charts the sequence of events that make up the action of the story. Your score might look something like this.

1. Butch walks into the light.
2. Butch calls to Eukiah and listens for him to answer.
3. Butch tries to convince Eukiah that he's acting strange and people think he's a "half-wit."
4. Butch plants the seed that Eukiah misinterpreted Barry.
5. Butch tries to get Eukiah to talk.
6. Butch discusses how the horse farm has fallen on hard times.
7. Butch talks about how great the old days must have been.
8. Butch discusses how beautiful the horses are in spite of the fact that they don't win.
9. Butch talks about what Eukiah might have overheard and suggests that the boy is sulking and temperamental.
10. Butch talks about everyone waiting for Eukiah to show up so they can eat.
11. Butch tells Eukiah never to trust talk about horses.
12. Eukiah speaks for the first time. He says he knows what Barry said.
13. Butch asks if Eukiah is by the oil drums.
14. Butch tells Eukiah that the horses only eat and drink for him.

15. Eukiah tells what he heard about killing the horses in a fire.

16. Butch tells Eukiah what crazy talk that is.

17. Eukiah says it's to collect insurance.

18. Butch tells Eukiah his date will be waiting.

19. Butch tells Eukiah, several times, that he is mentally challenged.

20. Butch says if the horses were killed there would be no work for anyone.

21. Eukiah says Butch said someone has to do something about the situation.

22. Butch says setting a fire is not the answer and calls Eukiah "crazy."

23. Eukiah appears.

24. Eukiah tells how the insurance plan could work by making the insurance people think the already-sold valuable horses were killed in the fire.

25. Butch counters the logic of the plan.

26. Butch tells Eukiah that he is half-witted.

27. Butch tells Eukiah that the plan is too horrible, too inhuman to even conceive, and that no one could get away with it.

28. Butch tells Eukiah to ask Barry what was really said.

29. Butch tells Eukiah he'll tell him about his date later.

30. Eukiah grins.

31. Eukiah moves into the light, then closer to Butch.

32. Butch puts his arm around Eukiah's neck and they start to move off. Butch has Eukiah in a head lock. Eukiah goes to his knees. Butch bears down on Eukiah's neck and breaks it with a snap. He lets Eukiah slump to the floor. Butch is breathing hard, standing over Eukiah's body.

If you were to read the list above back to yourself right now, you'd probably see the story unfold before your eyes. It is a map of the play. The action you've scored might have seemed apparent when you read it before, but having this step-by-step guide in front of you makes it perfectly clear. Without it, you might be at risk of doing just what that bad joke teller does, forgetting important details or getting the se-

quence balled up. Remember, your job is to put the playwright's story across. With a play-by-play map as specific as this one, you're unlikely to get lost on your way to accomplishing your mission as an actor.

Next time, we'll take an even closer look at the play, focusing on conflict, the engine of drama, and how it helps the actor determine his course of action.

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