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Thea101 (O21)

**Actor/Playwright Assignment  
#1 – THE ACTOR**

1. “My full name is Elizabeth Thompson.”   
   Elizabeth's surname is not explicitly stated. However, we do know the play is set in the office of the Knickerbocker Magazine in New York City. When researching names related to this office online, I noticed the names “Lewis Gaylord Clark (b. 1808)” and “Elizabeth Clementine Stedman (b. 1810)” but chose to use a different surname than the one provided because of the age differences between Clark and Elizabeth. Elizabeth, in this play, might be different altogether because she is hinted to be much younger than Clark. The surname Thompson is a relatively common name in the states. It is also about as common as the surname Clark that Lewis has in the play.

“My date of birth is June 29th of 1826. I am 20 years old at the time of this month’s magazine.”  
Elizabeth’s birthday is not specified in the play. However, in the play’s script, Clark calls her “girl”, “little Elizabeth”, “so young”, and “child” many times. It is safe to assume that Elizabeth is younger than Clark by a fair bit. “Lewis Gaylord Clark” would be around 38 years old by this month’s magazine volume, so I thought 20 years of age would be young enough. I chose June as Elizabeth’s birth month because it is the 6th month of a year, sort of like an equator line on the globe. During June, the weather can be quite hot or rainy, and June also represents the middle of the year, representing a neutral month or the “average” month of the year. Also, Elizabeth mentioned the numbers “forty-fifth” and “**sixth**” when describing her trip down Broadway. After searching for a *Knickerbocker* volume that was related to chickens crossing the street online, I came across the volume number 29 that was published during March in 1847, when this play is set. Volume number 29 is where I got Elizabeth’s date of birth from.

1. “I am Caucasian from America.”   
   I think that Elizabeth is Caucasian because most of the writers in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* group are white and American. She doesn’t publicize her ethnicity or heritage in this play.
2. “I don’t believe in any gods. I’m an atheist.”  
   Nothing in the play that is related to religious beliefs or ideals is written. The set year of the play, 1847, is well past the Second Great Awakening, which spanned between 1790 and 1830. The only thing that might be linked to religion in this play is the name Elizabeth, which means “my God is an oath” in Hebrew. This could be symbolic but there is not enough information in the play to tell.
3. “I am single currently.”  
   I believe Elizabeth is single because although she’s still young enough to be very involved with relationships, it is implied that she is just getting started with adult life. Clark sings that Elizabeth will “know what it’s like to learn about different things”. Romantic relationships might be something that she has to learn about later.
4. “No… I don’t have any children.”  
   I think that Elizabeth does not have any children because I don’t think she can handle taking care of them at the time of this play. She is too clumsy, and it is implied that her brewing skills are lacking, which leads me to believe that her cooking skills are not impressive either. She also seems to lack responsibility by always being late for her job. Elizabeth might need to learn about parenting someday.
5. “I am the assistant of Mr. Clark at the *Knickerbocker Magazine* office. We arrange a draft of our magazine every month.”  
   It seems like Elizabeth is just an aide to Clark. She makes tea, delivers papers, and follows his orders. Clark even says that he hired her. She may also help with publishing the monthly volume of the *Knickerbocker Magazine*.
6. “I am closest to Mr. Clark back at the office. He is the man I work under.”  
   Elizabeth is closest to Clark in the play. It seems like their relationship isn’t that strong, just linked by their jobs. Clark hasn't fired Elizabeth even after he went off on a rant about her flaws before arguing over the riddle. Ultimately, however, Clark incorporates Elizabeth’s riddle into the volume, showing he likes some aspect of her riddle. He even signs it under his name.
7. “Even though he’s my employer, I don’t get along with Mr. Clark much sometimes. We argue frequently…”

Clark’s relationship with Elizabeth is a bit lukewarm. Clark is the one who hired her initially, but he frequently complains about her tendency to be late to work, clumsiness, and inability to brew tea. On the other hand, Elizabeth wants her riddle to be published in the volume because she devoted a lot of time on it. However, Clark doesn’t "like" it, which makes Elizabeth question if Clark even took the time to break the riddle down piece by piece. This, in turn, upsets Clark, so there’s a sequential chain of Elizabeth and Clark upsetting each other in this play.

1. “The single most important event in my life was encountering that chicken on my way to work! This animal managed to make me contemplate why it was crossing the road.”  
   This is one event that we know happened in the play. It is also one of the central plot points because there is a song that accompanies the story, and the title of the play is closely related to the meeting with the chicken. Elizabeth’s encounter with the chicken prompted her to ask multiple people about their opinions on why the chicken crossed the road. Later, Elizabeth links the chicken’s purpose for crossing the road to the reason people do anything. Elizabeth is philosophically challenged by the chicken’s reason for crossing the road. We know this is important to her.
2. “I am just a high school graduate.”  
   Based on Elizabeth’s estimated age in my paper, she should be in college right now. However, in the early 19th century, women did not easily attain access to college-level education courses. Most college students during this time were young men that were born into wealthy households.
3. “My goal is to get my riddle published in this month’s volume of our magazine. I also want to know why the chicken crossed the road…”  
   In the first half of the play, Elizabeth discusses her riddle about the chicken crossing the road. She provides reasons from multiple people to convince Clark to approve of her riddle. Afterward, she attempts to devise a reason for why the chicken crosses the road. She repeatedly asks questions, either to herself or Clark, contemplating about the best answer. Because of her enthusiasm, I think that she desperately wants to learn about why creatures do what they do.
4. “In five years, I hope to be less clumsy and more responsible. I’m thinking… maybe I can acquire a writer position in the office!”  
   One of Elizabeth’s flaws is her clumsiness. She tends to trip and spill things. I remember reading online one time about ways to train the brain to not be so clumsy all the time. Another flaw that Clark points out is her awful tea and lateness to work. A broad characteristic that covers these flaws is a lack of responsibility. We see that Elizabeth is not very organized (her desk is cluttered, her apron is smeared with ink, she’s late to work), so being more responsible could be an ideal goal of Elizabeth’s.

**#2 – THE PLAYWRIGHT**

*[At rise we see ELIZABETH walking out of CLARK’s office*

*entering the room with the types. ELIZABETH is seen to be  
deeply contemplating something. She opens the doors. ELIZABETH  
enters the room. We see a functional room with lots of typewriters  
in the background. There is nobody else in the room.]*

ELIZABETH: Another riddle for next week … What was the issue with the riddle about the chicken crossing the road?   
  
 *[Music begins playing softly as she picks up a rag from the side.]*Why did Mr. Clark reject my riddle, and why did the chicken cross the road? Could they share a similar reason?   
  
 *[She begins to clean the types.]*Has anybody ever thought about this? Why did I decide to contemplate about the chicken’s decision?Is there a real purpose for crossing the road? Maybe…  
  
 *[Sings.]*

ONCE AGAIN, WHY DOES A CHICKEN CROSS THE ROAD?

I DON’T KNOW WHY THEY DO

BUT IT SEEMS OTHERS, THEY HAVE A CLUE

ANSWERS SUCH AS:

TO GO EAT SOME DINNER,  
TO GO SEE THEIR CHILDREN,  
  
TO EXERCISE, GET THINNER,  
EVEN TO CHECK UP ON THEIR KIN

IF I ASKED MR. CLARK,

WHAT WOULD HE SAY?

HE AGREES WITH WHOSE REMARK?

OR DOES HE MAKE HIS OWN WAY?  
  
ME, WHAT DO I EVEN THINK?  
I DIDN’T KNOW, I SAID,

LET’S GET AN ANSWER FROM EVERYBODY!  
BUT IT CONFUSED ME INSTEAD…

To understand… to learn why … I want to know. There is no definitive reason… only when different scenarios are placed does the reason even make sense. It’s not like I can read the chicken’s mind. So … Crossing the road is like everything? Perhaps … it is that doing anything is like everything, there’s an infinite amount of reasons you can provide to me…   
  
This marks the start of next week’s riddle! I’ll make it as mind-provoking as this one. Mr. Clark will like this one without a doubt.

*[Blackout.]*  
  
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