

11/12 limes

THE SADNESS OF THE LIMES by Veronica Bujeiro

Translation by Andy Bragen

(11/10)

Warning: This play's got a laugh track.

SCENE 1

A man facing Van Gogh's "Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear" scratches his right ear.

did he miss it

Not enough to hear the rest of the story

The man turns to face forward. He's putting on a clown nose.

This morning
driving on the highway
I saw a dog walking against traffic
and I thought

It's God

What are you laughing at
How do you know it wasn't Him
Could be you've seen Him

And didn't understand
and continued without understanding
What are you people laughing at

You
What are you laughing at

This man
he walked an entire day
just to see the woman he loved

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take off with her new husband
and so he began to paint
He challenged his era
his teachers
Convention
and he wasn't understood

He lived off his brother's hand outs
Never managing to show any of his works
But he continued painting

He always believed that in the end there'd be something

He went crazy
and didn't sell a painting
He cut off an ear
and didn't sell a painting
He killed himself
And not even that sold a painting

Which happened a hundred years later
A vase of sunflowers sold for 39 million dollars
With that kind of money, he could've bought himself an ear
Or an entire body
If that would've floated his boat

But what's this story mean
Why is it always referred to in self-help books

I should be grateful for not being a painter
For not having talent
For having both ears
Just like my third grade teacher
always preaching
always out to help us
saying
Let us give thanks for being whole
For counting on two hands
And two legs
For not needing any help getting around
And today
today precisely today
After seeing God walking against traffic on the highway
I listened to the news

A paraplegic woman avoided getting raped

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Fending it off by using her prosthetic leg as a weapon
She beat her assailant with the leg until he lost consciousness

They didn't say dead
only unconscious
It's very much on my mind

what are you laughing at

Where would my third grade teacher be now
Would she have been told
Would she have cut off an ear after hearing the story
I don't think so
Surely the bitch lives in a safe neighborhood
or she wants to be brutally raped
just like that
just to feel something
Because the bitch had a thing against cripples
She couldn't bear seeing them begging in the street
walking like that with their irregular gait
maybe it offended her
saying that two plus two didn't make four
The old bitch and her paraplegic pitter-patter

Rite Pool roars with laughter

Laugh
Why aren't you laughing
Want to hear a joke

My name is Rite Pool

Scene 2

Rite Pool walks over to a parking meter. He fills it with change. He takes a seat next to it.

Where did it all begin

With Genesis
I suppose

For me it began with a table
A table with three legs

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Tilted like a cheap Picasso
it was our kitchen table
it was also the ring for my parents' fights.
One argument we'd tip it to one side
Another and we'd tip it to the other
Don't drink water at my table
don't put down boiling milk
Mom's argument can get you wet
and Dad's can burn you
It was hard eating at our table
but we did it
It was there that I told my first joke

Mommy's stupid

Dad laughed while tilting the table toward his side
Daddy's stupid
And both of them laughed
Tilting the table from one side to the other
Soon enough my siblings came to see what was happening
And I tilted the table
From one side to the other

Mommy stupid
Daddy stupid

And we all laughed as if we were happy
Barely four and I'd already told my first joke

And then school
So poor and full of tilted tables and stupid people

Above all the teachers
Like that grim reaper I had in first grade
The one who cried at my feet telling me that I'd end up a garbageman
Even now I can't understand the cause of her tears
Given what a shit she was
Soon enough she sent me to the Principal's office
In the end, she didn't know what to do with me
but the Reaper never figured on my wit winning over that man
So much so that he assigned me the homework of telling six jokes every Monday after
the Pledge of Allegiance
A pledge that he confessed he hated for its solemnity and bad rhymes
That was the first of his confessions
It was also the title of my first routine

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Solemnity and bad rhymes

That's how I began my career
telling six jokes on Mondays after the Pledge of Allegiance

Solemnity and bad rhymes

I became so popular at school that the Principal decided that he himself would teach me
Little did young Pool learn of sums and remainders
On the other hand the Principal confessed his entire life
About his sleepwalking mother who saw ghosts in electric poles
A danger to one and all
of his unfaithful wife's barren womb
of love forbidden by the fourth grade teacher's polyester apron
And each Monday after the Pledge
six jokes

two about unfaithful wives
two about old ladies getting electrocuted
and two about polyester

He kicked me out
of course
And I was only eight years old

He rises and deposits more change in the parking meter. He sits back down.

And then a new school
With its tables
chairs
teachers
and it's complete perfect students
all of them complete
the only incomplete one there
was me

You want to hear a joke
My name is Rite Pool

What size
who knows
I could be Olympic-size, I could be a kiddie pool
I could be nothing but a tin bucket with delusions of grandeur
Truth is I don't know

Sometimes I laughed with them

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even though inside I was crying

But I kept on
In other places I kept on seeing incompleteness
Tables
Chairs
People
Dogs
They cried
While inside I was laughing

And I kept on
Always believing that in the end there'd be something

He confirms that the parking meter is still full

Then came the real world
Working at the Three Trapped Tigers
telling jokes
instead of begging
and just like in Genesis
I needed a comrade
An Eve
a sidekick
An Izzy Dedley

For every twenty miserable fools
an Izzy Dedley
a happy man
a happy man with whom I plunged into Solemnity and bad rhymes
I was Solemnity
He brought the bad rhymes
Along with a recently stolen joke

Izzy always said
that with a small-time crook for a father
And a mother who took in dirty laundry he was nursed on vice
All of his jokes were stolen
But that wasn't his worst sin
The worst thing about Dedley was that he couldn't even make his mother laugh
Even though he said he could

I wonder what became of him
Could he be dead
could he have cut off an ear
I don't think so

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He gets up one more time to put change in the parking meter. A man enters hurriedly carrying a painting in his hand. It seems like he's been on the run. He comes to a stop in front of Rite Pool.

IZZY DEDLEY
Rite Pool

RITE POOL
with disgust
Dedley
It's you

IZZY DEDLEY
What are you doing here

RITE POOL
Dedley

IZZY DEDLEY
You wait
Like the chicken in front of the roaster
Hoping his mama will escape unspeared
like that tiny bagel holding vigil by the toaster
praying that his parents avoid getting schmeared

RITE POOL
It's you
No doubt about it

IZZY DEDLEY
Probably you don't know whether to take off
on foot, or to wait for a dog
like those two little fleas outside the movies
Which one's your car

RITE POOL
You're in a rush
I could tell from a mile away

IZZY DEDLEY
Nope
Believe it or not I just got out of the joint

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RITE POOL

Like father like son

IZZY DEDLEY

Nope

I went there to do a gig

And well sure I did spend some time in the slammer

But now I'm out

RITE POOL

Surely they're waiting for you at home

IZZY DEDLEY

No

No one's waiting

Which one's your car

RITE POOL

don't got one

And that thing you brought here

IZZY DEDLEY

It's a painting that they lent me

Rite takes the painting. It's a lithograph of Van Gogh's 39 million dollar "Sunflowers"

RITE POOL

You know Dedley

This painting could buy an ear

IZZY DEDLEY

An ear

But I still have both

Mr. Pool

RITE POOL

Or a new body if that would float your boat

IZZY DEDLEY

Seriously

RITE POOL

It's too bad that Sarah Bernhardt never had a picture like this one

IZZY DEDLEY

Lucky me

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RITE POOL

She should've taken up painting

IZZY DEDLEY

What for

If her acting was already so good
and what if her painting was bad
maybe they should have had her sing
No Mr. Pool
Why paint

RITE POOL

Because at the height of her career a leg got cut off

IZZY DEDLEY

Ay

RITE POOL

And the Ringling Brothers bought it for a hundred thousand dollars

IZZY DEDLEY

Was it worth that much

RITE POOL

The damned leg wasn't worth much to them when attached to the rest of her body
But when it was separated from her it made more money than Bernhardt

IZZY DEDLEY

I don't recall any jokes about legs separated from their owners

RITE POOL

I do

but that wasn't it

IZZY DEDLEY

So tell it then

RITE POOL

No

It's too early
you know Izzy
I've been thinking about cutting off my right leg

IZZY DEDLEY

No way Rite

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how would you get to the store to buy a bite

RITE POOL
Or my left arm

IZZY DEDLEY
No way Rite
Without arms how could you fight
Cutting off an ear – now that might be bright

RITE POOL
No
No way Dedley
it's been done

IZZY DEDLEY
We'll listen to secrets and extort big fees

RITE POOL
No way, Dedley
It's way
way
way too cheesy

IZZY DEDLEY
And then, and then...we'll make up decrees

RITE POOL
No way
And maybe
More likely
my leg
my arm
or my ear
would end up poor if far from me

Dedley and Rite share a complicit look. They begin to laugh.

RITE POOL
I bring Solemnity

IZZY DEDLEY
And I the bad rhymes

They get back to laughing

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IZZY DEDLEY

Let's go back

RITE POOL

No way

IZZY DEDLEY

We're as good as we ever were

RITE POOL

Nothing is like it was

IZZY DEDLEY

We have a mission Rite

RITE POOL

A mission

IZZY DEDLEY

Laughter

Rite

Laughter

RITE POOL

What do people laugh at Dedley

IZZY DEDLEY

At jokes

I think

RITE POOL

One about blacks

One about midgets

One about old people

IZZY DEDLEY

At good jokes

of course

RITE POOL

One about the drowned

One about the burned

Or better yet

One about the crucified

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IZZY DEDLEY

We have to do it
There's a tremendous lack
haven't you heard

Rite shakes his head no

IZZY DEDLEY

They try and they try but it all lacks pacing
Now I'm the one whose jokes they're casing
Can't you see what we're facing

RITE POOL

A bad comic is attacked in the street
And the only thing that can make them stop
Is his jokes
It has wit

IZZY DEDLEY

You get it already my friend of good name
I believe that it's destiny – you and I are the same
I knew there was a reason I stole the frame

RITE POOL

I'm sorry Dedley
But I can't

IZZY DEDLEY

Come on Rite
I would chop off my right leg
Just to rent the Three Trapped Tigers
And go back there with you

RITE POOL

Then cut them both off
They're going to demolish it in three weeks

IZZY DEDLEY

Just enough time for a short run

RITE POOL

I can't Dedley
I'm tired

IZZY DEDLEY

Let's make the most of the time that's left at the Three Trapped

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RITE POOL

Tired

even without the energy

of those who get all dressed up just to throw themselves into traffic

IZZY DEDLEY

Me too

But I keep on keeping on

RITE POOL

You think that in the end there'd be something

Silence

IZZY DEDLEY

Certainly

What's that joke about the leg that's left its owner

RITE POOL

You don't know it

IZZY DEDLEY

No

RITE POOL

You're sure you've never heard it

IZZY DEDLEY

So tell it

RITE POOL

Not here

IZZY DEDLEY

Come on Rite

RITE POOL

I don't know if I want to tell it

IZZY DEDLEY

Rite

RITE POOL

It's too early

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IZZY DEDLEY

I'll give you my painting

RITE POOL

This doesn't seem like the right place

IZZY DEDLEY

Where then

RITE POOL

I don't know

Maybe the Three Trapped Tigers
is the place

Scene 3

In the Three Trapped Tigers three patrons slice onions. They make noise with their knives, creating a rhythm, a strange symphony, only stopping to dry their tears with handkerchiefs provided by an aide-de-camp

CRISTO SUAREZ

One day he showed up
He cased the whole house
He spat on the furniture
Kicked the dog
Slept with my old lady
And hit my children
Since then he's been living with us
I don't know how to get him out
How to say
Beat it

SABINO DIAZ

Let's go let's go let's go
So what if you're in a rush
You still haven't gotten very far
Let's go let's go let's go
Don't me me laugh
The guy who'll fuck his mother is you
Well then
Who's the late one now
Let's go let's go let's go
Don't fall behind
Let's go let's go let's go

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Can't you hear me
Move it

JOSEFINA MILETO

You don't love me
That much is clear
But at least have the courage to come here and say it to my face
Why did you send her
There's something I can't tell her
something between us
a secret
something invisible
Three months ago
I got AIDS
and three months ago
you were still with me
Yes my dear
Go rot

Dedley and Pool are seated with their backs turned. They're both wearing party hats.

RITE POOL

Come on Dedley
This is how you wanted it

IZZY DEDLEY

I feel nauseous

RITE POOL

Like in the old days

IZZY DEDLEY

It's not nerves
It's that horrible onion smell
Where's it coming from

RITE POOL

You'll get used to it
Let's take the leap
You go first

Dedley hops into the ring. He has tears in his eyes. Rite waits with his back to him

IZZY DEDLEY

This place reminds me of a joke

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None of the three trapped patrons put down their knives. To lift Dedley's spirits, Rite pulls out a machine that plays laugh tracks.

IZZY DEDLEY

A daddy louse and his little boy take a stroll across a bald man's head
The daddy stops and says
When I was your age this was a forest

The knives continue. Rite turns on the laugh track. Dedley is on the edge of tears.

IZZY DEDLEY

When I was your age
well
when I was young
this place was
Was

Dedley breaks down and cries. Rite gets out of his chair. He's wearing dark glasses, and he wanders toward the audience like a blind man in the night.

RITE POOL

Suarez
You're here

Suarez drops the knife

RITE POOL

Drop that onion
Cancer
AIDS
And all the other illnesses
remain incurable

Suarez cracks up. Dedley is surprised.

RITE POOL

Diaz

Diaz drops the knife.

RITE POOL

You already knew about the crisis
Twenty more years of this and we're done
I know
I can't afford the subway either
I still have some spare rope at home

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You want some

Diaz cracks up. Suarez joins him, but Mileto's knife still remains.

RITE POOL

Mileto

Mileto slams the knife on the counter. The knife music has ceased, now all that remains is the out-of-control laughter of Suarez and Diaz.

RITE POOL

Not so long ago

I got a letter from a girl

who had no legs

She said that my jokes about amputees

made her miss sex less

She asked me out

but I turned her down

Mileto laughs frenetically, to one side of Suarez and Diaz. Dedley collapses.

IZZY DEDLEY

What's going on

Is the mission over

RITE POOL

Control yourself Dedley

Just think where we would be

if Van Gogh

Had sold a picture

Everyone laughs, except for Dedley. Rite takes off his sunglasses

RITE POOL

So Dedley

You want to hear a joke

Dedley nods yes

RITE POOL

One day I got up and my legs had taken off

Everyone, including Dedley, laughs

RITE POOL

They were long gone

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They'd taken off for good
But they left me a note
that said
Thanks for everything
but it's time for us to find our own paths
PS
We got bored

No one laughs. Not a sound.

RITE POOL
And there I was
In bed
without legs

The phone ringing
And me without legs

Wanting to pee
And without legs

Wanting to scream
and without legs

There I was

IZZY DEDLEY
And then Rite

RITE POOL
Then

Rite turns on the laugh track.

Scene 4

Some wicker chairs, a night table with a drawer, and in the bed, Rite Pool, sleeping. The place is suspiciously similar to "Van Gogh's Room at Arles" (1889), but it's not identical.

A clock lying on the night table decides to wake Pool up with its alarm.

Pool wakes up startled and knocks the clock off the table. The alarm doesn't stop ringing.

Pool wants to reach the clock on the floor, but at each attempt it escapes. He pulls the blankets off, and tries to get up, but his damned legs have taken off. As a reminder there appears a note on the wall "PS – we got bored"

Pool takes a breath, then drinks a cup of tea in a single gulp. The alarm doesn't stop ringing, but it feels lonely, which is why the phone decides to keep it company.

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*The telephone is far away, enough so that he can't reach it.
Pool takes another cup of tea out of the night table drawer. He drinks it in a single gulp,
and tries to find the melody in the happy accompaniment of the clock and the phone, after
all what else can one do if one doesn't have legs.
Pool starts to smell something burning. He looks back over the bed, then at the furniture,
but there's nothing. Nevertheless the smell is overpowering.*

Fire
Fire
Fire

*To the happy melody of the clock and the telephone is added the fire alarm, even though
there continues to be no trace of fire.*

Help
Help
For this invalid
in danger
Someone

*The doorbell starts to ring with desperation, as the last chime in the symphony between
the clock, the phone, and the fire alarm.
Pool wants to fight for his life by turning off the alarm, answering the telephone and
opening the door but he isn't able to get out of bed. He searches desperately in his night
table drawer, and only finds the laugh track machine.
Its activation adds the final touch to the symphony.
Then everything quiets down.
Calm, pure calm.
But suspicion rises as to who will be next.
Even the chairs in their stiffness look malicious.
Pool looks at the chairs.
The chairs look at him.
No one moves.
Pool calms down and takes a cup of tea from his drawer.
He toasts the chairs.*

You guys understand me

Rite drinks his tea calmly. He laughs. He goes back to the same old thing.

What would my third grade teacher say if she saw me now
Who do I have to thank now
Answer me slut
I feel so
incomplete
In the end

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I suppose they never much liked me
Those pains in the knees
Those corns in the soles
Those ingrown toenails
They've made my life miserable
where have they gone
I've waited enough in this life
All my life I've spent waiting

I wonder what they're doing now
are they shaving
Two shaved legs
stroll down the street
hoping to be picked up
And they pull it off

Pool feels a sudden desire to pee, but the bathroom is very far away. So far that the bladder decides to empty itself. Pool sighs with relief. The alarm starts ringing again. It peals with insistence. Pool relaxes in bed and turns on the laugh track. Dedley enters the room through the window

IZZY DEDLEY
Why didn't you open the door
I've been ringing for an hour

Pool is silent

IZZY DEDLEY
Oh Rite
Your legs

RITE POOL
They took off

IZZY DEDLEY
And to the Three Trapped Tigers

RITE POOL
Talented morons
That had nowhere to go
Come on, we need to go get them

IZZY DEDLEY
No Rite
Someone has your legs