

27 Tips for Banishing the Blues

(full-length play-in-progress)

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CHARACTERS

NUTRITIONIST, a calming, if clueless, woman
SEEKER, mid-thirties, man

MANNY, a telenova star (also married to **ANGEL**)
ANGEL, a telenova star, sad, possibly depressed (also married to **MANNY**)
IMELDA, **MANNY**'s mother who has a sexual attraction to **ANGEL**

HE, depressed, in a relationship with **SHE**
SHE, frustrated with **HE**

FAMOUS SELF-HELP GURU, you know him

CHILD, resourceful, politically savvy seven-year-old boy
MOTHER, depressed about the state of her life and the world

PEOPLE, or **PERSONS 1-6**, can be played by above and/or others
(often, they appear on screen; occasionally on stage)

PATIENT, in a mental hospital
VISITOR, visiting patient

MAN 1, totally neurotic, in love with **MAN 2**
MAN 2, long suffering, in love with **MAN 1**

ASTROLOGER, a rather sweet quack
CLIENT, probably the **SEEKER**; possibly **PERSON 3**

FAMOUS CHEF, arrogant man, about to be divorced from **ASTROLOGER**

THERAPIST, generally good, but has a tendency to sleep with her male clients

NEARLY FAMOUS ASTROLOGER, used to just be **ASTROLOGER**
FORMER FAMOUS CHEF, **FAMOUS CHEF** turned Taijiquan Master

TIME

Now.

PLACES

A variety of television programs such as cooking shows, self-help confessionals, a telenova, and television commercials. Also, brief film excerpts spanning the 20th century.

Allusions, primarily to home environments, with minimal set pieces.

Note: As the play progresses, the boundary between screen and stage is broken (i.e., characters on screen suddenly appear on stage and vice-versa). Characters also talk to each other from stage to screen and vice-versa.

Scene: A black stage.

At rise: On a huge screen backdrop, flocks and flocks of ducks run around a field with the loud sound of “quack quack quack quack quack” in equal measure to the visual flurry.

(Lights up on **NUTRITIONIST** and **SEEKER**.)

NUTRITIONIST

What kind of sad are you?

SEEKER

I'm the kind that wants to be happy.

NUTRITIONIST

Are you saying. . . well, what are you saying?

SEEKER

This isn't a way of life for me. I never knew this pain. And there's no apparent reason for it.

(Suddenly, **MANNY** appears on screen.)

MANNY

I have reasons. Many many reasons. You wanna hear my reasons?

NUTRITIONIST

For now we're looking at symptoms. Symptoms are behaviors.

SEEKER

Don't you mean behaviors are symptoms?

NUTRITIONIST

Hmm, that's interesting.

MANNY

Not really.

SEEKER

You know how the 20s to the 40s are nearly imperceptible?

MANNY

Speak for yourself.

SEEKER

I would say until 50 it's imperceptible. After that, the downward path becomes evident.

NUTRITIONIST

Try the following:

Keep vegetables in the fridge.
The full array of colors.
Even just to look at them.

SEEKER

Yes, they're lovely. But then they shrivel up and turn brown and I don't have the heart to throw them away. And, when they've rotted, they look so sad.

(Suddenly, **ANGEL** on screen.)

ANGEL

I know what you mean. It's awful to face the decay.

SEEKER

Feels utterly useless to move them.

ANGEL

Yes, into the garbage. And begin again.

NUTRITIONIST

But to accept that is to be healthy.
(beat)
What is a day like for you?

SEEKER

I wake up in the morning.
Slowly I walk to the bathroom.
(with **ANGEL**)
I sit on the toilet and pee.

I get up from the toilet; walk back to the bedroom.
Lie down on the bed; turn on the TV.

Whatever is there I watch it.
If I'm tired I fall back to sleep.
The TV continues without me.
(with **ANGEL**)
Which is the dream I don't know.

Suddenly I hear my head pulsing.
Will you tell me how much I can say?

NUTRITIONIST

That need not be said.
Nothing such as that needs —

SEEKER

(interrupting)
I am the one who is living.
These are the days I am having.

SEEKER (cont'd.)

(to **ANGEL**)
Two tiny rooms I inhabit.
This is the way of my life.

NUTRITIONIST

To re-hydrate, try ancho or other dried chiles.

Scene: **HE**'s apartment.

At rise: **HE** sits alone at the table.

(Enter **SHE**.)

Do you like my hair cut? **SHE**

Yes. **HE**

You prefer it long? **SHE**

Short or long. I like it both ways. **HE**

I dressed up for you. **SHE**

Very springy. **HE**

Do you like it? **SHE**

Yes. **HE**

Did you miss me? **SHE**

Sure. **HE**

Do you miss me in bed sometimes? **SHE**

Sometimes when I'm tired I get into bed and it's bliss. **HE**

So you don't miss me? **SHE**

Sure I do. Sometimes. **HE**

What happened to our little talks? **SHE**

We can talk. Let's talk. **HE**

(excruciatingly long pause)

(Suddenly, **FAMOUS SELF-HELP GURU** appears on screen.)

FAMOUS SELF-HELP GURU

Is it safe for all depressed individuals to try to treat themselves using the principles and methods outlined in my book? The answer is — definitely, yes! This is because the crucial decision to try to help yourself is the key that will allow you to feel better as soon as possible, regardless of how severe your mood disturbance might seem to be.

(**HE** and **SHE** exit.)

Scene: **CHILD** and **MOMMY**'s house.

At rise: **FAMOUS SELF-HELP GURU**'s face on screen.

(Enter **CHILD**.)

Mommy? Mommy? **CHILD**

(no response)

Mommy?

(no response)

MOM-MY?

(no response)

MOMMM-MY?

(from offstage) **MOTHER**
What?

I need you. **CHILD**

(no response)

CHILD (cont'd.)

Mommy, I NEED you.

(no response)

Mommy?

MOTHER

I'm resting.

(**CHILD** cries. Thumping steps of **MOTHER**; she enters unshowered in bathrobe.)

CHILD

Mommy, I'm bored.

MOTHER

OK, honey.

CHILD

Will you get dressed now?

MOTHER

Yes, darling. I'll try.

CHILD

Pinkie swear me, Mommy.
No going back to bed, OK?

MOTHER

OK.

CHILD

I'm hungry, Mommy.
Can we go out for lunch?

MOTHER

What's in the fridge?

CHILD

Nothing.

MOTHER

There's more than nothing. I know that.

(**CHILD** mimes opening refrigerator door, as it opens on screen. Inside is filled with cheese and old hummus containers, along with some rotted produce and empty diet soda bottles and cans.)

CHILD

Cheese and hummus.

MOTHER

Can you have some of that?

CHILD

No, Mommy. I'm sick of that.
We need more food.

MOTHER

Let me just get dressed.

(Exit **MOTHER**. **CHILD** sits on the floor waiting for a long time. Refrigerator door closes and screen goes black.)

(Suddenly, a variety of **PEOPLE** appear on screen.)

PERSON 1

I take anti-depressants.

PERSON 2

Oh, I love my anti-depressants.

PERSON 3

I like my wine.

PERSON 4

My scotch.

PERSON 5

My crème de menthe.

PERSON 6

My yoga.

PERSON 2

My ice cream.

PERSON 5

My soaps.

PERSON 1

I need the dullness.

PERSON 3

I need not to notice everything.

PERSON 4

How about anything?

PERSON 1

Especially myself.

PERSON 6

Yeah. To be quiet.

PERSON 5

No No No. I need the noise.

PERSON 2

But not to be in it.

PERSON 6

Yes, to be on the periphery.

(Enter **NUTRITIONIST** on stage, looking up at screen.)

NUTRITIONIST

Try the following:

Essence of sepia for loss of general libido, sadness, and weariness.

Pine for guilt and self-reproach.

Sweet chestnut for unbearable anguish.

(**PEOPLE** exit screen. **NUTRITIONIST** follows them.)

Scene: A hospital room.

At rise: **PATIENT** sits up in bed talking to **VISITOR** seated in chair.

PATIENT

My toes move uncontrollably.

VISITOR

When?

PATIENT

All the time. Like they're feet walking.

VISITOR

That's a beautiful image.
Toes walking like feet.

PATIENT

No. It's not. It's grueling.
I can't make them stop.

VISITOR

What does it feel like?

PATIENT

It feels like they're trying to get away from me, like they'd just as soon fall off and die.

VISITOR

I don't know what to tell you.
It's completely out of my realm.
(beat)
What are you on?

PATIENT

The normal stuff. Same as everybody else.

VISITOR

Have you told him?

PATIENT

No way. I'll be locked up.

VISITOR

Not over that.
That's a bump in the road.

PATIENT

I can't make it stop.

VISITOR

They'll probably just change your meds.

PATIENT

I'm an inventor. Don't let this be my last invention.

VISITOR

Where on earth are you from?

PATIENT

Columbus.
(beat)
You know I'm from Columbus.

VISITOR

What's the air like there?

PATIENT

I don't remember.
(beat)
Where are we now?

(Suddenly, **NUTRITIONIST** appears on screen, walking from left to right, still following **PEOPLE** and exiting en route.)

NUTRITIONIST

Eat good mood foods.
Smell some lavender.
Sit under a bright, white light.

VISITOR

(to **PATIENT**)
You know, light therapy relieves suicidal ideation.

PATIENT

Since when did you get so fancy?

VISITOR

Shhh. Listen.

NUTRITIONIST

(walking in again from the left)
Use color to create healing energy and tranquility.
(beat)
Breathe fresh air in deeply.

PATIENT

(with **PEOPLE** offscreen)
Blah. Blah. Blah.

Scene: A black stage.

At rise: On the screen. A telenova in Spanish with the following lines dubbed in English. **PATIENT** alone in bed watching.

ANGEL

I need to learn to feel better or I'm gonna get cancer.

MANNY

Wha'choo you talkin' about?

ANGEL

I just saw it on a show.

MANNY

What show?

ANGEL

You know, one of those shows.

MANNY

You been watchin' the infomercials again, baby? What'd I tell you 'bout them?

ANGEL

It just came on when I wasn't lookin'.

MANNY

You musta turned it on, right?

ANGEL

Yeah, but I wasn't payin' attention. It was just for company.

MANNY

What, you got no company? Where's mami?

ANGEL

She had to go out.

MANNY

That's not what I brought her here for. Where the hell'd she go?

ANGEL

Papi wasn't feelin' good.

MANNY

What's wrong with Papi he couldn't come over here?

ANGEL

You know he gets the black moods.

MANNY

Well he better snap out of it. I got no time for his black moods on top a your black moods.

ANGEL

Manny, I wanna go to the doctor.

MANNY

Oh no. I'm not gettin' you all drugged up. You can forget about that.

ANGEL

OK.

(pause)

I'm afraid, Manny.

MANNY

Don't you worry. You're fine.
Where's the baby?

(Ominous music rises, then falls. Screen goes to black.)

(**FAMOUS SELF-HELP GURU** enters stage and talks to screen.)

FAMOUS SELF-HELP GURU

Try this. Choose any activity, and instead of aiming for 100 percent, try for 80 percent, 60 percent, or 40 percent.