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PROOF OF THE PUDDING
TEN MINUTE PLAY
BASED ON THE SHORT STORY BY O. HENRY

By Robert Frankel
PROOF OF THE PUDDING
By Robert Frankel

SYNOPSIS: Two old friends, one a down-and-out writer, Sheldon Dawe, and the other a successful magazine editor, Jonathan Westbrook, meet in a park to discuss Dawe’s latest submission. As usual, Westbrook has found his friend’s subdued prose lacking in the emotion and drama of real life tragedy. In an effort to prove the true-to-life accuracy of his writing, Dawe concocts a plot to falsely inform his wife that he is leaving her. Before the two friends can carry out their plan, a letter from Dawe’s wife gives them both a firsthand experience of real life calamity, with some surprising results.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(2 males)

SHELDON DAWE (m) .................. A down and out writer.
JONATHAN WESTBROOK (m) ... An editor.

SET

Split stage. Park bench down stage center. Kitchen table stage left or right, with a small lamp and a letter leaning against it.

TIME: Morning.

CASTING NOTES

O. Henry wrote in the early 1900’s, a time of transition from stereotypical cowboys and hobos to emerging technology. With this transition as a background to many of his stories, they were often male-heavy. Having said that, I am certainly open to any attempts you may wish to make at turning hobos into women and conmen into con-women! Clearly double-casting of the actors is also possible.

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The Love Potion of Ikey Schoenstein | Males: 2 | Females: -- | Either: --
Ulysses and the Dogman | Males: 2 | Females: -- | Either: 1
The Caliph, the Cupid and the Clock | Males: 2 | Females: -- | Either: 1
Modern Rural Sports | Males: 3 | Females: -- | Either: --
Ten Thousand Dollars | Males: 3 | Females: 2 | Either: --
Proof of the Pudding | Males: 2 | Females: -- | Either: --

From the Author…
Like many of you, I grew up on O. Henry short stories. His flair for language – “No man existed who had money enough to wear so bad a hat as his.” – his use of malapropisms – “He hit his head and lost conscientiousness.” – and his observations on life – “Life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.” – were manna to me.

And so, with the growth of interest in the “ten-minute play,” it was natural for me to turn to O. Henry’s short stories and look to turn them into “short plays.” Here then, are six of his classics which, when bound together, should give your audiences (and your actors) a one-hour glimpse into O. Henry’s way with a word, penchant with a pen, and authoritative ascendancy with alliteration. Where necessary for understanding, I’ve updated his language or varied the circumstances slightly. But where possible, I’ve left his characters as they were originally crafted – with even the simplest hobo having the utmost in dignity.

And the reason I loved reading O. Henry most? His vaunted surprise endings!

Enjoy,
Rob Frankel

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AT RISE:
The kitchen table is in darkness. SHELDON DAWE, a down and out writer, sits in dirty clothes on the park bench, perhaps whittling a stick or cleaning his fingernails, staring into space. He checks his watch occasionally, glances around, and returns to his staring. After a few moments pass this way, editor JONATHAN WESTBROOK, in suit and tie and carrying a briefcase, enters USR and saunter toward DSL, whistling. As he passes DAWE, DAWE notices him, stands, and tugs on his sleeve. WESTBROOK stops and turns.

WESTBROOK: (Awkwardly taking in DAWE’s condition.) Sheldon Dawe . . . is that you?

DAWE: Sit down for minute, will ya, Mr. Westbrook? This is my office. I can't come to yours looking like this. (WESTBROOK hesitates, looks at his watch.) Oh, sit down - you won't be disgraced. Those half-plucked bums on the other benches won't know you're a magazine editor.

WESTBROOK: (Sitting uncomfortably and reaching into his pocket.) Mint? (DAWE snaps up several from the tin and pops them into his mouth like food.) I have just -

DAWE: Oh, I know. You have just ten minutes to spare. How did you manage to get past my receptionist - the kid throwing a frisbee to his dog over there?

WESTBROOK: How, uh, how goes the writing?

DAWE: Look at me for your answer. Now, don't ask me why I don't get a job as a cab driver. I know I can write good fiction. I'll make you change the spelling of "regrets" to "a-c-c-e-p-t-e-d" yet! (WESTBROOK shifts in his seat skeptically.) Have you read the last story I sent you, "Alarum of the Soul"?

WESTBROOK: Carefully. I hesitated over that story, Shel, really I did. It has some good points. I was just writing a letter saying that I regret -

DAWE: Never mind the regrets. There's no salve or sting in 'em any more. So? Give it to me straight. What was wrong with this one?