

FEEL THE TINGLE

by
Grady Smith

CAST

Gustave
Jennifer
Canada Doc
Sex Shop Proprietor
USA Doc
Electra
Sparky
Father Severe
Lex Dura
Doctor Hippocrates

Gustave is played by a crash dummy with swivel hips.

The actor who plays Canada Doc can also play the other two doctors.

The actor who plays the Sex Shop Proprietor can also play Father Severe.

THE SET

There are several playing areas on stage when the show starts—Gustave’s hospital room, the sex shop, USA Doc’s office, Father Severe’s confessional, and the Tribunal of the Universal Inquisition. If at all possible, all of these areas should be preset so that one scene flows immediately into the next. There should be no interruptions to the onward momentum.

PLAYING STYLE

Definitely not gritty realism. Playing should be broad, for the laughs, but should stop well short of comic-book characterizations. Finding the appropriate middle ground will probably be deceptively hard work.

Satire from Jennifer comes from her sense of outrage in the face of freshly discovered information and situations. Satire from the professionals arises from their blasé acceptance of synthetic and sometimes contradictory rules for judging the rightness or wrongness of an action.

FEEL THE TINGLE

SCENE: at center stage, a hospital bed parallel to the curtain line. Nightstand with a bedpan on top. Chair at the foot of the bed. At various parts of the stage, a sex shop, the AMERICAN DOCTOR's office, FATHER SEVERE's confessional and the Tribunal of the Inquisition.

AT THE RISE: GUSTAVE—a crash dummy—lies in the hospital bed, covered by a thin sheet. HE's wearing a typical hospital gown. There is a large bandage on the top of HIS head, and a drip feeding into HIS arm. HE is on oxygen. JENNIFER sits in the chair.

JENNIFER

(Mournfully uses a Kleenex on her eyes and nose. Rises, crosses slowly up to the head of the bed. Rests one hand lightly on GUSTAVE'S chest, the other on HIS forehead.)

Oh, Gus. Honey.

(Bends down and gently kisses GUSTAVE on the forehead. Begins to tear up again and dabs her eyes with the Kleenex. Rests both hands on HIS chest, looking at his face.)

You'd have made a great daddy.

CANADA DOC

(Enters. Wears one of those disc mirrors on his head, but instead of a mirror, there's a red maple leaf on the disc.)

You have my deepest sympathy, Mrs. Fernburst. He was so young.

JENNIFER

We really wanted to have children.

CANADA DOC

Did you?

JENNIFER

At least two.

CANADA DOC

How long were you married?

JENNIFER

Fourteen hours.

CANADA DOC

What happened?

JENNIFER

We ran out of condoms.

CANADA DOC

But you said you wanted children.

JENNIFER

Not nine months and fourteen hours after the wedding.

CANADA DOC

You should have brought extras.

JENNIFER

We thought a whole box would get us through to the morning.

CANADA DOC

So—he died because you ran out of condoms?

JENNIFER

Well, he went out to get some more with this sense of—you know, urgency. And I think that's why he forgot to buckle up.

CANADA DOC

The human paradox—uses a condom but not a seat belt.

JENNIFER

Well, it *was* his honeymoon.

CANADA DOC

And now his brain is dead.
(Shakes head sadly)
PVS.

JENNIFER

What?

CANADA DOC

Persistent Vegetative State.

JENNIFER

(Getting an idea)
Wait a minute.

CANADA DOC

I went on a honeymoon once.

JENNIFER

His *brain* is dead—but not the rest of him.

CANADA DOC

My mother didn't know she was pregnant.

JENNIFER

Doctor.

CANADA DOC

Yes, my dear?

JENNIFER

I want you to take semen from Gus.

CANADA DOC

Do you think there's any left?

JENNIFER

That's why we needed more condoms. I want enough so I can get pregnant.

CANADA DOC

An inspired idea.

JENNIFER

Thank you.

CANADA DOC

Unfortunately, no can do. It's against the law here.

JENNIFER

What?

CANADA DOC

No Posthumous Assisted Reproduction.

JENNIFER

Gus isn't the only one who's brain-dead.

CANADA DOC

It's the law here, and in several other countries. Too bad this isn't Belgium—it's okay there. Or the U.S. Well, I have to continue on my rounds.

JENNIFER

The U.S.?

CANADA DOC

Sure. All you need there is a credit card.

JENNIFER

But they're so...thou-shalt-not.

CANADA DOC

Ah, but they don't let scruples interfere with commerce.

JENNIFER

So if Gus were across the border...

CANADA DOC

I know what you're thinking, Mrs. Fernburst. But your husband can't be moved.

(Starting to go)

I'll stop by again tomorrow morning.

JENNIFER

Doctor, how long will he—

CANADA DOC

He's young, Mrs. Fernburst. He could keep going for years.

(Starts to go, then sticks HIS head back in. Big grin:)

Have a nice day.

(Exits)

JENNIFER

Gus may not be able to cross the border, but a specimen sure can.

(JENNIFER leaves the hospital room and crosses to the sex shop. The PROPRIETOR, reading a newspaper and chewing on a dead cigar butt, sits behind a counter displaying appropriate utensils and appliances. There are more on the wall behind HIM.)

PROPRIETOR

(Looks up at HER a second. Back to HIS paper)

Vibrators're in aisle two.

JENNIFER

(Uncomfortable in these surroundings)

That's, uh—not what I need.

PROPRIETOR

(Looks at HER over the newspaper)

Watcha looking for, little lady?

JENNIFER

Well, I'm—not sure.

PROPRIETOR

(Puts newspaper down and looks at HER)

What exactly wouldya like to, uh—experience?

JENNIFER

Oh.

(Chuckles at the misunderstanding)

It's not for me. It's for my husband.

PROPRIETOR

(Picks up newspaper)

And what exactly do you want for *him*?

JENNIFER

Well, I'm not sure *what* I need.

PROPRIETOR

Handcuffs? Whip?

JENNIFER

Oh, no. See, I need something that will, uh—induce an orgasm so I can, uh—harvest his sperm.

PROPRIETOR

(This is so ordinary)

Oh.

(Reaches under counter and brings out a box, which HE proceeds to open as HE talks. Holds up the Jim Dandy little whiz-bang so SHE can see it)

Got just watcha need. Looky here.

(It looks like a black and chrome Polish sausage with wires coming out one end)

You just stick the business end where the sun don't shine...

JENNIFER

Where?

PROPRIETOR

Up his butt! Then you plug this wire into an ordinary wall socket, and you're ready to hit the on-button here on the end of this other wire. The tip that's inside sends a nice tingly little jolt into the appropriate anatomy, and boom-a-whack-a-bang! Mount Vesuvius!

JENNIFER

(Horrified)
A hundred and ten volts?

PROPRIETOR

Oh, no. No pain—that stuff’s on aisle three. There’s a transformer or something in here. He’ll get just enough of a jolt to tickle his fancy. Your husband’ll feel only mucho pleasure-o.

JENNIFER

Actually, he won’t feel anything.
(Tearing up)
He’s dead.

PROPRIETOR

Dead! You mean—dead??

JENNIFER

Brain-dead. PVS.

PROPRIETOR

Oh, Wow! Reverse-gender necrophilia!
(Looks at HER awestruck. A smiling compliment:)
You are so kinky!
(Throws money at HIM, grabs the box.)
Hey, wait. You’ll need this. On the house, little lady.
(It’s an empty specimen bottle.)

(SHE heads for Gus’s hospital room. Stops upstage of the bed. Takes the appliance out of the box and plugs it in. Holds the sheet up. The target area is not visible to the audience. Realizes SHE needs both hands free. Gets bedpan from nightstand and uses it to prop the sheet up and away from GUS, still shielding HIM from the audience’s sight.)

JENNIFER

(Trying to figure out how to gain access)
All right, Honey. Moon me.
(Struggling)
Honey, moon me.
(Throws caution to the winds. Raises GUS’s upstage leg straight up into a vertical position, tucks it behind HER head to keep it vertical, and thrusts home.)
Touché. Now then.
(Puts leg down. Gets the specimen bottle, uncaps it, holds it in one hand. In the other, SHE holds the on-button at the end of its cord.)
Okay, Gus baby. Give me a little Fernburst.

(SHE activates the on-button. HER eyes grow big and wide as they follow GUS's progress—all, of course dear reader, out of sight of the audience. Then, Fire One! It arches away, SHE tries to catch it with the bottle and misses. Fire Two, and SHE misses that. Finally gets a firm grip on the cannon and directs its fire into the bottle, HER shoulders jerking with each of GUS's spasms. SHE now has more than enough, thank you, and realizes both hands are fully occupied and SHE can't figure out how to turn the device off.)

Gus, that's enough, Baby. Gus!

(HER foot follows along the electric cord to where the plug is in the socket, but the wire is too slack. Bites on the cord to pull it taut and after a brief struggle unplugs the device with HER foot. Spits out the cord.)

Criminey, Gus.

(Holds the bottle up to check the take.)

Why, you old sweetheart. You are a great daddy.

(Gives HIM a kiss on the cheek. Holds up the device and addresses it)

And you're a pretty good papa yourself. Now I'm off—

(Starts to sing, to the tune of "South of the Border, Down Mexico Way.")

—South of the border, down USA way...

(Sits on chair in AMERICAN DOCTOR's office. HE's standing there wearing the disc mirror on his forehead, only it's got a stars-and-stripes motif on it. HE holds the specimen bottle up to the light and looks at it.)

AMERICAN DOCTOR

Electro-ejaculation, eh? Very resourceful.

JENNIFER

There's a name for it?

AMERICAN DOCTOR

Oh, my, yes. But to the issue—you say you want to get pregnant?

JENNIFER

Yes! Can you help me?

AMERICAN DOC

(A foregone conclusion)

Oh, Mrs. Fernburst. MasterCard or Visa?

(Beat. With smiling politeness HE ushers her from the seat SHE's sitting in to the one on HIS other side, where SHE sits again. With a flourish HE loses the specimen bottle and produces copy of a sonogram. Four months have passed.)

AMERICAN DOC

(showing HER the sonogram)

Twins.

JENNIFER

(Not comprehending)
Twins?

AMERICAN DOC

(Looking at the sonogram)
Yes indeedy.

JENNIFER

(Aghast)
Twins!

AMERICAN DOC

(Shows her the photo of a sonogram)
Here, see? A boy—see that?—and a girl.

JENNIFER

(Beginning to like the idea)
A boy and a girl....

AMERICAN DOC

Yes.

JENNIFER

(Smiling)
One of each!

AMERICAN DOC

What will you name them?

JENNIFER

Name?

AMERICAN DOC

Yes.

JENNIFER

(Thinks for a moment. This is fun)
Electra--

(an inspiration strikes:)
--And Sparky!

(Makes the final decision:)
Yes, that's it! Electra—

(ELECTRA enters. SHE's portrayed by a grown actor who plays HER as thirteen. An appropriate costume piece or two. Maybe a pigtail wig. ELECTRA acknowledges the audience.)

JENNIFER (continued)

--And Sparky.

(SPARKY enters. Again a grown actor, playing HIM at thirteen. Same costume deal. A sort of goofy bow-wave to the audience. JENNIFER & ELECTRA exit as the lights fade up on FATHER SEVERE, wearing a black cassock, and sitting in HIS confessional. A sign says "Father [blank] hearing confessions." HE hangs up HIS sign: "SEVERE." SPARKY goes over and kneels down next to HIM.)

SPARKY

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. Since my last confession I've had sex with papa.

(Beat. Hopefully for a laugh.)

Three times.

FATHER SEVERE

Oh, you poor kid. He made you do it, right?

SPARKY

Actually, it was my idea.

FATHER SEVERE

Well, *you're* precocious.

SPARKY

(smiling agreement)

I'm thirteen.

FATHER SEVERE

That's why papa should have put a stop to it. And started you on therapy.

SPARKY

(Laughs)

Oh. No, see—papa's a small appliance.

FATHER SEVERE

An—appliance?

SPARKY

Yes. It's a kind of kielbasa thing, with wires coming out one end.

FATHER SEVERE

(Praying to the heavens:)

Sweet Mary Magdalene! I'm going to need help on this one. So 'papa' is, uh—an electrical apparatus?

SPARKY

Of course.

FATHER SEVERE

(A light bulb goes on)
Wait a minute. This could turn into an article in Pastoral Theology Quarterly.

SPARKY

It could?

FATHER SEVERE

Yes! Why, I could even get promoted to monsignor!
(Leaps to HIS feet)
Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!
(SPARKY takes off. FATHER SEVERE heads for the Tribunal of the Inquisition — three chairs with maybe a table)
This session of the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition will now come to order! Is the representative of the law here?

LEX DURA

(Enters. Wears a necktie over HIS tee shirt, and carries a beat-up briefcase.)
Lex Dura, Esquire, here—at your service. By the way, Padre. It's not the Inquisition any more. They changed the name.

FATHER SEVERE

Oh, that's right—it's the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith now.

LEX DURA

Why'd they do that, anyway?

FATHER SEVERE

Sounds much more innocent. People kept associating the old name with torture and burning at the stake and all that. Torture's out now.

LEX DURA

Not for lawyers.
(To the audience:)
Well anyway, not for the ones with big jobs and high titles.

FATHER SEVERE

Is the representative of the medical profession here?

DOC HIPPOCRATES

(Enters. Wears a lab coat and the disc mirror on his head. It sports the caduceus symbol instead of a flag.)
That's me. Doctor Hippocrates, ready, willing and able.

FATHER SEVERE

Are the questionees present?

(JENNIFER, ELECTRA & SPARKY enter and cross to the tribunal area. THEY sit on three stools, which THEY can bring with them.)

FATHER SEVERE

Now then, Mrs. Fernburst. An allegation has been laid before this Tribunal, to wit: you underwent IVF using the semen of a dead man. Is this true?

JENNIFER

IVF?

DOC HIPPOCRATES

In Vitro Fertilization.

JENNIFER

The donor was my husband. There's nothing wrong with that.

(The three tribunal members think this is hugely funny.)

FATHER SEVERE

Nothing wrong! Charming naiveté. Such an act, Mrs. Fernburst, circumvents the natural processes of conception. Therefore it's immoral.

JENNIFER

But you let husbands use viagra and those other medications. Doesn't that circumvent natural processes? Or is it okay for men to do the circumventing but not women?

FATHER SEVERE

But a pill is, uh—an inside job. Heh heh.

JENNIFER

So's *papa*.

LEX DURA

Mrs. Fernburst, some religions don't have any quarrel with IVF.

JENNIFER

They don't?

LEX DURA

Not at all. But if a country's laws prohibit it, it doesn't matter. And yours is a *special* problem because the donor was technically deceased. In the United States that's okay—for now. But in another country, say...

JENNIFER

Yes, in Canada it's against the law.

LEX DURA

Oh, Canada's by no means alone. Germany, France, Sweden, England...

JENNIFER

That's appalling.

LEX DURA

That's the law.

JENNIFER

So legality is a question of geography?

LEX DURA

(This doesn't phase HIM in the least. To the other tribunal members:)
She's got it! And when you went from Canada to the United States, do you know what you did?

JENNIFER

I got pregnant?

LEX DURA

You committed reproductive tourism.

JENNIFER

Reproductive *what?*

LEX DURA

Tourism. AKA procreative tourism.

(Beat. To the audience:)
I'm not making this up. When you get home, google it.
(To JENNIFER)

The fact remains that in many countries—more every year—it's illegal.

JENNIFER

Immoral and illegal, eh? Doctor Hyppocrates, what's your angle?

DOC HIPPOCRATES

Ethics, of course.

JENNIFER

So it's also unethical, right?

DOC HIPPOCRATES

For some physicians it is, for some it isn't. Individual differences, you know.

(JENNIFER throws up HER hands.)

But the trump card is the law of the land—

(LEX DURA clasps HIS hands together like HE's just won a boxing match.)

—whichever land that happens to be. And of course, as often as not, the various religious denominations have lobbied hard for restrictive legislation.

(FATHER SEVERE waves HIS clenched hands over HIS head.)

Apparently they don't believe that the source of the Ten Commandments possesses enough enforcement authority. But the bottom line here is—if it's illegal, we can't do it.

JENNIFER

You mean Electra and the women of her generation are going to have to sneak down back alleys in the dead of night so they can get *pregnant*?

DOC HIPPOCRATES

Reverse *deja vu*, eh?

JENNIFER

All right, members of the Tribunal, a straight answer. If you can come up with one between the three you. Did I do right or wrong?

FATHER SEVERE

What's your religion?

DOCTOR HIPPOCRATES

Who's your doctor?

LEX DURA

What's your nationality?

JENNIFER

That's it. Come on, kids. You're too young to be exposed to this kind of stuff.

(Leads HER children to downstage center and addresses the audience. Arms around THEIR shoulders.)

Ladies and gentlemen, we're the Fernbursts. This is my daughter, Electra.

(a little kiss on the top of ELECTRA's head)

This guy here is my son, Sparky.

(Tousles HIS hair.)

And I'm their mom, Jennifer. Their father Gus died a year after a car accident. I finally decided that living on a machine like a vegetable wasn't living at all, and I made them shut it down.

(looks at the Tribunal)

I'm sure the Tribunal remembers *that* case.

(Tribunal members exit)

JENNIFER (continued)

It was heartbreaking to have to do that—but I loved him. The good news is, we actually had the children that we wanted so much. Oh, we have our scrappy little moments, the three of us. But when I stop and look, I can see that most of the time we're basically pretty happy. And we hope that all of you are too.

(looking at HER kids:)

So. We are the Fernburst family—

(Squeezes HER kids' shoulders.)

F-e-e-l the tingle.

THEY wave goodbye to the audience, ad libbing 'goodbye,' and THEY exit as

the curtain falls.

END OF PLAY