

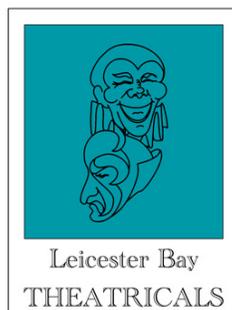
PERUSAL SCRIPT



# BORDERLANDS

A PLAY

*By Eric Samuelsen*



*Newport, Maine*

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*Artwork courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

## CHARACTERS

DAVE MCGREGOR . . . a salesman

GAIL LEWIS . . . an independent business owner

PHYLLIS WELLS . . . an office manager

BRIAN ROENICKE . . . a mechanic

## CAST

*Borderlands* was first presented by Plan-B Theatre Company 31 March–10 April 2011, funded in part by an “Access to Artistic Excellence” grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and directed by Jerry Rapier. The original cast was:

DAVE MCGREGOR . . . Kirt Bateman

GAIL LEWIS . . . Stephanie Howell

PHYLLIS WELLS . . . Teri Cowan

BRIAN ROENICKE . . . Topher Rasmussen

## AUTHOR’S NOTE

*BORDERLANDS MARKS A PLACE OF INTERSECTION*, a liminal space where roads end but new paths begin, where no horizons reveal themselves but also where collisions do us harm. I’m a believing, practicing Mormon, and Mormonism is at its most essential a religion that preaches literally endless human possibilities, eternal progression, and growth. But we Mormons face tremendous pressure to conform, to fit in, to obey, to define ourselves in certain quite limited ways. It is, for many, a religious culture of public orthodoxy and quietly whispered rebellion. And so we carve out spaces for ourselves, and we meet in those spaces, and we come out to each other. We come out. *SUNSTONE Magazine* is one such space, where we brave the borderlands — this play came in part from reading back issues of *SUNSTONE*.

But where to set it? And then I thought of a used car lot, the one commercial space in American culture where prices are contingent; the one place we still bargain. The very act of car buying is also liminal, but also sort of sleazy: the game of salesmanship, the give and take, the creating of quickly disposable narratives strikes me as quintessentially and disreputably American. Cars represent the transcendent open road, Kerouac and Hunter Thompson and Tom Wolfe. And Dale Earnhardt: go to any Christian bookstore in the South or Midwest, and see the two big displays on competing tables: the vulgar eschatology of *Left Behind*, and Dale Earnhardt— prints of him being raptured out of his wrecked #3 car. Cars represent mobility and portability and of course the possibility of instant death. And freedom, and life.

So I wrote a play about coming out, about cars and salesmanship, about death and God and sexual desire. And a space, perhaps in a mini-van, where we dare to tell ourselves the truth, and where we are appalled to find how little it sets us free.

—ERIC SAMUELSEN

## NOTE ON SCRIPT

A note about notation. In this play, a dash (—) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (. . .) suggests a pause, a line trailing off.

TIME: Now

PLACE: A used car lot in Provo, Utah

**BORDERLANDS** by Eric Samuelsen 2M 2W About 2 hours (For production by Professional Groups, College/ University Groups, Community Groups) What's it like to pretend to be perfect? What's it like to be a Mormon but question your faith? What's it like to be gay and LDS? What's it like to live in the "Borderlands"? A powerful exploration of the difference between outward orthodoxy and true faith. This is not an easy play. It asks hard questions by presenting tough material in edgy situations. It deals with hypocrisy and self-righteousness but deftly avoids smugness or easy answers. Set in a used car lot in Provo, Utah this play is written with Latter-day Saint characters, but its philosophies and questions, its heart, are part of any Faith. Mature Language. **ORDER #2031**

**Eric Samuelsen** taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright. He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine *The Sugarbeet*. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at [Mormoniconoclast.com](http://Mormoniconoclast.com). Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

# BORDERLANDS

## SCENE ONE

*(A used car lot: upstage, its small office. GAIL, early forties, searches, looking for the right car. DAVE, mid-50s, stands by the office, watches her. Finally he drifts over to her.)*

DAVE: You don't want that car.

GAIL: Excuse me?

DAVE: It's a lousy car. You don't want it.

*(She stares at him. He offers his hand.)*

Dave McGregor. "Can I help you?" That's how I'm supposed to start off, "Can I help you?"

GAIL: No, sorry, I really don't want to be sold anything—.

DAVE: The old dance. Used car salesman. Wary consumer.

GAIL: No. Please, I'll just look around—.

DAVE: So not today. No tricks, no sales tactics. Just truth.

GAIL: Look, I . . .

DAVE: And the truth is I don't have a car on my lot right now I'd feel good about selling you.

*(He holds out his hand.)*

As I said, I'm Dave . . .

GAIL: Gail.

*(Warily shaking his hand.)*

I don't understand. Why don't I want this car?

DAVE: It's got some things. You can't really see, but . . . just take a look.

GAIL: What?

DAVE: Underneath.

*(She leans down awkwardly.)*

GAIL: I'm sorry, I don't even know what I'm looking . . . Is that a . . . ?

DAVE: A towel. Big ol' beach towel. Duct taped under the drive train.

*(She stares uncomprehendingly.)*

Oil leak. Big one. And you know, you can patch anything with silicon, get a few hundred extra miles out of it. But this guy, he couldn't be bothered, not even a crappy half-assed fix.

Just a towel so it won't leak on your driveway.

GAIL: So, you're gonna fix it?

DAVE: What I figured, if you wanted to take it to a mechanic, I'd tell you about the towel. I'd say something like "Hey, we just got the car today. We're fixing the leak tomorrow."

GAIL: But if I didn't? If I just made you an offer?

DAVE: Caveat emptor.

GAIL: That's disgusting.

DAVE: Just the world of car sales.

GAIL: But you're what? Warning me off?

DAVE: Like I said, the truth. You ready?

GAIL: For . . . ?

DAVE: (*Sudden intensity.*) Don't buy this car; don't buy any of the cars on my lot. If I had a good car, I'd sell it to you. I don't.

GAIL: Who are you?

DAVE: An honest salesman.

(*A pause.*)

GAIL: Okay, okay, I get it now. Seriously, I came *this* close to falling for it.

(*She starts to leave.*)

DAVE: What?

GAIL: You've got this car, the towel car, you've got it priced around what I can afford. So you tell me all these things that are wrong with it, but, *but*, there's this *other* place where you've got all the other cars, the *good* ones, but more expensive. The idea is I'll be all, "He's so honest, he's someone I can trust," and I end up getting something that's not really any better, only I paid a lot more.

DAVE: Hey, that's good. Talk down one car to sell another one for more.

GAIL: I'm in no mood for it, tricks and—

(*She gathers herself to go.*)

DAVE: I'd do it, too. Except. I don't have a better car to sell you.

GAIL: You don't?

DAVE: When you walked on the lot, I thought "Hey, I bet I can sell her that Achieva." You were interested.

GAIL: Maybe.

DAVE: Under eighty thousand miles, and the price was right.

But then I couldn't.

GAIL: Why not?

DAVE: Don't know.

(*Pause.*)

GAIL: My son's going on a mission.

DAVE: Good for him.

GAIL: Yeah.

DAVE: Seems to me that you'd be selling—

GAIL: No, we are, we're selling *his* car. My daughter, she's going to college, and she needs a car. So she gets my Subaru, and I need a new car.

DAVE: Sounds good.

GAIL: (*After a pause.*) It's just . . . it's a stressful . . .

DAVE: And you're dealing with things alone.

GAIL: What?

DAVE: You're single? Divorced, widowed maybe?

GAIL: Excuse me?

DAVE: Buying a car for a daughter's usually a guy thing, so . . .

GAIL: That is absolutely none of your business!

DAVE: True enough.

GAIL: I'm leaving. You don't have a car for me anyway, so . . .

DAVE: Just thought I could help, maybe recommend a couple places . . .

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: Guys I know. Honest salesmen.

GAIL: Like you.

DAVE: Not really. You want some pointers?

GAIL: No, look, I'm just going to—.

DAVE: When a salesman sees a female customer shopping alone, it's Christmas in July. It's Mardi Gras. Commission plus maybe a sale over sticker.

GAIL: I said I don't need your help.

*(But she doesn't leave.)*

DAVE: Don't ever say you like a car. See, he'll use that on you, he'll be all "But you really like this car, right?" And if you agree with him once, on anything, it's a step closer.

GAIL: To?

DAVE: Him winning. Say, "It's okay, but there's this other car . . ." Say, "I'm looking a couple of places." His car's fine, but you're not in love.

GAIL: Who falls in love with a car?

DAVE: It's love or it's lust; it's not ever about transportation.

GAIL: It's *only* about transporta—.

DAVE: Make him meet your price; always, always be ready to say no.

GAIL: You make it sound like . . . war.

DAVE: It is. So you don't say you don't know much about cars. Nod, deflect, make him do the talking. And when it comes to price, he's gonna wanna talk sticker, you want out-the-door.

GAIL: Meaning?

DAVE: Sticker on this car here, I'm asking forty-eight hundred. Now, that's just where we start dickering. But say, forty-five, right? You add sales tax, dealer prep, licensing, you'll end up paying something around five grand. So just keep asking, "How much out the door?"

Salesmen HATE that. You're LDS, right?

GAIL: In this valley, that's not much of a—.

DAVE: Some guys, they'll wear a white shirt that's sort of see-through, he wants you to see his garment line. Walk away.

GAIL: 'Cause if he's parading his Mormonness—

DAVE: May not mean much. It may not be deliberately ostentatious. Still.

GAIL: I can't trust anyone—that's what you're saying.

DAVE: Well, you really can't trust used car salesmen. Anyway. I'll get you a coupla names.

*(Walks away.)*

GAIL: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: You don't want any names?

GAIL: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: 'Cause you really don't want that Achieva.

GAIL: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: I felt like it.

GAIL: Felt like what?

DAVE: Being honest.

## SCENE TWO

*(The office. PHYLLIS, mid-50s though she looks older, is working on paperwork.*

*DAVE enters, sits.)*

PHYLLIS: That didn't take long.

DAVE: Nope.

PHYLLIS: You showed her the Achieva?

DAVE: It's not what she's looking for. Good thing too.

PHYLLIS: We didn't put that towel there.

DAVE: Nope. Anyway, it was out of her price range.

PHYLLIS: What are we asking?

DAVE: Four eight.

PHYLLIS: It should move at that price.

DAVE: Long as they don't show it to a mechanic. We got any more Diet Coke?

PHYLLIS: Dave, now, don't go soft on me.

DAVE: I've told you, I don't want that car on my lot.

*(PHYLLIS glares. He gets a Diet Coke. She works on the paperwork, grimaces in pain.)*

Listen. You need me to finish that up for you?

PHYLLIS: I'm fine.

DAVE: Isn't it Homemaking tonight?

PHYLLIS: Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment.

DAVE: When did *that* happen?

PHYLLIS: A few years ago.

DAVE: That's a mouthful. Anyway. It's tonight.

PHYLLIS: Not that you'd know. Not that you'd know anything about what's going on in the Church.

DAVE: I'm just offering to finish the paperwork for you.

PHYLLIS: I'm fine. Twenty minutes, then I'm going.

*(She looks out.)*

Why aren't you out there? There's a customer on the lot.

DAVE: Thought I'd get myself a Diet Coke first.

PHYLLIS: There's a customer on our lot!

DAVE: I see him.

PHYLLIS: Dave!

DAVE: That Dodge pickup. That's what's caught his eye.

*(Working on his Coke. Burps.)*

PHYLLIS: That's so disgusting.

DAVE: Which is why I did it in here, instead of out there in front of a customer.

PHYLLIS: He's looking around! "Where's the salesman," he's wondering. "Oh, gee, I guess there isn't one. Guess I'd better just leave!" Dad would have been out there.

DAVE: Dad understood timing.

PHYLLIS: When you get out there, don't you give the whole store away.

DAVE: I know what I'm doing.

PHYLLIS: You spent a long time with that woman. For a car she didn't even test drive.

DAVE: Win some, you lose some.

*(He heads out the door.)*

Can I help you?

*(He's gone. PHYLLIS looks at him exasperated. Suddenly, with a tiny cry of pain, she doubles over. She looks furtively to see if DAVE can see her. Pulls out a prescription bottle, fishes out a pill. Takes a drink from the Coke to wash it down.)*

## SCENE THREE

*(GAIL looks around, a little anxiously. DAVE strolls out to her.)*

GAIL: Hey.

DAVE: Hey. It's Gail, right?

GAIL: Yeah. That's one of your tricks, isn't it? Remembering names.

DAVE: I'm actually terrible at names.

GAIL: And that's another trick. Self-deprecating . . . that's not why I'm here. I want that Achieva.

DAVE: With the towel?

GAIL: But you told me about the towel. So you're gonna have to fix that, the oil leak or—

DAVE: Okay . . .

GAIL: And you warned me; you said it was a bad car. So you'll have to drop the price. A lot.

DAVE: Okay.

GAIL: And that's why I came back. I can't afford something nicer. I can afford that Achieva.

DAVE: Makes sense.

GAIL: And you're going to have to sell it to me for way less than that sticker price. You already told me about its problems, so if you try anything funny at all, *at all*, I'll report you to the Better Business Bureau.

DAVE: I expect we can come to terms.

GAIL: I don't trust you, and I don't know what you were up to, telling me things like you told me, but it's got to be some kind of . . . ploy. I know that. And I'm not really adept at this kind of . . . never mind. I'll give you five hundred dollars for it, and for that I fix the oil leak, or fifteen hundred and you fix it, and that's it, that's all.

DAVE: Okay.

GAIL: And that's it, that's as high as I can—

DAVE: I said fine. Come into the office with me, we'll deal with the paperwork.

GAIL: And that's it?

DAVE: I don't want it on my lot; you're offering to take it off my hands. What I'm gambling: can I fix the oil leak for less than a thousand dollars.

GAIL: Well, I don't care.

DAVE: Oh, no, this is where it gets interesting. See, maybe I have to rebuild the entire engine. Could run two or three grand or more. But maybe it's just a gasket, and I make seven, eight hundred more than I was thinking. We're both gamblin' here, is what I'm saying.

GAIL: I didn't come here to gamble.

DAVE: Well, you don't live on a car lot. Got to have something to keep my blood pumpin'.

*(They go into the office. PHYLLIS is gone.)*

Nice job, by the way.

*(She stares at him uncomprehending.)*

The way you took charge of the sale.

GAIL: Fine, thanks, whatever. So we have a deal, what deal?

DAVE: So I take the gamble. Fifteen hundred. And I fix the oil leak.

GAIL: Okay then.

DAVE: Let's say delivery the end of this week. If it's gonna take longer, I'll give you a call.

*(Pulls out paperwork.)*

GAIL: I still don't trust you, you know.

DAVE: Fair enough.

*(Rummaging through paperwork.)*

GAIL: I hate this. Sorry, I just hate it. Cars.

DAVE: Hmmm?

GAIL: Why do people give 'em female names?

DAVE: What do you mean?

GAIL: People who name their cars. It's always old lady names, Gladys or Florence, or . . . female names. Cars are men.

DAVE: Why's that?

GAIL: Temperamental, unreliable, maddening. That's why cars get girl names. Hah! Men, on the other hand . . .

DAVE: I get it.

*(PHYLLIS enters. Furious.)*

PHYLLIS: Dave.

DAVE: Just a sec.

PHYLLIS: I need to talk to you.

DAVE: I'm with a customer, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS: I need to talk to you *right now*.

DAVE: *(To GAIL.)* I'm sorry. Excuse me.

*(Crosses a little away from her.)*

What?

PHYLLIS: You're selling that Achieva? With the towel?

DAVE: She knows about the towel. Fifteen hundred—.

PHYLLIS: Fifteen hund—!

DAVE: Plus we fix the leak.

PHYLLIS: I knew it! We assume all the risk, *all of it*, plus, *plus*, sell it for three hundred less than we paid for it!

DAVE: And get a lemon off our lot.

PHYLLIS: You want to ask her out!

DAVE: Will you keep your voice down!

PHYLLIS: That's the only explanation; you're giving that car away!

DAVE: I'm in charge of sales, Phyllis. I'm getting rid of a car I don't want.

PHYLLIS: This is *my* lot! You're *my* employee!

DAVE: Partner.

PHYLLIS: I know what this is; you're trying to impress her, telling her about the towel, offering to fix the car, accepting a deal like this!

DAVE: You pay me commission; *I'm* the one taking the loss here.

PHYLLIS: I'm keeping an eye on you.

*(She exits.)*

DAVE: *(Back to GAIL.)* Sorry about that.

GAIL: *(Tight lipped, angry.)* Are you?

DAVE: Am I what?

GAIL: Going to ask me out?

DAVE: Overheard that, did you?

GAIL: I'm out of here, I'm here to buy a car, not get all caught up in some kind of—

DAVE: What if I did ask you out?

GAIL: What?

DAVE: Will you go out with me?

GAIL: No!!!

DAVE: So okay. Good, we put that behind us. I've got your check, the paperwork's in front of me. Do we make a deal?

GAIL: Who is that woman? Why would she say that about you, about me, if—

DAVE: Pain pills, she doesn't like to take 'em, so she lashes out. I'm sorry you overheard that. But it's got nothing to do with this transaction.

GAIL: I don't know.

DAVE: So okay. You want, here's your check back.

GAIL: *(She stares at the check for a long time. Finally shakes her head, hands it back.)* No. I still want the car.

DAVE: And I still want to sell it to you.

*(Goes back to paperwork.)*

GAIL: I just . . . don't—

DAVE: You need a car, you found one you like that you think you can afford.

GAIL: Which I can afford because you told me about the towel. But why?

DAVE: I told you because I was, actually, hitting on you.

GAIL: Wait a minute, wait a minute . . . !

DAVE: I don't usually tell customers my cars suck. I had to have some reason for it.

GAIL: I am not, I'm NEVER—

DAVE: Okay. So that's out. I lose. No biggie, I've lost before.

GAIL: Give me my check back.

DAVE: Sure.

*(Hands it over.)*

GAIL: *(Gets up to leave.)* This is the most infuriating—

DAVE: I started off being honest with you. So I figure I'll keep on.

GAIL: I just . . . this isn't about . . . Just finish the paperwork and let me go.

DAVE: Almost done.

*(Writes, she's fuming.)*

GAIL: Listen, I don't know what qualifies as professional, or unprofessional conduct in your line of work, but when a woman comes to your car lot, she is there to do business, end of story, and for you to use her presence there to harbor some sordid little fantasy—.

DAVE: Sticker price on that Achieva is forty-eight hundred.

GAIL: I saw the sticker.

DAVE: I was honest with you. I've been honest with you the whole time. It's cost me three thousand dollars minimum and may cost me a lot more.

GAIL: But because you had ulterior motives, and that's—.

DAVE: Which I also told you about, straight up.

GAIL: That you wanted to date me.

DAVE: And by saying that, I lost any possibility of it ever happening. I've been honest from the start, to my detriment.

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: Because you walked on to my lot, and all the sudden, I couldn't lie anymore. Not to you.

GAIL: *(Pause.)* What are you doing, what are you doing now?

DAVE: I don't know.

GAIL: That's a . . . a *shitty* answer.

DAVE: It's the truth.

*(Another pause.)*

Can we start over, maybe?

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: I don't know.

GAIL: WHY?

DAVE: I just don't want this to be . . .

GAIL: What?

DAVE: Ordinary. A salesman slash customer thing.

*(Pause.)*

GAIL: I'm gonna go now, okay?

DAVE: Your car will be ready on Friday.

GAIL: Okay.

DAVE: I'll see you then.

GAIL: I don't know.

DAVE: Please.

GAIL: I don't know.

*(Pause.)*

DAVE: Okay.

## SCENE FOUR

DAVE: Hey. Your car's done.

GAIL: Okay.

DAVE: So I lost.

GAIL: Excuse me?

DAVE: I gambled and I lost. You've got a rebuilt engine in there. Should be good for a couple hundred thousand miles.

GAIL: Oh.

DAVE: Win some, you lose some.

GAIL: Look, we've got a contract; this was your gamble.

DAVE: I'm not complaining. Just get you the key.

GAIL: Listen, about . . . license, registration.

DAVE: Took care of it. New plates should show up in a couple of weeks.

GAIL: Oh. Great. Look, last time, I said some things—

DAVE: Don't worry about it. We were both sort of . . . off balance.

GAIL: Yeah.

DAVE: Keys.

*(Heads for the office.)*

GAIL: So, you're out some money on this. Your boss okay with it?

DAVE: My boss? Oh, my sister . . .

GAIL: You work for your sister?

DAVE: Yeah. I kinda crashed and burned a few years ago, ended up here.

GAIL: So you weren't always a used car salesman.

DAVE: No.

GAIL: What were you before? If you don't mind me asking.

DAVE: Attorney.

GAIL: Seriously?

DAVE: Yep.

*(Gets her the keys.)*

GAIL: Thanks.

DAVE: It's no trouble.

GAIL: So. Attorney to used car sales. What happened?

DAVE: Long story, don't worry about it.

GAIL: I've got time.

DAVE: Really?

GAIL: Oh, there's something you should be—?

DAVE: No. There's nobody on the lot.

GAIL: So. Tell me.

DAVE: Why?

GAIL: I don't know. The last time I was here, I wanted to hit you. I wanted to smash every car window on the lot.

DAVE: Sorry about that.

GAIL: It's okay. I got to thinking. How it's better to feel something than nothing.

DAVE: Sure.

GAIL: So I want to make you a deal.

DAVE: Okay.

GAIL: I sell Amway.

DAVE: No kidding. An Amway distributor.

GAIL: I have a wide range of products available. Household items, computers and software . . .

DAVE: Yeah. See, the thing about me is, I don't—.

GAIL: Look, you were honest before . . .

DAVE: Okay. I hate Amway.

GAIL: Good.

DAVE: I think it's a scam. And I sell used cars, I know scams, and Amway's a scam.

GAIL: Sure. You're dead wrong, but okay. Anyway. I want to see you again.

DAVE: You do.

GAIL: I want to ask you about men. I don't get men, and I need to and I've found something rare: a guy who tells the truth. So I'll stop by, once, maybe twice, maybe three times, and I'll ask you questions, and I'll try to sell you detergent or something, and you won't buy it, but that way I can feel okay about seeing you.

DAVE: Fair enough.

GAIL: I will never go out with you and I will certainly never sleep with you.

DAVE: So what's in it for me?

GAIL: Nothing. You were honest with me once, and maybe that was good for you, for once.

So . . .

DAVE: So, okay. It's a deal.

GAIL: That fast?

DAVE: Sure.

GAIL: Okay.

DAVE: Amway, huh?

GAIL: Yep.

DAVE: You good at it?

GAIL: Building a business. Bit by bit.

DAVE: Look, about the not-going-out part.

GAIL: That's really non-negotiable.

DAVE: Once, that's all I'm asking. One date. June 8<sup>th</sup> .

GAIL: June 8<sup>th</sup>?

DAVE: I get on your calendar; we can both spend two months anticipating.

GAIL: June 8<sup>th</sup> . You're serious?

DAVE: You gotta give me something to look forward to. Pleaasssee.

GAIL: I know you probably think that was charming, but really it wasn't.

DAVE: So, Amway. How'd you get into that?

GAIL: Well, it's sort of a natural isn't it? For a Mormon?

DAVE: I've heard a lot of Mormons are into it.

GAIL: It makes sense. I mean, that's the difference between Mormons and non-Mormons, right? Non-Mormons have friends with benefits, which I think means friends you have sex with.

DAVE: But Mormons don't have sex.

GAIL: Never. Tons of children, but no sex, ever. No, what we have are friends with agendas. I mean, you can't just have *friends*, you know. Just *friends* don't get you anywhere.

DAVE: I'm Mormon, I have friends.

GAIL: People you home teach, am I right? Where you're *friends*, but you also have to get your numbers?

DAVE: Okay.

GAIL: The member missionary thing is perfect. You're supposed to find some family, just people you pick who aren't Mormons, and you're supposed to make friends with them, so you can invite the missionaries over. They're friends, sort of, but you've got an agenda. So we have those sorts of friendships: Amway's perfect for us.

*(Pause.)*

I can't believe I just said all that.

DAVE: It's okay.

GAIL: I've never said any of that to anyone. In my life. I've thought it, but I've never said any of it, ever.

DAVE: I've never told anyone the truth about the cars I sell.

GAIL: Isn't that illegal?

DAVE: Beats me.

GAIL: *(Pause.)* I've met you twice before, we talked for ten minutes.

DAVE: I know.

GAIL: June 8<sup>th</sup>?

DAVE: It's a Friday. I bet it's a nice day, not too hot, not too cold—.

GAIL: And see, right there, you're flirting again, and that's who you are, I get that, but if we're going to be friends . . . Or whatever . . . I'm sorry, I'll just . . . goodbye.

DAVE: It's just nice sometimes.

GAIL: What is?

DAVE: A little . . . honesty vacation.

GAIL: Not from, toward. It is. It's nice.

*(Pause.)*

You said "ostentatious."

DAVE: I don't remember that.

GAIL: You did. You were talking about dishonest salesmen, and you said some guys wear shirts where you can see their garments. And you said it was "ostentatious."

DAVE: Itself a pretty ostentatious use of vocabulary.

GAIL: Maybe that's why I came back today.

*(Pause.)*

Listen, your sister's gonna be back out here.

DAVE: I think she took her pills.

GAIL: What's wrong with her?

DAVE: Cancer.

GAIL: I'm so terrible. I was making fun of her, thinking, boy, does he have the boss from hell.

DAVE: It's okay.

GAIL: I feel awful. Is she in treatment, is she in remission, or ...?

DAVE: They don't think there's much more they can do.

GAIL: I am so sorry.

DAVE: It's okay. So. June 8<sup>th</sup>?

GAIL: I don't know.

DAVE: *(Pause.)* I'll settle for that.

## SCENE FIVE

*(GAIL and DAVE sit in a car together.)*

DAVE: See, this is perfect. I'm showing the car to you. And I can see the rest of the lot; anyone comes in, I can get right up.

GAIL: How's she doing? Your sister slash boss.

DAVE: Today's not one of the good days.

GAIL: That must be tough.

DAVE: She's tough.

*(Pause.)*

Funny, I was about to say, "She's tough. She'll pull through." But it's not gonna happen.

GAIL: So, you crashed and burned. She took you in.

DAVE: She did. She didn't have to; nobody else would.

GAIL: So?

DAVE: It was . . . a whole series of things.

GAIL: Well, like what? You were an attorney; were you ever married?

DAVE: Eighteen years.

GAIL: See, I knew that. Something about you just told me you'd been married.

DAVE: But you're divorced?

GAIL: We're separated. He's been dragging his heels on the divorce the last year or so.

DAVE: I never wanted to do that. She deserved better: quick and painless.

GAIL: Not painless. It's never painless.

DAVE: No.

GAIL: It's the worst thing in the world. It's horrible.

DAVE: It is.

GAIL: It's horrible.

*(Pause.)*

So what happened?

DAVE: Well, it pissed her off that I cheated on her.

GAIL: Oh.

*(Pause, as she digests this.)*

So *you* were the bastard.

DAVE: I was the bastard.

GAIL: I really don't get that.

*(Insistent.)*

I mean it: explain that to me.

DAVE: What? I met someone, we had an affair, I got caught.

GAIL: No, no, no. This is the honesty car. You tell me *everything*.

DAVE: Maybe I don't want to.

GAIL: Mark did the same thing to me. My soon-to-be ex. He cheated on me, too, and I don't understand it.

DAVE: I don't know what there is to understand. I met someone; we went to a hotel together—

GAIL: It was about sex.

DAVE: Well, yeah.

GAIL: No way. No *way*. The one thing I know is that it wasn't about sex.

DAVE: So what was it about—?

GAIL: *Every* time he asked, *every* time he wanted to, even when I was exhausted, even when I really really wasn't in the mood, I said yes. Every single time. Four days after *childbirth* I said yes. And maybe I'm not, you know, a swimsuit model or something. But I've kept myself in pretty good shape, three kids and all. And I've met the other woman, and she's no movie star. So you explain this, you explain how you could do this, how you could think it's okay for you to just—.

DAVE: I never thought it was okay. I even knew I'd get caught. In a way, I was looking forward to it.

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: The whole thing's embarrassing. It's . . . tawdry.

GAIL: Good word. Tawdry.

DAVE: I want you to think well of me, maybe.

GAIL: Then explain this, I want to know. Why? How?

DAVE: In my case, I needed to, because she knew about the embezzling.

*(GAIL stares at him.)*

She worked at the law firm, case management, billing. And . . . turned out she was better at her job than she looked like she'd be.

GAIL: She caught you.

DAVE: I was skimming money off some trusts we were managing. She wasn't even supposed to do trusts.

GAIL: So you slept with her? To keep her mouth shut?

DAVE: I gave her half the money to keep her mouth shut. I slept with her . . . I don't know; we were partners in felony. Seemed like the next step.

GAIL: And you got caught.

DAVE: It was just a matter of time. I mean, sneaking around, someone would see me, they'd tell my wife. Or the IRS, an audit. I was a stupid criminal, you know, a stupid adulterer.

GAIL: Which one was it? Did your wife catch you, or was it the money?

DAVE: IRS. Not that it matters.

GAIL: No.

*(A pause.)*

You really did crash and burn, didn't you?

DAVE: I stayed out of jail. I destroyed two marriages, and I was excommunicated from the Church—did I mention I was in the bishopric?

GAIL: You didn't, no.

DAVE: I was disbarred. Check out my ankle, my right ankle.

GAIL: I can't see anything.

DAVE: I wear these pants just a little baggy. Ankle bracelet.

GAIL: When do you get it off? No, wait. June 8<sup>th</sup>?

DAVE: Well. Yeah.

GAIL: So you're still on probation.

DAVE: I got five years, just two months left. Plus, I had to pay back the money, with penalties.

That was all part of my plea bargain. See that shed over back behind the lot? That's where I sleep. I can't leave this lot. Well, to see my kids . . .

GAIL: Test drives?

DAVE: I can go on test drives. I can call. Look, it's not so bad. I stayed out of prison.

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: That's what you wanted to know, isn't it?

GAIL: Yeah.

DAVE: Because everything was perfect. Settled, and set and perfect. And it started to get a little boring. So . . . .

GAIL: What a stupid, *stupid* answer.

DAVE: No arguments there.

*(Pause.)*

GAIL: You must have had a good lawyer.

DAVE: An attorney friend took my case *pro bono*. That still amazes me.

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: For friendship, he said. When we finally signed the plea bargain, he shook my hand, and I haven't seen him since.

GAIL: So you had this great life. Good job, good money, good marriage? And you just got *bored*?

DAVE: Just one too many sacrament meetings.

GAIL: Okay. I'm gone.

*(She starts to get out of the car.)*

DAVE: Come on, Gail.

GAIL: I don't deserve flip. You can bob and weave, but if you want this, me, don't you *dare* be flip.

DAVE: Okay. You're right. I'm sorry.

GAIL: No! Don't do that either: don't give me that hang-dog look, don't tell me you're sorry.

DAVE: I won't say it again.

GAIL: Filthy cheating bastard. I should leave right this second.

DAVE: Please. Don't. You're right, completely right. But don't.

GAIL: *(Pause as she considers.)* Damn. A customer.

DAVE: I see him.

GAIL: Deal with him. It's okay, I'll still be here when you're finished.

DAVE: Okay.

*(He gets up.)*

Sorry. I mean—.

GAIL: Shut up. Go sell a car.

*(She watches him go. PHYLLIS comes over.)*

PHYLLIS: You're here again.

GAIL: I am.

PHYLLIS: You're not in the market for a car, are you?

GAIL: I bought a car.

PHYLLIS: I can make you leave if I want to. I can call the police.

GAIL: This is a used car lot. How often do you want the police to come by?

PHYLLIS: You're distracting him. He's my salesman.

GAIL: He's with a customer right now.

PHYLLIS: What's your name?

GAIL: Gail. And you're Phyllis.

PHYLLIS: I'm going to tell you the truth about Dave.

GAIL: I know the truth about Dave.

PHYLLIS: You can't trust him. You can't believe anything he tells you.

GAIL: I know that.

PHYLLIS: He's a liar and a thief.

GAIL: I know that too.

PHYLLIS: He's a good salesman. He doesn't have a conscience, or even a soul, so he can sell anything. But you, you're a woman, he's a tragic figure. He's told you his story?

GAIL: He has.

PHYLLIS: And so you can reform him, you think. Bring him back to humanity.

GAIL: You don't know what I want from him.

PHYLLIS: You're here. That tells me a lot. About you.

*(Mocking.)*

“The poor man. The poor self-destructive wretch. He has a good soul. He can still be saved.”

You're wrong, you're wrong, I know better.

GAIL: Why did you take him in?

*(PHYLLIS glares at her.)*

PHYLLIS: Flesh and blood and pity. And you trust him. Stupid fool.

*(She exits.)*

GAIL: Maybe I am.

## SCENE SIX

(GAIL sits in a car. DAVE comes up.)

DAVE: Hey.

GAIL: He bought it, didn't he?

DAVE: That kid? Yeah.

GAIL: Such a teenage car. Grand Am.

DAVE: You're getting to know your cars.

GAIL: Can he afford it?

DAVE: That kid? Doubt it.

GAIL: So why'd you sell it to him?

DAVE: It's what I do. Nah, he has no credit; his dad co-signed the loan. He's got some shitty fast food job; he'll start asking for extra shifts. His grades will start to slide. College, it's already a distant dream.

GAIL: And you're aiding and abetting. All that.

DAVE: It's what I do. And, by the way, tell me again what great detergent Amway sells.

GAIL: So that's how the honesty car works. We sit and tell the truth about what crooks we are.

DAVE: That's what we do.

(A pause.)

GAIL: My son's going on a mission.

DAVE: Yeah, I remember.

GAIL: He's wondering if he should or not. He doesn't want to, doesn't even know if he believes in it. He's twenty now, and he finally got into this electrical engineering program he likes.

But he gets all this pressure, you know, my parents, his father, the ward, his girlfriend.

DAVE: So *she's* supportive.

GAIL: Oh, like a rock. So I talked to him about it. You'da been proud of me, I was great.

DAVE: I had the same conversation with my son.

GAIL: Was that before or after you were excommunicated?

DAVE: After.

GAIL: 'Cause I'm sure whatever you said had a real ring of authenticity.

DAVE: I served a mission.

GAIL: Well, I haven't. But boy can I ever talk a mission up.

DAVE: So he's going. That's great.

GAIL: It's *not* great! It's not great at *all!*

DAVE: Wasn't that what you wanted?

GAIL: No. It's not. I lied about all of it.

(Pause.)

I felt so guilty, and I'd think, "That's weird, I just talked my son into going on a mission. What's with the guilt?" But I don't want him to go.

DAVE: He'll spend two years serving other people. Learning to deal with, you know, adversity.

GAIL: It's two years of his life! Two years doing something he doesn't even believe in, something I'm not even sure *I* believe in! I mean, if he were going to Africa to work with AIDS orphans or whatever, I'd be freaked out, but I'd be proud of him. He'd be doing something, you know, good. But a mission? You're not helping people, you're not serving anyone. You're trying to talk them into leaving their church and joining ours. You're bothering people in their homes to tell them that their beliefs aren't good enough.

DAVE: Wow.

GAIL: I never admit that to anyone.

DAVE: Why don't you tell him?

GAIL: I can't. I'm his mom, I'm active Mormon lady. His dad, he's the human cockroach; I'm the victim here, I'm the one that's strong. I can't tell him . . .

DAVE: So you'd rather . . . stay in hiding.

GAIL: Like you're hiding here? Anyway, what good would it do? To come out? My kids, they're already freaked out . . . their father . . . . What good would it do to tell them: "Oh, by the way, I've been living a lie all these years, I really don't believe . . ." Besides, I really really can't afford it. Financially. I sell Amway, remember—.

DAVE: Amway has a thing about you telling the truth about your religious—?

GAIL: No, look, the way Amway works is, you sell the stuff, but you also build your business. You have other people who you got into it, who also sell the stuff. You get a cut from their sales, and you send a cut to the guy above you.

DAVE: It's a pyramid scam.

GAIL: No, it's not! I hate that; it's not a pyramid. There've been . . . court cases. It's not. But you do have people under you.

DAVE: On the pyramid.

GAIL: Stop that! People who you got into it. Look, my ward members know how badly Mark treated me. They're kind, good people and they want to help, and sure it's a good deal for them too, but still. Without my ward, I wouldn't have a business. I have to stay active; I have to *look* active, anyway. I don't have a choice.

DAVE: You always have a choice.

GAIL: Yeah, and you told *me* the truth about that car. But not for that kid with the Grand Am?

DAVE: I'm just saying that the best thing I ever did was crash and burn.

GAIL: I know, it put you in touch with your real self; you were just going through the motions, now you're finally free. Such bullshit.

DAVE: I guess today would be a bad day for me to ask you out again.

GAIL: I know, I'm a total bitch today. I'm sorry. It's just, he had his bishop's interview

yesterday, and I was thinking about it, watching that kid . . . buy that . . . it all came out.

DAVE: It's okay. We're in the honesty car. We can say anything.

GAIL: The thing is, I was going to ask you a favor and then I go off on this tangent, which for some reason ends up being about what a slimeball Mark is, which rubs off on you, too, you slimeball.

DAVE: So ask.

GAIL: I just called you a slimeball.

DAVE: A convicted felon turned used-car salesman? If the shoe fits . . .

GAIL: I can't ask now.

DAVE: It's nearly three; your kids are home; there's a customer. So if you're going to ask me—.

GAIL: Okay okay! Will you give my nephew a job?

DAVE: I don't really have a job to offer him.

GAIL: Come on, washing cars, sweeping the lot. Just a few hours a week.

DAV: I'll talk to Phyllis.

GAIL: Will you?

DAVE: Your nephew can't find something better than this?

GAIL: He's gay.

DAVE: Your nephew?

GAIL: Yeah. He lives in South Carolina; my sister thinks his friends are a bad influence. They're shipping him to Utah, and I'm the relative who lives here, so . . .

DAVE: And you think a job washing cars will straighten him out.

GAIL: I don't know what I think.

DAVE: Why, then?

GAIL: He likes cars. And I just think he needs a friend. A straight male adult friend. His dad's hopeless, my sister's not much better. I feel for him.

DAVE: What's his name?

GAIL: Brian. Roenicke. Will you?

DAVE: I'll talk to Phyllis. Hey, I'd still love to go out.

GAIL: Dinner and a movie, right. Small talk over surf and turf, and then, I don't know, you seem pretty cool, so probably you'd take me to a chick flick. Romantic comedy.

DAVE: Whatever you want to do.

GAIL: Like, there's Meg Ryan up there, modeling cuteness and accessibility. I wish I were her.

DAVE: I didn't cheat on you, Gail. That was another guy.

GAIL: And you're a model of fidelity and . . . never mind, I'll stop by tomorrow. Your guy left.

DAVE: Damn.

GAIL: Look, I'm sorry about that, too. I'm just a bitch today, I got this call from my sister, and she just makes me nuts.

DAVE: My sister makes me nuts too.

GAIL: *(With a little laugh.)* Yeah. Look, I gotta run, see you tomorrow.  
*(And she leans up toward him and gives him a very quick kiss. And she's off.)*

## SCENE SEVEN

*(BRIAN and PHYLLIS sit in the office, waiting.)*

PHYLLIS: I don't know why we're doing this. We don't need you.

BRIAN: Whatever.

PHYLLIS: I run this car lot. I decide who works here and who doesn't.

BRIAN: I was told to wait here for Dave. Is that Dave?

PHYLLIS: He's with a customer. He's our sales manager.

BRIAN: So is that what I'm supposed to do? Sell cars.

PHYLLIS: Oh, no. No, I don't want you selling cars. I want to be very clear about that. You're not to talk to anyone while you're here. On the clock.

BRIAN: There's a clock?

PHYLLIS: We don't really have a clock. No. While you're on the time . . . card, while you're working for us. No, we have a very careful image we want to cultivate, and a teenage salesman is is is just not, not—.

BRIAN: Good. I don't particularly want to sell cars. I don't like sales.

PHYLLIS: Well, then. What can you do? What skills do you have?

BRIAN: Look, I was dropped off here, told to wait until I could talk to Dave.

PHYLLIS: Well, what would you like to do?

BRIAN: Get the hell back to South Carolina. Get the hell out of . . .

PHYLLIS: We don't use that kind of language!

BRIAN: Sorry.

PHYLLIS: This is a place of business!

BRIAN: I said I was sorry. Geez.

*(Looks out the window.)*

Okay,  
that guy's taking a test drive, it looks to me.

PHYLLIS: Yes. Yes, he is. That's a very good sign. Very few people buy cars they haven't test driven.

BRIAN: No kidding.

*(Enter DAVE.)*

PHYLLIS: So is he interested?

DAVE: Middling.

*(Offers his hand.)*

You must be Brian. Dave McGregor.

BRIAN: Hi.

DAVE: I hope Phyllis has been making you feel welcome.

PHYLLIS: I don't know why you want to hire this boy; we don't know him and we don't need help.

DAVE: Looks like she has. Phyllis, I'm gonna show Brian around a little; if that guy comes back, call me. I shouldn't miss him, but just in case.

PHYLLIS: If we lose a sale because you're showing this boy around, then—.

DAVE: Just call me, okay?

*(Leads BRIAN away from PHYLLIS.)*

Sorry about that.

BRIAN: No, it's cool. You had to talk to the guy.

DAVE: So whaddya think?

BRIAN: Of this lot?

DAVE: Sure.

BRIAN: Look. Like I told my aunt Gail, I'm not in town for long. Just until my parents stop freaking out. I'm just waiting out my time, like any good prisoner. Meanwhile, I like cars.

DAVE: Fair enough. So?

BRIAN: What do I think of your cars?

DAVE: You can be honest.

BRIAN: Well. I think you've got some seriously shitty iron.

DAVE: True enough.

BRIAN: Beater heaven, man. It's almost funny. That LeSabre: does it even have shocks? Not one but *three* Ford Explorers. And the piece-of-shit Chevys . . .

DAVE: Look, I'm doing your aunt a favor here.

BRIAN: And don't think I don't appreciate it.

DAVE: Okay . . .

BRIAN: It's a job around cars.

DAVE: Which you're on the verge of losing.

BRIAN: And which I'd rather keep.

DAVE: So show some respect.

BRIAN: Yes sir!

DAVE: Okay, is there some point at which you stop being an immature asshole?

BRIAN: I thought we didn't use that kind of language. This is a place of business.

DAVE: I'm still not amused.

BRIAN: Look. What if I start there?

DAVE: What, that old Blazer?

BRIAN: Just needs a little body work.

DAVE: Look, that car really is a beater. We're selling it as is, twelve hundred, which we won't get.

BRIAN: It's worth more than that. Put me on it.

DAVE: You serious?

BRIAN: You have a stud welder?

DAVE: I can get you one.

BRIAN: A sander, some twenty-four grit paper, some eighty grit for finishing, some filler. I'll give it three coats of primer, a paint job, and I'll feather it so you'll never notice the difference.

DAVE: Too much sun damage, you'll never match the paint.

BRIAN: Wanna bet?

DAVE: Gail didn't tell me you had body shop experience.

BRIAN: Totally self taught. Okay, I'm restoring a car.

DAVE: Seriously?

BRIAN: '57 T-Bird.

DAVE: No kidding! Roadster?

BRIAN: A Baby Bird.

DAVE: That's a beautiful car. With the 292?

BRIAN: It was shot. I pulled it, put in a 312. All new chrome, all new undercarriage. It's cherry.

DAVE: The two-tone?

BRIAN: Red and white, with sidewalls. It's street legal now, but I still want to do some things.

DAVE: Don't tell me. Headers, a spoiler . . .

BRIAN: Fender skirts; they weren't on the original, but I think they're bitchin'. And I'm cheating a little, putting in ABS. With the extra muscle I want the stopping power.

DAVE: No, that makes sense.

BRIAN: Look, put me to work on that Blazer. That dent's no big deal; I can pull it out and smooth it over. You can add eight hundred easy to the sticker. And all you'll be out is whatever you're gonna pay me.

DAVE: Yeah, what am I gonna pay you? Ten an hour?

BRIAN: Can you talk the boss lady into that?

DAVE: I'll deal with her.

BRIAN: I don't think she likes me very much.

DAVE: She doesn't like anyone right now.

BRIAN: Yeah, I got that.

DAVE: Stay out of her way, she'll be fine.

BRIAN: Okay.

DAVE: Listen, your aunt, she told me, well, a few things about you.

BRIAN: She told me she told you.

DAVE: You're here because your parents are worried that you're gay.

BRIAN: Could be.

DAVE: Look, I don't care, I really don't.

BRIAN: And it also isn't any of your—

DAVE: Thing is, Phyllis *will* care.

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAVE: So, they sent you to Utah—well, that makes sense because we don't have any gay people in Utah.

BRIAN: I assumed that.

DAVE: Just . . . you're in the closet, stay there.

BRIAN: Look, I have friends my parents hate. I'm also seventeen and going to college in a few months, at which point they can go to hell. Meanwhile, I went along with this, for entirely mercenary reasons of my own.

DAVE: You want them to pay your tuition.

BRIAN: Plus, they got onto my computer, and they found some things. So, I need a vacation from them as much as they need one from me. And I like my aunt Gail. I like her a lot.

DAVE: Another point where we agree.

BRIAN: So what's the deal there? You and her?

DAVE: What's she told you?

BRIAN: Not a thing.

DAVE: Fair enough.

*(Looking out at the lot.)*

Damn. That guy's *back*.

BRIAN: What, the Previa? He was only gone five minutes.

DAVE: Yeah, he's not gonna buy it. Ah well.

BRIAN: Show him that Outback.

DAVE: He doesn't want an SUV.

BRIAN: It's worth a try. And that's the best car on your lot.

DAVE: I will.

*(Starts to head off.)*

'57 T-Bird? Sweet ride.

*(He's gone. BRIAN looks at the cars in the lot. Chuckles to himself.)*

## SCENE EIGHT

*(GAIL and DAVE in a car.)*

GAIL: We bought his suits. The big shopping trip.

DAVE: Mr. Mac's? Boy, does that store have a racket.

GAIL: Hey, they've found their niche market, I take my hat off. You could stand to wear a suit once in awhile, you know.

DAVE: I'm a used car salesman. Sports coat, short sleeve colored shirt—that's the uniform.

GAIL: It makes you look cheap.

DAVE: That's the idea.

GAIL: You're supposed to look cheap?

DAVE: Sports coat says he's trying to look professional, but he can't afford a suit. My profit margins are so low, I'm barely making ends meet. Which means, you, the consumer, are paying my rock bottom price.

GAIL: I had no idea.

DAVE: I buy a jacket, first thing I do, I take a steel brush to the elbows, wear 'em down a little.

GAIL: But. I wouldn't want to do that, would I?

DAVE: No, not for Amway. You're trying to get people to join your pyramid. You have to look successful, like you have money to burn.

GAIL: It's not a pyramid.

DAVE: Okay.

GAIL: Is that guy gonna stop?

DAVE: They do that sometimes. Park in front of the lot, check the cars out without getting out.

GAIL: When you have to go, you just go.

DAVE: I'm keeping an eye out.

GAIL: Where's Phyllis?

DAVE: DMV.

GAIL: Where are we, Dave? What are we?

DAVE: Sitting in one of my cars.

GAIL: Every time we try to define it . . . coming out to each other: "I'm lying to my family," "I'm an adulterer and felon."

DAVE: That seems to be our relationship. Okay, he's getting out.

GAIL: Go.

DAVE: So far.

GAIL: Go!

DAVE: That's our relationship so far. It could grow, it could change.

GAIL: Go!

*(He goes. She waits, checks her watch, waits some more. He comes back.)*

Fifty-eight minutes you were gone.

DAVE: Sorry about that.

GAIL: No, it's great; he must have really been interested.

DAVE: Couldn't quite close it. Said he's price comparing.

GAIL: It's still a possible.

DAVE: I don't know. Something's off. I'm usually a good closer.

GAIL: See, what I think is, we have one of those situations where one of the people likes the other person more than the other person likes the other person—oh never mind. You like me more than I like you, is what I'm saying.

DAVE: Oh, that's nice.

GAIL: Where?

DAVE: Over by that little Geo. Looks like a father/daughter.

GAIL: Could be. That's a cute little car for a college girl.

DAVE: Exactly what I'm thinking.

*(He gets up. Leans in.)*

If we liked each other the same, how would we know that?

*(He goes. She waits. He comes back.)*

GAIL: We'd know.

DAVE: We'd know what?

GAIL: If we liked each other the same. That was the last thing you asked me before—.

DAVE: Sorry. I think I got that sale.

GAIL: They seemed interested.

DAVE: The daughter loves the car. He's gotta talk to his bank.

GAIL: Anyway. We'd know.

DAVE: I don't think we would. Off balance like this, our reactions off?

GAIL: Plus I'm still married. Plus I hate men. Plus plus plus.

DAVE: I just think we should date.

GAIL: Starting June 8<sup>th</sup>, right? Look, I've been sitting in this car for two and a half hours—.

DAVE: For maybe five minutes total conversa—.

GAIL: Well, see, doesn't that count as at least a sort of—.

DAVE: We should go out, see where we are. I could get permission to leave the lot. Before the 8<sup>th</sup>.

GAIL: I'm sitting in this car.

DAVE: I know. And what do we do with that, these days, you sitting there, me jumping up every five minutes to deal with—.

GAIL: This is what I'm up for. There's a guy.

DAVE: Will you go out with me?

GAIL: There's a guy. Over by the SUVs.

DAVE: Can we go out?

GAIL: When you're finished, come back to the car. I'll still be here.

DAVE: *(Pause.)* Okay.  
*(He exits. She sits in the car.)*

SCENES NINE through TWELVE  
21 additional pages to the end of the script

# Into the 'Borderlands': New play takes look at marginalized Mormons

[J. Michael Call](#)

Mar 31 2011 -

What's it like to pretend to be perfect? What's it like to be a Mormon but question your faith? What's it like to be gay and LDS? What's it like to live in the "Borderlands"?

A new play exploring those questions premiered this week in Salt Lake City and continues its run through April 10 at the Wagner Center.

"Borderlands," written by Eric Samuelsen, who teaches playwriting at Brigham Young University, takes a funny but dramatic look at the process of coming out in Mormon culture -- but not in the usual sense.

Samuelsen, who is an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, isn't afraid to tackle some thorny issues.

"I can't limit myself to a kind of writing defined by what seems to me a complacent and unchallenging Mormon aesthetic," Samuelsen writes in the Plan-B Theatre Company blog about his play.

"My play intends to honor those who live in the margins, those for whom Mormonism exists as a liminal state. I wanted to honor my borderland friends, to tell their story with compassion and accuracy. I don't want to judge; I want to describe."

The play, which takes its name from a column in Sunstone Magazine, is produced by Plan-B and is directed by Jerry Rapier, the company's producing director.

"There is a pressure within the Mormon faith to be perfect and to present yourself and your ideas and your life as in alignment with everyone else who is a member of your faith," said Rapier, who was raised LDS but no longer subscribes to the faith. "And it's really difficult to live up to that kind of pressure."

But what happens when four Mormon characters decide to be honest with one another about their lives? Samuelsen sets out to answer that question by setting his story in -- of all places -- a used-car lot in Provo.

The owner of the car lot is Phyllis, played by Farmington actress Teri Cowan. She describes her character as an angry, embittered woman who has had a rough life and is questioning her faith.

"There are more people that fall into that category than maybe admit it," Cowan said. "I think it's OK to have questions."

Phyllis is assisted on the lot by her brother Dave, a divorced salesman who has been excommunicated from the church because of a felony conviction. Dave is played by Kirt Bateman, executive director of the Davis Arts Council. Bateman said his character has hit rock bottom, is actually living on the car lot and is trying to find his way back to some kind of normalcy.

"He meets Gail, who comes to buy a car, and he falls for her," Bateman said. "He sees an opportunity to do something different, and that's be totally and completely honest. That's not something he's used to in his professional life, or his personal life."

But Gail, played by Stephanie Howell of Park City, has her own set of problems. Her idyllic Mormon life is coming apart at the seams due to a cheating husband. She decides she could do with some honesty as well.

Finally, there is Brian, played by Topher Rasmussen of Sandy, who is Gail's gay nephew and works as a mechanic on the car lot. Rapier said Brian has been sent by his parents to live with his aunt in Utah to "straighten him out, literally."

"They end up sitting in these used cars together," Rapier said. "And they refer to time in there as sitting in the 'honesty car,' and they tell the truth about what liars they are. It's a place where they feel like they can be completely honest and they find that they can be completely honest with each other."

### **Gay and spiritual?**

Who has access to God? Rapier hopes one outcome of the production will be people re-examining their attitudes about gay individuals. Brian doesn't fit the typical gay stereotype -- he loves cars and is quite faith-focused.

"It becomes clear in the course of the play that Brian is the most spiritually attuned of the four characters, and he is the one that does not have a place within the church," Rapier said.

Rapier realizes that some people may object to depiction of a young gay man as also a spiritual being.

"There's an assumption from a lot of religions and a lot of rhetoric out there that those two things can't co-exist, which is asinine," Rapier said. "Your sexuality doesn't have anything more to do with how spiritual you can or can't be than the color of your hair."

Interestingly, Rapier noted, the young actor who portrays Brian has been so affected by his involvement in this production that he has decided to go on an LDS mission. The other three actors are also LDS, but no longer practicing members.

### **Universal themes**

If "Borderlands" had been set in Minnesota instead of Utah, Rapier said, it would have been about Lutherans or Catholics instead of Mormons, but the message would have remained the same.

"It's spiritually accessible no matter what your faith background is," Rapier said. "Whether people are religious or not, we all experience a crisis of faith. They question the purpose of their lives and their relationships and how they fit or don't fit into their community."

Bateman and Cowan both say the message is universal and should appeal to a wide audience.

"It is what we hide from each other and what we assume about each other, and that's what's really relatable to everyone," Bateman said.

Bateman remembers having questions about the faith as he was growing up, but not being encouraged to pursue those questions.

"You just sort of put them aside and you don't really think about them," Bateman said. "You just go on faith."

What "Borderland" examines as its characters "come out and reveal who they are" is whether it is OK to ask those questions and what to do when an individual's beliefs don't exactly line up with the church's.

"Is it OK if you can't embrace all of it? Is it OK to embrace the part of it that gives you comfort?" Cowan asks. "Do you have to be a 100 percent believer, or is it OK to be a 75 percent believer?"

Added Bateman: "There's definitely a place in Utah culture for devout Mormons and there's a place in Utah culture for non-Mormons. But I don't know that there's a place for this sort of in-between."

Rapier and his cast believe the playwright, who has called this script his most personal project, has opened a dialogue that will get people thinking about those living in the Borderlands.

"What do you do with the questions that you have within a church that doesn't want you to ask questions?" Rapier said. "Where does the peace come from for people who do have questions and want potential answers for them?"

# City Weekly • Reader's Choice Awards

## *Best Individual Performance*

**Kirt Bateman, Borderlands (Plan-B Theatre Company)** Spencer Tracy, Tom Hanks ... Kirt Bateman. Yes, it's back-to-back acting gold for Bateman, who followed up 2010's Artys victory playing Machiavelli with a completely different type of role: car salesman Dave, whose disarming honesty to customers about the vehicles on his lot is informed by earlier deceptions for which he's trying to atone. With heartbreaking restraint, Bateman captured a man trying to re-establish his sense of himself as somehow worthy of trust, love and respect. **PlanBTheatre.org**

## *Best Local Production*

**Borderlands (Plan-B Theatre Company)**

## *Best Original Play*

**Borderlands by Eric Samuelsen (Plan-B Theatre Company)** Many local writers have delved into the notion of hypocrisy and self-righteousness when it comes to the local "predominant religion," but Eric Samuelsen and Plan-B Theatre Company managed a spin on the topic that deftly avoided smugness or easy answers. A terrific cast (see performance-winner Kirt Bateman above) and Randy Rasmussen's efficient set design were contributors to a powerful exploration of the difference between outward orthodoxy and true faith. Credit Samuelsen's intensely introspective text with addressing the collision between actions and beliefs in a way that both adherents and skeptics could find gripping and honest. **PlanBTheatre.org**