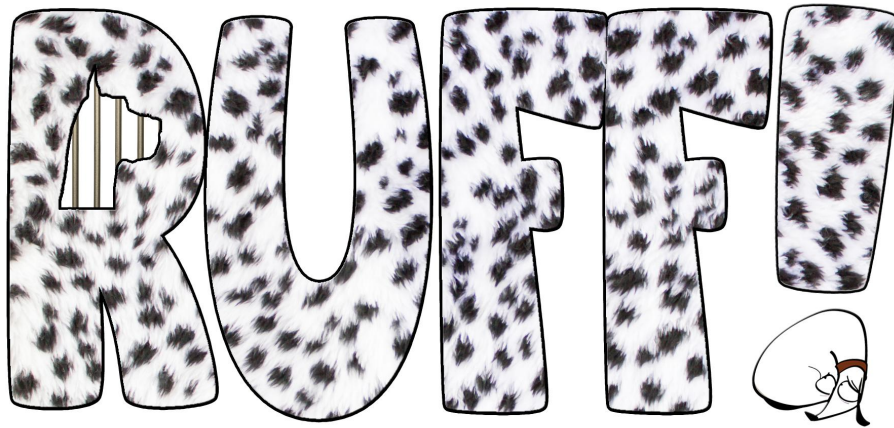


**PERUSAL SCRIPT**



by  
**Jenifer Nii**



Newport, Maine

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**RUFF!**

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***Cover Art courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company, Salt Lake City, Utah***

## ***RUFF!***

*Characters 1M 1F*

**AXEL** (male) and **BUDDY** (female), kennel mates at a local animal shelter

**RUFF!** by Jenifer Nii (*For grades K-3 performed by Teens through Adults for Child Audiences*) **1M1F**  
Anthropomorphic costumes, or simple suggestion. Simple setting. About 35 minutes. **RUFF!** is a metaphorical “tail” of two shelter dogs. Axel and Buddy. Together they discover what’s possible when dogs and their people learn to see past stereotypes and summon the courage to be the best they can be. It explores the issues of self-confidence, prejudice, and overcoming fear. **RUFF!** received its world premiere in 2015 as part of Plan-B’s third annual Free Elementary School Tour. A Plan-B Theatre Company Play. **Order #3203**

**Jenifer Nii** has had five plays produced at Plan-B Theatre Company. They include **THE SCARLET LETTER** and **SUFFRAGE**, which garnered back-to-back nominations for the American Theatre Critics Association/Steinberg Award for Best New American Play Produced Outside New York. **THE WEIRD PLAY** will premier at Plan-B in 2018.

### **Plan-B Theatre Company**

#### **PUBLIC PERFORMANCES AT GREAT SALT LAKE FRINGE FESTIVAL**

August 6, 7 & 8, 2015

#### **FREE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TOUR 2015**

Salt Lake City School District (with stops in Weber, Utah & Juab Counties)

August 31-September 11, 2015

Davis School District, presented by Davis Arts Council

September 28-October 9, 2015

***RUFF!** was first produced by Plan-B Theatre Company of Salt Lake City, Utah; directed by Jerry Rapier. The original cast was comprised of Tyson Baker and Latoya Rhodes playing the Shelter Dogs.*

### **COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCES AND TEACHERS OF THE PLAN-B TOUR**

- On many levels **RUFF!** gave us discussion topics. One tiny reference to making the dogs’ experiences apply to humans caused my students to do just that. One of my students said, “Isn’t that like fake it until you make it?” Profound deeper level tying into our character education. On the basic level of a dog’s experiences in life, our students showed compassion, concern and intense emotion. I personally liked the way the play “parabled” a moral value for all of us. The actors superbly gave us a look at life for our pets. – *Lynne J. Arnold, Third Grade Teacher, Franklin Elementary*
- Thank you for coming! The actors were fabulous! The therapy dog and handler were also super excellent additions. I appreciated the thought-provoking messages and the students were very attentive to the acting (it was very well done). We appreciated your willingness to come to our school. – *David Hales, Principal,*

*Valley Elementary*

- The actors were great. Even the kindergarteners enjoyed it since the story was fun and the actors did such a good job. – *Riko Reese, Principal, North Park Elementary*
- The presentation was wonderful! My students loved it and the dogs were a great treat and surprise! Thanks so much for inviting us to participate in this wonderful program. – *Dahlia Cordova, Principal, Bennion Elementary*
- The students at Emerson really enjoyed the RUFF! assembly. They were actively engaged and loved the therapy dog that visited our school. The message was a positive one. The two actors who performed were very personable and great with the kids. Keep up the great work! – *April Reynolds, Principal, Emerson Elementary*
- Thank you for bringing Ruff! to our school. I thought the presentation was excellent for the small kids. We try to give our kids experiences with theater and all the other performing arts, and your presentation was well received. All the children were engaged which is no small feat. – *Rae Louie, Principal, Beacon Heights Elementary*
- Our students thoroughly enjoyed the performance. There were many messages about acceptance and kindness that will be talked about in their classes. – *Marian Broadhead, Principal, Hawthorne Elementary*
- We loved it!!!! Thank you so much for coming to Provo. You were fantastic. – *Lois Bobo, Director, Walden School of Liberal Arts*
- Thank you so much for being so great to schedule a time for Plan-B to come and visit Bonneville's special education program. We had about 60 students that were able to participate. I was a little worried that it might not be age appropriate for some of the students, but they all LOVED it! They had tons of questions for the actors and they were all very engaged during the entire play. The actors also made a great effort to interact with the students before and after the play and get to know them. All around, it was a great experience and we hope to have Plan-B come back and visit Bonneville soon. Thanks again! – *Megan Robertson, Special Education Teacher, Bonneville Jr. High*

## RUFF!

**SCENE ONE.** *An animal shelter. AXEL is musclebound and very, very tough. He might be a German Shepherd, a Rottweiler, Pit bull, or other breed others may find scary. He knows the routine of shelter life, this being his fourth time as an "inmate". BUDDY is cowering in the back, paws covering ears, eyes clamped shut. She might be a Labrador, Golden Retriever, or other breed others often perceive as friendly and adoptable.*

**AXEL:** *(Snarling, barking, and pacing. Loud. To audience, who are potential adopters)* What are you looking at? Huh? You want a piece of me?

*(Mean series of barks and lunges)*

You think this is some kind of show? I'm just a piece of meat in a cage? You better back away, lady, and take those kids with you. Cuz I will SHOW you just what kind of dog I am. Go!

*(Snarls. Tracks the unseen woman and her children as they scurry away. When they are gone, AXEL begins to relax. Turns and notices BUDDY, who is now watching out of the corner of HER eye.)*

What?!

**BUDDY:** Nothing.

**AXEL:** That's right.

*(Looks BUDDY over)*

I don't know you. When they put you in here?

**BUDDY:** You were sleeping.

**AXEL:** What happened to the other one?

**BUDDY:** What other one?

**AXEL:** Little thing. All spots and ears.

**BUDDY:** All I saw are bigs.

**AXEL:** *(Motions to the area where BUDDY is crouched)* That's my floor. You don't touch my floor.

*(BUDDY looks, is confused)*

You deaf? MOVE.

*(BUDDY squishes a few feet to the side, which is as far as SHE can go in the cramped space. AXEL traces a line dividing up the space, one area very large, one very small. About the larger space)*

This is mine.

*(About the small space, an area where BUDDY currently is not in)*

That is yours.

*(BUDDY looks, AXEL glares. AXEL moves)*

Stay out of my space.

**BUDDY:** OK.

**AXEL:** You're new.

**BUDDY:** Yes.

**AXEL:** *(Sniffs)* You smell new.

*(BUDDY confused, sniffs. AXEL rolls HIS eyes)*

Look at you. Wide-eyed and scared like a little bitty puppy.

*(Soft)*

**BUDDY:** I'm--I'm not--

**AXEL:** *(Leans in)* I. Can't. Hear. You.

*(To the other dogs in nearby kennels)*

QUIET! All a ya! Breakin' in a newbie here!

*(The noise doesn't stop. In a deep, snarling voice)*

HEY!

*(Noise stops)*

Thank you. Punks.

*(To BUDDY)*

You were saying?

**BUDDY:** I'm...Buddy. My word is "Buddy."

**AXEL:** That so? Your mommy call you that?

**BUDDY:** My person. Her word is "Nana."

**AXEL:** *(Scoffs)* "Nana."

**BUDDY:** Others also called her "Grandma Betty." But to me she said "Nana."

**AXEL:** *(Uncomfortable with BUDDY'S affection for her person. Envy manifests as anger. He turns quickly, addressing unseen shelter workers)* You stick me with THIS? Time and time and more time I'm here and this is what I get? "My word is Buddy." "My word is Lucky." Dash, and Spot, and Gertie Two-Shoes.

*(Pacing)*

I can't-- This is--

*(Turns and points at BUDDY)*

Look at this!

*(BUDDY attempts a small, small smile. AXEL stares in disbelief, then turns toward the kennel door, shouting)*

Why can't you just leave me alone?

*(BUDDY cowers tighter, which sparks more annoyance on AXEL's part)*

Oh, will you stop that?

**BUDDY:** I can't.

**AXEL:** *(Mocking)* Try.

**BUDDY:** *(Slowly lifts her head)* What is this place?

**AXEL:** The "shelter." Used to call it the "pound,"

*(Makes punching gestures)*

which in my opinion is a much better word.

**BUDDY:** Why are we here?

**AXEL:** *(Shrugs)* They find us, they catch us, they bring us here.

**BUDDY:** For how long? How long do we have to stay?

**AXEL:** You don't wanna know.

**BUDDY:** Yes I do.

**AXEL:** Little ones always go first, poor schmucks. Unless they're freaky like Norman there.

*(Motions to another kennel)*

Been spinning like that since he got here. All day long, spinning and yelling, spinning and yelling.

*(Acts out what Norman looks like. To NORMAN)*

Hey! Norm! NOOOOOOORRRRRMMMMMAAAANNNN!

*(No response. To BUDDY)*

Guy has no clue where he is or what's going on. I have no idea how his whole head don't go flyin' right off. Not that he'd know the difference. Guy ain't right. Mostly, though, the littles go first, then the pretty ones.

**BUDDY:** Go where?

**AXEL:** Away.

*(BUDDY shrinks. AXEL whirls around as more potential adopters walk by)*

What're YOU looking at? That's right, stick your bony fingers in here, I dare ya. Tasty people fingers for me!

*(Snaps HIS jaws)*

Move along! Go!

*(Barks and lunges. Turns to BUDDY)*

You gonna help me out here?

*(Wide-eyed BUDDY doesn't move. AXEL goes over and picks HER up)*

Stand up. Get that tail out from under you and be a dog!

*(BUDDY stands, but in the smallest way possible. HER tail wags inadvertently)*

What are you doing?

*(BUDDY stops AXEL's tail)*

You'll cut that out if you know what's good for you. The ones who do that are the ones they take away. Little ones, pretty ones, the ones with broken...

*(Makes a wagging motion)*

...tails.

**BUDDY:** Who are they?

**AXEL:** The takers.

**BUDDY:** Take where?



go.

**BUDDY:** But--

**AXEL:** (*Motions to a far corner*) There, OK? Go there! What's the matter with you?

**BUDDY:** There is no potty inside!

**AXEL:** Take a whiff please.

(*BUDDY smells and recoils*)

You cannot tell me you didn't smell it from the very first second your paws hit the ground.

**BUDDY:** My nose was scared!

**AXEL:** You'll get used to it.

**BUDDY:** I'm not supposed to!

**AXEL:** Fine. Smell it. Love it. It's doo-doo-licious. I am going to sleep.

**BUDDY:** This is terrible.

**AXEL:** They'll clean it up when it's lights on. Before the food usually.

**BUDDY:** (*Recoils*) THERE IS NO POTTY WHERE WE SLEEP! THERE IS NO POTTY WHERE WE EAT!

**AXEL:** YES THERE IS!

**BUDDY:** (*Panic rises*) It's not right. This is not right. We aren't supposed to live like this.

**AXEL:** You get used to it.

**BUDDY:** I don't want to! I don't want to stay in a place like this! I want Nana! NAAAANNNNAAA!

**AXEL:** Quiet!

**BUDDY:** Nana will wake up and see that I'm gone. Nana didn't bring me here. She didn't know so when she wakes up and sees she'll come find me and we'll go back to her old folks' home. That's where I belong. With Nana. Not here. I can hold it until she comes. I can wait. I'll just wait and then she'll come and take me home.

**AXEL:** Oh, if I had a kibble for every time I heard THAT one.

**BUDDY:** NANA WILL WAKE UP!

**AXEL:** Fantastic! Then sit there and wait! Quietly!

**BUDDY:** (*Shaking*) She'll wake up and come for me.

(*Curls up in a little ball. AXEL watches for a while, then sleeps. After a while, BUDDY can't stay awake any more, and falls asleep*)

**SCENE TWO.** *BUDDY jumps as the lights suddenly go on. AXEL is slower to wake. Yawns. Sees that BUDDY is still there.*

**AXEL:** Morning, Sunshine.

**BUDDY:** Is it?

**AXEL:** Food will be coming soon.

*(Looks around)*

Held it all night, I see.

**BUDDY:** *(Beat)* I gotta go. Real bad.

**AXEL:** After food sometimes they let us out for a little bit. "Play time." It's nice. We can run and stretch and smell all around.

**BUDDY:** I know what "play time" is.

**AXEL:** Well good for you, Smarty Paws.

**BUDDY:** I think I might explode.

**AXEL:** *(Motions away from him)* Do it that way.

**BUDDY:** *(Looks around)* You already did.

**AXEL:** Yes I did. A fine piece of work if I do say so myself.

**BUDDY:** *(Closes eyes in defeat)* We're really still here. It wasn't a bad dream.

**AXEL:** Sorry. It's you and me, kid! And a buncha crazy beasts.

**BUDDY:** How do you do it?

**AXEL:** Do what?

**BUDDY:** This.

**AXEL:** Fourth time around.

*(BUDDY is in shock)*

Yup. It's not so bad. Could be worse.

**BUDDY:** I don't think so.

**AXEL:** *(Smirks)* You really have no idea.

**BUDDY:** We are sitting next to our own poo waiting for breakfast.

**AXEL:** Which they feed us.

**BUDDY:** Is it good food?

**AXEL:** It's food.

**BUDDY:** I have allergies. I cannot have turkey or else I get all itchy and want to chew my feet off.

**AXEL:** That'd almost be worth watching.

**BUDDY:** I'm serious! I get red bumps all over my tummy and toes and and it's all I can do just to --

**AXEL:** *(Has had enough)* Princess, you have got to stop talking.

**BUDDY:** // What?

**AXEL:** // I mean it. I don't want to hear your voice any more today.

**BUDDY:** I--

**AXEL:** Shut. UP!

*(BUDDY retreats, confused and hurt. Beat)*

**7 more pages to the end of the play**