

TWO-HANDER
[IT TAKES TWO!]



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SONGS can be demoed at:

<https://cmichaelperry.com/two-hander/>

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TWO-HANDER by *Elizabeth Hansen* and *C. Michael Perry* Once a successful writing couple of hit Broadway Musicals, Jenny and Johnny DePaul, divorced long ago over creative differences and parental conflicts over their newborn daughter. Jenny, still writing but not at her former level, is mired down in those writing blocks that threaten to derail her current show. Her producer decides to contact Johnny, now a successful writer of film scores and musicals to come in to ghostwrite the new song. Johnny is unaware that he is writing the song for his former wife's show. Jenny is unaware that Johnny has been contacted to fill the order. They are told to report to a hotel suite to write the song the producer needs over 2 days as the opening is a week away! And the fireworks fly from there! **ORDER #2-HAND**

MUSICAL #1 — PRELUDE & A SUITE AT THE WALDORF

(JOHNNY at the airport. JENNY at her apartment, and then on their way to the Waldorf.)

JOHNNY:

A SUITE AT THE WALDORF--
I'M DREAMING OF CRAB --
ALONG WITH THE WINE AND TWO BIG ROOMS
I GUESS I SHOULD CALL THE CAB.
THERE'S NOTHING MORE CONDUCTIVE TO
THE FLOW OF NOTES AND WORDS
THAN WRITING IN A SUITE AT THE WALDORF!

JENNY:

A SUITE AT THE WALDORF--
HOW HORRIBLY BLEAK.
ALONE IN A ROOM WHERE GLITZ AND GLOOM
CAN RUIN YOU FOR THE WEEK.
THERE'S NOTHING LESS CONDUCTIVE TO
THE FLOW OF NOTES AND WORDS
THAN WRITING IN A SUITE AT THE WALDORF!

BOTH:

A SUITE AT THE WALDORF!
(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE ONE — THE SUITE — *JOHNNY enters with a suitcase.)*

JOHNNY: Hello? Anyone? Hello?

(He checks his watch, puts down suitcase and dials the phone.)

MERRICK: Yeah!

JOHNNY: Merrick, it's Johnny.

MERRICK: Johnny! How was the flight?

JOHNNY: Good. Long.

MERRICK: Yeah, that flight is a doozy.

JOHNNY: I'm at the hotel.

MERRICK: Is the other guy there?

JOHNNY: Nope. No sign of him....

MERRICK: He'll be there soon, I'm sure. I talked to him this morning. He was buying a new pair of shoes for the occasion.

JOHNNY: What? Why?

MERRICK: Who knows?

JOHNNY: I see you stocked the bar. You know me too well. When can we meet for drinks...?"

MERRICK: When you finish the song.

JOHNNY: *(laughs)* Well, that'll be in about an hour, because I can write this song with my eyes closed."

MERRICK: Then close 'em and get me that song.

JOHNNY: *(laughs)* Right. Will do.

(JOHNNY exits into his room. After a moment JENNY enters with a suitcase.)

JENNY: Hello? Anyone? Hello?

(She checks her watch, puts down the suitcase and dials the phone.)

Merrick. I'm at the hotel. Nope. No sign of him.... Oh, okay, hang on.

(JENNY looks to Johnny's door as it opens. JOHNNY stops dead in his tracks. They are gobsmacked.)

(into the phone) You son-of-a-bitch.

(She slams the phone down and the song starts.)

MUSICAL #2 — IT'S YOU!?

JENNY:

IT'S YOU!

JOHNNY:

IT'S YOU!

JENNY:

IS THIS A JOKE?

JOHNNY:

WAS MERRICK DRINKING?

JENNY:

I'M GONNA KILL HIM!

JOHNNY:

I'LL GO HOME AND BILL HIM!

JENNY/JOHNNY:

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S YOU!

JENNY:

YOU'RE HERE!

JOHNNY:

YOU'RE HERE!

JENNY:

HE SHOULD HAVE ASKED....

JOHNNY:

YOUR SHOW WAS SINKING?!

JENNY:

WHY'D MERRICK DO IT?!

JOHNNY:

I THINK HE REALLY BLEW IT!

JENNY/JOHNNY:

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S YOU!

JENNY/JOHNNY:

HE SHOULD HAVE KNOWN WE'D HATE IT.

JOHNNY:

I HAVE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO.

JENNY:

EACH SONG YOU WRITE IS SECOND-RATE.
IT SOUNDS JUST LIKE A SQUEAKY SHOE!
HOW MUCH DID DERRICK PAY YOU?

JOHNNY:

NOT ENOUGH FOR THIS!

JENNY:

SO, YOU'LL COME HERE FOR THE WORK
BUT NOT FOR JILLIAN, ME, OR CHRIS!

JOHNNY:

THE KIDS AND YOU ARE DEAR!

JENNY:

NOT MORE THAN YOUR CAREER!

JOHNNY:

SO, WHAT AM I DOING HERE?!

JENNY:

THAT ISN'T VERY CLEAR!

JOHNNY:

YOU'RE JEALOUS!

JENNY:

OF WHAT?

JOHNNY:

OF MY HOLLYWOOD SUCCESS!

JENNY:

YOU'RE KIDDING?!
I'M SICK
OF THAT HOLLYWOOD EXCESS!

JOHNNY:

FROM ME?

JENNY:

FROM YOU!

AND FROM EVERYONE YOU KNEW!

JOHNNY:

THERE'S YOU, NOW!

JENNY:

THERE'S ME?

I CAN'T WAIT FOR YOUR RIPOST!

JOHNNY:

HOW'S ROGER?

HE GOOD?

YOU DID ALWAYS LIKE HIM MOST!

JENNY:

YOU CAD!

JOHNNY:

YOU CAT!

JENNY:

THERE'S NO FORGIVING THAT!

JOHNNY:

YOU'RE SOMEONE I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

JENNY:

YOU'RE LIVING IN A WONDERLAND!

JOHNNY:

A PLACE YOU KNOW FIRST-HAND!

JENNY/JOHNNY:

IF THERE'S ANYONE I CANNOT STAND

IT'S YOU!

(PHONE RINGS.)

JENNY: *(answers)* What!?

MERRICK: Have you killed each other yet?

JENNY: Not yet, but soon.

MERRICK: I want to talk with both of you, so put Johnny on.

JENNY: He wants to talk to both of us.

(JOHNNY walks to JENNY. She puts the handset between the two of them. They're very close.)

MERRICK: Now listen here, the both of you. I got a lot riding on this show.

JENNY: So do I.

MERRICK: We're not talking about you, we're talking about me, and the hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars I've already sunk in this show. I'm sick to death of this thing between the two of you. So because you wouldn't come together on your own, I did it. So, here's what's going to happen: come hell or

high water this will end now. By tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, you will have written the new song and it will be one Cole Porter will envy AND you will either file for divorce or get back together, is that clear?

(Silence.)

Is that clear.

BOTH: Yes, Merrick.

MERRICK: Good.

MUSICAL #3 — JUST KEEP IT AT THAT

(THE "A")

MERRICK: *(spoken over 'phone')*

JENNY'S THE WORDS, JOHNNY... THE MUSIC!

JOHNNY:

ANY OTHER WAY MADE YOU SICK!

MERRICK: *(spoken over 'phone')*

IT WORKED BEFORE! IT'LL WORK AGAIN!

JENNY:

I REALLY CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN!

MERRICK: *(spoken over 'phone')*

SO, TAKE A CHANCE!

NO RANTS!

JUST DANCE!

JOHNNY: *(skeptical)*

HOLD ONTO YOUR HAT!

JENNY:

JUST KEEP IT AT THAT!

And none of your garbage!

(THE "B")

MELODIES JUST KEEP REPEATING,

BEATS KEEP BEATING. TRY SOMETHING NEW!

WORDS MUST TRIP OFF YOUR TONGUE,

LEAP OFF THE PAGE WHEN SUNG,

JOHNNY:

WHAT, I SHOULD WRITE THE DUNG YOU DO!

(THE "C")

JENNY:

SIT AT THE PIANO

AND DO WHAT YOU DO BEST.

JOHNNY:

SHARPEN UP YOUR PENCIL

AND LET ME DO THE REST.

JENNY:

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN BY
“LET ME DO THE REST”

JOHNNY:

IT’S OBVIOUS TO MERRICK
YOUR GAME’S NOT AT ITS BEST!

JENNY: Look, you son-of-a——

MERRICK: Children!

JENNY AND JOHNNY: What?!

(THE “A2”)

MERRICK: *(spoken over ‘phone’)*

WRITE THE WORDS! WRITE THE MUSIC!

JENNY: *(to JOHNNY)*

SONGS THAT ONLY MAKE A FEW SICK!

JOHNNY: Hey!

MERRICK: *(spoken over ‘phone’)*

IT’S WORKED BEFORE, GIVE IT ONE MORE TRY

JOHNNY:

WE CAN WORK IT THROUGH...

JENNY:

I COULD SPIT IN YOUR EYE!

JOHNNY:

I CAN’T WORK THIS WAY!

JENNY:

YES, YOU NEED PALM TREES AND A POOL!

JOHNNY:

YOU’RE THE ONLY ONE WHO GETS ME OFF-A MY COOL.

I PREFER PALMS TO YOU!

MERRICK: Children! I swear if this doesn't work, I'm calling Roger.

JENNY: *(almost overlapping)* You wouldn't dare!

JOHNNY: *(almost overlapping)* That no-talent piece of—!

(THE “TAG”)

MERRICK: *(spoken over ‘phone’)*

IT’S WORKED BEFORE — BETTER WORK AGAIN!

OR I’LL TAKE THE SHOW, YOU TWO CAN SAY AMEN!

WE OPEN IN BOSTON IN LESS THAN A WEEK

AND WE STILL DON’T HAVE THAT SECOND ACT ZING!

WRITE MUSIC AND WORDS — YOU’VE GOT THE TECHNIQUE

JENNY:

OKAY, OKAY — THE PLAY IS THE THING!

JOHNNY:

WHAT EVER IT TAKES!

JENNY:

WE'RE A COUPLE OF ...PROS!

JOHNNY:

YOU WRITE — I'LL COMPOSE!

BOTH:

LET'S KEEP IT, JUST KEEP IT AT ... THAT!

(They hang up.)

JOHNNY: Sooo...I hear you're having a problem.

JENNY: I have a lot of problems, the song is just one of them.

JOHNNY: I read the script. It's good.

JENNY: *(warily)* ...Thanks.

(He pours them a couple of drinks.)

JOHNNY: Husband and wife, trying to work it out in a hotel room. Will they, won't they, do they, don't they. It's a little far-fetched but, it could work.

JENNY: It does work. The book isn't the problem — for once. I just can't get a handle on the damn song, and it's the turning point of the play. Everything hangs on that one song, and for the life of me, I can't get it.

(He offers the drink)

JOHNNY: Writer's block?

JENNY: No, thanks, I already have one.

(He chuckles. She takes the drink.)

MUSICAL #4 — WE NEED A SONG LIKE THIS

The "song" that they are looking for will most probably be the 11'O'clock number — a big power ballad.

JENNY: What we need is something like:

SOME ENCHANTED EVENING

IT SEEMS WE STOOD AND TALKED LIKE THIS BEFORE

IN THE JOY OF OUR DREAM COME TRUE...

WUNDERBAR, WUNDERBAR

THE MAN THAT WON YOU HAS GONE OFF AND UNDONE YOU

JOHNNY: Why is it always the man?

JENNY:

STRANGE DEAR BUT TRUE DEAR,

I AM THE SILENT BREATH OF SPRINGTIME

THAT TREMBLES ON THE BRINK OF A LOVELY DAWN.

JOHNNY: Well, that's clear as mud. Look, what does the song have to say? What is the song about?

JENNY: It's between the married couple. It's the wife's big song. They're at a turning point in their marriage and she's finally made the decision that she's going to leave him, but she doesn't know how to say goodbye. How do you say goodbye to the love of your life? He's a man she fell in love with in college. The man she raised children with. The man she created a life with. But he's grown distant and uncaring.

JOHNNY: Uncaring? I didn't see that in the play.

JENNY: It's there.

(He pulls the script out of his briefcase.)

JOHNNY: Show me.

(She thumbs through the script and stops)

JENNY: *(at a page.)* Here. On page 43, Lilly says: "I don't know what happened. When it all started to go wrong. Was it you or was it me? You just seemed to let us go, like you didn't care." There.

JOHNNY: That doesn't say he doesn't care. I think he cares very much.

JENNY: No, he doesn't. How could he when...? See, says it right That's her ASSUMING he doesn't. He isn't willing to sacrifice anything for her? His job, his time, his ego?

JOHNNY: But she wants it to be the way it used to be and it can't. They aren't the same people they were twenty years ago.

JENNY: She understands that.

JOHNNY: Then why can't she accept it?

JENNY: Oh, she's accepted it, all right. She's even met him more than half way. But he doesn't want her anymore or that's what she believes. They're living apart and she can't take it anymore. Yes, there is a part of her that wants it to be the way it was, longs for it to be the way it was, but she knows it can't be. And she is sick of being alone, cocktails for one, breakfast alone and all of that. It's killing her and he doesn't get it.

(Beat.)

And she's convinced he's having an affair.

JOHNNY: Is he?

JENNY: I think...yes.

JOHNNY: You think? You're the author. You have to know.

JENNY: That's just it. I think he is, but I don't want him to.

JOHNNY: That's part of your problem right there. You have to make the decision: is he or isn't he?

JENNY: ...What do you think?

JOHNNY: I think...

JENNY: Just know...if he is...it will devastate her.

JOHNNY: Then I think...you have to make the best dramatic decision. Is it better for the story that he is having an affair or isn't having an affair?

JENNY: ...That he is.

JOHNNY: I agree.

(Pause.)

JENNY: All right. It just makes me so sad. I am so disappointed in him.

JOHNNY: I think I have a handle on it. Why don't you go in and unpack. Let me noodle at the piano and

see what I come up with.

(She nods. He sits at the piano and plays a couple chords. She picks up her bag and takes it to her room. He noodles out a little melody. She opens the door then turns to him.)

JENNY: I like that. Riff on that.

(He riffs a bit. She enters her room and unpacks. As he's playing some notes, she starts to sing her want song. NOTES: She goes into her room and starts unpacking as he's doing a little this and that. She sings her want song to his noodling. Sometime she sings it acappella, sometime parallel to his noodling and sometimes contrapuntally.)

MUSICAL #5 — TOO MANY HOURS *(Jenny's "I Want" song?)*

(He's noodling on the piano.)

She wants it to be the way it used to be, and he doesn't.

She doesn't want to be alone anymore

She doesn't want to live in Los Angeles

JENNY: *(To herself as JOHNNY plays)*

(Intro)

I HEAR HIM PLAY AGAIN

I FEEL HIM SING AND THEN

MY HEART SKIPS

MY HANDS FUSE.

I DRINK HIS MELODY

IT'S IN THE PERFECT KEY!

THEN SOMETHING DEEP INSIDE ME RIPS;

I REMEMBER HOW I CHOOSE TO BE.

THEN EVERYTHING COMES BACK TO ME!

(Refrain)

TOO MANY HOURS

IN TOO MANY ROOMS

WITH TOO MANY DAYS

SPENT ALONE WITH THE FUMES

OF TOO MANY MEMORIES

LINGERING IN THE HAZE.

YOU HAD YOUR LIFE

I HAD MINE.

THEY USED TO BE ONE.

NOW, I'M JUST DONE.

(Verse)

TAKE THE CHILDREN HERE.

TAKE THE CHILDREN THERE.

COFFEE IN A SACK.
LUNCHES IN A PACK.
SCHOOLBOOKS? THERE'S NO LACK
OF LONELY DAYS
AND ENDLESS WAYS OF FINDING THINGS TO DO...
THINGS WITHOUT YOU...

(Refrain)

TOO MANY HOURS
I'M GRASPING FOR SOMETHING,
WAITING FOR SOMEONE,
I SHOULD GET TO KNOW.
NO MEMORIES.
NOT EVEN FLOWERS.
ALONE FOR TOO MANY HOURS!

JENNY: So you see, I know what this song is, I just need to write it, so you can go. I just need some peace and quiet and I have it here. Away from the kids...you remember our kids, don't you?...away from rehearsal, away from Merrick, so you can go. Pack your bag, take a plane and fly back to Los Angeles where you belong, because you sure as hell don't belong here!

(Beat)

JOHNNY: No, I'm not leaving, because Merrick needs me, he paid my way here, he got us this room, which, trust me, wasn't cheap, and you need my help. We're good writers. We've done our best stuff together.

JENNY: No, you've done your best stuff by yourself, and you have the Academy Award to prove it.

JOHNNY: Look...Let me help you. It's ONE SONG. We used to crank out three or four in a day, we can certainly crank out one song by tomorrow.

JENNY: Okay, then let's crank and get this over with.

NOTE: DO WE NEED TO ESTABLISH WHERE THEY ARE RIGHT NOW? ARE THEY ESTRANGED/
SEPARATED...DIVORCED?...HAS SHE FILED FOR DIVORCE?

She must forgive JOHNNY,
(NOTE: THIS IS AS FAR AS WE GOT.)

Remainder of songs in the act: we need to write connecting material

MUSICAL #6 — ONCE IN A WHILE (Johnny's "I Want" song)

JOHNNY:

WON'T YOU EVEN LET YOUR HAIR DOWN ONCE IN A WHILE?
GOT THAT "I AM WRITING" GLARE DOWN!
GIMME A SMILE!

BRIGHT AND BREEZY'S
NEVER CHEESY!
WRITIN' EASY COULD BE YOUR STYLE!
DON'T YOU EVER WEAR DOWN
ONCE IN A WHILE?

WON'T YOU LOSE YOUR OWN OPINION ONCE IN A WHILE?
I'M NOT ASKING FOR DOMINION.
GIMME A SMILE.
IT IS NEVER
FOR FOREVER!
WHEN YOU'RE CLEVER YOU CAN BEGUILE!
LEAVE IT TO YOUR MUNCHKIN MINION
ONCE IN A WHILE!

LIFE'S A JOURNEY,
NOT A TOURNEY!
A PLACE WHERE YOUR KNEE
NEVER BENDS!
WHAT DO YOU SAY?
THAT CAN'T BE HOW IT ENDS!

SURE, I KNOW THE SKIES ARE GLOOMY ONCE IN A WHILE.
AND I KNOW YOU ALSO RUE ME.
GIMME A SMILE!
LIFE'S TOO SHORT TO LEAVE YOUR COURT TO
SOME POOR SPORT WHO LOBS IT A MILE!
DON'T GIVE UP OR SUE ME!
DON'T KEEP LOOKIN' THROUGH ME!
SING YOUR MUSIC TO ME
MORE THAN ONCE IN A WHILE!

MUSICAL #7 — ALL MY LIFE

JENNY:

ALL MY LIFE I'VE NEEDED ONE, BIG, SOLID HIT!
WHEN I MARRIED HIM I THOUGHT, HE HAD TO BE IT!
BUT, THE TWO OF US, WE NEVER REALLY FIT.
THE SHOWS WE WROTE TOGETHER WERE ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU WANT TO SPIT!
SO, WHEN WE SPLIT THE SHEETS, WHAT CAN I SAY?
OUR CHILD WAS THERE. JON WAS NOT. HE KNEW WHERE! HE FOR-GOT!
SO, I LEARNED TO MAKE MY OWN WAY IN THIS BIZ!

HE CHOSE CALIFORNIA AS THE BIG, BRIGHT, MUSIC WHIZ.
WHILE I RAISED OUR CHILD, WHO'S SOME-THING SPECIAL, NOW...
HE NEVER SENT A LETTER, OR A POSTCARD, GIFT, OR PHONE CALL! WOW!
I KNOW JUST WHERE I'M HEADING, HOLY COW! A BIG NEW SHOW, LOVE IT SO, EVEN
THOUGH I HAVE LOST THE FLOW!

MUSICAL #8a SOMEONE'S GONE

JENNY:

ISN'T IT CRAZY TO NEVER SEE SO CLEAR?
ONE DAY YOU'RE FINE, AND LOVE IS FULL,
AND THERE IS NO FEAR!
MOMENTS SO HAZY BEGIN TO CREEP AND SWAY.
ONE DAY YOU CARE, AND THEN THE DAWN,
LIGHT UP A HORRIBLE DAY!

SOMEONE'S GONE! IT'S NEVER EASY TO BELIEVE
OR UNDERSTAND.
WHEN SOMEONE'S GONE YOUR STOMACH'S QUEASY;
YOU THINK YOU'LL NEVER AGAIN JUST HOLD HIS HAND.

EVERYTHING'S SUNNY.
A MYTH. A JOKE! A GAME!
HOW CAN WE BE WHO WE BECAME?
I DIDN'T SEE IT FLASH BY!
SOMEONE WAS, FUNNY!
WARM AND BRIGHT AND FUNNY!
NOW IT'S NOT FUNNY!!
ISN'T IT – FUNNY!?

SEGUE TO

MUSICAL #8b— I NEED HER

JOHNNY:

HOW I'VE MISSED HER TAUNTING EYES!
CAN'T RESIST HER SMILE, SO WARM, SO WISE.
NEED THOSE "FILL-EACH-MOMENT" HAUNTING SIGHS!
I WAS COMPLETE, YET—
SO SWEET — YET...

I DON'T KNOW WHO I AM NOW.
WHO I WAS BEFORE I CLOSED THE DOOR, I
FIND I'M WANTING MORE.
I WANTED HER BEFORE I KNEW HER.
AGAIN, I FIND I MUST PURSUE HER!
I KNOW HER!
I WANT HER!
I NEED HER!

(Then both songs sung together.)

JENNY:	JOHNNY:
SOMEONE'S GONE! IT'S NEVER	I DON'T
EASY TO BE-	KNOW WHO I
LIEVE OR UNDER-	AM
STAND. WHEN SOMEONE'S	NOW. WHO I
GONE YOUR STOMACH'S	WAS BEFORE I
QUEASY; YOU THINK YOU'LL	CLOSED THE DOOR, I
NEVER AGAIN JUST HOLD HIS	FIND I'M WANTING
HAND. EVERYTHING'S	MORE. I
SUNNY. A	WANTED
MYTH. A JOKE! A	HER BEFORE I
GAME!	KNEW
HOW CAN WE	HER. A-
BE WHO WE BE-	GAIN, I!
CAME? I DIDN'T	FIND I MUST PUR-
SEE IT FLASH	SUE
BY! SOMEONE WAS,	HER! I
FUNNY!	KNOW
WARM AND BRIGHT AND	HER! I
FUNNY!	WANT
NOW IT'S NOT	HER! I
FUNNY!!	NEED
ISN'T IT –	
FUNNY!?	HER!

JENNY: I want a divorce!

END OF ACT ONE — 12 more pages so far in act two