



Preview Script

# *“Mediocrity”*

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# Mediocrity

*None of the other seals can swim any better than I can, he reflected, but, on the other hand, they can all swim just as well. The more he pondered the monotony and uniformity of his life, the more depressed he became. That night he swam away and joined the circus.*

(from "The Seal who became Famous" by James Thurber)

# **Mediocrity**

By Anton Robert Krueger

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Published by :

Plays and Musicals, Lantern House, 84 Littlehaven Lane, Horsham, West Sussex, UK

[www.playsandmusicals.co.uk](http://www.playsandmusicals.co.uk)

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Publication History:

November 2002: First Edition

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**ISBN 1 904458 05 X**

## Characters

Kenaf  
The Wife  
The Brute  
The Doctor  
The Mr. Quatro  
The Narrator

## Setting

The setting for this piece, being essentially metaphysical and absurd, takes place beyond the realms of realism. All that is required are a table and a chair. The chair represents Kenaf's kitchen, and the table is used by the doctor to lay out and examine his hapless body and soul.

When first produced, enormous, over-sized props were created out of paper-mache to emphasise Kenaf's utter humiliation and despondency in the face of an imposing world. So, for example, we employed an enormous tea-cup and saucer which were wielded by the wife; a vast bottle of alcohol which was brandished by the brute, and a giant clipboard dangled by the doctor. The wife also had an additional massive slice of toast at her disposal for good measure.

We used various ridiculous extracts of music from PDQ Bach, and a few tragic tunes from Schubert's "Death and the Maiden". Generally, the narrator cues and stops the music. Kenaf's eventual triumph was accompanied by the theme from the original Rocky film.

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# mediocrity

**Narrator** Good evening, ladies and germinals, and welcome to the most ordinary show on earth -  
Mediocrity!....thank you...thank you...

The stage is clothed in silence. So sheer is this silence that one scarcely sees Kenaf seated at a table. He is seated there with a cup of coffee before him, and here, ladies and gentlemen, is where our tale begins- with this image of immaculate mediocrity.

Blander than bland, Kenaf doesn't read the papers, he doesn't glance about...he simply sits there...and sits there...and would surely continue to sit evermore there were it not for the fact that the silence of Kenaf's sitting is suddenly- and without due warning- shredded by the sounds of a shriek.

**Wife** Kenaf!

**Narrator** You see? Let's observe - our man may raise an eyebrow, he may well twitch his nose, and yet he continues, first and foremostly - to sit. Suddenly, (again) and, somewhat bizarrely, Kenaf throws out a right elbow. What's this? Pretending to simulate a kind of...uh...a sort of crane...Kenaf swings a limp forearm around to the cup of coffee before him...Curiouser and curiouser...he clasps mechanical fingers around the handle of the cup containing coffee, which he then proceeds to raise to the level of his mouth, before swinging it around to the front of his face where his mouth is situated and - my God! - it is here that he appears to tilt his well practised wrist just so, allowing the hot liquid to flow into the expectant aperture of his mouth. Fantastic! Truly...Extraordinary.

Unfortunately for our Kenaf...since he is so thoroughly engrossed in this rather private project, he seems only dimly aware of a repetition of the noise he has already heard once before, this noise being:

**Wife** Kenaf!!  
**Narrator** Now Kenaf slowly, slyly turns his head sideways towards the source of the disturbance, the cup still ever-poised before his lips...He continues to sip shyly at the brew whilst peering out. He fails, however, to register that The Wife has stalked right up behind him, and yes ladies and gentlemen, it is she who proceeds to holler, once again:  
**Wife** Kenaf!!!  
**Kenaf** Oh!  
**Wife** What in heaven's name are you doing?  
**Kenaf** Sorry love-  
**Wife** Yes?  
**Kenaf** I was-  
**Wife** You were?  
**Kenaf** Just-  
**Wife** What?!  
**Kenaf** In fact...I was only drinking...you see...a cup of coffee.  
**Wife** Oh?  
**Kenaf** Yes  
**Wife** Drinking?  
**Kenaf** Yes...poppet  
**Wife** Coffee?  
**Kenaf** Yes...look...here...coffee.  
**Wife** I can smell it from here Kenaf.  
**Kenaf** ...oh...  
**Wife** You know it's not good for you.  
**Kenaf** Not?  
**Wife** Not at all!  
**Kenaf** ...oh...  
**Wife** Yes!  
**Kenaf** Oh!  
**Wife** Next thing you'll be smoking cigarettes!  
**Kenaf** No!  
**Wife** Caffeine's a gateway drug.  
**Kenaf** You think?  
**Wife** Soon you'll be swilling beer for breakfast.  
**Kenaf** No never- I promise poppet-  
**Wife** And before you know it, you won't be able to face the day without a puff or a snort or a squeeze of something or other.  
**Kenaf** But it's only-  
**Wife** And you - with a doctor's appointment!  
**Kenaf** But lambkins...it's only a little cup of coffee.  
**Wife** It starts out small!  
**Kenaf** please...sweetness...I'm sorry...in fact...i'm so-  
**Wife** Stop snivelling you sorry sod! Hadn't you best be bustling off? You wouldn't want to delay the doctor.  
**Kenaf** But-  
**Wife** But?  
**Kenaf** But, but-  
**Wife** But but what?  
**Kenaf** But...but, but, but but-  
**Wife** Kenaf! You sound like a motorboat (but but but). Stop playing the fool!  
**Kenaf** But poppet, it's much too early!  
**Wife** Now it would be just like you to keep an important person waiting.  
**Kenaf** But dear-heart...

**Wife** A man whose gone and studied for all those years? Putting his brain into practise? Oh, no...Kenaf - the company man - sees fit to let him wait. What does he care?

**Kenaf** I'm so sorry, sweetness...you're absolutely right...in fact...I'll leave right away, I think...in fact...I'm so sorry..

**Wife** Yes - Go away! Get out of my kitchen! Go and wait for The Doctor!

**Narrator** The Wife rudely pushes Kenaf out of the kitchen, and a rather sad tune accompanies him on the lonely road to The Doctor's place of business...Here is that tune now - *(He indicates the cue and the music begins.)* And Kenaf would almost certainly have arrived there timeously, were it not for his having been accosted by one largely loutish individual, henceforth referred to, quite simply, as, The Brute.

**Brute** Oi – Kenaf!

**Kenaf** Oh...uh...Good Morning Mr Janse van de PogenStoffen van den Berg.

**Brute** Really? ‘at a fact?

**Kenaf** I'm sorry?

**Brute** You reckon it's a "good" mornin’, ‘eh? Is ‘at what you're sayin’? Is this what me ears is tellin’ me?

**Kenaf** Uhh...well...actually...since you mention it...it isn't a good morning really...in fact-

**Brute** No? Why? What's your gripe ‘en, big boy? What’s your trouble?

**Kenaf** Nothing, I-

**Brute** Jus’ no pleasin’ you is ‘ere?

**Kenaf** No...I mean...yes...you're perfectly right...

**Brute** Course I’s right!

**Kenaf** It is...in fact...I suppose...a good morning...I mean..isn't it?...don't you think?...

**Brute** You fink maybe you suppose, ey? Maybe this? Maybe ‘at? ‘eh? Where's your hat? Maybe here? Maybe there? ‘eh, 'ey? Could be. Could be not. What you say Kinnie? What you say?

**Kenaf** Please Mr Janse van de PogenStoffen van den berg...please...

*(The Brute, having grabbed Kenaf's hat, now teases him and trips him up by offering the hat and pulling it away etc. Some physically abusive humour could keep things generally jolly here. Eventually Kenaf ends up on the floor.)*

**Brute** Hehehehe...Only joshing Kenny...here, give us your hand.

**Kenaf** Uhh...it's alright Mr Janse van de-

**Brute** I said Give It!

**Kenaf** Uhh...

*(Unexpectedly, the brute carefully helps Kenny up and brushes off his jacket.)*

**Brute** On our ways to work 'en, ey?

**Kenaf** No...I'm actually...actually I'm going to the doctor...

**Brute** Zat so?

**Kenaf** Yes...there are some...uh...blood tests...which I need to find out about. You see...for months I've had this terrible pain, right here in my stomach...and so I went for a series of tests and now-

**Brute** Jesus, please us! Spare us, mate. What is it makes you imagine I’m the slightest bit interested in ‘earing about your groans and moans, ‘eh?

**Kenaf** No...

**Brute** You fink I've got time to stand here wif me ‘eart bleedin’ listenin’ to the likes of you all day?

**Kenaf** Yes...

**Brute** WHAT!

**Kenaf** I mean no Mr Janse Van de Pogen Stofen van den Berg.

**Brute** Tell you what, big boy. I’ll let you off this time if you come and buy us a pint. What you say, ‘ey?

**Kenaf** No, really...I can’t...I’m so sorry...I have an appointment...

**Brute** Really? Well ‘ats a shame, innit?

**Kenaf** ...uh...

**Brute** I said INNIT?

**Kenaf** Yes...it IN...

**Brute** Right then – off with you. Your standing ‘ere wif your gob open gabbing away has already kept me out of me drink.

**Kenaf** I’m so sorry, I-

**Brute** Go!

**Narrator** And so...the pitiful figure which we have come to know (and cherish) as Kenaf, once more attempts the arduous avenue, that lonely mile - doctor wards. And finally...he arrives. But surely, no man has ever before, sat so forlorn, as the forlorn figure, which now sits down before - The Doctor.

**Doctor** Did I say you could sit?

**Kenaf** Oh...sorry

**Doctor** Did I say you could stand?

**Kenaf** Sorry

**Doctor** Sit, Dammit!

**Kenaf** Sorry

**Doctor** Right. Name?

**Kenaf** Kenaf.

**Doctor** Ah - mister...Qenaf! Right. Let's see here what these tests have to relate about your state, let's see here... .. Good God!

**Kenaf** What is it?

**Doctor** Uhh...nothing...nothing at all.

**Kenaf** But...why...why did you say-

**Doctor** Look - I'm going to be perfectly straight with you my boy, alright? ... I said, is that quite alright!?

**Kenaf** Yes, yes of course, Doctor, alright, alright.

**Doctor** Alright, alright. You see, the situation is rather grim Mr uhhh....

*(The Doctor furtively searches for his name on the clipboard he holds.)*

**Kenaf** Kenaf.

**Doctor** Ah- Kenaf, quite right, yes...and if I were in your position, I should want to be well acquainted with all the facts, yes?

**Kenaf** Yes

**Doctor** Yes.

**Kenaf** Yes

**Doctor** Yes.

**Kenaf** Please tell me...the truth Doctor.

**Doctor** Oh I have no intention of misleading you my boy, no, no, no, no, no, no.

**Kenaf** How grim, are the facts really Doctor?

**Doctor** How grim? Oh- well to be quite honest with you Mr...

*(He again searches his clipboard.)*

**Kenaf** Kenaf.

**Doctor** Kenaf- correct, yes, very good...to be quite, quite explicit, I think one could well say that the facts are very grim indeed. One might even go as far as to name them exceptionally grim. Is that clear enough for you? Yes?

**Kenaf** Yes.

**Doctor** Yes.

**Kenaf** Yes.

**Doctor** Of course if it was absolute clarity one was after, one might even call the facts inordinately. Yes sir, I do not think it quite possible to overemphasise...the grimness...of these facts.

**Kenaf** But, but...I thought-

**Doctor** You thought?

**Kenaf** I thought...well...you at first said..."rather"...you said they were only "rather" grim.

**Doctor** Did I really?

**Kenaf** Yes.

**Doctor** Well I think one could almost immediately banish the word "rather" from any description at all as far as it concerned your rapidly deteriorating constitution, my good man.

**Kenaf** Oh dear.

**Doctor** Dear oh dear yes, one might say that, yes, one might.

**Kenaf** Please Doctor...what are the facts?

**Doctor** Oh! So now we're through questioning The Doctor's adverbially adjectival preferences? Now we do want to hear the facts? Is that right?

**Kenaf** Yes!

**Doctor** So if it's quite alright with you, Mr...uhhhh (*furtive searching*) Mr...if it's quite alright with you Mister, I'll get straight to the point.

**Kenaf** Please!

**Doctor** You agree then?

**Kenaf** Yes!

**Doctor** You're going to die.

**Kenaf** What?

**Doctor** It's true.

**Kenaf** No.

**Doctor** You don't believe me?

**Kenaf** I...I don't know...I -

**Doctor** Listen lad - this has hardly a thing to do with one's own opinion. We sent your blood off to the laboratory and they've returned their report. It's quite simply as plain as the plainest of days. Would you care to examine the evidence yourself, sir?

**Kenaf** No...I do...believe you...it's just...difficult to...come to terms with...

**Doctor** There's absolutely no reason to take it so very personally, my boy.

**Kenaf** Not? not personally?

**Doctor** I have it on excellent authority that it happens to the very best of us.

**Kenaf** Oh...right...right...

**Doctor** I think it best if one simply take this sort of thing on the chin, you know.

**Kenaf** How long do I have Doctor...before I...before I...uh...

**Doctor** Before you turn up your toes? Pop your clogs? Pass on? Perish?

**Kenaf** Yes!

**Doctor** Sink without trace?

**Kenaf** Please!

**Doctor** Well let's have a look, shall we?...Let's see here...let's examine the documentation...let's see...you did say your name was...

**Kenaf** Kenaf!

**Doctor** Precisely...let's see, if we round off this and divide by that... (*he whistles casually to himself whilst calculating*) ...It seems that before you succumb to the ultimate simplification, you'd have about...around ...more or less...let's say...three days, yes.

**Kenaf** What!

**Doctor** Before you go for a Burton, that is.

**Kenaf** Three days!

**Doctor** Approximately...yes...

**Kenaf** No!

**Doctor** And that's only if you mind your cholesterol, my boy...it's a killer.

**Kenaf** Ohaow!

**Doctor** For goodness sakes - don't take it so!

**Kenaf** But...Doctor...

**Doctor** Be reasonable.

**Kenaf** But...but...but...but...

**Doctor** There's absolutely no reason at all to be so very selfish. Stop and think of all the good people who were never even born! Pause to ponder the poor aborted who never even saw the light of day...Good God, my boy, three days is practically a lifetime! ... Hmm, I suppose in your case it is a lifetime... But still - in three days one could fall in love...in three days one could write a book, (it'd have to be a very short book, admittedly, but still). One could go to Guatemala! One could-...Pardon my impertinence sir but I was still addressing you! This is inspirational my boy, I'm only- oh never mind!

**Narrator** But a stunned Kenaf has already walked away. His left eye stares blankly ahead, whilst his right registers nought but sheer terror. What is this unfortunate creature to do? Our hearts go out to this poor sick, sad soul. Where will his highway lead? This road which traverses the living and the

already dead... After a dismal morning spent wandering, a distraught Kenaf eventually arrives home where he is almost immediately set upon by The Wife.

**Wife** There you are. Is this any sort of time to come traipsing through the door? I've had to keep your toast warm.

**Kenaf** Hello... Wife.

**Wife** Sit down...come, sit and eat your toast...

**Kenaf** No thanks.

**Wife** What? "No thanks" is all the thanks I get? I slave over a hot toaster, but now that he's a touch of flu Lord Muck can ease and breeze about as he pleases?

**Kenaf** Please- I can't talk about this now...

**Wife** What did the Doctor say? Is it serious?

**Kenaf** Yes...It's very, very serious.

**Wife** Dear oh dear- what's it going to cost us, then?

**Kenaf** I don't know...

**Wife** Heaven's above...Here we go, here we go - Look at 'im...didn't I warn you about that medical scheme? I did, didn't I? I told you...I said- Kenaf, I said- it's a scheme Kenaf, it even says so on the piece of paper. What you need is a product which covers hospital and surgery, not some *scheme*. Didn't I warn you?

**Kenaf** You did warn me, yes...

**Wife** Now we'll probably spend the rest of our lives paying off the debt!

**Kenaf** The rest of our lives, yes-

**Wife** You're not listening to a word I say, are you? Well that's nothing new, I said- go to gym, Kenaf. I said- look after your health, Kenaf, I said- drink Barley Green - Kenaf! But does he stir? Oh no sir!

**Kenaf** Please...I've...I've tried to...be a good husband...

**Wife** Really? This is news!

**Kenaf** I know...I may have been...a little dull at times, but-

**Wife** A little?...Dull?...Oh I don't know...If one considers your comatose-

**Kenaf** Comatose!

**Wife** -state in front of the television night after night dull, then perhaps you've got a point. And I suppose if one considers living with someone in a state of seemingly perpetual rigour mortis dull-

**Kenaf** Rigor Mortis!

**Wife** But don't get me wrong, I'm sure your supine flesh would be of interest to someone in this world. Perhaps someone interested in the morphology of cadavers-

**Kenaf** Cadaver!

**Wife** -for example. Though no-one's ever died-

**Kenaf** ...die...oh...eh...eh...

**Wife** -of being a dreary, drab, crashing bore, have they?...Kenaf? What's eating you? You're behaving awful strangely.

**Kenaf** You miserable bitch!

**Wife** Oh!

**Kenaf** Do you know what's about to happen to me? Do you?

**Wife** No!

**Kenaf** It's wonderful!

*(He jumps up and dances with her.)*

**Wife** Kenaf! Stop that at once!

**Kenaf** I am finally going to escape your miserable clutches.

**Wife** What?

**Kenaf** Do you realise how marvellous that will be?

**Wife** No!

**Kenaf** After years of being enslaved by you-

**Wife** What?

**Kenaf** -of being manipulated by you-

**Wife** No-

**Kenaf** -of working my fingers to the bloody bone for you-

**Wife** What?  
**Kenaf** -day in and day out-  
**Wife** No-  
**Kenaf** My God...d'you know how absolutely intolerable it's been living with you?  
**Wife** You don't mean it!  
**Kenaf** You have been the bane of my life...my dear...my cherub...my poppet!  
**Wife** You're ill!  
**Kenaf** I've never felt better! Now that I realise I'll be escaping your bickering, bilious, churlish, dour, sour, haggling, snivelling, sniping, griping, lying, petulant scowling forever!  
**Wife** What? No!  
**Kenaf** Yes! Because I..am going to die...my sweet porridge pie! In three days I'll be dead and rid of you forever! I'm going to be free!  
**Wife** Well, I jolly well hope you at least have the foresight to renew your life insurance.  
**Narrator** Aghast, our Kenaf flees the kitchen where so oft' before he has supped. What is this poor Charley to do? The man runs hither. The man runs thither....once more his path is crossed by - The Brute.

**The remainder of this play has been deleted from this preview copy.**

For further details on purchasing a full copy of the script, or for information on royalties, please contact

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