

AMPERSAND

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AMPERSAND SYNOPSIS

On his way to his wedding, Robert wanders into the middle of nowhere, a wasteland of furniture and dead trees. Believing he has been kidnapped, Robert tries to interrogate the first person he meets, a young man called The Son, but he's met with cryptic phrases and word games. The Son promises that Robert will learn more once he meets The Man. The Man arrives, but The Man is a beautiful woman who is even less helpful than The Son. She's even a bit hostile, telling Robert as she goes that he won't get any information from them until they get some information on him.

After a nap, Robert wakes to find a gun pointed between his legs by Lana, another confused new arrival to this place. She's dressed like a beatnik throwback and is convinced she's being held hostage. The Man returns telling Robert that his Pages are almost ready and that they'll all soon know more. After a brief conversation with a boy, named The Boy, who seems to keep messing up a task that The Man has given him, The Man reassures Robert and Lana that all will be solved with the arrival of the Pages. The Son enters and all four watch the Pages together.

The Pages are four people who reenact what is happening in Lana's life without her there. In awful hipster-beatnik slang, the Pages console themselves about the kidnapping of their leader Lana, and make plans to get her back. Convinced she has been right all along, that she was kidnapped, Lana demands she be let go and then aims the gun at The Son and fires. A cocktail umbrella emerges from the gun. The Son takes it as a sign that it's time for him to go back home.

With little fanfare, The Son goes and Robert's life is reenacted by the Pages. Robert's bride-to-be Sandra has cold feet, wondering if all this, even Robert, has been a huge mistake. Robert is livid, demanding answers from The Man, prepared to beat them out of her. When one of Robert's questions goes unanswered, Lana strikes The Man with the butt of the gun, sending her to her knees. Still she can't say a word; The Man knows little more than Robert and Lana.

The Man calls in a Page and instructs him to deliver a message to The Son's parents, telling them their son is dead. As The Man exits, Robert is in a bad place, shocked by what he believe The Man did to The Son, disheartened by his fiancée's doubts, and when Lana tells him this might all be a dream he thinks that that might be the best news he's heard all day. Lana goes into kiss him and he resists. "It's only a dream after all," she says, and Robert gives in as the first act ends.

The second act begins the next morning, Robert and Lana waking up in each other's arms. The Son has returned, unscathed, with no explanation. There is a tension now between The Man and The Son, and their argument causes The Man to storm off, Lana trailing her. The Boy returns and The Son manipulates The Boy's report, making him admit a mistake that he didn't make. As Robert begins to figure things out, Lana is arrested for the attempted murder of The Son.

The second act progresses with The Man's kangaroo court trial of Lana, the Pages to show Lana and Robert their lives again, Lana returning home, and Robert learning an amazing secret about his life and discovering just who The Man and The Son really are.

Ampersand

Cast of Characters

Robert Stacer

Accountant, 27, dressed in a tux. Robert is only a stereotypical accountant in his measured thinking, not in his appearance or demeanor.

Lana

Beatnik girl, 27, dressed in typical period costume. Lana begins the play confused and defensive, but as she becomes more familiar with her surroundings, her true personality, knowing and defiant, surfaces.

The Man

Beautiful woman, early thirties, full of knowing hopelessness. At times though, The Man breaks out of her knowledge, chasing after unattainable hope. She wears a red cocktail dress.

The Son

Blonde haired, green eyed sixteen year old, a hopeful innocent. At times though, The Son defies this idea, bringing reality to situations where The Man cannot see it. He wears a private school uniform for most of the play, except where noted.

The Boy

Boy of about ten or twelve, but the believability of his youth is not a necessity. He is a pawn, not knowing what is going on, but comfortable with routine.

Page #1

Large black man of indeterminate age. He will play Augur in Lana's pages. Augur is serious and militant, in period costume similar to Lana's. He will also play Ty in Robert's pages. Ty is a groomsman, a friend of Sandy, amiable and dependable, dressed in a tux. When Page #1 interacts with others outside of the pages, he is, like the others, an agreeable gopher in nondescript clothes.

Page #2

Small white woman of indeterminate age. She will play Tina in Lana's pages. Tina is nervous, excitable woman who constantly chain smokes, dressed in period costume. She will also play Kelly, Robert's impending mother-in-law, in Robert's pages. Kelly is a poised woman, constantly aware of other's opinions, dressed in a handsome, mother-of-the-bride dress.

Page #3

Beautiful Latin woman of indeterminate age. She will play Luisa in Lana's pages. Luisa is a sexpot spitfire, with a thick accent, dressed in form-fitting and revealing period costume. In Robert's pages, she will play Sandy, the bride. Sandy is a bit neurotic, no accent, but genuinely thoughtful about the impending marriage. She is wearing a beautiful, traditional white wedding dress.

Page #4

Tall, striking, blonde haired white male of indeterminate age. He will play Thomas in Lana's pages. Thomas is the strong, intellectual leader of the group. Always ready to motivate the others and stop arguments, he too is dressed in period costume. He will also play Arthur, Robert's future father-in-law, in Robert's pages. Arthur is the supportive, proud father, always willing to give his daughter an ear to talk to, dressed in a tux.

PLACE

This is the middle of nowhere, and it should feel that way, a place out of time and space, but somehow connected, not matter how thin the threads may be. The stage should be a combination wasteland / living room. Perhaps a liquor cabinet, a couple of couches, an empty dirt mound, and a dirt mound at center with a dead tree on it that has unworking Christmas lights strewn about it. For the pages, the sets need not be too intricate, for that would block the audience's view of the on-stage spectators. For Lana's, a chalkboard, maybe a bean-bag and a poster or two should do. For Robert's, just a vanity and a couple of chairs, maybe some flowers should be sufficient. Make much with little.

TIME

Each act is a day, consecutive days, in fact. There are no clocks working so the suggestion of earlier and later, to put it in the characters' terms, is an integral part of the piece. When Robert wakes up in the first act, and when The Man proclaims it to be later, it must seem later in some way, just as the morning of the second act must appear to be a kind of morning in this strange place.

Lights up on the stage. After a few seconds of emptiness, ROBERT enters.

ROBERT
(Calling)

Hello? Hello? Listen, if you're kidnapping me, whoever you are, don't be fooled by the tux. It's a rental. If you could just drop me off at St. Samuel's Methodist Church on Edwards Boulevard, we can forget about all this, okay?

(To HIMSELF)

Jesus.

(HE sits on the couch, and pulls out HIS cell phone. HE tries it, but it won't work. HE hits the back of it a couple of times with the heel of HIS hand.)

I know I charged it this morning. I ...

(HE checks HIS watch.)

Stopped. Wonderful.

(HE puts HIS head into HIS hands.
THE SON enters. HE goes to the liquor cart, gets a glass, and then sticks HIS hand into the ice bucket. HE pops a piece of ice in HIS mouth, and then fills the glass with ice. HE will be sucking on ice cubes during the scene.)

ROBERT (CONT'D.)

What am I doing here?

THE SON

Swurch muh.

ROBERT

What?

(THE SON spits the ice into the glass.)

THE SON

I said, search me.

ROBERT

What do you want?

THE SON

Ice. I've got it now, so ... goodbye.

ROBERT

Wait! Why am I here?

THE SON

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How should I know?

ROBERT

Well, you brought me here. You and your cohorts.

THE SON

I don't have any cohorts. Except for The Man. But I wouldn't call The Man a cohort.

ROBERT

You and The Man, you kidnapped me--

THE SON

If The Man were my cohort, though, I guess that'd make me a ... a what? A hort?

ROBERT

You two brought me here, and I can't be here. I have--

THE SON

Places to go? People to see?

ROBERT

Yes. Many people. A church full of people.

THE SON

A congregation. Are you a priest? We don't get many priests around here.

ROBERT

I'm getting married.

THE SON

I thought priests weren't allowed to get married.

ROBERT

I'm not a priest.

THE SON

Renouncing the collar so you can get married?

ROBERT

Look: I am not a priest. I have never been a priest. I am just a normal person who planned on getting married today until you and The Man kidnapped me.

THE SON

What are you talking about?

ROBERT

Why have you kidnapped me?

THE SON

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We didn't kidnap you. The Man and I have never kidnapped anyone.

ROBERT

There must be someone else then, someone who brought me here.

THE SON

Nope. There's nobody else. Just me and The Man. True, some people pop in from time to time, but they don't usually stay for very long. They don't have the guts.

ROBERT

Is staying here that bad?

THE SON

No, not "they", the visitors. The other "they".

ROBERT

I don't understand.

THE SON

If you stay, you will. And if you don't, well, it won't really matter, will it?

ROBERT

How did I get here?

THE SON

Search me. Well, you didn't take me up on the offer before. Thought I'd give you another chance.

ROBERT

I'll pass, thanks.

THE SON

Suit yourself.

ROBERT

Who are you?

THE SON

That's what you want to know? You're not at all curious about where you are? Or do you know where you are?

ROBERT

No.

THE SON

You're not curious.

ROBERT

I don't know where I am.

THE SON

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And you're not curious.

ROBERT

No, I don't know where I am, and yes, I am curious.

THE SON

Then why haven't you asked me?

ROBERT

I didn't think you'd tell me.

THE SON

Why not?

ROBERT

You haven't been very helpful so far.

THE SON

I'm very mistrustful. I get it from my father.

ROBERT

Will you tell me though?

THE SON

Where we are? Yes.

(Pause)

Oh, now?

ROBERT

Yes!

THE SON

You are in the Middle of Nowhere.

ROBERT

The what?

THE SON

Didn't I say it loud enough? The acoustics here are--

ROBERT

The Middle of Nowhere?

THE SON

Oh, yes. I'm not the one who measured it, of course, but I do believe it to be the exact middle.

ROBERT

Are you kidding me?

THE SON

We have to believe in a few things, don't we? I mean, at least one thing. One central tenet or we don't exist. That

this is the Middle of Nowhere is my central tenet.

ROBERT

And so you exist.

THE SON

More or less.

(HE pinches HIS arm.)

More today, it seems.

ROBERT

Do you even know how I got here?

THE SON

I can only assume it's the same way the others got here.

ROBERT

And how is that?

THE SON

I can't tell you. Actually, that's not exactly right. I probably *can* tell you. I *do* know, so I am *able* to tell you. What I should have said is that I won't tell you. I can tell you, I just won't tell you.

ROBERT

Why not?

THE SON

I'm very mistrustful.

ROBERT

You said that already.

THE SON

It's repetition.

ROBERT

I know.

THE SON

You'll get used to it, if you stick around.

ROBERT

I doubt it.

THE SON

That you'll stick around or that you'll get--?

ROBERT

Either. Both. Whichever applies.

Suit yourself. THE SON

You said that already. ROBERT

It's repetition. THE SON

I know. ROBERT

You'll get used to it-- THE SON

STOP IT!! ROBERT

Suit yourself. THE SON

Will The Man be coming around soon? ROBERT

Any second. I'll go get The Man if you like. THE SON

That'd be ... great. So, I'll just wait then. ROBERT

That's a good one. THE SON

Is it? I don't get it. ROBERT

You will. You might. THE SON

If I stick around. ROBERT

You got it. Goodbye. THE SON

What should I say to The Man? ROBERT

Search me. THE SON

(HE exits. ROBERT makes a drink.
THE MAN, who is a woman, enters unseen.)

THE MAN
Fix me a drink, stranger?

ROBERT
(Spinning around, surprised)
It's so good to see someone else.

THE MAN
I feel the same way.

ROBERT
But ... uh ... who are you?

THE MAN
Who are you?

ROBERT
(Slight laugh)
I asked you first.

THE MAN
(Stone serious)
So what?

ROBERT
My name's Robert Stacer.

THE MAN
Sounds like a name to me. How long have you been here?

ROBERT
I ... I don't really know. My watch has--

THE MAN
Stopped. Happens around here.

ROBERT
What is here, exactly? I mean, if you know.

THE MAN
Why wouldn't I know?

ROBERT
I don't.

THE MAN
Well, you haven't been here for very long.

ROBERT
I didn't say that.

THE MAN
Did you not?

ROBERT

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No. I said my watch had stopped and that I didn't--

THE MAN

Know. Right, you did. But you do not look like you know your way around here. In fact, if you are asking me where here is, I know you do not know your way. And, if you had been here long enough, then you would know your way. More or less. Also, I have been around here for a long time, and I've never seen you. Therefore, unless you've been actively avoiding me, which I would doubt is the case considering you're here, speaking to me, you are new here.

ROBERT

How come he doesn't know you?

THE MAN

He who?

ROBERT

The ... um ... he didn't tell me his name.

THE MAN

Didn't you ask?

ROBERT

Yes, but before he could answer, we moved on to more important questions.

THE MAN

Such as? What is more important than identity?

ROBERT

I asked him where I was. I think he was lying, though.

THE MAN

Ahh. Did he tell you that this wasn't the Middle of Nowhere?

ROBERT

That's what this place is called? Really?

THE MAN

You may call it whatever you wish. The Middle of Nowhere is what it is. Are you going to make me my drink?

ROBERT

Uh, sure. What would you like?

THE MAN

Anything but bourbon.

ROBERT

(Pouring HER a brandy)

Yeah, I'm not real fond of it myself.

THE MAN

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Oh, it's not the taste I mind. In fact, I rather like it.
It's just become tiresome. It's all he drinks, you know.

ROBERT

He who?

THE MAN

I said that already.

ROBERT

It's repetition.

THE MAN

I know.

ROBERT

(Handing HER the drink)

Stop. Who drinks bourbon all the time?

THE MAN

The Kid. The Sprout. The Little Bugger. The Son. He does.

ROBERT

You have a son?

THE MAN

Not my son. He is called The Son. Have you met him?

ROBERT

Maybe. I met someone.

THE MAN

Was he blonde haired and green eyed, about twenty-one or so,
wearing a private school uniform?

ROBERT

Yes!

THE MAN

You *may* have met him.

ROBERT

He didn't mention you.

THE MAN

Really? That's surprising. He always mentions me to the
newcomers. Funny.

ROBERT

Sorry. Who are you, by the way?

THE MAN

I am The Man.

ROBERT

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But you're a--

THE MAN

Woman, yes, I'm aware of that. I am called The Man as opposed to being a man, in the sense of not a woman. I am a woman, I am called The Man.

ROBERT

How did you get that name?

THE MAN

I chose it. I am given other names by other people, but I like this one the best.

ROBERT

What else are you called?

THE MAN

No, no, no. I won't say until I know if you're staying.

ROBERT

(Stopping HIMSELF)

Suit your--

THE MAN

You were going to say something.

ROBERT

I was just--

THE MAN

"Suit yourself." You have met The Son.

ROBERT

Of course I have. There's nobody else here.

THE MAN

Who told you there was no one else?

ROBERT

He did.

THE MAN

What if he was lying? In fact, what if I'm lying? What if his name's not really The Son, and mine's not really The Man?

ROBERT

That's not what you said. You said you chose that name. That is what you call yourself. You've already called yourself The Man, so that can't be a lie.

THE MAN

Very good. You're catching on.