

EVENTYR
12 UNLIKELY CONVERSATIONS

Andrew O'Connell

Eventyr : 12 unlikely conversations
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Acknowledgements

With my passion for theatre, some of the stories in this book began as short plays. I suppose I have Jacqueline Mikhail to thank for catalysing the whole thing. One of a number of theatre directors in the Sydney 2009 short play festival, Short and Sweet, she picked up, and was attracted by, my *The Clown and the Vampire* script, and went on to bring the story to life on the stage. While the play didn't go on to win the festival, it did get the 'audience vote' on the day it was performed.

High on my perceived success, I wanted to bring more of my stories to life. A year later, in 2010, I directed a show called *Three Unlikely Conversations* at the Sydney Fringe Festival. Reasonably well-received by the relatively few people who came to see it, *Three Unlikely Conversations* was a remount of *The Clown and the Vampire*, and the debut of *Death and the Little Girl* and *The Man and the Mannequin*.

I was fortunate to have actors who took the work very seriously. Many thanks to Aaron Gleanne, who actually undertook clown training in preparation for the role of The Clown, and Heather Maltman, who played the sexy, impatient, and unamused Vampire to perfection. Paul Treacy, bald (sorry Paul!), thin, and unassuming, was amazing as dispassionate and impartial Death. Claudia McDowell, not yet a teenager, was as mature as an adult

when it came to approaching the role, and brought The Little Girl in my story so truly to life that it scared me. Tim Wardell, pushing the boundaries of the script, stole the show. People were amazed at his performance as The Man who fell in love with the mannequin. He was so believable that a lot of people said to me after the show: “I swear I thought the mannequin was going to speak.” That’s how much he believed in it. He held the audience captive—myself included!

Not to be forgotten is Gil Balfas, who filled in as The Clown when Aaron—star that he is—had to perform with the Tap Dogs troupe in Melbourne on one of the nights scheduled for our show. Gil is a natural comedian who had us cracking up, laughing as early as his first reading of the script.

Another life-saver was Adriane White, who filled in for Claudia as The Little Girl, when Claudia couldn’t make it for one of the shows. Not exactly a little girl, Adriane made me see the story in a new light. Suddenly, the story was about Death and a twenty-year-old woman, which had a different gravitas.

The piano score, the haunting undercurrent to the three short plays, was composed by my friend, and role model when it comes to being a teacher, Nick Beswick.

I was proud of our show but I thought something was missing. I felt the shows needed to be more visually stimulating. I wanted the audience to see, feel, and hear more—leaves being blown off trees, the moon emerging from the clouds, the fading world as seen by the expiring vampire ... Yes, you can achieve these things in theatre, but I came to the conclusion that my passion for theatre had actually interfered with what these stories were really meant to be: *written* stories. Words alone, I concluded,

were best suited to communicate what I needed to say. So I set about writing the stories.

Before I thank those who helped me to make the dream of publishing this book a reality, I must thank my muse, my wife, Yudy, who has not only stimulated my creativity, and urged me to publish the book when I most doubted myself, but has also given me valuable feedback on the stories. An unforgiving critic, Yudy is ruthless when she gets even the faintest whiff that something I have written in the story is not true. A native Spanish speaker, I usually get a very straight answer from her—'I like it' or 'I don't like it'—and when my ideas are really bad, I get a very wry "It must make sense in English because it certainly doesn't in Spanish!" Gracias amor.

Next, I must thank the people who took the time to read some, or all, of the stories, and who provided me with invaluable feedback. So, thanks to Carol Wimmer, Frances Hannah, Ramona Nizar, Cecilia Nguyen, and Frances Attard.

If Jacqueline Mikhail helped to put my creative dream in 'first gear', a guy called Ocean Reeve helped to put it in fifth. My publisher, I knew Ocean was the guy to go with when he said to me in our first conversation, "It's all about building a relationship." Well, my father Patrick O'Connell says something similar—"It's all about relationships"—and he's a pretty wise man, so I knew I was onto a winner with Ocean.

I've only ever had one criterion for choosing people to work with me creatively, and that is that the person I'm working with must love the project I'm working on. Of course, I don't always get collaborators who are as passionate as I am, and that's fine—different people have different vested interests in what you're doing—but Ocean's energy is irrepressible yet harnessed, his vision broad yet strategic, and his outlook positive yet grounded.

EVENTYR

When I told my family I was publishing a book, my mum, Irene O'Connell, was quick to point out to everyone that I got my talent from her, the obvious proof being that I *look* like her. When she was forced to concede that my father had contributed not just a little to who I have become today, she reminded me of the fact that she read to me a lot as a child. Perhaps listening to all those fairytales really did leave its mark. Thanks Mum.

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EVENTYR

The Clown and the Vampire

It was a gloomy night. The wind was blowing through the trees, making the autumn leaves rustle and fall away to the ground. The moon was behind the clouds and everything had a silvery, shadowy look.



In this half-light on a lonely old hill, there was a lonely old house. There was a light on inside this house—a solitary globe, which hung by a cord from the ceiling and came to rest above a dresser. Seated at the dresser was a clown.

He was staring at himself in the mirror. He was very sad. He had performed at a child's birthday party that day and it had gone very badly. None of the children had laughed. Actually, a few of them had cried ...

The clown removed his bright red wig and bright red nose. He gave a long sigh and sat there, looking at himself, in silence.

Suddenly a tap, tap, tapping came at the window. 'Who could this be?' he wondered. The sound came again: a tap, tap, tapping at the window. The clown turned around and looked out the window but no-one was there. 'It's only the wind' he said to himself. He turned back around and got such a fright from his own reflection that he jumped in his chair. 'Oh! It's only me ... heh, heh, silly me!' The clown was scared.

The sound came again: a tap, tap, tapping at the window. In the mirror, to his great surprise, the clown saw the window behind him opening! He blinked firmly. Perhaps his eyes were playing tricks on him. No. The window was slowly opening before his eyes! The wind rushed in, bringing some leaves that had fallen from the trees. Suddenly, the clown heard someone speak.

'Hello.'

The clown's heart stopped. He shifted his eyes to the left, then to the right, and to the left again. He looked in the mirror but could see nothing.

'Hello!' the voice said again.

The clown turned around and saw a very beautiful woman standing in his living room. She was wearing a long satin cloak, which was black on the outside and red on the inside. She had black leather boots, which had very high heels and were laced up from the toe to the knee. She wore a short black skirt and a shiny silver belt around her waist.

A black velvet top clung tightly to her body and around her neck she wore a collar of diamonds. She had raven-black hair and her skin was white—as white as alabaster—but her lips were the colour of blood.

The clown saw two icy cold, pale blue eyes staring back at him. He looked at her in amazement.

'Cat got your tongue?' she said.

The clown did not know what to say. The woman's beauty had completely overwhelmed him. The woman knew this and laughed, revealing the whitest and brightest set of teeth you ever did see. Strangely, two of her teeth were longer—and *sharper*—than all the others, which the clown found quite strange.

'Aren't you going to say hello?' she said.

The clown rubbed his sweaty palms together. 'I think you're in the wrong house.'

'I think I'm not.'

'I think you are,' he answered back.

A look of scorn came across the woman's face. 'I think I'm *not*.'

An embarrassing silence followed.

'Are you lost?' the clown continued.

'Are you an idiot?'

'I'm a clown,' he replied candidly.

'Do you know what *I* am?'

'A ghost?' he guessed.

'I'm not a ghost!'

'Oh ... a magician?'

The woman's eyes flashed with anger. She glared at the clown. 'What makes you think that?'

'You look like a magician.'

'I am not a magician!' she snapped.

'Oh!' The clown got a fright. 'You're not a magician.'

'No!'

'Sorry.'

'Are you stupid?' the woman enquired.

'I'm a clown,' replied the clown.

'Is that right?' the woman replied, sarcastically.

'Yes,' the clown confirmed.

'And don't you know what I am?'

'No, sorry.'

'Can you guess?'

The clown looked at her and thought, his face a picture of concentration. He inspected her carefully from head to toe. She tilted her head back and bared her teeth to help him. The clown's eyes brightened.

'Well?' she enquired.

'I'm not sure.'

'*I'm a vampire!*' she screamed, her eyes becoming as sharp as the diamonds she wore around her neck.

'*Ok!*' the clown shouted back—not because he was angry or offended, he just felt it natural to speak in the same way as she did. And he continued shouting. '*Pleased to meet you!*' he said.

'*Pleased to meet you!*'

'*How are you?*'

'*Thirsty!*'

'*Oh!*' He brought his voice back to a more suitable volume. 'Would you like a cup of tea?'

The vampire was completely bewildered. '*Nooooo!*'

'A piece of cake?'

'Cake!'

'Yes.'

'Vampires don't eat cake!'

'What do they eat?'

'They *don't* eat, you fool—they *drink*. They drink blood!'



'Why do they drink blood?'

'You must be stupid.'

'I'm a clown.'

'*Oh my GOD!*' she screamed, and she slapped her forehead.

'Are you alright?' asked the clown.

'No, I'm not, actually!'

'What's wrong?' enquired the clown.

'Look, I'm a vampire. Vampires drink blood. I'm here to suck your blood.'

'Suck my blood?' The clown wondered aloud. 'Why?'

The vampire slapped her face again. 'I'm talking with an imbecile!'

'I'm a clown.'

'Yes, yes, you're a clown, so you've told me!'

'Yes.'

'Oh, please forgive me, I've never met a clown before!' she said sarcastically.

'There's a first time for everything.'

'Yes! Yes, there is! Well, go on! Tell me all about you!'

'I'm a clown.'

'And what do clowns do when they're not being imbeciles?'

'Clowns make people laugh.' The clown's face was very sad.

'How interesting,' said the vampire drily.

'I went to a birthday party today.'

'*I don't care!*' the vampire screamed.

'Oh! You scared me!'

'Are you a fool?'

'I'm a clown.'

'Whatever you are, I want to suck your blood! Now!' The vampire moved in for the strike.

'Wait a moment,' said the clown.

'What?' replied the vampire, trying not to lose her temper.

'You have to ask nicely.'

The vampire was at breaking point but she managed to control her anger. Gritting her teeth, she asked in the nicest voice possible, '*May I suck your blood?*'

The clown considered the request for a moment. 'No.'

The vampire had had enough. She let out the most terrible, blood-curdling scream ever heard by human ears. The scream rang out, so terrifying that all the remaining leaves fell off all the trees in the neighbourhood. A number of the dead who were resting peacefully in the nearby cemetery were woken by the shriek and tossed and turned in their graves. The scream even went as far as the distant hills, where it reached the ears of a number of wolves, who howled in reply, having recognised its message—the call for blood.

When the vampire had let all of the air out of her lungs, a deep silence followed. Suddenly, a look of panic came across her face. She started to waver on her feet and in the next moment, she doubled over in pain and fell to the ground. The clown looked very concerned.

'Are you alright?' he enquired.

'No,' she said breathlessly. 'I need blood.'

The clown thought for a moment. 'I can give you a little of my blood—if it would help.'

'Yes! Yes!' the vampire replied eagerly.

The clown looked quizzically at his arms and legs, wondering how he was going to extract his own blood.

'Cut your wrist!' exclaimed the vampire, who was pining.

The clown went quickly into the kitchen to obtain an instrument that would cut.

'A knife! Get a knife!' the vampire called out.

The clown rifled through some drawers until he found a knife. He then raced back to the vampire. 'I've got a knife!' he exclaimed.

But when the vampire saw what he had obtained, she wailed in despair because all the clown had managed to procure was a bread-and-butter knife. 'You got a bread-and-butter knife!'

'Yes.'

'You imbecile!'

With the little strength she had left, the vampire raised herself to her knees and clambered towards the clown. She grabbed the knife with one hand and, with the other, grabbed the clown's wrist and held it out firmly for the cut. With all her remaining strength, she drew the bread-and-butter knife across it. But her feeble attempt had only managed to leave the clown with a scratch. Her strength had failed her.

'Damn you clown!' she cried, and smashed her head against the ground.

'I have to go to bed now.'

'You fool ... I'm a vampire ... I need blood ...'

'Yes, you already told me that! *I'm a vampire! Vampires drink blood! I want to suck your blood!*' He imitated her with uncanny accuracy, '*Vampires don't eat you fool, they drink blood! Look at me, I'm a vampire!*' He moved and sounded exactly like her. '*I want to suck your blood!*' The clown grabbed a tablecloth, placed it around him as if it were a cloak, and started imitating her. '*Look! I'm a vampire! I want to suck your blood.*' The clown bared his teeth and flicked his hair back, trying to be like her.

The look of on the vampire's face slowly changed from anguish to delight. She started to giggle and then to laugh.

She laughed louder and louder until she started to interrupt the clown's performance.

'What are you laughing at?'

The vampire tried to answer but couldn't—she was laughing too much. But in between her gasps, she managed to get it out: 'You!' And she laughed even harder.

'Me?' replied the clown, completely confused.

'Yes! You're the funniest clown I've ever seen!'

'Oh ... thank you,' said the clown uncertainly.

'You're the funniest clown in the world!' she said, with tears of laughter streaming down her face.

The clown was funny again. He continued entertaining the vampire all through the night, telling her jokes and stories and acting things out from time to time if the situation called for it. The vampire's laughter, which started off strong, became weaker and weaker—not because the clown was becoming less funny—on the contrary, he became funnier as the night went on—but because she desperately lacked for blood. But she did not seem to care anymore. She was so happy being entertained.

Dawn came. The first rays of the sun shone into the house. The vampire was seated at the dresser but had become so weak she could no longer move. She knew her time was up but there was nothing she could do. 'At least I'll go with a smile,' she thought.

The sun rose higher. A new day was dawning,



and then ... the moment that all vampires dread—seeing the sun. There it was, high in the sky now, shining straight into the house. The vampire could hardly see. The clown appeared as a black silhouette moving strangely about. Her hearing started to go—the clown’s voice sounded as if he were at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

And then there was silence. Light poured in through the vampire’s eyes and deep, down into her soul. She started to fade and then she was gone—dissolved, it seemed, into thin air.

The clown was in the middle of telling a funny story when she had disappeared and had not noticed her go. When he had finished, he turned around.

‘Did you like that story?’

But she was not there. He looked around for her—perhaps she was hiding and wanted to play a trick on him. After all, she had done something similar to him the night before. He looked out the window but all he saw was the light of the early morning sun streaming into the house.

The clown was sad she had gone but was happy because he was funny again. ‘Maybe she’ll come back to visit me,’ he thought. But the clown would never see her again.

