

B R I L L I A N C E
a play in one act

Characters

JANE DAVID
THE DIRECTOR JOYCE
At least four STUDENTS

Eddie Kohler

10 March—22 April 1999

Thanks to Alan Brody, Janet Sonenberg, Sean Andrew Murray,
Fernando Paiz

* * *

1

The main yard of Camp Achievement. Evening

DAVID

Hi, Jane? I'm David. Looks like we're stuck together.

JANE

Oh yes. It's good to meet you.

DAVID

Good to meet you too.

JANE

So what are you doing here?

DAVID

Well, my company sent me up. Reimplementation Technologies, Cambridge, Mass. I'm the senior engineer. It's a tough job, but I've got it down cold – I haven't worked my brain for years now. Yeah, I'm bored and they know it. So they're sending me to all these camps and seminars. They say they're testing me, but really they want to promote me to management, buy my loyalty to the firm. But come on, who wants to be a vice president? This is nice and all, but I'm doing what I want – and as for loyalty, good luck, guys, but it's really just a job.

JANE

That's exactly why I'm here, to get away from "just a job". I'm between jobs, my choice, and this didn't sound like a job. It sounded hard. Like you're accomplishing something.

DAVID

You think? It sounds like a Mensa pissing contest to me. With a ropes course. Only hard if you care about winning.

JANE

I guess I care about winning.

DAVID

Only losers care. Winners –

JANE

Are you judging me?

DAVID

No, no, no –

JANE

I don't tolerate that.

DAVID

I'm sorry –

JANE

Judging me without knowing who I am or what I can do. It's not only rude, it's stupid. It stops you from seeing. You should stop that right now or this is going to be a very long weekend.

DAVID

Okay, two things. First, I'm sorry. I say things I don't mean. Please don't take them seriously. I'll try to stop, but I'm a little nervous, to tell you the truth, and the habit is not going to go away in one weekend. Even though I like you.

Second, you exist in the world, so you are always being judged. That is the price of admission. Other people are everywhere, and you manifest to them in at least six ways: they see you, hear you, touch you, taste you, smell you, and they understand you as an idea. You are bleeding information without knowing it, and information exists to be judged, that is its nature. So if you can't tolerate that, you need to go to outer space or kill yourself; and even then you will still be judged.

JANE

I like the way you put that.

DAVID

Thank you.

JANE

You're wrong, though. People don't judge all the time – it's just too hard. Most judgements aren't worth the energy it took to make them. The luckiest people never judge at all: they just react, unconsciously, like holy fools.

DAVID

That's totally naive. How can you react without judging?

JANE

So you don't believe in the unconscious mind?

DAVID

Ha! Everything's conscious, we just pretend we have an unconscious mind so there's something else to blame.

JANE

That's totally naive. We're all lucky enough to have a place in our brains we don't understand.

DAVID

We don't want to understand it! Because we don't like it. If you don't like a thought, call it unconscious.

JANE

So you've never had an unconscious impulse you liked?

DAVID

No.

JANE

You've never looked at someone and been attracted to them?

DAVID
Of course I have!

JANE
But you didn't enjoy it.

DAVID
Yes, but it was conscious –

JANE
Didn't it happen before you could think?

DAVID
I thought about it, just too fast to understand.

JANE
If you can't understand it, it's unconscious by definition!

DAVID
Your definition is awfully convenient for the point you're trying to make.

JANE
Name one way it's different from any reasonable definition you know.

DAVID *after a second*
Oh, Jesus. Listen, it's eight o'clock; let's stop this little word game before it goes any further. What do you really want to do?

JANE
Well what I want to do, David, is take that last sentence and everything you have said so far today, and use sheer willpower to make it materialize in its true form. Words have shapes, and the sentences you say have a whole other life in a space parallel to this one, where they coalesce into real matter shaped like the soul of the person who said them. I would like to have the power to shift that matter into our world and show you the gigantic, fecal half-dead cockroach that you have said in the last five minutes and watch you feel a punch in your gut you wouldn't forget for the rest of your life.
This isn't going very well.

DAVID
I'm not as bad as you think I am.

JANE
I'm not sure how bad I think you are. But I hope you're right.

DAVID
Look, I've got a couple things to do before I go to bed.

JANE
All right. There are snacks over there in the yellow cabin if you get hungry later – the cook, you know, that fat German woman, she told me she leaves the door unlocked.
This should be fun. Good night.

DAVID
Good night.

* * *

The main yard. The next day

THE DIRECTOR

Good morning and welcome to Camp Achievement. I'm Anne Brand, founder and director. I'm sure you've got questions – you stand out when you ask a question! – but hold on to them for now. I have some things to say.

Some of you think this is going to be easy—just another executive retreat: a little R&R, a good chance to sleep around. Wrong. This will be painful, rigorous, and difficult. Because at Camp Achievement, we test your will to achieve.

How? First: unfamiliar environment. Performance matters here, not history. You from Harvard? The deer don't care. Second: hard, unfamiliar tasks. We don't check your typing speed. We make you build a cabin out of grass. You don't just run a ropes course, you design it. Third: teamwork. You better decide that your ego takes a back seat to achievement. And finally: your own white-hot ambition to succeed.

That's right. Without that fiery ambition, we can do nothing. We provide a catalyst. You need to light the spark.

But you're successful already. You feel satisfied, right?

Wrong. I've talked to a lot of you one-on-one, and it's amazing how you all mentioned college. You were coated with gold. Captains of the football team, bestriding your campuses like colossi. The world belonged to you, and you were going to open it up and take it all.

But now, you said, you're just – OK. Your job is OK. The money's OK. You used to be great; now you're OK. You aren't a success, you're a survival. Your golden coating's gone, and you miss it more than anything in the world. And I bet late at night, when you think no one can hear, you point an imaginary gun at your head and say Pow! – and it feels good. Right?

Sure, you can keep living like this. You can die fifty years from now not having changed a thing. You can die irrelevant. Or you can make the first achievement of many to come and say, No. I want more. What's your choice?

Come on, people! Answer me! This is the easiest thing you'll do all weekend! Are you gonna give up? Are you gonna just survive?!

STUDENTS *involved but not excited*

No!

THE DIRECTOR

Pathetic. (*she turns to leave the stage*)

JOYCE

Annie, no! Give them a chance!

THE DIRECTOR

What's the fucking point, Joyce? Look at these people! They aren't brilliant! They're just *good*. Lifetime middle managers, it's written on their faces. I'm not wasting my time.

JOYCE

Stop. Listen to yourself.

THE DIRECTOR

Let me go.

JOYCE

Is it them, Annie? Or is it you?

You can help these people. It's not them you're afraid of, it's yourself. You're afraid of failing, just like I was five years ago before you showed me the way. These people are a challenge, Anne. A challenge you can turn into an achievement. A challenge you can crush like a grape. And when you do that, you'll fly even higher – so far above they'll seem like ants.

THE DIRECTOR

Joyce. Thank you. I bless the day we met.

(*to the STUDENTS*) You see? It never ends. You can always give up and settle for survival. I choose instead to crush every challenge in my way. You know your challenge. What do you choose? Survival? Or success?

Are you gonna give up! *Are you gonna just survive!*

STUDENTS

No!

a look from THE DIRECTOR

STUDENTS

NO!!

A STUDENT

No! No! No! No! No! (*another STUDENT shushes him*)

THE DIRECTOR

That's right. You're not.

And we can help. We've made this program hard, maybe harder than anything you've done in years, but there's a reason. If you rise to it, it'll polish that golden coating you thought the world wore off. Every one of you can walk out of here an Achiever, head held high – unless you fail. But that is up to you.

Okay. We're already late for lunch, but I'll still take one question. Anyone? Yes!

JANE

What did you do before this program?

THE DIRECTOR *with a hard stare*

That is not important. What is important is what I'm doing now. For your benefit.

Okay, enjoy your lunch. We'll meet back here in precisely one hour for some introductory games. (*exits*)

JOYCE *herds the students towards the cafeteria*

JANE to DAVID

This was a mistake, coming here.

DAVID

Why? What do you mean?

JANE

Well – she's dumb.

they are pushed out

* * *

The main yard. That afternoon. Students in a human knot

DAVID

I thought that speech was pretty good.

STUDENT 1

What?

JANE

Some of it was good, sure. Hold up your arm.

STUDENT 3

I can't, he's pushing it down!

STUDENT 2

I'm trying –

STUDENT 3

Well try harder!

JANE

Calm down. It's not his fault, you're in the wrong place. Just lean out further.

STUDENT 3

Oh – ow – okay. Okay.

DAVID

Some of it was good, but...?

STUDENT 1

What?

DAVID

I'm talking to her.

JANE

But some of it was pandering and manipulative. And bad.

STUDENT 2

I guess you didn't like her.

JANE

No, I didn't.

STUDENT 1

Ow!

DAVID

Sorry.

STUDENT 2

Why?

JANE

It wasn't a good performance.

STUDENT 3

We sure paid enough to deserve a good show.

STUDENT 1

It was a speech, not a show.

JANE

Oh, that whole thing with Joyce in the middle was scripted.

STUDENT 1

Ow!

DAVID

Sorry. Damn.

JANE
Just back off for a minute, let them go through.

DAVID
Who, me?

STUDENT 1
Who?

JANE
Not you. David, back off. You – I’m sorry, I forgot your name –

STUDENT 2
Pat.

JANE
Pat, just go right through there. See it?

STUDENT 3
Is that my leg?

JANE
Yes.

STUDENT 3
Just don’t knock into it. I broke it last year, cost a fortune.

STUDENT 2
Look, I’ll try, okay?

STUDENT 3
Yeah, well, try hard, okay?

JANE
Both of you shut up. Hold that arm up –

STUDENT 1
What?

JANE
Your arm. Hold it up.

STUDENT 2
Now I go through there –

JANE
No! You wait. You. Get down lower. Real close to the ground. David,
raise your arm. Okay, now you step over.

STUDENT 1
Ow!

DAVID
Sorry.

STUDENT 3
Don’t –

STUDENT 2
Yeah, I’m trying!

JANE
Almost there!

STUDENT 1
Ow!

DAVID
Sorry!

JANE
Okay – okay – okay –
The knot unties into two circles

ALL
Yes!

JANE
Finally.

STUDENT 4 *yelling offstage*
Joyce! Joyce, we're done!

STUDENT 3
I don't see why we have to tell them.

JANE
It's part of the whole manipulative ritual. They're in control.

STUDENT 1
Now you're just not being fair.

STUDENT 4
Joyce!

JOYCE *coming in from offstage*
All right, what have we got here? Two circles. Hmm.

STUDENT 2
It happens sometimes. I've done this before.

JOYCE
But can you call it an achievement?
Listen, people, this camp is not about settling for second best. You got two circles. It's not your fault, I know that, but it's second best. And you need to learn not to accept it.
Do it again.

general annoyance from the STUDENTS

DAVID
You gotta be kidding me.

JOYCE
Listen! We've got ten minutes scheduled for this, and it's only been five, so I'd've asked you to do it again anyway. Besides, the red team's already solved it. Twice. Now get going. (*exits*)

JANE
All right, let's go.
The STUDENTS *form another knot by closing their eyes and joining hands at random*

JANE
Now make sure and form a single circle this time. Stupid woman.
They open their eyes and try to untie the knot

STUDENT 2
You really hate this, don't you?

JANE
Yes.

DAVID
She's like this all the time.

JANE
That's not true.

STUDENT 3
Sure seems like it.

STUDENT 2
Now I go through there –

DAVID
No, that won't work.

JANE
You're fine, Pat. Go ahead.

STUDENT 2
Okay – good.

STUDENT 1
Well, I thought Ms. Brand was well put together.

DAVID
I kind of liked what she said about college, and afterwards. I feel like that.

STUDENT 3
Yeah. I want to be golden again.

STUDENT 4 *snorts*

STUDENT 3
Look at me – I used to be captain of the rugby team. Now I break my leg playing softball, and I'm not even old yet.

DAVID
Totally.

STUDENT 3
Things were just better then. Who doesn't want it back?

JANE
Me! I was a fucking moron in college, and so were all of you! That's what it's for! If you don't have a better life now, you've failed!

STUDENT 2
Oh shit!

DAVID
Sorry! Jesus!

JANE
So yeah, when someone tells me they'll make me golden again, and that college was the best time in my life, I think she's an idiot!

STUDENT 1
I like her. I introduced her to my partner and they got along great. It was totally easy and natural. That doesn't happen that often – usually people are uncomfortable.

JANE
Well, that's her job. Being nice.

STUDENT 4
Look, who cares?!

STUDENT 3
Ow! Will you watch your goddamned knees!

DAVID
I'm sorry.

STUDENT 3
You should be! Unbelievable!

DAVID
You all right?

STUDENT 3
Let's just get out of this knot so I can go to the bathroom.

STUDENT 2
Amen!

STUDENT 1
Ow!

STUDENT 2
Who, me?

STUDENT 1
No, him! (*to DAVID*) Hey! Ow!

DAVID
Shit, I'm just bad at this.

STUDENT 3
So what the fuck are you doing here?

JANE
Hey! Shut up! You will not be rude to people! Especially not people in this knot!
All right. Enough. You.

STUDENT 1
What?

JANE
Not you! You. Lift your leg.

STUDENT 2
Me?

JANE
Yes, you! Lift your leg! Now!

STUDENT 2
Like this?

JANE
Yes, like that! David! Go through there! No! Turn around first. Not that way, the other way, counterclockwise! Yes.

STUDENT 2
My leg's getting tired.

JANE
Too bad! David! Go there! You follow him!

STUDENT 1
What?

JANE
Follow him! Jesus Christ. All right. Now I'll go through here.

STUDENT 3
Don't step –

JANE
I won't! Now you, get up. Lift your arms above your head. Now turn around. Good.
The knot has come undone. STUDENT 2 is still holding his leg in the air

JANE *breaking the circle*
Unbelievable.

DAVID
Where are you going?

JANE
I want a snack. You can put your leg down. (*exits*)

STUDENT 2
Oh. (*puts it down*)

STUDENT 1
She was pretty good at that.

STUDENT 3

Yeah, she was. Cute too. But what a bite!
(to DAVID) Hey, man, no hard feelings?

DAVID

I don't know.

STUDENT 4

JOYCE!!

* * *

4

A clearing. Five planks, a lot of long, cut grass and reeds

DAVID

So we have to build a cabin out of this.

JANE

Yes.

DAVID

It has to have walls. And a roof.

JANE

Yes.

DAVID

Are there any nails?

JANE

No.

DAVID

Any rope? Anything?

JANE

We could probably weave a rope out of the grass, actually.

I think it's doable. It must be, people have done it before. We've got five planks, that might be enough to make a rigid frame. Like a teepee, you know? But they might not be long enough. Can we use anything else?

DAVID

No. Just this and the ground.

JANE

Well, hmm. That's better than it sounds. We could dig up the ground. Yeah, I like that. Make a sort of mound over there, use the planks as shovels and pile up the dirt – we could sacrifice one of them, actually, split its end with a rock, make a sort of a rake. Then, you know, stick the planks into the dirt pile so they hang out over here, over the hole. Then just put grass on them, make walls and curtains.

No, that's not good, you don't want water running into the middle of your floor – No! Yeah! Yeah! That's what we do! Well... Yeah!!

DAVID

What?

JANE

Well, it's like – we use four of the planks, you know, to make a floor over the hole! Then just one of them – this one, it's longer than the others – that one sticks out from the mound, and then long curtains

down from it all around the cabin! Oh, I like that very much, it's charming. You could use the hole for things. It'd make a great outhouse! Or you could call it a basement and rent it out! Oh, yeah, that's cool.

DAVID

Are you an architect?

JANE

Oh, no! I'm a linguist actually.

DAVID

Oh.

Listen, I was thinking. That long beam could make a pretty good roof line, right? We could just make two A-frames out of the other four and have the long one go between them. Like a tent.

JANE

Yeah, I thought of that. And I bet that's what they expect us to do. But see, these guys are so short that, you know, lean them up against one another, you've got a three-foot-tall tent. I mean, that's good enough for a tent, but it's not really a cabin.

DAVID

I guess not.

JANE

And besides, I want to build something unexpected. Something great.

DAVID

Me too.

JANE

Something that'll really blow their minds!

DAVID

Me too.

Okay, I'll see you later.

JANE

What? Where are you going?

DAVID

Over there.

JANE

What's over there?

DAVID

Nothing's over there. You are not over there.

JANE

David. I can't do this without you, and if you make me try, I am not afraid to bring you down. We're a team. We were assigned together. We both have to deal with that. Look, what do you want?

DAVID

I want you to build my idea.

JANE

But mine is better.

DAVID

I guess it is.

JANE

See? Anyway, it's certainly more interesting.

DAVID

I guess it is.

JANE
It's not like I think *you're* stupid.

DAVID
All right. All right. All right. You're brilliant. I can't compete.

JANE
Don't pull that shit on me.

DAVID
Why the hell not? You're brilliant! You can take it! What the fuck!
"Don't pull that shit on me"? After two days of watching you beat me
at everything! And I'm the bad guy now? I'm pulling the shit?
"Anyway, it's certainly more interesting." And I'm pulling the shit!
Unbelievable! Absolutely unbelievable!

JANE
Where are you going?

DAVID
I'm hungry. I need a snack.

JANE
Are you coming back?

DAVID
Yes, I'm coming back! Did you hear that? Yes! I want to really blow
their minds! And they'll know who really did it but I don't care,
because I can go back to my job and tell them all about the fabulous
cabin I built – I, me, no Jane even mentioned, with Jane excised from
this entire goddamned experience! But you know what? I'll still
remember you! For the rest of my life! You bitch! (*exits*)

JANE *after a while*
I'm glad you're coming back. I can't do this myself.

* * *

5

The clearing. Early evening. The cabin is built

DAVID
There it is.

JANE
Damn straight. It's gorgeous.

DAVID
It's pretty nice. It's sure different.

JANE
And we did it together!

DAVID
Yeah. Thanks for the idea.

JANE
It was an all right idea. But interesting. There are problems with it for
sure – those floorboards are a little too far apart for me, and that
certain doesn't leave a lot of headroom. But the shape is nice. Yeah.
Still, I wonder if the tent would have been better.

DAVID
I dunno.

JANE
That was an apology.

DAVID
Really? I couldn't tell. So it was a pretty bad one.

JANE
Fair enough. I'm sorry.

DAVID
It's all right, it's not your fault. Let's talk about something else.

JANE
Okay. But when do you think they'll come and look at it? I mean, the leaves will start to go brown by tomorrow – I'm amazed they've lasted this long – and it looks so rich and wonderful all green like this. I suppose the dew might help.

DAVID
Can we please talk about something else?

JANE
Whoops! Sorry. Okay.
Oh, I don't think I can talk about anything else! I'm too excited! Look at this gorgeous cabin! It reminds me of a carousel! Or a maypole, a big, thick, green maypole. It's cute! What a cute little thing we built!

DAVID
At least I'm better at staying off a subject.

JANE
Yep.

DAVID
And I'm better at talking to people, too. In general. Listening to what they want and reacting. I'm good at it.

JANE
Yeah, you're right. But that first speech about where you work, that was pretty annoying. That whole first conversation was pretty annoying.

DAVID
I was nervous. And by now you know I'm not really like that.

JANE
That's true.

DAVID
You are like this, though.

JANE
That's true too.

DAVID
And you enjoy it.

JANE
Hello and welcome to the Land of True Things!

DAVID
Okay, I'm going to go get a snack.

JANE
So many snacks, you'll get fat. Just stay here for a minute and have a good look.

DAVID
You just want your triumph witnessed.

JANE
Bitterness is ugly on you. It stinks.

DAVID
Bitterness doesn't smell no matter how smart you are.

JANE
Can you really not understand a metaphor? Let's go inside.

DAVID
I'll just stay out here.

JANE
Suit yourself. (*she goes into the cabin*)
God, it's gorgeous in here. Everything is so complex! A maze of greens and yellows, changing all the time. Oh, wow – when I run my hand along it, it's like some animal running round and round, shifting the curtain.

DAVID
Looks funny from here too.

JANE
What a magical space! I think I think better in here. Everything sounds muffled and grassy. And this floor – what a great idea! The boards are so far apart that there's this cool element of danger, it makes you notice them. I wonder how solid they are.

JANE *starts jumping up and down*

DAVID
What are you doing? Don't be stupid.

JANE *jumping*
Oh, I'm sure it'll be fine. Would they give us bad wood?
a cracking noise. JANE stops

JANE
I guess they would.

DAVID
Shit, Jane, get out of there.
Suddenly the plank JANE is standing on gives way. She falls into the hole underneath the floor. The other floorboards and the curtain come on top of her. She pulls on the curtain as she falls. This brings down the long roofboard and dirt from the mound. JANE cannot be seen.

DAVID
Oh my god, Jane! Are you all right!

JANE *muffled voice*
Ow.

DAVID
Can you hear me?

JANE
Of course I can hear you. Jesus God. Ow! I can't move my leg.

DAVID
Do you think it's broken?

JANE
I don't fucking know! Oh my god, this hurts. I can't get out! (*screams*)

DAVID
Don't panic.

JANE *screaming*
I can't get out! Help! Help me!

DAVID
Don't panic! Everything will be fine!

JANE
Don't you fucking tell me not to panic! You're not buried alive! You jerk! Why didn't you do something!

DAVID
I'm – What are you talking about! What could I have done!

JANE
You could've stopped me!

DAVID
I haven't been able to stop you at anything this whole fucking weekend!

JANE *screaming*
Help! Help!

DAVID
Why are you screaming? I'm right here! What, am I not good enough?

JANE
You're not doing much good right now!

DAVID
No, I'm not! And I think I like it!

JANE
What?

DAVID
This feels good! It's the first time in two days I haven't seen your ugly face!

JANE
We sleep in separate cabins!

DAVID
YOU'RE RIGHT AND I HATE YOU!

JANE
What the hell is this? Are you criminal? You think if you leave me here you'll win?

DAVID
NO!

JANE
Then what? You think I'll lose?

DAVID
NO!

JANE
Fine, then! It's the same either way! So, all things being equal, get me the fuck out of here!

DAVID
NO FUCKING WAY!

JANE
Why not!

DAVID
Because I hate you!

JANE
That's not even true!

DAVID
RIGHT AGAIN!

JANE

DAVID, YOU BASTARD! I DEMAND YOU TELL ME RIGHT NOW
WHY I AM STILL IN THIS HOLE!

DAVID

BECAUSE IF I TAKE YOU OUT NOTHING WILL CHANGE!
And I am desperate for this to change!

JANE

DO YOU THINK YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE?!

DAVID

NO!!
I'm leaving.

JANE

YOU CAN'T –

DAVID

I'M LEAVING! GOODBYE! I am leaving this camp and getting in my
car, and I am driving to another state and getting two dogs, and I am
changing my life so completely that I will never feel this way again!
Ever!

JANE

David –

DAVID *silently helps her out of the rubble and exits*

JANE *sitting on the rubble*

David?

Oh, God.

I don't want to be brilliant. I want to be good.

I want to be good.

* * *

End