

GALLERY
By Scott Gibson

GALLERY

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Cassandra at 10th and Elm

Sally – a young professionally-attired woman, 20s-early 30s

Kyle – a similarly attired young business-type, 20s-early 30s

Cassandra at 10th and Elm was first performed July 23, 2003 at The First Annual Playwrights Showcase of the Western Region at The Arvada Center for the Performing Arts in Arvada, CO.

Kyle ... J. Heston Gray

Sally ... Jillann Tafel

Director ... Susan Lyles

Cassandra at 10th and Elm

The time: *Morning*

The place: *A bus stop*

SALLY and KYLE, both in business attire, sit on a bench, waiting for the bus. They are not together; they just happen to be waiting at the same time. KYLE peruses a business newspaper. SALLY studies him for a few seconds and then looks away. KYLE turns a page. SALLY's attention returns to him. She watches a bit longer. If he is aware of her gaze, he gives no indication. SALLY looks away again, in the direction from which the bus will approach.

SALLY. *(Not looking at KYLE)* Someone is out to get you.

KYLE. I'm sorry?

SALLY. There's a... a troubling energy around you. Something.

KYLE. *(Looking around to see if she's addressing someone else)* Are... Are you talking to me?

SALLY. It's just coming off you in waves. *(KYLE stares at SALLY, who has gone back to looking around her. When it appears that no more information is forthcoming, he resumes reading his paper.)* I have a gift that way. Once, when I was at the movies with my sister Dodie, we were standing at the snack bar trying to decide what to get. Which is silly, really, because it's always the same thing. But that day, I said, "You do not want to get the chocolate-covered raisins. Get something else, instead. Get the Milk Duds." *(In spite of himself, KYLE is now staring at SALLY.)* You know that prickly feeling you get, like when your arm or your leg goes to sleep? Well, I get that, only on the back of my neck. That's how I know. *(SALLY massages the back of her neck, a worried look on her face. Again, it appears she is finished talking. But as KYLE goes back to his paper, she resumes.)* But you know Dodie. Well, you don't; that was just a figure of speech. If you did, you'd understand. She went ahead and bought the chocolate-covered raisins. *(Sighs)* Midway

through the previews of coming attractions, she bites down on something hard and cracks her tooth. (*SALLY is momentarily distracted, searching her pockets and the side pocket of her bag for something. After a moment, she gives up the search.*) We never did find out if it was a solidified raisin, or maybe something that shouldn't even have been in the box to begin with. (*SALLY contemplates this memory for a few seconds thoughtfully as KYLE stares at her.*) I wouldn't go so far as to say I'm psychic, but I definitely get these odd feelings sometimes, and I'm never wrong. (*Turning to KYLE*) What do you do?

KYLE. I... uh, look: We don't know each other, and this is making me very— (*SALLY extends her hand.*)

SALLY. Sally McDaniel. And you're..?

KYLE. (*Reluctantly shaking her hand*) No, you see, I'm not comfortable having this conversation with you. I don't mean to be a jerk or rude or anything, but I would just like to sit here and read my paper and wait for the bus. Okay?

SALLY. Sure. I understand. (*KYLE goes back to reading. SALLY looks around. Her expression slowly changes, a slight frown crossing her brow.*) It's going to be late, though. (*KYLE looks up from his paper. SALLY stares straight ahead, as if "receiving" something.*) By about twenty minutes. A leak in the fuel line, I think. (*Abruptly turning to KYLE*) You don't have to be anywhere by eight, do you? Is it okay if you're a few minutes late to work? (*KYLE studies SALLY as if he might have something to say, but then he thinks better of it, and goes back to reading. Again, SALLY does not take offense. She gazes around, then pulls out her cell phone to check for messages. There are none. She puts it back into her bag. She massages the back of her neck.*) There's a man in red... No, he has a red necktie, or a handkerchief, or something. You need to be wary of him. You think he's an ally, a friend. But he has it in for you. (*KYLE folds his newspaper and rises.*)

KYLE. Okay, Sally. You may have a gift of some sort, but clearly it isn't for picking up on when people would like to be left alone. Even when they've told you so. (*Picking up his briefcase*) So I am going to go wait over there. You stay here, and maybe somebody else will come

along, and you can share your “gift” with them. (*KYLE begins to walk away.*)

SALLY. ‘Bye, Kyle. (*KYLE stops.*)

KYLE. What?

SALLY. I said, “Bye, Kyle.” (*KYLE studies her, uncertain. Her expression is pleasantly indifferent.*)

SALLY. Kyle Vogelstaad. (*Now KYLE is just a little bit freaked out. He continues to stare at her. She gestures to the paper under his arm.*) It’s on the mailing label of your business journal. (*KYLE looks down at the paper, then back at SALLY. He crosses a good distance away from her and stops. He sets down his briefcase, unfolds his paper, and continues to read, standing up. SALLY takes a daytimer from her bag and flips through it. Several seconds pass. KYLE lowers his paper, checking to see if the bus is approaching. He glances at his watch. SALLY continues without looking at KYLE.*) Eighteen minutes. We’re lucky. The driver noticed the leak when he was just a few blocks from the bus barn. So they’ll be able to get another bus on the route pretty quickly. (*KYLE looks at SALLY, who pulls out a pen and starts writing in her daytimer.*)

KYLE. You know, you don’t look like a crackpot. You’re nicely dressed. I’m guessing you’re not homeless. You’re here at the bus stop, so you evidently have someplace you need to be. A job, or something.

SALLY. I’m a securities analyst.

KYLE. Oh, you have got to be kidding me. (*SALLY continues to write, ignoring him.*) Why haven’t I seen you here before? (*SALLY ignores him.*)

KYLE. Yeah, that’s what I thought.

SALLY. (*Still writing*) I usually carpool. But Julie’s on vacation, and Ron is sick. So I decided to take the bus. (*SALLY finishes writing, closes her daytimer, and puts it away.*)

KYLE. But then, wouldn’t you—

SALLY. I know, I know. If I have this marvelous gift, wouldn’t I have known this was not the day to catch the bus? Yeah, well, it isn’t something I can just turn on at will. Sometimes I know things; sometimes I don’t. Or I don’t know them in time. (*Pausing, as if she’s ticking off the seconds*) Sixteen minutes. (*SALLY gazes around her.*)

KYLE, intrigued, watches her for a bit, then picks up his briefcase and come back to sit down on the bench once more.) Oh, done with your paper?

KYLE. So... Do you just feel compelled to warn people—complete strangers—whenever you get this “tingly feeling?” (*SALLY does not answer.*) If it had been somebody else instead of me here, would you have had a prediction for them? Do you have warnings for Ron and Julie when you’re all carpooling?

SALLY. I’ve said all I have to say.

KYLE. No, really: I want to hear more about this guy with the red necktie. The one I shouldn’t trust.

SALLY. Don’t be condescending. I’m sorry I brought it up. You seemed like a nice guy, a decent human being, sitting there. I just... I wanted you to know. Maybe be prepared.

KYLE. For the guy who’s going to screw me over. (*SALLY shrugs. She seems to have lost interest. Both she and KYLE sit in silence a moment.*) Well, the bus has never been this late before. I’ll give you that. (*KYLE glances at SALLY, who does not look at him. He extracts his cell phone and punches in a number.*) Hey, Eric. Kyle. Looks like I’m gonna be a little late. ...No, I’m at my stop, but the bus hasn’t arrived. (*Covert glance at SALLY*) I’m hearing it might be a mechanical problem, but they’re putting another bus on the route. I don’t have anything pressing this morning, but you might just let people know I’m on my way. ...I will. Thanks. (*KYLE closes his cell phone and puts it away. SALLY smiles. Pause.*) A securities analyst. (*He smiles. A puzzled expression creeps across his face.*) So... At the risk of seeming condescending again, I have to ask—

SALLY. --No. I never get those kinds of visions. I wouldn’t stay in this job if I did.

KYLE. Oh. (*Pause*) Could you find missing people? Kidnap victims? Have you ever saved someone’s life?

SALLY. I don’t think you can change fate.

KYLE. I guess your sister’s cracked tooth proves that.

SALLY. Well, that didn't have to happen. She could have gotten the Milk Duds. Or she could have chewed more carefully. The solidified raisin would still have been there, but she could have avoided it. There's a difference between courting disaster and confronting fate. You may not be able to avoid getting hit by a car, but you don't need to sit down in the middle of a busy street. *(KYLE contemplates this.)*

KYLE. So... The guy I'm supposed to be looking out for...

SALLY. You'll know him when you see him. It may not be the necktie. I don't know exactly where I'm picking up the red from. But you'll know him. You'll be talking to him, and you'll flash on something he's carrying, or something he touches, and you'll know.

KYLE. What do I do then?

SALLY. *(Shrugging)* Maybe it's what you shouldn't do. It might be a matter of not taking some advice he offers. Not going someplace he suggests.

KYLE. Like not meeting him in a secluded alley, or something? *(SALLY looks at KYLE sharply. He holds up his hands to assure her that he isn't making fun of her.)*

SALLY. I doubt it's going to be as dramatic as that. But you'll know. When it happens, you'll go, "That's it. That's what she was talking about."

KYLE. *(Considering this)* Okay. Thank you. *(SALLY nods. Both of them gaze straight ahead a moment. SALLY turns to KYLE again.)*

SALLY. Do you play the piano?

KYLE. No.

SALLY. Me, either. Dodie does. She was a music major in college. Was hoping to be a concert pianist. Then she fell in love. Got married, and gave it up. That would be a good talent to have. Playing the piano.

(Pause) I know when she's going to die. And how. *(Stunned, KYLE looks at SALLY. She does not look at him.)* Isn't that something? I can tell her that she shouldn't buy the chocolate-covered raisins, but I can't tell her that she will draw her last breath on Tuesday, April tenth, less than two years from now. *(Looking at KYLE)* That is not the kind of gift you want to have.

KYLE. Okay, now I have to say that I flat out don't believe you.

SALLY. That's what she would say, too. Who wants to confront their mortality that specifically, anyway? (*KYLE looks at SALLY, who folds her arms in front of her, as if she's cold.*) Don't worry. I have no idea when—or how—it's going to happen to you. (*KYLE picks up his briefcase.*)

KYLE. I'm going to find a cab. (*KYLE stands and begins to walk away. After a slight deliberation, he turns back to SALLY.*) I guess I'd prefer to believe you thought it would be fun to yank my chain while we waited for the bus. Because I've known a couple of people in my life who have this pathetic need to elevate themselves like this. (*Mimicking*) "Oh, yes, I see ghosts all the time. The dead are just drawn to me, for some reason." (*Mimicking*) "I had this near-death experience. My heart actually stopped on the operating table. I was floating overhead, and I could see them working on my body." (*In his own voice*) As if they had so little self-esteem that they thought this was a good way to seem special. An amazing, otherworldly talent too nebulous to be measured or verified by mere human standards. (*Walking away from SALLY*) It's been fun. Get some therapy. (*KYLE exits. SALLY wipes her eyes. She takes a deep breath and looks in the direction from which the bus will approach.*)

SALLY. (*To herself*) Seven minutes. (*She waits for the bus as the lights fade.*)

CURTAIN

Definition was first presented by the Changing Scene Northwest Theatre in Bremerton, WA. (Pavlina Morris – Artistic Director) as part of Summerplay 2005. It opened on July 15th, 2005 and was directed by Mike Grauer, Stage Managed by Briana Osbourne, and Asst. Stage Managed by Rachel Cummings. The sets and lights were designed by Pavlina Morris and Sound was designed by Darren Hembd. The opening night cast was as follows:

Steve-----Kyle Boynton
Brad-----Christopher Dolan

DEFINITION

(Early morning. An upper floor of an abandoned warehouse. The play can be performed on a bare stage or in the midst of a collection of the sort of clutter that might be found in an old building. BRAD and STEVE, two men of indeterminate age, are on the floor. BRAD sits with his back against the wall. STEVE, curled up on his side, is asleep. Both are somewhat grimy. After a moment, STEVE stirs.)

STEVE. What time is it?

BRAD. A few minutes before seven.

STEVE. I'm hot.

BRAD. It's going to get even hotter, I imagine.

STEVE. I wish I had some water.

BRAD. Remind me next time. I'll bring some. *(STEVE gets to his feet and moves around somewhat stiffly.)*

STEVE. Did you sleep any?

BRAD. Like a baby.

STEVE. I really need to take a piss.

BRAD. *(Glancing around)* Go ahead. I don't imagine it makes much difference where.

STEVE. Don't you have to, too?

BRAD. I already took care of that.

STEVE. You did? When?

BRAD. An hour or so ago, I guess.

STEVE. How come I didn't know?

BRAD. You were asleep.

STEVE. How come you didn't wake me up?

BRAD. *(Standing)* I didn't know I was supposed to.

STEVE. No. I mean, I'm a very light sleeper, usually. I'm surprised you didn't wake me up.

BRAD. I'm a very quiet pee-er.

STEVE. You're a wise-ass, you know that?

BRAD. I've been told that before.

STEVE. It's a very unattractive trait. It makes it hard for people to get close to you.

BRAD. Yeah, I've been meaning to polish up on my people skills.
(STEVE paces. It's clear he's feeling uncomfortable.)

STEVE. So, where'd you take a leak?

BRAD. *(Gesturing off)* Over there. By that pile of plasterboard. Be careful, though; part of the floor is rotted through. I put my foot through it and nearly plunged to my death.

STEVE. Yeah? *(Brad shrugs)*

STEVE. You nearly fell through the floor, and I didn't even wake up?

BRAD. What can I say? You had a rough day yesterday. *(Pause)* I'm sure it's safe enough, if you need to urinate. Just be careful. It was still dark when I was over there. If you just look where you're going, you'll be fine.

STEVE. Maybe in a little while.

BRAD. *(Crossing away a few steps)* It's sweltering in here. I don't even want to think about what it's going to be like in a few hours.

STEVE. Stay away from that window.

BRAD. *(Turning back to STEVE)* What?

STEVE. GET AWAY FROM THAT WINDOW!

BRAD. I was just— *(STEVE pulls a gun from under the waistband of his pants. It has been concealed by the tail of his untucked shirt up until now.)*

STEVE. I said, get your ass back over here! *(There is a momentary impasse. The two men stare at each other, STEVE full of anger, BRAD uncertain, but not overly afraid. Finally, BRAD gives in and crosses back towards STEVE. As BRAD passes him, STEVE grabs BRAD around the neck with his free hand and shoves him to the floor.)* You stupid son of a bitch! Do you think this is some kind of a game? *(STEVE stands glowering over BRAD, who lies inert for a moment, and then lifts himself painfully into a sitting position, rubbing his bruised limbs.)*

BRAD. I... I just thought it might be cooler over by the w—

STEVE. *(Thrusting the gun at BRAD's head)* --You don't think, okay? You just stop thinking, and do what I say. Understand?

BRAD. Okay.

STEVE. Understand?

BRAD. Okay.

STEVE. You got me?

BRAD. *(Angry now)* I got you! I understand! I won't go near the window. *(Both men are breathing heavily. STEVE holds the gun at BRAD's head a moment longer, then lets his arm drop to his side. He tucks the gun back under his shirt and turns away.)* If I was going to try to escape, don't you think I would have done it while you were asleep? I made all the racket in the world when I nearly fell through the floor, and you didn't move. I could have gotten up and walked right out of here, and you'd never even have known.

STEVE. I would have waked up. You were too scared to risk it.

BRAD. Right. *(STEVE begins to pace once more, clearly uncomfortable.)*

BRAD. So, what happens now? How long are we going to stay here?

STEVE. I don't know yet. *(BRAD watches STEVE pace for a few seconds.)*

BRAD. When will you know?

STEVE. You'll be the first person I tell, okay? *(Pause)*

BRAD. It didn't work out very well, did it? *(STEVE glances at BRAD, but continues to pace.)* How long had you guys been planning this?

STEVE. Just shut up, would you?

BRAD. Nobody got killed. It didn't look like anybody even got hurt, though it was kind of hard to tell, with all the screaming and your partner and that off-duty cop rolling around on the floor.

STEVE. He isn't my partner. He's just... he's some guy.

BRAD. Was he the brains of the outfit?

STEVE. Huh?

BRAD. One of you was, right? No offense, but what kind of intellect was at work there? Holding up a coffee shop? How much money did you think you were going to get? And didn't it occur to you that there might be a policeman or two hanging around a place like that?

STEVE. I don't want to talk about it.

BRAD. You weren't wearing masks. There were, what, ten or eleven people in the place. A lot of witnesses.

STEVE. *(Turning abruptly to BRAD)* Stay right where you are. In fact, stretch out on the floor. Face down.

BRAD. On this floor? You've got to be kidding! I'll—

STEVE. —Do it! *(The two men stare at each other. Finally, BRAD sighs and spreads himself out, face down, on the floor.)* You stay just like that. If you move, I'll hear you. Maybe nobody got hurt last night, but if you move, I will blow your brains out. If you move one finger, I will blow your fucking brains out. *(STEVE watches BRAD for a moment, and then exits. Pause.)*

BRAD. *(Raising his voice so that STEVE can hear)* Why me? Why, out of all those people? Why not the waitress? Or the old guy? Was it because I was sitting closest to the kitchen door? Or because I tried to avoid eye contact with you? Do I just have “victim” stamped all over me? *(Pause)* Of course, what I've been asking myself is what made me decide to stop in there last night. I pass by that place all the time, and I've never gone inside before. Now, look what happens. *(STEVE re-enters, zipping his pants. He remains some distance behind BRAD, who doesn't realize he's returned yet.)* I was always the last guy picked when they were choosing up teams. What a time for my luck to change. *(Moving his head, he sees STEVE)* Oh, there you are. *(BRAD starts to get up.)*

STEVE. No. Stay like that.

BRAD. Come on. It's filthy down here. I can hardly breathe. *(BRAD continues to get up. STEVE pulls out the gun once more and walks over to BRAD, staring down at him.)*

STEVE. I said, Stay like that. You talk too much. I liked you a lot better last night, when you were so scared that all you said was... *(Mockingly)* “Don't hurt me. Please, for the love of God, don't hurt me!” *(Kneeling, holding the gun to BRAD's head, smiling)* Say it again. Come on. For old times' sake. “Please, for the love of God...”

BRAD. *(Frightened now)* Look, you don't want— *(STEVE grabs a handful of BRAD's hair and pulls his head back roughly.)*

STEVE. Say it! Say it, or so help me, I'll kill you right here, right now. (*BRAD is breathing hard and swallowing. It is difficult for him to speak.*)

BRAD. "Please... for the love of God..."

STEVE. (*Prompting*) "...don't hurt me."

BRAD. "...don't hurt me."

STEVE. That's good. Now, let's try the whole thing one more time. "Don't hurt me. Please, for the love of God, don't hurt me!" (*BRAD, breathing hard and close to tears, hesitates. STEVE yanks him by his hair again. BRAD cries out in pain.*) Come on, now. Let's hear it.

BRAD. "Don't hurt me. Please, for the love of God, don't hurt me." (*There is another prolonged moment. STEVE's reaction is unreadable. Finally he smiles and releases his grip on BRAD. He gets to his feet and steps back.*)

STEVE. Nice. (*BRAD lies face down a moment longer, humiliated. Finally he rises on all fours and crawls back to the wall. He sits against it, holding his knees, staring at the floor.*) Things were getting a little too cozy. I felt we needed to get back to that professional criminal/victim relationship. Nothing too personal. You understand. (*STEVE puts the gun in his waistband. BRAD wipes his face, removing dust, tears, whatever. STEVE crosses to stand close to the window. He looks outside for several seconds.*) Nice day. Hot, but still nice. I'd like to be out in the country on a day like this. I hate the city. I always wanted to go to summer camp when I was a kid. Or join The Boy Scouts. Later on, I knew people who had. Didn't think much of it, most of them. Said the counselors were mean and the older kids were bullies. (*Turning away from the window*) Sometimes you don't realize until a lot later that you were lucky to miss out on some of the experiences you thought you wanted to have. Were you a Boy Scout? You seem like the type. I'd really like some water. I'd like some water, and I'd like to have a cigarette. (*Pulling a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket*) Cigarettes, I've got. But I somehow lost my lighter in the coffee shop. (*Laughs*) I wonder how that happened. (*Pause*)

BRAD. You couldn't urinate in front of me.

STEVE. (*Slipping the cigarettes back into his pocket*) What?

BRAD. That's what this was all about. You couldn't take a piss in front of me. *(STEVE crosses to BRAD rapidly and menacingly. BRAD flinches.)*

STEVE. What the hell's the matter with you?

BRAD. You never would have lasted at camp. The bathrooms, the outhouses, have these long, trough-like urinals. The boys line up side-by-side to pee. You wouldn't have lasted one day. Your bladder would have exploded. *(The two men stare at each other for several seconds, BRAD defiant and STEVE angry. Finally STEVE snorts, a half-stifled laugh, and turns away.)*

STEVE. Boy Scout. *(Pause)* So, why are you still here? You said it yourself. You could have walked right out of here.

BRAD. I... I wasn't absolutely sure you were asleep. I thought... I thought maybe it was a test.

STEVE. A test? That's lame-ass stupid.

BRAD. I thought if you saw me trying to get away, you'd shoot.

STEVE. I would have. *(Pause. BRAD reaches for his windbreaker, which is balled-up and lying some distance away.)*

BRAD. I've got a candy bar. You want half? *(BRAD unfolds his windbreaker, locates the candy bar, and attempts to break it in half. It is slightly melted and comes apart in strings. He hands half to STEVE. The two men eat their candy bar in silence for a few seconds.)* I have this friend who's sick. Cancer. *(STEVE looks at BRAD curiously, but doesn't say anything.)* She's only twenty-eight. Can you believe that? I heard about it from another friend. The next time I saw Denise, I told her how sorry I was. She said the weirdest thing. She said that while it was scary and devastating, it was also... *(Trying to find the words)* Well, she started to have this strange feeling that her whole life had been leading up to just that moment. The moment she found out. And then, for the first time, she felt she had definition.

STEVE. Definition?

BRAD. Not like a profound revelation, or anything. But before, she was just this girl. Now she was the girl with the life-threatening illness who went for treatment three times a week. *(Pause)* I wish I could explain it

better. Maybe you'd have to know Denise. Know her both before and after.

STEVE. Did she die?

BRAD. No. She's better now. Almost through her last cycle of chemo. Things are looking good. *(Pause)* I don't know why I told you that.

STEVE. That guy? The one I said wasn't my partner?

BRAD. Yeah?

STEVE. If they didn't shoot him dead, then he's spilled his guts about the whole thing. Told them who I am. Everything.

BRAD. *(Not sure what to say)* Oh. I... Oh. *(Pause)*

STEVE. You might as well go now. *(BRAD looks at STEVE, who stares at the floor. The two men continue to eat their candy in silence. The lights fade.)*

CURTAIN

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