

# THE LINE FORMS TO THE REAR

a play by  
Cal Yeomans

SETTING: A “rest area (stop)” along a deserted stretch of quiet beach on the Gulf of Mexico in a remote area of Florida. Civilization is miles away. Stage rear is a backdrop that represents the shimmering water of the gulf and the horizon and sky in which a pulsating red sun is setting. It is that time of day. Stage right is the façade of a crude little concrete block toilet. The view into the door is blocked by a plywood partition upon which is inscribed in home-style letters: MENS. Stage left is a wooden picnic table with attached bench. There is a little shingled roof-ette over it. In between these two structures is a bedraggled and forlorn, solitary cabbage palmetto that blows occasionally in a summer breeze....

All is still and quiet. A few sea gulls fly by and inject a caw. The atmosphere is halted, suspended....

Suddenly:

A rather burly young man with the physical accoutrement of a burned-out construction worker, but the finger nails and walk of an off-duty drag queen comes out of the toilet. With a rather elegantly cocked finger he draws a circle around his mouth as if wiping off some troublesome moisture. He is not unattractive and has the rather schizophrenic ability to appear completely masculine one minute and, for no apparent reason, completely feminine the next. He crosses to the picnic table S.L., sits on it, crosses his legs and props his feet on the bench below. He lights a cigarette.

A moment passes.

Suddenly, in a nervous hurry, a pear-shaped real estate salesman in burgundy polyester slacks, blue & white checked shirt, white belt and shiny white shoes furtively exits the toilet looking neither right or left, but running a telltale finger up his fly to be sure it's closed. He begins to exit S.R. towards his offstage car, but before he can get very far, Henry, the burly young man, without moving, screeches out at the real estate salesman's vanishing back, in a flat brassy voice:

Next!

(The real estate salesman twitches perceptibly, picks up speed and exits. Henry thumps the ashes from his cigarette and addresses the audience.)

Flea meat, honey. And the hair's a mess.

(Car cranks up offstage, begins to drive off.)

Oh well. 80% mercy sex is about par for the course on any given day. On a good day I'm lucky if 15 per cent works out for me, but it's not my place to complain or question. My job is to perform, honey. I learned that a long time ago in Show Bizness, dear. I used to be an entertainer. Did you know that? Could you tell?

(Loud Music. Henry snaps to, jumps off table and in an elaborately worked out and memorized series of exaggerated Daytona-style drag gestures, he pantomimes a bit of

“Stop in the Name of Love.” Music stops abruptly mid-gesture. Moment of emptiness grips the stage. Wind stirs the old cabbage palmetto near the toilet’s door.)

Where is everybody? It's so slow down here today. Jesus.

( A few gulls caw. The light changes. Henry looks at his watch.)

Oh well. I'll give the next one fifteen minutes. Might as well wait it out. Yeah.... but.... Yeah, I used to do drag in Jacksonville. I was pretty good they said. Well..., I was a star for a while, u-know...., but then, uh...., I...., well, I moved back to Springfield and settled down for awhile. He was o.k. I loved him. I really loved him. But then this young kid came along, see, and uh, well....

That was the end of that.

But wait a minute! You don't even know who I am.

Pardon me. I'm Henry Wayne. They used to call me Henrietta Jayne. But that was a long time ago before...before...well. You know. Before all that other happened and uh....

I live with my mother now.

She has a real nice mobile home down at Baypoint—that’s about fifteen miles south of here. It’s got a big porch on it, you know, a good addition and uh we get along o.k. All except I just can't stand her boyfriend. When he comes over, I just leave.

I come here. That's why I'm here now. It's no fun to be stuck in the living room of your Mother's trailer while an idiot with body odor is fucking her to Thanksgiving and back in the bedroom.

There's not a television program in the world....that....that SOUND. Jesus!

I mean, now I come here....: Now. I used to go to the K-Mart and shop, but that's before I found..., uh , it's air-conditioned, but...., well---- I been at my Mother's 6 months, now, see....

She says it's o.k. Says we'll get another trailer---she owns the lot next door to hers, says I can have it, but, uh...., I may move to Daytona. I need some action you know? I got an uncle there, he's 73---says I'd be good company. (Squeals) He don't know!

But then one day I run across this place----just by accident. I mean I didn't have NO idea. u-know...., I mean...

Well, I mean, you can tell by looking at me I'm not the kind of person to hang-out in no place like this, but

uh....

I do construction-type work now, see. I'm a plasterer's assistant---three days a week. All I can take it, honey. Very hard on the nails. And if any of them was to know I mean about this and, well.... It's really hard doing that kind of work bogged-up in mud all day. Forget it sweetheart.

Pays the bills. I used to work at the front desk at the Holiday Inn in Springfield---then---

I was at the 7 to 11 for a lil while, but then.... when that young kid came along and fucked-up everything with Herschel and me and I mean I just couldn't take it! The kid was 18. I was 33.

Over the hill, u-know. How you gonna compete wi.th something like that. So I, uh---well---I might as well tell you: My nerves got bad.

I uh....I uh....

(Henry takes a very deep breath. Scans the horizon for a new “victim”. The light changes. The wind wooshes. Gulls caw.)

Mighty slow today. Maybe all the old men died...?

It was good when me and Herschel was together. Herschel and Henry. H.H. Looked good on all the towels. I embroidered it myself. Everyone said we were really a cute couple. We had our own little house u-know....

Good neighbors. Oh we didn't have hardly nothing else to do with any other gay people. I mean we couldn't afford to. I....

Herschel was good to me until

oh I mean he would slap me around a little bit every now and then, but that was just cause he loved me, but...a few beers too many u-know, but.... I loved him so much. Then that..., that..., teenager---hung like a Donkey came along and well, Herschel just lost his head.

Then my nerves got bad. Well they hadn't never been too good, but they got worse then and uh.... well, I, uh.... I lost control one day and uh---well, I.... (Pause)

I lost control.

And uh,.... well, anyway, I had to go to the hospital there in Springfield, they took me, and uh, well, they told me I'd have to see a specialist for my nerves and I did and uh, I explained it all to him and he ast me a lot of questions u-know about my family and my childhood and everything and then, the last time I seen him he said that was it. There wasn't anything to be done because nerves just run in my family u-know so uh, uh...

My Mother said I could come stay with her for awhile.

So I live with my Mother now.

I uh..., at first I told her no. I told her I was going back to Jacksonville and get into show bizness again....pick up my career and uh....

(Ghost drag show music starts.)

and uh...

("Before you break my heart...")

and so

("Think it o-o-ver....  
Think it o-o-ver.")

I did and I got me a real good looking

(Maniacal laughter is heard under music.)

outfit and a really good pair of heels and....

(Disparaging comments intersperse with maniacal laughter.)

("Who does she think she is?  
Where does she get off...  
Look at that....  
Do you believe..., etc., etc.")

I did one of my old numbers just like I  
just like I  
just like I...

Just like I used to do it. AND:

OH MY GOD! They laughed at me.

I mean they really laughed. I mean it wasn't the same so I...., so I.... got off the stage as gracefully as I could. I mean I RAN. And I just went back to the Y just like I was and they stopped me at the front desk and said women weren't allowed inside and I said I ain't no woman honey and went on in and got my stuff and I just come on home to my Mother on the first Greyhound bus they'd let me get on to get out of that place. Well, after the bus got out of Jacksonville, I retired to the toilet and took off what I could of my make-up and put on pants and I been in them every since and I don't want no part no more of no kind of Show Bizness. No sir. Everything changes, u-know?

Everything changes.

But my momma took me in and things is better now.

So I live with my Mother now, and it's o.k.

(Silence. The light changes.)

So I came to her and at first I just stayed home mostly and watched T.V. and I learned to crochet. Mrs. Wilkins who lives next door, she's 78, showed me how, said I needed something to occupy my hands. People been real nice to me. And I learned how to cut up beer cans and crochet em together and make these real cute little hats that people seem to enjoy wearing and so far I've made 38 of them! Ain't that something? And then, uh, well, finally my Mother turned to me one day and she said look Henry: you gotta start getting out, getting around people your own age some. It ain't good for you to stay cooped up in this trailer crocheting all day, so I started going shopping at the K-Mart---every once in awhile. I'd just wander around. and around. And around. Then Mrs. Wilkins told me it was purty down here at the beach so one day, I drove down here and it was purty and I started coming down here and watching the sun set, like today, and it is purty ain' t it. It's nice an quiet down here. Then one day I had to take a piss see real bad. Usually I don't like to go in public places, the seats is all infected an everything, but I had to go real bad. It was just about runnin down my leg so I just had to go in over there.... on a trot, honey, and, well, and....

I couldn't help but notice that somebody had done some whittlin in there so. So, uh---of course-- --at that time---that was before what happened at the K-Mart---I didn't have nothing to do with any thing like, I mean this kind and type of stuff, I didn't used to have nothing to do with any thing like this you see. I ain't never been one to uh, well, excuse me, but I am NOT your average run of the mill common glory hole type harlot. I want to make that perfectly clear right now. Such has always turned me off heretofore. But that was before what happened at the K-Mart happened, like....

Before I realized about my mission and everything. Well, to make a long story short, I was doin my usual amount of killin time in the air conditionin at the K-Mart---just lappin it up honey, and BANG Everything changed! I was in the plastic flower department, see, looking for some stuff to make an arrangement for the top of the T.V. My Mother always want s me to do that kind of thing---she says I do it a lots better than she does---well anyway, I had four lime green marigolds in my left hand and had just picked up three purple snap-dragons when---well it was the damndest thing. You know the K-Mart don't regularly carry tuna fish, but they had a huge stack of it at the end of the aisle next to the lingerie dept, it was on special, Blue Bay, 39¢ a can, a real good buy, then I bent over to pick out a couple of tiger lilies for accent material when all of a sudden, out of the clear blue sky, one of them cans of tuna fish exploded, honey, just exploded and blew a can out which struck me side of the head and knocked me backwards into a bank of red gladiolus---they had lots of them---knocked me out cold for a minute---and when I came to they was a bunch of sales women hanging over me saying are you alright? Are you alright? Well, I didn't know what hit me whether it was the end of the world or what and I started

to speak but I looked up past them women and over kind of behind a display of Pampers there was about an 80 year old man who'd chosen that exact moment to you know he wanted to take advantage of the confusion and everything and he was exposing himself, I mean, didn't nobody see it but me, but he had a big old ruptured lookin thang out shakin it directly at me past them women's backs and I, I, I ... at that moment I smelled the exploded tuna fish...well I just threw back my head and I

(Henry screams)

(Silence, pause. The stillness of the beach is thundering.)

And then them women said, What's wrong?

What's wrong?

What's wrong?

And I stood up and knocked plastic flowers every which a way and said, I been hit in the head by a flyin can of tuna fish and that's the straw that broke the camel's back....

I can't take it no more. It's my nerves!

It's my nerves!

It's my nerves!

Can't you see you silly geese, it's my nerves.

I can't help it.

And I tore out of them flowers and run out of the store into the parking lot and got in my Mother's car and drove down here and, and, and.... and the first one was here a waiting for me and.... You see, I realized in a flash when I seen that old man's exposure that it would be a heap more better for every body going if I got out from in front of that T.V. set and got off my ass and started DOING! So I been coming down here ever since administerin mercy sex to any and all comers. The man ain't walkin that I've turned down since that can of tuna fish hit me side the head.

But any way----I realized in a flash when I seen that old man's shlong,....., it came to me clear. I don't know how to explain it. But there's a mighty lot of sufferin out there cause people can't find nobody to touch em where they needs to be touched when they needs t.ouching and I just said to myself, I said, Henrietta Jayne, Get out an do your part for the sufferin miserable and afflicted. Give all the pleasure you can and see what you get back in return. U-know, everybody has to have a mission in life and I realized then, at that moment, that my true calling was to go out into the world as best I could and perform fee-lay-shee-oh on the masses. Anybody who needed or wanted it or thought they did. So I been coming here every day ever since doin my part to make the world a happi er and better feeling place for the timid and senile. Don't make no difference to me, honey. Red and yellow, black and white, pea green or ivory, from flea meat to elephant steaks...I don't draw no line. Bring me your tired your weary your poor and I shall give them hope for a new day....

(Suddenly the roar of a large motor is heard down the road a piece. Henry reacts like the shipwrecked Reizia in Weber's *Oberon* when she espies a rescue ship on the horizon. Music starts.... The roar of the motor comes closer....Then stops. We hear a strange dragging sound. Henry shivers in anticipation and says in a flat bored voice.)

Next!

(An ancient, ancient leather queen in fullest elaborate Folsom Street drag clumps on stage with the aid of a geriatric “walker.” He tries desperately to appear macho and masterful in his shaky near senility and somehow manages a smidgeon of it. He propos seductively on his “walker” and speaks.)

Leather Man: You don't mind a colostomy bag do you?

Henry: Darlin', as long as it ain't one of them Eye-talian clotch bags, I don't care what kind of pocket book you tote. Get on in there.

(The Leather Man enters the toilet. Music. Henry turns to the audience.)

Well, excuse me please. I got to get back to work.

(Pause)

It's one more strange place down here ain't it?

(Henry heads for the toilet, but just before he gets to the door, he pauses, looks back to the audience, music abruptly down, and says)

The line forms to the rear....

(Thumps cigarette onto beach)

....Honey. If you interested.

(Exits into toilet. Curtain.)

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The play premiered at San Francisco's Theatre Rhinoceros on November 1, 1980. In 1981, it became the first act of a trilogy by Yeomans, entitled *Sunsets: 3 Acts on a Beach*, which was presented at New York's Stonewall Repertory Theatre and at the Third National Gay Arts Festival in Chicago in 1982.

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