

# Bad Scene, Caesar

by Karl Stull

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# RESEDA 30-MINUTE THEATRE

*In the park, your classroom, or workplace*

RTMT Season Premiere

Randal D. Simmons Park

Noon, March 15 (Ides of March)

## *The Night Before*

(scenes from *Julius Caesar*)

***Coming soon...***

## *Sheriff of Cawdor County*

(scenes from *Macbeth*)

## *The Balcony and the Crypt*

(scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*)

### ***Critics acclaim***

“Shakespeare, kick in the rear — fast, fun, audience-grabbing drama and entertainment.”

— Marianne Avalone, *Greater Reseda News and Greensheet*

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## Meet RTMT Principal Players

**Lucius Tiber** as Julius Caesar  
**Mina Blatt** as Calpurnia (wife of Caesar)  
**Barrymore Barnes** as Brutus  
**Alycia Orrick** as Portia (wife of Brutus)  
**Teddy Twickenham** as Decius

**Margot Arrete** — Lady Macbeth  
**Gordon Blalock** — Macbeth  
**Soapy Stovall** — Night Watchman

**ATN Clement** — Romeo Montague  
**Vera Vasquez** — Juliet Capulet  
**Maggie Sebald** — Nurse  
**Dom Perry** as Friar Lawrence

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**Club Loco**

### **Reseda Thirty-Minute Theatre needs you!**

Actors, stagehands, carpenters, costumers, prop masters...  
Must be available days. Expenses reimbursed. The play is the thing!  
Contact Romeo Davis, Regalo's Rockhound Shop.

# ACT I

Dwell I but in the suburbs of your good pleasure?  
— Portia, *Julius Caesar* II.i.285-6

## Chapter 1

# A Bard in Hand

We opened with *Julius Caesar* on March 15. The Ides of March was of course a theme in the publicity. Everybody knows you better beware the Ides of March. Something unexpected and momentous is going to happen on that date. We had no idea something would.

Caesar damn near bled to death.

The idea for Reseda Thirty-Minute Theatre (RTMT) came to me years ago and wouldn't go away. I had no experience acting, no experience producing. I just thought it would be cool to put on a show in the middle of a workday. Or school day. We would go to audiences wherever they happened to be, and give 'em drama for half an hour. That's a short enough time to fit in a lunch break, long enough to engage emotions — fear, hope, remembered love.

How about *that* with your soggy tuna salad?

This whirly concept began to gather dust on an evening walk as Sally and I passed a flatbed truck parked on Kittridge Street. A sign on the windshield said: "Runs good. \$4,000 cash." The cab was squarish in shape and faded red. The planks in the bed were swollen from years of exposure, and smeared green by trimmings of trees and shrubs. The truck was a workhorse, carrying fairly light loads, mostly in-town.

"Ya wanna buy a truck?" Sally said, showing off her Groucho.

"You see a truck, baby. I see a mobile platform for thespian performance."

I put my foot on the nearest tire and vaulted up to the boards. With a big gesture, I declaimed, "Friends...!"

"You realize this truck belongs to somebody."

"Romans!" I rolled the R. "Lend me \$4,000."

"I'm walking away now." Sally took a couple of steps to show she was serious.

"Seriously, I'm walking."

It was too late.

A front door opened and out came a compact man in jeans and long sleeves. He strode across his lawn to the sidewalk by the truck. He had a walrus mustache and deep, dark eyes.

"Good evening, sir," I said.

"You want to buy the truck?"

"Yes, I do."

"You can pay cash?"

"Tomorrow morning I can pay cash."

The man nodded. I was a qualified customer. "It's a good truck. Very reliable. You want to look under the hood?"

"I want my mechanic to look under the hood. Is tomorrow morning okay?"

"Sure, we can go in the morning."

I gave the man a business card. His hands were thick and tough as work gloves. He looked at the card, then up at me. "You work for Luis Regalo?"

"He's my uncle."

"*Felicidades,*" said the man. "I am Hector Peña. Your uncle helped me buy this house, twenty years ago. Tell him Hector said hello."

"I will. And let me introduce my friend Sally Heimkrantz. *Somos novios.*"

I said we were *novios* because it's warmer than "We're a couple."

Sally put out her hand. Hector took it gently in his. "*Con mucho gusto,* Sally. Your Romeo is a fortunate man."

"I keep telling him."

As Sally and I continued our walk, she asked if I was really going to buy the truck. I said I thought I would. The truck seemed right and so did the moment. The bed was 20 feet, roomy enough for two actors and a tightly choreographed sword fight. I imagined a slide-out addition to double the floorspace. I imagined closet-sized crates that would hold sets, wardrobe, props, a sound system, whatever a traveling theater might require.

"You realize," Sally pointed out, "you're going to need a parking space, a long one."

"Hmmm. Hadn't thought of that."

"The homeowners association forbids commercial vehicles."

"What if I leave the truck where it is for now?"

"Street cleaning is Wednesday."

I met Hector the next morning and became the proud owner of a well-worn Ford flatbed. Uncle Luis remembered Hector and made a note to call him. It would be good to reconnect with a happy customer. Also, if Hector was selling his truck, he might be planning to relocate. Regalo Properties had a new agent, Claudia Garza, who could use a warm lead or two to get her career rolling. As to the parking, Uncle Luis suggested the airport. The Reseda Gem and Mineral Society had their workshop next to Uncle Luis's hangar. Mike

Banks, manager of the workshop, said I could park in their lot, no problem. I said RGMS was welcome to use the truck if they had equipment to move that was too big for Soapy Stovall's pickup.

With the truck, a substantial object, weighing about 8,000 pounds, the Reseda Thirty-Minute Theatre seemed to acquire gravity. RTMT began to attract further assets with a physical presence in the universe, notably actors. Soapy Stovall was the first. A lean and salty prospector in real life, Soapy was perfect for a supporting role in our Wild West *Macbeth*. The second actor to join was my insurance guy, Gordon Blalock, as the steely-eyed, grim-jawed Sheriff Macbeth. For Lady Macbeth we needed a strong personality and strong voice. That was Margot Arrete, a former high school vocational ed teacher. She could make herself heard over a roomful of teenagers with ball-peen hammers.

Then RTMT gained so much gravity it went supernova. I met ATN Clement, an intern at Flying Pigs Media, the folks who make TV commercials for Regalo Properties. ATN and I got to talking. He had a slew of ideas for the Wild West *Macbeth*, starting with a hologram for Banquo's ghost at the Weird Sisters Saloon. We ended up using none of these first-round ideas, but ATN agreed to direct *The Night Before*, a half-hour sequence from *Julius Caesar*, climaxing in the assassination of the great man in the Capitol. That was the show we premiered on March 15, the one that sent Caesar to the ER.

ATN was an actor as well as a director. He played Romeo Montague in our *Balcony and the Crypt*. For that production, he had an idea about building a steep slide from the first setting to the second. Romeo and Juliet would climb onto the slide and literally whoosh down from love-at-first-sight to their double-date with death.

"The audience will *see* it, and they will *get* it," ATN avowed. "Visual!"

ATN's real name, on his passport, was Étienne Clement. Before adopting ATN as a stage name, he considered 80n. It looked good — “80n Clement” — but there was brand confusion in his focus group.

“Eighty-en, cool.”

“Like Étienne. Yeah.”

“It's got street too.”

“Very street.”

“Like algebra.”

“What?”

“80n looks like algebra.”

“That's not cool.”

“Algebra's cool. Can be cool.”

“Can be cool. It's not street.”

“No, not street.”

“And the zero needs a slash.”

“What?”

“Zero or letter O. Changes everything.”

“You see 80n as... Eight Oh en?”

“Eight On.”

“Ate On. That's not cool.”

“Not for the street.”

“Slash is street. Zero with slash.”

“But it's the opposite of cool.”

“What makes it not cool?”

“Cool just is. Or is not. It never needs clarification.”

“So where are we?”

“Maybe letters are better.”

ATN was a senior at Calabasas College, majoring in Theater Arts. Calabasas was a small school for rich kids. ATN’s father, Colonel Charles Valéry Clement, was a high official in Haiti’s national police. ATN lived in Topanga Canyon with an aunt, Lili Celèste Clement, once an actress in American and French movies.

ATN had an idea for how to stage the assassination of Julius Caesar. Before Caesar’s assassination in Act III, Scene 1, Shakespeare gives us two scenes about talking things over with your wife. In the first, Portia notices Brutus is troubled. She bids him “unfold to me, yourself, your half / Why you are so heavy...” Seeing her devotion, and her courage, Brutus confides his plans and fears about tomorrow, the Ides of March. Caesar takes a different course. He accepts Calpurnia’s warning — “Do not go forth today!” — but then changes his mind, seduced by a flatterer who happens to be one of the assassins. Caesar finds out soon enough he should have listened to his wife.

ATN’s idea was to continue the “seduction by flattery” into the assassination scene. The six murderous senators would use caressing gestures and idolizing tones of voice as they closed in. They would violate Caesar’s body with their thrusting knives.

“Like a mugging with heavy-petting,” ATN exclaimed. “So visual!”

The actor playing Caesar had a different vision. Lucius Tiber wanted Caesar to go down fighting. He called for a ninja-style battle with Caesar driving off attackers in every direction.

“You want visual?” he exclaimed, “I’ll give you visual.”

Lucius leapt and spun into a fusillade of kicks and chops, finishing with a back flip. He was a man of girth, but nimble.

There was a great deal of further discussion about the body language at Caesar's assassination. Ultimately, it was for naught. The scene did not go as planned.

Shortly after 9am on March 15, I parked the Bardmobile on Archwood Street, south of the park, in a space reserved for us with city cones. Cast and crew were on hand to pull the stage out to full width, raise the Capitol backdrop, and post our "RTMT Presents..." sign. Woodworker Zev Young attached a flight of steps to the edge of the stage. Caesar would press through the crowd and go up these steps to the Capitol. Zev had given many hours to the shaping and finishing of the treads and risers, hoping the audience would wonder if they were marble.

The curious began to gather about an hour before showtime. Mina Blatt's pantomime students from Sylvia Street Middle School kept the growing crowd entertained. The kids performed from prompts such as *The Man in the Glass Cage*, *I Am a Dog*, and *Walking in the Rain*. Insurance man Gordon Blalock, who would play Sheriff Macbeth in our next production, acted as head of security for *Julius Caesar*. He and two helpers, Soapy Stovall and Misty Greaves, roamed the audience and kept people clear of the stage.

"A good mix," Gordon reported. "Office workers, seniors from the library, staff from the nursing home, councilmember's office, people from the bus stop. A few street people."

"Gang types?" I asked. "People hearing voices?"

"I don't see any obvious problems."

"What about that guy in the toga?"

"He's not your usual fresh-faced re-enactor," Gordon admitted.

Toga Man had a lean and hungry look. Years of farm work had so weathered him, he might have been any age from thirty to sixty. He seemed calm and interested in his surroundings, not overly intent or distracted.

“Getty Villa volunteer?” I conjectured.

With a doubtful wrinkle of his brow, Gordon said, “I’ll keep an eye on him.”

The preteen pantomimes left the stage. It was time for the Prologue to settle the audience. I bounded up Zev’s marble-like steps and raised my hands.

“Citizens of Reseda, welcome. This is a day we are all going all remember, a day of mighty portent, tradition, and moment. The Idea of March. You are here for the first performance of the first production of the Reseda Thirty-Minute Theatre. You’ll tell your grandchildren of this day, how you were here to see a great man laid low. And a great theatrical institution being born. In years to come, you will cast a jaundiced eye on others who will claim they were here and yet cannot recall that the Prologue was wearing... an Alpine hiker’s hat!”

I raised my hat, and a fanfare blared from street-shaking speakers in ATN’s Cadillac Escalade. Car doors flew open, and the toga-clad RTMT players came in procession toward the stage.

“Citizens of Reseda, he comes,” I cried out. “Hail, Caesar!” The audience picked up the chant. “Hail, Caesar! Hail, Caesar!”

Lucius waved benignly, making his way through the adoring masses. He ascended the steps, exuding command. Three times underlings tried to place a crown on his head. He refused it each time. Caesar had power. He did not need a crown.

“Beware the Ides of March!” cried ATN as the Soothsayer.

“What man is that?” Caesar was surprised at the Soothsayer’s words of warning.

“A soothsayer bids you beware the idea of March,” said Barrymore Barnes as Brutus.

One by one, the players disappeared backstage. Curtains unrolled and thudded, concealing the Capitol backdrop.

As the Prologue, I spoke again to the audience. “You’ve heard that Brutus is an honorable man. Hear now from me that Brutus is — like Caesar — a married man. Let us now listen in to these very public men at home.”

Alycia Orrick won the audience over as Brutus’ young wife — earnest and overly serious in the way the young often are. The audience gaped in shock when Portia revealed to Brutus the knife wound in her leg, self-inflicted to prove she could bear pain as stoically as a man.

In the next scene, Mina as Caesar’s wife brought her other-worldliness to bear. She was neither wispy nor loopy. She gave her husband sound military advice (“Do not go”) based on reconnaissance she had gathered from “the other side.” Calpurnia had a prophetic dream in which Caesar was a statue spurting blood. Caesar took but then forsook her advice, and then did Mina plead as a woman who pleads out of love for her husband. She begged on her knees.

The assassination scene went perfectly until the knives came out. Caesar stood at the Capitol. The senators swirled around him, pressing a petition they knew he would not grant. They edged Caesar into position at the top of Zev’s steps. The senators drew weapons from the sleeves of their robes. They made stabbing gestures toward his chest, preparing to lower him onto the steps, where his face would ogle the audience upside down.

“*Et tu, Brute?*” Lucius declaimed. “Then fall, Caesar.”

Toga Man came forward to join the attack, just as Caesar was tipping down. Toga Man plunged a chef’s knife into Lucius’ back.

Despite himself, Lucius cried out. “Oowww! Aaagh! Goddamn it it, what happened?”

The audience, uncertain of what they had witnessed, held its breath. Was this theater, some kind of trick to suspend disbelief in an over-the-top way?

Toga Man shouted to the audience, “Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!”

And he ran away from the stage toward Vanalden Ave. He shed his toga as he ran, revealing black jeans and a black t-shirt. He collected a bicycle lying beside a red pine. He pedaled away before anyone thought to give chase. The bicycle was flat black, with broomstick struts and skinny tires. He swung south on Vanalden. He would reach the LA River in two minutes. And disappear.

“Liberty, freedom,” lamented Cinna, played by Harry Otis. “That was supposed to be my line.”

## *Chapter 0*

# Title

We

# ACT II

O, full f scorpions is my mind, dear wife!  
— Macbeth, *Macbeth* III.2.36

A threatening note

# **ACT III**

Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
Ere one can say, "It lightens."

— Juliet Capulet, *Romeo and Juliet* II.2.119-20

ATN passes out cold on stage

# ACT IV

Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven [while he]  
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads...  
— Ophelia, *Hamlet* I.3.48,50

ATN's understudy runs away. Barrymore volunteers. (But you're in your 60s.)  
Blalock and Romeo discuss Hamlet scene for future. Blalock sees insurance perspective of  
I.3, an entire family would wipe out. Double indemnity, but no beneficiary to collect.  
Pardon my saying, it's an insurance grand slam. Actuary's nightmare, adjuster's grand slam.  
I'll forget you said that.

# ACT V

But earthlier happy is the rose distilled,  
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,  
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.  
— Theseus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I.1.76-78

*Chapter 0*

# Title

We opened