

# WINDOW DRESSING

A Ten Minute Play for the Holidays  
By Michael Buss

## *CAST OF CHARACTERS:*

*M103 - A male shop mannequin. 30s*  
*F22 - A female shop mannequin. 30s*  
*G17A - A girl shop mannequin in her  
young teens*

## *SETTING:*

*A display window in a Manhattan  
department store, within sight of  
Ground Zero.*

## *TIME:*

*It is Christmas Eve, 2001.*

*AT RISE the three characters form a  
group round a small table on which is a  
large wrapped gift. GIRL stands behind  
it with her hands upraised as in  
excitement, and huge smile on her face.  
MAN and WOMAN are on either side like  
parents waiting for the child to open  
the gift. Being only mannequins, they  
are totally motionless. After a brief  
while the music fades.*

*When the characters begin to move their  
movements are robotic.*

*WOMAN begins to move from her static  
position and makes her way to the shop  
window that is the fourth wall.*

*MAN*

*It's against the rules.*

*WOMAN*

*Once a year, that's all.*

*MAN*

*So you subscribe to the view that rules are meant to be  
broken?*

*WOMAN*

*No - but there's no point in having rules if there wasn't  
something fun to be had by breaking them*

MAN

You're having fun now?

*Woman has now reached the shop window.  
She feels it.*

WOMAN

It's like a huge sheet of ice. In here, our little world of Christmas perfection; out there, the seething mass of shoppers. Come on. It's safe. They've all gone home to await the arrival of Santa Claus.

MAN

*(Beginning to move)*

Last time I was caught moving they put me in home furnishings and dressed me up like a ridiculous butler. People kept staring right into my face breathing their hot, smelly breath just to see if I was real.

WOMAN

It all depends what you think is real. *(Pause)*. The bulldozers have stopped. Can you hear? The quiet? And look; you can still see the rubble and fingers of jagged steel pointing accusingly into the night sky. So weird in the halogen lights. Only a solitary cop stands guard.

MAN

There will be more. It's just that you can't see them

WOMAN

*(Pause)*

So where have you been, this past year?

MAN

I told you, home furnishings.

WOMAN

But before that? After last Christmas -- where did you go?

MAN

They put me in the winter sports window dressed in football gear.

WOMAN

You're too old for that.

MAN

I don't look old. And with a new helmet and shoulder pads, what does anyone know?

WOMAN

And then?

MAN

Does it matter?

WOMAN

It's been a whole year. I only get to see you at Christmas.

GIRL

*(Barely moving)*

He was in the back corridor by the staff rest rooms for ten weeks, on his side, totally undressed.

WOMAN

Shame!

GIRL

No more shameful than you flaunting your figure in silk in lingerie.

WOMAN

It was fun. I got a lot of attention.

GIRL

*(Moving more freely)*

Yes, from pervey old men and quizzical boys for whom an almost naked mannequin is the nearest they get to sexual excitement.

WOMAN

You're jealous because in the fifteen years you've been in this shop you never grew up -- and never will.

MAN

And you say the same old things to the girl every year. You are jaded and bitter. Outwardly the beautiful homemaker but inwardly so hollow. We are meant to be the happy family, the perfect commercial image of what every American home should be. We spend all our time here from Thanksgiving to Christmas pulling in the holiday crowds listening endlessly to banal bantering of the shoppers by day, and watching the drunks pass by at night. And when we finally get a few moments of peace on Christmas Eve all you can do is ask me where I've been for the last year, and bitch at the kid! I mean, come on. Get a life.

WOMAN

*(A long pause)*

I'm not cooking.

GIRL

Hello! We don't eat!

WOMAN

You want TV?

MAN

Just to gaze through another widow at another world where  
nothing is what it seems?

WOMAN

Then open the gift.

GIRL

It's not a time for gifts.

MAN

We don't feel like gifts.

WOMAN

But it is a time for giving. So it must be a time for gifts.

MAN

They found me choking under the stifling dust. All I wanted  
was water, to wash.

GIRL

And air, to breathe.

MAN

And someone to help me back on my feet

WOMAN

Well, yes, I know that. But that's over now.

GIRL

So what did you see in the street? In the halogen lights?  
What was happening before the bulldozers stopped? Is it  
really all over? Or will it just go on and on?

WOMAN

Look, you're being morbid. And I'm sorry for being -- so  
predictable. I had a bad time, too, you know. Let's just --  
cheer up.

GIRL

Okay.

MAN

We can do that.

WOMAN

Great!

GIRL

*(After a very long pause)*  
We have nothing to talk about, do we?

WOMAN

What do you mean?

GIRL

When you've looked through the window and not liked what you've seen. We only have ourselves. And we've nothing to talk about.

MAN

Look, your mother's right.

GIRL

She's not my mother. I was made in a factory, remember? I'm actually older than you!

MAN

You could pretend. It might grow on you.

WOMAN

Come on. Open your gift.

MAN

All right. Open the gift. Give us something to do.

WOMAN

There you go. Your father -- he, we can agree about something.

MAN

Yeah!

GIRL

Who is it from?

WOMAN

I don't know. It was just here, when we came.

GIRL

But what if I don't like it? Or worse, don't even want it?

WOMAN

Well you won't know until you open it.

GIRL

Maybe I don't want to know -- because not knowing is more fun than knowing.

MAN

What are you talking about?

GIRL

You can be so disappointed when the dream ends, when the mask comes off and all that's there is a shell.

MAN

People don't normally put masks on shells. I mean, they don't go around like giant clams dressed up for Halloween.

GIRL

Do you have any idea how silly you sound?

MAN

Trick or treat! Trick or treat! Trick or treat!

GIRL

Yes - it might be a trick.

WOMAN

Excuse me but what were you doing before you came here? The Back to School window? Reading books?

MAN

A trick?

GIRL

The searing flame; the limb tearing blast; the finely milled powder.

MAN

Oh my God! It's a Christmas gift. Not a bomb. You can't live like that all the time.

GIRL

Nowadays you never know. You can never be too careful.

MAN

Yes, but this is stupid. We're a family.

GIRL

We're not a family.

WOMAN

No we're not. Just blank dummies with wigs; now one thing, now another; never certain who we are, changing with the years from one thing to another.

MAN

*(Pointing out front)*

Like them, out there, in the street.

*They all follow his stare in a frozen moment, then break away.*

GIRL

Do I have a name?

WOMAN  
What sort of a question is that?

GIRL  
Do I have a name?

WOMAN  
Well of course you do.

GIRL  
So what is it?

WOMAN  
(*turning to Man*)  
Tell her. Her name.

MAN  
We don't have names. None of us. Just serial numbers.

GIRL  
So what's my serial number?

MAN  
It's G17A.

GIRL  
How do you know?

MAN  
I know them all. It's the only way I can tell us dummies apart when they keep changing our wigs and clothes. We're all in the computer. No two of us have the same number.

GIRL  
What's hers?

WOMAN  
I don't want to know.

GIRL  
Why?

WOMAN  
Because, because -- I have a name for myself. And I don't want anyone to change it.

GIRL  
What is it?

WOMAN  
I'm not saying. You might laugh.

MAN  
No we wouldn't. Go on. Tell us.

WOMAN  
Promise not to laugh?

MAN GIRL  
I promise. We promise.

WOMAN  
It's um, it's er, Poly.

GIRL MAN  
That's nice. I like that. Like  
a parrot.

WOMAN  
Not Polly Parrot. Polythene, actually.

MAN  
You may as well know -- your serial number is F22, and I'm  
M103.

*Woman begins to cry. They try to  
comfort her.*

MAN  
Now what's the matter? I mean, Polythene is a nice name - but  
it's not in the computer.

WOMAN  
You don't understand. If you take, my name away from me, my  
name, not my number, then I won't know who I am. You know  
what? I was happy until you told about serial numbers? I  
mean, how would I even know I was a woman with that number?

MAN  
It starts with F. F - for female.

WOMAN  
Look, is that the only way you know you're a man? Because you  
start with an M? Don't you have anything else (she waves at  
his pants)?

*Long embarrassed pause. He turns his  
head away with uncertainty.*

GIRL  
Stop arguing, you two. The time we have is too short for  
argument. Right now, it's Christmas Eve. And for a just a few  
minutes when no-one else is about, we have just us. There's  
only us.



WOMAN

No, we're so lonely, unknown, insecure.

MAN

We're, none of us, what we appear to be.

WOMAN

And soon the bulldozers will start up again. And the pain continue.

GIRL

*(indicating the table with the gift)*

Here. Come back here.

*They start moving back as they get back to the table their movements become more robotic again.*

MAN

Are you going to open it?

WOMAN

Go on.

GIRL

No. If I wanted a cat it might be a dog. It might be just an empty box, but as long as I don't open it, it can be anything I want it to be. Here - hold my hands

*She extends her hands, and slowly they all grip fingers.*

I will always call you Polythene. And you, just M103.

MAN

That suits me fine.

WOMAN

What are we doing? Someone might come -- and see us.

GIRL

No they won't. But time is short. For a brief span we have something more precious than empty promises, we have each other. And, and, even though the pain and the noise will start again there's always hope. And we always have tomorrow ...

MAN

And tomorrow ...

WOMAN

And tomorrow ...

*Their fingers release and with robotic movements they return exactly to their original postures.*

*There is a pause.*

**BLACKOUT**

*End of play.*