

STITCHES

Jonathan Starke

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

- DARROW: Lean body, 31, mid-length sandy blonde hair.
TRUCKS: More muscular than Darrow but still lean, 38, shorter dark hair.
HOOPER: Short and portly man, 47, with long and messy dark hair.

(*AT RISE:* Lights lift on the inside of a boxing glove mending factory where TRUCKS and DARROW stand across from one another at a metal table that rises to their beltline. Both men are in their late thirties. They wear dark maroon onesie uniforms, reminiscent of a mechanic's suit. Both men hold needles, TRUCKS between his left fingers, DARROW between his right. A large bin rests at the feet of both men. A pile of faded and dodgy boxing gloves sits between them. They talk as they stitch-up the seams of the boxing gloves. Rain can be heard on the roof.)

DARROW: You catch the Tomiko-Barnes fight last night?

TRUCKS: No, I had things to take care of. How'd it turn out?

DARROW: So-so. Tomiko probably threw four-hundred jabs. I thought his left arm was going to come loose at the elbow. It looked like string-cheese by the end the fight, just hanging there. Barnes lost the decision.

TRUCKS: Doesn't sound like I missed much.

DARROW: Sure you did. (DARROW throws jab punches.) Jab, jab, jab, jab, jab. Round over. Jab, jab, jab, jab. Jesus.

TRUCKS: Glad I missed it.

DARROW: I thought you were big on Tomiko. Didn't he grow up outside of your hometown? Clatskanie?

TRUCKS: You're thinking Yakima.

DARROW: I never liked Washington much. All this rain. Great for the trees, but what about us?

TRUCKS: We're stuck here either way. No use worrying about it.

DARROW. I'm not going to stick around much longer. (Pause.) So, why'd you miss the fight?

TRUCKS. I don't want to go into it.

DARROW. We got eleven hours to go.

TRUCKS. Ten and a half.

DARROW. Same difference. It all blurs after a while.

TRUCKS. Sure does.

DARROW. We got the time.

TRUCKS. Ugh. (TRUCKS drops the boxing glove he's been stitching into the large bin at his feet. He picks a fresh glove off the pile.)

DARROW. Appaloosa make you watch *Golden Girls* or something? (Laughs.)

TRUCKS. I had to take Loose to the clinic again.

DARROW. Jesus, what is that, the fifth time this month?

TRUCKS. Seventh.

DARROW. How can you afford that?

TRUCKS. Can't.

DARROW. Your bills must be to the roof.

TRUCKS. Through it.

DARROW. Huh?

TRUCKS. Through the roof is how you say it.

DARROW. Damn awful is how I say it.

TRUCKS. At least you got that right. No help from the higher-ups, either. How did we ever end up working here?

DARROW. Couldn't tell you. It's been too long.

TRUCKS. Loose keeps talking about going down south. Some place that has lots of sun and little rain.

DARROW. Texas would be good.

TRUCKS. She says Arizona, New Mexico, something like that.

DARROW. Ever heard of a town called Percival?

TRUCKS. Sounds like a carnival name.

DARROW. Well, it isn't. And it doesn't rain much somewhere like that. I read about it in a travel magazine.

TRUCKS. I've never seen you pick up anything besides Ring General.

DARROW. You think I can only think about boxing?

TRUCKS. Mostly.

DARROW. Well, you don't know everything like you think you do.

TRUCKS. All right. So what about Percival?

DARROW. I read once about a rancher, and the ground there talked to him.

TRUCKS. Are you sure you weren't reading the *Enquirer*?

DARROW. Yes, damn it! It was a travel magazine at the bus station. Had a man, a rancher from Percival on the front cover. He was pressing his ear to the ground, and his straw hat was pushed up his head. You could see a dust storm blowing in the distance behind him. The article said he was a religious-like figure, that the ground spoke to him. Through him. They call it The Percival Churn.

TRUCKS. That's *Enquirer* material if I ever heard it.

DARROW. Well, it wasn't. It isn't. I bet there's a churn out there somewhere. Sure as hell nothing churning here.

TRUCKS. You think cracked and dusty and dry is better than rain?

DARROW. I think anything's better than all this rain. (DARROW points up and they both listen to the rain.)

TRUCKS. You've lived here in Washington, what, thirty-some years?

DARROW. Yeah.

TRUCKS. How can you not be used to the rain?

DARROW. Rain like this isn't something a man can get used to.

TRUCKS. I suppose not.

DARROW. I don't think I want to talk about the rain anymore.

TRUCKS. All right. (HOOPER enters with a netted bag full of boxing gloves needing repair.)

HOOPER. Some caught fishy-fish in need of life saving. Echo E-M-P-L 3-3-9-4-7 and 3-3-9-4-8 have been assigned.

TRUCKS and DARROW. (Simultaneously.) Glove check!

(HOOPER throws the netted bag of boxing gloves on the table. He extends a sheet to DARROW, and DARROW signs, right-handed, and gives the sheet back. HOOPER extends the sheet to TRUCKS, and TRUCKS signs, left-handed, and gives the sheet back. HOOPER licks his thumb, creases the sheet, and walks out.)

DARROW. Have they figured anything out with Appaloosa yet?

TRUCKS. They just know there's something not right with her white blood cell count. That's all they say. Low count, over and over.

DARROW. Does it have anything to do with her...you know...handicap?

TRUCKS. I'm sure they'll say that's the cause sooner or later.

DARROW. And last night? Did she pass out because of the blood cell

thing?

TRUCKS. She did.

DARROW. Where was she?

TRUCKS. At home with me.

DARROW. No, I mean, where in the house?

TRUCKS. She was in the bath.

DARROW. That's no good place to lose it.

TRUCKS. You think there's any good place to pass out?

DARROW. I suppose there isn't, not with what she's got.

TRUCKS. No good place for it. (Pause.) I'd set her in the tub, and she was running water over her arms and face just fine. I took the bar soap and spun it in my hands as the water came out of the spout, spun it, you know, to get the bath to bubble up for her. It's cheaper than buying the bubbles. I keep telling her some day we can afford things like that.

DARROW. It's nice of you to think of her that way.

TRUCKS. Well, she's all I've got. All I need, really, but this blood cell thing scares me worse than anything I've been scared of before.

DARROW. I don't see you as that type.

TRUCKS. What type?

DARROW. The scared type. You've been in the ring with Brawler Bronson, Charlie Shinook, Spencer "C-4" Stevenson, and this scares you more?

TRUCKS. You feel about someone like this someday and you'll know.

DARROW. I don't buy that, sorry to say.

TRUCKS. I don't blame you. (Thinking.) It just has to come to you. Pop up like an exotic bird on the windowsill, and you're thinking, Where the holy hell did this bird come from? You don't want to get too close or it might fly away from your row house forever. Don't try and get a closer look, and you're just a schmuck in your underwear scrambling eggs and pouring cereal for yourself, thinking about the time you took out Tim Hoard in the third or Jimmy Favors by thirty-second knockout. Stole the title from Franklin Thurber when you were a six-to-one underdog. What's all that shit mean when you don't even have the guts to cut the distance between you and this bird on the sill? (DARROW doesn't say anything for a while. He stitches and thinks.)

DARROW. I think I might know what it's like.

TRUCKS. Yeah? (DARROW tosses a finished glove into the box and grabs another.)

DARROW. Is it anything like searching through the icebox at night when you've got no lights on and no clothes, and you've got your hands deep in there, and as you start to shake, you're not sure what you're doing, why you've come out there, how it is you got out of bed in the first place?

TRUCKS. (Thinking.) It's nothing like that. (TRUCKS and DARROW laugh.)

DARROW. What if you'd made it big like Tomiko?

TRUCKS. What if I had?

DARROW. You'd be pulling down what he's pulling down these days. I heard he got paid two-hundred grand for the fight last night. I've never seen that kind of money in anything but bank-robbing movies.

TRUCKS. Who has seen it?

DARROW. Nobody we'd know.

TRUCKS. It's hard to imagine, really. Someone actually having money like that.

DARROW. Seems impossible.

TRUCKS. It is.

DARROW. Well, is or isn't, I haven't seen any evidence of anybody having a life like that.

TRUCKS. Just like that ground listener.

DARROW. What do you mean?

TRUCKS. That kook you read about down in Arizona.

DARROW. Texas.

TRUCKS. Texas, whatever.

DARROW. Percival. I circled it on a map I took out of the magazine. It's so close to the border down there. You could be in Santa Rosa in less than an hour.

TRUCKS. What are you going to do in Mexico? You can barely speak English.

DARROW. I haven't thought it out so far yet.

TRUCKS. Well, what I was meaning is that people say things on TV and in magazines, and we're just supposed to believe it. They can fake all that stuff, though, what they show on TV. And words in magazines are just words. What'd the higher-ups tell us when we first signed on here at the factory? That we'd get fair shifts and good treatment and they'd cover us if we got sick. They put it in smart writing on the contracts, and we signed

them, and why? Because even if it wasn't in smart writing, they knew they had us, that we needed the work. Now my wife is dying of something no doctor can even understand, and those higher-ups won't pay a cent of the bill. (Pause.)

DARROW. What are you trying to say?

TRUCKS. I'm trying to say that just because it's shown or said or written doesn't make it truth. (HOOOPER enters with another netted bag full of boxing gloves.)

HOOOPER. Got some shot ducks here. Need to be rid of the bullets and ready for cooking. Echo E-M-P-L 3-3-9-4-7 and 3-3-9-4-8 have been assigned.

TRUCKS AND DARROW. (Simultaneously and less enthusiastically than the first time.) Glove check. (HOOOPER throws the bag of boxing gloves on the table. He extends a sheet to DARROW, and DARROW signs, right-handed, and gives the sheet back. HOOOPER extends the sheet to TRUCKS, and TRUCKS signs, left-handed, and gives the sheet back. HOOOPER licks his thumb, creases the sheet, and walks out.)

DARROW. You ever feel like we get stuck mending more gloves than Olivarez and Hitchins or Wombshaker and Norseberg?

TRUCKS. At least we got work.

DARROW. I've seen Scrimshaw and Hobart's log before. Sometimes they walk out after a half-day with only three bags finished. Now, how can we be okay with that? There's no justice in it. Me and you, we put out three times as many glove-nets in a half-day.

TRUCKS. Who said there was going to be justice?

DARROW. The granite lady with the scales and the linen at the courthouse, that's who.

TRUCKS. Jesus.

DARROW. Don't Jesus me. You know I'm right. And what about the higher-ups giving all those overtime shifts to Hitchins and Norseberg after they let go of Markham and Sproles. We been here longer. We work harder. What the hell's that about?

TRUCKS. Not much we can do about it.

DARROW. I could use the damn money. Aren't you sick of living in those row houses? I can't stand it anymore. The bugs that come screeching out of the walls, they're starting to look more like my dinner, and my dinner's starting to look like them. What's that say about the way we live now?

TRUCKS. You get those bugs, too?

DARROW. Damn near every night. You flip on the light to take a piss

in the small hours, and they freeze all suctioned to the wall like they're humping the paint. Appaloosa must hate it.

TRUCKS. (Laughs.) Loose is dead afraid of those bugs. I heard all this noise in the bathroom the other night, woke up and came rushing to her. Her wheelchair was knocked over and collapsed on itself, and she was sitting on the pot, taking a piss and smashing those bugs up with her hairbrush. I took the brush out of her hand and ran it under the sink, and all those bug-legs came running off and swirled around in the basin. (DARROW shakes his head.)

DARROW. Tough woman. (Pause.)

TRUCKS. I never thought I could love like that. (DARROW turns his head away from TRUCKS and scratches at his neck.)

DARROW. Can I ask you something?

TRUCKS. Oh, boy.

DARROW. No, don't give me that. It's nothing all too bad.

TRUCKS. Okay.

DARROW. How does Appaloosa, I mean, how does she.... (Long pause.)

TRUCKS. What? Spit it out.

DARROW. I don't know.

TRUCKS. Take a shit?

DARROW. No!

TRUCKS. What, then?

DARROW. Well, how does she stay on the pot without...you know...her torso falling in?

TRUCKS. (Laughs.) She puts the lid down. How wide do you think our toilet seat is?

DARROW. I just mean, you know...how can she keep up a balance on the toilet seat with having no legs and all?

TRUCKS. It's like anything else. You're born with something or without it, and you have to figure out a way to live with it. Loose could piss on her own since she was little.

DARROW. That's something to admire.

TRUCKS. A woman with that kind of upper-body and core strength. Just imagine what she could do with a pair of good legs. (DARROW laughs then looks away, getting shy.) I know what you're thinking, you bastard.

DARROW. How could I not?

TRUCKS. You want to know how it is she fucks.

DARROW. I didn't say it.

TRUCKS. I can see it. Look at your hand trembling with that needle. You're like an eleven-year-old boy with his boner sitting in the palm of his hand, and he doesn't know if he should tug or squeeze.

DARROW. Forget it.

TRUCKS. I'll tell you. I know it's the first thing on any man's mind who sees her.

DARROW. Not interested.

TRUCKS. Horseshit.

DARROW. Well, go on, if you're so set on telling it. (DARROW drops the boxing glove he's been stitching onto the table. He rolls his hand in a forward motion.) Well, go on. Let's hear it.

TRUCKS. It starts with the kissing. She's got a real smooth mouth. It's like kissing slick marble.

DARROW. Christ. I know how regular sex works.

TRUCKS. And we kiss like that for a while. She likes to twirl the hair behind my ears. Her mother used to do that to relax her. (DARROW rolls his hand forward again, bulges his eyes, urging TRUCKS on.) All right. All right. So, we end up on the bed. Together. Naked. Two naked married folks on the bed.

DARROW. And...?

TRUCKS. And I put my dick inside her. (DARROW picks up a glove and throws it in the air so it lands on the pile of broken gloves.)

DARROW. What a letdown!

TRUCKS. What'd you expect?

DARROW. Something with a little steam. That story's got no pop. No zip. I'm waiting for the upper-cut of the century, and you throw out a flubber. My nine-year-old nephew could talk a sexier tale.

TRUCKS. Well, damn fine idea I quit boxing if I'm throwing lame ducks.

DARROW. You never got the right pivot in your back leg on your hooks.

TRUCKS. My hooks were fine.

DARROW. Don't kid yourself. You couldn't knock out Upton toward the end of his career, and the guy had a jaw with the softest button of any fighter on the Northwest circuit. I saw a girl slap him in the face outside a dive in Tacoma, and he dropped to the pavement.

TRUCKS. You're such a jerk.

DARROW. Too bad you've got yourself a jerk for a partner.

TRUCKS. Not for long if you keep shaking your needle like that. Your stitching's going to be off the line.

DARROW. I got it just fine. (Both men go back to stitching and it's quiet for a while.) I'm curious about something else.

TRUCKS. Yeah?

DARROW. How does she move without her chair?

TRUCKS. How do you mean?

DARROW. I mean, let's say you're playing cards on the floor or something. Does she lift herself with her arms and walk around on her hands, or what?

TRUCKS. You've got a funny mind.

DARROW. At least I'm using it, right?

TRUCKS. Right. Well, about every day I've got her in my arms. She can walk on her hands for a while, but it burns her arms and shoulders. Can you imagine how hard that would be to hold up half a body like that? It's no good for the wrists, especially little wrists like hers. (DARROW rotates his wrist while staring down at them.) The doc says it's good for her blood flow and mobility. Says she needs to keep going, keep moving. She's real strong. She could do that quite a bit if she wanted to, but to tell you the truth, I carry her a lot. I think she likes being taken care of.

DARROW. I see what you mean.

TRUCKS. There's something about holding her in my arms like that, the half of her, but it's the whole of her, you know what I mean? There's no bigger intimacy than that. So, when she calls to me in the night, in the morning, I'm damn happy to carry her in my arms like that. How many men can say they can hold their whole wife in their hands and really mean it?

DARROW. I guess not many.

TRUCKS. None other than me.

DARROW. I don't know.

TRUCKS. It's what I want to believe.

DARROW. It's your right. (HOOPER enters and tosses another netted-bag of boxing gloves next to the ones he'd previously thrown on the table.)

HOOPER. Got some cracked bones that need fusin'. Echo E-M-P-L 3-3-9-4-7 and 3-3-9-4-8 have been assigned.

TRUCKS AND DARROW. (Simultaneously, sounding even more downtrodden than the last time.) Glove check.

(HOOPER extends a sheet to DARROW, and DARROW signs, right-handed, and gives the sheet back. HOOPER extends the sheet to TRUCKS, and TRUCKS signs, left-handed, and gives the sheet back. HOOPER licks his thumb, creases the sheet, and walks out. TRUCKS

puts his glove and needle down and picks up some gloves from the pile and drops them so they tumble.)

TRUCKS. How are we going to finish this pile and two other net-bags before they put more on us? What do those higher-ups expect, 16 net-bags today?

DARROW. I don't know what's worse, that or that. (DARROW points up toward the noise the rain is making on the ceiling. DARROW and TRUCKS listen to the rain together.) I sure wish that wasn't happening. Maybe that it wasn't rain at all.

TRUCKS. It couldn't really be anything else, could it?

DARROW. How's it possible that it can rain like this? Day in and day out. A gray winter. The grayest winter. Each one worse than the next. That is rain outside, isn't it? Is there any way that up there isn't rain?

TRUCKS. Do you actually think it could be anything different?

DARROW. I sure wish it was.

TRUCKS. Maybe for today we can pretend. Maybe we can say it's something, anything but the rain.

DARROW. You think we can convince ourselves of it?

TRUCKS. Don't you think I'd like to try to? Don't you think every man in this building would like to try to?

DARROW. I suppose they would.

TRUCKS. Fuck supposing. You know damn well they would.

DARROW. What's there that we can do about this?

TRUCKS. Nothing I know of. We're both stuck under it.

DARROW. Maybe ask for a soft roof?

TRUCKS. How'd that work?

DARROW. I don't know. I guess I didn't think it through.

TRUCKS. Like a sheet on the roof?

DARROW. Maybe a rubber pad.

TRUCKS. You realize what kind of noise that would make?

DARROW. Well, it wouldn't sound like pins being dropped in a tin mug.

TRUCKS. I'll take that.

DARROW. What's so wrong with a rubber pad?

TRUCKS. I can hear it like small gun pops.

DARROW. Now?

TRUCKS. No, then.

DARROW. When?

TRUCKS. Then, if we had a rubber pad on the roof.

DARROW. How do you hear it?

TRUCKS. I said, like gun pops. Like shots from one of those little pistols
whores used to put in the lace around their thigh in the boomtowns.

(DARROW cocks his head and listens to the rain.)

DARROW. I can hear it like that now, too.

TRUCKS. I don't want to think about it.

DARROW. I don't want to ever hear a noise like that.

TRUCKS. So, this is what you have to settle for. Little pricks on the tin
roof.

DARROW. It could just turn itself off once in a while, couldn't it? People
drown this way.

TRUCKS. How do you mean?

DARROW. Weren't there great big floods in the Bible?

TRUCKS. Yeah.

DARROW. Well, I mean like that. That's what it feels like.

TRUCKS. What do you know about Bible floods?

DARROW. I only know what I'm under now, that's all, and that's what it
feels like to me. Can you explain it any better? There's no sense in it, not
that I can see. Why would God do something like that to poor people?

TRUCKS. It flooded because God thought people who didn't obey needed
to die. Doesn't feel like much of a choice sometimes.

DARROW. What did we do that He holds the hose over us like this, all day,
every day, no stop, no shine. What did we do?

TRUCKS. It's one of those things I don't know much about.

DARROW. It's not boxing.

TRUCKS. It's not boxing.

DARROW. You'd have some kind of way out if it was.

TRUCKS. I probably would.

DARROW. I'd hope so.

TRUCKS. But, you can't loop a hook or throw a straight-left at the rain.
What happens if you do?

DARROW. Not a damn thing.

TRUCKS. You'd punch right through it and still get wet.

DARROW. The ultimate opponent.

TRUCKS. I never thought of the rain as a pugilist.

DARROW. Is there any other way to think of it now?

TRUCKS. I suppose not.

DARROW. You think there's ever going to be another way to think of the
rain? Not just as a pugilist, not just as this thing we fight against?

TRUCKS. I hope there's another way. (DARROW sets his needle down and picks up a razor blade to slit open the loose stitching on a glove. He mis-cuts and slices his palm open.)

DARROW. Ah, shit! Shit!

TRUCKS. You get yourself?

DARROW. Yeah.

TRUCKS. It bleeding bad?

DARROW. Sort of, I can't fully tell yet.

TRUCKS. Try and suck it out if you can. Jam up the bleeding.

DARROW. All right. (DARROW sucks blood from his hand.)

TRUCKS. We can't afford to slow down the work now.

DARROW. No.

TRUCKS. There's too much at risk.

DARROW. I hear you.

TRUCKS. They won't cover you for that. The higher-ups aren't going to cover you.

DARROW. I know.

TRUCKS. If Hooper comes by, just hide your hand between your ribs and your suit. Can you do that okay?

DARROW. I can do that.

TRUCKS. They'd just as soon fire you for negligence and drop the work on some other team. Then where am I left?

DARROW. Guess we're both out then.

TRUCKS. Get rid of two, easier than one.

DARROW. That's a strange way to see it.

TRUCKS. It's a strange world.

DARROW. You hit that right.

TRUCKS. After they cut Markham and Sproles and Lattermer and Forknight, we can't be next.

DARROW. We won't be next.

TRUCKS. Can't be. (Long pause.) Is it better now?

DARROW. It's bleeding pretty bad. I can taste it like there's metal in my blood.

TRUCKS. There's no metal in your blood. I can promise you that.

DARROW. How can you be so sure? It's not your blood.

TRUCKS. I can't be sure of much now. (TRUCKS pauses for a long time. He changes his stare from the pile of gloves to the roof and back, then over to DARROW.) How's it doing?

DARROW. Still bad. I'm trying to keep it from spilling over.

TRUCKS. It'll dry up soon. It's got to.

DARROW. If you say so, I trust that. (TRUCKS is slow to respond and stares at the pile of broken gloves.)

TRUCKS. Real soon. (DARROW is slow to respond.)

DARROW. Real soon.

(Only the rain can be heard between them now. DARROW continues sucking the blood from his hand. TRUCKS picks up a boxing glove and runs a single finger up and down it, around its edges, touching it as delicately as one might a baby's skin.)

END OF PLAY