

RESIST THE CRISP

A Play in One Act
by
Ethan Warren

617.721.0672
ewarren17@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

(NOTE: Though these characters are written as gendered, they could just as easily be cast as another gender with the pronouns changed)

Moonshadow – in her late teens. An earnest and compassionate young woman who's determined to navigate the world, no matter the challenges.

Dalton – in his early 30s. An intense and unbalanced man who's determined to save his reputation, though he's uncomfortable with what he might have to do.

Manager – in her late 30s. A sympathetic, frustrated lady who's determined to just get through this damn shift.

SETTING

Burger Stop, a mediocre fast food restaurant, just before closing.

NOTE: Moonshadow's diction is stilted and unusual, but actors should avoid the temptation to play her in a stylized, distant way. This is how she was raised to speak, but she's as emotionally intelligent as anyone else.

The dining room is empty. In the back, out of sight of the dining room, the manager and Moonshadow sit across a small table from one another, conducting an interview.

MOONSHADOW

(playacting)

Hello there. Welcome to The Burger Stop, where we ALWAYS resist the crisp.

MANAGER

It's just 'Burger Stop.' No 'The.'

(playacting)

Uhhhh, can I get a number four with a Diet Sprite?

MOONSHADOW

Absolutely, ma'am. I would be delighted to prepare that for you. Would you like to try our new fluffy wedge fries, guaranteed to melt in your mouth and not crack like kindling?

MANAGER

Crack like kindling?

MOONSHADOW

I am sorry. I thought I would try something. You said the frenched fries at the other restaurants are –

MANAGER

Just stick to the script.

(playacting)

Sure, gimme a large fries.

MOONSHADOW

All right. I will make you a number four with large FLUFFY wedge fries and Diet Spunk –

MANAGER

Sprite! Oh my god, how is this possible?

MOONSHADOW

A Diet Sprite! That will cost twenty-five dollars. And remember to tell your friends: always resist the crisp.

MANAGER

Twenty-five bucks?

MOONSHADOW

Is that too much?

MANAGER

It's five dollars twenty-five cents.

MOONSHADOW

I am sorry! I can learn, honest to spirits.

MANAGER

And you gotta not say that stuff, honest to spirits and everything. Customers won't – you just gotta talk normal.

MOONSHADOW

I am so sorry! There is so much to remember. Please, ma'am. I do not have any other options. I need this. I can do this.

MANAGER

Look, Moon –

(looking at application)

It's Moon, right?

MOONSHADOW

Moonshadow. But you can say Moon. I do not mind.

MANAGER

Moonshadow. You ever consider getting that changed, legally? It's, uh...an unusual name.

MOONSHADOW

Do people do that? What do they change it to?

MANAGER

Yeah, all the time. You can choose whatever you want. Sarah's a good name. Or Kate.

MOONSHADOW

It is my name. I do not have anything else. I would TRULY not exist. It is all I have.

MANAGER

All right! All right. Look, that was fine, you nailed the “resist the crisp” thing, I'm sure you can learn the rest. I'm a compassionate chick, I want to help you out, yadda yadda, but...there's no real protocol here, y'know? I'd be sticking my neck out. I don't know how I can justify that if the owner gets weird about it.

MOONSHADOW

I will do anything!

MANAGER

This is really important to you, huh?

MOONSHADOW

Yes, ma'am. I need to know what it is like to live a real life. I will work late at night. I will clean every surface. I will prove it to you.

The dining room door swings open. Dalton strides in, waving a butter knife hesitantly.

DALTON

(shouting into empty space)

I'm Dalton Crisp, a good and decent man, and if these terrible attacks on my good name do not CEASE then I'm scared that I will do things that I DO NOT WANT TO DO.

MANAGER

Oh my God, he came in. God DAMN it.

DALTON

Will someone PLEASE answer me when I demand answers about these vicious attacks?

MOONSHADOW

Who is this gentleman?

MANAGER

He called a couple days ago, I figured he was crazy. I didn't think he was THIS crazy. Shit, I really don't want to call the cops right now.

MOONSHADOW

He does not seem like a bad gentleman.

DALTON

I WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE ANSWERS AND APOLOGIES PLEASE.

MANAGER

Oh my God, I can't with this shit.

MOONSHADOW

If I convinced this gentleman to leave, would you give me this job?

DALTON

I THINK THIS KNIFE IS PROBABLY SHARPER THAN IT LOOKS!

He examines the knife nervously, tests it with his thumb.

MANAGER

Fine. Works for me. You get him to leave, you got the job.

Moonsbadow jumps up.

DALTON

I have a box of matches, all nice and dry –

Moonsbadow tiptoes into the dining room.

DALTON

- and if I don't receive apologies and promises that these attacks will end immediately, then maybe I will commit some arson on this restaurant, despite the fact that I REALLY don't -

MOONSHADOW

Good evening, sir.

Dalton whirls, waving his butter knife.

DALTON

Please keep your distance, lady, because I hate violence and I don't want to use this knife!

MOONSHADOW

Yes, sir. I respect your rights. I respect your freedoms as an individual.

DALTON

Then please respect my rights to defend my good name, and then remove this cruel propaganda from your store, so that I can maintain my pride in the Crisp family name and the heritage associated with it because this confrontation is extremely uncomfortable for me!

MOONSHADOW

I am sorry. I fail to understand you.

DALTON

(gesturing around at posters and ads)

It's everywhere! Resist the crisp, resist the crisp! Why are you always telling people to resist me when I have never done anything even remotely worthy of resistance?

MOONSHADOW

Sir, these large and colorful signs do not refer to you.

DALTON

I'm Dalton Crisp! And for weeks I haven't been able to turn on my TV without seeing ads telling people to RESIST me when all I've ever done is try to live a peaceful life!

MOONSHADOW

Mr. Crisp, these large and colorful signs refer to new fluffy wedge fries. As I understand it, the word 'crisp' refers to an unpleasant quality in frenched fries at competing restaurants.

DALTON

That's what they said on the phone, but I could hear them sneering, and lying, and thinking I'll stop and I'll think I'm crazy when I'm NOT crazy, I'm the only one willing to believe there's a plot against me, even if I can't possibly guess why they chose me for an attack!

(waving knife around the room)

WHAT DID I DO TO YOU, BURGER STOP? WHY DID YOU DECIDE YOU NEEDED TO MAKE ME BEHAVE LIKE THIS?

MOONSHADOW

Mr. Crisp, if you would wait, I could go –

(looks over shoulder, remembers her mission)

Mr. Crisp, I believe we can find a solution. I believe we can both be satisfied.

DALTON

Stop calling me Mr. Crisp and call me Dalton because you're making my family's name sound dirty, which is an attack on me, on top of the attacks I get from radio ads and billboards that make people look at me as someone to resist, which is the only look I get from ANYONE now, which makes me afraid to shop with my credit card because they'll think they need to resist me and not sell me groceries, and if I get pulled over then the cop will see my license and think he needs to resist me and take me to JAIL because this restaurant is making me seem like a criminal so everywhere I go people LOOK at me and SEE me and it's horrible and I wish I could DISAPPEAR, which would be so lovely.

MOONSHADOW

Dalton, being invisible is not desirable.

DALTON

It sounds SO desirable to walk through crowds without being seen and go about my life as an average man, which is what I used to do before I became MUCH too visible and spent my days wishing for a time I could leave no footprints and exist in quiet and PEACE.

MOONSHADOW

Being invisible is difficult. And oh my spirits, it is painful.

DALTON

It would be so lovely to disappear but you can't understand that because you don't –

MOONSHADOW

Dalton, I am invisible.

Dalton falters, fear crossing his face.

DALTON

No. No – you're here in front of me which means you're not like –

(he gently prods her arm)

You have to be real because I can always tell whether or not the person I'm talking to is real.

MOONSHADOW

I am a literally physical person. But in a manner of speaking I do not exist.

DALTON

You're spinning my head around, lady. I don't – I can't –

He snipes at her half-heartedly with his butter knife.

MOONSHADOW

I apologize. Would it be all right if I explained?

DALTON

Yeah tell me what you want to tell me if you want but PLEASE don't spin my head around!

MOONSHADOW

I will try not to. I was born in the woods in an unincorporated township. My parents have beliefs about personal freedoms. I have come to understand these beliefs are unusual. I was delivered by an unlicensed woman of medicine. I was taught verbiage by my mother. I was taught mathematics by my father. I have never visited a place of licensed medicine. I never received any documentation acknowledging my existence. This became a problem recently when I decided to enter conventional society. Because I have neither birth certificate nor social security number, I am invisible in the eyes of the Government of these United States.

DALTON

So they can't track you and they don't know you exist which means you can do whatever you want which sounds AMAZING and you should count your lucky stars.

MOONSHADOW

I can do almost nothing I want. I cannot get a license to drive a jalopy.

DALTON

Jalopy?

MOONSHADOW

Is that not the word? There are so many things that I do not know. And I cannot go to school and learn these things. I cannot open an account at a financial house. I cannot travel to a foreign country. There is very little you can do with no identity.

DALTON

But nobody knows you which means you have no past which means you're free.

MOONSHADOW

In that case, freedom is limiting. There is no way to begin. I cannot obtain papers without other papers. I came to this restaurant to beg for a job. My only chance is to start with a pay stub. I need Burger Stop to see me so that others can see me. Or else I cannot have a life.

DALTON

But you can't be hurt if you're invisible because you're not vulnerable to people who know who you are and have a problem with you like GODDAMN BURGER RESTAURANTS!

He waves his butter knife around.

MOONSHADOW

Perhaps. But I do not understand this world. And I cannot learn. And that frightens me.

DALTON

I'm scared too, so I need to take back some kind of freedom in my life, which means
MAKING THIS RESTAURANT STOP ITS ADS OR I WILL BURN IT DOWN!

*He rips the box of matches out of his pocket
and starts fumbling. The manager rushes out.*

MANAGER

OK! Enough, dude! I'm calling the cops!

*Dalton is shocked and drops his matches and
knife. He picks up the knife and points it at
the manager, hilt out, fist around the blade.*

DALTON

Please stay away from me because I am getting very mixed up!

*He gives a small, sad groan, realizes he's
holding the knife wrong, and flips it around.*

MOONSHADOW

Do not call police! It would be very bad for me to see police!

MANAGER

I don't have time for –

DALTON

I will cut you!

MANAGER

(pointing at ceiling)

You're on camera, bud.

DALTON

I WILL BURN THIS PLACE –

MOONSHADOW

(bail Mary pass)

Dalton you could change your name!

Dalton is struck, and lowers the knife a bit.

DALTON

It's my NAME, which is ME.

MOONSHADOW

But you do not want to be you. Am I correct? I understand you can legally choose any name.

DALTON

I don't want to be...I want to be ME, but I want to be...invisible, so...

MOONSHADOW

It seems to me that invisibility is not possible. But if you change your name, Dalton Crisp will cease to exist. Another man will exist instead.

DALTON

But I don't want to cease to exist because I'm worth something because I'm a good man.

MOONSHADOW

And the real you will exist. But this past you do not want? It will disappear. These colorful signs would no longer speak to you. You would have a blank slate.

DALTON

You're confusing me and I resent that because it makes my head hurt.

MOONSHADOW

Who would you like to be?

DALTON

I don't know!

MOONSHADOW

What a wonderful opportunity to find out.

Dalton thinks for a moment.

DALTON

So I could start over and have no mistakes attached to me and no regrets attached to me and do anything and nobody would know who I was if I didn't want?

MOONSHADOW

I believe so.

(looking to manager)

Is that correct?

MANAGER

Yup. That's – that's the whole deal. Sounds pretty sweet to me.

Dalton half-heartedly snipes his butter knife at the manager, who shuts up.

DALTON

This is an idea that I've never considered, and so I would need to think about it a lot.

MOONSHADOW

You could sleep on it. And you would not need to do the things you say you do not want to do. You would not commit arson. You could go home.

DALTON

That is a pretty good idea because I'm very tired and I really don't want to burn this stupid restaurant, and I guess I might as well at least make a list of names I might like instead of Crisp, because, quite frankly, it's a pretty stupid name that's always caused me trouble.

MOONSHADOW

I hope you can get some rest, Dalton. I am glad we met.

DALTON

Yeah, I'm glad about that too, lady, so I hope you have a good night.

He turns to go, then turns back.

DALTON

But think hard about getting a job, because as soon as you have an identity, you have a past, and the past follows you, and no matter what, once you have footprints, they're always behind you, and it can be hard to look behind you and know that other people can see where you've been, so think about whether this stupid world with all its stupid ugliness from all its stupid people is worth it to you, and whether you might have been happy enough where you were before, visibility or no, because if you want my opinion this world STINKS and it's only stinking more and more every day with no real signs of getting better and if you don't know what I mean then pick up a newspaper sometime and you'll figure it out quick.

He leaves. Moonshadow looks after him.

MANAGER

Well done, Miss Moonshadow. A deal's a deal. The job's yours. We'll figure it out.

Moonshadow looks at the closed door.

MANAGER

Moonshadow? You hear me? Earth to Moonshadow.

MOONSHADOW

Is there a newspaper here?

MANAGER

Yeah, I just recycled a few. Not sure I'd recommend it though. Nasty stuff going on out there today. You sure?

MOONSHADOW

There are so many things that I do not know.

END OF PLAY.