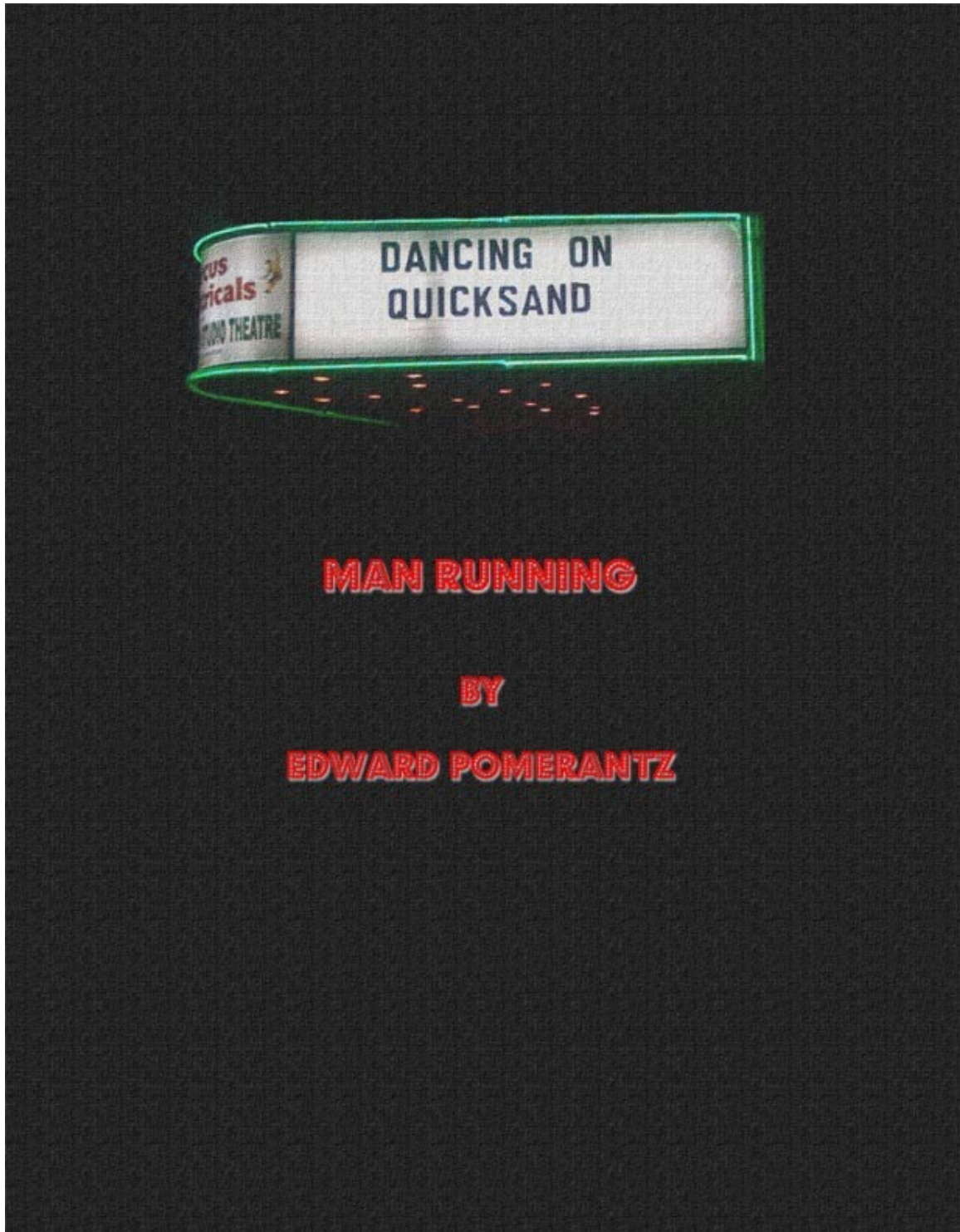




Man Running

by

Dancing On Quicksand

Edward Pomerantz

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Published by The Educational Publisher Publishing at
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Published and Distributed by
The Educational Publisher
Columbus, Ohio
www.EduPublisher.com

ISBN: 1-934849-67-7
ISBN13: 978-1-934849-67-5

For my parents

Gert and Al Pomerantz

who live and dance in these pages

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe this book to Sandy Kazan, who, for better and for more and less better, has lived with the writing of these plays. And I thank David H. Cohen and Robert Sims for their time, patience, hard work, and wizardry pulling it all together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In addition to the plays and screenplay in this collection, EDWARD POMERANTZ has written

INTO IT, a novel, originally published by Dial Press, reprinted by iUniverse.com

CAUGHT, the movie based on INTO IT, directed by Robert M. Young, starring Edward James Olmos and Maria Conchita Alonso, released by Sony Pictures Classics, and nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards

BRISBURIAL, a play/feast, produced by Woodie King, Jr.'s New Federal Theatre, published by Magic Circle Press

SWEETHEART, VIRGIN, AND GOD and DO ME A FAVOR, two novellas, published by Contact, the San Francisco Collection of New Writing, Art, and Ideas

THE GARDEN and ONLY A GAME, two one-act plays published by Samuel French

THE GARDEN (expanded into a full-length play), First Prize, Samuel French National Playwriting Contest

Over 35 commissioned screenplays and teleplays, including two LAW AND ORDER episodes, THE PRINCESS AND THE CABBIE, a CBS movie starring Valerie Bertinelli, and THE GOLD BUG and NEW YORK CITY TOO FAR FROM TAMPA BLUES, two award winning television adaptations

He was a Playwright In Residence at the Yale Drama School, and has received two Writers Guild Awards

He is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia University, where he teaches Filmwriting, and at SUNY-Purchase, where he teaches Writing for Television

He is the Director and Co-Founder (with Voza Rivers) of the Harlem Arts Alliance Dramatic Writing Academy, a program of free workshops and mentoring, created to find and nurture gifted playwrights, screenwriters, and writers for television, in the Harlem community

He has been a Creative Advisor, Mentor, and Visiting Writer at various international screenwriting labs in Mexico, Spain, South America, England, Germany, and Cuba

He is at work on his new play EL GALLO BRAVO TO GO

For reviews and personal tributes, visit www.edwardpomerantz.com

INTRODUCTION

Coming Home

When I was sixteen, my playwriting teacher at the High School of Performing Arts submitted the play I wrote to Samuel French. It was a one-act called *The Garden*, and I got fifty bucks for it. The next one, *Only A Game*, published a year later, made it official. The first was no fluke. I was the real thing—a Playwright, and got seventy-five bucks.

This was in the early 50's, when the American Theater was an exciting place to find a home in. Until then, I was a movie kid, going to double features at my Washington Heights Loews and RKO every Saturday from the day I was born. But now, a drama student at a pioneering new public high school at Broadway's epicenter on West 46th Street, I was a Saturday matinee kid, getting up at dawn to stand on line for standing room or the last row in the second balcony, where I had my heart broken by Julie Harris in *A Member Of The Wedding* and Bert Lahr in *Waiting For Godot*, my view of reality expanded by Jo Mielziner, his set for the bedroom in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* an open space, no pretending to look like a real bedroom, just Maggie the Cat in a white slip down left on a thrust stage, her husband Brick, drinking, on a bed up right, nothing but isolation and distance between them.

I was lucky. It was Jacob Weiser, the playwriting teacher, who saw a gift in me I didn't know I had, and mentored me (every day after school in his parked convertible on Riverside Drive) through a long process of endless rewriting, scene by scene, line by line. It's all Jack Weiser's fault. Instead of the next Gene Kelly, I would have to settle for being the next Eugene O'Neill.

Then Time happened. After the one-acts, I expanded *The Garden* into a three-acter, and won First Prize in the Samuel French National Playwriting contest, which led to interest in the play by Kraft Television Theater and an offer to go to Hollywood to be a contract writer for one of the Studios, neither of which happened. Instead, I ended up with an MFA from the Yale Drama School, where I returned six years later, when Robert Brustein took over, to be a playwright-in-residence and write my play/feast *Brisburial*. By now, it was the late 60's, and except for two one-acts in this collection and a production of *Brisburial* at Woodie King, Jr's New Federal Theatre in the early 70's, I didn't write or have another play produced for over twenty-five years.

I did, however, remain a storyteller—writing two novellas and my novel *Into It* (Dial Press), and over thirty commissioned screenplays and television scripts, some of which

have been produced (most not), some winning awards. Which jump-cuts me to the mid-90's, when *Caught*, the movie I wrote based on *Into It*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was released by Sony Pictures Classics. It was around then, after 20 years (and drafts) fighting to get the movie made, I returned to *The Goddess Of Filthy Things*, a play in my head and on scattered pieces of paper that demanded my attention and jeopardized my sanity until I finally "saw the forest for the trees" and figured out what all the voices and unconnected monologues, notes, stories-inside-stories were telling me. Most important, and we're coming around full circle now, I figured out how to travel through the play--through open space, the space Mielziner opened for me when I was a kid in the second balcony watching *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* forty-five years earlier.

With the writing of *The Goddess of Filthy Things*, I had come home. And "home" is where I've stayed since then, writing all the plays in this collection (except for the two one-acts written in the early 70's). I've also included *Man Running*, an original screenplay, which began many years ago when Bob Young, my treasured friend and director of *Caught*, brought me the gift of his idea for it. Decades later, it remains unfilmed. But that could be a "blessing in disguise." What you have here is the latest draft written in the last year (There's always a scene, an inspiration, a truer and funnier way to do it that makes me and Bob laugh, keep working on it).

Play. Novel. Screenplay. I've written them all with the deepest pleasure and satisfaction. Why then, in these last years, has the stage become the only arena for my ideas? Stories? Imagination? Why now, when I close my eyes, it's always that open space I see, giving me the same freedom movie writing gives me—to move fluidly through time and place—meeting and merging with what prose gives me—the music and density of language, the rhythmic force and driving flow of narrative. And even though the neighborhood movie palace was my cathedral, and the Josephs, Conrad and Heller, changed my life, it's the Theater—the public event, the human voice—out there, filling the space, the happening now, right now of it—that keeps me coming back to it. It's the space where all my writing—screenplays, novel, and plays-- intersect. The space where I can create what Matthew Ritchie, the painter, calls "a landscape...designed to produce adventures inside itself, adventures of information," where, like Ritchie, I can "dream the whole thing up as a way to express just how much fun you can have thinking."

Adventure. That's the key word here. Every play in this collection began with a question, a strong scene, image, or situation that haunted me, whose mystery could only be solved by writing it, moving step by step into unknown territory, emboldening me with clues and discoveries, as I moved forward, loving the danger of it, dancing on quicksand. "We're lucky," William Carlos Williams tells us, "when we catch the evasive life of the thing." With these plays, and the one I'm writing now, I feel lucky to still be spending my days in pursuit of it.

Edward Pomerantz
New York City

MAN RUNNING, an original screenplay, based on a story by Robert M. Young and Edward

Dancing On Quicksand

Pomerantz. Today's the day! The day Lou Robinson has to make up his mind, make a life-changing decision. A day he has to juggle all the jumbled relationships in his life, when he's running late, and there are all these women coming on to him, and a cab driver who quotes Martin Buber, and a traffic tie-up because the Pope is in town, and a chase by the cops who think Lou is a terrorist, led by an Israeli bomb-sniffing dog called Chutzpah. Can the day get any crazier? Wilder? How fast can Lou run? Keep running? Poor Lou! All he wants is to do the right thing—and be everything to everyone everywhere at the same time.

MAN RUNNING

by

Edward Pomerantz

Based on a story by Robert M. Young and Edward Pomerantz

FADE IN:

GOOGLE EARTH.

Moving in on North America, New York City, Brooklyn Bridge--the screen opening on an "army" of early morning runners running toward us across the Bridge to Manhattan.

Zooming in on one runner's Royal Blue Nikes, then panning up to reveal LOU ROBINSON, an ordinary appealing looking guy in his 30's, connected to his iPod, like all the other runners.

INT. LOU AND JANET'S BATHROOM AND BEDROOM MORNING

Janet, Lou's attractive wife, is brushing her teeth.

JANET

(calling, over the news on TV)

Lou...That you?

Lou, still jogging, runs into the bedroom. Without stopping, he checks his watch, pulls the iPod buds from his ears, gets into his rowing machine, starts rowing.

On the TV, Breaking News...

ANCHORWOMAN

...a bomb threat against the Pope arriving at JFK this morning for his speech at the UN, followed by a procession down Fifth Avenue. In response, the Mayor has raised the Security threat level from Code Yellow to Code Orange, and will be holding a press conference in a few moments, asking the city not to panic...

JANET

(coming out of the bath room, bright, cheerful, turning off the TV)

You just missed it. This shaman. Talking about you. On Good Morning America.

LOU

(horrificed)

About me?!

As Janet goes on, getting dressed, Lou rows, watching her in the mirror that hangs on the wall. A bevel in the mirror divides Janet's head from her body. As Lou moves back and forth rowing, Janet's head moves off and on her body. Lou watches, fascinated.

JANET

She said what really drives people crazy is feeling divided. Just when you think you know who you are...there's another you...and another you. How do you know which you is you? The true you...The you to be true to...

(a big smile)

Is that you or isn't it?

LOU

(escaping, running into the bathroom)

Got a 9 o'clock. Can't be late.

EXT. STREETS OF CHINATOWN MORNING

Lou and Janet (with a briefcase and Bendel shopping bag) are on their way to work. The Chinatown streets are an obstacle course bustling with open fish stalls and vegetable markets, coffee and breakfast wagons, early morning workers, tourists, vendors, bumper-to-bumper traffic, speeding delivery bikers suddenly sweeping around corners. Lou, weaving in and out, unstoppable, is racing ahead, Janet keeping up beside him.

JANET

(perseverating, unable to stop talking)

So you tell them yes...You take the job and you go to Africa...Is that Lou the filmmaker making that decision...or Lou the coward just running away?

LOU

The job's not mine yet. When they make me an offer, I'll have a group therapy session. With all the Lou's.

Janet is blocked by a passing truck. Losing Lou in the crowd for a moment, she spots him, catches up, runs alongside him.

JANET

There was an article in yesterday's Times...I clipped it for you...

(searching through her bag)

It said that most men who leave their wives for a younger woman think they'll live longer...

Lou picks up speed.

JANET (cont'd)

(finding the clipping)

Here it is. Listen to this...

(reading, racing alongside him)

"In the race against our mortality, the question we have to keep asking ourselves is: Is this trip necessary? Am I running toward something? Or running from it?"

(to Lou, brightly)

Amazing. It's like they're all talking about you.

Dancing On Quicksand

Lou just misses getting run down by a speeding delivery biker.

LOU
Jesus!

JANET
You okay?

LOU
Fine. Fine.

He looks at his watch, races on.

JANET
(catching up, putting the clipping away)
The poor girl.

Lou looks at her. Who's she talking about?

JANET (cont'd)
The one you're having an affair with.

LOU
(upset)
Don't call it that!

JANET
Why not? That's what it is, isn't it?

LOU
(shaking his head, trying to explain)
An af-f-f...An af-f-f...I can't even say it. It sounds so tawdry. So cheap.

JANET
(a wry laugh)
Sorry...
(rephrasing it)
The girl you think you're in love with...Does she know it's not love? It's just your fear of death that's gotten you into this...

LOU
I don't know what's gotten me into this. All I know is I love her. And I love you!

Another bike speeds by, and he dodges it, just misses getting hit by another, races on.

JANET
(catching up, racing alongside him)
Who will you be buried with? Have you thought about that?

LOU
(bewildered)
What?

JANET

When you die...Who do you see yourself lying next to? Being with? The poor girl...or me.

LOU

(at a loss, afraid he's losing his mind, racing faster)

I'll be cremated!

JANET

(stopping)

Cremated?!

LOU

(shouting over the traffic)

Then I can be with both of you!

Janet sighs, then looking at the Bendel shopping bag, she calls out.

JANET

Wait!

Lou, at the entrance to the subway station, stops, turns. Janet comes running toward him, holds out the shopping bag.

JANET (cont'd)

You forgot this.

(a shrug and smile)

A poncho. It's beautiful. It's just not me.

Lou looks at the shopping bag, then at Janet, suddenly full of remorse.

LOU

Janet...Listen...This is crazy. The way you're dealing with this. If I were you, I'd be homicidal. I'd hate me! Want to kill me...

She cuts him off with a kiss on the mouth.

JANET

Got a 9 o'clock. Can't be late.

She thrusts the shopping bag in his hand, runs off.

LOU

(calling after her)

We'll talk! Tonight!

(then suddenly looking at his watch)

Shit.

He runs down the subway steps. Overlap

DURANTE SUBWAY SINGER

(singing)

Did you ever have the feelin' that you wanted to go...

INT. SUBWAY STATION MORNING

Dancing On Quicksand

UNDER TITLES, Lou, carrying the Bendel shopping bag, comes running out of the train and upstairs through the connecting subway station, making his way in and out through the battalions on cell-phones. As he races for the Shuttle, he passes a SUBWAY SINGER doing a Jimmy Durante impersonation with a portable keyboard hanging from a strap around his neck.

DURANTE SUBWAY SINGER

...Still had the feelin' that you wanted to stay. You start to go. You change your mind. You start to go again. But you change your mind again. It's tough to have the feelin' you want to go. Still have the feelin' you want to stay...

EXT. STREET GREENWICH VILLAGE MORNING

With the song following him, Lou comes running up the subway steps, down the block and into the building where Natalie lives.

DURANTE SUBWAY SINGER (V0)

Do-re-me-fa-so...I'll go...I'll stay...

INT. BUILDING LOBBY MORNING

Lou runs in and buzzes the elevator, stands there waiting for it. Looking up, he realizes there's a security camera above watching him. Paranoid and impatient, he runs up the stairs, loosening his tie and unbuttoning his shirt as he goes.

DURANTE SUBWAY SINGER (V0)

I'll go...I'll stay...But who will be with you when I'm far away...

INT. NATALIE'S APARTMENT MORNING

Lou comes in and quickly tiptoes through the dark one-room apartment to the bed, taking off his jacket and shirt and getting out of his pants. Naked, he puts down the Bendel shopping bag and creeps gingerly into bed where he discovers much to his surprise that no one is there waiting for him.

DURANTE SUBWAY SINGER (VO)

Far far away from you...

The Durante Song and the Titles end.

LOU

Natalie?

Sitting up, he looks around, calls out:

LOU (cont'd)

Natalie...Where the hell is she?

He looks at his watch, reaches for his pants, takes out his cell-phone. Natalie's cross-eyed Siamese cat jumps up beside him.