

Burgie Belter



Breakdown

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Norman Maine Publishing

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*To my wife,
Pat,
and my children,
Julie, Bobby and Steve,
whose support has always been
present and unconditional.*

*I give special thanks
to the inspiration and input
of my fellow members
of Gag Reflex Comedy Theater,
past and present,
who have helped bring
my writing alive.*

*I especially thank
Eric Schwartz,
who not only has been
a good writing partner at times,
but a great friend.*

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Burgie Belter Breakdown was first performed at the Gag Reflex Comedy Theater in 1994 under the title "You Need a Rest."

Burgie Belter Breakdown

COMEDY. Everything is going well at The Burgie Belter, a local fast-food restaurant, until Josh arrives for work and notifies his boss, Herb, that he will be quitting his job as a fry cook and moving to Chicago to take a job as a sportswriter. Upon hearing the news, Herb suffers a major midlife crisis and suddenly wants to leave his wife, children, and job as manager of The Burgie Belter to start a new life in Chicago as Josh's "Uncle Herb." But when Josh refuses to take Herb to Chicago, Herb retreats to his office where he strips off his fast-food uniform and is discovered moping about wearing only his T-shirt and boxer shorts. Worried that Herb has suffered a complete Burgie Belter breakdown, Josh decides to call upon the only person who can bring Herb back from the brink of madness—Herb's no-nonsense wife. Audiences will adore the quirky characters in this hilarious "romantic" comedy!

Performance Time: Approximately 30-40 minutes.

NOTE: For a family-friendly version of this play, please go to our sister site, www.BigDogPlays.com.

Characters

(4 M, 3 F)

(With doubling: 3 M, 3F)

HERB BUTTER: Middle-aged manager of The Burgie Belter; wears black socks and shoes and a Burgie Belter uniform with a white T-shirt and boxer shorts underneath.

PAT BUTTER: Herb's no-nonsense wife; looks like an attractive middle-aged mom.

JOSH: Burgie Belter fry cook and college student.

GLORY: Josh's girlfriend and fellow Burgie Belter worker; can be either a college student or a "townie" who is working at the Burgie Belter until she finds something better.

LYLE: Burgie Belter worker who dreams of becoming a Burgie Belter manager; nice guy with a big heart, but a little dense.

KEISHA: Cynical Burgie Belter worker.

NARRATOR: Has a Rod Serling type voice as in "The Twilight Zone"; voice only; male.

NOTE: All Burgie Belter employees wear a fast-food looking uniform that consists of a white shirt, hat, and black pants.

Setting

A typical town, on a typical day, in a typical fast-food restaurant, known simply as The Burgie Belter.

Set

The set is divided in two with Herb's office SR and the kitchen/counter/dining area of The Burgie Belter SL.

Herb's office. There is a desk and three chairs.

Kitchen/counter/dining area. There is a counter SL and some small tables and chairs for the dining area.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Herb's office.

Scene 2: The kitchen/counter/dining area, one minute later.

Scene 3: The kitchen/counter/dining area, 10 minutes later.

Scene 4: The kitchen/counter/dining area, six minutes later.

Scene 5: Herb's office and the kitchen/counter/dining area, moments later.

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Props

Fast-food items (hamburger, fries, soda etc.)
Large plastic food container

Sound Effects

Music of your choice

**“All of a sudden,
you have six kids
in three years,
a nagging wife,
a lousy job
at The Burgie Belter,
and a useless,
worthless,
meaningless
bus ticket
to Chicago!”**

—Herb

Scene 1

“Josh and Herb find their kindred spirit”

(AT RISE: Stage is dark. Herb's office at The Burgie Belter. Music comes up under voiceover.)

NARRATOR: *(Voiceover, in a Rod Serling type voice as in “The Twilight Zone.”)* Submitted for your approval: a typical town, on a typical day, in a typical fast-food restaurant known simply as The Burgie Belter. *(Lights up on Herb's office. Josh is nervously pacing back and forth.)* But will it be typical for a typical employee who prepares to give his boss his two-week notice? Maybe not so typical, especially for those who have figured out that this is a bad imitation of Rod Serling, indicating something unusual is about to happen, something, well, atypical. And even as those younger than 50 years of age turn to their parents, friends, teachers, or mentors to ask who the hell Rod Serling is, they have already figured out that they are about to witness what one might consider to be a typical day in The Twilight Zone...or what passes for The Twilight Zone in these times...

JOSH: *(To himself.)* Okay, Josh. Be steady. There is no reason to be nervous. No reason. People quit jobs every day. Sure they do. They walk right in, they give their notice, and their boss says, simply, “Great, I understand. Thank you for doing a great job. You were a wonderful worker, and I wish you the best.” No yelling, no screaming, no guilt trips about just being trained, and just getting good, and then you quit. *(Slowly works himself up and gets more and more excited.)* It's a burger joint, for Christ sake. How hard is it to train someone anyway? No way can he yell at me because any dickhead off the street can do this stupid job. *(Herb Butter enters, startling Josh.)* Herb! Do you have a moment?

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HERB: Sure. I always have a minute for my best fry cook.

Nobody runs that griddle quite like you do.

JOSH: Oh, c'mon. You could find somebody to replace me in a second. *(Chuckles nervously.)* Any, uh, dickhead...

HERB: What are you driving at, Josh?

JOSH: I quit.

HERB: I see.

JOSH: And I feel really bad, Herb, I really do. I mean, I know I said I would work here for a while, and it's just been a couple months, but I just got this job offer, and I'd have to move back to Chicago. I can't turn it down.

HERB: What kind of job offer?

JOSH: Uh, sportswriter. I'd be a sportswriter for a small newspaper outside Chicago.

(Herb gets up and moves to the back of his office. Pause. Josh looks a bit relieved to have finally told Herb.)

HERB: That's nice...I always wanted to be a sportswriter...

JOSH: Oh, really?

HERB: ...in Chicago...

JOSH: Oh. Well...

HERB: Yeah, a sportswriter in Chicago. That's what I always wanted to be...

JOSH: Well, I won't actually be in Chicago. It's a suburb—

HERB: I suppose you won't actually be a sportswriter, either!

JOSH: Oh, I'll be a sportswriter—

HERB: Great! You'll be a sportswriter, and I'll be stuck here, manager of a Burgie Belter in [Fenton, Missouri,] with my hopes and dreams crashed around me like the goddamn Hindenburg! *[Or insert the name of another location.]*

JOSH: This is a fine place to be—

HERB: *(Sings.)* "Sweet dreams and flyin' machines in pieces on the ground." James Taylor. That was almost 40 years ago, and, you know, that man was soooooo right. Forty years of wisdom coming out of the mouth of that man!

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JOSH: He had some song about Mexico, didn't he?

HERB: Boy, those were the days, 40 years ago. A man could dream. James Taylor, Carly Simon, Bread, Chicago...Chicago...Chicago! Oh, why can't I be a sportswriter in Chicago?! That's what I wanted to be. And I could have been, you know. I didn't have to get stuck in this Burgie Belter. I was on my way, up and out! I had a bus ticket to Chicago! Then that bitch forgot her pills!

JOSH: Your wife, Herb?

HERB: Are you calling my wife a bitch?

JOSH: No, no! I'm sure she's a wonderful woman...

HERB: She is kind of a bitch, I guess. You know, I can see forgetting your pills once, but six times? Six times you forget your pills? I don't think so! She trapped me! That's what she did! She trapped me! All of a sudden, you have six kids in three years, a nagging wife, a lousy job at a Burgie Belter, and a useless, worthless, meaningless bus ticket to Chicago!

JOSH: Six kids in three years? Is that even possible?

(Herb drops to the floor and kneels in front of Josh.)

HERB: *(Pleads.)* Take me with you! Take me with you to Chicago!

JOSH: What?! How can I take you to Chicago? I don't even have my bus ticket yet.

HERB: I do! I still have it! I still have my bus ticket to Chicago! I framed it, but I can break the frame!

JOSH: No! Jeez!

HERB: We'll say I'm your father! You tell them you don't make a move without old Dad!

JOSH: I already have a father!

HERB: Then, your uncle! Old Uncle Herb! You tell them you can't write sports without Uncle Herb by your side!

JOSH: No! You are not my uncle. You're not my dad! You're Herb, the Burgie Belter manager, and I can't do anything

about that. Damn it! I tried to be a good guy about this, but you won't let me. I can't do anything about your bitchy wife, or your six kids, or your old bus ticket. I just wanted to give you my two-week notice! *(Gets up to leave.)*

HERB: Oh, is that it? Now I have to take life lessons from a kid? Is that the deal?

JOSH: Look, I got a shift to do...unless you're kicking me out right now.

HERB: No. Do your shift. *(Sarcastic.)* God forbid if we don't get this shit we sell as food out to the public... *(Puts his head down on his desk and falls silent.)*

JOSH: Well, uh, are you sure? *(No response from Herb.)* I mean, maybe I could stay here for a minute. *(No response.)* Because you're gonna be okay, right? *(No response.)* And we're okay, right? *(No response.)* Sure, you're okay. I'm okay. Hey, wasn't that the name of a book or something? *(No response.)* Yes sir, we are just fine, you and me. *(No response. Josh is getting more nervous.)* I mean, you're not dead, right? And you certainly haven't gone veggie here, right? Not you, no way, you are not catatonic, or in some kind of fugue state—

HERB: *(Raises his head, shouts.)* Go!

JOSH: *(Taken aback.)* You mean...

HERB: Go! Just go!

JOSH: You sure? I mean, you're not a danger to yourself or others, are you?

HERB: No. I'm just horribly depressed with no hope in sight. *(Puts his head down on his desk again.)*

JOSH: Okay, then. Good. We're, uh, cool. *(Exits, then quickly ducks back in.)* But this still counts as my two-week notice, right?

HERB: Go!

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

“It happens to Glory”

(AT RISE: Lights up on the kitchen/counter/dining area of The Burgie Belter, one minute later. Lyle is in the kitchen with Glory, and Keisha is at the counter SL. Josh enters SR, sort of in a daze.)

GLORY: *(To Josh.)* There you are! So what time can you pick me up for the party?

JOSH: *(Distracted.)* What?

GLORY: The party? What time can we go to the party tonight? *(She looks at Josh, who keeps looking in the direction of Herb's office.)* Hello?! Josh?! The party tonight...? Josh, are you listening to me?

JOSH: *(Not listening to her.)* Did you know Herb is nuts?

GLORY: Huh?

JOSH: Did you know Herb is nuts? I mean, *really* nuts.

GLORY: Of course, he's nuts. Everyone knows he's nuts.

JOSH: No, I don't mean nuts like, everybody thinks the boss is nuts. I mean, he's really, really crazy. He's lost it!

GLORY: What are you talking about?

JOSH: Go to the office if you don't believe me. He's there right now. The guy is a mess! He flipped out on me, quivering in his chair like a blob of Jell-o or something!

GLORY: Josh, really, what are you talking about?

LYLE: Order up! *(Pushes some fast-food items toward Keisha, who is at the counter.)*

KEISHA: K!

JOSH: He thinks I'm going to take him to Chicago.

GLORY: What for?

JOSH: To be a sportswriter! He thinks I'm taking him on a bus to Chicago to be a sportswriter.

GLORY: What? I'm sorry, I can't even...what are you talking about? Herb would be a sportswriter?

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JOSH: No, actually I would be the sportswriter. He would just come with me.

GLORY: On the bus...

JOSH: Yes.

GLORY: To Chicago...

JOSH: Yes!

GLORY: To be a sportswriter...

JOSH: Yes! Well, actually, I would be the sportswriter. He would just come along, I guess.

GLORY: And you think *he's* nuts! Josh, what are you talking about?

(Lyle approaches Glory and Josh.)

LYLE: *(To Josh.)* You know, I always wanted to be a sportswriter.

JOSH: No! Not you, too!

LYLE: *(Confused.)* What did I say?

KEISHA: *(Sarcastic.)* To be a sportswriter, you have to know something about, uh, sports. Oh, and you need to be able to write, too.

LYLE: I write!

KEISHA: Text messages don't count.

(Herb wanders in from his office, looking distant but a little more together than before. He comes up behind Josh and puts his arm around Josh's shoulders.)

HERB: *(To Josh.)* How's my guy, eh? *(Glory just looks on in amazement.)* My buddy, taking his old Uncle Herb to Chicago with him! *(Herb then faces the audience and begins pacing.)*

LYLE: Hi, Herb!

HERB: Lyle! Lyle, my boy! Now you would make a good Burgie Belter manager, you know that? I mean, you know,

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in case something happened to me... (*Turns and smiles or winks at Josh.*) ...in case I suddenly was gone.

LYLE: Uh, gee, thanks, Herb. I didn't know you were Josh's uncle!

JOSH: Oh, for—

KEISHA: (*To no one in particular.*) Why does he get to be manager? I've been here longer. I work the register. I tally up the receipts. Oh, and, by the way, if Lyle is manager, we should all stick our heads in the deep fryer!

HERB: Okay, Keisha, you can be manager.

LYLE: Hey! At least I know enough to keep my head out of the deep fryer!

GLORY: Uh, Mr. Butter, are you okay?

HERB: Herb. Call me Herb. My dad was Mr. Butter, heh-heh. In fact, so was my granddad...and his dad before him, and before him...a long line of Mr. Butters. But not me! No sir, I'm just Herb...Herb, the Burgie Belter manager. That's what I am, that's what I'll always be...good old Herb, the Burgie Belter manager...

JOSH: Uh, well, Herb...maybe you should sit down, or go back in the office or something...

HERB: (*Turns to Josh.*) I'm never going to be anything else! Who am I kidding?! I'm Herb the Burgie Belter manager! Fuck! Go ahead, take me to Chicago, what the hell difference will that make? I'll probably end up managing a Burgie Belter up there, too! (*Thinks.*) Do they even have Burgie Belters in Chicago?

JOSH: I think—

HERB: Who the fuck cares!? (*Calming down a bit.*) I'm sorry...I guess I should just...ah, crap...just face it. It's not so bad, I guess...

GLORY: Sure, Mr. Butter...

HERB: (*Turns to Glory.*) Will you call me Herb, for Chrissakes?! Didn't you hear me? Damn, my dad was Mr. Butter, and he was a prick! There, I said it! My dad was a prick! You know what I called him?

JOSH: A prick?

HERB: Mr. Butter! Can you believe that prick had me call him Mr. Butter?

JOSH: Well, some guys are pricks, I guess, uh, Herb.

LYLE: Did you just call his dad a prick?

JOSH: He said it first!

HERB: He called my wife a bitch, too.

LYLE: Wow.

GLORY: What is going on here?

HERB: Ah, it's okay...my dad *was* a prick, and my wife *is* a bitch. It's just my lot in life.

(Keisha has doubled back from the counter and is now standing next to Glory.)

KEISHA: What's going on here? Did Herb just call his wife a bitch?

GLORY: Well, as near as I can tell, Mr. But— *(Corrects herself.)* Herb wants Josh to take him to Chicago to be a sportswriter—

KEISHA: Herb would be a sportswriter? Can *he* write?

GLORY: I don't know. Josh would be the sportswriter. Herb would just be along for the ride.

KEISHA: Why?

GLORY: I really don't know, but it has something to do with Herb's wife being a bitch and his dad being a prick, and, well, Herb may or may not be Josh's uncle.

KEISHA: Huh?

GLORY: I don't know...

KEISHA: Okay, I'm going back to the counter. It's too fucked up back here.

JOSH: Herb, why don't you just go back to the office and sit down. Or maybe even go home, eh? I mean, we can cover here for a while.

HERB: *(Moping.)* I'll just sit at one of the tables.

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JOSH: I'm not so sure it's good for customers to see the manager whimpering out front.

(Josh starts to escort Herb SR toward the door to his office.)

HERB: Well...

(Josh manages to push Herb toward the door.)

JOSH: There you go, sir. You just go in and sit down and...

(By this time, Herb has exited into his office.) Jeez.

GLORY: Will he be okay?

JOSH: Fuck if I know. I'm not a psychiatrist.

LYLE: *(Proudly.)* Did you hear him say I'm manager material?

(Glory, Josh, and Keisha give him a look.) He said I could take over if anything happened to him!

JOSH: That could be sooner than you think.

GLORY: I don't understand. What made Herb go off? What happened to him?

JOSH: Oh, it was me, I guess. All I did was try to give him my two-week notice.

GLORY: *(Shocked.)* You're quitting?

JOSH: Well, yeah. I mean, semester's almost over. I was going to quit anyway, so I thought I would quit before finals. I need to pull my finals out so I can graduate.

GLORY: You were quitting...

JOSH: I had to lie to him a little. I mean, I knew he'd be pissed if I just quit, so I made up this shit about becoming a sportswriter. I didn't know he would just flip out like that.

GLORY: *(Angry.)* And when were you going to tell me?

JOSH: Huh?

GLORY: When were you going to tell me? About quitting. And why did you have to make up something about being a sportswriter? Josh, what's going on here?

JOSH: Look, this is my last semester. I knew I was going to graduate and move back to Chicago. I mean, no offense to

[mid-Missouri], but I'm not staying here. I figure I got a better chance for work back in Chicago. And I can stay with my parents for a while. But I needed some cash, and I applied here thinking it would be a nice little side job. I could work late, stuff like that. Which was fine. Except Herb said he didn't want to hire someone, train them, and then have them quit. So, of course, I said I wouldn't quit. But now I have to quit. I just don't want him to know I planned to quit all along. See?

GLORY: You planned to quit all along?

JOSH: Well, yeah...

GLORY: (*Upset.*) So, when you took this job, you knew all along it would just be for a short time and that you were moving back to Chicago...

JOSH: Exactly! So, you see my situation here.

GLORY: I see it all right! I...I...can't believe it! You shit!

(*Glory slaps Josh.*)

JOSH: What was that for?!

GLORY: Where do I fit in here? You never told me about the grand plan! I guess I was the girlfriend for the semester, too! When were you gonna give me two weeks notice? (*She goes to strike Josh again, but this time he intercepts her hand and grabs her by the wrist. Shouts.*) Let go of me!

JOSH: Hold on a second. It was not like that!

GLORY: You are such a liar!

JOSH: It was *not* like that! I never...I just never counted on you.

GLORY: Fuck you.

JOSH: Look, Glory, I didn't know I was going to meet you.

GLORY: But you did! You did meet me! And you went a little farther than that, too.

JOSH: All right...

GLORY: But apparently fucking doesn't rate changing the plan, eh?

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JOSH: Whoa! That is not fair!

GLORY: When was I going to find out...when you and Herb were on the bus to Chicago?!

JOSH: That's just... *(Slight pause.)* I'm *not* taking Herb to Chicago!

GLORY: I guess you're not taking me, either, are you?

(Glory storms offstage. Josh just watches her go.)

JOSH: Glory....

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

“Keisha awakens”

(AT RISE: Lights up on the kitchen/counter/dining area of The Burgie Belter, 10 minutes later. Josh is in the kitchen. He has opened a large container and has stuck his head inside it.)

JOSH: Unbelievable.

KEISHA: What?

JOSH: These onions. Look at this...I stick my whole face inside this tub of dehydrated onions and not one tear!

KEISHA: Dehydrated onions?

JOSH: Are these even food?

KEISHA: Well, maybe you're just tear-proof.

(Josh puts the container down.)

JOSH: What is that supposed to mean?

KEISHA: Nothing.

JOSH: It means something.

KEISHA: It's just that, well, maybe some guys don't get tears about anything...onions, sad movies...*people*...

JOSH: Now that definitely means something.

KEISHA: Just...forget I said anything.

JOSH: No, you mean Glory.

KEISHA: Of course I mean Glory, you idiot.

JOSH: Why am I an idiot?

KEISHA: I don't know why, but you are. You're sitting here sniffing fake onions while someone you supposedly care about just walked out on you.

JOSH: Are they fake? I thought so!

KEISHA: God! *(Gives him a look.)*

JOSH: All right, I *do* care about Glory. But what was I supposed to do?

KEISHA: Go after her! Chase her down! Haven't you ever seen any cheesy romantic comedies? The chase-down through the streets is almost a requirement in any relationship nowadays.

JOSH: In movies, maybe—

KEISHA: At least it might show her you have some kind of fire, some kind of passion, some kind of...backbone! What's the deal with all the guys around here? You and Lyle and Herb are three of the biggest wimps I've ever seen.

JOSH: Wimps!

KEISHA: What happens when you come to work at Burgie Belter? Are the men required to have some kind of spine removal surgery to work here? Is there some closet where you have to check your manhood when you walk through the door?

(Josh starts to speak, but is interrupted by Lyle.)

LYLE: Josh! You gotta come! Herb's freaking out!

JOSH: He's been freaking out all day.

LYLE: Yeah, but I think he's worse!

(Josh looks toward the front, then toward Lyle, then toward Keisha.)

JOSH: Look, I can't do it. I can't deal with him. He's just gonna have to freak. *(He looks at Keisha, who gives him a sort of knowing smirk and starts walking back up to the counter.)* What? What now?

KEISHA: Nothing. Go talk to Herb. I guess he's the one you care about. I mean, you *are* taking him to Chicago...

JOSH: I am *not*... *(Realizes.)* Oh Christ! *(To Lyle.)* All right, I'll talk to Herb. *(To Keisha.)* But only for a minute! I'll calm him down, and then you just watch me chase Glory down. You just watch! You're gonna see something then!

KEISHA: Sure I am. Watching a man without a spine try to run down the street will be something to see!

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[END OF FREEVIEW]