

## The Beaumont Technique

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A one-act play

By Rom Watson

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## Cast

BITSY, assistant, 30's - 50's

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT, actor, 50's - 60's, very full of himself

DUANE, an acting student, 20's - 30's

The location: a small theatre in Los Angeles.

The time: the present.

The lights rise on the mostly empty stage of a small, black-box theatre in Los Angeles. A table, (or perhaps a wooden cube), is on stage. BITSY, an ex-con, enters from the audience carrying a small, brand new waste basket. She crosses to the table, removes items from the waste basket and puts them on the table. There is a box of tissue, an adhesive tape dispenser and a hand mirror. She sets the waste basket on the floor next to the table.

BITSY

I hope Sebastian is good at this.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

(From off stage.)

Is everything ready for me?

BITSY

Yes.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

(From off stage.)

Then I shall make my entrance.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT enters grandly from backstage.

BITSY

This is not a performance.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Life is a performance.

He crosses to the table and rearranges the items.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

How many students today? I want to make sure I pace myself.

BITSY

Only one person responded to the ad.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

One? Why didn't you postpone until we had more students?

BITSY

This will be good practice for you. Think of it as trial run.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

A preview performance of The Beaumont Technique.

BITSY

Exactly. Besides. You need the money.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I am well aware of my current financial shortcomings.

BITSY

Good. Then you'll remember to be polite.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

(Somewhat insulted.)

I am always polite.

BITSY

Yeah, but you're not always kind. Remember to be kind.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I am not the ogre you think I am. If that's your opinion of me, why are you still my assistant?

BITSY

Because you're such a good actor.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Thank you, Bitsy.

BITSY

Now try to be a good teacher as well. I'll go check and see if he's here.

BITSY exits.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

One student. And we rented the theatre for the entire morning. Perhaps it's just as well there's only one. I mustn't overdo it on my first day. And when this student spreads the word he studied with the great Sebastian Beaumont, I'll have more disciples than I can handle.

Bitsy enters from the audience, followed by  
DUANE.

BITSY

This is Duane.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Duane. How nice to meet you. Thank you, Bitsy, you may go. Please let us know when the hour is up.

BITSY exits.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Welcome.

DUANE

Hi.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Don't say "Hi," say "Hello." It will make you sound more sophisticated.

DUANE

Uh, okay . . . "Hello."

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Better. Now. I believe the best way to learn is by doing. So after I demonstrate a lesson, you will try it yourself.

DUANE

Okay. Sounds good.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Excellent. Step One of The Beaumont Technique is to determine what your character looks like. I, Sebastian Beaumont, will show you how some of the greatest actors of the past hundred years have created indelible, iconic characterizations.

DUANE

What are the other steps?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Ah yes, the syllabus. There are three steps in The Beaumont Technique. Step One is the physical transformation into the character. Step Two is to write a detailed biography of the character from his birth to the moment he opens his mouth to speak his first line. That way you can think the characters thoughts, and ONLY the characters thoughts, from the moment you step on stage.

Or from the moment the cameras roll, depending on the job. Step Three is to memorize your lines and know them so well that you can begin acting from any line in the scene. You won't always have the luxury of starting from the beginning.

DUANE

Aren't steps two and three more important than step one?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Au contraire! Steps two and three are self-explanatory and any decent actor already does them. If you're not already doing steps two and three, there is no hope of you ever attaining my level of great acting. What I prefer to focus on when teaching The Beaumont Technique, is Step One, the physical transformation.

DUANE

(Unconvinced.)

Okay . . .

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

And by "physical transformation," I mean you must make yourself look as unattractive as possible. Hideous, if you can manage it. As I always say when asked about my acting process, "If I don't look horrible, I don't feel like I'm really acting. I feel like I'm just . . .being myself."

DUANE

And what's wrong with that?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Nobody wants to watch you be yourself. Trust me. The audience doesn't like *you*, they like the character you're playing. So you must erase yourself. You must make yourself disappear, so that the only thing the audience sees: is the *character*.

DUANE

Okay . . .but why does that mean I have to look unattractive?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Beauty is a bell curve. Very few people are truly ugly, and very few are stunningly beautiful. Most of us fall somewhere in the middle. Which is fine for every day life, but to be an actor, you must be either a character actor or a leading man.

DUANE

So I'll be a leading man.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

You're not handsome enough to be a leading man. You're handsome, yes. Handsome enough for real life. But not for acting.

DUANE

I have played leading roles.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Where?

DUANE

In plays.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

That's theatre. You look better from far away.

DUANE

I beg your pardon?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

We all do. But to be attractive enough for television or movies you have to be a genetic freak. When I was your age I was much better looking than you are, and even *I* wasn't handsome enough to be a leading man.

DUANE

And who decides what is handsome enough?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

No one "decides." It's determined by your jawline.

DUANE

My jaw?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Yes. You don't have the right jawline to be a leading man. Neither did I. But I will show you how to be the best character actor you can be.

DUANE

So you're saying I'll never get a lead role?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

There are many wonderful leading roles for character actors.

DUANE

Like what?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Richard the Third; the Elephant Man; the Hunchback of Notre Dame.

DUANE

That's it?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

No! There's more; there's the Phantom of the Opera, . . .and just a few years ago, Nick Dear wrote a stage adaptation of Frankenstein.

DUANE

Frankenstein?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Yes! You could play The Creature! For roles such as these, I recommend you take a course in make-up. Perhaps invest in prosthetic teeth. And I can give you the name of a good wig store. But let's get started. The first method to make yourself look less attractive is one I'm sure you've heard of. It's what Marlon Brando did in The Godfather.

DUANE

Who?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

(Shocked and disappointed.)

Marlon Brando. One of the greatest actors ever to appear on screen. He stuffed his cheeks to alter the shape of his face.

DUANE

Stuffed them with what?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I prefer to cut up an old T-shirt and use pieces of that. But today we'll use Kleenex. It's disposable and hygienic.

Sebastian pulls out two tissues from the box and stuffs them into his cheeks, one on each side, pushing them down along the sides of his lower jaw. Then he pulls out a third tissue, tears it in half, and puts one half behind his lower lip and the other half behind his upper lip.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Use your tongue to push the tissue into place. And always check yourself in a mirror to make sure the tissue cannot be seen when you speak.



DUANE

You look terrible.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT  
(Genuinely touched by this complement.)

Thank you!

DUANE

But your face is distorted.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Exactly. Now you try it.

Duane takes two tissues from the box and stuffs them in his cheeks.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Good. Let me show you.

Sebastian grabs the hand mirror from the table and holds it up in front of Duane, who is slightly horrified by what he sees.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Brando only used prosthetics inside his *lower* jaw, but try the upper lip, to see how it looks.

Duane takes a third tissue, tears it in half, and stuffs one half behind his upper lip.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)  
(Almost gleeful.)

Now you look even worse.

He holds up the mirror for Duane's perusal.

DUANE

Ugh.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Now the lower lip.

Duane stuffs the other half of the tissue behind his lower lip while looking in the mirror.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

(Proud.)

Good work. You may have a talent for this.

DUANE

Thanks?

Sebastian sets the hand mirror and the box of tissue on the table and grabs the waste basket.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

When you *look* like someone else, it's easier to *become* someone else. And becoming someone else is what acting is all about.

Sebastian holds the wastebasket under his chin and spits out the tissues in his mouth. In doing so, his face makes extreme contortions. He then holds the waste basket up to Duane's face so he can spit out the tissues. Duane, however, uses his fingers to pull the tissues out and drop them in. Sebastian sets down the waste basket.

DUANE

Do I really have to make myself look that bad?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

As far as the people who do the casting are concerned, you either have to look like George Clooney or you have to look like Danny DeVito. There is no in-between with them. You're never going to look like George Clooney, so you have to try really hard to look like Danny DeVito. (He pauses for emphasis.) Otherwise they won't know how to cast you.

DUANE

(Skeptical.)

Uh huh.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I like it when you ask questions. It means you're engaged in the learning process. Oh, and when you go to auditions, always take a lot of Kleenex. You never know when you're going to need to distort your features.

DUANE

Thanks.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Now the second method to make yourself look less attractive is something Lon Chaney did in 1925 when he played The Phantom of the Opera.

DUANE

Who?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Lon Chaney. He starred in silent movies; it's understandable you haven't heard of him.

Sebastian goes to the tape dispenser on the table, gets a five-inch section of adhesive tape, and puts one end of the tape on the bottom of his nose and the other end on his forehead, pulling the tip of his nose upward.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Chaney used small hooks in his nose that were tied to fishing wires which were then attached under the front of his wig. But you get the idea. It changes your profile. (He turns his head to show off his profile.) It gives you an entirely new look.

DUANE

I see that.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Now you.

Sebastian gets another five-inch section of tape, puts one end on the bottom of Duane's nose and the other end on Duane's forehead. He then holds up the hand mirror so Duane can inspect himself.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Look at you. So different. So bad. Of course for a role you would never use Scotch tape, you would use a prosthetic or perhaps a combination of medical tape and spirit gum. But I wanted to show you how different you can look just by changing one aspect of your appearance. I want you to open your mind to all the possible ways you can look grotesque. Let your imagination run wild.

DUANE

Uh huh.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Another way to alter your appearance is to use prosthetics to pin your ears forward to make them more prominent.

Perhaps Sebastian gets another piece of tape and tapes Duane's ear forward and then holds up the hand mirror so Duane can inspect himself.

DUANE

Grotesque.

Sebastian sets the hand mirror on the table. They remove the adhesive tape from their faces and put it in the waste basket. Perhaps Duane looks at his watch.

DUANE

Are you through telling me all the ways I can make myself look unattractive?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

There is one other, more extreme method of making yourself less attractive.

DUANE

I'm afraid to ask, but, what is it.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Do what Marlon Brando did. Gain so much weight that you don't even look like yourself anymore. In his later years he deliberately changed himself from a leading man into a character actor. That's what made Brando one of the greatest actors who ever lived: his willingness to go to extremes.

DUANE

So why don't *you* weigh three hundred pounds?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

It's hard for me to admit this, but . . . I do have a bit of . . . vanity.

DUANE

(Under his breath.)

A bit?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I don't want to weigh three hundred pounds.

DUANE

Most people don't, unless they're a sumo wrestler.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I . . . never had the courage to do it. Perhaps you will be braver than I. But if you do decide to gain three hundred pounds and deliberately ruin your health, you must do it under a doctor's supervision.

DUANE

Of course.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Good. I cannot stress this enough: talk to a doctor before you do anything drastic. Next I want to show you how to change your face without using any devices. In 2015, I had the opportunity to play one of the Muppets.

DUANE

A Muppet?

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Yes. Very little dialogue, but fun to play. Let me show you my characterization.

Sebastian imitates Beaker. Beaker is known for uttering only one syllable, which he repeats over and over: "Meep." Though this word always appears in print as "Meep," the "p" is silent. To imitate Beaker, Sebastian distorts his face by turning both ends of his mouth down.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Meep . . . Meep . . . Meep . . . Meep . . . Meep.

Sebastian stops imitating Beaker. He looks at Duane, and Duane realizes he is expected to compliment Sebastian.

DUANE

(Unenthusiastically.)

Wow.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Wow is right. But enough about my talent. Did you see how I achieved it? Look how I changed the shape of my face by drawing the ends of my mouth as far down as possible.

Sebastian demonstrates by drawing the ends of his mouth down.

DUANE

I see.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Would you like to try?

DUANE

No, I'll pass on this one. I don't think I'll be playing Beaker.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Well, no, not after I've played the role to perfection. But take a look at the other Muppets. Pick one and imitate it. Stand in front of a mirror and see just how far you can distort your face in all directions. That will be your homework.

DUANE

Right.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Duane, you do show promise as an actor. And you're willing to try new things, which is essential. You must be open to playing all types of characters.

DUANE

(Appalled by this class but being polite.)

This has been fascinating, but I'm afraid I have to leave now.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Oh, hour up already? My, the time flew by. Well, it always does when the creative juices are flowing. You can schedule your next class with my assistant on your way out.

DUANE

Uh . . . yeah. I'll give her a call when I know my schedule.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Fine. And remember your homework. Imitate a Muppet in front of the mirror.

DUANE

Okay.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Till next time.

DUANE

Bye.

DUANE exits.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I have a real talent for teaching. I think this may be my “calling.” And how satisfying to give back. I will serve others by opening up new horizons for clueless young people. My life is about to go in a wonderful new direction. I, Sebastian Beaumont, will be the greatest acting teacher of my generation!

A moment of silence. Bitsy enters.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Did you get the money?

BITSY

No. He refused to pay.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Why?

BITSY

He said the class was terrible. And I agreed with him.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

What!?

BITSY

I was listening in. He's right.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

You think I'm a lousy actor?

BITSY

You're a very good actor. But you're a lousy teacher.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I'm sure I shall improve with the next student.

BITSY

There won't be a next student. I'm cancelling the ad.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

But . . . The Beaumont Technique! I must pass my acting wisdom on to future generations.

BITSY

Sebastian, you don't have a "technique." You just have a bunch of weird ideas that work for you because you're so talented you can play anything. But those weird ideas aren't going to work for anyone else.

A pause as Sebastian takes this in and tries to process the information.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

(Hiding his disappointment.)

Well what shall we do now? We have the theatre for the entire morning.

BITSY

No we don't. I told Amber we only needed it for one hour. She cut me a deal.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

That's a relief. Good job.

BITSY

Thank you.

A pause as his disappointment overtakes him.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

What am I going to do, now that my teaching career is over?

BITSY

You taught for ten minutes. That is not a career.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

It felt like one.

BITSY

There are other ways to earn money.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Such as?

BITSY

Brothel, meth lab, crack house, . . .



SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

*Legal* ways to earn money.

BITSY

That does narrow it down. (Pause.) Sebastian, you were never meant to teach. You were meant to act.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

I suppose you're right.

BITSY

Teaching would have only distracted you from your acting.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

If I had devoted myself to teaching, I would have avoided my destiny.

BITSY

You've been bitching about how you haven't had a good role since Beaker, well get out there and audition.

To lighten the mood, Sebastian imitates Beaker.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Meep . . .Meep . . .Meep . . .Meep . . .Meep.

Bitsy is delighted and laughs.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

I'm glad I can give you some amusement.

BITSY

Do it again!

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Oh alright. It *is* one of my signature characterizations. Meep . . .Meep . . .Meep . . .Meep . . .Meep.

Bitsy laughs and claps her hands together with glee. Then Sebastian has an idea and stops.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Perhaps I'll try my hand at directing.

Bitsy slumps and perhaps buries her face in her hands.

BITSY

Uhhh.

Pleased at having discovered his next career move, Sebastian resumes imitating Beaker.

SEBASTIAN BEAUMONT

Meep . . . Meep . . . Meep . . . Meep . . . Meep.

The lights fade to black. End of play.