

The Exquisite Corpse Adventure
Reader’s Theatre Production of Episode 27 “Over Easy”
by Katherine Paterson

The Exquisite Corpse Adventure is a progressive episodic story game created as a fun and entertaining national reading and writing outreach initiative targeted at readers ages 9 to 15. The story includes a total of 27 episodes, all of which were originally published electronically on the Library of Congress’ READ.GOV website and then published by Candlewick Press in hardcover and paperback in August 2011. *The Exquisite Corpse Adventure* is also available on audio.

Contributing authors and illustrators to *The Exquisite Corpse Adventure* are: M.T. Anderson, Natalie Babbitt, Calef Brown, Susan Cooper, Kate Di Camillo, Timothy Basil Ering, Jack Gantos, Nikki Grimes, Shannon Hale, Lemony Snicket, Steven Kellogg, Gregory Maguire, Megan McDonald, Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, Linda Sue Park, Katherine Paterson, James Ransome, Jon Scieszka, and Chris Van Dusen.

The Exquisite Corpse Adventure is a joint project of The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance (www.thencbla.org) and the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress (READ.GOV/cfb). You can read more about the history of this project in the article titled “What Is The Exquisite Corpse Adventure?” on the NCBLA’s companion educational resource site. To visit *The Exquisite Corpse Adventure* Education Resource Center, go to www.thencbla.org and click on **The Exquisite Corpse Adventure**.

Episode 27, the final episode of *The Exquisite Corpse Adventure*, was adapted to a Reader’s Theatre production by Katherine Paterson (the author of Episode 27) for a performance at the National Book Festival in September 2010. To watch a webcast of the Reader’s Theatre production at the 2010 National Book Festival (starring *Exquisite Corpse Adventure* contributors M. T. Anderson, Timothy Basil Ering, Linda Sue Park, Katherine Paterson, and James Ransome), visit READ.GOV and select ***The Exquisite Corpse Adventure*** to display the webcast links.

Readers: 19 or more. Fewer readers can be used by sharing roles.

Reader Ages: 8 and up.

Length: Approximately 20 minutes.

Roles: In order of appearance: Narrator, Nancy, Joe, Angel, Ringmaster, Eggy-Thing A, Sybil Hunch, Eggy-Thing Yolk Chorus (This includes everyone on stage and in the audience.), Eggy-Thing White Chorus (This includes White A, White B, and White C.), Genius Kelly, Eggy-Thing B, White A, White B, White C, Boppo, Good Clown, Headless Woman, Professor Alistair Sloppy, Roberta, Libby Sloppy, and Hathi the Elephant. The narrator’s role is divided so that more than one person can read this part to accommodate a larger cast if needed.

Notes: The script has been double-spaced and formatted in a larger size font to facilitate easy reading when printed. This script also includes opportunities for audience participation. Suggested signs to hold up for audiences to read include: “Yuk, Yuk, Yuk,” “Screeech,” “Who’s There?,” and “Happily Ever After.”

NARRATOR: If you have been following this adventure as closely as the authors have hoped, you will not be surprised to know that at this moment of supreme crisis, Nancy, the brave, the intelligent, the moral Nancy, took charge of the situation.

NANCY: First of all, Pirandello must stop the train. (CALLING AFTER HIM) And tell the Ringmaster to set up the tent as quickly as possible with the large opening facing the woods! (TO THE OTHERS) It's so the aliens will come rushing in after us.

JOE: We're going to be standing in there *waiting* for them?

ANGEL: Good thinking, Nancy. We should all go now and help them set up the tent. We can do it in that grassy spot right beside the tracks. There's no time to lose.

NARRATOR: Everyone, except Genius Kelly who was very speedy when he chose, swung up on Hathi's back and the great beast raced toward the spot.

NARRATOR: The train had barely shuddered to a stop when all the members of the circus had been hustled off and, led by the shouts of the ringmaster, went to work. As you can imagine, persons who belong to a circus are well practiced in setting up a tent in an expeditious manner. In less time than it would take you to sing "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall" followed by all four verses of "The Star Spangled Banner" (provided you know all four verses) the big top was erected.

NARRATOR: With no time to spare, however. Indeed, Hathi and the other friendly pachyderms had barely hammered down the last tent pole when the invasion of Eggy-Things, having cast off all their disguises, came streaming through the woods and slurped into the tent at such a speed that our friends winced at the *schlap* against the canvas on the opposite side. The ringmaster was already on the job.

RINGMASTER: Ladies, Gentlemen, gentle beasts, and uh – Super Ova! We have, if a bit hastily, assembled for you the greatest little show on earth.

EGGY-THING A: Forget the show on earth! We want extraterrestrial jokes!

ANGEL: Ah, of course, but ours are old and tired and very earthy, we need your help.

SYBIL HUNCH: Yes! Give us your yolks!

EGGY-THING A: Then (yuk, yuk), the yolk will be on you, old voman! After the yolks we'll give you our very specially imported brand of salmonella. You will die slowly and painfully, which will be fun to see, but we won't be able to linger too long. We have to spread our contagion throughout the planet.

NARRATOR: With these words of mucousy menace, the Eggy-Things started across the width of the tent toward our heroes.

JOE: No, no! Ve only vant da yolks!

NARRATOR: The silly ova began laughing and separating themselves, the yellows from the whites.

EGGY-THING YOLK CHORUS: Toodle—oo.

EGGY-THING A: Be ready. As soon as we stop yolking around, slither hither. We gotta yob to do. Yuk, yuk.

EGGY-THING WHITE CHORUS: Don't worry, we're white behind you!

GENIUS KELLY: Not bad for ones so colorless. But, somehow, we expect better from you yellows. If the condemned prisoner can request one last good smoke, we'd like to go out with one last good joke.

NARRATOR: The eggy yolks couldn't bear to be sneered at by a pig and began to scramble for the honor of delivering the last good joke.

EGGY-THING A: Knock, knock!

YOLK CHORUS: Who's there?

EGGY-THING A: Oregon.

YOLK CHORUS: Oregon, who?

EGGY-THING A: Ore—e-gonna take over the world?

YOLK AND WHITE CHORUSES: You betcha!

NARRATOR: The yuks that followed this bad joke were so loud they shook the tent. (LOTS OF YUKS FROM EVERYONE INCLUDING THE AUDIENCE)

But, to the invaders' distress, not one of our heroes even cracked a smile. The yolks tried again.

EGGY-THING B: Knock, knock!

YOLK CHORUS: Who's there?

EGGY-THING B: Scieszka

YOLK CHORUS: Scieszka who?

JOE: Gesundheit!

EGGY-THING A: No more shouting out answers!

JOE: I'm sorry, but I do want to have one last laugh before it's all over, and I'd already heard that joke.

NARRATOR: The yolks went into a huddle. Or, for those readers familiar with the game, into a sort of rugby scrum. At last one yolk seemed to separate from the mass. There was the sound of a throat clearing.

EGGY-THING B: (SOUND OF THROAT CLEARING) We are going to have a joke, or, if you prefer, a yolk off. The winner will have the honor of making the final joke.

NARRATOR: Genius Kelly sighed loudly and pretended to examine his hoof. The elephants sighed even more loudly and lay down on the ground and pretended to snore.

EGGY-THING B: If you noodle noggins have any desire to live long enough for a last laugh, this will be your *last* chance.

NARRATOR: With that he/she/or it ducked back into the scrum and soon there arose from that side of the tent such a cacophony of screeches and yuks

(SCREECHES AND YUKS FROM EVERYONE INCLUDING AUDIENCE) that our heroes put their hands, hooves, paws, feet or trunks over their ears in defense.

NANCY: Look!

NARRATOR: Joe looked and what he saw astounded him. The mass of yellows was going around faster and faster. The more the yolks yelled, the faster around they went. The scrum was being scrambled.

JOE: Those stupid yolks are beating themselves up!

NARRATOR: Nancy glanced over at the waiting whites. If they had had eyes, their eyes would have been popping out.

NANCY: Quick! Everyone go into your act. As fast as you can!

NARRATOR: Suddenly the Sick and Tired Circus was sick and tired no more. Genius Kelly danced and whirled into his magical judo act. The twins did loopdy loops on the high wires; the elephants swung their trunks about and then their huge rear ends with their tails a-twirling. The Ringmaster spun around with his whip going at least ninety miles per hour. Roberta grabbed the hand of the headless woman who in turn grabbed a monkey's paw that grabbed the hand of the bearded woman who grabbed a string of chimps who grabbed a seal's flipper who flapped Roberta's other hand and they raced a ring a round a rosie about the startled whites who grew paler and fuller of air by the moment.

NARRATOR: Every now and then a piteous wail arose over the racket of frenzied circus acts:

WHITE A: Help!

WHITE B: Stop! I'm air sick!

WHITE C: We'll mend our wicked ways if you'll stop whipping us!

NARRATOR: But no one even paused to listen. Our heroes knew better than to trust even the pallid portion of the villainous invaders. And before long all the whites had been whipped into a giant meringue, making the lions roar with delight.

JOE: Fire juggling act!

NARRATOR: The clowns grabbed the torches and juggled and breathed fire onto the newly whipped meringue until it stood up in beautiful ecru peaks.

SYBIL HUNCH: Scrambled eggs for a main course and a lovely meringue for dessert. It looks almost good enough to eat.

GENIUS KELLY: (WRYLY) Almost.

NARRATOR: Meanwhile Angel had been busy summoning the Cradle of Time.

With the elephants' help all the scrambled yolks were piled into the cradle, topped off by the giant meringue.

NARRATOR: For a few moments our exhausted friends watched and listened, the beasts panting, the people perspiring, but they needn't have worried. There wasn't even a whimper from the cradle. Neither the scrambled yolks nor the whipped whites showed any sign of reconstituting. The Eggy-Things that had threatened them for so long had been done in by their own rotten humor and the cleverness of our little band of heroes.

ANGEL: Now off you go. Back to the big bang!

BOPPO: Not so fast!

NARRATOR: The ominous, but familiar voice belonged, of course, to Boppo. He had one giant clown foot atop Libby Verrie-Sloppy and another holding Professor Alistair Sloppy to the ground. Both the twins' parents appeared to be asleep.

BOPPO: They are under my power. While the rest of you were busy whipping up trouble, I managed to hypnotize this pair with my best juggling act. It was all done with mirrors – very skillfully, if I do say so myself. Now, I will rescue my comrades and throw these two into the cradle of their own making. Then I will extract one final bomb from my pocket, which will, for sentimental reasons, go off in exactly 47 ticks of the clock.

JOE: Oh, no. Not that stupid juggling act again.

SYBIL HUNCH: Just when I thought misfortune had landed on its head.

GOOD CLOWN: I never trusted that red-nosed ruffian.

GENIUS KELLY: (DEEPLY DEJECTED) Oink.

NANCY: Sing!

JOE: Huh?

NANCY: (SINGING) Lullaby and goodnight,

ANGEL : (BEGINS SINGING, OTHERS JOIN IN) : With roses bedight,

(HUMMING UNDER NARRATOR'S NEXT LINE)

NARRATOR: Before they got to the third line about the lilies, Boppo had sunk to the earth with a snore.

NARRATOR: With catlike quickness, Angel threw the evil clown and his ticking bomb into the cradle and sent him and the whole alien brunch racing toward the creation of the universe.

NARRATOR: It happened so fast that they all simply stared at the empty space in the sky that the cradle had flown through.

HEADLESS WOMAN: (IN A TINY VOICE) Hurray.

NARRATOR: Everyone turned in amazement. The tiny voice had come from the throat of the headless woman – her first spoken word.

NARRATOR: A baby monkey began to clap his tiny hands and soon they were all cheering and dancing and shouting and hugging one another in relief that the danger had passed and in joy at what they had accomplished.

(DRAMATIC PAUSE)

NARRATOR: And now we come to the part of the story no one likes much – the farewells between friends who have suffered and struggled and, yes, even laughed together.

NARRATOR: Pirandello headed off to the forest where he found Orlando munching on gummi bears and took her home. Angel and Sybil said goodbye and started off together, as Angel had become quite fond of the Misfortune Teller and determined to protect her from any misfortunes that still lurked in her neighborhood.

NARRATOR: The last departing pair were Roberta and Genius Kelly. Roberta had cleverly undone Boppo's hypnotic spell over the Senior Sloppys. When their friends and ours had escorted them to the door before Pirandello's shack, the professor gave a lovely little speech, thanking the robot handsomely for all she had done, and then adding, a bit sadly:

PROFESSOR: My dear, you are no longer a corpse, as exquisite as you were and are. You are free to go back to that other dimension where you will find others of your rare kind that I constructed in my years behind the door. They will welcome you as the hero you have become. Take this wonderful pig back with you as he and you belong in that other dimension. He will serve as a companion and reminder of all you have both done to save not only the Sloppy family, but all human and animal kind. The key which you have will take you back through the door. Please lock it behind you and throw away the key, for, though the Eggy-Things no longer exist in that dimension or this one, I am convinced that there should be no more trafficking between our two worlds.

NARRATOR: Genius Kelly opened his snout to make a long speech, but Roberta punched him in the short ribs and smilingly urged him toward the door, though she paused on the threshold to hug the twins and say:

ROBERTA: Now I know I have a heart, because it is breaking.

NARRATOR: It was all Nancy could do to keep from weeping. Even brave Joe was seen to wipe away a tear.

GENIUS KELLY: Wait! I have to tell the twins their true names.

NANCY: Nancy and Joe are not our real names?

GENIUS KELLY: No. Your true names (CLEARS THROAT

CEREMONIOUSLY) are Josephus and Natochka.

NANCY AND JOE: What?

PROFESSOR: I'm sorry, children. We repented as soon as we filed the birth certificates.

LIBBY: That's why we've always called you Joe and Nancy.

JOE: Then is it okay if we just stay Joe and Nancy?

PROFESSOR: Perfectly okay. (PAUSE) Thank you, G. K., for all you have done for our children.

GENIUS KELLY: May I beg a small favor?

PROFESSOR: Certainly.

GENIUS KELLY: I know it sounds preposterous, but could I have one last joke to send me on my way?

JOE: Knock, knock.

GENIUS KELLY: Who may I ask is calling?

JOE: G. K.

GENIUS KELLY: G. K. who?

JOE: Gee, Kan't you stay with us a little longer?

NARRATOR: A fat tear rolled down the porker's black snout.

GENIUS KELLY: Very good. I almost wish I could, but, as you know, I must return.

NARRATOR: With that he waved a hoof and followed Roberta through the door which closed soundly behind them.

NARRATOR: Suddenly Joe, who could never remain gloomy for very long, whipped something out of his pocket. It was the birthday card that had started all their adventures.

JOE: Mom and Dad, when we got your card we were in the middle of a very special birthday party.

NANCY: The Elephant Clown Party! In all the excitement I forgot about it.

HATHI: We didn't forget. Come back to the tent. Everything is ready. We will give you the party of your lives.

NARRATOR: I don't have time to tell you about the wonderful party. You'll have to use your imagination to picture clowns and elephants and seals and lions and a bearded woman and headless woman and monkeys and chimps and every person and creature determined to give the beloved twins the greatest time of their eleven years, even if in their hearts they knew it was not only a birthday bash but a farewell party.

NARRATOR: When it was over, and Nancy and Joe turned for the last worst goodbye to Hathi and all their friends of the circus, the loving pachyderm said to the Sloppy parents:

HATHI: There is no need for you to go. Please make your home with us. Joe and Nancy are already family.

NARRATOR: The Senior Sloppys looked at the twins and then into the pleading eyes of every person and beast assembled.

PROFESSOR: Why not? I could put my inventive mind to work among you all.

LIBBY: Why not? I've always longed to ride bareback on elephants. And I'm a terrible cook.

JOE: Why not? The villains are gone and our parents are here. That was all that was wrong with the Sick and Tired Circus – villains here and parents missing.

NARRATOR: Nancy stroked the place on her arm where the wolf had scratched her. The house with a picket fence and two parents with their twins no longer seemed so desirable. Wasn't a circus the perfect home for a girl who was, at least for the present, part wolf? And besides, she had promised the wolves to speak out for them.

NANCY: Why not?

NARRATOR: Hathi encircled the four Sloppys with her warm trunk.

HATHI: Then it's settled.

NARRATOR: I won't say it was the end of all their adventures, for Nancy and Joe were an adventurous pair, but it brings to a close the Exquisite Corpse Adventure – evil conquered, family united, and friends who lived, I'm quite sure,

EVERYONE INCLUDING THE AUDIENCE: happily ever after.

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