

The Comforts of Homley
a monology

By

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Cast of Characters

<u>Clive, 52:</u>	A favorite teacher - 'Ruining The Curve'
<u>Ruby, 15:</u>	A little sister - 'Holy Water'
<u>Tony, 18:</u>	A secret admirer - 'Shooting Stars'
<u>Wanda, 42:</u>	A mother - 'Nervous Laughter'
<u>Frank, 46:</u>	A police chief - 'The Same Old Story'
<u>Miriam, 18:</u>	A patient - 'The Comforts of Homley'
<u>Recorded Narration:</u>	A voiceover NARRATION, underscored with original music, is to be utilized in the blackouts between each monologue.

Scene

THE COMFORTS OF HOMLEY is comprised of six interlocking monologues which take place in the small fictional hamlet of Homley, Florida. The stage is blank, save for a few small set pieces, a table and two chairs. The rest of the settings should be suggested with lighting and sound. The six monologues of COMFORTS can be performed by one to six actors. Men playing women, and vice-versa, is encouraged.

Time

Around the turn of the 20th century.

ACT I

NARRATOR

On the southern edge of North America, near the tongue-tip of land called Florida, there is a tiny hamlet, a modest scrap of a town, called Homley. Few people go there, but many are from there. Built between the rippling edge of an enormous ocean and the frontier of a primordial swamp, Homley is a town like any other: its dogs run into the streets unannounced on hot August afternoons, and friendliness is more than a custom and less than a religion. Its mothers and fathers love their children, even though some are bound to rebel, and leave, never to return. Most endure, and prosper, even. Homely has two schools. The grammar school was once a bread factory, and twice Homley High has placed fifth in the regional football standings. The students of Homley High are earnest without being particularly inspired, with one quite remarkable exception, where an unusual student and her extra-ordinary teacher collide, like comets in the dark night . . .

RUINING THE CURVEScene 1**The Character**

CLIVE: An English middle-aged teacher at Homley High School.

The Scene

A classroom. AT RISE, Clive is seated behind his desk.

CLIVE

(Pause, with a smile.)

Deadly. Ammonium. Chloride. Deadly Ammonium Chloride. Deadly Ammonium Chloride, anyone? It's so pleasant, before they arrive. Listen to that silence. You can almost eat it. Oh, if only that bell wouldn't ring. They wouldn't come, wouldn't scuff up my floor. I should have never left London, to come here. Homley, Florida, indeed. The floors were always shiny at Beechwood, even on Fridays. They would have made me Headmaster, if Mr. Stiller hadn't come along. He ruined everything. No one could compete with a man like that. He ruined the line of my life, it bent relentlessly downward after him. Still, I should have stayed in England. At least they speak English there.

(Pause)

I wonder if it's time for her. No, too soon. And it just isn't right. Listen to that quiet. Even the chalk dust doesn't move. I could bolt the door. I could. Like Miss O'Hagan did last week. I could bolt it, and push desks against it. Not let anybody in.

(Pause)

I wouldn't give them the satisfaction.

(Pause)

He takes a sheaf of papers from his briefcase.

I should have marked these compositions. But then I would have had to read them.

(Pause)

Well, that doesn't mean I can't mark them anyway. C, C, C - no, make that a D - C. Oh, Anna, Anna, you split infinitives like woodsmen split wood. I'll give you an A, instead of your usual 'F.' I'll startle everyone. I'll announce it. "Boys and girls, everyone got a C on their composition, with the exception of Anna, who has an A, for her paper on . . .

He picks something off the paper.

(MORE)

CLIVE (cont'd)

What is that on her paper? Leftover Wanda's Chicken Wings. Or is it hamburger? "I Like Air," by Anna Molind. I like air cause I need it to really breathe. I like breathing cause I get to really use the air. Air is free. My mother says...is...one of few things we afford anymore without paying for and that is...very nice. Yes, Anna.

He tosses it down.

Definitely A-plus work. I wonder what Miriam Comfort will think of a C? She'll stay after class and argue. Tedious child. She's the most compelling argument for abortion I've ever heard. No, no. She's just too smart for this world. This world doesn't deserve people like us. She's lucky, though, the world hasn't scarred her yet. Oh, listen to that quiet. It's bliss. I'm afraid Miriam is ruining the curve. Mr. Selbrick will call me in and tell me I'm failing too many. That won't do. No, it won't, it won't do. C, C. This is so repetitive. I should have become a pornographer. That's useless repetition, also. Not child pornography, though. The whole point would be to get away from these creatures. I could make my own hours. And there'd be no PTA. Well, maybe: Pornographer's Trade Association. I could choose my friends as I wish. Have a little companionship, perhaps. Miss Gliss smiled at me this morning when I picked up my mail. I wonder, was that an accident? C, C. I wonder if pornographers have families? Little pornographic wives and children in little smutty houses. Little pornographic lives. It must be very lucrative, those magazines are frightfully expensive. Why? It's not as though they spend money on sets and costumes, now, is it? C, C. Oh, dear, Miriam. What did you write? "Hamlet and the Mystical Ideal." Brilliant title. That alone is worth ten thousand Cs.

Placing it to one side

C, C. I wonder what I should do about lunch? I should have made one. C, C. This quiet won't last. I wonder if any of them told their parents how Columbus discovered Lithuania. They were so rapt. Especially when I mentioned the naked Lithuanians running about on their sandy little Lithuanian beaches. I wonder if Miriam will be out sick again today? If she is, I'll give her an A, even though she'll be sorry. Eventually, she'll be sorry. Someone less intelligent than she, but more clever, will ruin her dreams, break the curve of her brilliant life. I can't let that happen to the poor girl. I can't bear to see that happen to someone else.

A bell rings. Fadeout.

Scene Two

After school. CLIVE sits, talking to MIRIAM. There is a flower in a vase on his desk. He has just been handed a book by MIRIAM.

CLIVE

Miriam, I really - I shouldn't - you don't really want me to - I can't - well, if you insist. Just one. Which sonnet? Oh, I haven't read this one in years. If the dull...

(He clears his throat and recites, with feeling.)

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought, Injurious distance should not stop my way; For then, despite of space, I would be brought From limits far remote, where thou dost stay. No matter then, although my foot did stand Upon the farthest earth remov'd from thee; For nimble thought can jump both sea and land, As soon as think the place where he would be. But ah! thought kills me, that I am not thought To leap large lengths of miles, when thou art gone, But that, so much of earth and water wrought, I must attend time's leisure with my moan; Receiving nought by elements so slow But heavy tears, badges of either's woe: I think that's enough, for now. Thank you, my dear, really, you're too kind, too kind. . . Yes, yes, Miriam, it is a strangely beautiful flower - that, that color - what would you call that color - indeed, black, one would have to say - a blue black; and those, those yellow orange things sticking out like that, like teeth. Well, it looks as though it might bite one, doesn't it? Where on earth did you get it? Oh, yes; yes, yes, the old, old woman who lingers by the road near the turnpike. I've often wondered what sort of person buys flowers from her. Enchanted, is it? How nice. You know, my dear, you really shouldn't bring me flowers every week. I mean, I appreciate them, certainly, but when a girl gets to be your age, such a token might be taken to be, well, improper -- and I know it's not and you know it's not but, well, I'm sure you understand. Yes, exactly. Well, back to your essay. I'll read it again, if you insist. You're arguments are quite compelling. Your intelligence is undeniable. I'm just afraid sometimes that it's too easy for you. I don't want to be easy on you, Miriam. You deserve better than that. You are a rare student, especially here. I don't know if you knew him, but several years ago I had a young man who was very much like you, a most brilliant young man. His grasp of the language was not unlike yours, though he didn't write stories as you did. Do, excuse me. Don Williamson was his name. Oh, then you know all about the tragedy. Yes. It's terrible when a young man is troubled. And to be found like that, hanging. Naked. It's very important for you young people to communicate your anxieties, to not let them bore inside of you. Every so often, I lose someone, so I know, I know how it feels. To lose someone dear.

(Pause)

I'm sorry, I was staring, wasn't I? I just. Your eyes are so bright, so clever looking. I'm going to tell you a secret. It's a secret about blue eyes. Don had them, you know. Yes, they were remarkable, weren't they? I've only known one other person, a headmaster back in England, who had eyes like that. But, you know, Don's weren't always blue. No, they were a tired green, like mine. But he discovered something, in all his reading, in an old book he found in the library. Have you ever mixed chlorine bleach with ammonia? You're not a chemist, no. Well, the result of the mixture is a most amazing vapor, which seems, at first, rather choking, but if you lean close and inhale, allowing it to rise into your eyes, it will make them turn. Sometimes, in the evening, after I've had a particularly difficult day, I will lock myself in my bathroom, sprinkle a generous supply of Ajax into the stoppered sink and then lavish it with an equally generous supply of bleach. This is a household miracle and a secret you must tell no one. No one. As I pour the bleach, I drape a towel over my head and bend over the sink. Inhaling the miraculous fumes, I feel the most amazing burning in my eyes, like ecstasy, and look up in the mirror, and there I am, with blue eyes glowing, blue like mist, like peacocks, blue like you've never seen before. It's breathtaking. Absolutely breathtaking.

(Pause)

But in an older person like myself, it doesn't linger, my eyes dwindle back to green within the hour. However for a young person, like Don, it was different. He was blue forever. Forever blue. Shakespeare had blue eyes. They are a sign, not just of intelligence, but of genius. I've often wondered why your eyes aren't blue. It must be terribly disappointing to you. It is an injustice, I think. Well, I'll read your piece again this evening my dear. No, there's no need to thank me. Don't be silly. Yes, thank you, good day.

(Pause, he watches Miriam leave.)

Ah. Listen to that. The unmistakable noise of settling dust.

Fadeout

NARRATOR:

There are many activities available to the inhabitants of Homley. Its library - one of the oldest in the county - has had every one of its books opened at one time or another, an unusual fact in such a small, word-fearing town. Homley has a fine old municipal building and two restaurants - one for quick chicken wings, and one where the owner is offended if you don't linger over your mashed potatoes. Wanda's Chicken Wings are thought by many to be the best in the south, known for their unique flavor, the result of a mysterious recipe which Wanda Comfort guards with all the tenacity of a Florida Panther defending her cubs. It's been reported that some people drive all the way from Miami just to purchase buckets of her wings. Upon their return, these culinary hounds freeze Wanda's Wings so they can enjoy them months later, without having to endure the numbing drive to Homley. Some even tell their friends that the oven reheated wings come from their very own kitchens. It's not a lie, but, like so many things in life, it ain't exactly the truth either.

HOLY WATERScene 1**The Character**

RUBELLA:

A twelve-year-old girl dressed in a smock. Wearing a WANDA'S WINGS paper hat with two wings off the sides, she stands behind a serving counter.

The Setting

Wanda's Wings, a fast food restaurant, late night.

RUBELLA

Mama laughed at me when it happened and I don't think that's right, but that don't matter, mama laughed anyway and what was I gonna do? Mama laughs at everything. Uh-huh. HA! ha-ha ha-ha ha-ha! Just like that, she laughs. Uh-huh. She don't mean nothing by it, she just laughs. A lot of times I think she just gets nervous and laughs. Uh-huh. HA! ha-ha ha-ha ha-ha! Like that. Sorta like a donkey. Like the whole world'd fall apart if it weren't for the fact that she was laughing. Uh-huh. No one can stop her when she gets like that, you couldn't nail her down with a big ole hammer when she gets like that, she gets all over the place. Miriam says she's historical, when she gets like that. Uh-huh. And mama calls me fidgety. Where does she think I get it? Mama laughed so hard that day, but I don't care. It was a miracle. I don't care what she says, I don't care what she thinks. That's why it's a miracle. I don't care what nobody says, no more.

(She hums, taps eyelashes with a finger)

Why do I got such long eyelashes? They's nothing but trouble -- falling in my eyes, where they don't belong. There. I got hair problems everywhere. Look at that. I can't get used to it. I wish my hair was long again. It hadn't been cut since I was six. I think Mama made me cut it on account a what happened. It used to be my fault, what happened.

(Pause, a big grin)

Until my miracle. My miracle washed me clean of everything. Uh-huh. Everything. Now I'm like a, like a newborn baby. Ooooo. Why do we say that? I saw one once, one of them newborns and it was all messy. Like chicken fresh out of the wrap. Getting born is real messy. Uh-huh. I would not do it again. No way.

(Pause, she takes her shoe off and starts cleaning her toes)

(MORE)

RUBELLA (cont'd)

Boy, that ceiling's awful dirty. It could use a good wipe. Uh-huh. I wouldn't buy no chicken from a place with a greasy, spidery ceiling like that. Nuh-uh. Fortunately, I just work here. Well. I do eat here, too. I mean, I have to, we live right there in the back. Maybe I'll ask Miriam to give it a wipe when she's done with the bathroom. I don't like spiders. They got too many arms to touch you with. And I don't have to be touched no more. Nuh-uh.

(Pause; picking her nose, she wipes her finger on her smock and sighs)

Good thing we don't got no customers. Miriam's been in that john for hours. She can't still be studying. I wonder what she really does in there. She better not yell at me when I have to get my mopping stuff out. Smells like she's cleaning something.

(Pause)

Why do we stay open so late? No one wants chicken wings at one in the morning, not in Homley. Nuh-uh.

(Pause, she puckers her lips as if to kiss the chicken)

I ain't ever seen nobody in here after eleven. Mama goes to bed, but she insists we stay open. If we didn't live in the back room, I'd leave. I would. Uh-huh, I would go. But I can't. So I sit here and bless the wings when my spirit says to. Uh-huh I do. When spirit tells me to, I do. I listen, now. Uh-huh, I do lots of things I didn't used to. But always after eleven when no one ever comes in. And I wash 'em off before I puts 'em in the fridge. I'm sure the cold kills any germs. Cold does that. It kills things. Uh-huh.

(Pause)

It ain't fair, how Miriam gets to go to school all the time and I don't. Nuh-uh, no way. If she's so smart, why don't she stay here and teach these here wings those songitss of hers or something and let me go learn things? Nobody believes I'm sick half as much as mama says. Nuh-uh. That day Mr. Selbrick came in, I think he saw me run in the back. And he's principal, Mama could get in a whole heap of trouble. Uh-huh. Mama could get kept after. I'd like to hear her laugh then. You bet I would. Uh-huh. Ha-ha-ha then. Uh-huh. Oh, I feel a blessing comin' over me.

(Pause, she spits on one of the wings)

Oh, my. Who is that there in the parking lot? Did he -- did he see me put my special sauce? I don't think. Nuh-uh. Spirit wouldn't let him see that. Well, what is he waitin' for? Why don't he just come in and get some wings already? Come on, boy, come on in! I could use the company. Ohmigod! It's Tony Bengoechea. Ohmigod. I think he likes me. He's always asking me things about Miriam and the shop and mama and papa. I think that means he likes me. Ohmigod, what am I gonna do? I have responsibilities. I can't get married right now. What about the shop and mama? She needs me. Oh, my!

She ducks behind the counter just as a little entrance bell rings

RUBELLA (cont'd)

Yes, hello. I'm down here. I. Uh. I dropped . . . my shoe. And a chicken wing.

(She places both back on the counter)

What may I do for you? Hi, Tony. Yes. I'm on duty. I can't really chat. I have to be professional.

(Pause, looks at watch)

Eleven-forty-seven. P.M.

(Pause)

It's one with numbers, it's easy. I can't read the other kind too good.

(Pause)

Nuh-uh. I don't know where she is. She's out. I'm all alone. Well, if she's out, she's probably busy, don't you think? I mean, why else would she be out? If she didn't want to do nothing, she could be here with these wings and I could be out. But I'm here. Alone with you.

(Pause)

I don't know. I'd be out doing things. Like you.

(Tony says something; she blushes)

Oh, Tony. You go on. You know my name is Ruby. You know that. Short? What do you mean? Oh. Oh, yeah. I do got a bigger name. Well, you know how mama likes to laugh at everything. Well, when I got born she named me Rubella. That's a sick name, you know. Yeah. Miriam says I'm lucky they didn't call it a measles epidemic, cause I'd be called Measley. That means little-tiny-itty-bitty-not-worth-a-damn. Uh-huh. Or a cancer epidemic. Miriam says I'd be called Cane. And that's a boy's name.

(Pause, she looks down at the chicken)

Okay, which piece? Um. No, I don't think you want that one. Nuh-uh. There's better pieces, that's all. Look, see them little hairs? I told mama we should use a razor to shave 'em, she told me to shut up. It ain't funny if it's about her chicken. My advice is to take one without hair. Not that one. No, it don't, but... How about the one next to it? And that little one? Two for one, I'll give ya two for one. Oh, you want a breast. A course. Boys 'n breasts, breasts 'n boys. This big enough? There ya go, there's your breast.

(She hands him his chicken; he pays her)

I don't know if I got change for that. You sure? You are so nice! Is it warm enough? You sure? Sure you don't want change? I could go in the back and look. Is it good? Good. My, my, you sure do know how to eat.

(Pause, she watches him eat)

I know all about breasts, you know. I developed 'em when I was ten. Uh-huh. They really change the way people look at you. I mean, nobody cares about that part of ya when you're a little girl, it's a chest, an ordinary chest. But the moment you start blooming out, well, all of a sudden you'd

(MORE)

RUBELLA (cont'd)

think you was Jesus from the way people stare at you. Especially men. Papa said by rubbing 'em he'd stop 'em from growing, but it didn't work. Nuh-uh. Maybe he didn't do it enough. It worked when he done it for Miriam. Mama thinks he done it too much with both of us. That's one thing that don't make mama laugh. Nuh-uh, no way. That's why we don't live with papa no more. Because of our breasts. Laughing. Mama says I talk too much. You think I talk too much? I don't think so, neither. Did you hear about my miracle? I am the proud owner of a miracle. I am. Mama laughed, but she laughs at everything. I think it scared her sorta. I musta been about twelve, uh-huh. It's funny how you don't know how old you were but you always know how old you are. Betty Babcock says that's a Mystery of Life, and she should know. She has acne, uh-huh. I hope I get acne. Then I can get them creams and lotions, put 'em on my face and feel like a real adult. I got breasts, but mama won't let me wear makeup, she won't even let me get my ears pierced. Papa promised to take me to get my ears pierced but that was before mama found out about my breasts. Is your chicken still good? Good. I like watching you eat. You have a nice mouth. I'd much rather have pierced ears than breasts. You can change earrings. Laughing again. HA!ha-ha ha-ha ha-ha. Oh, didn't mean to scare ya. Don't choke. Sorry. I was jest showing how mama laughed. On Christmas. It was my Christmas miracle. Well, the day before. Grandma sewed them bells on my dress and I was running around tinklin' and laughin' and laughin' and tinklin', and Barb and Betty Babcock, they thought that was just the neatest thing but then grandma! -- grandma. Ohmigod, ohmigod! Grandma made one of her little footpahs, uh-huh. Mama and Grandma was talking and Gran said I was getting so fat I looked like I was pregnant. Mama shot me one of them looks, so I didn't say nothing. Later, she told grandma I had surgery and they removed a growth the size of an orange. I guess that wasn't really a lie. A really big orange. One of them navels. But, anyway, that day I think maybe mama was afraid I'd say something to grandma -- about my situation -- cause she hollered that she wanted me to run to the store 'cause she was making cookies and she needed oil-of-the-knees -- she says it's funny to call it that -- but it's really called "Oil of Anise." That'd make a pretty name. Hi, my name is Anise, what's yours? Do you know what it means? I'll ask Miriam. Anyway, mama gave me money and Barb and Betty and I went to Drexler's. I bought his last bottle, even though it felt greasy and I got it on my fingers when I picked it up. Uh-huh. Barb asked could she look at it when we got outta the store. I warned her it'd get her fingers all greasy, but she don't mind, so I let her hold it. Uh-huh. It was then that it happened. My miracle.

(Pause, she taps her eyelashes)

All of a sudden, my eye started burning bad. Uh-huh. Like, like someone was poking hot nails into 'em, I mean, it hurt

(MORE)

RUBELLA (cont'd)

so bad that I started screaming. Uh-huh, uh-huh. And Barb is going what's wrong, what's wrong?! And Betty's jumping up and down and up and down and I say "My eyes on fire!" So Barb tries to look, but the instant her finger touches me, it's like more fire going in and I starts screaming louder and Betty says "what shall we do?! What shall we do?!" and I can't seem 'em, I don't see nothing cause I got my eyes like this, uh-huh, and then suddenly Barb says "We'll go there!" and takes my hand and leads me along like I was a dog or that blind old flower lady down near the turnpike, you know, and I goes "where we going?" and she says "to the one place where you can get help right away." I says "Barby, I can't walk all the way to your house like this," and she says we ain't going to my house, we going to our church." Well. That woulda been kinda neat, 'cause I always did wonder what it was like inside a church, with all them pretty ladies in their colored dresses, singing around those beautiful flowers I always seen 'em taking in, but my eyes was boiling like Ju-ly blacktop so it weren't a good time to see none of that. Nuh-uh. I told her I didn't want to go, but she insisted, so I went -- almost killed myself tripping on them steps. And Barb takes me to this place and tells me to lean over. I say why? She says just do it, so I done it and then I feel this, this cool refreshing water on my face, washing my eyes. "Open your eyes," she says. "I can't," I says. "Well, try," she says, and she pours water across 'em and all of a sudden the pain, it just goes away, it just flies away like on little wings and I can see again and the first thing I see is a little sign on the wall right above the little bowl. And it says "Holy Water."

(Pause)

How about that? Ain't that something? It is. It truly is. A miracle. I knew you'd appreciate it. You a sensitive boy, even if you don't look it. You're most welcome. You want another piece? Okay. That's fine. Uh-huh. I'll tell her you asked after her. Goodnight.

(She watches him go; little bell rings)

When I told mama about my miracle, she laughed and laughed. I thought she might choke, she laughed so hard. She didn't realize I had been changed. All my sins was washed away. And now, I see different. I do. Everyone's sin is all washed away and I see them little blue lights everywhere now. Smiling at me and everyone. That's why I smile so much. Uh-huh, uh huh. Cause everything is always dancing for me. Most of the time. Well, some.

(Pause, looking out the front window)

He's gone. I wonder where he goes this time of night? I don't like it when people go.

(She spits on the chicken)

I do not believe its right to laugh at children. 'Specially when they been washed by God.

Fadeout