



New New Economy (a short play)
Steven Hill

Synopsis

A young couple tries to deal with the realities of a down economy, set amidst the backdrop of their moody relationship and a very peculiar—desperate—money-making scheme in which they discover: one person’s junk is another’s treasure.

Character list and setting

ROGER: Late 20’s to early 30s, somewhere between self-employed and unemployed. Still in bed, dressed in his underpants; co-habiting with

LA’TANYA: Also late 20’s to early 30s, employed, getting dressed, trying to get out the door to her job.

SET REQUIREMENTS: Small apartment-type setting with some furniture, most importantly a bed or futon.

(ROGER lying in bed, blanket covering his whole body, only his face poking out. Staring intently at a crumpled sock that is perched on the edge of a nearby night stand.)

ROGER

Yup I definitely see it.

(Pause)

I can't believe it. It's a miracle!

(Longer pause. He keeps eyes riveted on the sock. Calling offstage.)

I'm not just seeing things, honey! It's really there. I can't believe it!

(To himself.)

Unbelievable. You wake up one morning, just like usual, and suddenly there it is, out of the blue. But that's how these things happen. ...

(Calling out)

Honey, you gotta see this.

LA'TANYA

(Voice from offstage bathroom.)

What are you going on about?

ROGER

Come see this, you're not gonna believe it. I can barely believe it. I'm telling ya, it's ... it's a miracle!

LA'TANYA

(Entering from offstage, half-dressed)

What's a miracle?

ROGER

(Poking out his torso a bit from the blanket.)

There. In the wrinkles of my sock. Can you see it?

LA'TANYA

(Bending and hurriedly looking)

See what? I don't see anything.

ROGER

Look harder. Put your head down here, where mine is. ... Maybe squint your eyes a bit. There, can you see it now?

LA'TANYA

Sure, I see it.

ROGER

You do?

LA'TANYA

Yeah ... I see wrinkles in your dirty sock.

ROGER

No, damn it, that's not ... look harder. Try again, please.

LA'TANYA

Why don't you just tell me what you see.

ROGER

No, I can't do that. I need an unbiased second opinion. Please.

(She bends over and puts her head right next to his. Finally she stands, frustrated, and continues dressing.)

LA'TANYA

I'm gonna be late for work. I don't have time to stand here and ... can't you just tell me?

ROGER

No! I need independent verification. YOU are my independent verification.

LA'TANYA

Oh, this is ridiculous.

ROGER

Don't you think it's strange that I can see it, but you can't? I really wish you could see it. I really do.

LA'TANYA

(Brushing her teeth)

Yeah, well, I wish you could see a few things too. Like dirty dishes, and pee on the toilet seat ... and the unscooped kitty litter box, and—

ROGER

Yeah, yeah, tape loop number 54. I'll give you a hint. Are you ready?

LA'TANYA

Roger! I don't have time for this! I have to catch the 38, and if I miss the Limited and end up on the Local...why is this so friggin' important?

ROGER

Are you kidding? If you can see it—and verify it—if others can see what I'm seeing—this is really big.

LA'TANYA

Really big? Because you're seeing something in your dirty sock?

ROGER

Are you kidding? This has happened in only a few other places. Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe...

LA'TANYA

For real? Roger, you promised me you wouldn't hit the weed anymore before you got out of bed.

ROGER

Does it smell like I've been doin' that? Just chill. Bend closer, and—

LA'TANYA

I remember something in the news about some place in Florida. ... People were seeing the Virgin Mary in the windows of a bank! A million people went to see it!

ROGER

Exactly. A million people.

LA'TANYA

The media thought the guy who discovered it was a kook.

ROGER

Yeah, him and a million others. Who cares what the “fake news” thinks. I'm sure others would see it, if they were here right now.

LA'TANYA

Oh, fantastic. That's all we need, a bunch of religious fanatics traipsing through our tiny little place.

ROGER

Hey, we could charge money for that! Don't you see?

LA'TANYA

No, I don't see. All those people ... coming here? Sounds risky.

ROGER

Life is risky. Risky as whiskey.

LA'TANYA

Christ, Roger. I need to get ready for work. So if you'll excuse me...

ROGER

OK, here's your hint. OK?

LA'TANYA

(Buttoning her blouse)

Alright, if you must.

ROGER

No, you have to get down close, where I am. Because when I give you the hint, you are totally going to see it.

(La'Tanya comes closer and lower, positioned to look.)

ROGER

The hint is: slavery.

LA'TANYA

Slavery? That's the hint?

ROGER

Um-hmm.

LA'TANYA

You know I've never been good at guessing games.

ROGER

I can't give you more of a hint than that. It would give it away. Just look at the sock.

LA'TANYA

Dammit Roger. One of us has a job to get to!

ROGER

OK, OK, you got that dig in.

(La'Tanya hands him an iPad.)

LA'TANYA

Here, why don't you focus your eyes on this? LinkedIn, Craigslist or—?

ROGER

(Glances at it, sets it aside)

I already sent out five resumes this week. That was our agreement.

LA'TANYA

Hell, Roger, try the want ads in the newspaper then--

(She tosses him a newspaper, frustration evident.)

ROGER

Newspapers are "old technology." Now bend down here and look. Really hard. Please?

(She bends even lower, and looks for about 5 seconds, finally giving up in exasperation.)

LA'TANYA

I'm sorry. I really don't see anything. Just wrinkles on a sock. And now I really do have to go so—Oh, damn! See what you did? Now my hose has got a run.

(She sits, tears off her panty hose, storms offstage.)

ROGER

(Calling to her offstage)

Okay, okay, I'll give you a better hint. Are you ready?

(She comes back onstage and gives him a look, starts putting on her new hose.)

ROGER

Beard.

LA'TANYA

Beard???

ROGER

Yup. Slavery ... beard. ...

LA'TANYA

Beard? Oh, uhh ... what's his name. ...

ROGER

Come on, you know it. ...

LA'TANYA

...it's on the tip of my tongue. ...

ROGER

Come on, La'Tanya, come on. ...

LA'TANYA

Well if I wasn't in a rush ... your timing is horrible. ...

ROGER

Miracles are like that.

LA'TANYA

Beard, slavery. ...

ROGER

Come ON, La'Tanya, even YOU can get this one.

LA'TANYA

OK, you got that dig in. Ummm ... Frederick Douglass?

ROGER

Frederick Douglass???

LA'TANYA

Yeah, Frederick Douglass. Slavery, beard? Didn't he have a beard?

ROGER

Does that vision on my sock look like Frederick Douglass? For God's sake, La'Tanya.

LA'TANYA

I don't see anything on your sock! Jesus Christ!

ROGER

Nope, not him either. Though he did have a beard. Come on: slavery, beard ... president?

LA'TANYA

Ohhhh ... what's his name.

ROGER

Yeah, ol' what's his name. ...

LA'TANYA

You mean ... Abraham Lincoln?

ROGER

Bingo. Now take a look, do you see it? Perfect spitting image. Crisp and sharp.

LA'TANYA

(Looking again.)

Sort of. It looks like ... a bearded Mr. Potato Head. And now, I really do have to get the hell out of here.

(She stands, starts to gather her purse and coat.)

ROGER

(Gazing in wonder at sock)

It's amazing, isn't it? It's a miracle! Get me my iPhone, rapido. I gotta get a photo of this.

(In a huff, she hands ROGER his phone. He starts taking photos, not noticing her impatience.)

LA'TANYA

(Sarcasm born of frustration)

Is Lincoln talking to you as well?

(In a deeper voice)

'Fourscore and seven years ago...'

ROGER

Very funny.

LA'TANYA

Oh Roger, you've always been a sweet-eyed dreamer, I've always loved that about you. But *this* one—

ROGER

Honey, I swear I'm on to something. I can just feel it and—

LA'TANYA

I know it's been tough since that asshole fired you—

ROGER

Have some *faith* in me, would you?

LA'TANYA

(Putting on her coat.)

Besides, Lincoln isn't even a saint, is he? I thought usually people saw the Virgin or Jesus or... you can't see someone who's not a saint, can you? Aren't there rules about this sort of thing?

ROGER

(Still taking photos, obsessed.)

He's a secular saint. Lincoln was both a secular hero *and* a saint. That's what's called crossover appeal. A marketer's dream.

(Triumphantly holding up his smartphone.)

There, hah, you see? Look at that. Perfect. I just posted it on TikTok, my Facebook page, my Twitter feed, Instagram, Reddit, SnapChat, Tumblr, Digg, Pinterest and all the rest. Please go like it, retweet it ... send it to all your friends, okay? This is going to be big, La'Tanya. It's gonna go viral. By tonight, we'll have thousands of people flocking here.

LA'TANYA

Oh great. That will be a lovely thing to come home to.

ROGER

(Sitting up in bed, flustered)

You see? *That's* what I'm talking about. About not being supportive, La'Tanya. You don't have even a pinch of ... of entrepreneurial spirit in you.

LA'TANYA

Entrepreneurial spirit?

ROGER

This is what social networking and commerce is all about, La'Tanya girl. Grabbing eyeballs. The big boys only come knocking when you can show 'em millions of TikTok friends and Instagram followers.

LA'TANYA

Puh-lease, Roger. You got that out of some article in Wired magazine or something. You aren't even out of bed yet!

ROGER

You don't have to get out of bed anymore, don't you get it? This is the new economy, girl. Entire fortunes are being made by people working at home in their underwear. You're so stuck in the "old economy" way of thinking.

LA'TANYA

(Taking her keys out of her purse)

Right, I'm old economy ... and now I need to get out the door or I'm gonna miss my bus, and be late for my "old economy" job at Fisherman's Wharf. While you stay in bed ... a new economy mystic. You and, and ... Mark *Sucker-berg!*

ROGER

You really are stuck, La'Tanya. I had hoped we wouldn't have to go there this morning. But it's really becoming a drag.

LA'TANYA

That's what, Tape Loop Number 34? I would think keeping a roof over our heads, and a little extra for a few drinks at the club or a movie and—

ROGER

Riii-ght, La'Tanya. And what tape loop is that?

LA'TANYA

(Pausing at the door, key in hand.)

Ohhhh, Roger. Where is this heading? It's been going there for a while. Let's be honest.

(She looks at him sadly.)

I can't be your mother, Roger.

ROGER

My ... mother?

LA'TANYA

I did that in my last relationship. I've told you, my life boat is for me this time. I'm sorry, I ... I really do have to go. We can talk more tonight ... and I guess figure out ... the details.

ROGER

What details? Are you serious? ...You mean like ... 'moving out' details?

LA'TANYA

Here, come on. I refuse to have my day start out this way. Give me a kiss goodbye.

(She comes to him, gives him a smooch. To do so, she steadies herself on the night stand and presses her hand on the sock, knocking it to the floor.)

ROGER

(Shouting, upset)

La'Tanya, NO!

LA'TANYA

Oh my God, Roger! I ... I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to, I really—

(Roger jumps out of bed, furious in his underpants. Then he buries his face in his hands, calms down, looks at her.)

ROGER

It's ... it's okay. Really, it's okay.

(Deep breath, pause.)

This ‘unemployed’ shit ... I’m no good at it. Eleven months of ... of slammed doors, of ...waiting for the call ... talkin’ to these *walls* ...

(They stare at each other across the divide.)

I ... I think I’m ... gonna get dressed and ... go down to the Unemployment office. Maybe they got some new listings.

LA’TANYA

Really? Are you sure?

ROGER

Yeah, honey, I’m sure.

(Pause.)

Thanks.

(Pause.)

I do have...one more crazy request though.

(ROGER struggles verbally, grabs her hands.)

La’Tanya...will you...marry me?

LA’TANYA

(Not thrilled, hands falling away.)

Oh ... that's ... so sweet. I ... I’m a little ... surprised, I ...

ROGER

Yeah, I’m just filled with crazy ideas this morning.

LA’TANYA

No, no ... it's not a crazy idea. Well, it is a little crazy, but. ...

ROGER

Sometimes, when I’m here, by myself, I find the words ... to tell you ... what I’m trying to say is ... Christ, am I making any sense?

LA’TANYA

(With a measure of sad tenderness)

I really do need to get out the door, okay? Why don't we talk about it tonight? Okay? Can we?

(He moves toward her, but LA’TANYA smiles sad-sweetly and then exits, closing the door. Roger paces, confused.)

ROGER

(To the empty room, like he’s rehearsing a speech.)

Some people ... spend their whole lives ... trying to find it, La’Tanya, you know?

(Roger grabs his SmartPhone, hits the button for dictating a text, which dings and he dictates, with a whiff of desperation.)

La'Tanya, honey, I ... what I'm trying to say is ...without you I'm ... La'Tanya, I'm doing my best, with what I got ... It's all I got. Please, tell me it's good enough. Please?

(He hits the send button and the audience hears the 'whoosh' sound.)

End of Play

[Steven Hill](#) is a *Caveat Lector* principal and contributing writer. He is a journalist and the author of seven books of political non-fiction. His essays, articles, and media interviews have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*, *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Die Zeit*, NPR, PBS, BBC, C-SPAN, Democracy Now, and many others. He is the chief editor and contributor to the online publication [DemocracySOS](#). He has published short fiction and poems in a number of publications, including the *Columbia Journal*, *Minnesota Review*, *San Fernando Poetry Journal*, *Struggle*, *Prophetic Voices*, and the anthologies *Sparkle and Blink*, *Grasp the Rainbow*, and *Poets for a Livable Planet*. His plays have been produced in New York City (Off Off Broadway), Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. His website can be found at www.Steven-Hill.com.