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## Participating in *Assniation*

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# Participating in *Assignation*

by Denise Stephenson



We sat at our kitchen table. Bob asked if either of us wanted a particular role. I wanted to be Woman 2. Read it aloud a couple of times, he suggested. I read Woman 2 and Susan read Woman 1. Then we reversed roles. How did it feel? he asked. I want to be Woman 2, I said again. Susan seemed content with either role. She asked some questions about how Bob saw the characters. He answered enigmatically, wanting us to ferret out who these women were for ourselves. Then he looked me in the eye and said, I want you to play Woman 1. I laughed. Shouldn't have told you what I wanted, should I? But he gave me some director-type reasons, saying my diction worked better for this "thinking" character.

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That was the beginning, night one in our kitchen. We moved rehearsals back and forth between our kitchen and Susan's apartment, waiting for the actual space to open up downtown at UICA. We had trouble memorizing our lines, pretty funny when it's only a ten-minute play. Each of us struggled on different nights to stay focused. The playwright/director kept encouraging us, nudging us in certain directions, but never pushing very hard. Finally we got to work in the space, block our lines, and it clicked. As our bodies moved, the characters became more complex, interesting women. Finally, the crucial prop arrived—the gun, which started each night in Susan's pocket and ended each performance in my hand pointing at the audience. That was my favorite part of *Assignation*, pointing the gun into the audience, taking my character's paranoia about world order directly to the masses, gaining their complicity.

*Assignment* was performed as part of the first Attention Deficit Drama production in Grand Rapids. Acting in a piece for a small, young company meant playing additional ensemble roles: increasing the audience with friends, colleagues and students, paying exorbitant downtown parking fees, setting up chairs for the audience, cleaning up each night before going home. To work on a play with the playwright at hand is exciting. The original vision behind the text is available in a way that it isn't in most situations. And particularly with a cryptic play like *Assignment*, that's an advantage. But the creative energy of a half dozen people filling roles as playwrights, directors, actors and stage hands stimulates imagination. The company bonded over the craziest things, like dancing behind the curtain and silently chanting the ever-changing lines of the last performance, "Think less, remember more.... Think more, remember less." As time moves on and A.D.D. prepares for another production, this time without me, I do think more. Or at least, I remember less. ♣