

An Embrace with a Freak
By Elizabeth Roth

Cast of Characters (In order of appearance)

- ACTOR 1 Male Narrator. He is a leader, confident. He tries to be an unbiased storyteller. He is a peacekeeper between Actors 2 and 3. Additionally, he plays the Ringmaster, Husband, Courier, George van Hare, and Doctor.
- ACTOR 2 Female Narrator. She is sympathetic toward Julia and doubts Theodore's sincerity, always attempting to highlight his selfishness. Does not get along with Actor 3. Additionally she plays the Scientist (drag), Wife, and Journalist.
- ACTOR 3 Male Narrator. He sympathizes with Theodore. He believes Theodore is in love and understands the tear between his wife and his money. Does not get along with Actor 2. Additionally he plays the Acrobat, Physician, Bachelor, P.T. Barnum, and Professor Sukolov.
- JULIA PASTRANA In her mid-twenties, she suffers from congenital hypertrichosis with terminal hair and gingival hyperplasia, meaning she has hair covering every aspect of her visible skin with the exception of the palms of her hands and soles of her feet. The disorder also causes her to have ape-like facial features with thick lips and a protruding forehead. Despite her Neanderthal facial appearance, her body should be that of a trim young dancer. She historically stood only 4ft 6in tall, but could be played a taller actress if the impression of shortness is sustained. She is incredibly poised and kind-hearted.
- THEODORE LENT A man in his forties. He is a life-long showman and not above the occasional con to gain money or reputation. Julia's manager and eventual husband.

The stage should be blank. The play should feel as if the three actors are telling the story with a few props and costumes. The actual placement of the scenes should be hinted at by furniture pieces: a desk to represent a study, a couch to represent a sitting room. Similarly, the costumes of the three actors should be suggested by smaller pieces that are easily changed throughout. However, Julia and Theodore are fully immersed in the story, meaning they should look, act, and feel very real throughout the course of the play. The Actors do all scene changes, treating Julia and Theodore like the furniture, moving them into position as necessary.

Three actors make their way onstage. Actor 1 should be dressed to suggest he is a ringmaster. Actors 2 and 3 should be dressed to suggest they are Acrobats.

ACTOR 1 Welcome to the circus.

ACTOR 2 Not the normal circus, mind you.

ACTOR 3 There aren't sword swallowers or fire eaters. No lions or tigers either.

ACTOR 2 And no clowns. Thank god.

ACTOR 1 But there are freaks.

ACTOR 3 If there's one thing a circus has always got to have, it's freaks.

ACTOR 2 Siamese twins

ACTOR 1 Pinheads

ACTOR 2 The human worm

ACTOR 3 The Ape-Woman.

ACTOR 1 Yes, she's my favorite.

ACTOR 3 We refer, specifically, to Julia Pastrana, a real woman who lived in the height of sideshow acts.

ACTOR 2 A woman who had a terrible congenital deformity covering her with hair and making her look like an ape.

ACTOR 1 A woman who bore some rather unkind names.

ACTOR 2 The Bear Woman.

ACTOR 3 The Baboon Lady.

ACTOR 1 The Ugliest Woman in the World.

ACTOR 3 Her story is unlike any you've heard before.

ACTOR 2 Or perhaps a little too much like those you've heard before.

ACTOR 3 We now turn back to December 1855 where Julia was performing with J.W. Beach (*indicates Actor 1*) just outside Boston, Massachusetts.