

cold standing there all wet and naked, waiting for the makeup spray to dry up into the skin. It would even out any pale bits or any veins. I felt so rubbery that I didn't give myself a good look. I just wanted to look good to other people, or good enough. Then I took a look at the call sheet and saw the name of the actor playing the book publisher I would be riding.

Stunned silence. Austin Pendleton. He is 76 years old and was in the Yale class of '61 with my father. He is also a wonderful acting coach and a great actor and director, having worked with Orson Welles and countless others—and he had been the man who trained me when I was 22 and in final callbacks for *My Fair Lady*. I've known him my whole life.

Austin is the man I have to sit on? To feign sex with?

In the trailer, there was a door between me and him. He was in the other half of the trailer, beginning his "hair" and make up, I supposed. Then I heard him ask for Tums.

The nudity wasn't the problem. I have a long history with nudity. When I was in *Dracula* on Broadway, I was topless for a flash of vampiric surrender. That happened because my female costar, Kelli O'Hara, playing the character of Lucy, was meant to approach a window in the middle of the night, hear a thunder clap and have her dress fly off. My nudity wasn't in the script, nor was it at all supernaturally poetic. We finagled a way for me to burst from my costume as Tom Hewitt, playing Dracula, leaned in for his bite. I was told we don't want Kelli being the only one doing

nudity, so I bared my breast. I always bore this feeling of duty, as if its exposure to fresh air in Act II was somehow a sign of feminist solidarity. Now we were both equally at risk to make this musical entertaining. (I'll add that while it was all rather superfluous, my nudity became an excellent decoy; Tom had difficulty hiding his transition to fanged monster, and we arranged it between us that he would snuggle into my neck and take that moment to fumble his fake fangs out of his pocket while my breast popped into the stage light, distracting the audience from his movements. My already dutiful

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boobs became further dutiful, and a trick of the eye was born.)

Later, in Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*, I reconfigured Dot's famous boudoir song: as George's muse, I frolicked completely naked through The Kennedy Center Opera House. It was entirely my idea to be nude in that production, and it was something of a shock, I think, to Mr. Sondheim, who adjusted a few lyrics to accommodate. (My husband, after 20 years of marriage, has learned to say: "Just come home to me.")

A nude sex scene on TV,

on the other hand, is not just an internal moral matter or an improvised actor and director's choice. It's accompanied by agent phone calls and contractual language. The most pressing negotiating term, in my case, turned out to be "side boob." The contract stated I would show my naked back but no front. My agent went through various additional options, as if the menu had sub-categories: full frontal, nipple, negligee, no negligee, one nipple, two nipples, butt crack, side boob—*oh, Eliza!*

Was I willing to show side boob? It was its own special negotiating category, and conversation sat for a moment. What makes a side boob so special, I wondered? Is a nipple from the side considered a less racy offering? (I should add, Showtime and my agent put no pressure on me, and I got the impression it really was just whatever I was comfortable doing.)

Having each inch of flesh discussed by negotiation is, I know, the right thing to do: television work involves more money, more agents and more paperwork than the theater, and time is taken to labor over terms. And then, of course, there are ultimately a lot more people due to see my body. Honestly, I felt scared once I was asked to break it all down piece by piece, more aware of all the things theater does not bring up—international exposure, film lasting forever, the unknown of who will edit what and who will be the cameraman, how close a camera goes, how they light me. But I appreciated being asked. Theater actors just get up in the light and control what they can control, being seen

MELISSA ERRICO'S HAMPTONS

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"I adore the public beach in East Hampton for the fun of meeting people and the convenience of the pleasant cafe and sun-covered deck." Main Beach, 101 Ocean Ave., easthamptonvillage.org

"We love the variety at Serene Green farmers market, but the freezer with fresh seafood around back is an excellent secret. I also pick up their local honey for my throat." 3980 Noyack Road, Sag Harbor, serenegreeninc.com

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