

AND THEN
A Stage Play
by
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ACT ONE

A cluttered one-room apartment, littered with mounds of unwashed clothes, stacks of dirty dishes, wastebaskets overflowing with weeks-old garbage. An attractive but fed-up woman, TINK, is packing her suitcases. Her disheveled husband, ODIE, is sprawled on his back on a rumpled bed, head draped over the edge of the mattress, face facing the audience upside down.

ODIE

I think I finally have something. I'm sure I have something. I'm well aware you've heard me say this before. Yes I do believe I'm onto something. The germ of an idea is transforming before our very eyes into a planted seed that's taking root and blooming. We now have before us a full-blown notion. Yikes, lo, behold, I believe we've rocketed past the concept stage into a concrete plan of action. Pay attention. Don't be distracted. You are about to eyewitness the genesis of a heaven-sent revolutionary celestial order.

TINK, sick of hearing ODIE's worthless ramblings, ignores him. She searches under piles of rubbish for her belongings.

TINK

A new religion? Last week it was a revolutionary new window-tinting franchise. The week before that, oh I can't even remember. It's all gone too far now. You know I was behind you in the beginning. Quitting our jobs. Selling the house. Living off our savings. For a while it was fun. Adventuresome. Two daredevils leaping the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle. Escaping the rat race. Moving off the grid. It's not fun any more. The endless babbling. The indolence. The mess. Look at this pigsty. I thought that if I let the laundry and dirty dishes pile up it might snap you to your senses. You used to be so neat, so organized. At work they nicknamed you Mr. Cleanfreak. Instead of being offended you had a plaque made and displayed it on your desk. You nearly had another one made

TINK (Continued)

for your locker at the country club. Mr. Cleanfreak, look at you now. You haven't changed your underwear in ten days. If I didn't shave you every morning you'd look like Ozark Odie. A new religion. Honey. I think you were closer with your window-tinting idea.

TINK returns to hunting for items and packing her suitcase. ODIE's eyes open with the wonder of revelation.

ODIE

The new religion will need rituals. Chanting? Fasting? Pilgrimages? I don't know the rituals. The rituals have not yet appeared. I do know the goal of this new religion, its mission.

Lights down on the apartment, lights up on an executive office, decorated with stylish furnishings, walls covered with awards and diplomas. A nervous woman, LISA, is squirming in a chair in front of her boss' empty desk. There's a plaque displayed on the desk that reads "Mr. Cleanfreak." LISA is having trouble catching her breath as she speaks into a cell phone.

LISA

Yes, I'm in his office right now. No, I'm alone. The sadist's making me wait. Sweat it out for a while until he comes in and lowers the boom. I have no idea what I did wrong. It could be anything. He doesn't like the way I write reports. He doesn't like the way I handle clients, the color of my hair, my wardrobe, who the hell knows. Mel Markham didn't have a clue why he got canned. Nancy Keller thought she was being called in for a raise and left with a pink slip. Last week I spilled some muffin crumbs on my desk, maybe he's going to fire me for that. They don't call him Mr. Cleanfreak for nothing --

The sound of someone approaching is heard. LISA abruptly clicks off the cell phone, shoves it in

her briefcase, attempts to compose herself, attempts to steady her breathing, in vain. ODIE enters the office, impeccably dressed, a poised, formidable business executive.

ODIE

Sorry I'm late, board meeting ran over.

LISA

No problem whatsoever.

ODIE takes his seat behind the desk and studies his nervous employee.

ODIE

Is it too warm in here?

LISA

Not at all.

ODIE

You're perspiring.

LISA

I skipped the elevator and walked up.

ODIE

Mid-day workout?

LISA

No time to get to the gym.

ODIE

It's seven flights of stairs between our offices.

LISA

In training for a 10-K.

ODIE

You're still out of breath.

LISA

I jogged the last three flights.

ODIE

Sure you don't want me to turn down the heat?

LISA

Not necessary.

ODIE lets the stalemate rest. He picks up a bound volume.

ODIE

I read your Bellingham report.

Her breathing grows more labored.

LISA

If anything's unclear I'll be glad to work on it some more.

ODIE

You think this report needs another draft.

LISA

Probably, I'm sure I overlooked something in there.

ODIE

Lisa?

LISA

Yes.

ODIE

What's troubling you?

LISA

Nothing.

ODIE

You seem so nervous.

LISA

I'm just a bit anxious about the Bellingham account.

ODIE

Because?

LISA

It's one of our biggest pieces of business.

ODIE

You think they're unhappy.

LISA

You never know.

ODIE

I had dinner with Ned Bellingham, he's thrilled with us.

LISA's breathing is no better.

LISA

That's great news.

ODIE

Lisa?

LISA

Yes.

ODIE

What's troubling you?

LISA

Nothing.

ODIE

Things okay at home?

LISA

Perfect.

ODIE

Kids?

LISA

Excellent.

ODIE

Then I guess it must be me.

LISA

Sir?

ODIE

I see you around the halls you seem very relaxed. I see you at the company picnic you're the life of the party. You step into this office you fall apart at the seams. It must be me.

Changing subjects, he holds up the Bellingham report.

ODIE

This is a good piece of work. Clear. Concise. I have a bit of confusion in Part III, projected marketing modifications, I'm never too concerned about projections. I'm interested solely in business at hand, and the Bellingham business is gangbusters. After reading your report I can see why Ned Bellingham invited me and my wife Tink to spend the weekend on his yacht. If life were fair I'd send you and your husband instead. But put yourself in my place -- three days on a sixty-foot luxury yacht, lobster omelets, unlimited massages -- would you hand that to a subordinate simply because she did all the work and deserves it?

LISA

Never.

ODIE

Talk to me Lisa.

LISA

About?

ODIE

You.

LISA

Me.

ODIE

Who you are. What you want. Why you're nervous.

LISA pauses, chooses her words carefully.

LISA

I'm a hard worker, I want success, I shouldn't be fired.

ODIE

Like Mel Markham and Nancy Keller?

LISA

They've crossed my mind.

ODIE

Do you know why I fired them?

LISA

Nobody does.

ODIE

Nancy repeatedly stole money from petty cash.

LISA

She never mentioned that.

ODIE

Mel described his testicles to several women employees.

LISA

I heard rumors.

ODIE

Your job is secure, you'll never be fired unless.

LISA

Unless?

ODIE

Nervous executives tend to sabotage themselves and others.

LISA

Hm.

ODIE

Lisa?

LISA

Yes.

ODIE

What's troubling you?

LISA's breathing has grown calmer.
She now seems somewhat comfortable
in her boss' presence.

LISA

I don't know. I guess I worry about things. You know. My son Lonnie, I worry about -- I don't know. Are you sure you don't want any changes in that Bellingham report?

ODIE

No changes.

LISA

Then I guess I'll go back to my office.

ODIE

Bye.

LISA

Unless there's anything else you want to talk about.

ODIE

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

LISA shakes her head no, rises from her chair and heads for the door. She stops, considers, there is more she'd like to talk about, but doesn't. LISA exits the office. ODIE waits a moment for her to return, then files away the Bellingham report.

Lights down on the office, lights up on the men's locker room of an exclusive golf country club. An important member, FULLER, sits in a plush chair waiting a bit impatiently for someone to arrive. The man's high-end golf gear and jewelry tell us he's wealthy. He checks his watch, looks around, rises, pokes his head off-stage in search of the person he's waiting for.

FULLER

No thanks, you guys go ahead. I'm catching a quick steam then racing off to the Jag dealer. My wife doesn't want to deal with the service people. Damn straight I'm henpecked. Do you have any idea what it would cost if she decided to divorce me? Enjoy the clubhouse. Have a drink on me, tell Ricky to put it on my tab. But booze only. If I see one steak sandwich on my monthly bill I'll get even with you bums at our next gin rummy game.

FULLER waves goodbye, then returns to the plush seat, sits, checks his watch, looks around impatiently. ODIE, dressed for golf, enters scowling at his putter.

ODIE

Eighteen inches from the cup and you miss by a foot.

FULLER

Smash the fucker.

ODIE

You think so?

FULLER

Best therapy on earth.

ODIE considers, scowls at his putter, kisses it goodbye, then, crunch, breaks it over his knee. He's overtaken by a profound sense of satisfaction.

ODIE

That. Felt. Divine.

FULLER

Stick with me kid.

ODIE begins to change out of his golf clothing.

ODIE

How'd you shoot today?

FULLER

Seventy-four, way off.

ODIE

In my dreams I've shot a way-off seventy-four.

FULLER

What do you expect playing once a week?

ODIE

A ninety-four, a hundred and four.

FULLER

Meet me at the driving range tomorrow I'll help you.

ODIE

Bobby gave up on me a month ago.

FULLER

Bobby's the club pro, he's afraid to kick your butt.

ODIE

You'll treat me like a drill sergeant.

FULLER

Hut downswing hut tempo hut loosen that grip recruit.

ODIE

I'll be on the driving range at oh eight hundred.

FULLER

Be prepared to win the club championship by Tuesday.

Awkwardly, FULLER checks to see if they're alone.

FULLER

Odie, you have a minute?

ODIE

Tink's meeting me here for lunch but I'm good till then.

FULLER

Ah it's nothing really.

ODIE

Then let's go play pinochle.

FULLER looks around to see if they're alone.

FULLER
Remember when we had lunch last week?

ODIE
Fun.

FULLER
I'm feeling a bit uncomfortable about our conversation.

ODIE
The best swimming pool cleaner in town?

FULLER
Not that conversation, the one about --

He looks around again.

FULLER
You know what we talked about.

ODIE
Your wife's illness.

FULLER
Did you mention it to anyone?

ODIE
Of course not.

FULLER
Not even Tink?

ODIE
You asked me not to.

FULLER
Chad Newmark said something strange to me today. We're driving in the golf cart and he asks out of the blue, 'So how's Andie?' I answer, 'Fine.' Three holes later we're approaching the tee area, Chad asks, 'We haven't seen Andie in a while is she okay?' Trying not to sound irritated I mutter something about Andie being busy with a charity auction, then I go quickly and hit the ball. On eighteen, right after I replace the final flagstick, Chad says, 'Nona

FULLER (Continued)

and I are having a cocktail party Friday night. We expect to see you there with Andie. WITH Andie is how it sounded, as if what? Andie died last week and I shoved her in a trunk?

FULLER measures his next words carefully.

FULLER

Odie, I'm not saying you leaked anything on purpose. I know you're a discreet man. Extremely discreet. That's why I felt I could talk with you at lunch. We've played golf together a dozen times, I've never once heard you gossip about another member of this club. The rest of these piranhas swim around gobbling up every scrap of dirt they can find then spew it out to anyone and everyone. An example. That new patio set you and Tink bought? We heard about it before you left the store. Odie, you're a new member of this country club, heed my words -- keep thine own council. Mum's the word. Take your secrets to the grave.

ODIE

What secrets?

FULLER

Everyone has secrets.

ODIE

You mean the time I was thrown out of college for cheating?

FULLER

I hope you're joking.

ODIE

The twelve thousand dollars I borrowed and never paid back.

FULLER

Careful.

ODIE

My high school girlfriend who put our baby up for adoption?

FULLER looks around, alarmed.

FULLER

Odie. Stop. That's enough.

ODIE, undressed by now, stark naked, grabs a terry bathrobe from his locker, puts it on, then heads for the shower room.

ODIE

Fuller, your wife's sick. Why you don't want anyone to know about it is beyond me. How can you play golf with the same men every day, eat lunch together, go to cocktail parties, and not confide in them? You need to talk, I need a shower. First, I'm calling Tink and canceling our lunch. I'll tell her it's a personal emergency, she'll understand. And a personal emergency it is. My friend you and I are having a burger together. Wait here ten minutes. Think about what you want to tell me. Start with that secret you referred to, the one you're taking to your grave. If you're not ready to go there yet at least we can begin with your wife's illness.

FULLER stares at ODIE, dazed.

ODIE

You look like a deer caught in the headlights. Don't be frightened, you can always run away while I'm in the shower. I give you permission to spew my secrets to the other members of the country club. On the other hand, now that the ice is broken, you can always stick around and --

Without finishing his thought, ODIE disappears into the showers, leaving FULLER alone with his decision. The wealthy man instantly starts to leave the locker room, then comes back, mulls, sits down in the plush chair, rises, leaves, stays...

Lights down on the locker room, lights up on the cluttered one-room apartment. TINK is still packing her suitcases, trying to ignore the ramblings of ODIE, sprawled on his back, head draped

over the mattress, face facing the audience upside down.

ODIE

I know, I'm aware. We're not all in need of a new celestial order. Some of us are just fine with the way things are. Minimal pain, reasonable anguish, great restaurants. Perhaps we're preaching to the choir. I can't pin down the nuts and bolts. I don't know the liturgy. The liturgy has not yet appeared. I do know we'll need patience --

He's growing exhausted.

ODIE

Patience and --

His eyes struggle to stay open.

ODIE

And --

He falls asleep.

ODIE

Patience.

TINK abandons the suitcases and approaches her husband with care and sadness.