

Hold a One Act Play

By

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A pool of light reveals a MAN on a cordless phone. On the third ring, another pool of light reveals ONE, seated, wearing a headset.

ONE

Yes?

MAN

(Surprised)

Oh, have I dialed the right number?

ONE

The right...number?

MAN

Yes, I think I dialed the...

ONE

What number are you looking for?

MAN

I...I've been having some problems lately...with...some mental stress...I--

ONE

Well you've called the right place.

MAN

(Relieved)

Oh! God, I thought...I mean, it was so hard to pick up the phone, let alone dial the...

ONE

What seems to be the problem?

MAN

What?

ONE

The problem. Why have you called us?

MAN

Oh. Yes. Well you see, I've been under a lot of stress lately, and...uh, this is hard for me to...

ONE

Take your time. I know it's not easy. Relax.

MAN

Thank you. You see, I've been recently divorced, and...

ONE

Mmmm Hmmm. Go on.

MAN

And since then, I've had trouble dealing with, the, uh, you know, the loneliness of it and...

ONE

I'm sorry, could you hold for one moment?

MAN

Sorry?

ONE

(Contrite)

Hold. I'm terribly sorry, could I leave you for one second? Something's popped up.

MAN

Uh, sure. Yes. Please.

*Lights down on **ONE**. A brief interlude of cloying muzak then lights up on **TWO**, who also wears a headset.*

TWO

Hello. Yes. Now go on.

MAN

Excuse me?

TWO

You were saying...

MAN

Um, I'm sorry?

TWO

Yes?

MAN

(Short exhale of a laugh)
 Uh, you weren't the one I was...That is, I...what happened to the fellow I was just talking to?

TWO
He's not with us. He had to go. But
I'm just as qualified. More so, if
truth be told.

MAN
Oh, well, it's just that I started
with...

TWO
Actually, he's kind of an
unprofessional idiot.

MAN
Oh. Well, I didn't mean to...

TWO
I'm top notch, if you don't mind me
saying so.

MAN
Great. I, well, I was saying that
I've been recently divorced.

TWO
I'm sorry to hear that.

MAN
Yes, well, thank you.

TWO
So, you're recently divorced...

MAN
Yes, and the stress of the, the
adjusting to, the loneliness of
it...it's been hard.

TWO
Yes, I see...

MAN
It's been difficult to...cope with
the...loss. I mean, in the end, I
know it was for the best,
rationally, I know this...but the
emotionally.

TWO
Ahhh, the emotional.

MAN
...has been terribly hard on me.

TWO
And...

MAN
And...and well, like I said, I think the stress of this...adjustment...coupled with my financial...you see, with the lawyers, lousy settlement...you see, I lost custody...

TWO
Daughter?

MAN
Son. I lost my son.

TWO
Your son.

MAN
And...all of this has added to my...

TWO
Stress...

MAN
Yes.

TWO
Emotional duress.

MAN
Very much so.

TWO
You're at your wits end.

MAN
Yes.

TWO
You're losing hope.

MAN
Yes.

TWO
What else?

MAN
What?

TWO
What else?

MAN
What else?

TWO
Yes. That can't be all. That's too
run-of-the-mill. You wouldn't of
called us if that was all.

MAN I... TWO
There is more.

MAN I... TWO
Something else.

MAN
I, uh...

TWO
Or you wouldn't have called us.

MAN
This is hard for me to...I'm...I'm
a little nervous.

TWO
That's only natural.

MAN
I'm scared.

TWO
Yes.

MAN
I haven't been thinking straight,
you see.

TWO
Straight.

MAN
No, I've been very...well,
paranoid. Yes, that's what you'd
call it.

TWO
Paranoid.

MAN
(Nervous laugh)
Yes. I mean, my thoughts have
been...I've been really
anxious over such small
things.

TWO
Anxious.

MAN
And I'm beginning to think that
things are...adding up against my
favor.

TWO
Conspiracy.

MAN
Yes. Like forces are joining up
against me.

TWO
I see.

MAN
And I know it's not true. I mean,
this I now in my rational mind, is
ridiculous...yet I still think
these thoughts.

TWO
You gravitate towards paranoia.

MAN
Well, not obsessively. I don't
think.

TWO
You don't think.

MAN
No.

TWO
I'll be the judge.

(Slight pause)

MAN
Uh, well, I mean, I've called you
for help.

(Pause)

TWO
Yes.

MAN
And these...thoughts...these
irrational...thoughts...

TWO
They just won't do.

MAN
No, I think they're beginning to
effect me.

TWO
You were right to call us.

MAN
I mean, I can see that I'm heading
towards...

TWO
You see that it's...unhealthy.

MAN
Yes.

TWO
I'm glad you called.

MAN
I'm...I'm glad I did too.

TWO
The first step is always the
hardest.

MAN
Yes, that's what they say, isn't
it?

TWO
Who says?

MAN
Hmmm?

TWO
That's what who says?

MAN
Excuse me?

TWO
You said, that's what "they" say. I
want to know who "they" are.

MAN
They?

TWO
Yes, who are "they?"

MAN
Well, it's just a manner of...

TWO
Are "they" the one's who are out to
get you?

MAN
No, no...I just meant that...

TWO
You mean what?

MAN
It's just a euphemism.

TWO
I see.

MAN
Yes.

(Pause)

TWO
What does that mean?

MAN
What?

TWO
That word. You-fa-mizzum.

MAN
Oh. Well. It means, not literal.
Like a metaphor.

TWO
Oh.

MAN
Yes, like a metaphor.

(Brief pause)

TWO
You're sure.

MAN
Yes, quite.

TWO
Hmmm.

MAN
What?

TWO
It's just that I've never heard
that word before.

MAN
Euphemism.

TWO
Yes. Yoo...fa...mizzum?

MAN
It's a word.

TWO
It's just that I have a fine
vocabulary.

MAN
I'm sure you do. It's funny,
sometimes one can just slip by...

TWO
(Reading from a dictionary)
Ubiquitous, U-Boat, udder,
udometer, ugh, I don't see it.

MAN
What?

TWO
Ugly, ukase, I've got a dictionary,
Ukranian, it's not here.

MAN
It's spelled with an "E."

TWO
No, I don't see...what?

MAN
It's spelled with an "E."

TWO
An "E?"

MAN
Yes.

TWO
An "E?"

MAN
Yes. E-U-P-H-E-M-I-S-M.

TWO
Oh.

(Pause)

MAN
Hello?

TWO
(To himself)
...an "E"... (Startled) Oh, yes?

MAN
So what do you think I should do?

TWO
(Trance broken)
Oh. Yes. Well. I think we should discuss your past mental history, before we move on.

MAN
My past?

TWO
Yes. But that's not my department. Hold on a sec.

TWO
(To someone down the hall)
Doctor? Doctor!

DOCTOR
(Offstage)
Yes?

TWO
Need you for a history.

DOCTOR
Fine.

TWO
(Into the phone)
Here's the doctor, to help you.

MAN
Um...

DOCTOR enters with a clipboard in hand, wearing a headset.

DOCTOR
(Cheery)
Hello.

MAN
Hello...doctor.

DOCTOR
Wait. Your chart. I'm reading.

MAN
Sorry.

DOCTOR
Divorce...mental stress...custody
battle...mental
duress...Paranoid...fabricated
vocabulary...

MAN
What?

DOCTOR
We've got some problems, don't we?

MAN
Yes.

DOCTOR
Well, don't you worry. This pattern
is very common.

MAN

Yes?

DOCTOR

See it all the time.

MAN

Really?

DOCTOR

Sure...Divorce, financial
instability, depression...it all
adds up.

MAN

God. I was beginning to think--

DOCTOR

It all builds up...

MAN

I mean, you start to think you're
the only one who--

DOCTOR

The pressure of it--

MAN

You think nobody else--

DOCTOR

Must be released...

MAN

Everyone else seems to have--

DOCTOR

You need release--

MAN

I mean, my wife is so, so--

DOCTOR

Or else...

MAN

Such a--

DOCTOR

Or else it just...

MAN
Such a controlled...

DOCTOR
It just swells...

MAN
Controlling.

DOCTOR
Swells up...

MAN
Emotionless...

DOCTOR
Bursting.

MAN
Heartless...

DOCTOR
Like a balloon.

MAN
I mean, I wonder if she even--

DOCTOR
It's gotta give.

MAN
If she's capable of...

DOCTOR
It get to be too much--

MAN
I mean, not a tear.

DOCTOR
Who can blame you, right?

MAN
Bitch.

DOCTOR
What did you say?

MAN
I...I'm sorry...I must have--

DOCTOR
You must have?

MAN
I mean, I got a little carried
away.

DOCTOR
Potty mouth. Potty...mouth.

MAN
Really, I don't know--

DOCTOR
My ears are not garbage cans.

MAN
I...

DOCTOR
No. Now. Back to business. Have you
ever been institutionalized?

MAN
Why no.

DOCTOR
Are you on Prozac, Lithium, or any
other medication?

MAN
No.

DOCTOR
Have you ever been hospitalized for
a head injury?

MAN
No.

DOCTOR
Suffer from seizures?

MAN
No.

DOCTOR
Diagnosed for schizophrenia?

MAN
No.

DOCTOR
Have you had sex in the last three weeks?

MAN
No, but why?

DOCTOR
Just answer the questions please.
Do you suffer from paranoi...oh.
Yes. Ever suffer from delusions?

MAN
What?

DOCTOR
Delusions. Have you ever been under the impression you've been another person?

MAN
Well, no, I don't think--

DOCTOR
Or an animal?

MAN
Animal?

DOCTOR
Ever think you were a dog?

MAN
A dog?

DOCTOR
You know, get down on all fours.
Raise your leg. Piss on a tree.

MAN
Never, I...

DOCTOR
(Like a dog)
Owwwwwwwwuuuuuuuuuu!

MAN
No, no!

DOCTOR
Just checking.

(Brief pause)

MAN
Well, when I was young...

DOCTOR
(Excited)
Yes?

MAN
I don't know if this counts...

DOCTOR
Uh-huh?...

MAN
I sometimes had this fantasy...

DOCTOR
Oh. Go on...

MAN
It's kind of silly.

DOCTOR
That's okay...

MAN
I used to pretend, imagine that I
was...

DOCTOR
You were...

MAN
A bird.

DOCTOR
Oh.

(Pause)

MAN
Yes, you know...I was a teenager. I
used to have this great
imagination...you know how kids get
depressed. They daydream.

(DOCTOR doesn't respond.)

MAN
I'd imagine myself as a great,
white bird...you know,
outstretching his wings, flying
away from his problems. Corny stuff
(MORE)

MAN (cont'd)
like that...you know,
adolescence...

DOCTOR
Uh...

MAN
You know, a lake bird, like a
crane, or some such...

(Pause)

MAN
With white wings
outstretched...pretend stuff, like
I could sing a song...

(The MAN imitates a bird)

MAN
Whooper wi...whooperwi...

DOCTOR
Whooper...wi?

MAN
Yes.

(Pause)

DOCTOR
A bird.

MAN
Yes.

DOCTOR
A big...white bird?

MAN
Well, yes. Why?

DOCTOR
That's very strange, you know.

MAN
Well, I don't think beyond...

DOCTOR
Very troubling.

MAN
You don't think...

DOCTOR
Problematic.

MAN
Problematic?

DOCTOR
This changes everything.

MAN
What? Come on, I was just---

DOCTOR
Sheds new light.

MAN
You can't be---

DOCTOR
I've never heard of---

MAN
Surely you've come across---

DOCTOR
I mean...this...this, with
the...and the...

MAN
No.

DOCTOR
Please hold. Lights down on DOCTOR.
A brief interlude of muzak.

MAN
Wait. I really think you're putting
too much-- Hello? Please?

*Lights up on **TWO**. Muzak abruptly ends.*

TWO
Euphamism.

MAN
Huh?

TWO
Noun. One. The use of a mild word
in place of a plainer but possibly
(MORE)

TWO (cont'd)
 offensive one. Two. A word or
 expression thus substituted.

MAN
 Uh...yes.

TWO
 You meant it in the second sense.
 Right?

MAN
 Yes.

TWO
 You didn't make it up.

MAN
 No.

TWO
 I was wrong.

MAN
 Yes.

TWO
 You were right.

MAN
 Yes.

TWO
 Touche'.

*Lights down on **TWO**. Muzak abruptly continues.*

MAN
 Wait. Please. Come back.

*A pool of light on **CALLER**.*

CALLER
 Hello?

MAN
 Hello?

CALLER
 Are you the doctor?

MAN
No. Who are you?

CALLER
Can you help me?

MAN
Well, I...no...I'm not...

CALLER
They put me on hold.

MAN
Yes, same here.

CALLER
I need help really bad.

MAN
I'm sorry. I need it too.

CALLER
I mean, I'm in grave danger of...I
told them this was serious...I'm
not just talking this time.

MAN
They must've connected us by
mistake.

CALLER
I think I'm going to hurt myself. I
took the entire bottle. I don't
feel well...

MAN
Maybe you should hold on a bit...

CALLER
I've been trying. You know...that's
what they always say...

MAN
Just be patient.

CALLER
It's always the same
bullshit...tomorrow's another
day...look ahead...

MAN
I know...

CALLER
So I wait, and it comes...and it's
just the same...

MAN
I know.

CALLER
I need help. I need...help.

MAN
I wish...

CALLER
Can you help me?

MAN
I don't know.

CALLER
I need more than that. I got a gun
today.

CALLER reveals a revolver.

MAN
A gun?

CALLER
Yes. Bullets. It's loaded.

MAN
Wait. Let me try to...

CALLER
(Crying)
You've got no help. Just
words...just words...

MAN
No. I'm not...god, please...wait.

CALLER
(Through tears)
It doesn't matter. It's just
words...

Lights swiftly down on CALLER.

(A pause)

MAN
 Wait...let me see if... Hello?
 Where are you?

DON'T GO!
 Muzak resumes.

MAN
 Hello? Hello!

*Pool of light on **LAWYER**, who is on a cordless phone.*

LAWYER
 Hello?

MAN
 Hello?

LAWYER
 Larry?

MAN
 Richard?

LAWYER
 God, you really are fucked up.

MAN
 What are you doing on the line?

LAWYER
 I needed to speak with you.

MAN
 Richard...

LAWYER
 I just wanted to tell you I'm sorry
 how the case turned out.

MAN
 I know.

LAWYER
 I tried my best, but I told you,
 the courts lean in favor of the
 woman.

MAN
 I know.

LAWYER
I'm really sorry about the kid.

MAN
Yes.

LAWYER
I know you loved him.

MAN
I do.

LAWYER
About the bill...

MAN
Huh?

LAWYER
You're good for it, right?

MAN
What?

LAWYER
I mean, I'm just concerned...after
the way you got shafted.

MAN
Listen, Richard.

LAWYER
I know your financial situation. I
just want to be sure.

MAN
This isn't the time.

RICHARD
Before we go any further, I'm going
to need some kind of confirmation
of your...

MAN
You know damn well, you
sonofabitch.

LINDA, also on a cordless phone, appears at LAWYER's side.

LINDA
Larry, what are you doing?

MAN

Linda?

LINDA

If you think I'm going to let you see David, after this?

MAN

What?

LINDA

Not until you get some professional help?

MAN

She's probably right, Larry.

MAN

What? You...what are you two doing on the same line?

LINDA

That's none of your business.

MAN

None of my...Richard, what's going on here?

LAWYER

Well, Larry...there seems to have been some complications...

LINDA

You're crazy. I knew it. From the start, loony toons.

LAWYER

Linda and I, well, we've been...

LINDA

Richard, just say it.

MAN

Say it? Say what?

LAWYER

I realize the ethical problems that...

MAN

Richard!

LAWYER
But I think I love her.

MAN
Love?

LINDA
Love.

LAWYER
Deeply.

*A different pool of light on **SON**, a phone to his ear.*

SON
Daddy?

MAN
David?

LINDA
David, get off the phone!

SON
Dad, where are you?

MAN
David?

SON
You lied, Dad.

MAN
What?

LINDA
Off the phone.

SON
You said we'd get to stay together.

MAN
I know, but...

SON
I miss you.

MAN
I miss you.

LINDA
This minute!

MAN
Please!

LAWYER
God, Larry, I'm really sorry.

MAN
David!

*Lights down on **SON**, **LARRY** and **LINDA**, muzak restarts.*

MAN
David! David!

(Pause)

*Muzak ends. A pool of light on **THREE**, who wears a headset.*

THREE
Thank you for holding. Can I help
you?

MAN
(Quietly)
Whooper-wi.

THREE
I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.

MAN
(Gaining composure)
Whooper-wi! Whooper-wi!

THREE
Sir?

MAN
(With vigor)
Whooperwi! Whooperwi!

THREE
Can I help you?

MAN
Whopperwiwhooperwhiwhooperwi!

THREE
Can I put you on hold?

*Lights down on **THREE**.*

MAN
Whooperwiwhooperwiwhooperwi!
(Continuing)

*Lights slowly down on **MAN**, as the sound of a bird, then two, then many birds overtake **MAN**'s own bird-calls.*

END

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