

FOR CRYING OUT LOUD IN SOUTH BELOIT

by

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9/16/2013

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Characters

ALLISON, female, any age--the acerbic one.

ANDREA, female, any age--the alienated one.

HAROLD, male, any age--the know-it-all.

WEBSTER, male, any age--the worn-out humanist.

ANNOUNCER, male or female, any age.

ENGINEER, male or female, any age.

Time

Present.

Setting

Radio station's beat-up on-air broadcast studio, equipped with an old-fashioned group microphone on a stand and an "On-Air" sign.

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ALLISON, ANDREA, HAROLD, and WEBSTER lounge in the beatup on-air broadcast studio of a local radio station. There are various places to sit under a digital wall clock. One old-fashioned group microphone on a stand is inconspicuously available. An "On-Air" sign is invisible until needed.

ALLISON

I give up.

HAROLD

You can't give up, you have 17 questions left. So far you have "Alive," "Animal," and "Human."

ALLISON

(Fed up, weary.)

I don't know.

HAROLD

OK, I'll ask the next one for you: Male or...Non-male?

ANDREA

What's "non-male?"

HAROLD

You know, like you. Female.

ALLISON

Are you thinking "Hermaphrodite?"

HAROLD

No, 16 questions left.

ALLISON

That's not fair. You tricked me into using one of my questions.

HAROLD

Tough.

ANDREA

Works for me. Now we know what he means by "non-male."

WEBSTER

Enough...please.

ALLISON

Just defending myself here.

WEBSTER

Mime it then, why don't you.

ALLISON flips him off.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Can't you all please just...desist.

HAROLD

Cease and desist.

ANDREA and ALLISON turn away shaking their heads and throwing their hands in the air in disgust at HAROLD's familiar interference. ANDREA pulls her brightly colored knit cap over her ears.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

You put them together because they have different meanings. "Cease and desist." One means "to stop" and the other "to discontinue."

ALLISON

"Stop" and "discontinue" are the same thing.

HAROLD

You ever been driving, seen a discontinue sign?

WEBSTER

Keep it up, Harold. I am this close to cease-and-desisting your ass.

HAROLD

(Flippantly.)

Only trying to help.

WEBSTER

And I am just trying to shut you the fuck up.

HAROLD

Again with the threats.

WEBSTER

Threats and recriminations. They go together.

HAROLD

(With mock concern.)

It's plain that we must loosen the tension around here.

ALLISON

Boys, boys, we females are not interested in a pissing contest. I, for one, don't have the energy for it.

As if.

ANDREA

Get a little exercise. That'll give you more energy.

WEBSTER

That makes no sense.

ALLISON

That's why it's called a paradox.

HAROLD

The others turn on him at the same time.

Shut up!

ALLISON

Shut the fuck up!

WEBSTER

A long pause, as the players shift positions.

OK, I'll be the one: What time is it?

ALLISON

The clock overhead is visible to all, but no one will move to look.

Anybody?

ALLISON (CONT'D)

I don't know and I don't care.

ANDREA

You're pathetic. Pathetic and apathetic.

HAROLD

I am not apathetic. I simply don't have faith in apathy. Apathy is over-rated as a motivating force.

ANDREA

Aw, do we have to keep this up?

WEBSTER

What up?

ANDREA

This, this...circular reasoning. These spiral arguments. These attacks that generate nothing but mutual touchés.

WEBSTER

Don't forget the "emotional dead ends" coming from the non-male contingent in the group.

HAROLD

ALLISON and ANDREA give him the evil eye. ALLISON also punches HAROLD in the arm. It hurts.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Shit! Cut that out.

ALLISON

You knock it off--always trying to pick a fight.

ANDREA

Sometimes it seems that's the only reason we're here.

ALLISON

Don't you start now.

ANDREA

Start what?

ALLISON

With your repetitious negativity. If I have to hear one more lamentation about "poor little Andrea," I am going to puke in your hat.

ANDREA takes off her knit cap and hides it in her clothing protectively.

HAROLD

Nothing like a list of grievances, though, to exercise your right to free speech.

ALLISON

Which doesn't include the right to sing to the choir in a crowded theatre.

HAROLD

Or in a cage, like this.

ANDREA

You don't want to face reality: Our confinement is self-perpetuating. Each new failure locks down our minds a little more. Each added restraint breaks down our humanity. Each rash and ill-advised protestation further separates us from our loved ones, family, and friends.

HAROLD

Like they say: Whatever doesn't still you makes you stranger.

ALLISON

And commentary like that goes a long way to explaining why don't have visitors.

HAROLD is about to respond, thinks the better of it, and lapses into silence.

WEBSTER

(Getting an idea...)

Maybe...maybe it's time for a new approach.

ALLISON

(Ironically.)

Oh, goody, let's hear it.

WEBSTER

Well, we all agree that we're in a rut.

Unanimous nonverbal assent.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

And we're tired of it.

ALLISON

No poop, Poirot.

WEBSTER

But whereas in the past we merely surrendered to our predicament. Now...

WEBSTER gestures expansively.

ANDREA

(Doubtfully.)

You're saying we can do something about it.

WEBSTER

Don't you see? We've been enslaved by our passivity.

ALLISON

True. Up to now we've drifted along. Unhappy but not enough to do anything about it.

WEBSTER

Well, I've had it. I want to change things around here.

ANDREA

Bringing us back to the problem of "doing something," which seems unlikely, given our history.

WEBSTER

Oh, we've always been able to resist our psychic imprisonment. What's different now is that I believe our discontent is finally strong enough to push us to act.

ANDREA

By sheer grit, I suppose?

HAROLD

It'll take more than that. Like sheer grit and resolute determination.

WEBSTER

Well...yeah, I guess. But we--all of us--have been lulled by our routine. We can change our lives, but first we have to change our attitude.

ALLISON

All right, I got an idea. Let's practice the change we want. Let's pretend to have changed and see where that takes us.

ANDREA

(Skeptically.)

You first.

ALLISON

OK.

(Beat, fidgeting, unsure.)

OK. We can do this. We can do this. We can face our despair--

WEBSTER

--Reject our victimhood. Banish our doubt. Repress our tendency to take the easy way out and vegetate--

ANDREA

--Or worse, to compost.

ALLISON

(Beat, searching for words.)

Enough with the hopelessness. Enough with the self-pity. Enough...moping around.

WEBSTER

I'm ready to remake myself into a healthier, more hopeful person.

ANDREA

Me too. I can break the chains of "I can't and I don't care."

HAROLD

(Struggling to sound positive.)

Maybe you're right. I hate to admit it, but maybe this is going to work.

ALLISON

There you go. Change already.

HAROLD

I'm amazed...at how easy it seems, once you put it that way.

ALLISON

And we're bound to get better at it with practice, achieving a new reality based on true optimism.

ANDREA

We girls are ready to rock. Are you with us?

HAROLD

(Aside to ALLISON.)

You know, you're very...impassioned right now. I like that.

(Beat, then louder to all.)

Yeah, I'm in.

WEBSTER

Let's do it then. United as one single mighty unstoppable power, let's act to escape our bondage and save our souls.

Just when the celebration of new-found camaraderie reaches its height, the clock flips to 2:59...

ENGINEER (O.S.)

Uh, guys...

(Beat.)

Guys...

(Beat, loudly.)

Hey!

The four figures stop, revealing themselves to be crushed in characteristic ways: ANDREA, her doubts confirmed. ALLISON, as if physically whipped. WEBSTER, sadly. HAROLD, with hatred and self-loathing.

ENGINEER (O.S.)(CONT'D)

Guys, it's time.

Slowly the four figures respond, dragging their sorry asses CS, to the old-fashioned group microphone on a stand that WEBSTER mournfully places before them. The four arrange themselves around the mic.

ENGINEER (O.S.)(CONT'D)

Are you ready?

(Beat.)

In three...two...

At the unspoken count of one, the clock flips to 3:00. The "On-Air" sign lights up, making its presence known while for the first time revealing the radio station's call letters--WAAH. The four figures sing with forced brightness, their smooth individual voices merging in automatic harmony...

WEBSTER

Double you--

Double-- ALLISON

Ay-- ANDREA

Single aitch-- HAROLD

ALL
Radio...98-FM..."For Crying Out Loud"...in South Be-loit.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Here we are--
(Diminishing to silence.)
--back at the top of the hour, with some great stuff coming
up ahead...

*The "On-Air" sign goes out. Immediately
the four figures slump, falling back
onto the furniture with characteristic
postures of unbearable resignation and
despair. Pause until the clock flips to
3:01, then...*

ENGINEER (O.S.)
Good work, guys. See you in 59.

Pause.

ANDREA
What a useless existence...

Pause.

ALLISON
I give up...

Pause as long as possible.

HAROLD
You can't give up, you have 16 questions left...

Fade to black.

THE END