

INTO THE PIT

By

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Jude 12, 13

“These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit witherith, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”

SCENE

The house lights are dark. The stage lights are dark. The background is black. The stage floor is black. If possible, the temperature of the theatre should be turned down to induce an uncomfortable chill. The curtain opens, but there is still no light.

The stage is empty, save for a middle-aged man alone in the void. The man is dressed in a collared, black, long-sleeved shirt, black slacks, and black loafers. A dim, blue spotlight shines, barely strong enough to illuminate the man. The spotlight follows him throughout the play.

After prolonged silence, the man emits an angry, frustrated yell.

ADAM SMITH: Hello? Hello? Is anyone there?

He pauses, but receives no reply.

Hey. Hey there. *(angry)* Somebody? *(frightened)* Anybody?

He waits again, but no one responds.

Hello? Where is everybody? Somebody answer me, dammit!

He stomps his feet and pounds the ground, making as much racket as he can. He wears himself out causing the din and collapses in a heap. He can be heard catching his breath between sobs.

This isn't my fault.

(louder) I didn't know.

(louder still) Nobody told me.

(gets back to his feet and yells) No one told me!

Silence.

William. Will. Will told me. But who listens to Will? No one, that's who. C'mon, that guy was freakin' strange, man. How could you expect

me to listen to anything he had to say? Johnny didn't pay him no mind. Vince blew him off. Cindy wouldn't hear it either. Where are *they*?

(calling out) Johnny?

Silence.

(calling out) Vince?

Silence.

(calling out) Cindy?

Silence.

Hey, Vince, if I gotta be here, then you should be too. You're no better than me. I know about you. You were a goddamn newlywed when you fucked the maid.

Oh yeah, she seduced you. Right. What a crock of shit. You've been pug ugly since the day you were born. But, no – that girl probably had a thing for skin tags and double chins. Couldn't have had anything to do with that phone call to the INS you threatened.

Vinny, you were lucky to find a girl in the first place, but it didn't take you six months to turn that into a disaster.

Your wife was freakin' pregnant for crying out loud. But I didn't give you up, did I? I covered you.

"Fix it for me Smitty. C'mon, I need you."

Just like always, I made your dumb ass decisions disappear. I'm your goddamn eraser.

Believe me, that was no cheap and easy fix.

Pregnant, Vince. She was pregnant!

But I saved your family, didn't I? Jan would've taken your kid and half your cash and gone back to Baltimore if it wasn't for me. I'm the reason they stuck around.

You owe me, you son of a bitch. Why aren't you here?

Silence.

Yeah, John – Willy was the crazy one. Wouldn't let us hire strippers for his bachelor party, remember? He must be a homo, you said. A three

dollar Bill. Good thing you brung that teener. Couple of bumps off the bathroom sink got us through 'till we could ditch him and hit the tittie bar.

Holy hell did you made him squirm. Going on about that trip we made to Vancouver. He wrung his hands and gnawed his nails to the nubs. He was practically in tears when he pulled me aside. He thought we were planning to take him with us the next time. Said he wasn't cut out to be a mule.

(ADAM *imitates Willy's high-pitched pleas.*) What if the balloon breaks while its up there? I'll diiiiiiiiie, Adam. It'll keel me. An' I don't think my policy pays off on stuff like that.

(ADAM *resumes his normal speaking voice.*) Ha! He didn't sit down again 'til we left. Just stood against the wall pinching his cheeks together like a vice.

Man, you could be a jerk off. It was all fun and games then. Why don't you have a rail for me now?

I need it. I need you. Where the hell are you?

Silence.

Cindy. Cind. Cinderella. If *anyone* should be here...

Silence.

Damn, Sis, I wasted a lotta good years following your lead. Family first. Blood's thicker than Karo consommé. Stick together or fail apart.

God, you had my head all spun up. You were slick, though. I'll give you that. Not a lotta people coulda talked me into doing half the things you did. Sometimes I feel sick just thinking about them.

Silence.

Sometimes I wonder if I shoulda gone a little farther.

Silence.

I'da never got involved if you hadn't asked. You knew that. Finding licks and vics was your thing, not mine. But I did that shit for you and I kept my mouth shut about it.

So now I need a favor. I need you to back me up. Come here and take my place.

You said it was family first. Why aren't you with me? Why aren't you here. (*sighs*)

Silence.

C'mon, though. Chalk that shit up to youthful exuberance. I was a goddamn kid. That shit was stupid. But I turned it around.

Beth. She turned me around. With her eyes. Those hazel eyes. So strong. Dependable.

(Pauses to reminisce.)

Yeah. What about that? I put that shit in the past. Turned over a new leaf. With Beth I held down a job. A real job. I was an honest to goodness family man.

I mighta cut a corner or two – only to avoid the tax man – but Uncle Sam expects that. Contruction's a cash business. Gotta stay liquid. Economy's built on side jobs and favors. If I didn't play the game, Beth and the kids would've gone without. What kind of man lets his family starve?

And if it wasn't food on the table, it was G.I. Joes and My Little Ponies. And they always needed new school clothes. I couldn't help it that notebooks and pencils turned into software and hard drives. Try footing the bill for *that* running the straight and narrow.

Silence.

And who keeps the door closed when opportunity knocks? When a man of Mayor Cahill's stature comes to you and says he wants an addition put on his house, you do it. It's getting done one way or another. So I scored some materials on the sly and we greased a few palms on the zoning board. So what? If it wasn't me, it would've been someone else. And they probably wouldn't have done half the job I did. That deck alone will last 'till kingdom come. Kingdom come...

But Beth gave up her time and her figure for our children. She deserved that tummy tuck. It was the least I could do. It's not like I picked up the money by selling drugs to school kids or anything.

Beth was so proud of me. I was making connections. Going places. It was like we were newlyweds again. God, I miss her... (*starts sobbing*)

I shouldn't be here. I know I spent a couple of Sundays sitting in the back pew pokin' fun at the Kohl's suits with the tags still on the sleeves, but I'm not so bad.

Just 'cause I snickered a bit when Megan Mills tried to mask that funny meat lump with a silk scarf, doesn't mean I wasn't getting' churched up just the same.

I'm not *this* bad.

Silence.

Jeez, my son's a damn pediatric oncologist. My daughter teaches learning disabled third graders. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I'm the tree! Doesn't that count for anything?

Silence. He paces back and forth, contemplating his next argument.

What about the blizzard? The big snow storm in '95? When the church needed a new roof, who'd they go to for the shingles? I didn't hear anyone bitching about me ripping off a job site then. They didn't complain when I had my crew out there every Saturday for the sack-shriveling month of December fixing the thing. The Board of Directors sure didn't mind paying the guys under the table and keeping that mess off their books. Did they?

And how about the year I personally renovated the electrical work. Instead of being spellbound by strobe lights, the whole congregation applauded when Pastor Bob illuminated that year's tree.

And I'm *here*? No better than some kiddie-touching swimming coach or a suicide bombing sand-nigger?

I'm the two thousand two Church of the Open Door "Man of the Year" for chrissakes. You think they give that out to guys that belong *here*?

(ADAM turns his back to the audience, pauses, and gathers himself. He turns back around and steps forward to an imaginary podium.)

Pastor Robert Masterson, Board of Directors, fellow parishioners, I humbly accept this honor that you have bestowed upon me.

As many of you know, I came from meager beginnings. My family... we didn't always have it easy. There more than a few nights that I ate

cold Spaghetti O's for dinner and did my math homework on toilet paper. Two ply, none of that fancy Charmin stuff.

Before I'd fall asleep on nights like that, I'd pray. God, I'd say. Let me grow up to be rich. Let me grow up to be important. Let me grow up and ride in the parade's lead car.

Good thing He knows best. He didn't give me all those things, but He gave me something better... the will to overcome.

I took those hard years and internalized them. I pulled myself up by the bootstraps and decided that I wouldn't be broke. I refused to be some two-bit hill rod with perpendicular teeth taking out a second mortgage on his double-wide so the wife and kids could have an extra-special Thanksgiving at the Cracker Barrel.

And after I succeeded, I didn't forget about God. I didn't forget to pay him back. Look around you, everyone. Those pews you're sitting in. Effort paid for that. Those stained-glass windows you're looking through. Perseverance paid for them. The very roof on this building. Tenacity shingled that. And that's all for God. Sure, I did that stuff for you all. But I did it for Him more.

He's the reason we're gathered here, not me. He needs you like he needed me. Take a look inside yourselves. Find that inner will and use it. Use it like I do every day. Use it balance out that ledger between you and Him. I promise you, it will pay off.

Thank you.

Silence.

But it didn't pay off, did it? I motivated those folks for you. Where did it get me?

Silence.

I gotta be honest, I thought this place would be different. Like a bad ass party or something. Maybe some beers. Alice Cooper. A snake or two. At the very least I thought there'd be a fire. I guess I didn't expect it'd be so cold... or empty. *(He folds his hands across his chest and rubs his arms, trying to warm himself)*

He is quiet for a minute, then he starts humming "Jesus Loves Me."

Ha-hah! 'Member that Mom?

(starts singing in a low tone) Je-sus loves me, yes I know. For the Bi-ble tells me so. Lit-tle ones to Him be-long. For they are weak, but He is strong...

He is quiet again.

No. I was too little. I can't be held responsible for that.

Silence.

The sign? At the ballgame? Yeah, I saw that friggin' crackpot up in the stands. Who didn't? C'mon, he was wearing a Snuggie for chrissakes. You can't expect me to take that shit seriously.

Silence.

Fine. I looked it up. Once.

(drones monotonously) For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that who believed in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Silence.

That's not it. There's had to be more to it.

I had to *do* something, right? I know You wouldn't just let me off the hook for free. If it was that easy, *nobody* would be here.

He pauses and looks around.

Am I... am I the only one?

Silence.

I made my donations. I paid my bill. I'm no dead beat. You sure as hell accepted my money, didn't You? My greenbacks didn't burn up in the offering plate. So why are you doing this to me?

Prolonged silence.

Are You there? Are You even listening to me? This is Adam Smith, goddamit! Answer me!

Silence.

I'm sorry. I lost my temper. How about this? We'll just start over. You and me. Blank slate. Starting... now.

I apologize. I get it. I was wrong. My life was wrong. I just wanted to be comfortable. I took the road that looked the easiest. Maybe my priorities were a little out of whack. First things should've been put first. I didn't do it to be spiteful. You gotta know that. I just had some other things going on. That's not to say they were more important, they just needed my attention, that's all.

I rejected Your offer. That was my bad. I ignored You when you called. But you coulda called a little louder. Maybe nudged a little harder. You know I woulda got the hint eventually.

I thought I could do it my way. I made a mistake. It was a slip up, that's all. Just 'cause I missed some signs, does that mean I deserve *this*?

Silence.

He drops audibly to his knees.

Lord. Are you there? Can you hear me?

Silence.

Please. Can't I get a second chance?

Extended silence. The curtain closes.