

The Intervention

A One-Act Play

by

Mark Bellusci

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by Mark Bellusci
mark@markbellusci.com

104 Hemlock Drive
Stamford, CT 06902
(203) 363-0070

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JANEY. Dressed modestly. Nervous.

PHIL, a worn, beleaguered looking man in his mid thirties. Dressed in a wrinkled shirt and tie.

JOHNNY, a tough looking guy in his thirties. He wears a black leather jacket and jeans. He could even be wearing sunglasses upon entrance.

ROCCO, very similar to JOHNNY. Maybe even larger.

THE SCENE

A normal living room in a normal house. The entrance to the living room is upstage center. Centerstage is a couch facing the audience. A comfortable chair flanks the couch on stage right. Downstage is an imaginary television, which is facing the couch.

AT RISE

JANEY is pacing nervously in the living room. She continues pacing as she breaks into prayer.

JANEY

Please let this be the right decision. And someday, let him forgive me for it.

(She continues pacing. Doorbell rings. JOHNNY and ROCCO enter.)

JANEY

Hi.

JOHNNY

Is he? --

JANEY

Soon.

JOHNNY

Okay, good. Janey, this is Rocco. He's here to help keep things under control.

(They murmur greetings.)

JOHNNY

You remember the plan, right?

(Pause as JANEY stares off into space, as if she didn't hear JOHNNY's question.)

JOHNNY

Janey? JANEY.

JANEY

Huh?

JOHNNY

Are you ... ready for this?

JANEY

I ... I think so.

ROCCO

Not good enough. You can't "think so." He sees any weakness, any hesitation, and it won't work.

JANEY

I just -- I keep imagining the look he'll give me when he realizes I betrayed him.

JOHNNY

Betrayed him? Are you the one who stopped living in this world? The one who's about to lose a job? He's the betrayer. Him and his addiction. That's why you called us.

(JANEY tries to keep from crying.)

But we can do something about it. We can bring him back. Now there might be some screaming -- and maybe even a little physical stuff. That's the only way I know how to beat this thing. But if he sees any weakness in you, believe me, he'll be back at it so heavily, he'll make a crack addict look like SpongeBob Squarepants.

JANEY

Don't you think I know that!

ROCCO

That's it, Janey. Yell, scream, get angry. Whatever it takes, just be strong -- for his sake.

JANEY

I will. I will!

JOHNNY

(He turns on the TV.)

All right. Now remember, me and Rocco were in the neighborhood, wanted to watch a ballgame, and you asked us to stay for dinner -- then, the intervention.

JANEY

He'll fight you with every ounce of strength.

ROCCO

We'll control him.

JANEY

But he's an animal. You don't know--

JOHNNY

No, we do know -- because we've been there! Fighting the same addiction.

(Pause.)

JANEY

Oh you poor, poor souls.

JOHNNY

One day at a time, but we're fighting it. And Johnny can, too. But only if we follow the plan.

JANEY

(Drained, and more sympathetic to the men.)

Yes.... Of course.

(Offstage is the sound of house keys jangling.)

JANEY

He's here! Oh God, he's here!

JOHNNY

All right, folks, let's save this poor slob.

(They get in position, JANEY and JOHNNY by the door, ROCCO sits on the far side of the couch, stage left. PHIL opens the front door and is greeted by JOHNNY.)

JOHNNY

(Loudly, with a lot of energy.)

Dude. What's happening?

PHIL

(At first shocked and scared by the appearance of his friend, PHIL then responds listlessly.)

Oh. Hi John.

(JOHNNY gives him a bear hug, then shakes his hand vigorously, pumps him on the shoulder, and feigns a friendly punch or two. Throughout, PHIL remains listless. JOHNNY then leads PHIL to the center seat of the couch. JOHNNY then sits on his right. JANEY then sits on the chair flanking the couch. Meanwhile, ROCCO just glares at PHIL.)

PHIL

(Trying to sound happy, but it comes out lame.)

It's good to-- Wow. It's been a -- so long --

(He then notices ROCCO.)

Who's?--

JOHNNY

Hey Rocco, this is Philly, the guy I've been telling you about.

ROCCO

(Brusquely.)

How ya doin?

(ROCCO continues staring at PHIL.)

JOHNNY

He's my workout buddy. Got a few bucks riding on the game tonight, you know.

PHIL

Oh ... uh ... I'm uh ... what brings you --

JOHNNY

Our new gym! We're working out right up the street from you. We finish working out, want to catch the game, I say I got a buddy in the neighborhood.

PHIL

I'm... glad you stopped by and everything. But Janey --

JANEY

Oh no, it's fine, Phil.

PHIL

But dinner--

JANEY

I called in a pizza. With pepperoni, the way you like it.

ROCCO

Boy, this should be some game, you know? The Nets are--

PHIL

The thing is, well, I gotta get up early and --

JOHNNY

We'll have a few slices, watch the game, you'll be in bed by eleven.

PHIL

But I have to do some work.

ROCCO

Work can always wait, man.

(JOHNNY turns his attention to the TV.)

PHIL

No, see you don't underst--

ROCCO

You been following the Nets?

(As they watch the game, PHIL is beginning to twitch with withdrawal pains as he frantically searches for the TV remote control. The others sneak furtive glances at him as they ostensibly watch the game.)

PHIL

Nets? No... Yeah ... I mean, a little.

JOHNNY

They're playing okay, you know, moving the ball and --

PHIL

Where's the, um, where's the ... REMOTE CONTROL?

(Beat.)

JOHNNY

(Deliberately and slowly, while holding the remote control away from PHIL.)

I've got it.

PHIL

(With intense nervousness and spasmodic twitching.)

Can I ... Could you ... Just throw it over here?

JOHNNY

Why? We're just watching the game, right?

PHIL

(Increased twitching.)

JUST! Just give it to me, please!

JOHNNY

Why don't I just hang onto it. Pizza will be here soon and--

PHIL

NO!

(As he speaks, his right hand holds an imaginary remote control, and he goes through the motions of changing the channel with a remote control.)

IT'S MY REMOTE CONTROL!--

JANEY

Philly!

ROCCO

It's starting--

PHIL

I NEED MY REMOTE CONTROL!

(As PHIL screams this, ROCCO prepares to restrain him.)

I WANT IT!

ROCCO

Talk him down, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Easy, Philly.

PHIL

I NEED IT!

(JOHNNY then points the remote control at the TV and shuts it off. PHILLY lets out a howl and gets up to charge JOHNNY, but ROCCO grabs him and sits him back down. Even after he's restrained, he points his right arm at the TV and flicks with an imaginary remote control.)

JOHNNY

Hold him, Rocco. Hold him good.

JANEY

Please don't hurt him!

PHIL

MY REMOTE OH GOD PLEASE GIVE IT TO ME I NEED IT I WANT IT I LOVE IT WHERE IS IT I GOTTA FLICK MORE CHANNELS --

ROCCO

Deep breaths, Phil.

PHIL

WHAT'S ON CABLE I NEED IT PLEASE COME TO ME LITTLE LOVE
REMOTE PLEASE PLEASE OH PLEASE JUST ONE CHANNEL CHANGE
PLEASE--

(His thumb continues changing imaginary channels
faster and faster, until his hand is a blur.)

JANEY

Oh my God, look at his hand!

JOHNNY

Turbo Thumb. A bad case of it.

ROCCO

He keeps that up, he'll pulverize his knuckles.

JOHNNY

Janey, quick. Get me something soft -- a wallet, a sponge.

(JANEY runs offstage and returns with a sponge. She
approaches PHIL to put it in his hand, but JOHNNY
intercepts and almost tackles her before she reaches
PHIL.)

JOHNNY

Are you crazed, woman? In that state, he could snap your
wrist like a steel trap on a rabbit's paw.

JANEY

He wouldn't hurt me! He's my husband!

JOHNNY

He doesn't know you from Adam right now.

ROCCO

(Struggling with PHIL.)

Can't ... hold him ... much ... longer!

(JOHNNY takes the sponge from JANEY, approaches PHIL
like an animal doctor trying to approach a wounded
wild boar. He reaches out with the sponge, and
carefully, calculatedly, places it between PHIL's
thumb and the rest of his fingers. JOHNNY then
dives back from PHIL, who now flicks the sponge as
if it were the remote control. PHIL sighs with
relief now that he has a tactile feel between his
flicking thumb.)

ROCCO

He's coming down, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Let up just a little. But stay alert.

JANEY

Phil? Can you hear me, Phil? I'm so sorry! Oh Phil, I did it for your own good... don't hate me!

JOHNNY

Save your breath, Janey. He's ... somewhere else right now.

(PHIL stares at the TV. He continues flicking the sponge as if it were the remote control. A beatific, contented smile comes on his face.)

PHIL

Ohhh, my love.

JANEY

(Mistakenly thinking PHIL's profession of love is for her.)

Oh Phil, I knew you'd understand--

(JANEY takes a step towards PHIL, but again, JOHNNY grabs and restrains her.)

JOHNNY

Stay back.

JANEY

But he's ... he's calling me.

ROCCO

It's not you he's calling.

PHIL

(Addresses the sponge/remote control lovingly.)
Ohhhhhh it's so good to have you back, my love, flick flick flick, all my channels, they're back, look look look--

JANEY

Phil? Phil? Oh my God, he's lost his--

JOHNNY

It's okay, he's just going through a flicking fantasy.

PHIL

All my old friends, my two-hundred-and-ninety-nine channels. Ahhh, take me away from it all. Gotta see what's on, gotta check my channels.

(Pointing at the TV with the remote sponge.)
Do you see it? Do you see it?

JOHNNY

(Sotto voce.)
Play along with him.

JANEY

Yes Phil. Oh yes, I see it.

PHIL

(He flicks the sponge.)
Good old Star Trek. Never'll be another Captain Kirk -- always with that too-small shirt and the belly popping out.

ROCCO

What else is on, Phil?

PHIL

Let's see ...

(He flicks the sponge.)

PHIL (Continued)

Here we go. A PBS nature show -- lions eating a live zebra -- with a Royal English guy narrating. Blood, guts, culture!

JOHNNY

Too highbrow for me.

PHIL

(He flicks the sponge.)

Let's see what's for sale at QVC. Hmm, talking ash trays that scream "ouch" when you put out a cigarette.

JOHNNY

We don't smoke, Phil. Move on.

(As PHIL continues flicking and giggling with happiness, JOHNNY calls JANEY and ROCCO into a corner, away from PHIL.)

JOHNNY

He's too heavily into psycho surfing syndrome. We're gonna have to turn up the treatment.

ROCCO

Substitution situation?

JOHNNY

Exactly. Janey, I'll need a People magazine.

JANEY

I've got one in the bathroom--

JOHNNY

Get it.

(JANEY runs offstage.)

Rocco, you ready with the antidote?

ROCCO

In my coat.

(JANEY returns with the People magazine.)

JOHNNY

Let's go. Janey, you stand back here, and don't -- DON'T -
- come close till I call you.

(She nods; ROCCO and JOHNNY return to their original
seats.)

ROCCO

What are you watching, Phil?

PHIL

C-Span. Ease the guilt from wasting all that time watching
idiot shows. It's a House hearing on whether to regulate
bumper stickers that use the letter "P."

JOHNNY

(To ROCCO.)

Okay, now.

(ROCCO restrains PHIL, while JOHNNY grabs onto his
arm with the sponge/remote control. JOHNNY removes
the sponge/remote control from his arm. PHILLY
screams in panic. JOHNNY then inserts the People
magazine. He slowly calms himself after the magazine
is in his hand. He tries to change the channel with
the People Magazine, but is frustrated by the
results.)

PHIL

What the--

JOHNNY

No Phil, it can't change channels for you. It's for
"reading."

PHIL

Reading?

JOHNNY

Yeah, little letters on a page that form words.

(He sits next to PHIL and points to an article.)

Look, here's an article about a tenth Gilligan's Island
reunion.

PHIL

Hey hey! I love the Gilligan's Island.

(He starts singing the theme song.)

*If not for the courage of the fearless crew, the Minnow
would be lost.*

JOHNNY

Just -- read the page.

PHIL

(As he stares at the page, he gets an alarmed look.)

Ohh. Ohhhh.

JANEY

What's the matter?

PHIL

Nothing's moving here!

JOHNNY

It's not like TV. The page stays the same, you move your
eyes to follow the words.

PHIL

(As if learning an interesting fact.)

Huh.

(He reads slowly at first and with his finger. He
then picks up speed in his reading.)

PHIL

Wow! There's gonna be a new Survivor! I can't wait!

(He shakes his head as if he is coming out of a
trance.)

Hey, why isn't the TV on?

ROCCO

Because we were talking.

PHIL

We were?

JOHNNY

Yep.

PHIL

Are we ... almost done talking?

JOHNNY

Yeah.

PHIL

Then let's put on the TV! Where's my remote control?

JOHNNY

Not so fast.

(To ROCCO)

Give him the antidote.

(ROCCO hands PHILLY a TV Guide.)

PHIL

A TV guide?

ROCCO

It can save you life.

PHIL

But I don't need that. I'll just flick--

JANEY

No! You won't flick! You can't flick! Don't you see?
It's destroying you, it's destroying our marriage!

PHIL

Look, I've got my flicking under control. I can stop
anytime I want!

ROCCO

You're a flickaholic, Phil. And until you admit it, you'll
be stuck in a never-ending channel surf from Hell.

PHIL

Well ... what am I supposed to do? I can't survive without
TV.

JOHNNY

We're not asking you to give up TV. That's too much for
any human. But you must never, ever handle the remote
control yourself. For people like us, one flick's too
many, and a thousand's not enough.

PHIL

But ... how will I turn it on?

JOHNNY

There's actually a power button right on the TV.

PHIL

There is?

ROCCO

Mmm hmmm.

PHIL

But ... how do you ... reach it?

JOHNNY

You must get off the couch and actually touch the television.

PHIL

Ohh, I don't know if I can--

ROCCO

It'll be a struggle until you build up the muscles in your legs, but you'll get there.

PHIL

And to change the channel?

JOHNNY

(He approaches the TV.)

You walk over and touch this button.

PHIL

(Amazed.)

Wow, a remote control built right into the TV! What will they think of next?

JOHNNY

Philly, from now on, only Janey is allowed to possess the remote control.

(JOHNNY hands the remote control to JANEY.)

PHIL

What if it does the same thing to her that it did to me?

JOHNNY

Not likely, my friend. This dreaded disease rarely affects women.

(To JANEY.)

We'll check up on him next week. If there are any relapses, call us immediately.

PHIL

How can I --

(He takes JANEY'S hand.)

how can we -- ever thank you?

JOHNNY

By helping some other poor slob in the grips of this dreaded disease.

(He looks off into the distance, which is actually the audience. House lights could be put up and JOHNNY could stare at the men in the audience.)

While he is giving his speech, ROCCO puts his hand on his heart and hums "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah)

There are plenty of them out there. Whenever a man is left alone with a remote control, he's a flick away from hell.

(Lights go back down.)

Come on Rocco, our work is done here.

(They utter their goodbyes and exit the stage.)

JANEY sits next to PHIL, remote in her hand. PHIL is intently reading his People magazine.)

JANEY

Well, what do you want to watch?

PHIL

Hmm? Ohhh, I don't care.

JANEY

(Incredulous)

What?

PHIL

Put on what you want.

(Reading the People Magazine.)

Fascinating! Here's an article about the Beaver, all grown up.

(He gets up to leave the room.)

JANEY

Where are you going?

PHIL

For some reason, this People Magazine has given me a tremendous urge to *read* in the bathroom.

(He gets off the couch and is about to exit when he turns back to JANEY.)

By the way, where *is* the bathroom?

JANEY

Third door on your left, dear.

PHIL

See you ... tomorrow morning, honey.

(As JOHNNY exits, JANEY looks to the sky, shakes her head and sighs.)

JANEY

From one addiction to another. One addiction to another.

(She then uses the remote control and starts quickly flicking through the TV stations, entranced.)

LIGHTS DOWN.

THE END.