

The Power Behind the Flush

by

Mark Bellusci

Copyright © 2003, 2004
by Mark Bellusci
104 Hemlock Drive
Stamford, CT 06902
(203) 363-0070 (Voice)
markbellusci1@yahoo.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

FIRST MAN: Business man anywhere from his thirties to his early sixties. Business attire, non-descript.

SECOND MAN: Slightly disheveled, of mid-thirties to fifties.

THIRD MAN: Another conservatively dressed businessman. Any age from early thirties to late fifties.

THE TIME

The present.

THE PLACE

An attractive, well-kept Men's room, presumably in an upscale restaurant or hotel.

SETTING: Downstage left is the entrance to the men's room, which is a sensor door with that opens automatically when a person approaches it from either side. Up stage of the doors are two sinks that are in profile to the audience. These sinks are the kind that automatically dispense water as a person approaches them. Downstage right is a three- to four-foot barrier. Ostensibly behind that barrier are two urinals. The effect is that the two actors will approach the barrier, go through the motions of unzipping their flies and do their business. All the audience will see is the barrier and from the stomach up on the two actors.

AT RISE: The room is dim. The men's room door opens automatically. It is important that the audience knows this is an automatic door -- perhaps an automated whine can be played from offstage. Additional lights then go on, as if they were on automatic sensors. After a moment, the FIRST MAN enters the men's room, checks his appearance in the mirror above the sink, then goes to the urinal that is farther stage right. After another moment, the bathroom door opens, but no one enters. The FIRST MAN already at the urinal looks over at the door. After a moment, the SECOND MAN carefully, warily works his way through the door. He is especially

concerned with the sensor and, after avoiding it, runs past it as quickly as he can. He then stops, breathes a sigh of relief, composes himself, then goes to the urinal, where the first man has been watching him curiously. The SECOND MAN nods in acknowledgment to the first man, who nods back warily. They then both look at the sky as they do their business. The FIRST MAN finishes first; the audience can tell this because he is the first to look down and go through the motions of zipping his fly. Perhaps offstage audio can be heard of a fly being zipped up. As soon as the fly is zipped up, the SECOND MAN reaches to flush the urinal, but again, from offstage we hear the sound of a urinal flushing before the SECOND MAN even reaches out for a urinal handle. He then screams in panic.

SECOND MAN

Ahhhhhhhh!

FIRST MAN

(Shocked by the scream.)

What what what? What's the matter?

SECOND MAN

It flushed!

FIRST MAN

(Beat.)

... And?

SECOND MAN

And I didn't--

FIRST MAN

It's automatic.

SECOND MAN

(Fighting panic and tears.)

Oh no--

FIRST MAN

You know--

SECOND MAN

Not here--

FIRST MAN

It has sensors--

SECOND MAN

Not this too--

FIRST MAN

So it can tell--

SECOND MAN

They've infiltrated even here--

FIRST MAN

You know, when you're done--

(He now finishes, zips up and steps back.)

SECOND MAN

What's left?--

FIRST MAN

It knows when you step away--

(He starts to make his way to the sink and mirrors.)

SECOND MAN

(Anguish as he stares at the urinal.)

WHAT THE HELL'S LEFT?

FIRST MAN

(Beat.)

What are you carrying on about?

SECOND MAN

(Now approaching SECOND MAN, who shrinks back slightly from the somewhat raving FIRST MAN.)

Don't you see? Don't you see?

FIRST MAN

See what?

SECOND MAN

The urinals -- they've automated even the goddamned urinals.

FIRST MAN

And what's wrong with that? You don't have to touch anything, and you don't have to worry about some slob not flushing.

SECOND MAN

(Beat.)

They've gotten to you too, huh?

FIRST MAN

Nobody's gotten to -- and who is "they."

SECOND MAN

As if you didn't know.

FIRST MAN

Why don't you just humor me?

SECOND MAN

The powers.

FIRST MAN

The powers?

SECOND MAN

Behind the power.

FIRST MAN

Exactly what are you--

SECOND MAN

Those shrewd and crafty bastards who really run the show.

FIRST MAN

What, you mean the president and--

SECOND MAN

Come on, man. He's just a puppet for these boys.

FIRST MAN

(Chuckling.)

Oh boy, the old conspiracy theory.

SECOND MAN

Sure, laugh. Act like I'm a looney. That's exactly what they want you to do in their brilliant brainwashing campaign.

FIRST MAN

Sure, the old brainwashing plot.

SECOND MAN

And the world fell for it. One of the sneakiest offensives ever mounted.

FIRST MAN

And where, exactly, has this offensive taken place?

SECOND MAN

(Gestures with his hands to indicate the Men's room.)
You're looking at it.

FIRST MAN

Looking at what?

SECOND MAN

This automatic sink, the automatic door, and yes, now even
the automatic urinal.

FIRST MAN

So these "powers behind the power" are destroying us by
making our lives easier. Well, if they are, sign me up for
the torture treatment.

SECOND MAN

Go ahead, scoff, just like the Bolsheviks did before Lenin,
the Kaiser before Hitler, Gore before Bush.

FIRST MAN

So do you want to explain how an automated urinal translates
into a conspiracy plot?

SECOND MAN

Don't you see? Every time some new automated thing comes
out, we lose the skill it's replacing. The powers have been
doing it to us for sixty, seventy years.

FIRST MAN

(Sarcastically.)
Patiently persistent, these powers.

SECOND MAN

Radio gets popular in the thirties, people stop telling
stories. Car comes out, everybody gets fat.

FIRST MAN

So we'd be better off with rick-shaws.

SECOND MAN

In the fifties, they dropped their nuclear bomb: TV. Easily
the most destructive force ever launched against the free
world, its effects are still causing major damage.

FIRST MAN

Nobody's ever died from TV.

SECOND MAN

Not physically, mentally.

FIRST MAN

Ooooooh, big bad TV. I'm scared. Hey pal, TV's been around for a while now, and we're still the strongest country on earth.

SECOND MAN

This is guerrilla warfare, my unseeing friend. We're getting attacked and we don't even know it. TV was the big salvo, and they've been peppering us ever since.

FIRST MAN

With what?

SECOND MAN

Calculator comes out, no one can add.

FIRST MAN

Less math mistakes, everybody is happy.

SECOND MAN

Frozen dinners come out, no one can cook.

FIRST MAN

It's called ... convenience? People are ... busy?

SECOND MAN

Video game comes out, kids become shut-ins. 24-hour ATMs come out, people don't track finances. Internet comes out, people don't talk face-to-face anymore.

FIRST MAN

People can communicate worldwide right from their PCs. What's wrong with that?

SECOND MAN

Oh there's nothing wrong with it -- in phase one of their plan. It's what happens in phase two that will keep us down forever.

FIRST MAN

Ahhh, the infamous "phase two." And what, my friend, happens in this "phase two?"

(He looks around to make sure no one is listening, then whispers Sotto Voce.)

SECOND MAN

They shut everything off.

FIRST MAN

They shut every--

SECOND MAN

Everything. The calculators, the cars, the computers.

FIRST MAN

And what's supposed to happen then?

SECOND MAN

Then? Then we sit like stumps, like vegetables, like doormats. Unable to do even the most basic of functions. They shut the automatic lights and we sit in the dark. They stop the cars and we get heart attacks from walking. They shut the calculators and we pay hundreds of dollars for a pack of gum because we can't figure out if we have change coming. They shut the TVs -- oh my God, I don't even want to think about it -- the riots, the pillaging, the desecration. Even in here --

(Indicates the bathroom.)

I thought we were at least safe in here, but no more -- even in here, they shut the "automatic urinals" and the "automatic sinks," and it becomes a pestilence and plague party.

FIRST MAN

(Laughing.)

I'm sorry, pal, I don't mean to laugh, but -- a pestilence and plague party?

SECOND MAN

It's a matter of time.

FIRST MAN

Hey, I have an idea: on your way out? Why not stop by and visit earth for a while?

SECOND MAN

Open your eyes brother, see what's around you--

FIRST MAN

Oh, I see. I see that you need some help, my friend. A therapist or something. They haven't automated them yet, have they?

SECOND MAN

I cannot open the eyes of those who will not see.

FIRST MAN

(He says the following line as if he were a TV newsman announcing a story.)

"Brainwashed by Baywatch: the new menace."

(He laughs.)

SECOND MAN

I will pray for you, brother, for you are too far gone -- like most.

FIRST MAN

Oooh, woe is me. I'm being controlled by the "powers." Big brother is in my urinal.

(He laughs.)

SECOND MAN

I can only hope your end is mercifully quick.

FIRST MAN

(Addressing the urinal.)

Hello, Mr. Power-behind-the-power. Hung pretty well, ain't I?

(He laughs again.)

SECOND MAN

I must move on, before they get me too. May you someday see the light.

FIRST MAN

(He points to the lights above.)

Won't be hard, they're all automatic.

(FIRST MAN sneaks up to the door carefully, steps in front of it, then retreats quickly as it opens automatically. He then sprints through it like a man diving through a deadly fire.)

FIRST MAN

(Laughing, he says the following to himself.)

Man, the nuts you meet in a Men's room these days.

(He puts his hands under the automatic faucet, then dries them under the automatic hand dryer.)

Oh well, I needed a good laugh.

(He walks to the automatic door.)

Wait till I tell--

(He is in position, but the automatic door doesn't open.)

Huh.

(He steps back away from the door, then steps up to it again. It still doesn't open.)

Okay, come on.

(Nothing. He flaps his arms to try to get the motion detector to notice him. There is now slight annoyance in his voice.)

All right, enough already.

(The door doesn't open. Now he jumps up and down to get the door sensors to notice him, but nothing happens.)

Let's go, let's go, let's go. I've had enough of this place.

(Door stays closed.)

Okay, if you're going to be stubborn--

(He backs up, puts his head down in a determined way, walks forcefully up to the door -- and then right into it. The door stays closed and he bounces off.)

Come on, I've got to go.

(He backs up and walks into the door again and again. After the second time, he runs up to it, smacks into it and falls to the floor. Now he's in a panic.)

Oh please please please let me out I don't want to stay here
I hate it here please door let me out I'm scared of this
place please please please

(Beat.)

Wait a second!

(He stands up, collects himself, straightens his clothes and faces the door.)

Wait a second! What am I, an idiot?

(He walks up to the door.)

I know how to open a door.

(He reaches out, then hesitates.)

I just ...

(He tentatively feels different parts of the door. After a while, he brushes his hand against the doorknob.)

This ... thing.

(He holds his hand on the doorknob.)

This "thing." It has something to do with it, I know it. I just have to ...

(He puts both hands on the knob, but it's obvious he doesn't know what to do with it.)

I just have to ... what?

(He does everything but turn the doorknob; he hangs from it, he karate chops it, he talks into it like it was a microphone, he tries to hammer it in.)

Come on, I used to do this. I used to know. I used to--

(Suddenly, the toilets start flushing arbitrarily, as does the sink, the automatic dryer and the automatic lights.)

What's -- What the --? ... Not the ... Oh my God, he was ... he was right! The powers!

(He frantically does everything he can with the door, until he slumps away exhausted, laying on the floor.)

(Yelling to the ceiling.)

I don't have to tell you anything but my name and serial number.

(Just then, the door opens. The SECOND MAN gets to his knees, scared and startled. A moment later, a THIRD MAN enters. He is dressed in a nice business suit, and looks calm and normal -- until he sees the SECOND MAN on the floor.)

FIRST MAN

Oh thank God!

THIRD MAN

(Somewhat shocked.)

What the?--

FIRST MAN

Thank you, sir. Thank you!

(He gets off his knees and grabs the lapels of the THIRD MAN and implores.)

Get out. Get out while you still can.

THIRD MAN

What--

FIRST MAN

The powers. They're here. They're everywhere. They run the country. They're the powers behind the power!

THIRD MAN

Excuse me!

(He pulls away from the SECOND MAN and looks at him with distaste. He then smoothes his suit and tie, and looks like a business man again. There is a long pause, then the following is said softly, understated.)

We don't like this "power-behind-the-power" term

(SECOND MAN shrieks in horror.)

THIRD MAN

We prefer the kindler, gentler "political advisors."

(SECOND MAN cries.)

THIRD MAN

Ahhh, but I've upset you. Here.

(He hands SECOND MAN a calculator and a remote control.)

Go home, play with the calculator and flick your TV channels. You'll soon be comfortably numb again.

(SECOND MAN gets a dumb, glazed look on his face, then plays with the calculator, then aims the remote control at the door, which now opens.)

THIRD MAN

And you'll need to increase your contribution to the party, hold a political fundraiser in town, and of course, track down that ... *subversive* ... you were chatting with.

FIRST MAN

(From outside the door.)

Of course, of course! I'll start looking right now. Long live the power!

THIRD MAN

Shhh. We like to keep a low profile, remember?

FIRST MAN

(Sotto voce.)

Got you. I'll write a check today.

THIRD MAN

See the cashier on your way out.

FIRST MAN

Thank you. Thank you.

(He exits.)

THIRD MAN

(Sighing and washing his hands.)

Children. Just like children. Reminds me a young "Dubya."

END