

CALPURNIA'S MISFORTUNE



By

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CHARACTERS

CALPURNIA, a housewife in distress. Relies heavily on her routine. Fears death and change.

OLIVER, married to CALPURNIA. Frequently at her disposal.

ROY, a brooding opium user/dealer. Very Wealthy. OLIVER'S college roommate. He acts quite eccentric and impulsive as his brain has been affected by years of drug usage.

ROY'S BODYGUARDS, five cloaked figures. Large and muscular.

SCENE 1

The stage is divided in two. On stage right is a kitchen and a kitchen table. CALPURNIA sits at the table looking fretful. On stage left is a warehouse and makeshift opium den. OLIVER is seated at the apron, feet dangling. He looks on edge surrounded by opium pipes.

CALPURNIA

(Concerned and talking to herself)

How was I to know he wouldn't be home for dinner? Was I supposed to feel it in my bones whilst shopping for our groceries at the bodega? Was my oven supposed to tell me when I so cleanly slid the lasagna in to sizzle? Or when I set the table with two plates, two forks, and two wine glasses was I supposed to assume that: "O the lord wants me to drink tonight, something bad *must* be a-comin'!" No, more like. When at two-in-the-morning he finally calls to say that he's been caught up at work and I'm still at the dinner table, now drunk as hell, stroking the fat cat, *our* fat cat, on my lap, seething with rage, and sweating buckets as fast as I'm consuming the wine. And the lasagna's still warming in the oven and I've been thinking he's to arrive any second now, any second, for the previous six hours? Is this a life worth living?

Calpurnia freezes. oliver unfreezes.

OLIVER

(Breaking fourth wall)

You must know, this evening, rather these turn of events, were unpredictable, most certainly not in my day planner. I'd rather be at home with my wife. She's especially attractive when she's cross and she almost always is cross. Really, I'm an honest man. When I insist that tonight was out of my control... Well, you can decide for yourself if I'm at fault.

Queue flashback music as OLIVER retells the evening's turn of events chronologically. He takes pleasure in reminiscing and as he does so, he moves his arms with gusto,

nearly painting a visual picture with his movements. He speaks theatrically.

The evening was an ominous one. A distant storm was brewing and thunder clapped uproariously. I exited work at a quarter past seven.

At this point, OLIVER stands and freezes. CALPURNIA unfreezes.

CALPURNIA

(Increasingly intensifying)

Really, how am I to believe him? Oliver works at some cigarette company or other and it's true I'm with him for the money, but he loves me. Or he loves my legs, or my housekeeping knacks, but it's love at that. We've been good for a while too. That type of compatibility where you don't talk much, but the sex is good and so is the lasagna, so you're happy.

CALPURNIA freezes. OLIVER unfreezes.

OLIVER

I walked block after block in the pouring rain. My vision blurred and my bones felt numb with cold. They came out from behind me all at once like a barbaric ambush. "They" meaning five unidentifiable cloaked figures--with hidden faces mind you.

ROY'S BODYGUARDS come onstage and surround OLIVER. They freeze around him. CALPURNIA unfreezes.

CALPURNIA

Whatever will I do now? Eat lasagna cooked for two all by my lonesome? I'll be bloated as a boat! Feed his half to the cat? It'll show up regurgitated in my shoes when I go to put them on before my spa appointment tomorrow. No, I suppose I'll wait and hope Oliver returns in a timely manner. And whilst I wait, I'll meditate.

Calpurnia moves to the floor. She sits cross legged with abnormally good posture. She exhales, freezing. OLIVER unfreezes. As he describes his encounter with the masked men, the men that surround him act out his story.

OLIVER

(Looking around as he describes his location)

And so they dragged me into the confined trunk of a moving vehicle, and swept me away to a warehouse. The warehouse was massive, with ceilings that seemed impossibly far and boarded up windows that didn't let in light. There, the distinct odor of my college roommate hung heavy

in the dusty air. So it came as no surprise to me when my roommate himself stepped out of the shadows to greet me.

ROY steps onstage in dark clothing. He reaches out to formally shake hands with OLIVER. OLIVER continues to narrate the story facing the audience, but talks to ROY when demonstrating the dialogue between them both.

Roy was a tall, brooding, roommate. He spent his weekends hotboxing our shared bathroom with opium, even dedicating a drawer in our dorm room to his neatly lined pipe collection, pipes varying in lengths and colors. Upon our initial meeting, Roy was polite enough to ask me if I was okay with his illegal hobby and upon my indifferent response, he left me to my own devices. I didn't engage in a real conversation our entire year together. Until of course the favor came.

CALPURNIA interrupts with a particularly long, meditative hum.

CALPURNIA

This zen thing does not work. Now, I'm exhausted and starving and bored. If Oliver is cheating on me, then God bring him back to me and I'll be all forgiveness and servitude. I will not eat until he eats with me! I will not sleep until I know that he's safe! Without him, I am nothing but a woman with no purpose. With him, I am a wealthy wife, with friends and soirees to attend. I was content! And if his mistress brings him joy so be it! I simply want his company at the dinner I so dutifully prepared.

CALPURNIA returns to sit at the table. She freezes, sadly.

ROY

(To OLIVER)

You are indebted to me.

OLIVER

I was wondering when you would at last return to retrieve the payment you so rightfully deserve.

OLIVER pulls out his wallet kept conveniently in his back pocket.

Fortunately, I'm equipped with my checkbook! How much do I owe you? Are you factoring in years worth of interest? Please Roy, name your price.

OLIVER turns toward the audience to narrate/explain the interaction. ROY and his men freeze as he does so.

As far as foolish college students go, I was the absolute worst. I splurged my savings on sports cars and woman, maxed out more credit cards than I could count, and found myself on the deep end of a pool of debt. I thought I was destined for a dismal future working a minimum wage job at the corner store in order to live a lonely life in a one room apartment with no furniture. BUT one afternoon, I walked in on Roy dealing opium to a frat boy, and he gripped a wad of cash worthy of Bill Gates in his left hand. To this day, I can clearly remember the money, shining under a trail of holy sunlight, leading me to my salvation!

OLIVER raises a fist patriotically at the thought.

We made a deal, Roy and I. He would cover my expenses if I began making responsible decisions, both economically and otherwise. He told me that when my smarter decisions would leave me successful, I could pay him back the money he lent me.

ROY unfreezes and steps forward to narrate his perspective.

ROY

Oliver once asked me what was in it for me.

OLIVER

He was smart and business savvy, but I couldn't figure out why he was willing to help.

ROY

Well, with a growing demand for my drugs, I realized I could benefit from some help. Those who owed me, could provide their assistance in expanding my business, even becoming safety nets for future favors I might ask of them.

OLIVER

(To audience)

So he brought me here with a favor to ask. And it was...

ROY

....*not* money. I have enough money to last me a lifetime. Living luROYriously at that!

OLIVER

(Turning to ROY, perplexed)

Then what?

ROY

Romance.

OLIVER

ROMANCE?