

Two Men About to be Killed by a Comic Book Supervillain

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The play opens at an office building security desk. Two security guards—HECTOR, an older man, and JULIUS, a younger man—are standing behind it. HECTOR has a button depressed on an intercom, and he is speaking into it.

HECTOR

OK, OK Dr. Messenger, we'll make sure the signs are up for the meeting tomorrow. You don't have to worry about a thing; we'll take care of it. Anything else, you just let us know.

He releases the button and sighs.

JULIUS

I had maintenance put up the signs two days ago.

HECTOR

Guess they forgot, I'll have to have Brian—

JULIUS

No, Hector, I saw the signs go up. It's all taken care of.

HECTOR

Really?

JULIUS

I don't know what Dr. Messenger is talking about.

HECTOR

Smiles:

Well Julius, there's a simple explanation for that. She's a scientist. While they may work on the third floor, their heads are in the clouds. They can work fantastic equations, but half of them can't work the elevator. And Dr. Messenger is one of the worst.

JULIUS

No...

HECTOR

Yeah! There was this one time I saw her come down to the cafeteria. At the time, someone was there to refill the juice machine. So she comes in, and she sees the machine, the metal guts exposed, and she just stares. She watches the man stock the sodas, empty the change, his whole routine. Once he finishes, she continues to stare. Then a few seconds later, she snaps out of it and goes back upstairs.

JULIUS

That's not so bad...

HECTOR

You're right; that's not so bad. But then what happens is some guy walks up to me, asking for Dr. Messenger. He said they were supposed to have a meeting over lunch, and she hadn't shown.

JULIUS

Ahhh...

HECTOR

Yeah, and this guy was from the government; he was going to rule on her funding for the next year. Luckily I buzzed her back down. But that was a big thing and she just spaced out about it. The doctor is definitely daffy.

JULIUS

Laughs:

What?!

HECTOR

What?

JULIUS

What did you just say?

HECTOR

Daffy?

JULIUS

What kind of a word is daffy?

HECTOR

It's... you know, crazy...

JULIUS

Like the duck?

HECTOR

Yeah. It's just a more endearing way of saying she's nuts.

JULIUS

Hector, I've got to say: the word "daffy" is way before my time.

HECTOR

It's before mine, too. But for the scientists, it fits. They like to think that they're just as hip as everyone else, but it's just not the truth. Believe me, I've seen what they do at parties...

He sighs.

The scientists are a special breed...

On recognition, Julius smiles and begins to quote a poem.

JULIUS

"I grew a special breed of sunflower/Because others grew too high./So I dug and planted one/That wouldn't even try./And..." Ah, I forget the rest...

HECTOR

Is that something Maggie wrote?

JULIUS

Yeah, I think it's great. Though we've never had a sunflower at our place...

HECTOR

Ah, that's not important. You see with Maggie, the real sunflower is in her mind...

JULIUS stares.

You know, figuratively?

JULIUS

Exhales sharply:

That's why I'm the security guard. She's the poet...

HECTOR

But she loves writing, huh?

JULIUS

Absolutely. I'll wake up sometimes, and she'll have left me a few handwritten pages about kittens, the mortgage, all kinds of stuff. It's her imagination, just spilled all over our bed. I wish I could appreciate it more, you know? I mean, I love it, and I try to memorize some of it, but I feel like this could connect to somebody a lot better than it connects to me.

HECTOR

But you try.

JULIUS

I try...

HECTOR

That's all that counts.

Julius shrugs.

You know Julius, you should really have Maggie, tell her to do something with her words.

JULIUS

How do you mean?

HECTOR

Get it out there; find an audience...

JULIUS

She's doing that tonight, actually. They've got something, I think it's at the Barnes and Noble's downtown. They do an open mic poetry thing every couple of weeks. And tonight she's there, standing in front of a crowd, reading some of her favorite stuff...

He punches the palm of his hand.

JULIUS (cont.)

God, tonight, out of all the nights I've worked here, I just want to walk on out of here. I want to be with Maggie. It's horrible because here, it's just another night. I'm stuck, working the desk like hundreds of nights; Maggie's out there having a once in a lifetime experience. It would be easier—not by much—but it would be easier if Dr. Messenger's meeting was tonight instead of tomorrow, you know? Then here something would be happening—something. Not like this nothing. She's going to bring me home her entire night; her sets of poetry, the looks in the crowd... And I've got nothing for her...

HECTOR

I'll cover for you.

JULIUS looks at him.

If you want to get out of here, I'll say you were here the whole time. In your place I'd want the same thing.

JULIUS takes a few steps away from the desk, stops, and turns back to HECTOR.

JULIUS

Nah, I can't make you do that...

HECTOR

Are you sure? I'll make excuses, say you're on phony calls, destroy security tapes...

JULIUS

Thanks Hector, but I'll stay...

He checks his watch.

I probably missed most of it anyway...

HECTOR

Can I destroy some tapes anyway?

He smiles. JULIUS does the same, then sighs.

JULIUS

The sunflowers of her mind, Hector... They're blooming... I'm missing them...

He walks back to the desk.

She's bringing the baby and everything...

HECTOR

At least you're there in spirit. And furthermore, hey, she's probably reading something about you right now...

JULIUS

About me?

HECTOR

Yeah...

JULIUS

No, Maggie doesn't have any poems like that.

HECTOR

Really?

JULIUS

Most of her poems are like the sunflower one; they're things that you could picture Maggie doing, but things I've never seen her do. And actually, I'm really happy about that. Why limit her poems to just us, when her imagination is so much bigger than that?

HECTOR

So no poems about Julius, huh?

JULIUS

Smiles:

I asked her the same question once; same exact words. She turned around and said to me, "They're all you, Julius, all of them. All my poems are about me, and you're the most treasured part of me."

Beat.

Hector, that means more to me than if Maggie wrote a hundred poems about me. That's my "Ode to Julius" right there. Everything she writes; it's me.

HECTOR

That's a heck of an ode.

JULIUS

I try to give it back. It's because I treasure her, and she's a part of me, that I'm in this uniform, behind this desk right now. It's for her...

Smiles:

And all those sunflowers blooming tonight are for me...

Beat.

HECTOR

Is she reading the sunflower poem?

JULIUS

Yeah, along with a few others she really likes; sort of her greatest hits.

HECTOR

Yeah...

JULIUS

Why'd you ask?

HECTOR

Well, she's telling the same thing again, and that made me think...

JULIUS

Yeah...?

HECTOR

You remember a few months ago when Dr. Fielding's ex-husband came around here, to harass her?

JULIUS

Yeah, and you found him hiding in the-

HECTOR

Yeah; you know it...

JULIUS

I've heard you tell that story hundreds of times.

HECTOR

That's the thing; that's part of what I'm talking about. Not only did you hear it all those times, I must have repeated it to everyone in this building ten times over. I got sick of it.

JULIUS

So you're afraid that Maggie is going to get sick of reading her poems again?

HECTOR

That's part of it. But there was something else in the repetition. I wasn't telling the story anymore...

Beat.

HECTOR (cont.)

You remember how in school they make you memorize the Gettysburg Address? Well I had memorized my own story, and now I was feeding it secondhand to my listeners. It wasn't mine. For all it mattered, Abraham Lincoln was the one who captured and hogtied a half-naked Vince Fielding...

JULIUS

Now there's a thought...

They nod.

HECTOR

But you see my point; I didn't know it at the time, but I was squeezing the life out of the event. I was burying the memory and chiseling the epitaph. And I had no idea until after I'd done it. And even now, when some random part of the memory comes to mind, it's still overpowered by the loud voice of the words I committed to memory.

He turns to JULIUS.

Julius, this is what I don't want to see happen to Maggie. I don't care if she writes them down, but the moment the poems start coming from the paper and stop coming from her, don't let her read them. Those pages she leaves on your bed, the moment you start seeing words in print and stop seeing Maggie, don't let yourself read them. It's Maggie's life in these poems. If it's treated like a child with the Gettysburg Address, well, what a life we've wasted...

JULIUS

That's it.

HECTOR

I know.

JULIUS

No, that's the end of the poem; the sunflower poem.

HECTOR

I triggered a memory?

JULIUS

You triggered Maggie.

He takes a breath.

"I grew a special breed of sunflower/Because others grew too high./So I dug and planted one/That wouldn't even try./Then I thought 'What a life/The plant I've just begun./A sunflower designed/to never reach-'"

The intercom buzzes. HECTOR and JULIUS roll their eyes.

There's the door...

HECTOR

I'll buzz them in.

He does so. The two wait for the visitor to approach the desk. The COMIC BOOK SUPERVILLAIN enters, either in full supervillain regalia, or in a very shabby disguise. Either way, HECTOR and JULIUS are skeptical.

SUPERVILLAIN

I'm here for Dr. Messenger and the Coding Sequence Center.

HECTOR

Don't waste my time:

I'm sorry, that's off limits...

SUPERVILLAIN

Then DIE!!!

The SUPERVILLAIN stands in a fearsome battle pose and attacks the pair. HECTOR and JULIUS react, but they are killed by the SUPERVILLAIN's super powers. Alarms sound. The SUPERVILLAIN looks around, then dashes past the desk to offstage. The bodies of HECTOR and JULIUS are left strewn across the desk. The lights fade.