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By

MICHAEL RAGOZZINO

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All Rights Reserved premiered at the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Conn., during the New Works New Haven Play Festival in May of 2008.

Cast:

Grace Iris McQuillan-Grace

Ralph J. Kevin Smith

Jerry Alex Teicheira

Christie Anna Hayes

Director Jeremy Funke

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CHARACTERS

GRACE (w): Late 30s to early 40s.

RALPH (m): Mid-to-late 40s.

CHRISTIE (w): Mid-to-late 20s.

JERRY (m): Mid-to-late 20s.

TIME

Any weekday in the last five years.

PLACE

A big city.

SETTING

A boardroom in the marketing department of a large pharmaceutical company.

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(A boardroom. Notebooks, pens, a landline phone and a bottle of pills sit on the conference table. A small wastepaper basket sits under the table. GRACE, an older woman in business dress with powerful calf-high boots, sits at one end of a table across from RALPH, an older man in a cheap suit. CHRISTIE, a younger woman, sits at the center of the table. Behind them on the wall is a company logo reading “PharmaHope” with the slogan, “Curing ailments you didn’t even know you had.”)

GRACE. No, no, no, that’s all wrong. You’ve got it wrong. You’re still missing the religious right and a good chunk of the Southwest.

RALPH. So we’ll throw in a cross right in the middle of the scene. Of course it can’t be just a cross, we’ll make it a ... a ...

CHRISTIE. A cactus.

RALPH. A cactus.

GRACE *(raising an eyebrow)*. The commercial is set on a yacht. You want to put a cactus, in the shape of a cross, right in the middle of the ocean?

RALPH *(thinking, then a moment of inspiration)*. Subliminal flash. Waves rolling in, captain’s wheel rocking from side to side ...

CHRISTIE *(quickly, flashing her hands)*. Jesus Cactus. Jesus Cactus.

RALPH. Salt water spraying off the sun-splashed bow, and ...

GRACE. We have a rule, Ralph. Thirty seconds, no more than five subliminal flashes. Otherwise we're manipulating the public.

RALPH. This is number five.

CHRISTIE (*disappointed*). No, it's number six. We've got the mountain goat in the tire swing, the splintered white picket fence, the steaming banana in the middle of a frozen field, the cat wearing the football helmet, and the olive-skinned American guy dressed up for Halloween wearing a turban, carrying a copy of the Koran in his left hand and a sledgehammer in his right.

RALPH. That's four.

CHRISTIE (*faster*). Mountain goat in tire, splintered picket fence, steaming banana frozen field, cat in a football helmet, olive-skinned American guy dressed up for Halloween wearing a turban carrying a copy of the Koran in his left hand and a sledgehammer in his right.

GRACE. Wait, I got four that time.

CHRISTIE (*sighs*). Goat tire, splintered fence, banana steam, football cat, olive-skinned American.

GRACE. You're right, it's five.

RALPH. Let's take out the "A"-rab with the sledgehammer.

(*CHRISTIE squeals.*)

GRACE. Jesus Christ, Ralph, "A-rab"? Do you know what kind of a lawsuit you could've just opened us up to? As far as PharmaHope and anyone associated with PharmaHope is concerned, he is an olive-skinned American dressed up for Halloween.

RALPH. It's just us in here, Grace.

GRACE. This is twenty-first century America, Ralph.

(GRACE glances about, indicating the dramatically justified paranoia but never quite acknowledging the audience.)

GRACE *(cont'd)*. The walls here have eyes. *(Back to RALPH.)*

And there's no way we're getting rid of the Halloween terrorist. We've been over this.

RALPH. Then what about the ... wait, what were they again?

CHRISTIE. Goat, fence, fruit, cat, olive.

RALPH. What the hell is the ...

GRACE. Don't you say it, Ralph.

RALPH. The damn goat shouldn't be in there.

GRACE *(sober)*. We have until five p.m. today to come up with an entire marketing scheme that should have been finished over a month ago, and you want to bring up the whole goat argument again. We settled this.

RALPH. No, you settled this, your highness.

GRACE. I settled it because I was right. The goat is envy, shame ...

RALPH. Oh. There you go.

GRACE. Ralph! You need to focus on moving forward.

RALPH. Are you saying it's my fault we're in this spot?

GRACE. You're the senior marketing strategist, Ralph. We had fifty million labels scheduled to be printed this morning. All the little boxes and bottles and physician sheets are sitting there, and what do they say? Nothing. They're blank. Why are they blank, Ralph?

RALPH. Gracie ...

GRACE. Don't Gracie me. They're blank because you haven't even come up with a name for the product yet. And every minute is costing PharmaHope more money. Not to mention that we've scheduled the ad shoot for tomorrow and all we've got is a montage of second-rate rehashes.

RALPH. Hey, those are my second-rate rehashes.

GRACE. Six months you had to come up with something.

RALPH. We had.

GRACE. You're the senior marketing executive here, Ralph.

RALPH. What are you trying to say, Grace?

GRACE. We're screwed. Buried under a pile of clichés and I'm starting to think ...

RALPH. You're starting to think what?

GRACE (*calmer*). I'm starting to think you're slipping.

RALPH. I what? I'm slipping? I'm not slipping. I've just, I ...

CHRISTIE. He's just hit a little rough patch.

RALPH. I've hit a little rough patch. Thank you, Christie.

CHRISTIE. Because he's old.

(RALPH glares at CHRISTIE.)

CHRISTIE (*cont'd*). Which is not a big deal considering how much he helped my father build this place.

RALPH. Your father's a real mensch, Christie. One of the real good old boys. A man among men. A John, a Peter, a Richard, a ...

(JERRY enters, a young man wearing a suit and carrying a heavy bag. They do not see him.)

GRACE. Oh, just say it, Ralph. A penis.

RALPH. Don't you pull that sexist stuff on me.

JERRY. Eh-hmm. Excuse me.

(They all stop and look at the door. Two beats.)

RALPH. What?

JERRY. I'm sorry to interrupt. I can come back later if this is a bad time.

RALPH. We're out of donuts.

GRACE. No, no, it's a great time, come on in. You're Jeremiah?

JERRY. Yes, Jerry, yes.

(RALPH looks puzzled.)

GRACE. Come on in, Jerry. We were expecting you.

RALPH. I wasn't.

GRACE. Don't mind Ralph, Jerry, he can be such an old fogie at times.

RALPH. That's it, Grace. I'm going to Christie's father.

GRACE. Go right ahead. Of course, maybe I already went to Christie's father. Maybe I've already had a long discussion with Charles about people who may or may not be slipping.

CHRISTIE *(to JERRY)*. Hi, I'm Christie.

JERRY. Jerry, nice to meet you.

CHRISTIE. We met yesterday. I don't know if you remember.

JERRY. Yes, of course. Nice to see you again.

CHRISTIE. Likewise.

RALPH. I helped her father build this place brick by brick.

GRACE. Maybe Christie's father thought bringing in some new blood was a good idea. After all, Ralph, the walls are made of steel now.

(A beat. As it dawns on him, RALPH turns to JERRY. They look at each other. JERRY shrugs. RALPH sucks in his stomach and reaches out his hand. JERRY takes it.)

RALPH. Steel, huh? What are you made of?

JERRY. Uh ... wit?

RALPH (*laughing*). Wit, hah, that's a good one. Pleased to meet you, son.

(*RALPH squeezes JERRY's hand.*)

JERRY. Thanks, pleased to meet you too.

(*RALPH's face falls. JERRY's face twists as RALPH squeezes harder.*)

JERRY (*cont'd*). Ralph ... is ... it?

RALPH. Mr. Simon. So, you're the new hotshot, huh, Witley?

JERRY. It's Jerry ... uh ... wow, that's a heck of a grip there.

RALPH. Gonna bring us into the twenty-first century, are you? Got a lot of ideas, huh, Witrock?

JERRY. Yeah, I've got a few ideas. Can you let go of my hand now? It really hurts.

RALPH. Oh, yes. I'm sorry. (*Lets go.*) I'm sorry. Sometimes I forget I have such strength. I'm such an old man. (*A beat.*) What have you got for us, Witman?

JERRY. Call me Jerry.

RALPH. Well, what have you got for us, Jerry ... Witman?

JERRY. It's not actually Witman.

RALPH. Sorry. Wittamer? Witasick? Witstein? Wittacious?

GRACE. You're acting like a child.

RALPH. Me? You're the one who went to Christie's father behind my back.

GRACE. I had no choice, Ralph. We're losing money every second. And if we don't finish this today, DopaCorp will beat us to market. And you know what that means.

CHRISTIE. What is your last name, Jerry?

(JERRY acts as if he hasn't heard.)

GRACE. Jerry?

JERRY. Yes?

GRACE. Your last name?

JERRY. Uh ... Actually, it's Jawitski.

(A beat.)

GRACE. You're kidding.

JERRY. No.

CHRISTIE. What are the odds?

JERRY *(passing out his materials)*. Anyway, can we get started?

GRACE. Yes. Good idea. Wow, impressive. Are all these mock-ups? Do you need a multimedia set-up?

RALPH. Of course he does. He's a twenty-first century go-getter. He goes and gets it. With his wit.

JERRY. Mock-ups? No. This is a copy of my Ph.D. thesis.

GRACE *(muttering)*. Oh ... *(Tosses it into the trash can.)*

JERRY. They told me to bring something that might help the team get to know me.

GRACE. Who told you?

JERRY. The guy who did my interview yesterday. Charles.

CHRISTIE. That's my dad.

RALPH. You were hired yesterday?

JERRY. Well, I had my interview yesterday. Technically, I was hired today.

GRACE. This doesn't make any sense. Charles told me he'd find a cracker jack from inside the company. How many years of experience do you have at a senior marketing level?

JERRY. Uh, when you say senior ...

GRACE. I mean, years as a senior-level strategist.

JERRY. So ... internships ... don't count, right?

GRACE. No, Jerry.

JERRY. OK, so uh, let's see ... not—not really any ... you know ... whole years.

RALPH. When did you graduate from school?

JERRY. June. (*A beat.*) This past June.

GRACE. I'm sorry, Jerry, I think there's been some sort of mistake. You see, Charles ...

CHRISTIE (*quickly*). Jerry did very well in his interview. He came in last night. After you left. My father asked me and I told him I thought Jerry would fit right in with the team.

GRACE. You told him what?

CHRISTIE. I believe his exact words were, "Well, you know I hate to have to spend the extra salary, but Grace did ask for new blood. She'll make my investment work."

GRACE. I see.

CHRISTIE. And I told him he was absolutely right. You'd rather quit than not finish on time.

RALPH. Oh, this is good. I can't believe I doubted you, Jerry. I think I'll just take a seat right over here and let you get right to it.

CHRISTIE. That's exactly what I said to my father. "Ralph feels the same way as Grace," I said. "He'd rather quit than not finish on time."

RALPH. You what? I've got the twins in college and Phil! Christ! Who knows how much I'll have to shell out for bail next time. Gracie, we've got to do something.

GRACE. Don't you Gracie me, Ralph. You were just about to take a seat and let boy wonder over here get me canned.

JERRY. Hold on a second. I may be young and have a slight lack of experience, but I spent seven years studying marketing at Yale School of Management.

RALPH. Oh, God. He's got gumption. And he's a thinker.

JERRY. Really, I've got ...

GRACE. Jerry. Shut up.

JERRY. OK.

GRACE (*to RALPH*). Listen, maybe we can use what we have. It's not your best work but ... we'll find a way to get the Jesus cactus in there and go from there.

RALPH. Grace, it's awful. You know it's awful.

GRACE. It's not that bad.

CHRISTIE. You called it a montage of rehashed images. That means like, clichés, right?

RALPH. Yes.

CHRISTIE. Oh, OK. Yeah, it is.

RALPH. Thank you, Christie.

(JERRY raises his hand.)

RALPH (*cont'd*). Look, now it's raising its hand.

GRACE. Oh, God. Jerry, you don't have to raise your hand.

JERRY. Sorry. (*Hesitates.*) Can I speak now?

GRACE. Yes!

JERRY. Look, I know I'm new, and I know we don't have much time, but I'm pretty good at this. I've seen the product specs. I've got ideas.

GRACE. Well why didn't you say so? Man, I thought you'd come in with nothing but a thesis and that goofy smile. What have you got for us?

JERRY. Well, actually, if we could start by looking at my thesis, I think ...

GRACE. This is advertising, Jerry, not school. Here, you're alive for thirty seconds. I couldn't read one page of that in thirty seconds. What have you got?

JERRY. OK, OK. Thirty seconds, huh?

GRACE. Twenty-seven now.

JERRY. OK, first shot is a street. Suburbia. Trees, manicured lawns, white picket fences, the whole bit. Camera pans to a doorway. Doctor coming out of an old but well-kept house.

GRACE. Twenty seconds.

RALPH. What kind of doctor, Jerry?

JERRY. Old. No, not old, experienced. White coat, black bag, stethoscope. Kind of guy you trust just by looking at him.

GRACE. Fifteen.

CHRISTIE. Come on, Jerry.

JERRY. Close up. Serious doctor eyes. He tells us he makes house calls. He knows his patients' whole histories. He's been invited to Mr. Johnson's son's graduation and the Goldsmith daughter's wedding. When he's prescribing medication, he can't afford to prescribe anything but the best. That's why he prescribes. (*A beat.*) What's it called again?

GRACE. We don't have a name yet.

JERRY. You don't have a name?

RALPH. That's next. Go on. This is pretty good.

JERRY. Well, that's why he prescribes whatever it's called.

GRACE. And then?

JERRY. Then he tells us why people take it. Simple, easy to shoot, and effective.

(A beat while they consider.)