

“SURPRISE!”

a play in ten minutes

by
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CHARACTERS

TED a young man in the middle of his dating years

CINDY a young woman, Ted's female counterpart

ACTOR/CAMERA OPERATOR(S) - cast as fitting the scenario chosen

THE SETTING

The stage on which the play is presented

THE TIME

The immediate present

A NOTE REGARDING TECHNICAL OPTIONS TO THIS PIECE:

This play may be enacted with differing levels of technical bravado. The more elaborate of which would include a live action screen in where what is filmed through camera(s) onstage is immediately replayed to the audience on a screen behind TED and CINDY. *Those parts of the text and stage directions devoted to the live action filming will be presented in this script in Bold Italic type (like you are reading now).*

The play is also presentable scaled down to no filming, no screen—in a more traditional live theatre format. All of which will become clearer as you read on. So . . . read on.

(The stage is bare.

Stage directions & Dialogue in BOLD/ITALIC font [such as these] are to be considered optimal yet optional—as they will require the use of projector screen and one (or two) live cameras . . . as well as actor(s)/camera-people to operate the cameras . [More on this later but let’s get on with the story, shall we?]

At the back of the stage hangs a large projection screen or scrim (which we’ll call screen from here on in). Projected on the screen is the one word, “SURPRISE!”.

Silence.

One [or two] actors set up a table and two chairs center onstage—with table cloth, plates, silver ware, a bottle of wine and two wine glasses, and then depart. They [he/she] return[s], [each] carrying a hand held camera or phone set in record mode. Followed by:

TED, a young man in the middle of his dating years, who escorts a blindfolded CINDY, his female counterpart onto the stage to one of the chairs. TED recognizes the audience as they both enter but firmly places a finger to his lips indicating to the audience to remain quiet. As TED helps CINDY to the table and to her seat he also silently tries to tell the audience with gestures and whatever words he can clearly mouth: “When I remove her blindfold—we all yell ‘SURPRISE’—OK?; but, not until then.” Simultaneously the couple are engaged in the following dialogue [*and through this all the camera-person{s} continue filming: the same pictures also being edited and projected on screen {“SURPRISE” remains superimposed over the picture until indicated later}*]):

CINDY

What are you doing?

TED

I told you . . . trust me.

CINDY

Last time a man told me to trust him—

TED

This'll be nothing like that, I promise.

CINDY

I don't know about this.

(She feels around the table to find:)

TED

Are you ready?

CINDY

Oh, well, there's a drink, that's something at least.

(CINDY pours herself a glass of wine as TED removes the blindfold; and leads the audience in yelling out:)

TED

SURPRISE.

(Pause: CINDY is now silent. She looks around to see where she is, who's here, who's not, *who's filming*, and whatever else she can surmise without giving any of her reaction away. *The word "SURPRISE" fades off of the screen—the camera feed however continues throughout.*)

TED

Well?

CINDY

(Takes a drink. Very calmly:)

What's going on here?

TED

I thought you'd like it.

CINDY

Like what?

TED

(Sits down in the second chair:)

This.

CINDY

What *is* this?

TED

It's a one act festival. For you. Isn't it perfect?

(No reply. He stumbles for the right words:)

I know how you love the theatre. I know you love the limelight and everything that goes with it.

CINDY

Are my parents out there?

TED

No. No, they couldn't come. But they'll be seeing this on Youtube.

CINDY

We're not live, are we?

TED

No, no. Not . . . yet. There's a delay. We're live here, though. In front of these people.

CINDY

Do I know any of these people?

TED

(Getting down on one knee:)

Cindy—

CINDY

Ted . . .

TED

I didn't know how to say this—

CINDY

(Finding the words:)

. . . I . . . can't.

TED

Can't what?

CINDY

We've only known each other for . . . a few months.

TED

The longest few months of my life.

CINDY

Mine too. But I . . . can't . . . marry you.

TED

Oh my God, no. That's not . . .

CINDY

Then what are you doing on your knee?

TED

I would say I was going to tie my shoe but I was just going for the added effect—I had to be sure.

CINDY

Be sure of what?

TED

It isn't working out . . . between us.

(Silence.)

CINDY

Are you breaking up with me?

TED

. . . Kind of . . . Yeah.

(Long silence.)

CINDY

And this? This is how you do it?

TED

I know how you love theatre—

CINDY

This is-- . . . This is NOT how you break up with a person.

TED

To be honest you can be a little volatile and I needed the cushion of support.

(In an attempt to avoid being volatile—and thereby proving Ted right--CINDY pours herself another drink. TED follows suit and does the same.)

TED

Look, at it this way, at least I'm not asking you to marry me.

CINDY

(To one of the camera operators:)

Can you get that out of my face, please?

TED

That's what she said.

CINDY

Really? Really?

TED

You just set it up so well.

CINDY

You thought I wouldn't create a scene in front of all of these people that I don't know?

TED

That was the plan.

CINDY

And . . . I suppose I'm just supposed to throw this in your face?

TED

I was prepared for that. There are towels offstage.

CINDY

You should have bought the cheap stuff then.

(Takes another drink:)

Little too good to waste . . . but you bargained on that, right?

TED

To be honest, I just bought it 'cause it was cold. I remembered you like cold better.

CINDY

That supposed to mean something?

TED

No.

(Slight pause.)

No.

CINDY

(Takes in the audience for a moment—possibly even walking out into the aisles (a camera-person following ahead of her, lighting her with the light from his/her camera [*don't you hate having to be politically correct in describing the camera operator? But that's the world today, now, isn't it?*]?)

So how'd you come up with this? This venue?

TED

It's a tribute. You see, I listened. You're always quoting Randy Warmhal and everybody getting their ten minutes of Fame and all.

CINDY

(A beat.)

Fifteen.

TED

What?

CINDY

It's supposed to be fifteen minutes; not ten.

TED

Sorry. I knew that but I could only get you ten. It's a ten minute one act festival. So . . . the rules only gave us ten minutes max.

(No reply.)

Consider it the evolution of mass media.

(No reply.)

Moving from fifteen to ten. And that we have to share the time.

CINDY

I got the concept.

(No reply.)

Andy Warhol, by the way.

TED

What?

CINDY

His name is Andy Warhol. Was. He's dead. As are we, I suppose.

TED

You know you're going to look back on this and . . .

CINDY

Oh, I'm laughing now. A piece of me really (appreciates) . . . Yeah . . . So, I have tickets to see the rest of the plays?

TED

If you want.

CINDY

Any seat?

TED

We're in the ba—

CINDY

“We” are not. There is no “we”. And I still have ten minutes, right?

TED

Oh no, to be fair you've only got about . . . three, maybe four.

CINDY

(Returning to the stage:)

Oh, well, then I should make the best of it, shouldn't I?

(Referring to the cameras and video set up:)

Was this really necessary?

(TED shrugs.)

CINDY

Alright then.

(She sits down next to him, pours him a glass of wine.)

I'm pregnant.

(TED is at a loss for words . . .)

TED

Then you shouldn't . . . how do you kn-- . . . you're lying.

CINDY

Yeah, I am. Lying. How do you like it? Shoe on the other foot, hunh?

(To a camera-person:)

You get a good shot of him on that?

TED

This is why things haven't worked out.

CINDY

This is why you're a prick.

TED

I guess I had that coming.

CINDY

Were you that worried that I'd embarrass you that you had to . . . do this?

TED

I figured there was safety in numbers.

CINDY

Shall we put it to a vote?

(No reply. Nor does she wait for one.)

Or better yet should I . . .

TED

Oh, come on. Isn't this what it's all about for you? Those key moments of life: shared with the whole world? Everything bigger than life. Go big. Always. Just consider this the start of your own reality show. Nothing private. Nothing held back? Millions of fans.

CINDY

I don't see millions here. I just see . . . petty.

TED

One man's treasure . . .

(A Slight beat.)

CINDY

Congratulations.

TED

For what?

CINDY

For . . . this. You . . . you have taken something I loved and turned it into something I know I'll eventually learn to hate.

TED

You've always loved an audience.

CINDY

(Looking out at them . . .)

I did. But not the way . . . And now I'm afraid that whenever I look out into an audience I will always see . . . this. And I will always hate it. And I will always hate you for it.

(Slight pause.)

When I was in Jr. High School, people always ignored me, I was awkward. Nobody understood me but back then I didn't know I was just a cliché. So I made up for it by being big. Making believe my life was bigger than it was—because I just wanted to be somewhere else—someone else. So I went big to protect that little girl inside of me. Bigger than life because I had to be. Then someone said you should be on the stage: you're already a drama queen. So . . . I did. I ignored the insult and I proved them wrong because . . . I was good. And I could escape and I could be anybody I wanted to be. Not a victim. And even if I was playing the role of a victim I had control over where—I knew—I had a script and . . . control. And I could be anybody. Anybody other than . . . For a while.

(Considers her thoughts a moment more.)

But not now. Now I'm just me. And I look out there and I see . . . you. And I suspect I will always see . . . you. Because you wanted protect yourself from my creating a scene, drama queen that I am. So, you took something I love, and traded it in for a few months of our mistake together, and turned it into something I will always hate. Something that made me feel . . . bigger than life; and now so very . . . small.

(Slight beat. Considers her options.)

So, no . . . I won't give you the satisfaction. How much time do we have left?

(No reply.)

Never mind. Thank you, I guess, for teaching me how to be small.

(She empties her glass, sets it down on the table and exits.)

(Pause. *The cameras continue to focus now on TED as he focuses on his own unfinished glass of wine. // alternatively: the actor who set up the scene initially returns to change set for the next scene.*)

CAMERA OPERATOR/ACTOR

What do you want me to do with the ring?

TED

. . . Keep it.

(*The cameras are shut off.* CINDY's chair is removed. Pause. The CAMERA OPERATOR/ACTOR returns.)

CAMERA OPERATOR/ACTOR

'You own a grey 2010 Impala?

Why?
TED

It's on fire.
CAMERA OPERATOR/ACTOR

Of course it is.
TED
(Considers this a moment.)
(He drinks down his glass and exits stage quietly.)

(The set is cleared by the ACTOR/CAMERA
OPERATOR.)

END

OK here's the "More" from the "More on this later" comment made at the top of this script. If you've read this far then it may be worth this further consideration:

While the optimum presentation of the piece would include the two actors and two camerapersons with an editor offstage choosing which camera feed to use to be presented on screen projected behind the this will not always be feasible for all productions. Therefore below I have outlined several production options.

- a) To begin with let's take technology a step further and ADD a direct feed not only to the back screen but also to audience members' smartphones (there are several outfits that will enable this.) With this feed in mind: The last shot (on phones only) following lights out would be that of a flaming Impala in the parking lot as TED emerges into the shot walking toward the car and shaking his head quietly.
- b) The same as above but without the final footage
- c) Exchange cameras (in above settings) with smartphones
- d) The same as above without the final footage NOR the smartphone phone feed to the audience
- e) One camera (one camera person with the same above options but no editor)
- f) One camera (one camera person) but NO editor and no projected backscreen (keeping dialogue printed in BOLD/ITALIC). Optional direct feed to smartphones (with or without final footage).
- g) Roles of TED & CINDY can be changed to TED & ANDY or ANN & CINDY (same sex partners). Though I don't think the script would work as well with TED & CINDY's genders being directly reversed.

So, there you are. Lots of options. Just throwing it out there. Have fun choosing.

- Michael Perlmutter