

OPEN MEETING CLOSED

a play

by

Michael Perlmutter



© Michael Perlmutter
805-469-2897
lmjdj@msn.com
www.DirectingHamlet.com

SYNOPSIS

4 women have closed their open AA meeting today to confront Helen, the woman who has slept with all their husbands . . . well, almost all. Enter the newcomer, looking for her first meeting, and you have the mix for an AA meeting / Intervention gone wrong.

CHARACTERS

- SUZANNE - righteously indignant – she has come to these meeting to get answers and right a wrong
- HELEN - a loner, she carries herself with a thick shell of “whateverworks” and a bit of an attitude
- REBECCA - the self appointed leader of the group, has a need for order
- LETTIE - “wants” everything to be “ok”, willing to help, a nurturer under stress
- MARION - not quite following along with everybody else although quite sincere and willing to help
- RAVEN - the newbie, an unknown to the group, being her first meeting, she is very unsure and tries to stay in the background; asking questions only as needed (late teens/early twenties)

THE SETTING

A meeting hall – rented or borrowed from any number of sources for a local AA meeting.

THE TIME

A sunny afternoon, anywhere but Utah.

A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.
(please note these passages will also be highlighted in grey in this script)
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.
(also note that these passages are NOT highlighted and SHOULD BE read aloud)
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

(At rise:

Lights rise on a “meeting” already in progress – but before we go there, let’s take a look at the “where” of “where we are”.

A meeting room; could be a school classroom, a cafeteria, office space, gymnasium, local church—any space that offers itself available to a twelve step meeting or any number of other uses when not occupied for its original function—the room has been repurposed for today’s meeting. What has been added to the original décor are a number of folding chairs, a couple tables, a few pamphlets and signs. There is also the obligatory pot of coffee, stack of cups, sugars (or sweeteners), cream and bargain store pastries (possibly cookies—possibly left over from the last meeting). Among the signs of support and encouragement is one placed by the owners of the building “This is a Smoke-Free Facility. Thank you for your cooperation.”

So, now that we know where we are—and did I mention that if there’s a window involved in this space it is clearly daylight outside, the middle of the afternoon actually—let’s get to know who’s here. Five women, various ages but none too young and none too old to stand out from the others. One woman in particular (HELEN) is standing where we assume the speaker would do so to share their testimonial ... if we’d ever been to such a meeting we’d know what we’re talking about. Clearly HELEN doesn’t, as her demeanor is being vigorously corrected by the other women:)

SUZANNE

Three.

HELEN

What the ... what the fuck is three? I don’t know them out of order.

REBECCA

You don’t know them at all.

LETTIE

“Be honest.” “Be truthful.”

MARION

Don’t sleep with other people’s husbands.

SUZANNE

We're getting to that.

LETTIE

"What is said in the room: stays in the room."

HELEN

I thought that was a Vegas commercial.

REBECCA

It started here.

HELEN

You got it. You can understand my confusion.

LETTIE

"Don't come to a meeting drunk."

MARION

I thought that was just a suggestion.

REBECCA

It's a rule.

LETTIE

Technically you shouldn't come to a meeting if you've been drinking. You come to a meeting to keep from drinking.

MARION

So, if you've already been drinking / ... ?

LETTIE

Better to go to the meeting, Honey.

HELEN

So, can you un ...cable me now?

(And upon looking clearly we can see that HELEN has been zip-tied to the speaker's stand.)

SUZANNE

So, Helen, which of these rules do you feel you may have broken?

HELEN

... I'm assuming all of them?

SUZANNE

All of them.

MARION

Amen.

SUZANNE

And you're a sanctimonious bitch to boot.

HELEN

I am?

SUZANNE

Meaning?

HELEN

Meaning I .. am. I'm a sanctimonious bitch; can I go now?

MARION

Not until we hear your story.

(A beat.)

HELEN

You're serious?

Oh, you are. You're really. (Oh, we're doing this. Wow.)

LETTIE

We want to feel for you, Honey, we really do. And we thought if we really heard your real story that ... Well ... we might finally identify with you and find it in our own hearts to accept you.

HELEN

Which fucking step is that?

LETTIE

It's a combination, really.

MARION

Can we dial it back on the language a bit? That word actually.

HELEN

... Up yours.

MARION

Thank you.

HELEN

(cunt).

MARION

(Starting to move to her:)

Alright, / that's it—

(And yet before MARION is even out of her seat SUZANNE shocks HELEN, using a hand held device commonly known as a stun gun, the type sold for self protection ... probably in a pink case.)

HELEN

Wha the—Holy sHIT ... What the hell—?

SUZANNE

I call it my equalizer.

HELEN

That can't be legal.

SUZANNE

My father would have called it an attitude adjuster. Got it on a Groupon.

HELEN

You're all OK with this?

(Pause. The silence says everything.)

REBECCA

You did kinda push it over the edge there.

MARION

Such a mouth.

REBECCA

I was talking about Brian.

HELEN

Brian? Who the hell is [Brian] ...

(LETTIE holds up her hand)

HELEN

Your ... ?

REBECCA

Husband, yes.

HELEN

I didn't sleep w—I never touched your husband—I don't even know who her husband is—.

LETTIE

(Showing her a picture from her phone:)

You let him watch.

HELEN

Oh ... him ... What do you—

(SUZANNE shocks her again.)

HELEN (Continued:)

—Goddamm it. / Watch it with that!

SUZANNE

We don't have time for lies. Or games.

MARION

Actually they do have a bingo game comes in at five o'clock to set up. I sometimes stay over. Last week I won twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents. (It was a fifty-fifty.)

(A beat.)

LETTIE

So, your story, Honey.

HELEN

... F—ine.

(Looking directly into Suzanne's eyes.)

Keep her—keep her the fuck away from me; I have a heart condition.

LETTIE

We all have heart conditions, dear.

MARION

And you've slept with / them.

SUZANNE

And anyhow I've got it set on low; I've trained my dogs at [a] higher voltage.

REBECCA

Suzanne? Enough. Let her talk.

HELEN

Thank you. Can I have a moment to [collect my thoughts]—Get her away ...

(SUZANNE stays her ground.)

HELEN

Can you take these off?

REBECCA

'fraid not.

HELEN

You are a law suit waiting to happen; you know that, right?

SUZANNE

Yeah ... about that ... I don't think you'll be pressing any charges.

HELEN

And why not?

(Silence: a bit of a Mexican standoff: the women hold their ground, no one quite sure if there is more to the story for Helen or not ... and yet is it worth taking the chance if they do know something or not ...)

REBECCA

Start your story.

HELEN

... If this will end things: fine. I started drinking in high school but nothing really over the top until college. I didn't fit in [there]; Didn't think I fit in. Didn't really feel it, you know? But drinking: drinking allowed me not to feel ... allowed me to ... relax. It offered me an escape. And it worked. Till it .. stopped working. Until drinking became more important than relaxing. More important than anything. I could function at work but all I could really think about was where I was going to hide on my lunch break. Passing out in my car [became a regular routine]. Till I lost that job and then the next one and eventually I lost my boyfriend and then I realized I was really alone. But I didn't care because I just wanted my next drink. Long story short: finally, I met a doctor. Somewhere in Ohio. He was a drinker too. I'm sorry—he was an alcoholic. Let me start over: Hello, my name Helen: I'm an alcoholic. Ok, then. I met Doctor Bob in Ohio—

(Again, Suzanne hits Helen with the stun gun.)

SUZANNE

(As she continues the shock:)

You think we're total idiots? You're not Bill W; this is not a game—I mean it you [god you make me so mad I just want to] ...

(She lets loose the trigger.)

Start over.

(But HELEN does not respond. She has succumbed to the moment ... how far succumbed, at this point, is anybody's guess. Meanwhile, somewhere at the end of Helen's testimony, the door to outside has opened and in the doorway stands a young woman in her late teens named RAVEN, who watches all quietly, unnoticed.)

REBECCA

What the hell did you do now?

SUZANNE

I didn't do anything. It's on low / ...

(Just to be sure she checks the device's settings.)

LETTIE

What?

MARION

Is she dead?

SUZANNE

Of course, she's / not dead.

LETTIE

Oh my god, I think she's / dead.

SUZANNE

She's not dead.

REBECCA

Then what is it?

(She is now checking Helen's vitals.)

SUZANNE

I think I may have had it turned on to high.

LETTIE

Oh my god, she's dead!!

SUZANNE

She's not dead!! / No one's dead!!

LETTIE

Does she have a / pulse? She said she has a heart condition!

MARION

Is she / breathing?

LETTIE

Is she bleeding?

SUZANNE

Why would she be bleeding?

LETTIE

I don't know: you might have a ruptured a vein or something.

REBECCA

She's breathing.

MARION

Oh, thank god.

SUZANNE

God had nothing to do with it.

REBECCA

That's enough of you.

(Taking the stun gun from Suzanne:)

And that's enough of that.

MARION

(Taking the device from Rebecca:)

Give me that thing.

(Dumps it in coffee.)

SUZANNE

What did you—What did you have to do that for?

REBECCA

You're a menace.

SUZANNE

You could have just taken the batteries out.

MARION

(Sees LETTIE, who has shut up since noticing RAVEN at the door,—turns also to see Raven:)

Hello, Honey.

(Everyone quiets and turns to look. A beat.)

MARION

How long've you been there?

RAVEN

... I think I'm at the wrong meeting.

LETTIE

Where're you supposed to be?

RAVEN

... No, I'm pretty sure. This is the wrong place.

SUZANNE

This is a closed meeting.

RAVEN

The sign says "open" .. /.. my mistake.

REBECCA

Why didn't you lock the door?

MARION

We never lock the door.

RAVEN

Actually, the sign says "open meeting closed"

REBECCA

... Why does the sign say "open meeting closed"?

MARION

(Knowing because she wrote it:)

Because we're an open meeting. And because we're closed.

(A beat.)

REBECCA

(To Marion:)

And that didn't sound stupid to you? When you read it?

RAVEN

I wasn't here.

LETTIE

You're looking for the AA meeting?

RAVEN

I'll catch the next one.

MARION

(referring, of course, to Helen:)

(You're sure she's breathing?)

REBECCA

(Shuddup.)

SUZANNE

Come in and close the door.

RAVEN

I don't think I want to.

REBECCA

Come in. Now.

(A beat. RAVEN follows instructions.)

SUZANNE

Close the door.

RAVEN

You want me to lock it?

REBECCA

That would be a good idea.

(RAVEN does so. Not turning her back to the group.)

REBECCA

Have a seat.

MARION

Have some coffee.

LETTIE

Have a cookie.

(They all sit. A beat. The silence becomes awkward. MARION takes a cookie. Offers the plate to anyone else—everyone else—stopping at Raven.)

RAVEN

No. Thank you.

MARION

(Setting the plate back on the table.)

Suit yourself. I like regular Oreos better—but you get all that chocolate in your teeth—And we don't have any milk.

(Again: no response. Another silence.)

REBECCA

You have something for us to sign?

RAVEN

What? Oh ... yes.

(RAVEN digs what appears to be a court document it out of her purse. She hands it to one of the women. It is then handed to REBECCA, who looks it over, signs it and hands it back via the same route. HELEN slips at the speaker's stand and dangles awkwardly. The women try not to react—as if everything's quite normal. REBECCA tends to Helen.)

REBECCA

Somebody got a knife or a pair of scissors?

MARION

I have some cuticle scissors. Stops me from / biting them.

REBECCA

Give.

(MARION fishes the scissors out of her purse and attends to Helen with REBECCA. RAVEN finds herself being stared at by SUZANNE. Nothing is said, as HELEN is

freed from the zip-ties. REBECCA rechecks the woman's pulse. LETTIE looks through Raven's paperwork—drawing Raven's attention away—with sincere interest:)

MARION
(She has a heart condition.)

(REBECCA's look alone shuts MARION up. The two women, start to move HELEN to a chair next to REBECCA, who keeps her fingers on Helen's wrist to feel her pulse throughout. SUZANNE helps as needed.)

LETTIE
Court ordered?
A little young for a second offense?
Thirty meetings for thirty days?

RAVEN
Sixty for sixty.

LETTIE
Third offense?

RAVEN
First. Throwing me into the deep end—
Making an example for an election year.
I'm here, right? You're here.
Obviously I walked in on something I
shouldn't have.

MARION
What?—No?—Why? ?—She's just [sleeping ... long day; got off a double ...
shift] ...

REBECCA
Yes. Yes, you did. First meeting too.

RAVEN
Lucky me.

REBECCA
You know the rules?

LETTIE
Do you have a book?

RAVEN
I've been ... my friends told me what to expect but ... No—something ... no
names—just ... yeah ...

REBECCA
Nothing leaves this room.

RAVEN

Right. Right. Yes.

(There is another pause.)

SUZANNE

Ok; somebody clue me in to what's going on?

REBECCA

... Don't even try it.

SUZANNE

Try what?

REBECCA

You don't have blackouts. You haven't been drinking.

SUZANNE

What?

LETTIE

I find this extremely offensive.

SUZANNE

I don't know what you're talking about. What happened here?

MARION

Suzanne, it's not fair to those of us who actually have blackouts—to pretend you're not responsible for what you've done totally sober.

LETTIE

Amen.

REBECCA

Amen to that.

SUZANNE

I don't know what you're talking about.

REBECCA

Ignore her.

(Referring to Helen:)

You're no better than her if you insist on playing out this game.

SUZANNE

What happened to Helen—

(To Raven:)

Who are you?

REBECCA

(Brandishing the stun gun:)

(Would you like me to remind you?)

(SUZANNE just stares at Rebecca—both knowing the device won't work.)

LETTIE

(Start to say something to Suzanne—then turns back to Raven:)

What's your name, honey?

RAVEN

... Raven.

LETTIE

(Continuing—on pilot—under an echo of “Hello Raven”'s or similar responses from the others:)

I'm Letticia; but people just call me Lettie ('Cuz I let 'em).

(She smiles at her own little joke—and then it registers:)

“Raven”: that's a pretty name. Black, isn't it?

(There is a silent hush from her compatriots: “Oh my god, I can't believe you went there”.)

LETTIE

(Innocently to the group:)

Well, isn't it?

(Realizing:)

OH: that's not what I meant.

REBECCA

You had a point?

LETTIE

What?

SUZANNE

(Offering her hand:)

Raven, I'm Suzanne.

LETTIE

(Kicking in:)

Oh: my point:

(Looks again to Suzanne—then back to Raven:)

You don't have blackouts—Do *you* have blackouts, Raven?

RAVEN

I don't think so. I don't [know what to say here] ... if I did [have blackouts—nope, I really have no idea what to say]...

LETTIE

“You forgot them”: cute,—(I've heard that before.)—but speaking as someone who really does have blackouts: it isn't funny. And you can't use it as an excuse to cover up what you've done stone cold sober. I'm just saying.

(To Raven:)

It's not like going to sleep and waking up—it's more like suddenly coming to: you were here (doing God knows what .. well, drinking usually) and now it's three hours later—or four days later—and you don't know how you got from there to here and why or what you did and it's scary as hell.

(To Suzanne:)

And it's not an excuse. Especially when it didn't happen.

MARION

I never blacked out. I remember every blessed minute and bad decision clear as day. (Just not able to course correct.)

RAVEN

I'm sorry, but I don't really .. have a .. drinking problem.

MARION

(None of us have a drinking problem. We've got a stopping problem, that's what we've got.)

LETTIE

“It's not a drinking problem: it's a thinking problem.”

That's on one of the flyers around here someplace.

(Letting her gaze move around the room to see it—her eyes stop on Suzanne:)

I am so disappointed in you.

SUZANNE

can't blame a girl for trying.

LETTIE

I'm Lettie (we met), you're Raven; and that's Marion and Rebecca, you met Suzanne and .. uh .. Helen—

MARION

She's just a little tired ...

(A beat.)