

Good Intentions, Limited Resources

by
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Scene 1

Leafy, male, a nervous type
 Queen, female, a haughty type
 Nugent, female, a serious type
 All are in their mid-thirties.

A shabby, once elegant living room, now gone to seed. There are two sofa chairs, one in the corner stage right, the other front left with a small table beside it on which is the "inheritance" box. There is another small table toward the rear center of the stage with a simple chair behind it. Stage left is a door facing off to the left and beside it is a curtained window.

Leafy is standing by the window, cautiously peering out from behind the curtain. Nugent is seated in the corner chair reading. Queen is seated in the left sofa chair, thinking pleasant thoughts while absently stroking the "inheritance" box.

QUEEN

Come away from there, Leafy. They are not coming. Not a chance. *(dramatic)* I bowled them over. I was simply magnificent. Magnificent. No other word for it. There was rumbling at the start, but I quickly put a stop to it. Oh my, what a tale I wove for them. Our heritage. Our forbears. Our good intentions. *Our hearts are with you.* Gave it the eyes. Not too much. *(beat)* Followed up quickly with: our diminished circumstances. They needed to understand that. And I think they did. Good intentions *and* diminished circumstances. What a combo. Stopped them dead. What could they say?

LEAFY

(continuing to peer out the window) The peanut butter sandwiches?

QUEEN

Ah, my tender Leafy. How you do fret. Peanut butter sandwiches. The very symbol of good intentions ... *and* diminished circumstances. Gobbled them up they did. Couldn't thank me enough. Those two extra sandwiches. A brilliant touch. A trifle maybe, but they got the message.

LEAFY

(incredulous) It can't be true.

QUEEN

It *is* true. If you hadn't been such a droopy daisy, Leafy, you could have seen it for yourself. *(beat)* They are *glad* to be here.

LEAFY

Glad? Not possible.

QUEEN

Glad. And why wouldn't they be? A nice house.

LEAFY

It's a dump, Queen! You know it's a dump.

QUEEN

A roof over their heads. Heat. They have one another. And...

LEAFY

Peanut butter sandwiches?

QUEEN

Stay focused, Leafy. Keep your eye on the vision and it will carry you through. Waver and you're finished. Stay on message. In time whatever doubts exist – yours and theirs – will disappear. *(beat)* *(as to a child)* Now go to your room, stand before the mirror; say it fifty times. No smirks, no gulps, no averted eyes. Simply look yourself in the eye and say it. Good intentions, diminished circumstances. That's our story. Fifty times. *Now go.*

LEAFY

I think I *will* go to my room. I need to rest. It's been an exhausting day.

QUEEN

Exhilarating, Leafy, exhilarating. I am fully charged, exploding with energy. *(beat)* So ask yourself, Leafy. Same day, identical in all respects. Exhilarating for me, exhausting for you. Now why is that?

(Leafy shakes his head)

Fear, Leafy. Fear will do that to you. And sleep won't help. The mirror, Leafy. To the mirror! Now go. *Really.*

(Leafy exits.)

(to Nugent) You would have been impressed. Proud no, impressed yes.

NUGENT

Did you lie?

QUEEN

Ah, Nugent, there is your mousetrap. See the world from that...oversimplified frame and...*(clapping her hands together like a snapping mousetrap)* SNAP! You are finished before you begin. Lie, truth, this is only *one* dimension of human intercourse. And a much overrated one I must say. Have you noticed, my dear Nugent, *who* demands the truth? Losers, Nugent. It's always losers who insist on truth.

NUGENT

Did you lie?

QUEEN

Please, Nugent. Don't pull me into this. Trap yourself if you must, but leave me free. *Free! (dancing around the room)*
I've never felt so free. La deedah, ladeedah, ladeedah.

NUGENT

I simply want to know. Did you lie?

QUEEN

Queen stops, walks over to Nugent and, during the following speech, she primps her, straightens her posture, trying to create a more formidable presence.

Ah, sweet Nugent. Some day your nobility will serve us well. This, however, is clearly not the day. *(beat)* The *appearance* of nobility, yes. If only you could bring yourself to that. The *appearance* of nobility. A simply marvelous role for you. *(beat)* Think for a moment, dear Nugent: Is acting a lie? And strategy, Nugent. Is strategy a lie? When we play chess, you and I, should I reveal my strategy? And, if I don't, is that... lying? Oh! Such a trivial concept.

NUGENT

(angry, breaking away) This isn't a play.

QUEEN

Everything is a play, dear Nugent. Couldn't some clever actor step in right now and do you to a tee. Miss Honesty. Virtuous Maiden.

NUGENT

I'm not playing a role.

QUEEN

Oh, Nugent, of course you are. What you don't see is how limited your repertoire is. There are so many challenging roles to play. Fill yourself out.

NUGENT

(acknowledging the "inheritance" box on the table)

So it's safe to assume you said nothing about the money.

QUEEN

(mock shock) Our inheritance! Of course not. Be sensible, Nugent; it would change the entire game.

NUGENT

And if I choose to change the game?

QUEEN

Not again, Nugent. We've gone over this and over this. It's boring...and stupid.

NUGENT

All that money!

QUEEN

It would corrupt them.

NUGENT

Instead of us.

QUEEN

(as if explaining to a child) The money is our burden. We had no choice. We were...*born* corrupted.

(Leafy enters, frightened. He goes to the window and peers out cautiously through the curtain.)

LEAFY

(frightened)

Did you hear that? Someone's out there.

QUEEN

(calm)

Leafy, did you practice in front of the mirror?

LEAFY

I heard them. Muttering, giggling.

QUEEN

(the gracious hostess)

Well then, maybe we'll be entertaining guests.

LEAFY

(horrified)

Guests! How do they know where we live?

QUEEN

I told them, of course. *(beat)* Now, Leafy. Please. Center yourself. Breath. Focus. Good intentions, diminished circumstances.

LEAFY

(frantic, doesn't know what to do with himself, moving back and forth frenetically)

Help me. Help me. My god, help me. The woman's insane.

(A brick comes crashing through the window. Leafy freezes, horrified.)

QUEEN

It seems our guests have arrived.

NUGENT

Should I put up some tea?

(dark)

Scene 2

(One hour later. Queen is seated in the corner sofa chair calmly reading a book. Nugent is cleaning up broken glass with dustpan and brush.)

QUEEN

(without looking up from her book)

Just leave it.

(Nugent continues cleaning)

They'll be back. They said they'd be back to clean up.

(Nugent continues)

(annoyed) For God's sake, Nugent, please stop! They said they'd be back. ...Something about organizing a committee. *(distaste)* Committees, committees, committees! Let their damned *committee* take care of it.

NUGENT

I don't mind.

QUEEN

That is *totally* irrelevant. Whether you *mind* or not. It is not a question of *minding*; it's how it *looks*. Appearances.

NUGENT

(continuing) I'd just as soon.

QUEEN

They broke, they clean.

NUGENT

I don't mind.

QUEEN

Can you understand that I *do* mind?

(The bedroom door opens. Leafy peers out cautiously; seeing that the "others" have gone, he enters.)

Our hero.

LEAFY

I need something for my nerves.

QUEEN

I couldn't have put it better myself.

LEAFY

Do we have anything?

QUEEN

(sarcasm) Ah, it is so comforting to have a man around the house.

NUGENT

Leave him be.

QUEEN

And that will help? That's all poor Leafy needs? Just a bit of kind heart? Sympathy. Let's try. *(mock)* Oh, my poor Leafy. Come. *(She reaches out for him.)* Come sit on Queen's lap. Come, let me rock you to sleep. Poor, poor baby.

(Leafy sits on Queen's lap and allows himself to be rocked.)

(Silence as he is rocked. Then he speaks.)

LEAFY

Just something...for my nerves...something... to let me sleep...so tired...

(Queen drops Leafy to the floor in disgust.)

NUGENT

(to Leafy)

In my room, I have something.

QUEEN

Ah, our sweet savior. You see how perfectly you play your role.

(Queen rises, goes to Nugent's neat pile of broken glass, and spills it back out over the floor. She returns to her chair and book while Leafy and Nugent stand frozen in place.)

NUGENT

Why?

QUEEN

Neatness.

LEAFY

You made a mess.

QUEEN

No, *you* made a mess. Both of you. Continue making a mess, and we'll all be in trouble.

NUGENT

What *are* you talking about?

QUEEN

Neatness. Everything in place. Roles to be played.

NUGENT

I told you, I am not playing a role.

LEAFY

I hate this. How did I get here?

QUEEN

(aside, angry)

Who dealt me this improbable cast? *(to the others)* Please listen. Everything we have depends on your listening to me. *(beat)* Are you listening? *(Leafy nods.)* We have them where we want them. They believe. That's all that is required. That they continue to believe.

LEAFY

Believe what?

QUEEN

In us, Leafy.

NUGENT

In our lies?

QUEEN

In our legitimacy. *(beat)* That we belong here *(beat)* and they belong there.

LEAFY

Do I belong here?

QUEEN

(soothingly)

Of course you do.

LEAFY

(pacing, peering out the window.)

It doesn't feel that way.

QUEEN

(furious) Leafy, listen carefully. You belong here. Get it through your thick skull. This is your house. This is your inheritance. Yours, yours, yours. Godammit. What is so hard to understand?

(Leafy backs to a wall, hunching over, quivering.)

You're frightening him.

NUGENT

He's frightening him.

QUEEN

(There is a knock at the door. Leafy freezes then heads for the bedroom. Queen grabs him.)

Now what?

NUGENT

(calm) Ask them to wait.

QUEEN

(Nugent goes to the door, appears to be speaking to "others", then returns.)

Five minutes.

NUGENT

Either we go on, or it ends here.

QUEEN

What?

NUGENT

Do we belong here?

QUEEN

(Leafy is shaking his head no.)

If we don't, then we turn it over. All of it.

Everything?

NUGENT

QUEEN

Of course everything. The house, the food...*(pointing to the box) the money!*
(She stands and walks queenly) And the role. God, how I love the role.

NUGENT

Would it be so bad?

QUEEN

It would be grotesque. Their righteousness. Debates. Votes. Interminable meetings. Their grubby fingers digging into everything. Who sleeps where. How many to a room. Discuss, discuss. Vote, vote. *(beat)* And think about this: the bathroom indignities...*(beat)* Would it be so bad? It would be grotesque...not to mention...*boring*.

NUGENT

But to stay? To stay is to lie.

(knocking)

QUEEN

To stay is to stay.

(loud banging on the door)

Time to decide.

NUGENT

I don't know if I can.

(violent knocking)

QUEEN

Time's up. We belong ...or we don't.

(violent knocking, knocking, knocking)

dark

Scene 3

(One hour later. Queen is at the door waving and shouting in her best hostess voice "Come back soon, ya hear? She moves to the rear table, sits and pores over a stack of papers. Leafy is seated on the floor, curled up in a corner.

Nugent is sitting calmly in the left front sofa chair.

QUEEN

(shaking her head in disbelief)

In like lions, out like lambs.

(Nugent continues reading.)

I am impressed. *(poring over the papers)*

(tossing the papers aside) This makes no sense to me.

(Nugent laughs, while continuing to read.)

The look on that negotiator's face. She came to kill, and left feeling...what? Like a moron.

(incredulous) Math anxiety, she said. *(beat)* Math anxiety. Do you suppose any other revolution has been stopped by *math anxiety?* *(laughs)*

(to Nugent) I am impressed. *(reaches again for the papers, turning them this way and that)* And then she says...so apologetically...please go over it again. I'm sorry. Get that, *she's* sorry – for being so slow...God, you had her, you *really* had her.

(Queen rises and mimics the Negotiator, striding in, being demanding, tough.)

Full disclosure, she says. Like she's going to rip it out of you. The books, she says. I demand to see the books. *(to Nugent sweetly)* And you, calm as can be, show her the books *(waving the stack of papers.)* You explain this column and that column. She can't quite grasp it, so you go over it again...and again. And by now our horrid little negotiator has magically transformed into dull student groveling before her patient teacher. Marvelous, marvelous, marvelous. *(back to studying the papers.)* But now, dear Nugent, if you please, explain it to me. It makes absolutely no sense.

(Nugent laughs out loud.)

(slapping the papers down on the table) Ha! That's it, isn't it? It makes no sense. That's the beauty of it. It is sheer *bullshit*. Brilliant, Nugent. Brilliant. And there she is, wracking her brain, trying to make sense out of sheer bullshit. And there you are, patiently explaining bullshit as if it were a formula any third-grader would understand. *(beat)* That's it, Nugent, isn't it? God, you had me going too.

(Leafy begins to take serious notice of this conversation.)

An important lesson in leadership. *(beat)* It's not *what* you say; it's *how* you say it. With confidence. Like it's obviously true. Ergo, it *must* be true. A lie to believe in. That's what sticks, isn't it, Nugent? Belief. They don't understand it, but they *believe* it. That's all that counts. Brilliant.

LEAFY

(a barely audible mumble)

You lied.

QUEEN

Ah, something has attracted the attention of our dear Leafy. Up out of his coma. How nice.

LEAFY

(still weakly)

She lied. Nugent. She lied.

QUEEN

She maneuvered.

LEAFY

Lied.

QUEEN

Trumped, castled, cornered, treed, fainted, outfoxed.

LEAFY

Lied.

QUEEN

Leafy, if that's to be your only contribution to our seminar on strategy, then I must ask you to kindly slip back into your coma.

LEAFY

Lied.

(pitifully beating his chest, then howling in pain like a trapped animal)

Owwwwwwwwwwwwwoooo!

QUEEN

Please, Leafy. Decorum

(Leafy howls again)

If you can't be more fluent, then go to your room.

(Leafy continues to howl, then, on hands and knees, he crawls to his room.)

(to Nugent) You belong, Nugent. You *really* do belong.

(We hear Leafy howling in his room and a loud banging on the door as the scene ends.)

dark

Scene 4

(Days later. Dance music is heard. The lights come up on Queen and Nugent dancing, Nugent in a tuxedo jacket over her slacks and Queen in a dress.)

(The music stops, Nugent bows, Queen curtsies, they kiss lightly. Nugent pours a glass of champagne for each. They toast one another "To class." "To class." They resume dancing, then stop.)

NUGENT

(with some pride) Not a knock on the door. It's been two days.

QUEEN

Ever since you cut back on the peanut butter ration.

NUGENT

Had to. No work, no peanut butter.

QUEEN

They made the connection.

NUGENT

Simple macro-economics.

The dismal science.

QUEEN

(They both laugh heartily.)

(pause)

(They dance, then stop. The following dialogue is point/counterpoint in both word and emotionality.)

(appreciatively) It's quiet.

NUGENT

Too quiet.

QUEEN

It's peaceful.

NUGENT

Too peaceful.

QUEEN

I adore the calm.

NUGENT

(Queen stops dancing)

I hate it.

QUEEN

I'm relaxed.

NUGENT

I'm bored.

QUEEN
(annoyed)

You're an addict.

NUGENT

(dramatic) I'm an actor.

QUEEN

NUGENT
I'm a.. (*Gay, struggles to find a word*)

QUEEN
bore.

NUGENT
(*offended*)
Excuse me.

QUEEN
Skilled, manipulative, at times useful, but still – a bore.

NUGENT
Come, let's dance.

QUEEN
So quick to reconcile. Smooth. Polish. Harmonize. Sweep under the rug.

NUGENT
I forgive you.

QUEEN
Creep.

NUGENT
(*reaches out*)
Come, let's dance.

QUEEN
(*pushes her off*) You could spend your life this way.

NUGENT
I could.

QUEEN
Sunsets and champagne. Books. Crossword puzzles. Serious talks. Walks in the woods. Boozy lunches. Cruises. Endless hours of whist. Midday naps. Leisurely luxurious meals. Passionate sex. Lying on the beach. Pina Coladas. That's it for you.

NUGENT
You paint a lovely picture.

Of Hell!

QUEEN

Isn't this what we fought for?

NUGENT

What?

QUEEN

Peace.

NUGENT

No!

QUEEN

What?

NUGENT

To fight.

QUEEN

(*incredulous*) To fight? We fought to fight?

NUGENT

Exactly.

QUEEN

NUGENT
(walks off shaking her head. Ponders, comes back.)

The beach. Lying in the sun. Luxurious meals. *(staring at the "inheritance" box)*
 Our inheritance. How far could it take us?

(She lunges for the "inheritance" box; Queen gets to it first; they wrestle viciously for it. While wrestling, the following dialogue takes place.)

Now isn't this fun?

QUEEN

You're mad.

NUGENT

QUEEN

Challenged, excited, in the action. Drama, conflict.

NUGENT

Mad.

(They continue struggling, the box between them, rolling on the floor, without speaking.)

(breathless, throwing up her hands in a gesture of peace)

Let's be reasonable.

QUEEN

(responds with a powerful poke)

Ah, a peaceful resolution in the offing.

NUGENT

(incredulous) What is wrong with a peaceful resolution?

QUEEN

(violent) I HATE PEACE..

(knocking at the door as they continue wrestling)

(breathless) Leafy dear, would you please get that.

(no response)

Please, Leafy, can't you see that Nugent and I are tied up?

(no response)

(angry) Damn you, Leafy. Get the goddamn door. A little face-to-face would be good for your weasely soul.

NUGENT

(Breaks off) I'll get it.

(She goes to the door, opens it, and jumps back in alarm.)

(Leafy enters. He is dressed in a fatigue jacket, red bandana wrapped around his forehead, a string of bead dangling from his neck.)

(stunned) Who?...Leafy, is that you?

LEAFY

(strong, a new man) Commandante Oaktree. (a cavalier's bow)

NUGENT

I don't...

LEAFY

(Turns, raises his arm as if holding off the hordes outside who are about to enter.)

I hereby claim this house and all the property herein – *(staring at the “treasure” box)* including the *treasure* – in the name of the People's Most Up-To-Date, Revolutionary, Egalitarian, Humanistic, Anti-Fascistic, Anti-Imperialistic, Anti-Inheritance Tax, Army for Peace and Justice, Fairness, Full Disclosure, and unrestricted access to *Peanut Butter!* *(A roar goes up at this last.)*

QUEEN

(aside) Now there's a name assembled by committee.

(Leafy turns to the “horde” outside the door and waves them in.)

NUGENT

(despair)

Oh shit!

QUEEN

(stepping forward, clearly delighted, rubbing her hands together)

All right! Let the play begin!

Curtain