CHUM AND GET IT!

A monologue
By Craig Houk

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Synopsis

An exuberantly unscrupulous theater representative, Ray O. Sunshine, welcomes a roomful of desperate playwrights to the "New Works Initiative" at Feeding Frenzy Players, where artistic opportunity comes wrapped in absurd bureaucracy and barely veiled exploitation. What begins as a routine orientation quickly spirals into a gleefully unhinged breakdown of submission guidelines, complete with a nonrefundable entry fee handled by a reformed thief, ever-shifting formatting demands, and a literal bucket of rotting "chum" contestants must consume to earn the privilege of having their scripts read. As the stakes escalate from humiliation to possible death (and a posthumous honorable mention), Ray's chipper sales pitch exposes the cutthroat hunger, vanity, and institutional dysfunction lurking beneath the promise of artistic validation, skewering the theater world's pay-to-play culture with escalating absurdity and bite.

Characters

RAYMOND OLIVER SUNSHINE or **RAYLYNN OLIVIA SUNSHINE** or just **RAY O. SUNSHINE**, Any Gender, Any Race, Older though any age is fine.

Place

Feeding Frenzy Players Theater

Time

Present

Setting

A dim basement space lit by fluorescent lights.

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RAY

Good evening, playwrights! And welcome to our fifth annual New Works Initiative! We are thrilled you've chosen to share your work with us, because here at Feeding Frenzy Players we believe in nurturing original, bold, fearless, uncompromising stories composed by eager writers with debatable skills. The kind of stories that rattle foundations, unsettle polite society, and induce nausea.

And a very special welcome to Agnes Hugendubler, our lone octogenarian scribe, who rode her mobility scooter as far as it could go on a single charge, transferred across three bus lines, and hobbled nearly ten blocks just to be here, only to learn she missed the age cutoff by about thirty years. We greatly admire her spunk, and we'd appreciate it if everyone could keep the chaos to a minimum tonight since she appears to be napping in the back row. At least, we hope she's napping.

Anyway, given Agnes's likely catastrophic misunderstanding of our carelessly laid-out procedures, I think it's only fitting that I go over our submission guidelines with everyone once again because it's absolutely crucial that we're all on the same page… pun fully intended.

First: the fifteen-dollar entry fee. If you haven't yet paid, please see Corey in the hallway. They'll be taking checks only. No Venmo, no PayPal, no Cash App, no Apple or Google Pay… None of that electronic nonsense because frankly, here at the playhouse, we've got the combined technical skills of a wobble of ostriches. And while we did, at one time, accept cash payments, we've had to discontinue that service since young Corey has, what we call in the biz, "sticky fingers". We did terminate them, and they were convicted and jailed for three months, though they were let out early for good behavior and as part of their community service, we've invited them back to continue handling our payments at no cost to us.

Second: formatting. We accept single-sided printed and hand bound, hard copies only. Hopefully you selected from the endless array of standard playwriting formats available online and, of course, picked the one that best aligns with our ever-evolving criteria. For those of you who swung by the print shop next door for some last-minute reformatting and printing, I regret to inform you that the odds of your script actually meeting our current guidelines are virtually zero.

That said, and to keep the playwrighting field even, we've provided everything you need to properly bind your scripts on the table at the back. Not exactly official materials per se, but a lovely assortment of yarn, ribbon, twine, double-sided tape, glue sticks, cardboard, colored pencils and googly eyes, all generously donated by various local schoolteachers directly from the back seats and trunks of their unattended vehicles. But one at a time only please so as to keep the noise to a minimum. We do not want to disturb Agnes, if that's even possible at this point.

Third: the chum bucket. Yes, the chum bucket. For those of you who aren't fully familiar with our New Works Initiative, this is not a metaphor. It is, in fact, a three-gallon metal bucket filled with rotting fish and the severed thumbs of playwrights who dared submit two scripts instead of one. All of it ground into bite-sized chunks, lovingly aged in the artistic director's office, which incidentally, doubles as storage for our concessions, and stirred twice daily by our unpaid interns.

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Now, if you refuse to eat from the chum bucket, your script goes straight into the trash bin. No exceptions. If you try to eat from it but throw up before finishing it, we'll read a thirty-page excerpt of your script. If you eat most of it but not all of it, we'll read act one. If you finish the bucket but can't keep it down, you'll be named a finalist, though your play will not be produced. If you finish it but you expire, you get an honorable mention and a hastily crafted write-up in the program's In Memoriam section, possibly alongside Agnes. And if you manage to eat the whole thing and survive, we will of course read the entire script, but we will not provide feedback, and you won't hear from us unless your piece is chosen for production. Should you happen to hear from us, please plan to meet us at this very location on the date and time noted in our barely legible handwritten letter, which will undoubtedly reach you by bulk mail in an untimely manner, so that we can discuss next steps.

And lastly, the big question on your mind: what happens with the fee money? It's very simple really. This is a fundraiser for our organization, so every dime stays right here with us. Also, I've got my eye on a bussin' pair of Nikes. And what do you get in return? A late summer, budget-friendly, unlicensed, royalty-free, world-premiere production featuring a cast of local folks who've always thought, "Hey, maybe I'll give acting a whirl."

And of course, as always, we must acknowledge that without your indefinable creations and your ongoing financial support, our specious tradition of championing edgy, modern, original plays would not exist. And frankly, in many ways, it doesn't.

Anyway, so, that's about it. Looks like everyone is technically still with us, but if you do have any further questions, well, then frankly, you haven't been paying attention. Alright, then! Let's dive in, shall we? On your mark, get set… Chum and get it!

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