



THE VULTURE

A Play in One Act

by

Micah C. Miracle



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Phone: 916-519-0889

Email: micahcmiracle@gmail.com

Cast of Characters

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| <u>David:</u> | A man in his late 20's. |
| <u>Sheila:</u> | A woman in her mid 20's; David's coworker. |
| <u>Larry:</u> | A man in his 30's; David's other coworker. |
| <u>Cathie:</u> | A woman in her mid 50's; Office supervisor. |
| <u>Policeman 1:</u> | A man in his 40's. |
| <u>Policeman 2:</u> | A man in his 30's. |
| <u>The Director:</u> | A man in his 40's. Business attire. |

Scene

In the office.

Time

2011

ACT 1Scene 1

SETTING:

We are overlooking downtown Sacramento from the 12th floor of a Stalinesque government building. This is where DAVID works as an environmental scientist for a state permitting program. The office we are in, like all offices in the Natural Resources building, consists of a single row of cubicles, each separated by paper thin partitions. A large, shared printer/copier sits in the hallway that connects them. Stained ceiling panels laden with asbestos and flickering fluorescent lights contribute heavily to DAVID's irritability.

AT RISE:

A printer whirrs. Three cubicles aligned in a row show three government employees at various stages of work. SHEILA shuffles papers together at her desk while LARRY leans back in his chair, feet up by his computer monitor, editing a printed document by hand. DAVID stands in the middle cube, neglecting work as he stares through the window at the building across the street. His hands are shoved deep in his pockets and he languishes at the thought of returning to his computer. His face shows his discontent. SHEILA brings her papers to the copier and begins to ready the machine when she notices DAVID.

DAVID

(DAVID lets out an irritable sigh)

SHEILA

You ok, David?

DAVID

Hey Sheila. Yeah I'm ok.

(DAVID turns to face SHEILA. He takes his hands out of his pockets and fiddles with his office chair as if he may sit down.)

SHEILA

What are you lookin' at?

DAVID

Oh. Vultures, actually. They're always circling that building across from us.

SHEILA

The Renaissance Tower? Yeah. I've seen 'em. Disgusting birds, aren't they?

(SHEILA lifts her chin and stands on her tippy toes to get a peak.)

DAVID

Disgusting? Some biologist you are! I'm rather taken by them, actually.

SHEILA

Well I think they're just awful! You know, I read somewhere that they'll pee on themselves to cool down in the heat.

(SHEILA shutters and turns back to the copier.)

DAVID

(mumbling under his breath)

Beats government work.

SHEILA

(turning back toward DAVID)

What was that?

DAVID

Nothing.

SHEILA

Are you sure you're feeling ok? You don't seem like yourself

SHEILA CONT.

lately.

DAVID

Yeah, I'm fine. Really. It's just...

LARRY

(LARRY's pencil breaks against his papers in the cubicle next to DAVID and SHEILA.)

Dangit!

SHEILA

(Attempting to ignore LARRY's outburst)

Just what?

DAVID

It's just that-

LARRY

(LARRY stands from his desk and walks toward the copier, interrupting DAVID.)

Do either of you have a pencil sharpener?

SHEILA

Are you serious, Larry? It's 2011! Why are you using a pencil? What's wrong with your computer?

LARRY

Virus.

SHEILA

Again? That's like the third time this year! What have you been googling over there? You know what, on second thought I don't want to know!

DAVID

(David gives a short laugh and answers LARRY with a reluctant smile.)

There's an electric sharpener in the office by the elevators.

LARRY

Ok. Thanks. I guess I could use a stretch.

(LARRY stretches his arms over his head as he leaves the office to search for a pencil sharpener.)

SHEILA

Where were we?

DAVID

Vultures, I think.

SHEILA

Oh yeah. Vultures. Gross. Why do you like them so much, anyway? I mean, they literally survive on the remains of others.

DAVID

As a state employee, you'd think that might resonate a bit!

SHEILA

(Sarcastically)

Very funny.

DAVID

Did you know a group of vultures is known as a committee? I think we may have more in common with them than you're willing to admit!

SHEILA

Well, I don't know about you, but the work I'm doing here is actually important. Did you know that the last permit I signed-off on establishes a brand new wetland for giant garter snakes and California tiger salamanders – both endangered species!

DAVID

No offense, Sheila, but I think you may be attributing more importance to your work than is really deserved.

SHEILA

(offended)

What makes you say that?

DAVID

Well, take that new wetland being created, for garter snakes-

SHEILA

(Cutting off DAVID)

And salamanders!

DAVID

Yes, and salamanders. That wetland will help protect these species, sure. But it came at a pretty big cost, right?

SHEILA

What do you mean?

DAVID

Tell me, what was the project doing to require that sort of mitigation in the first place?

SHEILA

If you must know, the permit was for a subdivision, just south of Elk Grove. It's gonna impact some pretty sensitive habitat there.

DAVID

(Animated)

You see! That's what I'm saying! I mean, you know that engineered wetlands aren't as productive as the real thing. But we make these tradeoffs without any real thought as to what we've lost. And we can't just stop developers from applying for our permits. Hell, Cathie told me herself when I first started that we're-

SHEILA

(SHEILA finishes DAVID's sentence)

-not in the business of denying permits. She told me the same thing.

(SHEILA nods her head, signifying her understanding.)

DAVID

Exactly. We just attach our conditions and try to soften the blow. And then we celebrate our work, when the truth is, we're still losing important habitats at an unprecedented rate. I guess I'm just starting to see the futility in it all. It's like we're fighting a losing battle.

SHEILA

Oh don't be so pessimistic, David. It's not all gloom and doom out there. We do make a difference!

DAVID

I used to think so. Or at least I hoped so. My student loans are proof of that much. But now I feel like I'm just another cog in the machine.

SHEILA

The job is more than just mitigation you know. I mean, the public demands our productivity, right? And who can blame them? We feed on their taxes like vultures, don't we?

(SHEILA rolls her eyes,
exaggerating her sarcasm.)

DAVID

Right! And more often than not the regulations we create just end up working against their interests. Sometimes I can't help but think that shutting the whole thing down might result in better outcomes.

SHEILA

O.M.G. You sound like Ron Swanson.

DAVID

Who?

SHEILA

You know, Ron Swanson! From Parks and Rec. The TV show?!

DAVID

I don't really watch TV.

SHEILA

Well maybe that's your problem right there!

LARRY

(LARRY storms back into the
office, sharpened pencil in
hand.)

Click out of Facebook guys, Cathie's
coming!

SHEILA

Shit!

(SHEILA rushes to her
workspace and quickly
minimizes her screen. Larry
and DAVID return to their
seats.)

CATHIE

(CATHIE bursts into the office
with authority.)

Hello everyone. Sorry to interrupt. Region 2 just sent in a draft of their programmatic permit templates. Larry, I need you to look these over and make appropriate edits, NOT in pencil this time.

(CATHIE hands LARRY a small
stack of papers and continues
to the next cubicle.)

LARRY

Got it.

CATHIE

David, I need a bill analysis for AB 2283. Specifically I need you to focus on the fiscal impacts of the Department's upcoming name change. Revenues, expenditures, you know the drill.

(CATHIE hands a copy of the
bill to DAVID and continues to
SHEILA's workspace.)

And Sheila, I have the copy of the Fish and Game Code you asked for. You guys need to take better care of these. They aren't free. Leave it in the office. Don't bring it home with you this time.

SHEILA

Yes ma'am.

CATHIE

That's all everyone. Make sure you're ready for our meeting with the new director tomorrow. I want our permitting program positioned front and center for his first visit to headquarters.

(CATHIE leaves the office as
quickly as she entered.)

SHEILA

(After a moment passes)

Well. I need to get going. I'm catching the light rail out to Rancho today.

(SHEILA stands from her chair
and gathers her belongings.)

LARRY

Yeah. I need to head out a bit early too, actually. You don't mind turning out the lights when you leave, do you

LARRY CONT.

David?

(LARRY stands, grabs his coat
and follows SHEILA out of the
office.)

DAVID

(Somewhat dejected)

No, I don't mind. See you guys tomorrow.

(David puts his things into
his backpack and walks away
from his desk. He sighs deeply
and hits the lights on his way
out.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1Scene 2

SETTING: Downtown. After midnight.

AT RISE: DAVID is alone outside of the Natural Resources building. The stage is dark. A spotlight illuminates his figure.

DAVID

(DAVID speaks to the audience with conviction as he stands outside of his workplace.)

Up until this point in my career I felt uncertain about my future – and my place – within this corrupted bureaucracy. But after our conversation that day, I knew something had to be done. Someone had to make a stand. And no one was going to do it for me.

(DAVID puts on a zip-up sweater and pulls the hood over his head. He sneaks slowly across the stage. His tone of voice becomes more sinister.)

And so began my inevitable transformation from hero to villain. From public servant to public enemy. I admit, my first efforts rebelling against the state were feeble and childish. Like a three-year-old denied his favorite toy, I reacted as if I were the infant in a carefully constructed parent-child relationship. The rationale behind my anger had yet to be fully articulated. I was foolish and young, hiding behind dumpsters and parked cars in the middle of the night, fiendishly exacting my revenge. My heart would race as I spray-painted curse words on the benches of bus-stops and light-rail ticket machines in the heart of the city. Feverish chills would overtake me as I let out the air from the tires of loosely guarded government vehicles.

(DAVID pulls a can of spray paint from his bag and tags a bus stop. His mark is the stenciled outline of a vulture. He continues his monologue.)

A fear of authority, instilled in my core since childhood, would seep from my pores as I darted in and out of the shadows. I relied on stealth alone. I hadn't developed the

DAVID CONT.

sophistication necessary to outrun the law, nor the capacity to defend myself if approached.

(DAVID ducks behind a parked car. Two policemen rush onto the stage, shining flashlights and searching the area.)

POLICEMAN 1

I think he went this way. Did you see him?

POLICEMAN 2

That's a negative. I was unable to get a visual on the suspect.

POLICEMAN 1

(POLICEMAN 1 notices the graffiti left by DAVID.)

Roger. He can't be far. Keep your eyes peeled.

POLICEMAN 2

10-4... And don't call me Roger!

(Both policemen leave the stage, narrowly missing their suspect.)

DAVID

(DAVID reemerges from behind the parked car. He continues speaking to the audience.)

Looking back, I find it hard to remember the expectations I had set for myself. I almost expected to be caught. Maybe I wanted to be caught. Over time, I would become more comfortable with the delinquency. Little did I know, the hardest part would be coming back into work after an evening in the shadows.

(DAVID looks over his shoulders and sneaks off stage.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1Scene 3

SETTING: Back in the office. Early morning.

AT RISE: LARRY is working with his feet up at his desk, newspaper open and pencil in hand. SHEILA is also at her desk, typing up another permit.

LARRY

Did you read about the most recent spate of vandalism in the newspaper this morning?

SHEILA

No. But I saw the graffiti at the light rail station. Just awful.

LARRY

They think it's just one guy. Some kind of bandit. Someone with a grudge against the government I guess.

(DAVID Enters the office. He has a disheveled appearance and is exhausted from staying out the night before. LARRY looks over his paper at DAVID.)

You're late.

DAVID

Yeah. I guess I stayed out too long last night.

(DAVID shuffles past LARRY toward his cubicle.)

LARRY

Well you look like hell. You better straighten yourself out before Cathie comes back.

DAVID

Has she been in already?

(DAVID stops and waits for an answer.)

LARRY

Don't worry. I covered for you. Said you were out getting coffee. She's busy preparing for the meeting with the new director anyway. You're safe for now.

DAVID

Thanks Larry.

(DAVID continues to his cubicle and turns on his computer. He picks up a stack of permits that have collected on his desk, briefly glances at them and then tosses them back down with disdain. He falls hard into his chair and lets out a sigh. He runs his hands through his hair and tries to shake off his exhaustion when the phone rings. After a moment it rings again.)

SHEILA

You gonna get that?

DAVID

(DAVID picks up the receiver and sets it back down on its base, hanging up on the caller.)

If it's important they'll call back.

SHEILA

You really are something, you know that.

(SHEILA shakes her head and stands up from her desk.)

I'm going to get some coffee before the meeting. You want to join me, Larry?

LARRY

Yeah. I could use a break.

SHEILA

(SHEILA glances out of the window on the way out of the office. She is upset with DAVID's attitude.)

SHEILA CONT.

I noticed your vultures are back, David. And I think I'm starting to see some of those similarities you were talking about.

(SHEILA walks out of the office with LARRY.)

DAVID

Oh, leave me alone.

(DAVID grumbles in disapproval and puts his head down on his desk. He falls asleep. An image of a clock displays on the screen at the back of the stage. Its hands move, showing 2 full hours go by. SHEILA and LARRY re-enter the office and find DAVID asleep at his desk.)

SHEILA

(Surprised)

David, where have you been! Are you sleeping? You missed the meeting. Get yourself together. Cathie's heading this way now!

(SHEILA hurries to her desk. David stands and tries to straighten up. He tucks in his shirt and runs his hand across his hair.)

LARRY

(LARRY shakes his head, showing his disapproval.)

Wow. This is a new low. Even for you, David.

CATHIE

(CATHIE enters the office. She is upset.)

There you are, David! We missed you at the meeting this morning. I thought I had made it clear how important it was that you be there.

DAVID

I'm sorry, I -

CATHIE

Save it! The new director is making his rounds through the department, shaking hands with each employee. You can try out your excuses on him when he gets here.

DIRECTOR

(The DIRECTOR enters the office.)

Hello everyone. I hope I'm not interrupting.

CATHIE

(Fawning)

Not at all! Thank you for visiting our permitting program.

DIRECTOR

The pleasure is all mine. I see you're all very hard at work. Larry, good to see you again. Sheila. Now who is this?

(The DIRECTOR notices DAVID)

I don't believe I saw you in the meeting this morning?

(He extends his hand.)

DAVID

(DAVID shakes the DIRECTOR's hand with a firm grip.)

The name is David, sir. David Starbuck. I apologize for missing this morning's meeting. I thought I'd use the time to catch up on some work.

(DAVID motions to the paper's on his desk.)

DIRECTOR

Well I can certainly appreciate that. I'm afraid there's not too many people around here that share your work ethic – an important quality to be sure.

DAVID

Honestly, sometimes I find it hard to pull myself away. It's such important work we do here, afterall.

DIRECTOR

You know. That's just the attitude this department needs! I'll tell you what. Here's my card. There's an opening in the executive suite that I'd like to meet with you about. Cathie, see if you can arrange a meeting with my secretary.

CATHIE

(Confused, but compliant)

CATHIE CONT.

Well I... Of course. Right away.

DIRECTOR

It was nice meeting you David. We'll talk soon. Glad to see all of you again. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to get going. My car was vandalized last night and I need to catch a cab to my next appointment.

CATHIE

Let me see you out.

(CATHIE walks out of the office with the DIRECTOR.)

DIRECTOR

(Offstage)

David certainly seems like a fine young man.

CATHIE

(Also offstage)

Oh yes, he's one of our best.

LARRY AND SHEILA

(LARRY and SHEILA shake their heads, mouths agape, dumbfounded by what occurred.)

DAVID

(DAVID rubs his hands together. He stares into the audience and lets out a diabolical laugh.)

MUAH HA HA HA. AH HA HA HA HA!!!

(BLACK OUT)

(END)