

A Bad Play

written by

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## Characters

Sam	m/f	late 20's	The Artistic Director of a local theatre
Alex	m/f	early 30's	A local playwright. Friend of Sam's

## Time

Present Day.

## Location

The Offices of Cladach Loch Community Theatre, Middle America, USA.

Lights up on the offices of Cladach Loch Community Theatre, Middle America, USA. A utilitarian room with a door, shelves, desks, tables.

The office is a mess: papers and plans strewn across multiple desks. Fast food wrappers abound. Bulletin boards are covered with clippings. A white board is filled with play titles, two dollar signs are written, largely, a top the list. Stacks of scripts punctuate the mess like skyscrapers above the clouds.

Sam sits at their desk, reading an anthology of plays.

There's a knock at the door.

SAM  
(not looking up)  
It's open!

ALEX  
(off stage)  
No it isn't.

Sam reaches under their desk and pushes a button.

There's a buzz, then a thud.

ALEX  
(off stage)  
It didn't open.

SAM  
Push harder. Really, throw your shoulder into it.

This time, Sam doesn't push the buzzer. There is a thud and Alex enters, carrying a satchel.

SAM  
Hey, Alex. Sorry about that.

ALEX  
You keep the door locked?

SAM  
Yeah, security. We need to get it repaired though, one good push and anyone can walk it. Well, as you saw.

ALEX

Right, because who wouldn't want to steal all this?

SAM

You never know. So, what brings my favorite, young, theater writer in?

ALEX

Playwright, Sam. I'm a playwright.

SAM

Ew... *playwright*.

ALEX

What do you mean "Ew... playwright?"

Pause.

SAM

It's a bit pretentious, isn't it? You write a few sketches in college, now you're a "playwright."

ALEX

That's unfair. And you know more than a few theatres have produced my stuff.

SAM

Short pieces; pieces for festivals. Great and noble accomplishments, I'm proud of you! That will open doors for you!

ALEX

Right, which is why I'm here.

SAM

What's up?

ALEX

My writing.

SAM

(uncomfortably)

What about it?

ALEX

Have you even read it?

SAM

I've known you for fifteen years! Of course I've read it. I was in your play writing class, for chrissakes!

Pause.

ALEX

Recently? Have you read my work recently?

SAM

We celebrate the playwright here at Cladach Loch Community Theatre, you know that.

ALEX

I know, which is why I'm so excited that my friend Sam works here!

SAM

(admitting)

I'm a little busy, Alex.

ALEX

Oh, I see. Busy Artistic Director at the busy community theatre...

SAM

(interrupting)

Unfair! I have a season to plan, and, in case you've forgotten, *that's my job*. I'm sorry that I don't have the time in my day to read your, forgive me, avant-garde, art-for-arts-sake, scripts.

Alex is slightly taken aback, but notices the whiteboard.

ALEX

Now who is being unfair? You know damn well that my script would fit in perfectly with everything that your'e considering doing! I mean, look at that list... There isn't one piece on there that's from this century.

Silence.

SAM

So? That's hardly important. On top of that, the audience doesn't care.

ALEX

You don't know that.

SAM

(quickly)

Yeah, I do. The audience doesn't want to be challenged, they want to be comforted. Each one of those shows are guaranteed to but butts in seats and make us a profit.

ALEX

So will mine.

SAM

No, Alex, it won't. I know you think that the purpose to theater is to make art and heal the world and some other idealistic crap like that...

ALEX

(interrupting)

The purpose of theatre is...

SAM

(interrupting)

No, the purpose of theatre is to exist. We have one goal here, and that's to survive to put on another show.

ALEX

You have an obligation to challenge your audience!

SAM

Challenge my...?! Oh, young child, the audience doesn't want to be challenged. No, no, no. The typical theater audience wants to be distracted.

ALEX

You are the Hallmark Channel of community theatres.

SAM

We give the people what they want.

ALEX

You should give them what they need.

SAM

(reinforcing)

We give them what they want. No theatre has ever survived by giving people what they need.

Alex starts to protest.

SAM

(continued)

Have you seen the world out there? It's pretty crap-tacular. And if people want to give us a few bucks for a couple of hours of escapism... Who am I to say no?

Alex sits on a paper covered chair.

ALEX

(defeated)

But that list, my play fits in with every thing that's there. It belongs on that list.

SAM  
Maybe, except for one tiny detail.

ALEX  
What's that?

SAM  
Those plays will make money.

Pause.

ALEX  
It's so dirty.

SAM  
It's entertainment.

Alex notices the book on Sam's desk  
and moves to pick it up.

ALEX  
What's... "The Best of Off-Broadway 1976?"

SAM  
I told you that I'm busy. I'm planning our  
next season.

ALEX  
1976??

SAM  
Celebrating the bicentennial celebration!

Pause.

Alex reaches into their satchel and  
pulls out a copy of their script.  
They stand there, contemplating the  
juxtaposition: And original script  
in one hand, a decades old  
compilation in the other.

ALEX  
Sam?

SAM  
Yes, Alex?

ALEX  
(afraid of the truth)  
Did you even read my script?

Pause.

SAM  
No.

Pause.

ALEX  
Why not?

SAM  
Because you didn't pay the submission fee.

Silence.

ALEX  
What?

SAM  
It clearly states, on our website, that we will not consider a script without a non-refundable twenty dollar submission fee.

ALEX  
I've known you for fifteen years!

SAM  
And I have to make a car payment every month.

Silence.

Life has just punched Alex in the stomach, and it shows.

SAM  
I don't even know what your play is about.

ALEX  
It's about a writer who goes to his friend who runs a theatre and they were gonna stage a show that was gonna change the world.

SAM  
Really? Huh. That sounds like a bad play. I'm going to guess that you used gender neutral names, so casting can be totally flexible. I mean, after all, these are *universal experiences* that can happen to anyone *without regard to gender*. Besides, it might be interesting to see how it *plays* with different genders in the roles. Oh, puke. Nobody likes that crap. Now, listen, if you don't mind, Alex, I need to get back to work. I was about the re-familiarize myself with "Hay Fever" when I buzzed you in.



ALEX

This was going to be my big break.

SAM

Yeah, well, get your head out of the clouds.

ALEX

You said that the festivals would open doors.

SAM

I'm your friend, I'm being supportive.

ALEX

So...

SAM

I lied. Festivals don't mean crap. Unless, like I said, you paid your submission fee. Then we look forward to showcasing the work of new and upcoming talent. "Celebrating the Playwright," and all that.

ALEX

It's a lie, isn't it? That "Celebrating the playwright" thing.

SAM

It's not a lie, it's marketing.

Pause.

ALEX

What's the difference?

SAM

The number of tickets sold.

Pause.

ALEX

I suppose.

Pause.

SAM

I hate to dash the hopes of new and upcoming talent like this... Actually, I enjoy it. Very much. But, you're a friend, so I feel dirty.

ALEX

(pulling themselves together)

Then what do you suggest? How do I take this writing thing to the next level? I know this is super bad timing, but I'm getting kind of desperate here and don't have anyone else to ask. So, any ideas? How do I make my Big Break happen?

SAM

I dunno, write your next piece fifty years ago?

ALEX

Fifty years?!

SAM

Maybe thirty. But definitely not an hour after August 29, 1999.

ALEX

(incredulously)

How the hell am I supposed to do that??

SAM

I don't know! You're "The Creative," you figure it out.

Alex, defeated yet again, slumps into a chair and fights back tears.

ALEX

(becoming increasingly emotional)

I was going to uplift the downtrodden. Heal the sick. My plays were going to end all war, and I can't even get in the poorly locked front door of Cladach Loch Community Theatre. YOU ARE THE KILLERS OF ART!

SAM

Oh, please don't... No.. No tears. It's horrible when I see some actress start crying when she doesn't get a role. And, by "horrible," I mean "funny." But it's just pathetic to watch you do it. So, could you please leave so I can laugh at you, too?

ALEX

(with passion)

I just want this so bad! I was meant to be a playwright! Ever since my grandmother took me to the children's theatre show, I only wanted to be a playwright. Not a novelist, not a reporter... A playwright! Like Shakespeare, or Wilde, or, hell, even Morgan! I just wanted to be a playwright! I'm not qualified for anything else! I'm not even qualified to ask if someone wants fries with that!!

Pause.

SAM

Holy crap, when did you get so wishy washy?

Sam paces the room until they get to the white board. They look it over for a moment.

Sam has an idea. They pick up a dry erase marker, and add another dollar sign.

They turn back to Alex.

SAM

(continued)

Tell you what, Alex.

ALEX

(softly)

What?

SAM

(selling it)

Be with me, here. I have an idea. I think I see a way forward. Do you think that you can tweak your theater-can-save-the-world piece to fit with our theme of celebrating the bicentennial celebration?

Alex considers this.

ALEX

(gaining confidence)

I... I think so... Yeah.. Why not? I can do it!

SAM

Oh, that's great! That's the attitude! That's the go get 'em, Tiger that I've come to expect.

ALEX

(like a tiger)

Rwar!

SAM

We'll work on it! But, if you can do it, and if I think the theatre can get behind it, we'll tell you how much it'll cost to mount the production! And the moment you pay the production fee, we will get to work on producing your show!

ALEX

You'd do that... For me??

SAM

Yes! Just be sure to pay the submission fee first!

ALEX

Sam, I can't tell you how special you've made me feel!

SAM

That's nice to hear! We love celebrating the up and coming playwrights! It's what we do here!

Alex stands and moves to hug Sam.

SAM

(hugging back)

Well, this is unnecessary. And uncomfortable.

Sam begins to usher Alex to the door, grabbing the satchel, but leaving the script behind.

SAM

(continued)

Now, you get to work, busy as a beaver. And the moment you're ready, and not a second earlier, we will get to work PRODUCING YOUR PLAY!!

Sam pushes Alex out the door.

ALEX

(in doorway)

Sam, thank you. I can't begin to tell you what this means to me. This is my dream, my reason for...

Sam slams the door shut.

SAM

(aside)

Gotta get the locks fixed. Maybe add some more.

Sam begins to walk back to their desk when they notice Alex's script.

SAM

(aside)

Damn fool left their script.

Sam sits at their desk, and,  
putting their feet on the desk,  
begins to read.

SAM

(aside)

Huh, this isn't that bad... Kind of good  
actually... Yeah, we'd do a hell of a job with  
this... It'd be a hell of a hit... Oh well,  
that's what you get for not paying the  
submission fee.

Sam throws the script away.

End of play.