

SISTER DESTAIN'S FAITH

A STAGE PLAY

BY

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Contents

Cast of Characters.....	4
Setting	5
Act 1, Scene 1.....	6
Act 1, Scene 2.....	7
Act 1, Scene 3.....	9
Act 1, Scene 4.....	14
Act 1, Scene 5.....	17
Act 1, Scene 6.....	25
Act 2, Scene 1.....	35
Act 2, Scene 2.....	43
Act 2, Scene 3.....	51
Act 2, Scene 4.....	55
Act 3, Scene 1.....	61
Act 3, Scene 2.....	71
Act 3, Scene 3.....	79

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Theresa	18, morbidly obese young woman
Tommy	40s, Theresa's father, a workman
Ajax	6, neighborhood boy
Sharon	40s, postal employee
Nooskie	30s, delivery man
Sandy	40s, woman from Care at Home
Sharif	30s, a medical doctor, also a neighbor
Mrs. Grundy	60s, head of Christian education at Theresa's church
Kathryn	60s, a neighbor

SETTING

June 2019. O'Hara Township, suburb of Pittsburgh PA. Gutted interior of Tommy's small, single-story house. The walls and doorways have been knocked out. Bathroom fixtures upstage left and kitchen fixtures downstage left are visible and part of the same space. Remains of the demolished walls have been swept into heaps here and there along the walls. Household cleaning equipment is stacked in crates against wall near bathroom. An industrial broom leans up against wall near by. Upstage right is the door to the property's front yard. The interior's three small windows are smashed but are hung with curtains. A large, handsome mirror in a heavy, ornate frame leans up against the wall, just downstage right from the door. A small fan stands on floor beside it. The room is dim, stifling, and bare of furniture except for a low divan downstage center heaped high up with something indefinite. It could be a pile of earth or the silhouette of a beast at rest.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Gutted interior of Tommy's little house. Evening. Soft lights flicker from the windows. A conspicuous mound lies inert on divan downstage center. Faint singing - just a murmur - heard of the song Kumbaya then stops. Sound of labored breathing and excessively loud snoring begins. Dawn breaks.

SAMPLE

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Gutted interior. Late morning. Sound of snoring stops replaced by labored breathing, although the space appears to be empty. It is dim and stifling hot. A ray of strong light shining past opening in curtains is reflected in mirror by the door. Tommy appears in doorway, listens for a moment, then exits. Labored breathing continues. The mound jerks and fumbles for crutch lying unseen by the divan, grasps it. Leaning heavily on it, the mound rises to take the form of a morbidly obese person wearing a loose cloak that completely covers the body. This is Theresa. She moves laboriously to the bathroom area, retches into the toilet, cleans herself, then sits on toilet to urinate, all the while keeping her body concealed. As she sits, she erupts in a sudden fury, slapping and pinching herself. Her rage passes, she rises, washes again, pulls cloak around her. On her way back, she stumbles over crutch, falls, cannot get up. She wails, thumps, thrashes. Tommy enters and rushes to her.

Tommy I'm here. I'm here. You didn't hurt yourself, did you? Let's get you up. Up. Up.

Theresa thrashes him with crutch.

Tommy Don't hit me, Theresa. Please. I'm here to help. We'll get you back to your bed. We will. Come on. Help me out here.

Tommy helps Theresa back to divan. She lies down, assuming shape of mound seen in the opening scene.

Tommy This can't happen, Theresa. If they find out you fell and I didn't know about it, they're going to say we can't do this anymore. It's bad enough like you wouldn't believe already. Let me know when you want to get up, honey. I'll come right in and we'll go wherever you want. That's what I'm out there for. Promise me you'll do that. Please.

Theresa assaults him with slaps and pinches. Tommy retreats toward door.

Tommy I think you know I want to help. I'm trying. I'm -
(*notices bathroom, sniffs*) Oh geez.

*Tommy moves to toilet area, pulls out cleaning equipment stacked
against wall.*

SAMPLE

ACT 1, SCENE 3

Room. Continuous. As Tommy cleans toilet, Ajax enters and stands in door looking at Theresa, who stares at him. Tommy notices, crosses to Ajax.

Tommy It's not very nice in here, Ajax. I didn't mean for you to come in.

Ajax *(makes stiff bow from the waist, one hand in front, one behind, then curtsies pulling at the pockets of his shorts)* Good day, Sister DeStein.

Theresa Good day, Ajax.

Ajax waits, uncomfortable. Tommy watches warily, mystified, then returns to cleaning toilet area.

Theresa The naughtiest one.

Ajax You look different.

Theresa And why is that?

Ajax You melted.

Theresa That's right. I melted down to the essence of God's holy spirit.

Ajax Is that why you're not our Sunday school teacher anymore?

Theresa Such a naughty little boy. You never believed a word I said.

Ajax You said we'd get the sparkly feeling. I never did.

Theresa I told you, you have to believe to get the sparkly feeling. You did not believe. You wanted the sparkly feeling without believing, cheap little boy.

Ajax My mom said it was tripe.

Theresa That zit-faced whore.

Tommy (*approaches Ajax*) Come on, Ajax. Let's go outside now. Theresa isn't feeling well. Come on.

Ajax (*resists Tommy*) She's not a zit-face. She's not.

Theresa Come here. Come over here, I said.

Ajax moves obediently to stand in front of Theresa.

Theresa I'll teach you to defy God's word.

Theresa begins slapping Ajax in a frenzy. Ajax takes the blows passively.

Tommy (*pulls Ajax away*) What is all this? What are you doing, Theresa? Stop it. Stop it, Theresa. You can't hit Ajax like that. Come here, Ajax. Come here.

Tommy drags Ajax away. Ajax resists.

Theresa You heard what that cheap little boy said.

Tommy No, I didn't.

Theresa I won't tolerate such impudence. Ever again. Ever again. Come here, cheap little boy, and get your whipping.

Tommy What are you talking about? You're not going to give anybody a whipping. (*to Ajax while holding him back as Ajax tries to approach*) You stay right here. (*to Theresa*) What's come over you?

Theresa Let him come forward and get the whipping he deserves for refusing to believe. You nasty, dirty boy.

Tommy You can't talk to Ajax that way. Ajax, you shouldn't be listening to any of this. This is - this is - not right. She doesn't mean it. She's not feeling well.

Ajax is transfixed by Theresa.

Theresa (*to Ajax*) Come here, I said, and get a switching to save your soul.

Tommy Ajax is going now, Theresa. Say goodbye, Ajax.

Ajax I'm a naughty, wicked boy.

Tommy Ajax. Ajax, listen to me. You are not a naughty, wicked boy. Don't ever let anyone call you that. And don't ever let anyone hit you. It's not right. Remember that. No one has the right to hit you. And even if someone says you're wicked, that doesn't mean you are. You are not wicked, Ajax.

Ajax I'm a naughty, wicked boy and I'll get the sparkles if I get whipped. I want to get the sparkles.

Theresa I know how to save wicked little boys. By flaying the filth from their souls.

Ajax It doesn't work, Sister DeStein. I never got the sparkles.

Tommy Ajax? What are you saying? Did she whip you?

Theresa Because you didn't believe. And because of this one wicked, filthy little boy, none of those wicked children believed. Now they're all lost.

Ajax I like being naughty and wicked. I like it. Getting filthy and dirty and running away and hiding. That gives me the sparkly feeling. It gives me the sparkly feeling all over.

Theresa Because you were fathered by a goat.

Tommy Theresa.

Theresa And a zit-faced whore-mother.

Ajax runs at Theresa and pummels her. Theresa slaps back with both hands in a frenzied, awkward way.

Ajax She's not a zit-face. She's not.

Tommy Please, Theresa. She's dead. Let her be.

Ajax, overcome with grief, continues pummeling Theresa who continues to slap him back.

Ajax She's not a zit-face. She's not.

Tommy separates them with difficulty.

Tommy Tina was your friend, Theresa. Why are you talking this way?

Theresa She never cared about him. He was only good for cleaning bathrooms while she turned tricks down the hall. And not for anything useful like money. Another snort would do it.

Ajax She does care about me. She does.

Theresa And who was looking after the savage? Who was paying attention? Who knew what was going on? Me. Isn't that right, Ajax? *(attempts to slap at him)* I did. I was going to pull you out of all that, make you a soldier of God. And what do I get for my trouble? A brat who prefers a zit-faced whore who treats him like filth because that's what he is. Filth.

Tommy You shouldn't be hearing this, Ajax. Don't listen to what she says. She not - not feeling well. She's - she's ill. Very ill.

Theresa She would have been sending him out to turn -

Tommy *(covering Ajax's ears)* Enough. Stop, Theresa. For God's sake. We're going out now, Ajax. We'll leave her in peace. Something has gotten her upset. She has to rest. She needs time to settle down.

Ajax *(to Theresa)* It stinks in here. You stink. I'm glad I'm going. And I'm not coming back. Not to get the sparkles. Not for anything.

Tommy Ajax, you weren't cleaning rooms at the hotel for your mother, were you?

Ajax exits, running.

Theresa Wicked little boys can't run away from me. My body is hot with God's glory. His kingdom is coming. I will get you.

As Tommy exits, he surveys back wall.

Tommy Whoa, mule. I think I just thought of something. No more squabbles. No more slapping around. No more falling down with Tommy not knowing about it. This could be very good. No one will ever have to come in bothering you again, Theresa. You will have all the privacy you want. Yes. *(moves to door, turns fan on)* That better?

Theresa punches the air in fury. Tommy exits.