

THE NATIVITY PAGEANT

By

Ian Patrick Williams

CAST: ARTEMIS P. LODESTONE (theater director -- M, 50's-60's)
TULLY JAMESON (pastor -- M, 35-45)
SLAVIC WOMAN (would-be actor – F, 35-45)
V. D. (would-be actor; gang member; any ethnicity – M, 25-35)
HOOKER (would-be actor – F, 20-30)

SYNOPSIS: A mild mannered pastor hires an eccentric director to mount his Nativity pageant and realizes he's made a terrible mistake.

BIO: Ian Patrick Williams shared the Chicago Emmy award for co-authoring the PBS teleplay BLEACHER BUMS, which was later produced by SHOWTIME. After moving to L.A., he worked for the non-profit company Enrichment Works, writing and directing seven one act plays that toured the LAUSD school systems. His one act play PROVENANCE was recently produced at Ensemble Studio Theater's One Act Play Festival. His one act play NORMAL SHNORMAL won the first place Gold Quill award at the 2017 Tehachapi playwright's Festival. His screenplay IN THE COMPANY OF GOOD MEN is currently in post-production with Status Media Entertainment.

THE NATIVITY PAGEANT is a new play with no production history.

4148 Whitsett Ave. #103
Studio City, CA 91604
818-760-0193
Ianpatrick777@aol.com

THE NATIVITY PAGEANT

PLACE: A small theater

TIME: November, present year

AT RISE: ARTEMIS P. LODESTONE, an older disheveled theater director, is seated in the front row of his small dilapidated theater. A pile of 8X10's sits next to him as he scribbles furiously on a crumpled yellow legal pad. After a moment, mild-mannered pastor TULLY JAMESON stands in the doorway.

TULLY

Excuse me. Um...excuse me?

(Lodestone looks up.)

Are you Mr. Lodestone? Artemis P. Lodestone?

ARTEMIS

It depends. Do I owe you money?

TULLY

Uh...no.

ARTEMIS

Then yes. You may enter.

(He resumes writing as Tully enters.)

TULLY

I was just looking for the director that my sister met here.

ARTEMIS

I meet a lot of women, sir; it's not my fault they find me irresistible. Now then, if this about a paternity suit, I can assure you...

TULLY

No, no. She approached you about directing a Nativity play that I wrote.

ARTEMIS

Oh, her! Yes, of course, I'm working on it as we speak. I remember her mentioning you now. She said you were...a rabbi?

TULLY

Well...no...I'm...

ARTEMIS

No, no, don't tell me. Cardinal. Bishop.

TULLY

No, I...

ARTEMIS

Imam. Ayatollah? Sensei?

TULLY

Pastor. Pastor Tully Jameson.

ARTEMIS

No, that doesn't sound right. Are you sure?

TULLY

Well...yes.

ARTEMIS

Well, you should know. And you're here because...?

TULLY

Like I said, my sister Jackie?

ARTEMIS

Ah yes.

TULLY

I have to tell you, Jackie's kind of the black sheep of the family. You know, always doing crazy things like yoga or protest marches or going to see avant-garde theatre productions.

ARTEMIS

If you'd like to have her committed, I know a facility or two that I can recommend.

TULLY:

No, no. I didn't mean...she's just a little different than the rest of the family. Anyway, she spoke very highly of the production of ALICE IN WONDERLAND that she saw here. She's sure you're the person I've been looking for to direct my script.

ARTEMIS

Yes, she gave it to me.

TULLY

Oh! And...?

ARTEMIS

It...needs a few improvements. Not to worry, I've been jotting down ideas for days now. What day is it by the way?

TULLY

Tuesday.

ARTEMIS

My God, I've been up for seventy-two hours?! Boy, time just go by flying by, doesn't it?

TULLY

So anyway, I thought I should stop in and see if you were really interested.

ARTEMIS

Indeed I am. Yes, I was flattered that she stayed to talk after the show. She was one of the few people who didn't walk out during the nude scene.

TULLY

I'm sorry, the what?

ARTEMIS

The nude scene. I always try to include one in every production. It's very freeing for the actors.

TULLY

Well...this is going to be done in a church. So of course that can't happen.

ARTEMIS

No nudity?

TULLY

No.

(Artemis crosses out a line on his pad.)

ARTEMIS

All right. Not a problem.

TULLY

But she said she was quite taken with all the special effects that you had.

ARTEMIS

Yes! Do you know what the top ten grossing films last year all had in common?

TULLY

Uh...they all co-starred Samuel L. Jackson?

ARTEMIS

Yes. But also: special effects! Audiences love them.

TULLY

I know! That's what I want too! Angels flying, the star of Bethlehem shining, the arrival of the Magi...

ARTEMIS

Yes! I see it all!

TULLY

Wonderful. I may as well tell you that this Nativity show pretty much HAS to be a success. I've been told by the church elders that if I can't get more people in the pews, I might not be able to keep my job.

ARTEMIS

Not to worry Padre, you've come to the right man. Now, here's what I'm thinking: we'll start with the parting of the Red Sea. Then...

TULLY

Wait! That was actually several thousand years before the Nativity.

ARTEMIS

Really? Well, perhaps I'll do it as a prologue.

TULLY

Maybe...maybe you should just focus on the New Testament.

ARTEMIS

Very well...no Red Sea.

(He crosses off another line, then gazes off into the distance.)

Now then...I see sand. Small villages. Quaint townspeople going about their daily chores. They've been humbled by their harsh conditions, yet have never given up hope that a Savior is coming.

TULLY

Yes, that's probably exactly how it was.

ARTEMIS

And then...the mummy enters!

TULLY

The MUMMY?!

ARTEMIS

Yes! Now listen: you said you wanted special effects that would wow the audience, yes? We're in the Middle East...near ancient Egypt.

TULLY

Well, yes but...

ARTEMIS

And what do we think about when we hear the word 'Egypt'? Mummies!

TULLY

But...but...

ARTEMIS

You want this to be a hit, don't you? Did you see those 'Mummy' movies? They were HUGE.

TULLY

Well I know, but...

ARTEMIS

I've even thought about the poster! You've probably seen movie ads saying, "It came from outer space!" or "It came from the Black Lagoon!" Now how about this: "It came upon a midnight clear!"

TULLY

No, no, no. Look, there are all sorts of miraculous things within the story just as it's written. You don't have to add anything else.

ARTEMIS

No mummy?

TULLY

No mummy. I'm sorry, but...

ARTEMIS

No no no.

(He scratches off another line.)

Just one concept of many. Not to worry; I have a million of them!

TULLY

Well, I'll leave you to your work.

ARTEMIS

No no, have a seat, your Grace.

TULLY

Really, just 'Tully' is fine.

ARTEMIS

As you wish. I'm just about to start auditions.

TULLY

Really? I've never seen professional actors audition before.

(He sits.)

ARTEMIS

Oh these aren't professionals; you don't want to work with them. They're so needy. Always demanding things...like bathroom breaks or payment. No, rather than posting audition notices for the actors I need, I go directly to the agencies.

TULLY

Talent agencies.

ARTEMIS

No, more like homeless shelters and rehab facilities. But I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

(Artemis picks up a photo and résumé and calls O.S.)

All right, send in the first one.

(A large Slavic looking woman enters.)

ARTEMIS

Hello dear. I understand you're going to do a dramatic monologue for us. Whenever you're ready.

(She strikes a dramatic pose.)

SLAVIC WOMAN

Flurg bagan zur haban! Neez goffag blor eek. Noon zoobin fratcha gack; jee whoo see da! Oh glogin heeb nunga; wha pleeg oofta bazang!

(She smiles and nods that she's done.)

ARTEMIS

Wonderful!

TULLY

What did she say?

ARTEMIS

I have no idea; she's from some country I never heard of.

(Artemis peruses her résumé.)

TULLY

Well...does she speak English?

ARTEMIS

I don't think so...but neither did the people in the Bible, right? Wasn't it Hebrew or Aramaic or something?

TULLY

Yes, but...the show has to be in English.

ARTEMIS

Are you sure? Because I was thinking I could run subtitles across the bottom of the stage.

TULLY

No, I need everyone to understand what people are saying without reading a translation.

ARTEMIS

All right. Another fine idea bites the dust.

(He scratches another line off his idea list, then turns to the woman.)

Thank you dear; that was marvelous! Very expressive! I'll call you.

(She nods and exits.)

TULLY

Really?

ARTEMIS

Oh yes, She has a very strong stage presence. In fact, I think she's butch enough to pull off the role of King Herod. Think about it. Next!

(A tough-looking gang banger swaggers on stage.)

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

And you are...?

V. D.

The guys in my gang call me V. D.

(They stare at him in, stunned)

ARTEMIS

Because you have...?

V. D.

A Very Dominant personality!

ARTEMIS

Ah, that's a relief. What brings you here today, V. D.?

V. D.

I dunno. I'm kinda tired of gang bangin' ...dealin' drugs. Thought I'd try show business instead.

ARTEMIS

Not exactly an upward career move. And don't be so sure about giving up drugs; they can very conducive to the creative process.

TULLY

What?

ARTEMIS

I mean...uh...so I've heard.

(Artemis hands a script page to V. D.)

Here, why don't you try reading the part of Joseph?

V. D.

Yeah, okay. Uh..."My wife is with child. Is there no one here who will give us shelter?"

ARTEMIS

Hmm. That was a tiny bit stiff. Tell you what, forget the script. Try it in your own words.

V. D.

All right.

(He drops the script and pulls a switchblade)

V. D. (CONT'D)

Hey! My old lady is knocked up and we need a place to crash! You gonna let us stay here or do I have to cut a bitch?

ARTEMIS

Yes!

TULLY

NO! He can't pull a knife!

ARTEMIS

No? What about the angel Gabriel? Didn't he carry a flaming sword or something?

(to V. D.)

Would it be possible for you to bring a sword next time?

V. D.

Sure, man.

TULLY

Wait, wait. I need to talk to you for a moment.

ARTEMIS

Certainly. V. D., callbacks are Monday.

V. D.

Cool.

(He struts off)

TULLY

Artemis, this pageant has GOT to be a success. That means it has to appeal not only to the audience, but to the church elders as well. And they're a pretty traditional bunch.

ARTEMIS

I've heard that about them.

TULLY

Right. So I still want you to be creative and have all kinds of special effects, but you have to do it in a way that doesn't offend anyone.

ARTEMIS

I see. Spectacular but non-offensive. State of the art, yet old-fashioned. Revolutionary but traditional.

TULLY

Exactly.

ARTEMIS

I completely understand. I think you'll be pleased with the next actor. Next!

(A gum-snapping, scantily clad HOOKER saunters on stage.)

TULLY

Oh God...

ARTEMIS

Is that Mary Magdalene or what? I mean, she WAS a...

TULLY

I know what she was! But no!

ARTEMIS

All right. Perhaps one of the shepherds?

(to the hooker)

How do you feel about working with sheep?

HOOKER

You want me to do it with a sheep, it's gonna cost extra.

TULLY

OK! You know what, I think I'm going to have to keep looking for another director. Thank you anyway.

(He exits.)

ARTEMIS

What? No, wait! You don't want to hear about the dance number with the Magi and their camels? All right fine, be that way. Everyone: take five; it's time for me to take my meds anyway. I'll be back in...well, probably closer to twenty. I shall return! *Hasta la vista!*

(He swoops out.)

THE END