

“ The Initiate ”

By John Ladd

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... The Initiate is set in a gated community where the relentless Claire is petitioning for membership in the exclusive women's group, "Femmes in the Pines." Higher-up Deirdre remains skeptical, but Bonnie feels that Claire has potential in this shrewd play where women are expected to live up to their meta-narratives and beyond. The application process is rigorous – it's Claire's fourth time "reapplying" – and the requirements of membership are kept secret, but Claire isn't to be deterred. Could something have changed in Claire's favor to give her enough qualitative points for admission? There's no telling how far Claire will go in this cutting tale. She may not even know herself.*

DEIRDRE

Bonnie, you do remember- years ago- when you were the chairwoman of the qualifications committee, you were emphatic about there being no exceptions- for no reason- PERIOD!

(pause, then rhetorically)

Remember?

BONNIE

(nodding, reluctantly)

I do, I do.

DEIRDRE

Good. You just have to be patient, eventually, the right person will come along.

Spacing is playwright's own.

“THE INITIATE”

A Play in One Act

by

John Ladd

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CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

DEIRDRE

BONNIE

CLAIRE

SETTING

A room in a gated community in a New England state. There is a table at slightly off-center, downstage. On one side of the table, facing downstage, are two chairs, side by side. On the other side of the table, facing upstage, is one chair, facing the other two. There are various folders and files on the table.

AT RISE

DEIRDRE is walking the stage in a casual, relaxed and unhurried manner. Enter, from stage-left, BONNIE. She is carrying a shoulder bag.

BONNIE

Been waiting long?

DEIRDRE

No, just a couple of minutes.

(pause)

You know, this is the fourth time she’s re-applied for membership.

BONNIE

(nodding)

I know, I know.

DEIRDRE

(shaking her head)

I mean, what can be different this time?

BONNIE

(shrugs)

I don't know.

(pause)

I'm assuming she has a reason-

(quickly)

something must have changed.

DEIRDRE

We hope.

BONNIE

Maybe that's what she's got going on.

DEIRDRE

What?

(pause)

Hope?

BONNIE

Yeah.

(pause)

Hoping that she catches us on a good day- a better day- and we'll let her become a member.

DEIRDRE

By default? By hounding us?

(pause)

Listen, if nothing else has changed, you agree that we have to be more strict about the process, right?

(pause)

That she's going to have to wait- at least a year- before we do this, again.

(pause)

Agreed?

BONNIE

(nodding vigorously)
Absolutely- whole heartedly.

DEIRDRE

Good, good.

BONNIE

But, it's really a shame, because she has talents- and qualifications- that none of the other sisters have- she could be so useful to us.

DEIRDRE

Bonnie, you do remember- years ago- when you were the chairwoman of the qualifications committee, you were emphatic about there being no exceptions- for no reason- PERIOD!

(pause, then rhetorically)

Remember?

BONNIE

(nodding, reluctantly)
I do, I do.

DEIRDRE

Good. You just have to be patient, eventually, the right person will come along.

[Enter, from stage-left, CLAIRE, walking smartly, quickly and with a sense of purpose. She is carrying a shoulder bag and a notebook. BONNIE approaches CLAIRE and offers her hand.]

BONNIE

(shaking CLAIRE'S hand)
Claire, so good to see you, again.

CLAIRE

(nodding)

Thank-you for taking the time. It means a lot to me.

[DEIRDRE comes over and also shakes CLAIRE'S hand.]

DEIRDRE

Yes, I'm sure it does. In fact, we were just talking about how determined you are to become a member of Femmes in the Pines.

CLAIRE

(flattered)

Well, thank-you.

BONNIE

(motioning to the table and the chair)

Would you care to sit down-

(pause)

or, perhaps, you'd prefer to stand?

[CLAIRE walks to the table, puts her purse and notebook down, pulls out the chair, but, then decides to stand.]

CLAIRE

Maybe a little of both-

(pause)

but, for now, I'll start off standing.

BONNIE

That's fine- whatever suits you.

DEIRDRE

So, if you remember, in our last meeting, we acknowledged that although your application does have a number of strong points, they were not, however, enough to qualify you for membership-

CLAIRE

(interrupting, emphatically)

At the time.

*[DEIRDRE looks over at BONNIE and then
back at CLAIRE.]*

DEIRDRE

(slowly)

Yes,

(pause)

at the time.

BONNIE

Has something changed?

CLAIRE

(excited)

Yes, indeed!

BONNIE

(carefully)

You do remember us telling you that Femmes in the Pines strongly values qualitative characteristics-

(pause)

and not just the sum total- more of the same- quantitative- and therefore meaningless ongoing in the life of an initiate.

*[DEIRDRE and BONNIE walk over to the table,
sit down, open their respective folders on CLAIRE,
scan the pages for a few moments, and, then, look up
at CLAIRE, prepared to continue.]*

DEIRDRE

(sighs with a slight tinge of impatience)

Now-

(pause, then slowly)

which section does your present petition address?

CLAIRE

(slightly excited)

The “Current Relationship, Spouse, Significant Other” section.

[DEIRDRE and BONNIE refer to their respective notes.]

BONNIE

(looking back and forth through the file)

It says, here- you have *repeatedly said in this section-* that you have been married for thirty-two years.

(pause)

I take it something has changed?

CLAIRE

(excitedly)

It has- it has!

DEIRDRE

(hesitantly)

Ah, before you go on, you must- you should know-

(shrugs)

well, of course you know, you’ve been before us so often, though, it does bear repeating-

(pause)

membership in Femmes is based on a point system.

CLAIRE

(confidently)

Yes, I know.

DEIRDRE

Of course, but what you might not know is that a change in a relationship due to divorce or a naturally occurring death garners you no points.

(pause)

You do know that, don't you?

CLAIRE

Yes.

BONNIE

Okay, then tell us.

CLAIRE

My husband dropped dead-

DEIRDRE

(interrupting and throwing up her hands in frustration)

I just told you-

CLAIRE

(interrupting and smiling)

in front of his girl friend in New York.

[DEIRDRE and BONNIE exchange surprised glances.]

DEIRDRE

Interesting.

BONNIE

(nodding approvingly)

Indeed-

(pause)

very qualitative.

DEIRDRE

(nodding)

There are points for him having a girl friend,

(pause)

but, the dropping dead part-

(pause)

you can't get points for that-

CLAIRE

(interrupting)

He dropped dead because he was triple-dosing Viagra!

BONNIE

(excited)

Wow! Oh, nice, very good!

DEIRDRE

You definitely get points there.

CLAIRE

And, on top of all that, they had two kids- *together*- and named one after me!

DEIRDRE

While he was still married to you?

CLAIRE

Yes!

BONNIE

Not estranged?

CLAIRE

No!

DEIRDRE

Abandoned?

CLAIRE

No!

BONNIE

Separated?

CLAIRE

No! No! No!!

BONNIE

More bonus points!

[DEIRDRE stands up from the table with her note pad and begins to slowly walk around the stage.]

DEIRDRE

Well, I'll say Claire, *I am* impressed-

BONNIE

(interrupting)

Me, too!

DEIRDRE

(continuing)

You are definitely getting close to the membership threshold.

(pause to check her notepad)

You're just a few points shy!

BONNIE

(looking from CLAIRE to DEIRDRE and back to CLAIRE)

Is there anything else? Did you ever meet the other woman? Confront her in public, in a restaurant, sue her for alienation of affection, send her hateful emails, bad mouth her on Facebook, twitter- anything!

CLAIRE

No, nothing. I just left it alone.

DEIRDRE

(returns to the table and begins to pack up)

Claire, Claire- my dear Claire- you came so close this time- and you demonstrate a life narrative that would mesh- in one way or another- with so many of our other members, but-

(pause, then in resignation)

I'm sorry, like I said- you just need a few more points-

BONNIE

(interrupting with a sense of urgency)

Maybe an affair, here, in The Pines, that leads to a physical fight with the injured wife- at the liquor store- that causes the police to show up and arrest you for public drunkenness, assault and battery, resisting arrest, disturbing the piece-

(pause)

that sort of thing could definitely put you over the top.

DEIRDRE

Yes, yes-

(pause)

you should go home and think about it- plan it!

CLAIRE

(the lucidity of a memory trace is coming back to her)

The police?

BONNIE

What about them?

CLAIRE

But I was arrested!

BONNIE

(standing)

You were? For what?

CLAIRE

(proudly)

Driving under the influence!

DEIRDRE

Where?

CLAIRE

Over on the Coast Road.

(pause)

But that's not all!

BONNIE

Really? What else?

CLAIRE

They charged me with destruction of property and leaving the scene!

DEIRDRE

Impressive!

CLAIRE

(excited, then quickly)

And, and-

(pause)

after I was arrested, I-

BONNIE

(interrupting)

WHAT?

DEIRDRE

Come on! Tell us!

CLAIRE

I refused the breathalyzer!

DEIRDRE

So, they suspended your license- right?

CLAIRE

(proudly)

They did- for six months!

BONNIE

Well, well, well- I do believe that these new developments put your reapplication in a most favorable light.

CLAIRE

It does?

DEIRDRE

Yes, of course!

CLAIRE

Oh, thank-you, thank-you.

BONNIE

Now, I take it you have no way to get around the compound- is that right?

CLAIRE

(nodding with faux sadness)

Yes, that's right.

BONNIE

(to DEIRDRE)

Why don't we call an emergency meeting- tomorrow- so that Claire can meet her new sisters in the Femmes?

(pause)

And, while we have everyone there, I'm sure we can arrange some sort of driving pool to help Claire out.

DEIRDRE

(nodding)

Sounds good to me.

CLAIRE

(at a loss for words)

I- don't know what to say.

BONNIE

You're a sister now- there's *nothing* to say.

DEIRDRE

(gesturing with open arms)

Come here, Claire, we want to welcome you into the sisterhood.

[DEIRDRE, BONNIE and CLAIRE come around the table, and embrace. After a few moments, they break the embraces.]

(continuing to CLAIRE)

Now that you are- officially- a member of the sisterhood of Femmes in The Pines, you are entitled- and encouraged- to rise through the internal, secret ranks. There are, however, new- different- criteria for each level. Foremost and always, there is a cash donation toward our operating budget. Bonnie, here, is the treasurer, she will apprise you.

[CLAIRE, turns cautiously, glances away- toward, but not at the audience, before turning back to BONNIE.]

CLAIRE

(slowly, carefully, suspiciously)

I see.

BONNIE

But, before I do that, there's something we're going to ask you to do.

CLAIRE

(thinking)

Besides the donation?

DEIRDRE AND BONNIE

(together)

Yes!

DEIRDRE

(to CLAIRE, slowly and in an utmost serious tone)

This is what you wanted? Right?

[CLAIRE looks from BONNIE to DEIRDRE and then to the audience before turning back to BONNIE.]

CLAIRE

(slowly, with guarded hesitation)

O- kay...yeah...sure...

(there is a moment of pause, then, even more slowly)

...what...is...it?

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS...

QUESTION # 1- What inspired the submission?

ANSWER # 1- A person's need for acceptance and inclusion, maybe, no matter the cost.

QUESTION # 2- What issues, themes I wanted to explore?

ANSWER # 2- The two sides of a possible quid pro quo, though, sometimes one party doesn't always get equal value. It could depend on desperation.

QUESTION # 3- Stylistic and literary influences.

ANSWER # 3- In drama, I have always liked G. B. Shaw.

AUTHOR BIO: John Ladd is currently living in a small town in upstate New York where he is working on a number of projects. Prior to this, he lived in New York, Ontario, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina and Illinois before moving to New York City where he spent a considerable amount of time- and still does- writing and having his plays produced at Off-Off Broadway- and other NYC- venues. When he is not writing, he farms, part-time, with his coonhound buddy, Roma.

He has had plays produced at No Frills Theatre Collective, Manhattan Repertory Theatre and The Short Play Lab as well as ActSense Theatre Company, The Belarussian Dream Theater Project, The Puzzle, and the Bad Theater Festival among others.

John Ladd was a Resident Playwright at the Manhattan Repertory Theatre, 2013-2018.

