

The



By

Tracey Daniel Roberts

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes... This play makes a strong statement about the snarky, shark-like undertone in our current culture that seeks to exploit and monetize any conceivable advantage - and the truth, ethics and personal integrity can just “sod-off.” A duel between financial masters, abundance and prosperity evangelists, or various stripes of extremist political pundits might also work but it’s telling that this playwright has chosen self-help sages. After all, these types – above all others – should hold the emotional and spiritual welfare of their clients as their foremost concerns. Not image, not market share or power as a TV / digital influencer - like the mutual antagonists in this self-serving struggle of the more against the (maybe) a little less fraudulent. Weaving the George Floyd murder and BLM movement into the situation – as a live TV event, yet – completely made this piece, from my perspective. That and the ultimately successful efforts of Anton’s daughter, Ann, to leverage her father’s voice (and celebrity) behind a compelling heartfelt statement about racism and violence, regardless of the impact on his business model. It’s not too much of a stretch to call this piece a smaller (kinder / gentler) iteration of Day of the Locusts, but with that crucial uplifting final twist, and minus the atavistic violence in Nathanael West’s original. (Spacing is playwright’s own.) JS*

THE GURU GAMES

A One Act Play
by
Tracey Daniel Roberts

Cast Of Characters

Anton Woods: A man on his 30s. A self-help author and lecturer.

Ann Woods: A young woman just out of college. Anton's daughter.

Virna Sutherland: A woman in her late 20s. Also a self-help author and lecturer.

Barett Billings: A man in his 30s. A talk show host.

Natalie: A woman who comes to the show seeking advice.

Dale: A man who comes to the show seeking advice

Jane: A very ambitious, glasses wearing, african-american woman who comes to the show seeking assurance.

Assistant: A young man in his 20s. He is Virna's assistant.

Director: The director of the talk show
Two Security Guards: Two male security guards.

Scene

The set of a talk show. There are two comfortable chairs in the middle of the set.

Time

The Present.

SETTING: We are on the set of the Barett Billings talk show. BARETT and ANTON are sitting in two comfortable chairs in the center of the set.

AT RISE: BARETT and ANTON have already been discussing ANTON's self help career highlights.

BARETT

(to ANTON)

We have to take a quick break now, but when we come back, I'd love to talk more about your personal journey.

(He turns to address the audience)

Today on Barrett Billings Live we're talking to famous self-help author and motivational speaker, Anton Woods about his new book.

(He holds up ANTON's book.)

We'll be right back.

(He smiles and freezes for a moment.)

Are we good?

(DIRECTOR enters the stage.)

DIRECTOR

Okay, we're in commercial everybody.

(He exits the stage.)

BARETT

(to ANTON)

Excuse me for a moment.

(He gets up and exits the stage.)

(ANN enters the stage holding her phone.)

ANN

He's going to ask you your opinion on this.

ANTON

No he's not.

ANN

It's like the biggest story in the world right now. Come on an African-American man is killed by the police in Minnesota because of police brutality, of course he's going to ask you where you stand on this. Now, after you say that you fully support the victim, we'll have to come up with some excuse as to why you've waited so long.

(She holds up her phone for ANTON to see.)

Look at this. Every tweet is the same thing:

Your silence is deafening or your silence speaks volumes and on and on.

ANTON

I'm sorry, do you have amnesia? Remember when we had this same conversation yesterday morning and at dinner last night and again this morning? I told you why I can't...

(He looks around furtively, gets up then takes ANN to one side of the stage.)

I can't say anything. You know I support the victim, but ...

ANN

But it will hurt your book sales and your prospects for more speaking engagements if you upset your white fans who support the police.

ANTON

Ann.

ANN

And since your entire career relies on the theory that anyone can achieve their goals as long as they're optimistic and motivated, admitting that for certain people that's just not enough because they're purposefully held down, would destroy your credibility.

ANTON

I always knew you'd be too smart for my own good, ever since you used your toy blocks to tell your mother, daddy hides cigarettes in his shoes.

ANN

Since you're so old and I do all of your social media anyway, maybe I should just put out a response for you.

ANTON

Do that and I'll have to bribe the neighbor kid with ice cream to go in and remove your name from all of my bank accounts and credit cards.

ANN

I can not believe this. You have millions of followers who look up to you and respect your opinion. With just a few words you could seriously strengthen this movement. You could change people's attitudes on this. You could actually improve the lives of people instead of just peddling childish optimism.

(she looks sheepishly at ANTON)

I didn't mean it like that.

ANTON

Leave, now.

ANN

Okay, but you're going to have to make a statement eventually.

(She exits the stage.)

ANTON

(shouting after ANN)

NO, I won't!

(BARETT enters the stage and he and ANTON sit back on their chairs.)

(The DIRECTOR enters the stage.)

DIRECTOR

Sorry guys, looks like it's going to be another few minutes. The network news just charged in with a special report on the Minneapolis incident with those cops.

(DIRECTOR exits the stage.)

ANTON

Oh really? Well if we can't finish the interview, we can just reschedule it for later. My calendar is pretty full, but maybe something will open up.

BARETT

It's okay. If the news update goes on too long, we'll just continue the interview for our studio audience, tape it and show the rest tomorrow. They'll have to make a decision soon, though. The audience looks like it's getting antsy.

(The DIRECTOR enters the stage)

DIRECTOR

The network just told me that they'll be coming back to us in one minute.
(DIRECTOR exits the stage)

BARETT

Hey, maybe it would be a good idea to get your take on that mess in Minnesota.

ANTON

I thought we were going to talk about my personal journey.

BARETT

Oh we will, but if we could keep the conversation topical, it would give the show more of a journalistic appeal.
(ANTON sinks into his chair.)

BARETT

(Addressing the audience)
Thanks for joining us on Barrett Billings Live. Today our guest is best selling author and motivational speaker Anton Woods.
(He turns to ANTON.)
Mr. Woods, since my colleagues have reminded us all about the incident in Minnesota, what is your opinion of the situation?

(Suddenly VIRNA enters the stage followed by ASSISTANT who tries to keep a camera from a phone trained on VIRNA's face.
DIRECTOR enters the stage.)

DIRECTOR

What do you two think you're doing? We're on live tv. You can't just barge in here.
(He shouts to offstage.)

Security!

(ASSISTANT stops and stands behind VIRNA. BARETT and

ANTON rise from their chairs.)

BARETT

Wait, don't you know who this is? This is Virna Sutherland. She's a hugely popular self-help guru. Her lectures sell out stadiums all over the country Mrs. Sutherland this is highly irregular. I'd love to talk to you, but I already have a guest, Mr. Woods. Maybe we could schedule an interview for later this week.

VIRNA

Unfortunately, I'll be in Hawaii all week with a group from Antarctica showing them how they too could make their property a beloved vacation spot using grass skirts and those little paper umbrellas in the drinks .

(DIRECTOR exits the stage.)

BARETT

Well, maybe Mr. Woods wouldn't mind if I chat with both of you for the rest of show.

VIRNA

I have no intention of being on the same stage as this pretender for any longer than I have to .

ANTON

Pretender!

(ANTON jumps to his feet.)

BARETT

So you're familiar with Mr. Woods work?

VIRNA

Oh yes, I know all about this miniscule influencer and his comfy, cozy theories: telling his misguided followers to never let themselves get discouraged by life, that if they work as hard as they possibly can and stay optimistic miracles will start to happen.

ANTON

I never said miracles.

BARETT

So, what is your philosophy, Mrs. Sutherland?

VIRNA

Simply to use up all of that anger everyone has inside them to push themselves toward their goals. It's silly to think that it's not good to have anger. Anger is a natural human emotion, like how fear helps us survive and sadness shows us the true value of things we lose so that we can treasure more what we still have.

ANTON

And happiness?

VIRNA

Happiness is the goal. It shouldn't be the fuel to get to your goal. Optimism and belief in oneself is fine, but it is not the most efficient method to get what you want. Imagine how much harder you would work or how much more dedicated you would be toward reaching your goal if you knew that by reaching that goal you would be hurting someone who hurt you in the past.

ANTON

That sounds like a miserable way to live.

VIRNA

The results make it worth it, though, I assure you.

BARETT

Okay, that's enough philosophizing for now. Mrs. Sutherland, why exactly did you come here?
(ANN enters the stage behind ANTON.)

VIRNA

As you know, I was giving a lecture to a sold out, packed house, at the local amphitheatre. Well, my followers suddenly became so enthralled by my words, they demanded that I go out and save the hundred or so people that you have here along with the rest of this simpleton's misguided minions from having to endure any more childish advice.

BARETT

I don't understand.

VIRNA

One of my followers had the brilliant idea to come here and challenge this disciple of Santa Claus to a contest to decide once and for all whose self-help philosophy is the best.

ANTON

Absolutely not.

BARETT

What type of contest?

ANTON

This is not okay. People's mental health is not a joke.

VIRNA

We'll have a group of people from the audience come up, tell us their problems and we'll take turns giving advice. The first one who fails to help the audience member loses.

BARETT

I don't know.

(He looks at his watch, then
offstage to his DIRECTOR.)

ANTON

I am a professional and as such I refuse to make a mockery of people's lives.

ANN

You tell her, dad.

VIRNA

The winner will not only get bragging rights, but will also probably get a ton more speaking engagements and book sales, since they'll be seen as the best of the self-help experts.

ANTON

I'm in.

(Frustrated ANN slaps her father in the back of the head.)

ANTON

Ow! That hurt.

(ANN exits the stage with ANTON following offstage.)

VIRNA

(To ASSISTANT)

Remember the plan.

(ASSISTANT hands the phone to VIRNA, then exits the stage. ANTON enters the stage.)

ANTON

We don't have to do this, you know. There are plenty of people in need of advice for the both of us.

VIRNA

Negotiating already? I thought you said you were always optimistic.

ANTON

Just trying to save you from embarrassment. After all, it would appear that I already have a psychological advantage.

VIRNA

Such as?

ANTON

You said it yourself, you get motivation through anger. I've never done anything to you to be mad about .

VIRNA

Of course you have. A long time ago, I was in desperate need of answers and guidance. I thought you had those answers, so I went to one of your first book signings. I waited in line all day and when I finally got to tell you my problem all you had to say was some ignorant dribble. It made me so mad I vowed to become a success so one day I could crush you. Then it dawned on me, if my anger towards you could

motivate myself so much, why not develop that into a self-help strategy for others? Then I could become a more popular self-help guru than you and hurt you even more.

ANTON

Wow, just wow.

VIRNA

My victory today will be the ultimate proof that my technique is superior to yours.

(BARETT enters the stage with
NATALIE, DALE and JANE.
BARETT gets them in a line facing
ANTON and VIRNA.)

BARETT

Okay experts, here are three willing participants who've told us that they have legitimate problems that they need your advice on. Who goes first?

ANTON

Ladies first.

VIRNA

No, you first. I insist

ANTON

Okay, you.

(He points to NATALIE.)

Tell me your first name and your problem

.

NATALIE

My name is Natalie and recently, about a year ago actually, there was a death in my family. It effected me greatly. I still find it hard to function normally because I miss them so much.

ANTON

I'm very sorry for your loss. May I ask what the deceased's relationship was to you?

NATALIE

He was my adopted son.

(She wipes her tears with a
handkerchief.

BARETT

How old was he?

NATALIE

That's hard to say. You see, most of my adopted children I raised from the time they were born.

BARETT

You were there at their birth?

NATALIE

Yes, it was amazing to be a part of. Their mother would give birth to them, lick off the seminal fluid, bite through the umbilical cord then jump out of the box I'd prepared for them. After that, I would gently take each one, finish cleaning them off and lay them on a blanket on the floor next to the radiator. Lucky, that was his name, was different, though. I found him. I still remember looking out from my window at the full moon, one night and seeing his long tail swaying back and forth from inside my trashcan.

VIRNA

So your adopted son was a cat?

BARETT

You told us you had a legitimate problem.
(He yells to offstage.)
Security!

ANTON

No, wait. That's okay. I can handle this. A lot of people love their pets like their children and while that's not widely accepted as normal, it is better than a lot of other things. So Natalie, you said you were always sad. I can tell by the way you talk that you've always tried to give your "children" the best life possible. Is that correct?

NATALIE

Of course.

ANTON

So, I'm sure that lucky was very happy towards the end of his life and I'm also sure that you always wanted him to be happy. Right?

NATALIE

Right.

ANTON

Well don't you still want lucky to be happy?
He's looking down on you from that big litterbox in the sky and all he sees is you being sad. So he feels sad. Your love for him didn't stop when he died and neither did your responsibilities. It's your duty to let lucky always see you trying to be happy and enjoying life so he can enjoy his afterlife.

VIRNA

That's just awful.

ANTON

So go out more. Go see a movie. You don't have to go with anyone. Have an adventure. Go someplace you've never gone before. It doesn't have to be all the way around the world. It could be just one city over or even just browsing in a store you've never shopped in before. You probably already know what it is you could do. So do it and let lucky see that your happy.

BARETT

Did Mr. Woods advice help you, Natalie?

NATALIE

I think so. Yes, it did and I'll do it. I'll try to be happy for lucky.

BARETT

I think that's one for team Woods. Mrs. Sutherland?

VIRNA

I'll pick, you.

(VIRNA points to DALE)

DALE

My name is Dale and I have a lot of problems at my job because there's someone I work with who really irritates me.

VIRNA

What irritates you about them?

DALE

They're so arrogant and obnoxious. They think that everyone should think like they do and have the same opinions on things that they do. People like that drive me crazy and I don't mean like crazy cat lady, here. I mean committing grievous bodily harm crazy.

(NATALIE stares angrily at DALE.
BARETT escorts NATALIE
offstage. BARETT exits the stage.)

VIRNA

The answer is simple.

ANTON

Right, just ignore them. You're giving this person way too much power over your life. You're letting them choose how you feel everyday. If they're as horrible as you say eventually they'll do something bad that will probably get them fired.

VIRNA

Wrong. Eventually is too long to wait. Dale, you have to take quick, decisive action now. Spy on them. If they're arrogant that probably means they think they can get away with things others can't. Find out what that is. Then you can either be generous and tell them you won't disclose what they're doing if they change or you can just go ahead and get them fired or arrested depending on what you find. You have to be ruthless to get ahead. Remember, if you want to drive a porsche, don't take advice from someone who probably rides a bicycle to work.

ANTON

Hey!

DALE

I don't really want to drive a porsche. They're too low to the ground. It would be like getting up from a beanbag chair.

VIRNA

Okay, how about: the lion is more powerful when it's not performing in a circus.

ANTON

No one understands your supposedly cool motivational catchphrases.

(ASSISTANT enters the stage.
VIRNA types on the phone, then
reads off of it.)

VIRNA

Forgiving someone who's hurt you is like trying to push a rusty nail into your own heart.

(She stares bewildered at her
ASSISTANT, then starts
scrolling through the phone. She
reads off of it)

Okay, I've got it. Nobody cares about the pie you made if you sit on someone's birthday cake.

(She throws the phone at her
ASSISTANT who picks it up and
runs offstage. BARETT enters the
stage)

BARETT

Dale, did any of that help at all?

DALE

Well, I liked the part about spying on my co-
worker. If it works I might even use it to make
my family do what I want. Thank you, Mrs. Sutherland.
(DALE exits the stage.)

BARETT

You're up Woods.

ANTON

(He nervously looks at Jane.)
Could I take a break for a minute? I'm really thirsty.

BARETT

Sure. We should probably take a quick commercial break, anyway.
(He addresses the audience.)

Be sure to come right back, though, everybody. You don't want to miss the thrilling conclusion to today's show.

(He freezes for a moment.)

Are we in commercial?

(He gets the signal from offstage
that they're in a commercial break

and moves JANE to further back on stage where they act like they're talking.)

(ANN enters the stage with a water bottle she hands to ANTON. Behind ANTON the ASSISTANT enters the stage with a large bag. He gets VIRNA's attention and pulls a wig out of the bag. VIRNA quickly pushes the ASSISTANT back offstage. VIRNA exits the stage.)

ANN

This is it. You can't avoid it anymore.

ANTON

What?

ANN

This is your chance to take a strong stand against systemic racism and discrimination.

ANTON

Not this again.

ANN

All you have to do is say how unfair it is that she'll have to work several times harder than her white counterpart to achieve her dreams. Tell her how your mantra of always working hard and being optimistic may not be enough until we all work together to end the horrible racism that still plagues us like what happened in Minnesota. If we do that then one day women like her could easily achieve their dreams.

ANTON

If I say all of that, I'll lose everything.

ANN

Not everything, you'll still have a lot of people's respect. You can use that to become a beacon of hope for the future.

ANTON

Beacons can't pay a naive, idealist's college education.

ANN

You can't just get this woman's hopes up and give her a lot of false optimism. You need to tell her the truth so she and everyone else can realize the reality of the current situation. You are going to do the right thing, aren't you?

(ANTON takes a drink from the bottle, then hands it to ANN.)

ANTON

Of course I am You'd better get off the stage

now. We're coming back from commercial.

(ANN exits the stage. BARETT
and JANE come back upstage.)

BARETT

We're back and I believe it was your turn, Mr. Woods.

ANTON

I'll pick this lovely lady here.

JANE

My name is Jane and before we start could I just say that I'm a big fan of yours I've read all of your books, but I still have a problem.

You see, I really want a certain high profile job that not many people can even apply for. I think I have what it takes, but a lot of people have told me that I'm wasting my time or that I don't have a chance of getting it. Even my family has tried to dissuade me.

ANTON

Let me guess, they probably say things like:
you'd be better off lowering your expectations, otherwise you'll just be disappointed.

JANE

That's exactly what they say.

ANTON

Well, let me tell you and everyone listening something Jane.

(He hesitates for a moment.)

You should never let anyone convince you to settle for less. Just keep telling yourself that you can have that big job and if you stay motivated and optimistic, I'm sure whoever's doing the hiring will see that and say this person is dynamic, this person is exactly who I need for this job. So shoot for the moon, Jane.

BARETT

Did that help, Jane?

JANE

I really needed someone to reassure me.
Thank you, Mr. Woods. You don't know how much your words mean to me.

ANTON

It's my pleasure. In fact, here.

(He reaches into BARETT's seat
and picks up his book. He hands
it to JANE.)

That's a copy of my latest book.

JANE

Thank you.

(ANN furiously enters the stage
and confronts her father.)

ANN

I can not believe you! This was your chance to do the right thing.
(ANTON puts his arm around ANN
and turns her to the audience.)

ANTON

Sorry everybody. She must be mad at me for leaving the toilet seat up again in the dressing
room. Did you fall in again, dear?

(ANN shoves ANTON away and
exits the stage. ANTON chases
after her and exits the stage.
JANE exits the stage with the
book.)

BARETT

(He addresses the audience.)
There you have it. Apparently, self-help expert Anton Woods has won this competition two to
one.

(VIRNA enters the stage.)

VIRNA

Wait, this contest isn't over yet

BARETT

I'm sorry, those were all of the audience members chosen.

VIRNA

No it wasn't. Look over there, it's another audience member.

(the ASSISTANT enters the stage
now wearing a wig and a dress.)

BARETT

Fine, whatever.

(A shaken ANTON enters the
stage.)

BARETT

Mr. Woods, apparently we have one more audience member. Mrs. Sutherland, it's your turn.

ASSISTANT

(He speaks in a higher pitch)
My name is Ambrosia and I suffer from a lack of confidence which causes chronic depression.

VIRNA

We all suffer from a lack of confidence from time to time. When you feel like that all you have to do is think of those less fortunate than yourself.

ANTON

Are you actually suggesting that helping the less fortunate would give her a sense of pride that would lift her spirits?

VIRNA

No, I'm telling her to google images of the poor and ugly so she can see how much better she is than them. She can also keep those images as a reminder of what she might become if she ever loses that ultra aggressive edge as she claws her way to the top of the ladder.

ASSISTANT

Thank you, Mrs. Sutherland. I don't know what I would do without your words of wisdom.

BARETT

That ties up the competition.

ANTON

Wait a second.

(He removes the ASSISTANT's
wig.)

This is her assistant.

(ANN enters the stage behind
ANTON and VIRNA.)

BARETT

There was nothing said against it when we established the rules Mr. Woods. Just to make it fair, though, you can help your assistant.

(He goes and brings ANN around
to face ANTON and VIRNA.)

Now, tell us your problem miss. Remember Mr. Woods this will break the tie if you succeed in helping her.

ANN

My problem is that I've discovered there's an unbelievable jerk in my family and I don't know how to deal with them.

ANTON

Everyone has people in their families who irritate them, but it's important to see things from their point of view before you condemn them. Maybe if you take the time to understand why they do the things they do, you'll learn to respect them more.

ANN

Fail! That's the worst advice I've ever heard.
(She exits the stage.)

ANTON

(He turns to BARETT.)
I'm still tied, though, right?

BARETT

Sorry Mr. Woods.

VIRNA

That's right, you failed. That's what she said.
The rules were the first one to fail to help someone loses. That means I've won. I can't believe it I won.

(She turns, grabs her
ASSISTANT's shoulders, then
catches herself being too
excited.)

I mean, of course I won. My methods have always been superior.

(ANTON exits the stage.)

VIRNA

Mr. Billings, I'd like to invite you, your production staff and your entire audience back over to the
ampitheatre where I was giving my talk. We'll turn the whole thing into a victory party.

BARETT

I still have a show to finish here, first.

(He looks around for ANTON.)

I suppose since my first guest is otherwise occupied, we might as well finish by chatting with
you. Would you like to sit?

(BARETT sits in the chair.)

(The ASSISTANT starts fussing
over VIRNA, then she pushes him
toward offstage. The ASSISTANT
exits the stage. VIRNA sits down
when the DIRECTOR enters the
stage.)

DIRECTOR

Sorry, but we've been interrupted again by another news break. We're just going to have to stop
and see how long it lasts.

(The DIRECTOR exits the stage.)

BARETT

That's one of the problems with doing a live show, I guess. Would you excuse me?

VIRNA

Yes, I need to check on the preparations for the victory celebration, anyway.

(BARETT and VIRNA get up and

exit the stage. ANN enters the stage followed by ANTON.)

ANTON

Ann wait.

ANN

Why? Is it so you can fix everything by telling me it will all turn out great if I just stay positive?

ANTON

I have helped millions of people have better lives by being that one voice, sometimes in the entire world, who says that I believe in them. That has to count for something, doesn't it?

ANN

Yes, it counts for a lot and that's what I admired most about you. You were my hero for standing up and showing that everyone has the inner strength inside them to do wonderful, amazing things, but you, yourself could still do more. You always tell people not to listen to that voice in their head that makes up excuses for them not to do something. You tell them to keep pushing forward even when things get tough. You've obviously not been listening to your own advice and right now, you're not my hero.

(ANN exits the stage.)

(ANTON slumps down in his chair.
JANE enters the stage carrying
the book)

JANE

Oh, Mr. Woods, I came back to thank you again for your advice.

ANTON

I'm just glad I was able to help.

JANE

I knew that I could rely on God to show me the correct path to take and here you were; a holy messenger from our heavenly father ready to motivate me toward achieving my dream.

ANTON

I'm sorry...?

(He gets up from his chair)

JANE

I prayed to God last night to give me a sign as to what I should do with my life. He must've caused all of this to happen.

ANTON

All of what to happen?

JANE

Well, it all started when I accidentally sat on my glasses and broke them this morning after I got my two kids safely on their school bus . Unfortunately, I'm almost blind without them, so I had to get them fixed. Well, I couldn't drive myself into the city to my optometrist and my husband is on a business trip, so he couldn't help. I tried calling everyone I normally would, but they were all too busy. That only left one person, Natalie.

ANTON

You mean the Natalie that was here. You poor soul.

JANE

I'd met her once before when she lost her cat. I remember she started asking everyone in the neighborhood if they'd seen her fluffy bottoms. It was the name of her cat. She just kept wandering around saying she didn't want anything to happen to her fluffybottoms, so I decided to help her before she got herself institutionalized.

ANTON

Probably a good call.

JANE

Anyway, she brought me into the city and I got my glasses fixed, but she said she had somewhere to go too, so I would have to wait a little bit before she drove us home. I had no idea she was coming to this show in hopes of meeting you. All I knew was that I couldn't take the smell of catfood and catnip coming from her car anymore, so I asked if I could tag along to wherever she was going. You know what happened after that. It must've been God's divine hand guiding everything to this point. He wanted me to come here, realize what I should do and have you give me that last push of encouragement to know that I will succeed.

ANTON

What is it you want to do?

JANE

I'm going to be the Pope.

ANTON

(Stunned)
Excuse me?

JANE

It's always been a dream of mine to be the Pope. I can still remember being a little girl and seeing him deliver God's message to millions of people all over the world through the tv. He looked so amazing, standing there in his white robes, his beautiful vestments and that big, funny hat he wears. The Pope is our direct link to God, you know. Imagine being that close to the heavenly creator.

ANTON

But I don't think...

JANE

What?

ANTON

When I told you to shoot for the moon, I didn't know what you wanted to do.

JANE

So? You said as long as I do the work , stay motivated and optimistic, I could do anything.

ANTON

Yes,I did say that and normally that's true, but in this case there are some extraordinary factors to take into account

JANE

I don't understand.

ANTON

Well, for example, it would take a very long time to become the Pope. Even using my techniques, it would take years. You would also have to become a nun and devote all of your time to studying scripture.

JANE

Are you saying you don't think I can do the hard work? I assure you, I'm ready to do whatever it takes and like you say,

(She holds up his book)

put a smile on your face and your nose to the grindstone.

ANTON

What about your family: your husband and your children?

JANE

It'll be hard on them at first, but eventually they'll get used to the fact that mommy lives in a convent now and can't spend as much time with them.

ANTON

Won't you miss them?

JANE

Of course I'll miss them all terribly. That's why I was so torn about this decision. It wasn't just that it's my dream and everyone was telling me not to do it. I realize what I would be sacrificing too. That's why I'm so grateful to God and to you for showing me the right path. Now my soul can be at peace knowing for sure that I'm on the right path and I will succeed.

ANTON

I can see that you're very passionate about this, but there still might be one or two reasons why this particular goal may be very, very hard to achieve. Okay, lets say, hypothetically that you don't reach your goal.

JANE

But you said...

ANTON

I know what I said. Now just hypothetically, if for some reason you couldn't achieve this particular goal, what would you do?

JANE

Well I still don't really understand what you're saying, but if you had told me to listen to my family and friends who were against me trying to be the Pope, I would've accepted your opinion and would've worked toward my other goal of being a writer.

ANTON

What kind of writer?

JANE

Probably fiction. I couldn't write non-fiction, because I've always been terrible with history, but I love fiction. I've already had a few short stories published and a play I wrote was performed by the local community theatre. Actually, I've been thinking this whole time that everything that's happened today might make a good story. Why are we talking about this? I need to focus on being the Pope. Like you said in chapter 3...

(She starts flipping through the book until she stops on a page and reads.)

Always stay focused. Imagine being the absolute best version of yourself you can be and always try to live up to that version of you.

(ANN enters the stage behind JANE.)

ANTON

(He looks at ANN.)

You know, Jane, when I started this all those years ago, I was a dreamer just like you. I dreamed I could make the world a better place for my daughter and everyone by showing them that they all had the potential to be great people. They just had to try.

(The DIRECTOR enters the stage.)

DIRECTOR

We're coming back live in one minute, everybody.
(the DIRECTOR exits the stage.)

(BARETT, VIRNA and her ASSISTANT enter the stage.)

BARETT

Mr. Woods, you're back. I hope you won't be a sore loser

ANTON

Actually, Mr. Billings, I'd like to make an announcement if I could.

BARETT

I guess that would be alright. Okay, we're coming back.
(He turns and addresses the

audience.)

We're back. Right now, I'd like to take a moment and personally thank everyone in the studio audience and especially everyone who's been watching us at home for sticking with us through all of the breaking news updates. If you have been watching all the way till now, you've witnessed a truly incredible episode. We've had not one, but two of the world's leading self-help experts battling it out to determine whose methods are the best and it looks like Mrs. Virna Sutherland has won.

ANTON

Barret, if I may, there's something I need to say.

(He addresses the audience.)

I know there are those of you who've been wondering why I haven't put out a statement on the tragedy in Minneapolis where an african-american man was apprehended by the police who forced him to the ground to the point of not letting him breathe and killing him. Well, I haven't said anything because I

was being stupid and very selfish. The truth is, I knew there would be those who wouldn't want me to even bring the subject of racism up because it's uncomfortable for them and they make up the majority of my benefactors.

I hope they will hear what I am now saying and embrace my message, but I expect most of them will just get angry and turn to someone else who will tell them what they want to hear. I can't do that anymore. As much as I'd like to tell everyone that everyone's dream can come true if they just try hard enough and stay motivated the reality is that the world is still a very unfair, racist, discriminatory place as we witnessed in Minnesota and unfortunately my methods just aren't enough to overcome that I'm sorry.

(He turns to JANE.)

I'm especially sorry to you, Jane. I know it was your dream to be the Pope, but I think it will still take some time before we see an african-american, female Pope. I know you would have made a great one, though.

(ANN hugs her father.)

ANTON

Of course, that's not to say there'll never be an african-american, female Pope. I believe it will happen in the near future, if we all come together and have intelligent dialogue and try to learn from each other so we understand each other better. Then, who knows, maybe one of Jane's children can be the Pope or achieve any other dreams they might have just as easily as anyone else. We can't just avoid the topic of racism and discrimination anymore. We have to start addressing it now to end it as fast as we can.

ANN

I'm very proud of you, dad.

(JANE walks up to ANTON and shakes his hand.)

ANTON

Good luck, Jane.

JANE

When I write this story, I'll send you a copy of the book.

(JANE exits the stage.)

BARETT

Wait a minute, young lady, did Mr. Woods just solve your problem?

ANN

Yes, he did.

BARETT

Then Mr. Woods has won the contest, three to two.

VIRNA

No, I'm the winner. Remember, he failed.

BARETT

Technically he only failed temporarily. The competition never actually ended. It took him a while, but he finally helped his daughter.

VIRNA

The contest is still going then. That's great, I can still tie.

BARETT

I'm afraid, we've only got...

(He looks at his watch.)

under five minutes left. There's not enough time to find another person to help.

VIRNA

You're still here.

(The ASSISTANT turns VIRNA
around.)

ASSISTANT

Don't do this.

VIRNA

I can do this.

(She addresses BARETT.)

So tell me your problem.

BARETT

No.

VIRNA

Oh, come on you're from Hollywood, you must have lots of problems.

(BARETT folds his arms and
stares angrily at her.)

VIRNA

Fine then, I'll figure it out. I'd say you suffer from an inferiority complex brought on by a bad relationship with your mother. When you were little she wanted you to go into taxidermy, but you were enchanted by the glamour of 1970s talk show hosts. Then one day, when you'd finished building your child size replica of a talk show set complete with shag carpeting, lava lamp and pretend microphone, your mother burst in, interrupted your imaginary interview with the big haired model turned actress and ripped it all down before shoving your head into the body of a stuffed otter. Am I close?

BARETT

(He shouts to TWO SECURITY GUARDS offstage.)

Security!

(TWO SECURITY GUARDS enter the stage to carry VIRNA off.)

VIRNA

(as she is being carried off)

Whatever your problem, the answer is to always stay ruthless and aggressive like a shark. Just remember it like this: the shark goes chomp, chomp. All of the other fish are just chum compared to you. Chomp, chomp.

(The TWO SECURITY GUARDS exit the stage carrying VIRNA.)

ANTON

Well, I may have won the contest, but I think my days as a self-help guru are over.

ANN

Not over, just paused while you do something much more important. I hope you can remember that speech you just gave. I have a feeling a lot of people will want to hear it again on various media platforms.

ANTON

You do realize that I still need to make money. Embarking on a noble mission to spread the word about fairness and equality doesn't pay much.

ASSISTANT

Why not write a book on good parenting and become an expert in that field. You've obviously done a great job.

ANTON

Thanks. Hey, I never found out what Virna came to me for advice about all those years ago.

ASSISTANT

I can tell you that. Virna told me she went to see you to ask why all of her friends and classmates eventually shunned her even though she tried to always help them by explaining what they were doing wrong all the time and how to fix it.

ANTON

And what did I say?

ASSISTANT

Apparently you said, nobody's perfect, not even her and maybe she should focus more on fixing her own problems, like her ego and just be supportive of her classmates.

ANTON

Thinking about it now, I guess I could have put it a bit more gently. Maybe things would've been different.

ASSISTANT

I don't think so. She still would've been an egomaniac and she still would've found her way into self-help because she loves the way it makes her feel superior to tell people how to live their lives.

ANN

Ever consider you might really suffer from low self esteem and that's why your still with her?

ASSISTANT

Nope, I'm probably just a masochist. I'd better go check on her.
(He exits the stage.)

ANTON

Nice try, but I think that's a fail.

BARETT

Uh, everybody, we're still live for another minute, so I think I'll end the show now.
(He turns to address the audience.)

Thanks for joining us on Barrett Billings Live. I'm sure we'll have another exciting show tomorrow, if the network doesn't cancel us for this one.

(BARETT, ANTON and ANN all
wave goodbye to the audience.)

(END)

Tracey Daniel Roberts loves to write. From his home in Tennessee, along with his favorite muses, otherwise known as his pets, he dabbles in stage dramas, he cavorts with comedy screenplays and will hopefully someday manifest his murder mystery manuscript full of so many mad machinations that mankind will marvel at his mastery, hopefully. He'd probably be just as happy if people simply enjoyed his work.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *My play, The Guru Games, was inspired by my confusion surrounding the world of self-help gurus. Specifically, how one who started out with the best of*

intentions might be lured away from their desire to genuinely help people toward a more tell them what they want to hear so they'll keep coming style.

I wanted to explore how a self-help guru turned childish, naïve optimism and catchphrase peddler would react when confronted with a real life situation that they couldn't easily brush away.

I also wanted to explore the effects of racism and discrimination, two subjects that need to be discussed. I tried to add a spoonful of sugar to the medicine by using humor and I sincerely hope that is how my play is received.

AUTHOR BIO: Tracey Daniel Roberts loves to write. From his home in Tennessee, along with his favorite muses, otherwise known as his pets, he dabbles in stage dramas, he cavorts with comedy screenplays and will hopefully someday manifest his murder mystery manuscript full of so many mad machinations that mankind will marvel at his mastery, hopefully. He'd probably be just as happy if people simply enjoyed his work.