

Alphabet Soup {a,b,c,d...yum}

By

Tom Misuraca

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes...*

This clever comedy – and I don't say clever pejoratively – is built almost entirely around a word game set in a restaurant that involves an unwitting waitress and some incredibly slippery dialogue. It all makes perfect sense when you suss out the puzzle at the core of the show. Normally, a piece without strong conflict / high stakes doesn't prove this satisfying but this play is, for me, an exception. The sole objective seems to be perpetuating the game, and involving others close by, whether they know what's what, or not. Gus, the male lead, is remarkably abrasive – a perfect candidate for flying lessons through the nearest open window – but Janice, serves more as a counterweight than his foil and the plot (in its 2 ½ iterations) chugs along so smoothly that I never even questioned why the waitress stayed with it: someone like Gus will never be much of tipper. I won't say much more about the rules and details of the game because even reading this script, you've got to pay attention: that's the point / the whole gist of Alphabet Soup.

ALPHABET SOUP

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LIGHTS UP ON:

(A restaurant. Night. GUS and JANICE are at a table. WAITRESS enters and heads for their table.)

WAITRESS

Are you ready to order?

(GUS perks up oddly excited by the question.)

GUS

Barely had a chance to look at the menu.

JANICE
Can you come back?

GUS
Don't ask her to come back, they never return if you do that.

JANICE
Eventually she has to come back. She can't keep us waiting here forever.

WAITRESS
Forever? I wouldn't make you wait that long.

GUS
Good to know.

JANICE
How's the meatloaf?

WAITRESS
I had it for lunch yesterday. It was delicious.

GUS
Janice, we usually start with soup.

JANICE
Kind of tired of soup.

WAITRESS
Let me give you a couple of minutes.

GUS
Maybe you need to try something different.

WAITRESS
Nachos make a great starter.

JANICE
Oh no, that's too much food for an appetizer.

GUS
Please-

WAITRESS
(almost at the same time)
Perhaps I'll come back...

(GUS is not happy about being talked over.)

GUS
Quit stalling, and order something.

JANICE
Relax. We're in no hurry.

GUS
Still doesn't mean you have to take all night to order.

WAITRESS
Though my shift ends in an hour, so I'll only be able to help you out until then.
(GUS is displeased by this.)

JANICE
Understandable.

GUS
Very bad service if you ask me.

JANICE
Well nobody's asking you.
(GUS is angered by that, but does not say anything. They all look awkwardly at each other.)

JANICE
Anybody got anything?
(GUS is displeased by JANICE's question. WAITRESS shakes her head.)

GUS
(under his breath)
Janice...

WAITRESS
But we can just...

GUS
(angrily at JANICE)
Can't you do anything right?

JANICE
Don't yell at me, Gus.

WAITRESS
Even if she made a mistake, I followed her lead and continued with a "B".

GUS

For the love of God, you're not supposed to say what we're doing.

JANICE

Good grief, Gus. It's only a game.

(GUS is conflicted by her good choice of words but bad choice of subject.)

GUS

How come you're still talking about it?

JANICE

I can talk about anything I want.

GUS

Jesus, you're annoying!

WAITRESS

Kindly refrain from blasphemy.

GUS

Like you're religious.

WAITRESS

Matter of fact, I am.

JANICE

Not that you ever took the time to get to know her, Gus.

WAITRESS

OK, we should get back to your order.

JANICE

Probably going to have a salad.

GUS

Queer that you suddenly want a salad.

JANICE

Really? You're going to use that word? It's not very politically correct.

GUS

Somebody has to be original.

JANICE

That's being crude, not original.

WAITRESS

Unless you order soon, I'm going to have to come back.

GUS
Vile service!

JANICE
We better order.

GUS
Exactly what am I supposed to eat?

JANICE
You can't use that for X.

GUS
'z better than nothing.

(JANICE is frustrated.)

JANICE
You always change the rules to suit yourself.

GUS
Janice...

WAITRESS
I wasn't aware of the rules. Did I miss something?

GUS
They were understated.

JANICE
More like made up as we go along.

GUS
Well, if you actually paid attention...

JANICE
All I do is pay attention to you, so much I'm about to go broke.

GUS
Don't try to talk in metaphors. It's one of the many language skills you don't possess.

JANICE
Mr. Retired English professor thinks he's the only one who can use the English language. Well, go screw yourself.

GUS
Now who's being crude?

JANICE

It's the only way you'll listen.

GUS
I'll listen when you have something interesting to say.

JANICE
(offended)
Maybe I'm waiting to say it to a better man.

(There is an awkward moment, until:)

WAITRESS
A couple of orders of soup to start with then?

(GUS is somewhat satisfied with the question.)

JANICE
(reluctantly)
Best make it that.

GUS
C'mon! Please try to get through one round without one of you messing it up.

JANICE
Don't blame us. You're the one who screwed up.

GUS
Even now you did it again; you used "don't" in the last round.

JANICE
Fuck you!

(GUS and WAITRESS are taken aback. Awkward moment.)

WAITRESS
Gonna get that soup started.

(WAITRESS exits.)

GUS
How come you have to suck the fun out of everything we do?

JANICE
I'm not the one who ruins things. You are.
(beat)
Jerk!

GUS
Killing me! You're killing me!

JANICE
Love to do it for real.

GUS
Man, I ought punch you in the jaw.

JANICE
Now you're threatening violence.

GUS
Only because you did so first.

JANICE
Perhaps I should stop playing your stupid little game.

GUS
Quitter!

JANICE
Right. That's what I am, a quitter.

GUS
Sure you don't mean loser.

JANICE
That's what you are.

GUS
Up yours!

(They slowly rise as the fight continues.)

JANICE
Vulgar man!

GUS
Wicked woman!

(They reach over the table and embrace each other. They make out and begin to get intimate.)

JANICE
X-rated movies have nothing on us.

GUS
You turn me on when you talk like that.

JANICE
(sensually)

Zumba baby!

(This breaks the moment for GUS.)

GUS
Are you kidding me?

JANICE
(nonchalantly)
Better than nothing.

(GUS returns to his seat, JANICE is a little surprised by this.)

GUS
Could have been better.

(JANICE returns to her seat.)

JANICE
Don't give me that after using queer in the last round.

GUS
Even that made more sense than Zumba.

JANICE
Forget it. I'm not playing your stupid game any more.

GUS
Good. Because you suck at it.

(JANICE does not respond.)

GUS
How long can you keep up the silent treatment?
(beat)
I only started this to spice things up.
(beat)
Just like other couples do all those crazy things when they realize they lost the fun in
their marriage.

(beat)
Keep it fresh and fun but with something more cerebral.

(beat)
Love that you were game to take part.

(beat)
Meant the world to me.

(beat)
Now we got the waitress involved, too.

JANICE
Only because we tip her 25%.

(GUS smiles.)

GUS
Probably.

JANICE
Quite interesting stories to tell her friends, no doubt.

GUS
Random question: Do you still love me?

JANICE
Silly man, of course I do. You just frustrate me when you get so pedantic.

GUS
To think, you didn't even know what that word meant until you met me.

JANICE
Until you met me, you didn't know how to have fun.

GUS
Very true.

JANICE
We complement each other, don't we?

GUS
Like a noun compliments a direct object.

JANICE
You say the sweetest things. But, honey, you're breaking the rules of the game.

GUS
Who cares? As long as we're having fun.

JANICE
Are we having fun?

GUS
(slightly forced)
Yes. Of course.

(Another pause. JANICE appears to have an idea.)

JANICE
One thing we can do is come up with a new game.

GUS
Like what?

JANICE
(insistent, holds up one finger)
One thing we can do is come up with a new game.
(holds up a second finger)
Together.

(WAITRESS returns and watches them.)

JANICE
(holds up third finger)
Three of us, if the waitress agrees.

GUS
(looking into her eyes)
Forgive me?

(Without a word, JANICE takes GUS' hands in hers which tells us that he is indeed forgiven. WAITRESS approaches the table.)

WAITRESS
Glad the two of you made up.

(JANICE and GUS groan in frustration at the WAITRESS who is uncertain what she did wrong.

(BLACKOUT.)

The End

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *I regret that I haven't done more improv comedy in my life. I'd always been fond of the alphabet scene, especially when you got to the more difficult letters like q, x and z. So I decided to write a play based on the game. Instead of just a sketch, I wanted to tell a story about how couples who've been together a long time find new ways to spice up their relationship. But something a little more cerebral than sexual (though one can always lead to the other). Showcasing the importance of having a good balance of intellect and fun. That way, the world can be one big improv game.*

AUTHOR BIO: I studied Writing, Publishing and Literature at Emerson College in my hometown of Boston before moving to Los Angeles. Over 100 of my short stories and two novels have been published. This year, my work has appeared in *Grim & Gilded* and Red Ogre Review. Last year, my story, [Giving Up The Ghosts](#), was published in *Constellations Journal*, and nominated for a Pushcart Prize. I am also a multi-award winning playwright with over 150 short plays and 13 full-lengths produced globally. My musical, [Geeks!](#), was produced Off-Broadway in May 2019.