

AN UNEXPECTED TURN

A One-Act Play

by

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THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

There is a tension going on in Corporate America which can be oversimplified as "the old vs. the new". Throw in the heightened all around sensitivity toward political correctness and the hostility that takes place in An Unexpected Turn bubbles to the surface. My intent in writing the play was, at its core, to explore the issue from different perspectives. Do I have a point of view? Wrong question. To paraphrase a playwright who I greatly admire, David Mamet, my single priority should be to entertain an audience. I very much agree with his premise that, as a playwright, I am not wiser than anyone in the audience. When my script begins to preach or teach, I stopped being a playwright. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

AN UNEXPECTED TURN

Cast

<u>Myra:</u>	A thirty-something writer, wife of David
<u>David:</u>	A late-thirties Finance Manager, husband of Myra
<u>Sai:</u>	A Finance Consultant in his early thirties of Indian descent, husband of Nova
<u>Nova:</u>	A female in her mid-twenties, wife of Sai

SYNOPSIS:

David and Myra are planning an evening at their home to welcome Sai and his wife, Nova. Sai is a new high profile hire in David's group at a major corporation. From the start, David is seething with barely controlled rage at the political correctness of Sai joining his group at the same level as David, who has had "above average reviews" for fifteen years.

David and Sai engage in a rancor-filled debate as David's wife, Myra, very much wants to rekindle the "moment" that she shared with Nova.

An Unexpected Turn explores the Corporate obsession with the new being better than the old and the impact of diversity. The play also challenges how we think about gender.

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Scene 1

SETTING: *A suburban condo just outside of New York City. It is February in the present. There is a large table C with four chairs.*

AT RISE: MYRA sits at the table LC holding a menu, which she is reviewing. DAVID is standing, polishing the table with a rag.

(MYRA looks up from her menu, bemused at DAVID'S polishing)

MYRA

You know, no matter how hard you rub, it's still going to be a table that we got from IKEA for two-hundred dollars.

DAVID

(still polishing)

I just don't know what this guy is all about. What's his end game? Did he strike a deal with Louise before he joined the company? That would be good for her career. He's got all the boxes checked and she could cross off a big one.

(shakes his head)

What a dope. Thinking that maybe fifteen years of way above average reviews and busting my butt would pay off, finally get me the kind of recognition Oh fuck-it. I never had a chance.

MYRA

Can I put your pity party on pause for just a sec and ask you something?

DAVID

(looks at MYRA for a beat)

Oh, you think this is all in my head. None of this is real. My career isn't being ...

(makes air quotes)

“plateaued”. I'm sure it will take at least mmmmmm a couple of months before he's my boss. And a few more after that before he tells me that they'll be going in another direction ...

MYRA

Looks like tonight should be a lot of fun. Maybe we should play password and use words like: severance, outplacement, unemployment.

DAVID

(with great sarcasm)

How about diversity?

MYRA

Babe, you're so far into your own head, you'll definitely need a drink or five to get through the evening. Why exactly are we doing this tonight?

DAVID

(angrily)

Because Calvin had him over for New Year's. And Liz would have had him over already, but his wife got sick. I don't want to look like the only one ... like I'm pissed about his getting hired.

MYRA

But you are pissed about his getting hired. No, pissed is too mild. More like livid, seething, outraged.

DAVID

(angrily)

That's enough! My career is teetering on the brink of disaster and you seem not so concerned.

(DAVID rubs the table with anger, then stops and points the rag at MYRA)

You know, getting paid for writing an article in a publication no one ever heard of every couple of months is not what pays for your cryotherapy tanks or workout clothes that cost more than my suits.

(MYRA motions with her finger for DAVID to come to her. As he approaches, she motions for him to get down at her level. He kneels. MYRA takes DAVID'S face in her hands and looks deeply into his eyes)

MYRA

(speaks slowly in a controlled tone)

I let you go on because you needed to vent. But as you often do, you went too far. Now apologize and maybe there won't be consequences later.

DAVID

(looking at the floor)

I'm sorry, Myra. Please don't I really am very sorry for that outburst.

MYRA

(smiling)

Much better. You really do need to take it down several notches.

(tapping DAVID'S head)

You wouldn't want Nova and her husband to think you're so insecure. Even though you are.

DAVID

(standing)

Wait, how do you know his wife's name? Did you meet her somewhere? Myra, please, this is my career. What aren't you telling me?

MYRA

(casually)

I met her during the Holidays. We were each bringing gifts for the company's toy drive for needy families. I think he started the week before. She had no idea where to go. It was like she had a blinking sign over her head saying ...

(motions with her hand)

"I'm the new kid and desperately want to make a good first impression".

DAVID

When were you going to tell me this?

MYRA

Calm down. I was going to tell you, until you started on your very un-PC, "woe is me" rant.

(says coyly)

I think this evening has real possibilities.

(DAVID stares at MYRA, trying to read her intentions. He becomes uneasy and exits RW.)

Lights, fading

(CURTAIN)

Scene 2

SETTING: A suburban condo just outside of New York City. It is February in the present. There is a large table C with four chairs.

AT RISE: MYRA, DAVID, NOVA and SAI sit at the table. A drink is in front of each.

DAVID

So, Sai, it's so great that we could set this up. I know you've been making the rounds. It must feel like you have a new movie coming out and you're going on one of the Jimmies, Kimmel or Fallon.

(SAI looks at DAVID, confused. DAVID chuckles uncomfortably)

(quickly changes the subject)

Sai, is that some kind of derivation of Cyrus?

MYRA

(to SAI)

You'll have to excuse David. He's always been Jeopardy-challenged.

(to DAVID)

Two syllables, SAH-ye.

(to SAI)

It's a beautiful name. Is it from Japan?

SAI

(speaking like giving a lecture)

Very good. Many people do think the name first appeared in Japan. I'm Indian and the name is linked with a Spiritual Master. He was big on the realization of self and critical of the love of perishable things. I try to think about that whenever I get overwhelmed by life. It helps ground me.

DAVID

(tries to interject humor)

I guess we'll have to put the kabosh on the Japanese menu for tonight.

NOVA

(trying to help the awkwardness)

We both love Japanese food.

MYRA

Nova, that was David's feeble attempt at humor. We picked up a table-full of dishes from this new Moroccan place in the city. Everybody that tried their food says you get addicted. My mouth's been watering for an hour. Hope you like it.

NOVA

Sounds great. We're adventurous eaters. Sai actually tried rotted shark in Iceland. They bury the fish, I think because the ground covers the smell.

SAI

(smiling)

I wouldn't have been able to do it if they didn't give you this strong liquor drink to wash it down.

DAVID

(trying to steer the conversation)

So, Sai. What do you make of our little Finance group? Are we succeeding in spite of ourselves?

SAI

I haven't gotten to do much with many of the group, including you, David, so it's hard to say. There certainly is a lot of experience in the department.

DAVID

That's a good thing, right? I mean, don't they say you never get good at anything until you've done it for at least 10,000 hours?

SAI

We could spend a good part of the evening on that point. Maybe one of the things you need to do for 10,000 hours is have experience at different companies. Learn different ways of thinking, doing things, really being open to what is the best solution.

DAVID

(striving to control his anger)

Are you saying that because something worked at a completely different company, with different people, under different circumstances, that's better than a solution coming from people at our company with deep knowledge and understanding of the workforce, the history, the network, the systems?

(shaking his head lamentingly)

Damn, I never thought we'd be overtaken by the flavor-of-the-month club.

(sarcastically)

Let's never make a decision, until we learn how everyone else did it. That way we can copy them and cover our asses, in case it fails. Because we don't know what the hell we're doing. We're just passing through on the way to a different job, where we also won't have a clue.

(DAVID rubs his face as the others maintain an awkward silence for a few beats)

MYRA

Is everybody salivating like I am over the new Games of Thrones season?

DAVID

(trying to defuse the emotions)

Look, Sai. I don't know what came over me. Sometimes

SAI

(attempting to appear unemotional)

It's good to know all view points. That way we can

MYRA

(cuts off SAI, speaking like a teacher to her pupil)

David, why don't you and Sai take your drinks and go outside for a breath of fresh air. Sai, you mentioned grounding yourself. That's what you both need. Now go!

(DAVID nods his head yes, looking down.
DAVID and SAI exit RW)

MYRA

(smiling, looking at NOVA)

That's what happens when men face conflict. Wild emotion, wed to their own views, no calm, rational discussion.

NOVA

I couldn't believe how quickly that escalated. I feel like if I went to the bathroom, World War III would have come and gone and I wouldn't even know it. I hope you don't think that was all David's doing. Sai can push buttons, when he sounds like a know-it-all.

MYRA

(looking intently at NOVA)

It did really happen, Nova. I've thought about it, about you, a lot. We both felt something and we had a moment. I don't regret one second of it. That kiss was different than it was like I was kissing an alternate version of myself, but not really.

NOVA

Myra

MYRA

(cutting off NOVA)

That came out wrong. I meant that kiss was tender and sweet and so fucking hot. I want to do it again with you.

NOVA

(sounding conflicted)

It was equal parts mind-blowing and unsettling. Sai and David

MYRA

I know this sounds delusional, but it had nothing to do with them. Oh fuck it, maybe it had everything to do with them. David and I have ... an evolving sexual relationship. Can we at least ...

(DAVID and SAI suddenly enter the room
RW)

DAVID

(speaking as if to himself)

Okay, I have a lot of buttons to push. Sai walked into a land mine. It wasn't his fault.

SAI

David, that generous of you, but I shouldn't have gone deep into business-speak at this lovely evening that you planned.

DAVID

(smiling)

That sounds like this evening is a détente to you, ready to resume hostilities when we're back in the office.

SAI

No, no. We shouldn't look at my joining the group as a basis for hostility. I'm just trying to lend a breath to allow us to consider all ways to move forward.

DAVID

You're really in the catbird seat these days, aren't you? Must be real nice for you.

MYRA

Okaaaaay. Who's hungry?

NOVA

(raises her hand)

I am. Ever since you mentioned Moroccan food ...

SAI

(staring at DAVID)

What exactly is a cat ...bird ... seat? Is that some sort of implication that I don't deserve my success? That Louise hired me for some political reason?

DAVID

(sarcastically)

No, of course not. Why wouldn't a company which has been in business for 150 years, with a pretty fair history of return to the shareholders, which means they kind of know what they're doing why wouldn't they bring in a guy at the same level as someone who's been doing way above average work for fifteen fucking years at that company?

I don't know. You tell me, Sai. Words of wisdom from a guy who's worked at four different companies in less than ten years.

SAI

(with barely controlled anger)

You know, David, if you could focus on the good of the company for even a millisecond, instead of only what it means to you, you might better understand *why* the company has been in business for 150 years. Did it ever occur to you that my skills are in demand and that's why I changed jobs. Why I got a significant salary increase each time?

DAVID

Did you say skills or skin color?

SAI

Nova, get your coat. Myra, I'm sorry we have to leave.

NOVA

Sai, we're not leaving like this. That just delays what you two need to work through. It'll be worse if you take this stuff ... into work. Now go refill your drinks and go back outside and don't return until you're both ready to behave like adults.

SAI

(nods his head, looking down)

Alright.

(SAI and DAVID exit RW)

NOVA

This isn't the first time there's been friction when Sai joins a new company. People value what they do. Who they are. I get that it's very disruptive to have a new person come in and everything you've known, everything that's worked in the past is no longer good enough.

(MYRA places her hand on NOVA'S hand.
She gently rubs NOVA'S arm.)

MYRA

I've always thought a big part of intelligence is understanding differing points of view before you make a decision. I think David spends so much time extolling his own views, he sees you as less intelligent if you don't ...

(making air quotes)

“get it”.

NOVA

(sounding uncertain)

Myra ... I ...

MYRA

Something did happen between us. I can't explain it. Hell, I don't even want to try. I just want to do it again. There's so much we ...

(DAVID and SAI enter the room RW. They sit down, each looking uneasy.)

MYRA

(to DAVID)

So, can we resume this stimulating evening and begin to think about eating?

DAVID

I think the best we're gonna do is agree to disagree.

SAI

No argument on that one.

DAVID

Until we're in work, of course. I'm sure you'll be in constant closed-door meetings with Louise and everyone else who's tripping over each other, rushing to get on the *right* side, regardless of what they really believe is right.

SAI

You make it sound like I'm just a concept, the new way of doing things.

DAVID

That's the first thing you've said that I agree with.

SAI

You completely discount me as a person. Someone who has made a positive difference everywhere I've worked. I'm not so naïve as to not know the resentment that people like you carry. But that's more about you than me.

DAVID

(raises his voice in anger)

People like me! Who exactly is that? Someone who's given his blood and guts for his fucking job, only to be pushed aside by the flavor of the month.

(in mock seriousness)

Or should I say, the politically correct flavor of the month.

SAI

Louise was right. You are a problem. You can't see the way forward. Too blinded by your own arrogance.

DAVID

I'm arrogant? Me? I'm the arrogant one? Don't start throwing Louise at me. Someone you've known all of ten minutes. Someone I've worked with for ten years. Who has

given me “exceeds” on my reviews for each of those ten years. Louise knows who and what you are.

SAI

(smugly)

I think it best if *she* tells you your future with the company.

(DAVID suddenly stands over SAI in a threatening manner. SAI quickly responds by standing)

I’ll have to consider who deserves your corner office.

DAVID

(making a fist)

I’ll have to consider introducing you to my fist!

(NOVA stands, holding her hands out for MYRA. She helps MYRA up and places her arms around MYRA’S lower back. NOVA tentatively kisses MYRA. MYRA responds with a passionate kiss. NOVA and MYRA embrace and kiss deeply. DAVID and SAI stop their anger toward each other and stare at their wives.)

Holy shit! Holy shit! Mother of God!

SAI

(trying to sound dignified)

Nova, you have put me in a very difficult position.

(Still in an embrace, NOVA looks at MYRA, as a slow smile emerges, turning to a giggle. MYRA begins to laugh, looking at NOVA. They break their embrace as each roars with laughter)

Lights, fading.

(CURTAIN)

AUTHOR’S BIO: *Joe Bulvid has written a number of short plays that have been performed in New York City, one in London and one at the University of Alaska. Go figure. His play, Reina, was selected for Best of 2018 Short Play Celebration at*

Manhattan Repertory Theatre and was published in the Coachella Literary Review Blog. He is considering opportunities for a full-length play, Blue Moon, and is hard at work writing a full-length play, M&A. He continues to learn about human interaction as a Professor, teaching graduate students about Mergers & Acquisitions at New York University (NYU) in Manhattan, New York.