

A LINGUIST FALLING OFF THE WAGON

By Ilan Wachsman

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

My monologue 'A LINGUIST FALLING OFF THE WAGON' started as a one minute dialogue between two middle aged men, and was based partly on imagination and partly on a true story. It came to life on a warm winter night in 2017 outside a Tel Aviv pub, after I overheard a couple of half-drunk tourists justifying their spur of the moment decision to resume drinking following a long period of abstinence. The piece is inspired by Eugene Ionesco's 'The Bald Soprano', sopranos in general and my own fascination with existential questions and idiomatic expressions. Through a unique use of language, it portrays a man dealing with an enigmatic and frightening reality in his own way, which leads to a spectrum of emotions from enthusiasm and joy to disappointment and despair. This monologue offers a glimpse into the daily struggle with a rapidly changing world, takes kindly to a common human weakness, and also makes for a good read over a pint or two. The original one minute play 'A LINGUIST FALLING OFF THE WAGON' was part of Gi60 2018, the International One Minute Theatre Festival, and was produced in June 9-7 at Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY (Dir: Michael Jones). The monologue of the same name was adapted by me from my one minute play, and in these very days (April 2020) is being recorded in London by Ragged Foils Productions, led by producer Natalie Winter, and performed by voice actor Isi Adeola. This recording is part of the 'Isolation Sessions', a special series of new writing monologues, recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic in support of NHS workers on the front lines. I'm grateful for the opportunity and proud to contribute to this important and inspiring initiative. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

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A MONOLOGUE

CHARACTERS

The Linguist - a middle aged man dressed in a worn out suit.

SETTING

A bare stage.

TIME

The present.

SYNOPSIS

An experienced linguist falls off the wagon in an absurdist monologue full of dark moments and idiomatic expressions.

Hello silent majority, I see you're all itching to get the show on the road. Fresh as daisies and ready to roll. Good for you, I'm dead on my feet. And yet I never let nobody beat me in my own game. So let's get down and dirty, shall we? The truth is we've got thrown in at the deep end, so we must fly by the seat of our pants, and do everything against the clock. Now you might think that making bricks without straw is a bit much, but let me tell you, my friends, they don't call me the Linguist for nothing. I put my shoulder to the wheel, keep my nose to the grindstone and never say die. It's no secret that recently things have gone out of hands. We're clutching at straws here. Ideas are flying at a rate of knots falling on stony ground. Nobody knows which way to turn... like being between a rock and a hard place. We're up the creek right on the edge hanging by our fingernails struggling to keep our heads above water, but to no avail. Looks like we're done for. Not a ray of hope... *(Suddenly*

becomes determined) But wait... wait... I've got a brainstorm. Yeah... against all odds I'm on top of that. I'll save the day, come hell or high water. So help me God! Now is the moment of truth. Keep your fingers crossed. *(Slight pause)* It's like pulling teeth, the words just won't come out. I know you're disappointed but bear with me a bit. Yes... oh yes... believe it or not, but just as we came within a hair's breadth of falling flat on our faces I've managed to put the genie back in the bottle.. luck of the devil we got it in under the wire, right at the eleventh hour, as they say. It's up and running again. But no rest for the weary. We must strike while the iron is hot. Time and tide wait for no man. *(PAUSE.)* Oh dammit! What can I say? Looking back I realize I shouldn't have celebrated too early. I can't tell you how sorry I am. Not only that words are failing me at the moment, but I can almost see the blood draining from my own face. I feel like nothing on earth... at the end of my tether. Looks like I've come to a cross-roads. I've been in the business the best part of twenty five years... slogged my guts out for one linguistic project or another; got shifted from pillar to post. I put my head in the lion's mouth; served as the hatchet man; laid my reputation on the line ...the whole shebang. Been treated like dirt at the best of times. With all the blue-eyed boys in key positions and their I'm all right Jack frame of mind, it's here today, gone tomorrow. Every man for himself. It breaks my heart to abandon ship like some panicked rat. Better late than never, though. I'd rather leave than get thrown to the dogs. You can't blame me for that, can you? I've had my fill of the business. I want to get away from it all, hang up my hat and watch the world go by.

Let's be clear on this. I Don't expect a golden handshake... there was no golden hello either. I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth. My father was a proud son of the soil. I started earning my keep at the age of ten... I've been making an honest buck ever since. But can I make ends meet? To be honest with you, I haven't got two cents to rub together. Actually I live from hand to mouth. Barely enough to keep the wolf from the door. *(Reaches into his pocket and pulls out a flask of whiskey.)* Ahhh... well... surprise surprise... just what the doctor ordered... a bit of Dutch courage. I've been on the wagon for way too long, anyway. But mum's the word. If my trouble and strife finds out I'll catch hell. *(Lifts the flask)* Down the hatch! *(Takes a long swig from the flask.)* They say it's all for the best, and I should count my blessings, but I've had it up to here... at

the end of the day idioms are just a load of crap, pardon my French! In your heart of hearts you know we're all pissing in the wind, don't you? (*Lifts the flask again.*) It's tempting to say to hell with it, but I don't give in that easily. Life, as we all know, is an ongoing struggle, and unfortunately every day is a new battle against the same foe. I'm well aware it doesn't look too promising right now, but if you know anything about me, you know I haven't said my last word yet. (*Slight pause*) Cheers!

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AUTHOR BIO: *Ilan Wachsman is an Israeli playwright and screenwriter who more often than not likes to keep an open mind. He usually keeps it in the fridge inside a small bowl of ice, alongside a slice of fresh brain, which allows him to go on thinking outside the box. Some of his short plays have been produced on off-off-Broadway and on London's fringe scene, and received both audience and critical acclaim. In London he had the privilege to be working with Encompass Productions and their creative team led by Liam Fleming & Jonathan Woodhouse who produced and directed two of his short works: 'END UP LIKE JULIE', which earned a five star review from critic James Waygood, and 'NO BROKEN BONES' which was later developed by Ilan into a full length play. You can reach Ilan at: ilanwachsman5@gmail.com*