

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

by

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ONE MAN'S ANGELS

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ONE MAN'S ANGELS

“A reticent, but healthy bachelor and tropical fish fanatic, decides that he is in a rut. Following an evening spent with his landlady’s neurotic daughter, he is thankful to return to his rut, which on reflection, he decides is more of a safe and comfortable cocoon.”

CHARACTERS

COLLIER: a bachelor, sensitive, wary and woman-shy.

JAKE: a divorcee, vain, jocular and woman-mad.

MABEL: their widowed landlady, prim, gossipy and domineering.

CYNTHIA: Mabel’s unmarried daughter, impressionable, neurotic and ruled by her mother

SETTING: The living room of JAKE and COLLIER’s flat in the house of MABEL SOBERS and her daughter CYNTHIA

TIME: The 1970’s

SCENES

Scene One: Early One Friday Evening in Autumn

Scene Two: A Short Time Later

Scene Three: Later That Evening

Scene Four: Later Still

Scene Five: The Following Morning

SCENE ONE

Early one Friday Evening in Autumn

The living room of JAKE and COLLIER's flat in the house of MABEL and her daughter CYNTHIA.

(The living room furnishings should include a long, low sofa with cushions and a rug, a small table and chairs, a side table with hotplate, a record player with records, and a magazine/book shelf. In a prominent position is a tank of tropical fish. On the wall is a mirror, a small framed certificate, and a framed print of a nude. In a corner, is a collection of wine bottles, some corked, some empty, and an empties crate).

(The play opens with the sound of a front door closing offstage.)

MABEL. (Calling off) Oh...Collier...?

JAKE. (Calling to her off) It's not Collier, it's Jake.

MABEL. (Voice off) Jake? Isn't Collier with you? But you always arrive home together.

JAKE. (Voice off) He went out at lunchtime, and didn't return to the warehouse.

MABEL. (Voice off) I hope nothing's happened to him.

JAKE. (Voice off) Don't fret, Mabel. Don't fret.

(Enter JAKE. He carries a newspaper. He pauses and addresses himself.)

JAKE. How the hell do I know where Collier is?

(He tosses down the newspaper, takes off his jacket and hangs it up. He brings a tray of dishes, cutlery and condiments, and places it on the table. He moves by the tropical fish tank, sniffs, sniffs again, and pulls a face of displeasure. He looks at his watch. He turns his attention to the collection of home-made wines, taking a verbal inventory.)

JAKE. Parsnip...parsnip...elderberry...ginger...ginger...ginger...parsnip
...parsnip...ginger...elderberry...

(Sound of front door closing offstage. JAKE looks towards the living room door. Enter COLLIER. He wears horn-rimmed glasses and carries a polythene carrier bag. He goes straight to the fish tank and peers in.)

JAKE. Collier...Where've you been all afternoon? Cyril was champing at the bit.

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

(Collier gives JAKE the carrier bag. JAKE sniffs.)

JAKE. Not fish and chips again? Can't think how you can eat fish the way you do.

(He indicates the fish tank.)

Especially the way you drool over those.

(He puts the food on the hotplate and switches on.)

COLLIER. Perhaps we do eat a lot of fish. But you can't compare a cod to a...to a... to a Betta Splendens for example...

JAKE. A betta what?

COLLIER. Nor can you compare a plaice with an Angel Fish. Jake, did you know that the Betta Splendens or Siamese Fighting Fish, will fight to the death over a female?

JAKE. Almost been in a spot like that myself...

COLLIER. And Angels... they can turn their stripes on and off with their emotions.

JAKE. Kinky...

COLLIER. Their stripes are at their most beautiful just before death...a bit like us... just as we reach our prime, we're struck off... obliterated.

JAKE. Poor old soul...soon to be obliterated...and they never called You 'Dadda'.

COLLIER. Angels are majestic. They glide through life...serene, all the time in the world. Like me at the tailor's this afternoon, could have had my inside leg measured nine times if I wanted...and have coffee in between.

JAKE. So that's where you've been...but you've got the whole day off tomorrow...the whole weekend...

COLLIER. But I have the weekend always. So I thought I'd take the afternoon off today too...Leave the rut for a change. Amazing isn't it? I haven't been off for...it must be eighteen months...yes, when I had the Asian 'flu. Then I take one Friday afternoon off... and there's a riot act.

COLLIER. The rest of them at the warehouse...any trivial excuse, the slightest cough, sneeze or gripe, they're off. Can't see them for dust.

JAKE. No need to blow a fuse, Collier; you didn't say anything to Old

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

Cyril...and you know what he's like.

COLLIER. Know what I'd like to say to the silly...and the years I've put in at that blasted warehouse.

JAKE. Not happy in Credit, are you?

COLLIER. Bored to hell. I sorted out the problems years ago. Anyway, I've asked Cyril for a transfer to Parcels.

JAKE. Pigs might fly. I know Sneezy Harper's retiring at Christmas, but if Cyril gives you the job, he'll have to put the salary up...officially. Sneezy doesn't earn your barrow load you know... No, I reckon Cyril'll give the job in Parcel's to a youngster at the same low rate as Sneezy's. At the same low rate if not lower. Tight as a ...

COLLIER. How did you find out?

JAKE. Working in Personnel...and what with Nora from the wages office... Main trouble's Sneezy's been there too long and likes his job...that's his mistake...letting them know it. Soon take advantage of you if they find that out. Never let on you like your job, even if you're infatuated. So you spent the whole afternoon measuring for a suit?

COLLIER. Went in the park afterwards...peaceful. Read on the benches with the retired folk. There's some lovely variegated fantails in that ornamental park pool. Someone must have slipped them in. They don't...

JAKE. What cloth did you choose? For the suit?

COLLIER. ...they don't usually frequent park pools. You'll like it...you like brown.

JAKE. Brown, Collier...you never wear brown suits...you'll be sporting tangerine ties and Hawaiian shirts next.

COLLIER. No lapels.

JAKE. No lapels? What's come over you? Skiving from work, reading in the park, choosing brown cloth suits? With NO LAPELS? But you must be disgustingly healthy if you've had no bugs for eighteen months. No drinks – apart from a drop of my home-made wine – no drinks, no smokes, no women. Your libido must be A1.

COLLIER. Right now I feel about as virile as a...as...a...pregnant porpoise.

JAKE. I'm going to wash. Tubes make me feel like a rat in a maze of sewers.

(He exits)

(Collier clatters about with the dishes and cutlery etc. There is a knock on the door.)

COLLIER. Hallo?

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

(Enter MABEL, carrying a covered dish.)

MABEL. Hallo Collier. Is everything all right? I've been doing some cooking and made you a pie.

(She lifts the cover ceremoniously.)

Gooseberry!

COLLIER. Mabel, you're an angel. You keep me in pastry.

MABEL. Jake out again?

COLLIER. Going out soon. You know Jake...a bit of a one for the...After all, it is Friday.

MABEL. You don't have to tell me...the lustful beast. Once he's had his way, he drops them...or they drop him. I've met his kind before...who hasn't? And if you ask me, they're on the increase. He was after my Cynthia the other week.

COLLIER. Yes. They went out together, didn't they?

MABEL. If you heard what Cynthia told me...I soon sorted that out, told him where to get off...I'm not saying that I don't want Cynthia to have boyfriends. But not his variety.

COLLIER. He's out nearly every night. I don't know how he re-charges his batteries.

MABEL. Where there's a will...You're not one for going out much, are you Collier?

COLLIER. Er...

MABEL. Women, I mean.

COLLIER. Women?

(He coughs)

I find...women...unpredictable.

MABEL. You don't like women?

COLLIER. Yes, I like them, but – well – the ones I've met – with a couple of rare exceptions, they seem so what's the word...volcanic ...smouldering ... sizzling...breathing fire...unstable...unpredictable...

MABEL. Interesting...

COLLIER. ...frightening...

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

MABEL. Reckon you're quite a charmer on the quiet.

COLLIER. Where are the quiet women? The shy, intelligent listeners? The thoughtful, the demure...

(MABEL preens her hair, 'demurely')

The unhampered, the untampered-with ones? Perhaps I'm an old fashioned dreamer...But I can't come across them.

MABEL. Sounds as if you're looking for an angel, Collier. You aren't in the same Street, you and Jake. And Cynthia was only saying the other day: "Mum," she said; "why are men all the same?" I'm sure she'd find you a bit different.

COLLIER. Different?

MABEL. But she's not a strong girl my Cynthia; suffers with her nerves. Seeing her dad drink himself to death did something to her.

(COLLIER looks surprised.)

I don't keep it a secret. That man of mine...he was no good. But we still stayed together. I loved him. I suppose I had enough love for both of us. His only love was the bottle. If he couldn't get the real thing, he'd drink anything... anything...cough syrup...Worcester sauce... He would knock back a pint of vinegar before I could stop him. Once I caught him just in time, sniffing at the metal polish. He used to go out nights. If I hadn't had Cynthia, don't know what I'd have done. Real company our Cynthia was – until she went wrong.

COLLIER. Wrong?

MABEL. Just after Freddie died. They found her vanity case packed with goods from the shop where she worked. I'll never know what made her do it. They said perhaps she was sort of – compensating. And then when they tackled her with it, accused her, she flew into a rage. And went for the manager with her nail file.

COLLIER. Good God.

MABEL. I'm worrying you, Collier. What started me off?

COLLIER. No, you tell me Mabel. It sounds as if you need someone to talk to.

MABEL. Yes, ten years ago I lost my Freddie; Cynthia's twenty-nine now. She was away a couple of years. They said she needed help.

COLLIER. Y..e..ss... And when she returned?

MABEL. I tried to keep her life as quiet as possible. She didn't go back to work; She helped me in the day to day running of the house, as she still does. Then I took in Jake and his wife. Just married they were, and full of it.

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

I didn't dream it would be over in six years. Since you moved in six months ago, Collier, life's been much more peaceful. You and Jake don't row like him and his wife used to.

COLLIER. Well Jake and I don't have much in common. But we understand each other.

MABEL. Good. Anyway, I'll have to be going to get the tea. Cynthia does her best to help, but she's forgetful. She needs looking after. If only she had some hobby or other, but she just mopes around the place.

COLLIER. They linger on you know. Nerve troubles.

MABEL. Still, she's a good girl. Fish all right are they?

COLLIER. (Eagerly) Yes...er...er...they...

MABEL. Good – I'll have to go...you'll be wanting your tea.

COLLIER. Just about to Mabel. Fish and chips, good standby. And pudding will now be a doorstep of your good cooking.

MABEL. It's not good to have it too often, you know.

COLLIER. What's that?

MABEL. Fish and chips.

COLLIER. We like chips...easy...filling...nutritious... to a certain extent. Why, the other week, we had them every night; faggots and chips, sausage and chips, omelette and chips, liver and chips, beef, rissoles...pie...you name it and put it with chips and we've had it.

MABEL. You need someone to cook for you...anyway, I'll have to go.

COLLIER. Cheerio then and thanks for the pie.

(MABEL exits)

(COLLIER picks up an aquatic magazine and puts it on the table, then takes his fish and chips from the 'hotplate' and sits at the table to eat them. While eating, he glances through his magazine.)

COLLIER. Digestive disturbances in the Neon Tetra...Mmmnn...nn...

(Enter JAKE)

JAKE. Feeding your face again, Collier? Grief, can't Mabel gas?

COLLIER. Your chips will be dried up.

JAKE. (Collecting his meal from the hotplate)

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

Have to make myself presentable.

COLLIER. So – Casanova – who's the lucky girl tonight? Or unlucky as the case may be?

JAKE. Her old man's head of Partridge Products.

COLLIER. I said who's the girl, not who's her father. Although in your case it's as well to know. You're likely to have to tussle with him later. Look at this gargantuan gooseberry pie Mabel cooked.

JAKE. She's a soft spot for you, our Mabel.

COLLIER. Rubbish.

JAKE. See it a mile off. Ever since you walked through that door six months ago...

COLLIER. She confides in me sometimes.

JAKE. Talks to you about Cynthia, does she?

COLLIER. Yes. Why?

JAKE. She had a go at me. Don't forget I've lived here six years and you've only been here six months. I know all about "Our Cynth", from Mabel's point of view, that is. Cynthia was very uncommunicative on the one occasion I took her out. In some areas she's as pure as the detergent ads.

COLLIER. Why did you take her out? Thought she'd be easy game?

JAKE. The truth is, I took Cynthia out to please her mother. She hinted that 'Cyn' was lonely...then for some reason changed her mind later.

COLLIER. Would have been a very convenient set up for you, wouldn't it? Very handy. Living in the same house.

JAKE. Some women are best left alone. Cynthia's one of them...you'll find out. I've yet to establish whether Mabel wants to marry her off, or keep her enmeshed in her sticky, motherly web. She tries to set her up with boyfriends, then whips her away again. Just as the appetite's whetted.

COLLIER. I'm relieved to hear that your appetite was only whetted, and not satisfied.

JAKE. Plenty more fish in the sea. But they're rarely worth drowning over. Why are you relieved? Don't tell me you've designs on Cynthia?

COLLIER. Not particularly.

JAKE. Bit of a bore. Not over intelligent either.

COLLIER. That may be only your opinion. Trying to put me off, are you Jake?

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

- JAKE. Have you ever tried to hold a conversation with her? She clams up on you. Too much like hard work for me.
- COLLIER. She's a listener?
- JAKE. Yes, she's a listener, but does she bother to understand?
- COLLIER. She evidently understood your lewd intentions judging by what she told her mother.
- JAKE. Yes. Well I haven't hit it off with Mabel just lately. What doesn't she like about me?
- COLLIER. You know damned well what she doesn't like about you. Your behaviour.
- JAKE. I'm harmless enough...
- COLLIER. And I don't think she approves of the way you've vastly increased your drinking capacity lately, either. Probably reminds her too much of her Freddie who drank himself to death.
- JAKE. Old Freddie Sobers who died of drink? He was a spirits man, I'm beer.
- COLLIER. And home-made wine.
- JAKE. Streuth...that's only a hobby...you seem to get through more of that than me.
- COLLIER. I do like the parsnip. Have you noticed, Jake, the way Cynthia dresses.
- JAKE. I assume you mean the way she is dressed?
- COLLIER. Strange long clothes; it's a wonder she doesn't fall over them.
- JAKE. Long and lean our Cynth. Yes, she does wrap up a bit. I wonder how she really is under all those layers?
- COLLIER. You would. Do you really think Mabel is husband hunting for Cynthia?
- JAKE. Husband hunting for both of them if you want my opinion. Wouldn't put it past her. After all, Mabel's been a widow ten years now. She must be...
- COLLIER. Lonely...lonely...ostracized.
- JAKE. More than lonely. Not a bad looking woman on reflection. Well she won't get much joy from you, will she my old mate? You're married to your fish.
- COLLIER. Ridiculous. You don't think...

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

- JAKE. Could be.
- COLLIER. But she's trying to get me interested in Cynthia.
- JAKE. Is she? Devious, that's the way her mind works.
- COLLIER. But Mabel's a bit...
- JAKE. A good woman there. If you've not noticed her inclination for your company, your fishy friends must have supersaturated your senses. By the way, have you noticed Cynthia's twitches? Very off-putting.
- COLLIER. We all have our nervous manifestations in one field or another. Take you for instance.
- JAKE. Me? I'm as normal as they come.
- COLLIER. Normal? If you call your behaviour normal, then London must be Sodom and Gomorrah hotted up...if it's peopled by normal beings.
- JAKE. Careful Collier.
- COLLIER. A new girl every month; change your women as often as your socks.
- JAKE. Give over; if I changed my socks only once a month, they'd smell like your fish.
- COLLIER. My fish do not smell.
- JAKE. A matter of opinion.
- COLLIER. I mean you don't study their spirits, their personalities...
- JAKE. How do you know what I study?
- COLLIER. You'd never have the time...Don't you ever fall in love with any of them? Want to stay with them a bit longer than a few weeks?
- JAKE. I did once.
- (He pauses)
- For six years. It didn't last.
- (Silence)
- COLLIER. My fish do not smell.
- JAKE. Neither do my socks.
- COLLIER. So you have a new woman more than once a month?
- JAKE. It has been known. What is this? The Spanish Inquisition? You've

ONE MAN'S ANGELS

been acting strangely all day Collier. Are you changing...are you facing the change of life, or something?

COLLIER. Needn't be insulting. I was merely trying to point out that you knock people with nervous mannerisms...people like Cynthia. Yet you do not have anything as simple, YOU have an obsession.

(Addressing himself thoughtfully)

Although I suppose it could be termed a nervous mannerism.

JAKE. It's a perfectly normal male characteristic liking women.

COLLIER. Not to your extent. Perhaps you should see a psychiatrist?

JAKE. (Laughing) What did you say? A psychiatrist?

COLLIER. You may have what is called in the psychiatry world, a...can't remember the term now...it's a something...something syndrome.

JAKE. Let me know when you find out. And you needn't preach to me about obsessions and syndromes.

(Indicating the fish tank)

You'd sleep with them if you could, wouldn't you? They're your

obsession. I've got other fish to fry. Anyway, since when have you studied psychiatry?

COLLIER. Always browsing through one book or another.

JAKE. So that's what you get up to on your fishy evenings? Schubert, and psychiatry on the sofa? And who knows, perhaps before long it will be Schubert, psychiatry and Cynthia?

END OF SCENE ONE

ONE MAN'S ANGELS