

THE CREATOR AND MR. POUF.

Idea for a Play in One Act by Hugh J. Schonfield

SCENE: A CELESTIAL OFFICE

Characters:

THE CREATOR (who is not God but a spiritual embodiment of the Positive principle).

MR. POUF (who is not the Devil but a spiritual embodiment of the negative principle).

The Creator's desk is covered with documents which he is studying intently with his head cupped in his hands. At his right hand is a telephone, or buzzer. He is tall and well-built, youthful and, with a shock of naturally wavy hair. He wears a long rainbow-coloured robe.

The telephone rings, but the Creator lost in his work does not immediately answer it.

THE CR. Hallo! Yes, speaking. Who? Mr. Pouf! *(A rather impish smile lights up his face)*. Yes, of course I'll see him. Ask him to come up. *(He rings off)*.

A moment or so later a knock is heard.

THE CR. Come in! *(ENTER MR.POUF)*

Mr. Pouf is short, middle-aged and spectacled, looking rather like Strube's 'Little Man,' He is dressed in a black coat and striped trousers and wears a wing collar and bow tie. A bowler hat is on his head and he carries a neatly rolled umbrella. Affixed to his shoulders there is a small pair of white wings. He advances diffidently, a little out of breath. The Creator rises to welcome him.

THE CR. Ah, Mr. Pouf! So nice to see you again.

MR. P. Good morning, Sir, thank you.

THE CR. Do sit down!

MR. P. *(gratefully)* Thank you Sir, These heavenly flights are a little trying at my time of life. *(He sits primly resting his hat on his knees and holding his umbrella squarely in front of him)*.

THE CR. *(cheerfully)* Well Mr. Pouf, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?

MR. P. *(carefully)* There are rumours Sir.

THE CR. Rumours?

MR. P. *(firmly)* Yes Sir, rumours - rumours that you are up to something again.

THE CR. I see. But then we are always 'up to something' in this office.

MR. P. I know that Sir. But this isn't routine. You've got something big on. Do you deny it?

THE CR. No, Mr. Pouf, I don't deny it.

MR. P. *(triumphantly)* There you are. You can't hoodwink me. I want the truth.

THE CR. *(musing)* Let me see. Last time you called it was the Church, I think.

MR. P. (*grimly*) Yes Sir, it was, and a nice mess you made of that. I warned you it would fail. So you did, Mr. Pouf. But I don't quite agree with you about the failure. Allowing for the human element I think we succeeded. (Mr.P. Snorts). After all there is still a Church after nearly two thousand years, and essentially it represents the original purpose and upholds the same principles of service, love and self-sacrifice. Without the Church there would now be millions without aim or hope. The incentive to strive after a nobler way of living would largely have disappeared. When we made the Church we gave the world a conscience.

MR. P. Pouf Sir! And who listens to your conscience? Every year it is more discredited. And why is it discredited? Because your Church is not even a conscience to itself. You can't tell me Sir. I know too much of what goes on. I'll grant the ideals are there. They've got all your fine ideals, and much good does it do them, or the world either. The kingdom of God that you expected is further away than ever. You must face the facts Sir. The scheme wasn't practical: it couldn't be done - not with human nature what it is.

THE CR. I try to face facts, Mr. Pouf. I do really. I'm studying them in this office all the time. That is why I'm confident that we.....

MR. P. (*interrupting*) That's your faith, Sir, very excellent, I'm sure. I wouldn't say a word against it. But it isn't enough. You've got to be business-like, come down to earth.

THE CR. That's what you said two thousand years ago; and your advice was followed, if you remember. It taught us a great deal. Indeed, it was that very practical experience that confirmed our intention to proceed with Plan B.

MR. P. Plan B?

THE CR. Yes, the Church - extension of Plan A, the Jews.

MR. P. Very good, Sir, quite smart that. But I'm an old hand. You can't take me in with your talk. Visions is what you mean, airy imaginations. Plans are solid things. You'll be telling me next, I suppose, that this new idea of yours is plan C.

THE CR. Well, I had thought of calling it that, if you don't mind.

MR. P. But I do mind. I mind very much. It's - if you'll, pardon me Sir - its a form of self-deception. It's taking a liberty with words. You can't indulge in Utopian dreams and call them plans.

THE CR. (*earnestly*) You are mistaken Mr. Pouf. I am the only one for whom there are no barriers between plans and dreams, Dreams open out vision and beget plans; but my vision carries to the end of time; my plans and my dreams are the same. Even Man has had the apparently senseless dream that two parallel lines will meet in infinity. You will say that those lines have always failed to meet, that there is no prospect of them ever having meeting. But only infinity can declare that this is no dream, for only infinity will witness the meeting.

MR. P. There you go. It's always like that. Whenever you come up against a

reasonable argument you take refuge in infinity, in eternity. It's begging the question. I Must remind you Sir, that we are discussing the affairs of Earth, which is neither eternal nor infinite.

THE CR. I beg your pardon Mr. Pouf. One is apt to forget ones lack of limitations. Let us keep on the terrestrial plane, by all means.

MR. P. No Sir. That won't do either. So far as these ideas of yours are concerned you have very definite limitations: you are limited by human free will. I don't doubt you will get your way in the end; but whether you get it soon or late will depend on human co-operation. Time means nothing to you; but it does to me, and it does to those people on Earth. I want results, and they want results. That's why I'm here. It's not my business to tell you what you ought to do; but it is my business to see that you don't go asking impossibilities and filling people's minds with schemes they can't carry out. If you go on like you've been doing they'll lose heart, they'll become desperate. They'll ignore your ideas altogether. They won't even give them a trial.

THE CR. I beg your pardon again Mr. Pouf. There is much in what you say.

MR. P. (*warming up*) Now take the Jews. You started with them - the Chosen People. Instead of giving them a chance to get used to the situation, you dumped the whole weight of your Law on them when they had only just escaped from four hundred years of slavery. You extracted a promise of obedience out of them when they were scared by thunder and lightening and trumpet blasts. Was that reasonable? Was that practical? Of course they couldn't keep your Law. There wasn't a hope of it. I warned you beforehand it wouldn't work. So then you reduced the numbers - a faithful Remnant you called it. But they got on no bother. I grant you found one Jew at the finish who came up to your expectations, and that made you believe you could start all over again, taking a few of every nation and forming them into a Church. If you had gone about things the right way you might have brought it off in time. But no, you were just as exacting. Your Christian standard was so exalted that not a saint in the calendar could come up to it. I warned you that would happen. Now there's this new scheme, plan, whatever you like to call it. I don't know what it is; but I warn you again. If it means making the same extravagant demands that you've made in the past it will fare as badly. There are plenty of people still who will respond to your call; but lead them, don't drive them. Give them a sporting chance.

THE CR. Your comments are very strong, Mr. Pouf. You have courage and conviction, both admirable qualities. I will admit that you appear to be justified in your criticisms. But you are wrong in supposing that I have paid no heed to your counsels. I have always found them profitable and stimulating, and up to a point I have followed them, though you are of the contrary opinion. While I have kept to my basic plan of a chosen People, which being a true plan I had to do, I have continuously slowed up the operation so as to enlarge human capacity for fulfilling it. As it has developed I have provided new aids for realising its requirements. I am about to provide more for this further phase. Contemporary

conditions also have become increasingly sympathetic. We really differ only in one thing. You think me a hard taskmaster, that I make impossible demands. But I know Man. Give him an easy task and he will not think it worth-while to make the effort. But invite him to attempt the difficult, the dangerous, yes, and even the impossible, and he will strain every nerve to achieve it. He may face short again and again, but he will not utterly fail: and he will still press on determined to win through. My demands are the challenge which he will refuse to disregard; and he will never confess himself beaten: nor will he be beaten. Have you marked what he has done already. One by one he has overcome every obstacle of nature in earth and sea and sky; he has triumphed over disease of body and soul. He will carry on the struggle through life and death and beyond, until he becomes what he is meant to be, and the plan is finished.

MR. P. (*humbly*) If that is your view Sir, I have nothing more to say. I have done what I came to do. (He rises to leave) But I shall watch, Sir, every step you take!

THE CR. I am sure you will, Mr. Pouf, and I am unfeignedly glad of it. Please come again whenever you think it necessary.

MR. P. I know what my duty is, and you can count on my doing it. I bid you good day Sir. (*shaking his head*) Plan C indeed!

(*EXIT MR. P.*)

The Creator stands looking after him, sighs, and resumes his work as the CURTAIN FALLS.

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