

The Hidden Cost

(A short play)

By Christine Williamson

Contact:
Christine Williamson
2710 Rt. 25A
Orford, NH 03777
(603) 558-0999
Mossflower@fastmail.fm
www.moonsongstudios.com



Member

© All rights reserved. 2016

(Lighting/Sound: Lights fade up, revealing WRITER surrounded by mess, sitting on a partially torn apart couch. WRITER sits very still, not actively acknowledging the mess. Not, in fact, seeming to actively acknowledge anything, at all. Something is very wrong...)

Enter COMPANION

COMPANION
(Freezes in shock.)

...

(Taking in WRITER's, alarming state.)

...

WRITER
It didn't work.

COMPANION
(Approaching warily.)
It looks like a Hurricane's been thru here.

WRITER
I know...

COMPANION
What did you— Why...?

WRITER
(Tired. Defeated.)
It didn't work.

COMPANION
What didn't work?

WRITER
My plan.

COMPANION
Plan?

WRITER
My grand plan to free myself from debt and finally have time to pursue my Dreams without having to waste copious amounts of time and energy figuring out how to pay my bills.

COMPANION
So you trashed our apartment?

WRITER

(Looks about briefly.)

Yes. ... Yes, it seems I did.

COMPANION

You realize you're going to have to clean it all up.

WRITER

(Nods.)

...

COMPANION

(Stares at WRITER.)

...

WRITER

...

COMPANION

...

WRITER

(Notices COMPANION staring.)

... What?

COMPANION

Are you alright?

WRITER

No.

COMPANION

What happened?

WRITER

I'll pick it up. I doubt anything of consequence was broken.

COMPANION

What happened?

WRITER

It didn't work. That's all. I slaved for months with an express goal in mind, and I failed to achieve it. Happens everyday. Millions of people fail. This time, I did.

COMPANION

What was your goal?

WRITER

I worked overtime. For someone who normally works half-time, that's a lot of extra hours. A lot! I was full-time, basically, for months. I don't do well on full-time. That's why I'm half. My brain just eats itself alive. I go nuts. And then I get health problems.

COMPANION

I'm aware.

WRITER

But I told myself, I can do this. You can do this. It's just a short period of time. Go full-time for a short time, and you'll be fine. You'll be free.

COMPANION

What happened?

WRITER

All I wanted was to pay off the car. (*Starting to laugh/cry.*) But the extra hours bumped me into a higher tax bracket. And I won't get that back for another year. Meanwhile the interest on principle I could have paid, will have another year being compounded. Which, of course, defeats the purpose of earning extra money to pay it down now.

COMPANION

The car?

WRITER

My hours doubled. My income should have doubled.

COMPANION

You tried to pay off the car in two months?

WRITER

Almost three. Fulltime feels like an eternity.

COMPANION

You've been driving both of us nuts for three months for the car?

WRITER

I calculated that without the car, the meager pool of residuals I've managed to accumulate would be enough to cover my share of the housing. And then I could stop being half-time and be Me-time. I could pursue freelance freely, and not be constrained by an arbitrary sleep schedule when I'm in the grips of... my Muse.

COMPANION

Is that what this is about?

WRITER

I lost an entire play. Because I had to get up and go to work, come home exhausted, and go to sleep. Then get up the next day and do it all over again. All while it was beating, screaming to come out. And a week later, when I finally had a chance to stop and catch my breath. ...It was gone. (*Crying quietly. Mourning.*)

COMPANION

Life, Liberty, ...And the pursuit of Currency.

WRITER

How many children must I lose to this mad numbers game?

COMPANION

(*Holds WRITER.*)

Shhhhh...

WRITER

How do you do it? I feel so selfish.

COMPANION

What?

WRITER

You go to work, and you're fine. Millions of people... go to work, and they're fine... I go, and all I can think of is how fast I can get away.

COMPANION

There's nothing wrong with that.

WRITER

There has to be. Otherwise, why base the entirety of Society around it?

COMPANION

Oh, no, don't you go there. Society is fucked up. Unrestrained Capitalism is poison. The assumption that one system of governance, based on extreme idolization of the individual at the expense of Others' wellbeing, is unsustainable. It breeds insensitivity and punishes people for not conforming to its exploitations. ...People don't fit neatly into boxes. ...You shouldn't force yourself into one when you know it won't fit.

WRITER

I don't fit anywhere.

COMPANION

You fit here.

WRITER

(Scrutinizes COMPANION.)

...That's enough... sometimes.

COMPANION

But not all the time.

WRITER

Never all the time. I'm too Mercurial.

COMPANION

That's a good word.

WRITER

Isn't it?

COMPANION

Though the term, Artistically Ambitious might be more accurate.

WRITER

Oh...

COMPANION

Along with, Financially Ambivalent.

WRITER

(Laughs)

You're on a roll today.

COMPANION

(Shrugs)

One of us has to be. How much progress did you make?

WRITER

I cut it by a third. An entire year. My plan was to do two thirds... And be done by Christmas. A present to myself.

COMPANION

That's still impressive. A year's a year.

WRITER

Assuming we live that long.

COMPANION

...What?

WRITER

I could drop dead tomorrow. In which case, it wouldn't have mattered anyway. But if I drop dead NEXT year. Then I'll be annoyed.

COMPANION

You're hurting my brain.

WRITER

You're welcome.

(Starts straightening things and gathering bits of mess.)

COMPANION

(Watches WRITER for a moment.)

So... How much progress did you make?

WRITER

I told you—

COMPANION

I mean, on your play? The one you lost.

WRITER

Two pages. ...The beginning... And some snippets. That's usually enough—It would have been... But I can't find it. The Mindset. The Pattern. It was very specific.

COMPANION

Specific?

WRITER

Mmmm... And I suspect I was more than a little depressed. I'm not sure I can safely take voluntarily depressing myself to recapture it now.

COMPANION

That's understandable.

WRITER

(Cleans with increasing agitation.)

Is it? There's a myth, you know. That you have to be depressed to make Great Work. And that your work's not Great unless your audience feels like crap after experiencing it.

COMPANION

That is a pattern I've noticed...

WRITER

Utter rubbish. Complete and Utter Rubbish.

COMPANION

Good.

WRITER

But this would have been Great. And being mired in Depression, would have been Recognized as such.

COMPANION

(Takes whatever's in WRITER's hands.)

I'm going to stop you again. You're about to go spiraling off into a miring bog of impotent, and more importantly, self-destructively righteous fury. ...Need I mention futile?

WRITER

...

(Deep breath...)

...In the interests of the well-being of our shared living space... I shall heed your observation.

COMPANION

How magnanimous of you.

WRITER

(Laughs.)

You're welcome.

COMPANION

...

WRITER

Thank you. I don't know what I'd do without you.

COMPANION

Live is squalor and depression, I assume.

WRITER

Alternating with bouts of extreme ecstasy and excessive cleanliness.

COMPANION

I've never seen you surrounded by excessive cleanliness.

WRITER

Well, you're about to.

COMPANION

I'll believe it when I see it.

WRITER

I have a tendency to clean frantically before sitting down to work. You never see it 'cause you've already left for the day. And, of course, I've messed it up again by the time you get home—But for those Glorious moments after I've finished cleaning, when I'm first sitting down to begin... Ecstasy.

COMPANION

(Staring at Mess)

...

WRITER

You're not impressed?

COMPANION

...

(Looks at WRITER.)

...You broke my chair.

WRITER

What?

COMPANION

My chair.

WRITER

My God. So that's what it was...

COMPANION

Huh?

WRITER

It's why I stopped. I tripped, and I heard, and felt, a huge crunch. I assumed I'd hurt myself and the pain hadn't caught up. So I sat down. ...And never got up again.

(Stares at chair. Then puts a hand on hip, wincing.)

...I think I have a bruise.

COMPANION

Oh, for Heaven's sake...!

WRITER

I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I can fix it. *(Looks around.)* I'll fix it.

(Fade to Black)

FINIS