

THE TRIALS

by Vitanopoulou Anastasia

The play is about a social experiment meant to force humans into experiencing their worst fears, but this is not revealed until the end of the play. The protagonists are two siblings, the sister being older than the brother. Their mother died a year ago and they live together in the house she left behind. The family experienced abandonment by the father when the children were still very young. The loss of the mother was a catalyst for their introverted personalities. The brother works in a bank spending most of his days in front of a computer screen and the sister stays home almost every day watching TV shows. They are both isolated and the only true human relationship developed is the one between them.

One day, suffocated by the routine of their existence, the sister has the idea of robbing the bank her brother works for just for the sake of doing something fun. She believes that her brother's position can facilitate them hacking several bank accounts without being caught. After a long conversation regarding the brother's hesitation and fear, he agrees and the day comes when he has to use his manager's computer and hack the bank accounts. However, as he waits outside the empty office, he is overwhelmed by panic and never finds the courage to get inside. In the end, the man in black, who is in charge of the experiment, is revealed looking at the two siblings sitting unconscious in iron chairs covered in wires. He talks to himself wondering if they will ever find a way out of their misery.

MARION- The sister

JOE- The brother, two years younger

OPERATOR- also, **VOICE**

SCENE I

(A kitchen, small table with three chairs. Next to it a sofa and a small table with a TV on it. A staircase in the back. It is Monday morning.)

MARION *(holding a small towel and a plate)*

Your breakfast is ready, come downstairs!

(Silence)

Joe! Wake up, you're going to be late again!

JOE (*walking down the stairs and sitting on one of the chairs*)

Can you please stop screaming? I just woke up...

MARION

It's 8 o'clock already!

JOE

You could inform me about that without sounding like a dying whale. And I won't be late anyway.

MARION

Do you plan on running your way to the bank?

JOE

No, I plan on quitting.

MARION

What?! Are you serious?

JOE

No...unless you have a better idea that would keep me away from this place without us starving ourselves.

MARION

Well, Joe... Look, I know that you hate it there, but since mum...

JOE (*interrupting her*)

No! Not the talk about mum again, not this early in the morning.

MARION

You know that this is the future she always wanted for you, don't you?

JOE

Well, and I never wanted her to die... So, I guess none of us got what they wanted, right?

(MARION remains silent)

We're both rotting now... She rots in a grave and I rot in front of an old computer screen and a keyboard counting money I will never have.

MARION

You're cruel...

JOE

No, just late.

Anyway, I'll see you when I get back... Have a nice day!

(MARION says nothing as JOE leaves the stage. She looks down for a minute, then starts to turn on the TV)

MARION

Okay, let's see...

(She hits the buttons of the remote relentlessly for a few seconds trying to decide what to watch)

Well... no... NO!... Hell no... Oh, come on, not that crappy movie again!

Oh, wait... well, that's new...

(MARION sits on the sofa, her eyes glued to the screen. The only light left on this part of the stage comes from the screen.)

SCENE 2

(JOE'S office, the lights turn brighter revealing JOE sitting on his desk next to a pile of papers and an obsolete computer screen talking to himself as he types)

JOE

Mrs. Smith...two point five, last payment next month...seven eighty- six, three thousand six hundred ninety- seven due to Monday...delete...Mr. Goldsmith loan approved, ten thousand...enter... tell Phil to call Mr. Levinson tomorrow...

VOICE *(interrupting JOE, heard as from another room)*

Joe! Did you cancel all my meetings for today? I also need you to make some calls on my part... I left a list on your desk this morning. Maybe you can stay a little bit more today there are these papers I need to sign and I could really use some help, I hope I'm not ruining any plans of yours...

JOE *(to himself)*

Are you finished yet? Did you forget the "you won't be paid any extra hours" part maybe? Who has a life to live instead of being here? Oh, you of course...damn-

VOICE

Joeee!

JOE

YES! I'll make the calls and help you with the papers and stay longer...

VOICE (*forced enthusiasm*)

Here comes the employee of the month then!!!

JOE

And when I bust your head with a goldbrick, I'll be the convict of the year...

(*JOE types in a furious manner still talking to himself*)

Sixty hundred and seventy-two, ninety-nine thousand seven hundred point forty-eight... Oh, shit! (*picks up the phone*)

Hello? Mrs. Martin? Good morning! I'm calling to inform you that the payment for your loan is late for this month... Yeah...(*Pause*)...I'm not the one who takes such decisions...I understand...Could you possibly come here next week so that we can make an arrangement?... Thank you, Mrs. Martin! Have a nice day! (*hangs up*)

Jesus! I hate it when I have to do this! A stranger calling asking for money pretending to sympathize with any tragedy... People apologizing, crying, lying, swearing...Well, shoot the messenger, I guess...

(*Lights dim as JOE keeps on typing and staring at his computer. Again, the only light left comes from the computer.*)

SCENE 3

(*Evening of the same day, MARION still sits on the sofa as the lights grow brighter, her eyes still focused on the TV screen when JOE enters the scene*)

JOE

Marion I'm sorry I was late for dinner, I hope you didn't wait for me... This bastard kept me 4 freaking hours to help him... No... to actually do all the paperwork of the week!

(MARION hasn't even noticed him and remains silent)

Hey! Marion! Wake up for heaven's sake, I'm talking to you!

MARION *(looking startled and surprised to see JOE)*

Heey! Why did you come home so early?! I haven't even cooked yet.

JOE

Girl, are you serious? It's almost eight... What have you been doing all day?

Oh, wait... Don't answer! You were just sinking in that sofa rotting what is left of your brain!

MARION *(too enthusiastic, talking incessantly ignoring JOE'S tone)*

Shhh! Stop it! I reallyyy need to talk to you! Look, there is this movie that I watched today as soon as you left. Well, it is about a robbery, a bank robbery in a small town and there is this guy, this tall mysterious guy with his black suit and all that helps a desperate poor little man to get the money and start his life again. Deus ex machina, I'm telling you... He jumps into the man's life right on time to stop him from committing suicide... Awesome character development, three-dimensional and mysterious. Did I mention mysterious?

JOE *(interrupting the torrent of words)*

Heyyy! Marion, slow down! Jesus! It must be some kind of talent what you have... the mother of headaches!

MARION

Joe we should do it!!!

JOE

Do what?

MARION

The robbery! We should rob your bank! Your sooo good with computers...you can hack them, can't you? Oh, I'm sure you can! Look, I have it all planned. Tomorrow morning you will get into your boss' office, you will hack one or two bank accounts and we'll finally live the way we want to like the guy in the movie, only now I'm the guy in the black suit, I have your plan ready to be executed, you just need to be veryyyy fast...

JOE (*staring at his sister obviously confused*)

Marion, I really need you to tell me the truth...Are you high? Did you take something?

MARION

I'm serious! The security system in your bank is shitty and your boss is rarely in his office...you could easily sneak in and...

JOE

And why would I do something like that? Isn't this life enough for you? I make enough money for us to be okay.

MARION

I'm sick and tired of okay! When was the last time you did something for fun? Just for fun? I'm offering you a way out of your misery! Also, you hate this guy and this could seriously get him into trouble.

JOE

So, you're telling me to rob a bank for fun! Risk my job and my life for fun!

MARION

Yes!!! Joe, I know you want to get out of that place and never look back. Why won't you leave with a smile on your face and some money in your pocket? Let that anger of yours help us somehow... We can finally do something, just something different, exciting! Oh, you're gonna love the excitement of it!

JOE

Marion, you're not thinking straight...

MARION

And you're thinking boring! Please at least think about it and you tell me tomorrow morning!

(She leaves the stage. JOE is alone, sinks into the sofa and watches the same movie MARION did)

SCENE 4

(Tuesday morning in the kitchen, JOE is awake as MARION enters)

JOE *(looking defeated)*

I'll do it... don't ask why, don't say anything! I'll just do it... for the sake of fun or whatever...

MARION

Really?! I knew you'd listen to me after all! Ah, I'm sooo soo excited, you can't even imagine! Well, get dressed and try not to be late on this big day! Come on, get up!!!
Oh, how am I supposed to wait so many hours for you to get home?? I'm missing all the fun... you're sooo lucky Joe!

(The lights dim in the kitchen as they both exit)

SCENE 5

(JOE in his office a few hours later sitting on his desk)

JOE *(frustrated, talking to himself)*

You can do it! You really can! Come on! You just get inside, play with some numbers, get the money and get out of this shithole...Damn, this guy in the movie made it look soo easy! Well, Joe, one step at a time... Get the hell up!

(JOE gets up and moves toward the boss' empty office, stays frozen beside the door)

Ok, now you get inside... *(does not move)*

Look, I know this is crazy, but when was the last time you felt like this? Truly afraid, the numbing paralyzing fear of getting caught doing something way out of your league? Maybe never or maybe this one time when you broke that vase and never told mum. So, that's what this is all about! Yeah! The fun! I'm numb and I'm having fun! Besides, think of his face realizing that the money is gone! They'll never suspect you. You have the perfect alibi. You are no one, a shadow passing through a bunch of somebodies. Mum wanted me to be a somebody, Marion wanted me and herself to be somebodies and suddenly mum is gone and Marion is still stuck on that day...not moving, just staring...staring at screens both of us. She lives more lives than I do with

the movies and all that... Well, I'm going to be the one who does it... I'll do it! In a few seconds I'll take my life into my own hands... Come on, Joe, get in! (*he remains still with a blank stare never enters the office, blackout*)

SCENE 6

(*The stage is empty apart from two chairs covered in wires, JOE and MARION are seated unconscious, also covered in wires, the OPERATOR enters*)

OPERATOR (*talking to the unconscious JOE and MARION*)

Oh, why Joe?! Again? Really?! Why can't you just cross that line? This thin line that separates fear from freedom, passivity from action, the victim from the agent... you left poor Marion waiting for nothing again and this time I was really convinced that you could actually be moved by my part in the film... I think I was pretty persuasive and charming... charming indeed! I remember the last time how sad and angry you were seeing the disappointment in your sister's eyes! She looked at you like a lost puppy at first, realizing that even the perfect plan she thought of was not enough to set you in motion. The fear of risking, fooling your superiors, denying your inferiority was too overwhelming for you poor little Joe, huh? (*laughs sarcastically*)

(*Silence*)

I thought you knew what you were getting yourselves into when you signed all those papers. You agreed to this and to that and didn't even bother to read between the lines. "The subjects will be submitted to the process of reliving their worst fears until they come up with a solution to break the loop" ...and you agreed regardless of your cowardice! For months I've been trying to get you to understand, to help Marion turn off the damn TV, to get you out of this bank where you "rot in front of an old computer screen and a keyboard" as you said in this version of your reality.

(OPERATOR moves closely to the chairs whispering into JOE'S ear)

No! Always backwards, moving in circles like little rats in their tubes... same beginning, same ending... not even one unexpected turn, no surprise... wake up, work, stare, rot, small-talk, sleep... Now, repeat! Repeat thousands of times after me until there comes the day that you skip the first step and straight to the last into perpetuity.

(Moves further facing the audience)

That was trial number fifty... fifty times they tried, fifty times both of them under any circumstances, under any possible scenario, they failed to move, failed to act... getting comfortable in fear they seem, where the enemy is known, not faceless, in flesh and blood, in their own heads.

End