

PEACE OF MIND

A room with a desk or counter, very sleek and modern. Behind the counter stands ELAINE, an attractive woman. Beyond the reception area, the stage is divided into several smaller rooms, cordoned off by grey curtains. Each cubicle/ sanctuary is empty except for a coat rack and a couch. Everything designed to be soothing.

EARL MELTON and ROY GRANBY enter. Earl is a well-dressed executive and seems very much at peace with himself. Roy is tense, nervous, with energy spilling all over the place. He carries a heavy briefcase in one hand and a portable phone in the other. He wears a watch on each wrist so he can tell the time no matter what his hands are doing. Elaine recognizes Earl and produces a fancy wooden bucket from beneath the desk.

Roy's phone rings and he answers it quickly.

ROY

(overlapping Earl and Elaine)

No, no, no. Call them back and tell them we won't have it from the printers until tomorrow. There is no way we can deliver the full shipment until next week. Just try to keep the place from falling to pieces for the next hour, all right? Tell Wendyl I want to know where Stoltz's manuscript is. I was supposed to have it on my desk two days ago. I don't want to hear excuses, I just want to see a stack of paper on my desk. I've got to go. I'll call you back in a couple minutes.

ELAINE

(overlapping Roy)

Nice to see you today, Mr. Melton. You look good.

EARL

Thanks, Elaine. I think we could be in for a real adventure. Mr. Granby will be my guest today.

Earl empties the contents of his pockets into the basket, along with his watch.

ELAINE writes down the information in her register and produces another basket. They wait patiently for Roy to finish. He finally hangs up.

ROY

Sorry about that, Earl. You'd think the whole world falls to pieces if I'm gone for ten minutes.

EARL

I'm sure they'll survive the next hour without you.

ROY

I hope so. We've got three manuscripts supposed to go to the printers today, and two of them are late. Distributors are ringing my phone off the hook. I gotta put this off another day. I'm sure it's a blast, but I'm too busy. Sorry, Earl.

EARL

Just empty your pockets, Roy.

ROY

You aren't listening to me. I don't have time for this today.

EARL

Nancy said she and the doctor gave you an ultimatum.

ROY

Just tell her that I stayed. Give me a break, Earl. I have a business to run. You know how it gets.

EARL

Yes, I do. I've got orders for ten thousand more bowling pins than I have in inventory. But I need to center myself. Running a business is like making your approach to the lane--you've got to calm down, focus... otherwise you go right in the gutter.

ROY

So my blood pressure is a little high. I'll take a pill. I can get through one more day. Maybe I've been a little intense lately, but that doesn't mean...

Earl and Elaine stare at him in hard silence. Roy finally takes a deep breath and gives in.

ROY

All right. Maybe it wouldn't hurt me to learn to relax a little. What do I do?

ELAINE

Empty your pockets into this basket.

Roy empties his pockets.

ROY

Hmmm.

ELAINE

We'll need your watches too, please.

Roy takes off one and puts it in the basket.

EARL

Both.

ROY

How am I gonna know when it's time to leave?

ELAINE

I'll inform you.

He puts it in the bucket.

ELAINE

And your phone too.

ROY

Next you're going to want the clothes off my back.

EARL

Just give her your phone, Roy.

ROY

How long are we going to be here?

EARL

Give her your phone.

Roy puts his phone in the bucket.

ROY

I hope you're satisfied. I'm naked.

ELAINE

You are in sanctuaries A and B, Mr. Melton.

ROY

You said this would be fun, Earl. I'm not having fun yet.

EARL

I said it would be fulfilling.

ROY

Let's get it over with.

Earl leads Roy into the first room.

EARL

Just lie down on the couch and relax. You may want to take off your shoes. I'll be right next door.

With that, Earl goes into the next chamber and lies down on the couch. He takes off his shoes, breathes deeply, and starts to relax. Very quickly all tension flows out of him. Roy still stands in front of his couch, puzzled.

ROY

(calling out)
What the are you doing?

EARL

Relaxing on my couch. Just lie down and take it easy.

Roy sits on his couch and waits. The silence is deafening. He looks around, bites his nails, looks around again, and finally gets up and peeks his head inside Earl's chamber.

ROY

Hey, Earl, let's get this meditation guy in here and get going.

EARL

(without opening his eyes)

What meditation guy?

ROY

The leader, you know, like the aerobics teacher. Nancy said we were supposed to meditate and learn to relax. I'm ready for my lesson. I don't have all day to sit around and wait for some idiotic instructor.

EARL

There is no instructor. All that is here is you and some peace and quiet.

ROY

No lessons?

EARL

No.

ROY

This is great. I'm supposed to do it all on my own?

EARL

You can handle it.

ROY

Maybe I'll go see if that woman, Elaine, can help me relax.

EARL

I'm sure she can. She's a licensed psychotherapist.

ROY

She's a shrink?

EARL

I hear that she can be very helpful with initial customers.

ROY

I don't need a shrink.

EARL

I didn't think so.

ROY

So what am I supposed to do?

EARL

Go back in your sanctuary and lie down on the couch.

ROY

And then what?

EARL

And then nothing.

ROY

Just do nothing?

EARL

Exactly. Enjoy the silence and the peace.

ROY

I can't believe you. You actually pay to use this place?

EARL

It's worth every penny.

ROY

How much do you pay?

EARL

Twenty.

ROY

Twenty bucks a pop?

EARL

Twenty thousand, for a lifetime membership.

ROY

You're out of your head.

EARL

It's worth the money.

ROY

Guys pay less than that for the Country Club.

EARL

Are they happy?

ROY

I'm sure they're very happy. Maybe you need a shrink.

EARL

(trying to stay relaxed)

Look, Roy. I'm just as busy as you. I've got just as many people pounding on my door every minute of the day wanting something. More pins, more balls. I need this time, alone with the silence. But I told Nancy I'd do her a favor and bring you here. Would you at least give it a try?

ROY

Give what a try? I'm not supposed to do anything. What am I supposed to try?

EARL

Go back into your chamber, lie down, and relax. That's all. Just be quiet and relax. Keep still. I need to be alone.

ROY

All right. All right. Sorry to be such a pain. I'm not used to this sort of thing.

EARL

I understand. I was just like you when I first came.

ROY

Yeah, well, I like being just like me. You have a grand old time, all right?

Roy returns to his own couch. He lies down and makes a feeble effort to relax, but he just can't get comfortable. He tries to take a couple deep breaths, but finds it doesn't help. He taps his fingers, wiggles his feet. The pressure of the silence weighs heavily on him.

ROY
Hey, Earl?

EARL
What?

ROY
Do they have a stereo in here? I could go for some tunes.

EARL
Enjoy the silence.

ROY
I'd rather have some music. How about a magazine?

Earl ignores him. Roy shakes his head and goes out to the admission desk.

ROY
Hi there.

ELAINE
Is there a problem, sir?

ROY
No. No. Everything is peachy. I'm feeling very well adjusted.

ELAINE
I'm glad to hear that.

ROY
But, uh, could you hand me my briefcase?

ELAINE
Is something wrong?

ROY
No. Nothing's wrong. I want my copy of the Financial Times.

ELAINE
I'm afraid there is no reading in the sanctuaries, Mr. Granby.

ROY

I can read if I want to. Just give me my briefcase.

ELAINE

I'm afraid I can't do that.

ROY

Hey, look, it's my briefcase, my magazine, give them to me.

ELAINE

Why do you feel you need a magazine?

ROY

Don't try that psycho garbage on me.

ELAINE

I can only retrieve items for members.

ROY

I'm the guest of a member.

ELAINE

But not a member.

ROY

I handed it to you five minutes ago, you know I'm not a thief.

ELAINE

We're very strict here. No reading. No items for non-members.

ROY

Oh, come on. Please... Please?

ELAINE

No.

Roy tires of this and decides to take it back. Elaine quickly grabs Roy, picks him up, and sets him back down outside the desk area.

ROY

Hey.

ELAINE presses an intercom button.

ELAINE

Would Mr. Melton please report to the front desk.

ROY

You're stronger than you look.

Earl emerges.

EARL

What's wrong?

ELAINE

I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Melton. But your friend is having some problems.

ROY

I am not having a problem. I just want my briefcase. My briefcase.

EARL

(embarrassed)

I'm really sorry about this, Elaine.

ROY

Tell her to give me my briefcase.

EARL

You don't need your briefcase.

ROY

Yes, I do. I want my magazine. Give it to me. Tell her to give me my magazine. I want it. I want it now.

EARL

(takes Roy by the arm and leads him back to Roy's chamber)

Pull yourself together. You can't have anything to read. It's against the rules.

ROY

I can't read or listen to music or watch TV or do anything. That's what you're saying?

EARL

That's right. Just relax.

ROY

Those things are relaxing.

EARL

Let your mind empty. Let all your troubles flow into the void. Learn to be at one with the universe.

ROY

You sound like some sort of flake.

EARL

Look, Roy, just sit still and shut up. I've got problems too, you know, and if you'd just keep quiet, I might be able to handle them. It's not going to kill you to stop worrying for one stupid hour.

ROY

Hey, hey, calm down. I'll sit here and be quiet, all right?

EARL

Thank you.

ROY

Toss yourself into the void. I'll be here when you're done. I've got enough to think about to keep me busy.

Earl goes back to his cubicle and tries to calm himself down. Roy lies on the couch and shakes his head. He taps his fingers nervously and closes his eyes to concentrate. After a moment, he takes a few deep breaths. He relaxes his muscles, stretches out.

ROY

Hmmmm. Ahhhh. Ohhhh. Ahhhh.

He takes a deep breath, then another. Really getting into the recesses of his lungs now.

ROY

Ahhh. That's all right. Not so terrible. Ohhmmm. Relax. Relax. Breathe.

He gradually releases all the tension in his body. His breathing is deep and even. It's hard to tell if he's awake or asleep. He's smiling. After a while, Earl finishes his meditation, gets up, straightens himself out, and enters Roy's sanctuary.

EARL

Roy. Roy. Wake up.

ROY

(quietly, not opening his eyes)
I'm awake.

EARL

Your hour of torture is up.

ROY

It's been an hour already?

EARL

So you learned to relax.

ROY

Don't gloat.

EARL

I'm just surprised.

ROY

I surrendered my problems.

EARL

You're pulling my leg, right?

ROY

Thanks for putting up with me. I know I made it difficult.

EARL

I wanted to strangle you. (beat) Don't think I've ever seen your forehead without worry lines before. You can see why I like this place, huh?

ROY

It could change your life.

EARL

You remember what I was like last year? Working all the time, trying to see if those new polymer pins would break. Really started to wear on Theresa. She was going to her friends, getting recommendations for divorce lawyers. I was a flaming nutcase. Went through crates of Roloids and aspirin. My secretaries called me Mr. Maalox. Then this place, this place took care of all that. Brought my blood pressure down, stopped my stomach troubles, helped me quit smoking. When you spend time in bowling alleys, it's hard not to smoke.

ROY

Saved your marriage, saved your life.

EARL

Your marriage will improve, that's for sure. Last time I talked to her, Nancy was pretty fed up.

ROY

She needs to come here. She needs to see that she can let her petty concerns float away.

EARL

Just like a clean strike, effortless, rolling onto the headpin. Maybe you'll even become a member, huh?

ROY

It's at the top on my list. I suppose you get a commission.

EARL

If you don't think it's right...

ROY

You deserve it. I should pay you a finders fee.

EARL

I'm glad to see you get out from under your mountain of stress. You looked like you were about to crumple.

ROY

I was one click away from an explosion.

EARL

Bet you can't wait to get back to work and call Nancy.

ROY

Yeah.

EARL

So let's get go.

ROY

It could wait a little longer.

EARL

I thought you were worried about missing manuscripts.

ROY

Are you trying to wreck the mood?

EARL

It's just that we have to go.

ROY

You go ahead.

EARL

What about work?

ROY

Rick and Wendyl can handle things.

EARL

So you want to take the rest of the day off?

ROY

I deserve it.

EARL

You're right. I have to get back, though.

ROY

I can relax just fine on my own, Earl. I'm a big boy now.

EARL

Okay, then. I guess I'll see you tomorrow night at Lacey's.

ROY

On your way out, could you get my phone? I'd like to arrange a membership.

EARL

They don't allow phones back here.

ROY

They will for twenty grand.

EARL

She's pretty strict.

ROY

Just ask them for my stupid phone.

EARL

Why don't you ask them?

ROY

I'm communing with the void. I finally find a little peace of mind and you want me to jostle around and lose my connection with inner peace.

EARL

Maybe they'll bend the rules a little. Like you said, for twenty thousand, most of us can be a little flexible.

Roy goes back to breathing deeply, a pleasant grin on his face. Earl walks out to Elaine.

EARL

Elaine, can I please have Mr. Granby's phone?

ELAINE

I'm sorry, Mr. Melton. No phones are allowed in the sanctuaries.

EARL

He wants to transfer funds, so he can become a member. A lifetime member.

ELAINE

He can place his call from here.

EARL

He doesn't want to get off the couch. You know how comfortable they are.

ELAINE

He can go back when he's finished.

EARL

Can't you bend the rules? Just a little? We're talking a full membership here.

ELAINE

It isn't that much trouble to get up and make one call.

EARL

You're right. Nobody's that lazy.

Earl goes back to Roy.

EARL

You're not going to believe this, but they're even stricter than I thought. You have to go out front.

ROY

No chance.

EARL

Just make your phone call and then come back and relax. You won't have any trouble getting back to Nirvana. Once you're found your mark, it's smooth sailing.

ROY

I've found where I want to be mentally, and I'm not going to lose it. Tell them they don't get a cent if I have to move.

EARL

Come on, Roy.

ROY

I'm not screwing around here. I have serious meditation to do. We're talking years of missed relaxation. If these people want screw around, send in the manager and we'll have a talk.

Earl exits to the front desk. Roy relaxes even deeper, thoroughly enjoying himself.

EARL

Are you sure you won't bend those rules, just a little?

ELAINE

He won't get up?

EARL

He's stubborn. He's the kind of guy who could go up in the space shuttle and still insist the world is flat. He thinks you should go in and kiss his feet for the membership fee.

ELAINE

But he insists that he doesn't need to get up, correct? Not for work, not to join this club, not for anything.

EARL

Yeah.

ELAINE

This is Jenkins all over again. Jenkins all over.

EARL

Jenkins?

ELAINE

A former member, very much like your friend. Thought of nothing but work and meetings. Until he came here... He was at the breaking point. No one thought he could learn to relax. Then in a flash, he was hooked. It was horrible. Horrible.

EARL

What happened?

ELAINE

We thought we could wait for him to come to his senses. He called his attorneys; we had no chance to move him. He wasted away.

EARL

He died?

ELAINE

Let's see if we can help your friend.

They walk quickly to Roy, bringing Roy's portable phone with them.

ELAINE

Mr. Granby, I am Dr. Elaine Stevens. We met a short while ago.

ROY

I remember. I want to join this place. I just need my phone so I can transfer the funds.

ELAINE

As you are aware, we do not allow phones in the sanctuaries.

ROY

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We went through all that crap. I'm gonna stick twenty grand in your pocket; I think you can get my phone.

ELAINE

Mr. Granby, can you open your eyes?

ROY

Of course.

ELAINE

Go ahead.

ROY

I'm relaxing. Meditating. Or at least trying to, but you guys keep coming in here and giving me a hard time. Did you ever take a good look at the darkness? I never realized how comforting it is.