

Fear of Fears

A play

by
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A dark corner of the Library of Congress. Densely-filled shelves of books surround DANNY, who is huddled in the corner. A table downstage is littered with open books. Danny looks supremely frightened. He glances around nervously.

Danny tries to stand up by grabbing a bookshelf, but as he does so books tumble onto the floor and he screams and runs toward the table. But when he sees the books on the table, he screams even louder and flings himself back into the corner, weeping and shaking.

DANNY

(a mantra)

I know nothing, I know nothing, I know nothing, I know nothing...

He continues repeating this mantra as MARCIA, his sister, enters hesitantly.

MARCIA

There you are.

DANNY

MARCIA!

MARCIA

(jumps)

What?! I'm sorry!

DANNY

WHY AM I IN A ROOM FULL OF BOOKS?! No! I don't want to know.

MARCIA

It's the Library of Congress.

DANNY

What in the hell am I doing in the *Library of Congress*!?

MARCIA

I--

DANNY

No, stop, don't tell me.

MARCIA

(backing up)

I didn't do it!

DANNY

So this is Charlie's plan, is it? Always coming up with some scheme to make me look like an idiot.

(points to a book)

Look at this shit.

MARCIA

(opens book)

"A Treatise on the Economic Surplus of--"

DANNY

(covers ears)

AAAAAA NO NO NO NO NO NO--

MARCIA

I'm sorry!

DANNY

I said LOOK, not READ!

Marcia slams the book shut, which startles her.

MARCIA

Charlie is going to be so mad at me.

DANNY

You didn't do anything, sis.

MARCIA

I'm sorry, I can't deal with it. I can't. I can't.

DANNY

You know what I can't deal with?

(looking at books)

"The Age of Enlightenment."

(throws book)

"Foucault's Theories on Modernist Humanity."

(throws)

"A Dadaist Perspective on--"

(throws; shudders)

I know nothing, I know nothing, I know nothing...

MARCIA

I'm sorry.

DANNY

Don't be sorry, it's not your fault.

MARCIA

I'm sorry.

DANNY

Stop saying you're sorry!

I'm--

MARCIA

Marcia stops herself, then swallows.

Get me out of here.

DANNY

I'm sorry.

MARCIA

DANNY

Marcia, please! I can't make it out alone. If I have to walk by another book on property gains I think I'll *shoot* myself.

MARCIA

No!

Marcia starts to leave.

DANNY

Marcia! Stop. It was a figure of speech. I don't even have a gun. Come on, help me out of here.

Marcia stands at the edge of the stage, unsure of what to do.

DANNY (cont'd)

(angrily)

MARCIA! Stop being a goddamn scaredy cat!

MARCIA

NO! No no no no no...

She repeats this as she runs offstage.

DANNY

Marcia! Damn it!

Danny stands alone in the corner for a moment.

CHARLIE, Marcia's boyfriend, enters, carrying a white book. He habitually looks around the room throughout the scene.

CHARLIE

Danny!

DANNY

(startled)

AAAH!

CHARLIE
(also startled)
AAAAAAH!

Charlie kicks one of the table's chairs over.

DANNY
Charlie! Why did you bring me here? No, don't tell me.

CHARLIE
I didn't bring you here!

DANNY
Liar!

CHARLIE
Where's your sister?

DANNY
I scared her off.

CHARLIE
How?

DANNY
A figure of speech.

CHARLIE
Oh, she hates those. Well, look, I found a book that is perfect for you.

DANNY
Aha! I knew it! I knew you would spin this vacation into a self-help meeting.

CHARLIE
Danny, I swear I didn't bring you. Don't you remember walking in the door?

DANNY
I don't remember anything.

CHARLIE
Of course you don't. Here.

Charlie tries to hand over the book.

DANNY
Get that thing away from me!

CHARLIE
It's called "Dealing with Epistemophobia."

DANNY

Don't tell me--

CHARLIE

It's what you have.

DANNY

No, I don't *have* anything. And either way, I don't want to know! I don't want to know. I know nothing, I know nothing, I know nothing...

CHARLIE

Why are you so afraid of learning things?

DANNY

Knowledge is power, Charlie. But ignorance is bliss. And I prefer to be more blissful than powerful.

CHARLIE

We all have fears that we can deal with.

DANNY

Not you. I've never seen you afraid of anything.

CHARLIE

Well...

*(changing the subject, he reads
from book)*

"The first step in dealing with epistemophobia is understanding that it is impossible to not learn."

Marcia enters behind Charlie.

DANNY

Stop reading that filth to me!

CHARLIE

Interesting. Even when you say, "I know nothing," you still *know* that you know nothing. You know?

DANNY

Don't you dare, Charlie. No philosophy, not in this room.

CHARLIE

It's true though, isn't it?

DANNY

You *know* how much I hate *philosophy*.

CHARLIE

You can't go a day without learning something.

DANNY

Not true! I haven't learned a damn thing today. I don't even know how I got into the Library of Congress, and I don't intend to find out!

Charlie tosses the book by Danny's feet. Danny cringes and kicks it aside.

CHARLIE

Go on, read it.

DANNY

Don't tell me what to do!

CHARLIE

You're not illiterate, are you?

DANNY

Ha! I wish!

CHARLIE

Just read it.

DANNY

No!

CHARLIE

Come on!

DANNY

NO!

CHARLIE

Don't be such a wuss!

Marcia taps Charlie on the shoulder.

MARCIA

Charlie--

CHARLIE

(startled)

AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Charlie flips out, punches Marcia in the face, and runs off screaming. In response, Marcia screams, cries, and runs off in the opposite direction.

DANNY

What the hell just happened?

(short beat)

No, I don't want to know.

Danny glances around the room, until his eyes land on the white book.

DANNY (cont'd)

You can't help me, book. I can say "I know nothing" and leave it at that, as long as I don't think about the "I know" part. It's simple Buddhism! Letting go of needless thoughts, embracing the emptiness. Simple.

(takes a breath)

Alright, Danny. Time to get out of here. Just, maybe ... close your eyes, walk in a direction. Then you'll run into a librarian who will tell you how to get out --

(shudders)

No, no librarian. No one can tell me where to go. I'll just...

Danny closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and begins fumbling toward an exit. Instead, he quickly slams his knee against the table.

DANNY (cont'd)

OW! God damn it! You're supposed to be my friend, table!

He retreats back into the corner, nursing his knee.

DANNY (cont'd)

You can't learn anything from a table.

Charlie and Marcia reenter, engaged in a heavy makeout session. They speak in between kisses.

CHARLIE

I'm so sorry--

MARCIA

No, please--

CHARLIE

I thought you were a ghost--

MARCIA

It's nothing--

CHARLIE

Or a werewolf or--

MARCIA

Don't speak--

CHARLIE

A cyborg or something--

MARCIA
It's over now--

CHARLIE
You know how scared I get sometimes--

MARCIA
Never, never--

Danny stands, walks over to the couple.

CHARLIE
Is your face alright--?

MARCIA
Yes, you're very weak--

CHARLIE
I know--

MARCIA
I mean, not weak, but--

CHARLIE
I am weak, I punch like a baby--

DANNY
Uh, guys?

MARCIA
(not listening)
No, not like a baby--

CHARLIE
Yes--

MARCIA
Like a toddler, at least--

CHARLIE
Don't humor me--

DANNY
Guys?

MARCIA
I don't humor, you know that--

CHARLIE
You hate humoring--

MARCIA
I hate confrontation--

DANNY
(loudly)
GUYS!

CHARLIE
(startled)
AAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Charlie punches Danny and runs off screaming. Marcia stiffens up, shell-shocked.

DANNY
Wow, he does punch like a baby.
(notices Marcia)
Marcia, don't run away.

MARCIA
I'm sorry.

DANNY
Shh, it's okay.

MARCIA
Sorry.

DANNY
Don't say that.

MARCIA
Sor--

DANNY
Shh. I need your help.

MARCIA
Okay.

DANNY
I'm going to close my eyes, and I want you to lead me out of here. Can you do that?

MARCIA
I don't know.

DANNY
Look, I really need you right now. This isn't a confrontation, this is you helping me. Do you understand?

MARCIA
Of course.

CHARLIE

How would you know?

Beat. Danny wants to respond to that but can't.

DANNY

... Touche.

CHARLIE

Ever since I heard that speech in 7th grade US History class, it's stuck with me.

DANNY

And now you're afraid of being afraid?

CHARLIE

Precisely. But I recently read a book called "How to Deal with Phobophobia," and it changed my life. Had I not read that book prior to being startled by you earlier, I might have cowered on the ground, rocking back and forth, knees hugged to chest, perhaps even urinating on myself!

DANNY

Now you just punch people.

CHARLIE

I've learned to take my fear and turn it into anger! Fury! I fight what frightens me!

DANNY

So what are you saying? That I should fight my way out of here? Punch the shit out of all these books?

CHARLIE

No, you should read that book I found.

DANNY

Oh.

Marcia peeks her head in.

DANNY (cont'd)

(soothingly)

Charlie, Marcia is here.

CHARLIE

I know, I see her.

DANNY

Good, good.

CHARLIE

Marcia, tell Danny to read that book I found.

MARCIA

I can't, I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

Sure you can. Just say, "Read the book."

DANNY

You're just going to freak her out.

CHARLIE

If she can control her anxiety, so can you.

(to Marcia)

Pick up the book.

MARCIA

I'm sorry.

DANNY

(to Marcia)

Don't listen to him.

CHARLIE

Encourage her, Danny.

DANNY

I'm not encouraging her to make me read.

CHARLIE

It's the only way you're going to get out of here.

DANNY

Just pick me up and CARRY me, for Chrissakes!

CHARLIE

Marcia, pick up the book. Just think of it as an action independent of the actions prior to it or after it. Picking up the book is not confrontational, is it?

Marcia looks down at the book. Then she looks out toward the audience with a blank look on her face, as if deactivating the reasoning part of her brain. She crouches down to pick up the book with the blank look on her face. Then her face returns to normal.

CHARLIE (cont'd)

Now just give it to Danny.

DANNY

Don't give it to me!

Marcia tosses the book to Danny, who catches it like a hot potato.

CHARLIE
HOLD THE BOOK, DANNY!

DANNY
No! No no no!

He throws the book at Charlie, who dodges. He then runs to the table and picks up a black book.

DANNY (cont'd)
I've got a book for you, Charlie: "Six Shit-Curdling Scary Stories, Volume 1."

MARCIA
How do you curdle shit?

DANNY
What?

MARCIA
I'm sorry.

CHARLIE
You hate books, Danny, you'd never read that to me.

DANNY
It's not knowledge, Charlie. It's just storytelling.

CHARLIE
Danny, if you open that book I will punch your lights out.

DANNY
You couldn't punch an *actual* light bulb, Charlie. Let's see ... "The Tale of Black Aggie"...

CHARLIE
No! Shut up!

Charlie runs and grabs the white book as Danny reads in a spooky voice:

DANNY
"Once upon a time, a man named Frank Angus brought a bronze statue of an angel to his sleepy little town."

Charlie hastily opens his book and reads loudly:

CHARLIE
"Chapter Two: How to Deal with Knowledge."

DANNY
"Little did he know he was actually bringing a DEVIL."

CHARLIE
Marcia, stop him.

MARCIA
I ... can't.

CHARLIE
What are you so afraid of?

DANNY
(reading the book:)
"Frank placed the grieving angel in the middle of the cemetery. One night--"

CHARLIE
"Knowledge is everywhere! Everything you read, see, or speak comes from knowledge!"

DANNY
No! Not true! Some of it is instinctual, like pooping!
Marcia, make him shut up!

MARCIA
... I can't!

DANNY
Oh for the love of God, it's not your fault! Parents get divorced! Get over yourself!

MARCIA
NO!

In a fury, Marcia picks a red book off the table and starts beating Danny with it.

DANNY
Ow! What are you doing?!

MARCIA
Stop trying to scare my boyfriend!

CHARLIE
Marcia...

Charlie goes to Marcia. She beats him as well.

MARCIA
Stop trying to make my brother learn!

Both Danny and Charlie fall to the ground. Marcia stands over them, book held high, panting.

She then grabs the white book from Charlie and gives it to Danny.

MARCIA (cont'd)

Read this. No matter how much knowledge you gain, you'll never know everything.

(to Charlie)

And YOU... Get up. We're going to see a scary movie.

CHARLIE

No! ... No!

MARCIA

Yes, get up.

(to Danny)

We'll see you back at the hotel.

DANNY

Wait! Can't I come with you?

MARCIA

No. Read the book. Dad was smart, but that's not why he was an asshole.

Marcia leaves. Beat.

CHARLIE

Sorry I punched you in the face. And forced you to read a book.

DANNY

Just get out of here.

CHARLIE

Okay.

Charlie leaves. Danny looks at the white book. He picks it up. Starts to open it, but then he angrily throws it offstage. He buries his head in his hands for a moment.

Then he stands up with a renewed energy, and forces himself offstage.

Lights fade on an empty room.

The end.