



ALL SAVE ONE

by Greg Jones Ellis

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ALL SAVE ONE

A Play in Two Acts

by

Greg Jones Ellis

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All Save One premiered on November 15, 2018 at the Washington Stage Guild (Bill Largess, artistic director) in Washington, DC, USA. It was directed by Carl Randolph, scenic design by Carl Gudenius, Jingwei Dai and Kirk Kristlibas. Costumes were designed by Reema Al-Bawardy, lighting by Marianne Meadows and sound design by Frank DiSalvo, Jr. Arthur Nordlie stage managed.

Original cast:

SIMS GLENDENNING.....Bill Largess

BASIL STEELE.....R. Scott Williams

CLAIRE MORGAN.....Laura Giannarelli

JOHN GRANT.....Lawrence Redmond

FATHER THEODOR.....Danny Beason

CHARACTERS

Sims Glendenning: 50s, male, British, world-famous writer

Basil Steele: 50s, male, British, Sims's "secretary" of twenty years

Claire Morgan: 50s, female, British, Sims's wife and a famous character actress

John Grant: 50s, male, American, producer of Sims's upcoming play and film

Father Theodor, 30s, male, American, priest

Place and time: Hollywood 1950

A sunny room that may be a sitting room for the permanent owner but is currently the study of its temporary tenant, Sims Glendenning.

ALL SAVE ONE

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

Lights up on SIMS, sitting in a large wing chair. The room is a sunny study somewhere on the Pacific coast west of Hollywood, 1950. It is a rented house, the owner being an absent member of the English expat community. It is a perfect blend of cluttered writer's den and gracious mid-20th century resort decor.

At first, it appears that SIMS is addressing the audience. He is not. He is rehearsing a speech to be used to open a filmed version of his work. This becomes clearer as he goes along. His confident pronouncement of the first few sentences falters, and he looks heavenward in hesitation thereafter.

SIMS

Many have noted that everything that has happened in my life has insinuated itself into my work. This is truer than even they might imagine. From my somewhat overdecorated— (*He hesitates, then remembers:.*) From my somewhat exaggerated contributions in the Great War to my rather famous friendships, nothing has escaped my Oh, balls!

He realizes he's lost his place. He searches his memory to find a place he remembers. He finds it. He seems to have regained his full composure. He stands resolutely, and experiments, rather badly with clever gestures (perhaps with a pipe or his glasses) and continues:

From my somewhat exaggerated contributions in the Great War to my rather...damn! Oh well, this part I know.... The film you are about to see is an anthology of sorts. Three short plays of mine have been adapted to the cinema and I couldn't be more pleased. (*Aside:*)

Yes, I could, but they've promised to pay me absolute gondolas of money. (*Back to the script:*) In each, a man of the world meets with an unexpected visitor. The results are, in order of appearance, ironic, tragic and romantic. At least that is my hope.

He bows his head, returns to his chair and puts a "button" on his last phrase by sitting down, smiling beatifically at an unseen camera and murmuring:

Enjoy the goddamn— (*to himself:*)—must watch this language— (*back to unseen audience:*)
Enjoy the film.

He then rewards himself by jumping up rather surprisingly well and wheeling a full drinks trolley from behind the wing chair.

As for me, this calls for a cocktail.

During the next bit he methodically mixes a cocktail. Occasionally he looks off to make sure no one approaches. He re-rehearses this bit, considering it thoughtfully.

From my somewhat exaggerated contributions to the Great War to my rather...to my rather...ah, yes!...to my *rather fraught personal trials*, I have endeavored to distill all my experiences to find universal truths. Damn right. To my universal truths!

He drinks.

And to *my* kind of writing.

He drinks again.

And to hell with William Fuck-all Faulkner.

Another sip.

"*Sound and Fury*" alright...signifying *nothing*... Stream of consciousness, my arse. Tell them a good story.

He suddenly falters. He looks about to weep. BASIL enters. SIMS pulls himself together.

BASIL

No need to hide the tears from me.

SIMS

I'm just feeling nostalgic for home.

BASIL

Which one?

SIMS

Home is always the cottage!

BASIL

Too bad you're never there.

SIMS

What, and pay the bloody British government 90 percent of what I make? After all I did for them.

BASIL

Well, the little island is a bit broke still.

SIMS

Oh, the war, the war! We won the war, didn't we?

BASIL

If you say so.

SIMS

Join me in a drink?

BASIL

Sims! You've been coming to California off and on since before talkies! Set your watch, for God's sake! It's only noon!

SIMS

I've been up for hours.

BASIL

Really working, or trying out various readings of this silly film intro?

SIMS

Both.

BASIL

Are you up to discussing the news of the day?

SIMS takes a sip from his drink.

SIMS

Barely. Start slowly.

BASIL

Well, I could start with the bad news.

SIMS

Always start with the bad news, you know that.

BASIL

Yes I do. Edna St. Vincent Millay is dead.

*A slight moment where it looks as if
SIMS is affected emotionally by the news*

SIMS

How old?

BASIL

Fifty-eight.

Another slight moment.

SIMS

How?

BASIL

Rather grimly, actually. She fell down the stairs.

SIMS recovers brightly.

SIMS

Ah.

BASIL

It may have been a heart attack that sent her pitching forward.

SIMS is less bright. A pause.

SIMS

I remember that every time Tallulah Bankhead heard the name “Edna St. Vincent Millay,” she would then say, in rhythm, “Boom, BOOM!” Try it.

BASIL

Try what?

SIMS

(Emphasizing the meter of her name:) Say “EDna St. VINcent MillAY.”

BASIL

“EDna St. VINcent MillAY.”

SIMS

Boom BOOM!

He waits for BASIL to laugh. BASIL does not.

BASIL

Ah. Speaking of Tallulah, she’s in town to do a radio show and wants to throw you a party.

SIMS

Fine.

BASIL

She’ll want to invite everyone from her heyday in London.

SIMS

If she can dig them up, I’ll be happy to see them.

BASIL

I want you to acknowledge my tact in referring the 20s as *her* heyday.

SIMS

Move along. Any more bad news?

BASIL

No, we can move on to the merely banal.

SIMS

Oh, let's not. Let's skip it till after lunch. Then we can begin *in medias res*.

BASIL

Have you prepared yourself for Claire?

SIMS

What do you mean, prepared myself?

BASIL

(He hesitates, as if about to say something and thinks better of it.) With her latest film over, she'll be in need of a role to play while she's between engagements. As such, when she crosses our threshold, she will immediately resume playing the role of gracious wife and occasional Oscar-winning actress. In turn, she'll expect you to enact your part: devoted husband of an international treasure. And an occasional scribbler in his own right.

SIMS

That's rather funny, Basil.

BASIL

I'm so glad you're amused.

SIMS

I've missed Claire. There is something about a woman in the house that puts things in order.

BASIL

Yes.

SIMS

Oh, I didn't mean that you're not the master of order around here. Look how you take care of things. I wouldn't have known about poor Edna Millay if it weren't for you.

BASIL

You could pick up a newspaper.

SIMS

I'm already an ink-stained wretch from putting my own thoughts to paper. Why should I add to the smut on my fingers when I have you?

BASIL

Speaking of smut, where is the dear little chap?

SIMS

Stop.

BASIL

Sorry, where is little Conrad?

SIMS

Little Conrad's name is actually Clay, as you very well know. He seems to be out for a swim.

BASIL

To bathe his own stained fingers?

SIMS

Don't be disgusting.

BASIL

May I expect *Clay* to join us for lunch?

SIMS

Clay may have other engagements.

BASIL

Good. He might return with a little pocket money of his own for a change, instead of putting out his tan and manly hand—palms up—in your direction.

SIMS

I meant that Clay may have an audition or interview somewhere.

BASIL

Really?

SIMS

God knows he's got the looks.

BASIL

Mmm.

SIMS

You were once a breathtakingly handsome boy with no visible means of support, too, as I recall.

BASIL

And along came you. Perhaps I should have your towels monogrammed “VMS” for Visible Means of Support.

SIMS

Anything further?

BASIL

Yes. Your absurdly good-looking “technical advisor” is due in an hour. Your absurdly good-natured producer in a mere twenty minutes. I couldn’t space them out any further than that. Something about a baptism for one and a script meeting for the other, I think. Since you’ve drunk breakfast, may I suggest that you ingest something solid for lunch?

SIMS

That would be divine.

BASIL

Does Mr. Grant keep, as they say, kosher?

SIMS

Mr. Grant is Jewish?

BASIL

Less Jew. More “ish.”

SIMS

(Flaring:) The Jews are still God’s Chosen!

BASIL

(Reacting to Sims’s sudden passion:) Where in the world did that come from?

SIMS

I have great regard for Mr. Grant and his people.

BASIL

Producers?

SIMS

Don’t be disrespectful.

BASIL

(Flaring himself now:) And don't order me about as if I'm some hired toady!

They both take a moment.

SIMS

Will Claire be here in time for lunch?

BASIL

I haven't the vaguest idea. And for all I know, she's found some new diet out in the desert and will want nothing but cactus paddles or sagebrush or some such.

SIMS

So that everyone is accommodated, let's have a simple chef's salad. No ham. Perhaps a cold soup.

BASIL

Fine.

BASIL starts to leave.