

Closer

A short play

By Lisa M. Konoplisky

Lisa M. Konoplisky
330 N Hillside Terrace
608-712-5609
lkonoplisky@mac.com
<https://newplayexchange.org/users/15107/lisa-konoplisky>

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PLACE/TIME

The hallway of high-rise office in Midtown, just past 11 p.m. on a Monday night. The building is empty and very still, making everything feel especially tender and intense.

CHARACTERS

MOP - A JANITOR, male, any race or age

SUIT - A TRADER, male, any race or age

PRODUCTION NOTE: In addition to dialogue, much of what happens between these two characters is expressed in their physical “conversation”, including small and subtle shifts in how and where they stand, breathe and move with respect to one another. This is a delicate dance.

*At rise **MOP** is in the hallway pushing a long-handled shaggy industrial mop back and forth. His efforts are precise, not at all sloppy or uncaring. He works with deliberate purpose. And, despite that, there is a piece of him that exists apart from what he is doing. Something private that he does not quickly or easily give up.*

***SUIT** enters, his tie loosened, carrying a briefcase and a gym bag slung over his shoulder. When he first comes into the hall he doesn't notice **MOP**. When he does see **MOP**, he stops short and watches him for a moment. **SUIT** gives a glance up and down the hall, ensuring they're alone, and then carefully approaches **MOP**.*

MOP

(Without looking up)

Careful where you step--

SUIT

(Where to put his feet?)

Should I--?

MOP

I don't want to have to clean it. Again.

SUIT

...

MOP

...

SUIT

Good to see you--

MOP
*(MOP doesn't respond, keeps his head
down)*

...

No one's around.

SUIT

No one?

MOP

Besides us.

SUIT

Us?

MOP

You and me.

SUIT

Just us.

MOP

Look-

SUIT
(Beat)

What?

MOP

...

SUIT
*(Whatever SUIT was going to say fails
him)*

MOP stops, looks simply and plainly at SUIT.

SUIT stands, does nothing.

*MOP takes a still, deep breath, returns to
mopping.*

MOP

I've got work to do. You're done for the day. I get that. You're going home to...

(beat)

I'd like to get out of here some time before midnight is all.

SUIT

Why don't I stay?

MOP

I don't know. Why don't you?

SUIT

I mean, if you want me to stay--

MOP

Why you asking me?

SUIT

I'm asking if you want me to stay--

MOP

No, I mean, why are you asking ME? You don't need my permission. I'm just the help. You. You're the big deal.

SUIT

I'm no big deal. And you're not--

MOP

Am I supposed to be impressed?

SUIT

No. I said I'm not a big--

MOP

Impressed by your modesty I mean.

SUIT

Oh.

MOP

Yeah.

SUIT

I--I don't want you to think...
I'm not ignoring you.

Why would you? MOP

Exactly. SUIT

Exactly. MOP

It's just--I didn't mean-- SUIT

MOP
(Making eye contact, almost a challenge. Almost.)

For it to happen? SUIT

I- MOP
 Because I did. Mean for it to happen. Knew exactly what I wanted. And I did it.
(Beat)

I can't say what you meant. SUIT

I-- MOP
(Shift. A defensiveness rising)

You don't have to be a dick about it. SUIT

Ahhhh. MOP

What?? SUIT

MOP
 That's how you get things done. When you don't get what you want.

SUIT
(Moving towards MOP)

I--

MOP

(With great authority, indicating the wet floor)

Don't step there!

SUIT

(Reflexively apologetic)

Oh. Sorry.

MOP

(Less harsh)

Just. Mind yourself.

SUIT

Look--

MOP

You keep saying that, "Look-", "Look-". Like there's something I'm not seeing. I'm pretty good at seeing what's in front of me.

(Beat. Another challenge)

So why don't you just get out of here?

SUIT

(Beat)

Fine.

(SUIT starts to leave. MOP chuckles to himself. SUIT hears, turns back)

What? What are you laughing at?

MOP

You sound like a pissy little brat.

(Imitating SUIT)

"Fine."

SUIT

Ok. You tell me what to say and I'll say it. How's that? That make you happy?

MOP

You give a shit whether I'm happy?

SUIT

...

SUIT lays down his bags. A breath. He leans against the wall and watches *MOP* do his work for a few extended beats. A temporary truce.

What do they call you?
MOP

Whaddya mean?
SUIT

MOP
Around here. I listen. That's the great part about being invisible. You hear everything. The shit I could tell you. You have these names for each other. Like frat boys or cub scouts or something stupid and kinda gay. But not gay, ya know? You don't have the balls for that, do you?

SUIT
So it takes balls to be queer? That what you're telling me. That's rich. Coming from you.

MOP
I don't mean...
(Makes a vaguely obscene gesture to indicate fucking)

I mean telling the truth. About who you are. Those balls. 'Member them?

SUIT
...

MOP
So what do they call you?

SUIT
(Beat. A touch of sheepishness)
The closer.

MOP
The closer.

SUIT
Yeah.

MOP
You get things done.

Make the sale. SUIT

Close the deal. MOP

Yeah. SUIT

Win the game. Don't give up. Otherwise, how you gonna get what you want? MOP

Right. SUIT
(Beat)

They'd be lost without you, huh? MOP

If it wasn't me, it would be someone else. I'm a placeholder. Just a warm body with the right... SUIT
(A quick bitter laugh)

Pedigree? MOP

Yeah. SUIT
(Beat)

You sound like a show dog. MOP
(SUIT is about to respond. Again, MOP indicates the wet floor and directs SUIT to step aside)

Step. *(Pointing)*

That way. SUIT
(SUIT steps aside, then a beat, and then he moves back, closer this time)

You know, you could do something--

MOP

Nah. I'm more of a mutt fella thanks very much.

SUIT

Not with dogs for chrissake. I mean you don't have to do--

(Referring to the floor)

-this.

MOP

Actually I do. I don't need any shit from Dave about slacking. That guy's a boil on my ass.

SUIT

Forget about the goddamn floor!--

MOP

Easy for you to say, you've never had Dave climb up your boil-covered ass--

SUIT

I mean--you could be--there are other things you could do. I could help--

MOP

I don't want help.

SUIT

Everyone gets help.

MOP

Everyone?

SUIT

And that's something I can do. I can help.

MOP

Can you?

SUIT

Absolutely.

(Beat)

Come on!

MOP

What makes you think I'm not doing what I want to be doing?

SUIT

Nothing. It's just. This

(Gesturing vaguely)

--can't be...

MOP

I don't expect it to be. That's the trick. I don't expect it to be anything more than it is. And whatever it is, I know it. I see it. That's the difference between you and me.

SUIT

That's the difference.

MOP

Among other things.

Suit

And what the fuck does that mean?

SUIT

Look. I'm not saying there is anything wrong--there's just so much--

MOP

I don't need someone to be proud of me. This isn't little league. I'm all growed up.

SUIT

...

MOP

Anyway, I hate sports.

SUIT

So do I.

MOP

(Pointing to the gym bag)

Then what's with that?

SUIT

That's not sports. That's working out. You gotta do that.

MOP

Why?

SUIT

I can't have clients thinking I'm some kind of slob.

MOP

...

SUIT

...

MOP

Whadda you do?

SUIT

(?)

...

MOP

At the gym. Whadda you *do*?

SUIT

Cardio mostly. Treadmill.

MOP

That's stupid.

SUIT

(*Slightly taken aback*)

How's that?

MOP

Those machines. They're stupid.

SUIT

If you saw my resting heart rate you wouldn't think--

MOP

(*Interrupting*)

I don't give a damn about your resting heart rate.

SUIT

Well what do you care about?

MOP

...

SUIT

...

MOP

You know what a treadmill was built for?

SUIT

("Duh?")

Working out.

MOP

For prisoners. They were built for prisoners. They'd spend 8-10 hours a day--use them to crush grain, power mills. They used them to break men.

SUIT

Yeah, well, they never met my trainer, cuz he--

MOP

(Not interested in jokes)

You wanna know what I care about? I care about what a man can do. And I don't mean all this--

(Gesturing vaguely to the office space)

--bullshit. I mean, what are you going to do? That's what a man is. What are you gonna do?

SUIT

What about a woman, huh? What's a woman?

MOP

Being clever isn't the same thing as being smart. You know that, right?

(SUIT continues mopping. One beat.

Then another: SUIT steps, tentatively towards MOP. MOP does not look up.)

Watch where you step.

SUIT ignores him, stepping onto the wet floor, closing some of the gap with MOP. Several beats. They meet each others eyes.

SUIT

Well where do you want me to go?

Several beats follow

MOP

Where do you--?/

/want to--/
SUIT

I was inside you.
MOP
(Beat)

I know.
SUIT

...
MOP

So where do you want me to go?
SUIT

Depends.
MOP

On what?
SUIT

On what do you wanna do.
MOP

Closer. I want to come closer.
SUIT

SUIT takes a final step closer to MOP. They are almost touching. MOP steps back. SUIT stands his ground. SUIT steps, again, closer. They are close. Close enough to kiss. Everything that did, could or will happen lives in that one, still moment.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY