

SNIFF

By Jules Tasca

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CAST: one male

SETTING: The game room of the Morrisville State Psychiatric Hospital. Some games and a few chairs and card tables suggest the setting. After a beat, RAYMOND COFFIN enters.

For contest purposes, this monologue may be done without the use of props.

(A middle-aged man sits and stares out at the audience. After a beat, RAYMOND COFFIN enters. RAYMOND sees the other man. HE looks at him. Pauses.)

RAYMOND

Hello...Hello...I'm Raymond. It's nice...it's nice...they have a game room like this, isn't it? It's a...a nice accommodation. **(pause)** I'm...Raymond Coffin...I'm Raymond...

(RAYMOND walks around and stops at a table on which is a checkerboard.)

Say, how about a game? How about a game of checkers? What do you say? **(pause)** You don't? You wouldn't like to play? Even one game? This is a game room. This is the hospital game room and checkers is a game. And you're in the game room doing nothing. How about some checkers? **(pause)** Will you play? Oh, I know why you won't. You're trying to be courteous and not show it. But I know why you won't play. Yes, I do. You won't play because you can smell it. You can smell it, can't you? Oh, don't deny it. Just don't deny it. Even though I just had a hot shower – a long hot shower – and I put on an unscented deodorant and baby powder – and I didn't rush down the

stairs, and took the elevator, so I wouldn't sweat...I stink...I stink anyway, don't I?

(RAYMOND sniffs his armpits.)

You smell it? Of course you do. I'm sorry. This is not something I can control. I told the doctor this. I can't stop it.

It started...it started with my wife. She began sleeping in the guest room. I couldn't figure out why, after thirty-two years, she took to the guest room. Oh, I called her on it. Oh, yes, I did. And she blamed the whole thing on herself. Menopause. Menopause, she said. Hot flashes and sweats. And the woman wouldn't come near me for intimacy. We used to fight over it. It was about that time when I started to smell it – smell me. She couldn't admit it, but the reason she took the guest room, my friend, is that she couldn't bear the smell that oozed outta me. But I could detect it. Oh, I know, it's a horrible smell. When I took off my shirt or my pants or my shoes there was a stifling odor. Then...then...I began to notice that my daughter didn't come to visit as often as she did. Or she'd come during the day to see my wife when I wasn't home. I noticed that when she did come in the evening, she'd give me a quick kiss and not the usual longer hug...and the grandchildren...the grandkids didn't want me to hold them anymore. My daughter said it was because they weren't babies anymore, and they didn't like sitting on anyone's lap. But I know it's this stink on me, coming from me, that made them back off...Oh, don't even ask, my friend, of course, I went to my doctor. Then to a specialist. A dermatologist. Yes, I did. The specialist told me the same thing as my family doctor: he told me I had no odor. Do you believe it? Do you? You, who stand there in my reeking presence? Huh? Do you believe this dermatologist told me I had no unusual body odor? What? You're leaving? Oh, go ahead, go. I know...I know I've made your nose a sinkhole.

(RAYMOND sniffs his armpits and his hands. Then HE unbuttons his trousers and pulls them down a bit as if to air them out.)

Whew...it comes from all over my body.

(HE pulls his trousers back up.)

My condition is so bad the dermatologist lied to me. Oh yeah, he lied. I could smell the bad smell...of myself...right in his office. He had no cure for it, so he told me I had no particular odor. That's when I knew it was real serious. You understand me? At meetings, at work, I'd make suggestions and people would hardly glance at me or consider what I said. Can't blame 'em, I guess...who's gonna consider a suggestion from a man who stinks? I'm sure that after meetings, they got together and had a lot to say about me, about the smell. Young turks now, all of them. But not one of them had the guts to say anything to me about the odor because I'm older. Not one...then...then I lost my secretary. Oh, I know why. She couldn't breath deep around me. The smell. After all those years of having my own secretary, I had to use the secretarial pool. Like a rookie. Don't even wonder – yes, I went to other dermatologists. You bet. A whole yellow page full of 'em. They all said the same thing, because they have no cure for such a condition as mine. "You have no unusual body odor, Mr. Coffin," they said. What can a doctor do when a man's giving off the smell of rotten meat and that doctor can't stop it? Nothing...I changed my diet. I took vitamins. Ginseng root. Herbs. I drank only pure Cranberry juice. I slept with potpourri spread all over the bed. I prayed to Almighty God. Yes, I did. I swear I did. I prayed, oh, Jesus, how I prayed.

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