

SUPERB OWL

A comedy in one act
by
Bradley Hayward

PREVIEW ONLY!

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SYNOPSIS

When Ethan's life hits fourth and long, a wise owl emerges from his sofa to coach him through the ultimate halftime adjustment. Amidst a sea of cheese puffs and broken dreams, the owl delivers the talons Ethan needs to reclaim his ambition and save his crumbling relationship. It's a surreal comedy about flipping the field, finding your soul, and realizing that life's biggest plays happen off the gridiron.

CHARACTERS

(1m, 1 either)

ETHAN: (30s, m) A loser. Dishevelled and out of shape. Wears an extra large football jersey.

SUPERB OWL: (m/f) A puppet. Majestic, yet dusty. He has oversized eyes and a miniature velvet cape.

SETTING

A messy apartment, with dirty laundry scattered everywhere. A flickering TV illuminates a sagging sofa. There's a fortress of empty beer cans and a bowl of cheese puffs on a large ottoman.

RUNNING TIME

10 minutes.

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(The lights rise.)

(ETHAN sits on a sagging sofa, with the muffled sound of a Super Bowl broadcast in the background. He reaches into a bowl of cheese puffs. He sighs.)

ETHAN: (To the TV) Yeah, okay. Even the dog has a job. Great.

(Suddenly, a melodic hoot echoes from behind the couch. ETHAN freezes. He looks left. Then right. Behind his head, two feathery tufts slowly rise from behind the couch. The unblinking face of SUPERB OWL, an owl puppet, appears over the back cushion.)

SUPERB OWL: You're eating the orange ones again, Ethan. The yellow dye six is beginning to settle in your soul. It's unsightly.

(ETHAN screams and tumbles off the couch, landing in a pile of laundry.)

ETHAN: What the...! Who...? Why is there a Muppet in my house?!

SUPERB OWL: (Offended) I'm no Muppet, you two footed disappointment. I'm the Superb Owl. You summoned me with your lack of ambition. The universe hates a void. And boy, are you a void.

ETHAN: I didn't summon anything! I'm just watching the game!

SUPERB OWL: Are you? You haven't looked at the score in twenty minutes. You've been staring at that smudge on the ottoman, wondering if Jessica is going to text you back before or after she changes her relationship status to "It's Blissfully Over."

(ETHAN stands up slowly, clutching a throw pillow like a shield.)

ETHAN: How do you know about Jessica?

SUPERB OWL: I see all. I have binocular vision. Also, she's currently outside your door. She's been standing there for three minutes, practising the phrase "It's not you, it's your complete lack of a personality."

ETHAN: (Panic rising) Wait, what? She's here? Now? During the halftime show?!

(SUPERB OWL hops onto the back of the couch, furiously flapping its wings.)

SUPERB OWL: The halftime show of your life is over. You're deep in the fourth quarter. You're down by thirty, you have no timeouts, and your star quarterback is currently crying in the locker room.

ETHAN: Look, Mr. Owl, Bird, Thing. I'm just in a rut, okay? It's the economy. It's the the climate. It's the world.

SUPERB OWL: It's pathetic.

ETHAN: I was the small town hero, making it in the city! I was going to be a documentary filmmaker!

SUPERB OWL: And instead, you've documented every flavour of Pringle.

ETHAN: Do you really think she's going to break up with me?

SUPERB OWL: Affirmative.

ETHAN: I should have known when she packed up her drawer in the bathroom.

SUPERB OWL: And right now, she's wearing her important jeans. The ones that mean business.

ETHAN: (Terrified) She only wears those to the Starbucks that never gets her order right.

SUPERB OWL: And now, a break up.

ETHAN: It wasn't always just about the Pringles and the couch, you know. I used to care. Like, really care.

SUPERB OWL: Oh, here we go. The "I was a contender" speech. Fetch me a mouse, this is going to be long.

ETHAN: No, listen. I left home to make it in the city. And I did, for a while. I loved the camera because it was the only thing that made the world stop moving so fast. Everything is a mess, right? People yelling, bills, the climate, the sheer noise of existing. But through a 50mm lens? The world is just a frame. You get to decide what's important. You get to focus on one single thing and blur out all the garbage in the background.

SUPERB OWL: (Softens) A curated reality. A bit cowardly, but poetic.

ETHAN: It wasn't cowardly. It was how I found her. I was filming that protest downtown. The one about the historic night club they wanted to turn into a condo. It was chaotic. Cops, megaphones, a blizzard. Everyone was blurry. And then, I adjusted the focus ring. Just a quarter turn to the left.

(He turns to the left and stares at the TV screen, as if he's seeing the footage.)

And there she was. So beautiful. She was holding a sign that was melting in the snow, and she was laughing. Not a polite laugh, but a messy, "I don't care who's watching" laugh. She was the only thing in focus in the entire city. I spent three hours filming her without even knowing her name. I wasn't being a creep. I was captured. When I finally talked to her, I told her she was cinematic. She thought I was a dork.

SUPERB OWL: She wasn't wrong.

ETHAN: But she loved that I saw the world that way. She loved that I looked for the light. And then, I don't know. The battery died. I stopped looking for the frame. I let the background noise take over until everything was one big out of focus smudge.

SUPERB OWL: (A beat) That was almost poignant. You're still a loser, but you're a loser with

a back story. That's a dangerous combination.

ETHAN: I lost the ability to focus. And if I can't find the frame again, I'm going to lose the only thing that ever looked good through the lens.

SUPERB OWL: Then stop staring at the static. The lens is dusty, but the glass isn't broken. Not yet. Look at that door.

(ETHAN looks at the audience, toward an unseen door, downstage center.)

She's about to walk into the shot. Are you going to be the director, or are you going to let the screen go black?

ETHAN: (A whisper) Focus, Ethan. Focus.

SUPERB OWL: Roll camera, kid. Don't miss the take.

(There's a loud knock at the door. ETHAN jumps.)

ETHAN: That's her. Oh god. I'm wearing a jersey for a team that moved to Vegas years ago. I'm a mess.

SUPERB OWL: Listen to me, you featherless dunce. If you go to that door as couch Ethan, you're extinct. But if you go to that door as a man with final cut, or at least a man who hides the cheese puffs, you might survive.

ETHAN: What do I do? Give me some owl wisdom! Do I play hard to get? Do I tell her I have a new job?

SUPERB OWL: (Leans in close) Tell her the truth. But say it with the confidence of a bird of prey. Tell her you've realized that life isn't a game to be watched, but a mouse to be swooped upon and swallowed whole, bones and all.

ETHAN: That's a little dark.

SUPERB OWL: Nature is not for the weak of heart. But don't let her in just yet. You have some work to do. And if she sees a talking puppet, she'll skip the breakup and go straight to calling an asylum.

(The knocking continues, more insistently now. ETHAN looks toward the unseen door, then back at SUPERB OWL, who is now preening himself.)

ETHAN: I can't open that door. Look at this place! It's a dump!

SUPERB OWL: Then move, boy! The first law of the forest is camouflage. Currently, you're camouflaged as a failure. We must alter the environment.

(He points a wing toward the ottoman.)

The beer cans. Gather them. Not as trash, but as the discarded husks of your former self.

(ETHAN begins frantically shoving cans under the couch cushions. He's moving faster than he has in months.)

ETHAN: (Out of breath) Husks. Right. Discarded husks. What about the smell? It reeks of

pizza farts in here.

SUPERB OWL: Open a window. Let the cold air of reality bite your cheeks. And for the love of Athena, put on a shirt that doesn't have powdered cheese residue on the chest.

(ETHAN rips off his jersey, revealing a grey t-shirt underneath. He begins frantically spraying a bottle of air freshener on everything while kicking a pile of socks under the couch.)

Pick up the pace! If Jessica walks through that door right now, she isn't just calling a timeout, she's cutting you from the roster entirely.

ETHAN: Cutting me? We've been together for two years. I have tenure!

SUPERB OWL: Tenure is for people who actually wash their towels. To her, you're an under performing rookie who's been on the bench since the preseason. I've seen her phone. She's scouting.

ETHAN: (Stops) What do you mean, scouting?

SUPERB OWL: She's looking for a different kind of player. Small town heroes who made the big league! Men who have retirement accounts and don't think fine dining means a taco place with free nachos. Meanwhile, you're sitting here in the dirt, hoping for a miracle catch that isn't coming.

ETHAN: I'm a developmental prospect. I have high upside!

SUPERB OWL: You're a project that's been under construction since Janet's wardrobe malfunction. Look at you! Your motivation is sub zero and your only special skill is knowing exactly which delivery apps have the lowest service fees. If she puts you on the trade block tomorrow, she'd be lucky to get a used air fryer in return.

(Deflated, ETHAN sits on a pile of laundry.)

ETHAN: So what? I'm just a bust?

SUPERB OWL: Only if your main goal is simply not to lose. Jessica wants someone who takes the deep shot. Someone who actually leaves the house without being prompted by a fire alarm.

ETHAN: You mean, I should think about entering that film festival?

SUPERB OWL: I mean you need to show her you're worth the effort. Stop playing for the tie! If you want to stay in her life, you have to prove you're not just a bench warmer.

ETHAN: (Getting hyped) Yeah. I'm a franchise player! Number one draft pick!

SUPERB OWL: (Sighs) Let's just start with putting on some deodorant. You're currently projecting unwashed gym bag energy.

ETHAN: Good plan!

(He sprays some air freshener under his armpits.)

SUPERB OWL: Better. Now, mental hygiene. Calling yourself a loser? That's a lazy man's luxury. A loser has no responsibilities. A protagonist, however, has a character arc.

ETHAN: I don't feel like a protagonist. I feel like the guy who gets eaten in the first five minutes of a monster movie.

SUPERB OWL: Because you have no talons! Not physical ones, you'd look ridiculous, but mental ones. You mentioned a film festival. Where's your camera?

ETHAN: (Shamefully) In the ottoman. Under the Christmas lights. I haven't charged the battery in a year.

SUPERB OWL: The battery is a metaphor. Plug it in. Not later. Now! Action is the only antidote to rotting away!

(ETHAN lunges for the ottoman, opens it, and emerges with a movie camera tangled in Christmas lights. He looks slightly more upright.)

ETHAN: It's still charged! Look! The little red light is on!

SUPERB OWL: A spark in the dark. Now, the girl. Jessica doesn't want a filmmaker. She wants a man who is *filming*. She doesn't need a winner. She wants someone who is actually on the field and not in the nosebleeds.

ETHAN: (Straightens his hair) On the field. Right. I'm in the stadium. I'm the quarterback of, I dunno, something.

SUPERB OWL: Don't over metaphor it, you'll sprain a brain cell. Just stand tall. Chin up. Don't blink too much, it shows weakness. Look her in the eye and tell her the Super Bowl is just a distraction from the Superb Soul.

ETHAN: (Testing it out) The Superb Soul. That's actually kind of catchy. Or really cheesy.

SUPERB OWL: In this apartment, real cheese is an upgrade. And when you open that door, don't mention me. To the world, I'm a hallucination. To you, I'm the only thing keeping you from becoming a permanent fixture of the upholstery.

ETHAN: (Whispering) Wish me luck.

SUPERB OWL: Hoot.

(He slowly descends behind the couch as ETHAN approaches the door.)

ETHAN: (A panicked whisper) Wait! One more thing! What's the play? What's the final play?!

END OF PREVIEW

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