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## **Cast of Characters**

DIONYSUS: a young man in his twenties, dressed in a toga and Roman sandals

STEVE: an ordinary average guy in his late 30's

*A Greek Chorus:*

CHORUS 1: also plays ZEUS, BOSS, SUIT and DARREN STEVENS 2

CHORUS 2: also plays WIFE, LEADER, SECRETARY and INTERVIEWER

CHORUS 3: also plays COP, CLERK, CREATIVE TYPE, DARREN STEVENS 1 and STAGE MANAGER

## **Setting**

The play takes place in multiple locations, all of which are contained within Steve's imagination. No elaborate scenery is necessary. A unit set, or a bare stage works well.

## Acknowledgments

*The Temple of Dionysus* was first presented by Ground Zero Theater Company at the “Out of the Loop” Festival presented by Water Tower Theatre in Addison, Texas, on March 8th, 2002. The production was directed by Kimberlyn Crowe.

The cast in order of appearance was:

CHORUS 1 ..... Pat Watson  
CHORUS 2 ..... Jennifer Halteman  
CHORUS 3 ..... David Carter  
DIONYSUS.....Matthew Halteman  
STEVE .....Josh Hepola

*The Temple of Dionysus* was subsequently presented by Drury University in Springfield, Missouri, on April 15, 2004. The production was directed by Dr. Robin Schraft.

The cast in order of appearance was:

CHORUS 1 ..... Chuck Jones  
CHORUS 2 ..... Gretchen Casey  
CHORUS 3 .....Josh Thompson  
CHORUS 4 .....Charlie Runnels  
DIONYSUS.....Logan Williams  
STEVE .....Stephen Ehrlich

# THE TEMPLE OF DIONYSUS

by James Venhaus

## Scene 1

*(The lights come up on an empty stage. Enter the CHORUS dressed in robes and wearing masks. During this speech they speak in unison and dance.)*

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Two thousand years have passed since the armies of Persia, their eyes filled with bloodlust, killed Emperor Julian of Constantinople, the last of the great and honorable emperors of Rome to worship the gods of Olympus.

**CHORUS 2.** It was then that the Three Fates...

**CHORUS 1.** ...whose eyes can see beyond the fog of time...

**CHORUS 3.** ...told mighty Zeus that his reign had come to an end.

**CHORUS 1.** Forced to leave Olympus, Zeus, filled with the fire of anger, destroyed the palace with a mighty thunderbolt.

**CHORUS 3.** The fallen gods, once, powerful, spiteful and full of the passion of vengeance, sought a more peaceful life among the humble country people.

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Woe betide them...

**CHORUS 2.** ...even that would not be so. Missionaries of a new religion chased them out with the sign of the cross and turned their temples, once filled with the glory of their grace, into churches, which they divided among their mortal saints. The Olympians were forced to hide in the woods and caves, and have not been seen for centuries.

**CHORUS 1.** Zeus and the other Olympians waited for the reign of the new religion to come to an end. They desperately hoped that one day they would return to Olympus and reclaim their place in the hearts and minds of the people.

**CHORUS 3.** Yet, things are what they are and will be what they will be in spite of the will of the mighty and noble gods. Until now. This day. This very moment in time.

*(Enter DIONYSUS, dressed in what we expect a Greek god to be dressed in, a white toga and leather sandals, with a wreath in his hair.)*

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Dionysus...

**CHORUS 1.** ...the god of mystery whose very being defies explanation...

**CHORUS 2.** ...and who elicited wild ecstasy from his followers has had the desire to be worshiped again reborn within his immortal heart.

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Dionysus...

**CHORUS 3.** ...creator of wine and god of fertility, has sickened of the path that mortal man has taken and is ready to return to glory.

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Dionysus...

**DIONYSUS.** Enough already.

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* We speak what must be spoken.

**DIONYSUS.** You speak what must be boring. If I let you go on, you'll tell the whole story before I make my first entrance.

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Mighty are we that can see the future and whose tongues...

**DIONYSUS.** Unemployed are you who don't get off the damn stage.

*(Without hesitation, CHORUS 2 & 3 rush off stage and return with a throne. CHORUS 1 remains and removes his robe and mask to reveal a white toga and long white beard. He is ZEUS. He sits on the throne.)*

**DIONYSUS.** O mighty Zeus, whose power and wisdom know no bounds, hear my plea once more. It is time for our return. The world needs gods. And we, humbled by centuries of exile, need to feel the glory of Olympus. Immortality has become a curse. Our

days are filled with nothing and there is no hope for change. It really sucks!

**ZEUS.** Do not tempt the hand of mighty Zeus. You know it displeases me to hear you talk as the mortals talk. Son, no argument in spite of its logic, and no plea in spite of its passion can sway me. My contempt for mortal man knows no end.

**DIONYSUS.** Yeah, and how is that working out for you? Look, as you foretold, mortals have been plagued by war, famine, disease and low intelligence. Yet, they still reign over the earth and enjoy the wonders of life and love. Their stupidity has not weakened them, it has only made them more oblivious to our greatness. Your powers have become moot.

**ZEUS.** Do not dare to question the power of almighty Zeus. My thunderbolts can still wreak havoc on mortal lives.

**DIONYSUS.** There is no question that your power knows no bounds, mighty one. But mortals explain away your thunderbolts as random acts of “weather” or “fate.” Why do you not allow me to convert them back to the worship of Olympus?

**ZEUS.** Because they do not want the presence of mighty gods in their lives. To accept us as beings of power, they must also accept our wrath.

**DIONYSUS.** Father, in my time on Olympus, my followers knew no wrath from me. They feasted on the beauty of nature and drank the wine of life. This religion can flourish again.

**ZEUS.** With the rewards of the flesh, man must in turn serve you and worship you. Man believes he is above worship. You should know this. You have spent more time observing them than any of us.

**DIONYSUS.** Allow me to prove that man can and will worship us again. What harm can it do?

**ZEUS.** Their apathy is too strong and their minds are too weak to understand. You are wasting your time.

**DIONYSUS.** Wasting time? There is no such thing for an immortal. Allow me access to the world and I will bring your throne back to Olympus.

**ZEUS.** I grow tired of this argument. Convince one man to follow you, to worship and to serve you and you may do as you wish on earth.

**DIONYSUS.** And if I can not?

**ZEUS.** Then spend the rest of eternity here with us, without complaint.

**DIONYSUS.** Fair enough. But, only one man mighty one? Your challenge is far too easy. I can convince a weak man to follow me with little effort.

**ZEUS.** Not any man, but one of my choosing. *This man.*

*(ZEUS points to the opposite side of the stage, and a light comes up on STEVE who is standing in front of an imaginary mirror shaving. He is dressed in pajamas.)*

**DIONYSUS.** Who is he, mighty one?

**ZEUS.** He has occupied much of my time of late. He is the victim of my worst curse. He is without love, without direction and without hope. He has been stripped of everything that matters to his puny brain. He has clung strongly to his beliefs, but he has not been rewarded in the way that he wished. I want to see if he will stay true to his beliefs even when life deals him a cruel blow.

**DIONYSUS.** Father, I did not know that you toyed with the mortals so. It is good to see your vengeful nature again.

**ZEUS.** Everyone needs a hobby.

*(ZEUS snaps his fingers and STEVE cuts himself shaving.)*

**STEVE.** Ouch!

*(ZEUS and DIONYSUS enjoy a good laugh over this.)*

*(Blackout.)*

**Scene 2**

*(The CHORUS enters with robes and masks. They dance and chant as before.)*

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Lowly is the path walked by mortal man.

**CHORUS 3.** Wicked is his heart and empty is his brain. His suffering is petty, yet his heart fills with self pity and woe.

**CHORUS 2.** Struck down by Zeus' curse, and unaware of his future, this mortal man wanders aimlessly through the valley of his despair.

*(STEVE appears onstage and is surrounded by the CHORUS dressed in robes but without their masks. They appear to him as various people in his life. They dance and swirl around him, and begin chanting his name. One by one, they break away from the group and confront STEVE.)*

**CHORUS.** *(Together, chanting:)* Steve, Steve, Steve.

**WIFE.** Steve, we need to talk.

**BOSS.** Steve, do you have a sec?

**WIFE.** I'm sorry Steve, I never meant to hurt you. I wasn't looking for someone else, it just sort of happened. I didn't want you to find out this way.

**STEVE.** What way did you want me to find out?

**BOSS / WIFE.** *(Together:)* Steve...

**BOSS.** ...it's not that we don't like your work, it's just that...well, we need fresh faces, new ideas. I would, of course, be happy to write you a letter of recommendation.

**STEVE.** What would it say?

**BOSS / WIFE.** *(Together:)* Steve. It's just better this way.

**STEVE.** Better for you.

**WIFE.** I think I love him, Steve. I want a divorce.

**STEVE.** Fine.

**WIFE.** And the house.

**STEVE.** Fine. Take it. Take what you want, just go.

**BOSS.** Why should I go? This is my office. Steve, are you all right?

**STEVE.** I'm fine. I'm giddy.

**WIFE.** Steve, please don't be like this. I think it's better this way.

**STEVE.** Stop saying that.

**CLERK / WIFE.** *(Together:)* I'm sorry sir,

**CLERK.** ...your credit card has been declined. Do you have another way to pay?

**STEVE.** No, no I don't. I'm sorry I guess I have to put this stuff back. How much do I owe you?

**WIFE.** Owe me? Well I never thought of it that way, but now that you mention it, my lawyer will be in touch.

**STEVE.** You have a lawyer? How long has this been going on?

**WIFE.** Steve, I'd hoped you wouldn't react this way.

**STEVE.** How did you think I would react?

**BOSS / WIFE.** *(Together:)* Please...

**BOSS.** ...don't make a scene. I don't want to call security.

**STEVE.** Call them. I don't care.

**WIFE.** Call who?

**COP.** Sir, do you know how fast you were going.

**STEVE.** Not fast enough to get away from you.

**WIFE.** What did you say?

**STEVE.** Nothing. Maybe I should just go.

**COP.** Not so fast. I'm writing you a ticket.

**WIFE.** I should call my lawyer before we speak again. He said this might happen.

**STEVE.** *(Suddenly realizing:)* You've been screwing a lawyer?

**BOSS.** I'm calling security.

**STEVE.** Kiss my ass.

**COP.** That's it. We're going downtown.

**STEVE.** No. No. No. Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean you officer. I've been under a lot of stress lately.

**CLERK.** That's all well and good sir, but if you can't pay, I'm going to have to call my manager.

**STEVE.** No don't. I'll just go.

*(The CHORUS disperses, and DIONYSUS appears.)*

**DIONYSUS.** Hey, are you OK?

**STEVE.** Yeah, I'm fine. Just give me a drink

*(As if taking a cue from STEVE the CHORUS stands behind them, and mimes the actions of patrons at a bar.)*

**DIONYSUS.** What kind?

**STEVE.** I don't care.

**DIONYSUS.** Pardon me for being nosy, but you don't seem OK to me.

**STEVE.** The world has decided to take a giant dump all over me.

**DIONYSUS.** How bad could it be?

**STEVE.** My wife is screwing the lawyer she is using to divorce me, my boss fires me after 10 years with the agency, claiming that he wants "new ideas," I got a speeding ticket, and my credit card just got cut up by a kid whose voice is still changing.

**DIONYSUS.** Oh. *(Beat.)* I've seen worse.

**STEVE.** Screw you. *(Beat.)* Listen, I'm sorry. I'll have a beer.

**DIONYSUS.** *(Pouring him a beer:)* So what do you do? I mean, what did you do before...

**STEVE.** Advertising.

**DIONYSUS.** Really.

**STEVE.** Yeah. All I ever wanted was to be Darren Stevens. You know, the guy from Bewitched? All my life. Darren Stevens. He had the best deal going. Beautiful wife, nice house. Easy job. From 9 to 5 Monday through Friday, all he had to do is, play golf, go to lunch, go to the club with the boss, have drinks with the client, go home, have sex with his hot wife, and get paid a bunch of money for coming up with a few snappy slogans. Ad campaigns looked so easy in that world. And it was, for almost ten years. Then the slogans aren't so snappy, and none of the clients drink anymore, and no one ever goes to the club, and you wake up one morning and you're old. Well, not old, but older than you need to be. Too old for "hip." Too old for "trendy." Too old to work. For this business anyway. I did my job. I came up with some brilliant stuff. But, in this business it's not enough to be good. You have to be ruthless.

**DIONYSUS.** That's true in any business. I've been around for a long time. It's the same all over.

**STEVE.** (*Sarcastically:*) You don't say. I just don't think I've got it in me to do the kind of things that you have to do to be successful in this business.

**DIONYSUS.** It isn't about being successful anymore. You have to be ruthless to survive. A long time ago, I invented this new drink and it really caught on. Everybody was into this drink. Buying it by the bucketful. I even took the recipe around to different places and taught people how to make it. For years my name was synonymous with this drink. But, I moved on to other endeavors, and after enough time passed, other people took credit for it, and by then it was too late. I wasn't aggressive enough to keep what was mine and I lost it. Since then I don't take any shit from anyone. And that's what you need to do.

**STEVE.** That's easier said than done. What drink did you invent? Would I know it?

**DIONYSUS.** Wine.

**STEVE.** What do you mean, like wine coolers?

**DIONYSUS.** No. Wine itself. I invented wine.

**STEVE.** Yeah. OK. Whatever.

**DIONYSUS.** See, that's what I mean. I don't get credit for anything. It really chaps my ass. Listen, maybe we can help each other out. I've got a project that I need an ad man for, and you need a job.

**STEVE.** You mean work for a bartender?

**DIONYSUS.** I'm not a bartender. And you are not in a bar.

*(STEVE looks around at the empty stage and seems to realize, on some level, that things are not as they appear. The CHORUS swirls around him as the lights go out.)*

*(Blackout.)*

### Scene 3

*(The CHORUS enters with robes and masks. They dance and chant as before.)*

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Dionysus...

**CHORUS 2.** ...the most clever of the gods of Olympus, continues to gather a group of mortals to bring him back to glory.

**CHORUS 1.** Determined leaders, creative types, and the biggest corporate suits available...

**CHORUS.** ...assemble to build the ground work of Dionysus' master plan.

*(DIONYSUS enters followed by STEVE who is carrying a briefcase.)*

**DIONYSUS.** Steve, I'm so glad you're here. Thanks for coming.

**STEVE.** I'm thankful for the work. So what is this about anyway?

**DIONYSUS.** Like I told you, we are building a new world religion.

**STEVE.** That is a great gimmick to sell stuff with, but...

**DIONYSUS.** We are not selling anything.

**STEVE.** That is the part that confuses me. What do you need me for?

**DIONYSUS.** Trust me. I need you.

**STEVE.** OK, but, I have some questions. First, let me see if I understand this: we are developing an advertising strategy for a religion based on the ancient Greek myth of Dionysus.

**DIONYSUS.** I am not a myth.

**STEVE.** Um, OK. Whatever. Anyway, if I remember correctly, Dionysus was known for wild drunken followers who paraded around naked in the woods and went mad with ecstasy.

**DIONYSUS.** That has been completely overblown throughout history. Sure, we liked to party, but...

**STEVE.** So how is a “party culture” a religion? Shouldn’t you believe in something?

**DIONYSUS.** What do you believe in Steve?

**STEVE.** What does that have to do with anything?

**DIONYSUS.** Just tell me. I mean, do you believe in the whole “one God” thing that seems to be so popular these days?

**STEVE.** Sure I do. I mean I thought I did, until recently. I *do* believe, but I’m not sure why certain things are allowed to happen...

**DIONYSUS.** See, that is why people need me. I have something to offer people. Not some mystical figurehead god who never talks to you or does anything, but an active god who is present in the lives of his followers. My followers give me loyal service, and I give them something in return. No vague afterlife promises, but tangible stuff you can use in the here and now. I need a man who can help me make an entire world see that my way is better.

**STEVE.** You mean turn my back on God and sell an idea that promotes wanton sex and irresponsible drinking?

**DIONYSUS.** Hey, that’s advertising.

**STEVE.** I don’t think I can turn my back on the Lord.

**DIONYSUS.** Oh, it’s “the Lord” now. Ooh, I’m so impressed. Look, hasn’t he turned his back on you? Plus, I’m paying you a lot of money.

**STEVE.** I don't know.

**DIONYSUS.** Well, at least meet with the team, and see how it goes.

**STEVE.** The team?

**DIONYSUS.** They are waiting for us.

*(The CHORUS enters with chairs and assembles a makeshift conference table. CHORUS 1 is dressed in a suit. CHORUS 2 is dressed in a stylized version of the female "power suit" and CHORUS 3 enters with fake goatee and ponytail, dressed in jeans and a tie-dyed T-shirt.)*

**LEADER.** All right, let's get started. We have a religion to build.

**DIONYSUS.** Before we get started, let me introduce Steve. He will be helping us.

**CHORUS.** *(Together, adlib:)* Hi Steve. Welcome aboard, etc...

**STEVE.** Thanks. It's good to be here.

**LEADER.** First, let's talk strategy.

**SUIT.** Let's not reinvent the wheel here. This has been done before. Two thousand years ago, a religion was built that is still around today. We would be smart to learn from their success and failures. Specifically, American Christianity is the best example of religious marketing in history. No other world religion uses billboards, TV shows, magazine ads. Hell, they even got their ad materials placed in every hotel room in America. That's genius. Pure marketing genius.

**LEADER.** So how can we use that?

**SUIT.** Well, our research shows that although the most popular religion in the country now has very few people who actually practice it, it has name recognition in the public that is close to one hundred percent.

**DIONYSUS.** One hundred percent?

**SUIT.** Yes, when we sampled a group of 500 people at a mall last week, 498 knew the name "Jesus" and only 47 knew the name "Dionysus."

**DIONYSUS.** Ouch.

**SUIT.** We have to get your name and your image out before the public.

**STEVE.** Greek gods aren't exactly in the public mind much these days.

**SUIT.** Well, 450 of the 500 surveyed knew the name "Hercules."

**DIONYSUS.** That bastard. Now, this Jesus guy, what kind of advertising does he do?

**SUIT.** The man himself? Well, none really. He is sort of a cultural icon.

**DIONYSUS.** That's what I'm shooting for. Cultural Icon status. That's what I want.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Well, sir. We have a lot of work to do to get there. In fact, we may have better luck if we change your name.

**DIONYSUS.** No way. I tried that already. I changed my name to Bacchus back when the Romans took over. I thought it sounded more "hip" and "with it." You know what they say, "when in Rome..."

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Well I was thinking about something more...modern, like Blake or Chase or Cameron.

**DIONYSUS.** No thanks.

**LEADER.** Hold on. I think Dionysus will work. It has a classical coolness that people will want to emulate. In a few years, people could start naming their kids Dionysus.

**SUIT.** Hey, can we copyright a baby name?

**STEVE.** I don't think so.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Plus, it's harder to pronounce than Jesus. So fewer people will take your name in vain. I mean, when you hit your thumb with a hammer you are not very likely to yell "Dionysus."

**SUIT / LEADER.** Good point. Well said. (*Ad lib, etc.*)

**LEADER.** Well then it's settled. Dionysus it is.

**DIONYSUS.** Steve, what do you think so far?

**STEVE.** Well, from a marketing standpoint, it all sounds good, but I'm not sure you will ever be able to convince people...

**LEADER.** He's right. Image. It's all about image. You need a major makeover. Show him what we have so far.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Based on what your religion has to offer, our market research indicates that you have a large pre-existing customer base. For example, practicing alcoholics, actors, and most college fraternities are technically already worshiping you based on the lifestyle choices they have made. They just don't have your brand-identity to cling to.

**LEADER.** Not yet, anyway.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Right. People are already buying what you are selling. They just don't know they are buying it from you.

**DIONYSUS.** So what do we do next?

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Total image overhaul. The only images of you we could find were ancient paintings, reliefs and statues found in museums. These images just won't work, from a marketing standpoint.

*(CHORUS 3 reveals some poster-sized images of DIONYSUS taken from ancient paintings that he places on an easel.)*

**DIONYSUS.** I hate that picture. I look so fat.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Exactly! Nobody worships the overweight. Now, we've done some mockups of the kind of image of you that we want out there in the marketplace.

*(He reveals some poster-sized photographic images of DIONYSUS holding a glass of wine and surrounded by bikini-clad Maenads, much like a magazine beer ad. A slogan underneath the picture says, "The Temple of Dionysus... The Religion that ROCKS!")*

**DIONYSUS.** That's what I'm talkin' about.

**LEADER.** What we need now is a marketing plan that can get this name and this image into the minds of the people.

**DIONYSUS.** Steve, what do you say?

**STEVE.** Well, it sounds pretty interesting. I mean, nothing like this has ever been done before. If you've got the cash to back it up... It can be done.

**DIONYSUS.** The question is: do you want to be the man to do it?

*(The CHORUS rises from their chairs and are no longer ad execs, but they are back in CHORUS mode, swirling around STEVE.)*

**CHORUS 1.** How many opportunities have to pass you by before you wake up?

**CHORUS 2.** How long can you ignore her before she leaves?

**CHORUS 3.** How many times does this have to happen to you?

**CHORUS 1.** How many chances do you get to start over?

**CHORUS 3.** How many...

**CHORUS 2.** How long...

**CHORUS 1.** ...Chances...

**CHORUS 3.** ...Opportunity...

**CHORUS 2.** Wake up.

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Wake up Steve!

**STEVE.** All right. *(Reaches out to shake DIONYSUS' hand.)* I'm your man.

*(The CHORUS returns to their seats and resumes their ad exec characters.)*

**DIONYSUS.** Great. Wait till I tell my dad.

**STEVE.** What?

**DIONYSUS.** Never mind. So Steve, what do we do next?

**STEVE.** Well, we are going to have to develop a long-term marketing plan based on some previous religious models. I guess we

can start by having a high-profile website. Then we can publish your manifesto and religious creed in all of the appropriate religious journals.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** (*Writing this down:*) Rolling Stone, Spin, High Times, Low Rider, GQ, Cosmo and the Wall Street Journal.

**STEVE.** Then the morning talk-show circuit, and if that goes well, the late-night talk shows.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** This whole thing is *so* Conan O'Brien.

**STEVE.** (*Picking up steam:*) And then in about six months, we will have our first "religious festival." Probably at Woodstock. Bands, beer, boobs. The whole hippie thing. That will allow us to step back and see how loyal your followers are. If they are willing to travel to a three-day festival in upstate New York, then we know they are in it for the long haul.

**LEADER.** A good turnout should land us on Larry King, and possibly Nightline.

**STEVE.** You are onto something with this cultural icon idea. Once we get a loyal fan base...

**DIONYSUS.** Religious followers

**STEVE.** Whatever. We can start to establish a network of affiliates across the country who organize their own festivals, erect their own temples, and the thing starts to have a life of its own.

**LEADER.** I like it, I like it, I like it.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** Go man, go.

**STEVE.** At that point, you can take it easy. Make a few public appearances at the big festivals, and just sit back and watch the flock grow.

**DIONYSUS.** You know, that's exactly what this Jesus guy did. Made a big splash two thousand years ago, and he has been coasting ever since.

**SUIT.** Brilliant!

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**STEVE.** In the first few months we can expect a nice market buzz, and within year one, you will have a cult-like popularity status, and within three years, you should be bigger than some of the modern religious icons like Amway, The Beatles, and Bill Gates.

**DIONYSUS.** But, I've had all that before. The Olympians used to be *the* world religion. And then one day it was gone. How do I establish a firm foothold in the consciousness of the people, so that we don't have to rebuild it again in another thousand years?

**STEVE.** Two words:

**STEVE / CHORUS.** Corporate Sponsorships.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** We get Budweiser or Coors to sponsor the first few festivals, and maybe Trojan Condoms to sponsor your first personal appearance tour, and we go from there.

**STEVE.** You see, instead of random stone temples or weak little non-profit churches, we establish a series of franchised temples that adhere to a corporate standard. Like Bennigan's or Chili's.

**CREATIVE TYPE.** (*Getting an idea:*) The Dionysus Temple and Grill.

**STEVE.** Oh. I've got the slogan: "You sacrifice it. We grill it."

**DIONYSUS.** Ooh, nice. I like that.

*(The CHORUS dissipates taking the table and chairs with them.)*

**STEVE.** This is exactly what I needed.

**DIONYSUS.** I knew you could do it. In fact, I was betting on it.

*(Blackout.)*

**Scene 4**

*(CHORUS enters wearing robes and masks.)*

**CHORUS 1.** It takes only one year for The Temple of Dionysus to travel from idea to fruition.

**CHORUS 3.** Even the oracles at Delphi could not predict the way the lowly humans embraced the new religion.

**CHORUS 2.** Sins of the past become celebrated feats. The lifestyle of the unspoken becomes a prideful proclamation. Wild women, whose wanton ways were shunned by a conservative public are now revered as Maenads, Dionysus' most loyal followers.

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* Look to us as we reveal the world that Steve has created.

*(They remove their masks and act out the following scenes in rapid succession.)*

**CHORUS 2.** So Phil, do you want to go to church with me on Sunday?

**CHORUS 3.** I'd love to, but I go to church on Saturday nights.

**CHORUS 2.** I didn't know you were Jewish.

**CHORUS 3.** I'm not, I'm Dionysian.

**CHORUS 2.** Cool.

**CHORUS 3.** Why don't you come with me? The wine is free and tonight The Maenads are having a wet T-shirt contest.

**CHORUS 2.** You're on!

*(CHORUS 1 appears with a pointer and addresses the audience.)*

**CHORUS 1.** I'm here to show you a plan to financial freedom. You can be your own boss and retire in six to twelve months. Temple of Dionysus franchise temples can provide you with a supplementary income of at least two to four thousand dollars a month. And you don't have to sell anything, just convince others to join and be their own bosses...

**CHORUS 3.** (*On the phone:*) I'd like to order 37 cases of wine please. Great. Can you deliver that? Excellent. That address is 2100 Olympus Drive. You know, the building with the big steeple? Great... Thanks.

**CHORUS 1.** It must be so hard on you and Roger since Paige went off to college.

**CHORUS 2.** We are having a little bit of "empty nest" syndrome, but we are so proud of her. She's started to be really involved in church now. She goes almost every night, and if she works hard, she could be a Maenad before the end of the semester.

**CHORUS 1.** Oh, you must be so proud.

**CHORUS 3.** And with each \$25 pledge to the Temple of Dionysus by credit card or the easy-checks program, you will receive a one-year membership and this nifty tote bag.

**CHORUS 1.** I'm Ted Koppel and this is *Nightline*. Tonight. The Dionysus phenomenon. How can an ancient religion based on alcohol consumption and free love take hold of a nation? Please welcome our guest, high priest Robert Downey, Jr.

(*STEVE and CHORUS 2, dressed as STEVE's SECRETARY, enter.*)

**SECRETARY.** Sir, here are your messages. Your ex-wife called. Again. I've told her that you won't be calling her back, but, she just won't take no for an answer. Charlie Sheen returned your call about becoming a high priest. He sounded very interested. Hugh Hefner called, and said that our Maenad-of-the-month centerfold in the church newsletter infringes on his copyright. He didn't sound happy. Oh, and the Today Show people called about a booking.

**STEVE.** The Today Show. I'm sure Dionysus will be thrilled.

**SECRETARY.** No sir. They want you.

**STEVE.** Me?

**SECRETARY.** Yes, they said the American people want to see the man behind the phenomenon.

**STEVE.** Why?

**SECRETARY.** Sir, I've heard your name in the press almost as much as his lately. People are curious.

**STEVE.** Well. I don't know. What is this one? "Dinner with me tonight?" Dinner with who?

**SECRETARY.** That one's from me. I thought maybe we could get a drink and maybe go out.

**STEVE.** I'm flattered. Believe me, I'm very flattered, but I don't think that it's a very good idea for a boss to date his secretary. It wouldn't be proper.

**SECRETARY.** *(Bursting with laughter:)* Oh, that's a good one. You almost had me going for a minute. *(Imitating him:)* "Wouldn't be proper." That is so cute. If there is one thing I have learned from you guys in the last year, it's that proper is very overrated. You've taught me to let loose and embrace my wild side. Wouldn't you like to see my "wild side" Steve?

**STEVE.** I'd like that very much, but I really don't think we should...what the hell. I'd love to.

**SECRETARY.** Great. Then it's a date. Oh, and there's someone here to see you. He's waiting in your office.

**STEVE.** Who is it?

**SECRETARY.** All he said was that he was an old friend, and that you wouldn't mind.

*(The SECRETARY leaves, and the Bewitched TV theme begins to play. STEVE looks around wondering where the sound is coming from.)*

**DARREN STEVENS 1.** *(Offstage:)* Sam! You make Endora change Mrs. Kravitz back. No one wants a mule in their living room.

**STEVE.** It can't be. Oh my God it is. It's the ghost of Darren Stevens.

**DARREN STEVENS 1.** *(Entering:)* Hi Steve.

**STEVE.** I can't believe it's really you.

**DARREN STEVENS 1.** It is. Nice to meet you. I've admired your work for a long time. For years you have been one of the most clever ad men I've seen. Your ear for slogans is remarkable. And this Dionysus thing. WOW. Larry Tate would have been very impressed. You've outdone yourself.

**STEVE.** Thanks.

**DARREN STEVENS 1.** Promoting bars and whorehouses as temples and churches is a stroke of genius.

**STEVE.** Gosh, thanks. That means a lot coming from you.

**DARREN STEVENS 1.** I never dreamt up anything like that.

**STEVE.** That reminds me. I've always wanted to ask you something.

*(During STEVE's line, CHORUS 3 enters and in tag-team fashion, switches places with CHORUS 1.)*

Sam had all these great powers, and... *(Seeing CHORUS 3)* who are you?

**DARREN STEVENS 2.** I'm Darren Stevens. We were just talking.

**STEVE.** I know, but you look different.

**DARREN STEVENS 2.** I'm still the same Darren Stevens.

**STEVE.** Oh, OK. *(He gets it.)* Well anyway, what I wanted to ask you was this: Sam had all these great powers and you never wanted her to use them, not even when it could have made you rich, or gotten you out of a mess. Why not take advantage of all that power? You could have had so much more.

**DARREN STEVENS 2.** I could have. And believe me, it was tempting. But, I wouldn't feel like I had accomplished anything on my own. I wanted to look back on my life and be proud of the things I had done without having to wonder if it was me or the magic that was successful. I didn't want to take the easy way out. It would have been fun, but I just had to make a choice between what I knew was right and what I knew was wrong.

**STEVE.** I know what you mean.

**DARREN STEVENS 2.** Do you?

**STEVE.** Look, no one is getting hurt.

**DARREN STEVENS 2.** Are you sure?

**STEVE.** People have their own free will. They're smart enough to choose for themselves.

**DARREN STEVENS 2.** That is not what advertising is based on. The whole concept of advertising is that people *aren't* smart enough and *you* make their decisions for them. It's a big responsibility. Just because you have the power, doesn't mean you have to use it. Steve, look around you. Trust your instincts. Listen that voice inside you and do what you know is right.

**STEVE.** Wait. Don't go. What should I do next?

**DARREN STEVENS 2.** Why are you asking me? I'm the ghost of a fictional character.

**STEVE.** Good point.

*(DARREN STEVENS 2 exits.)*

*(Blackout.)*

## Scene 5

*(CHORUS enters wearing robes and masks.)*

**CHORUS.** *(Together:)* The winds of time continue to swirl, whipped by the hand of fate.

**CHORUS 2.** But now, new events unfold, and old ideas reemerge, the world of thought begins to unravel.

**CHORUS 1.** Everything that is known to Steve begins to change.

**CHORUS 3.** His universe, our universe, all that is known is threatened by...

**STEVE.** *(Entering:)* Who are you people?

*(Suddenly realizing they can be seen by STEVE, the CHORUS panics and runs off leaving STEVE alone on a bare stage.)*

**DIONYSUS.** (*Entering:*) Oh Steve, there you are.

**STEVE.** Who were those people?

**DIONYSUS.** What people?

**STEVE.** Those people in the robes and masks.

**DIONYSUS.** You can see them?

**STEVE.** Of course, I can see them. They were right over there.

**DIONYSUS.** Oh, never mind them. They're not important. Just ignore them. I just came by to wish you luck. Today is a big day for you. Bigger than you realize I think.

**STEVE.** What does that mean?

**DIONYSUS.** You'll see.

*(CHORUS 3 enters dressed as a STAGE MANAGER complete with headset.)*

**STAGE MANAGER.** Sir, you're on. Come this way, please.

*(CHORUS 3 leads STEVE to a chair C. STEVE sits and CHORUS 3 pats his face with a powder puff.)*

**STAGE MANAGER.** And we're on in 5...4...3... (*He does "2" and "1" with his fingers only.*)

*(The lights fade except for a single tight pool of light around STEVE.)*

**INTERVIEWER.** (*Heard from offstage:*) We are back. It is fifteen minutes before the hour, and we are joined by a man who is an integral part of the new religion that is sweeping the nation. Thank you for joining us.

**STEVE.** Thank you. It's my pleasure.

**INTERVIEWER.** So tell us, how did all this get started?

**STEVE.** Well, I have a background in advertising, and I was approached by a group of people who were looking to start something new.

**INTERVIEWER.** I thought that this religion is based on an ancient Greek belief system?

**STEVE.** It is. It is. But the modern movement is based on the idea that people, through their daily behavior, are already “worshiping” this ancient religion without even knowing it. We just connected the people with Dionysus.

**INTERVIEWER.** Speaking of Dionysus. Do you know him personally?

**STEVE.** Oh yes. He hired me. I know him well.

**INTERVIEWER.** What is he really like?

**STEVE.** He’s a nice enough guy.

**INTERVIEWER.** (*Laughs:*) You talk like he’s just a normal guy and not a god.

**STEVE.** Oh. Well, he’s...

**INTERVIEWER.** Is he a god?

**STEVE.** Well, let’s define the term “god”—

**INTERVIEWER.** You said he hired you. Aren’t you also one of his followers?

**STEVE.** Well, technically—

**INTERVIEWER.** How can you promote this religion if you don’t believe in it?

**STEVE.** It’s not my job to—

**INTERVIEWER.** How do you respond to the reports that the Dionysian religious festivals are nothing more than excuses to get drunk and have sex?

**STEVE.** Well, that’s the point. We’re all adults—

**INTERVIEWER.** And the injuries. At these festivals, people are getting hurt.

**STEVE.** I don’t know what you’re talking about.

**INTERVIEWER.** Is this what you signed up for?

**STEVE.** What?

**INTERVIEWER.** Is this what you believe?

**STEVE.** What kind of question—

**INTERVIEWER.** What *do* you believe, Steve.

**STEVE.** I don't think that it's relevant what I...

*(Voices of the CHORUS begin to chime in, each one overlapping the others.)*

**CHORUS 1.** *(Off:)* What *do* you believe. Believe. Believe.

**CHORUS 3.** *(Off:)* Who are you? What do you believe in? Believe in. Believe in.

**CHORUS 2.** *(Off:)* What do you believe Steve? Believe Steve. Believe Steve.

**STEVE.** *(Overlapping:)* I'm not sure. I mean, I mean, my belief system is very personal— I just— I DON'T KNOW!

*(As the voices get louder it becomes clear to the audience and to STEVE that one of the voices is DIONYSUS. The pool of light expands to fill the stage and STEVE notices that he is alone on a bare stage. Bewildered, he looks around, then gets up and tries to follow the sound of the voice, which is now just DIONYSUS. STEVE pulls back a curtain to reveal DIONYSUS sitting in a chair, speaking into a microphone.)*

**DIONYSUS.** What do you believe, what do you believe, what do you. *(Sees STEVE.)* Oh.

**STEVE.** What are you doing? What is going on?

**DIONYSUS.** What am *I* doing? What are *you* doing? You're falling apart.

**STEVE.** I know. I don't know if I can do this anymore.

**DIONYSUS.** Do what?

**STEVE.** This. This whole thing. I'm not comfortable with this.

**DIONYSUS.** What are you talking about?

**STEVE.** This was fun until... I'm starting to have reservations.

**DIONYSUS.** Reservations? What you just said was not a "reservation." Look, don't let one little meltdown on national television shake your confidence. Just remember: Every one of our followers is a consenting adult.

**STEVE.** I know.

**DIONYSUS.** We don't force anyone or coerce anyone to do anything.

**STEVE.** Don't we? I mean, isn't that what advertising does?

**DIONYSUS.** If people are so weak minded that they are influenced by TV ads and billboards, I can't be held responsible for that.

**STEVE.** I agree. Mostly. It's just, we call it a church. I have a problem with you asking them to worship you.

**DIONYSUS.** Well, I am a god.

**STEVE.** Yeah, I get that. If people want to drink, I'll sell them wine. If people want to dance around naked, I'll sell them a ticket. Our church is probably a lot safer environment than the clubs and bars. But in clubs and bars, people aren't asked to pledge their allegiance to a god.

**DIONYSUS.** Aren't they? Every religion has its rituals. Go to a singles bar every night for a week and tell me you don't see a ritual of behavior. Every night, the same dress code, the same bar stool. Searching for some meaning in their lives. It's depressing. I tell people that they don't have to search for meaning. Their lifestyle *is* the meaning.

**STEVE.** Yeah, but do they have to pledge undying loyalty to you. Do they have to call you a god?

**DIONYSUS.** This is a religion.

**STEVE.** Yeah, as a marketing gimmick, it makes a great religion.

**DIONYSUS.** What are you saying?

**STEVE.** When we started this thing, I thought the religion angle was...

**DIONYSUS.** Angle?

**STEVE.** This is the best marketing gimmick ever created. I'm proud of my work on that level. But this is not a religion. You are not a god.

*(A loud thunder clap is heard.)*

**STEVE.** Did you hear that?

**DIONYSUS.** Yeah, it's my Dad. He's gloating. Look, let me get this straight. Thousands upon thousands of people worship me, follow me, and depend on me for guidance, and you of all people, don't believe in me?

**STEVE.** I believe in your charisma, your leadership, your whole persona. But I don't believe that you are a god. You may be very powerful, but you're not a god in that way. Look, if you really are a god, then you don't need me to do this, you can do this on your own.

**DIONYSUS.** If you understood why the gods do what they do, you'd be a god yourself.

**STEVE.** What the hell does that mean?

**DIONYSUS.** Look, I don't have time for this.

**STEVE.** No. We are going to settle this. You are not a god. This religion is a sham. A very successful, profitable sham. But a sham. And I want out.

**DIONYSUS.** It's not that easy. I won't let you walk away.

**STEVE.** Won't let me? What are you going to do?

**DIONYSUS.** Look, you and I had a deal. Just look around you. Look at what you created. This new dynasty, this new corporate giant, this new religion is all yours. You did this.

**STEVE.** Then I want to undo it.

**DIONYSUS.** You can't.

**STEVE.** I'm leaving.

**DIONYSUS.** *(Stifling a laugh:)* Oh, you're leaving, are you? You'd walk away from all of this:

*(The CHORUS enters. CHORUS 1 has a handful of bills, fanned out. CHORUS 2 is dressed as the SECRETARY, and CHORUS 3 has a camera and is flashing pictures.)*

The money, the women, the fame. They are calling you.

**CHORUS.** *(Swirling around him:)* Calling you. Calling you. Steve. Steve. STEVE.

**STEVE.** Shut up. God, that is so annoying. Go away. Shoo. Shoo.

*(STEVE shoos the CHORUS offstage.)*

**STEVE.** I would gladly walk away from all of this. I *am* walking away from all of this. I don't want it.

*(Another, louder, thunderclap.)*

**DIONYSUS.** I'm not giving up on you yet. How could you do all of this and not believe? This is your destiny. This is your kingdom. You are a god.

**STEVE.** No! I don't believe in this. I don't believe in you.

*(Another even louder thunderclap.)*

**DIONYSUS.** *(Defeated, looking skyward:)* Alright, Dad! You were right, I was wrong. *(Thunder.)* You don't have to rub it in. *(Thunder.)* I'm coming. I'm coming.

*(He starts to exit.)*

**STEVE.** Wait. Where are you going? We're not through yet.

**DIONYSUS.** What do you want from me? You win. I lose. What else do you want?

**STEVE.** I want my life back.

**DIONYSUS.** I don't have anything to do with that. The things that you screwed up, you have to put back. You're on your own.

*(Exit.)*

**STEVE.** *(Slow realization:)* Oh.

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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