

The Nose

by

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ACT I

SCENE ONE

Lights up on BETH working in a test laboratory. As she speaks Vivian, her assistant, comes up to her with small vials for her to inspect.

BETH

(to audience)

Ever since I can remember I've had a nose for things. Literally. It all started back when I was about seven years old. During summer vacations, in Rhode Island, my cousins and I would play this game...

(to lab worker)

Too much vanilla.

(back to audience)

They would put wild flowers under my nose and I would identify them by their scent. I always amazed everyone by my accuracy so it's no small wonder that I eventually became a "nose" in the fragrance industry.

(to lab worker)

This one is still a bit too floral. It needs to be more *earthy*. It's a man's fragrance. Try some sandalwood. Thanks.

(back to audience)

In this eccentric line of work I am the best. I don't say this to be arrogant. It's just the truth. Over the years I have worked for many high end clients and companies. My nose is secretly behind the creation of dozens of many successful perfumes, fragrances, and colognes.

She picks up a clipboard and begins to write.

I hate to admit it but I'm more of a scientist than anything else. People rely on my nose for guiding them in the right direction. It's big business and a big responsibility when you think about it. I just recently took out an insurance policy on my nose. I pray I will never have to use it.

(to lab worker)

I can't even begin to tell you what's wrong with that. Please, just take it away.

BETH

Lately I'm beginning to feel the quality of my work slipping. I blame this on the state of my personal life.

Lights cross fade from the lab to a park. NICK appears entering the park gate.

NICK

Can I help you?

BETH

(to audience)

Nick is my *former* fiancé. We met six months ago in Gramercy Park.

(to Nick)

No, I'm fine, just leaving thank you. Could you hold the gate open please?

NICK

Why don't you use your key?

BETH

My key?

NICK

Yes. Your key.

BETH

I don't have one.

NICK

Then you have a problem then don't you?

BETH

(to audience)

Gramercy Park is one of those exclusive places in Manhattan where one not only needs a key to enter but one needs a key to *exit* as well. Now, since I live nowhere near Gramercy park I don't own a key. To gain entrance I rely on trailing unsuspecting patrons, very closely, with a set of *decoy* keys in my hand to make it appear that I do indeed belong in the park as well. In other words, I sneak in.

NICK

How did you get in if you don't have a key? You do realize that this isn't a public park.

BETH

I'm sorry. It won't happen again. I promise. If you could just open the gate I can be on my way. I'll never to do it again.

NICK

No.

BETH

I beg your pardon?

NICK

I said no.

BETH

What do you mean no? If you don't let me out then how am I supposed to leave?

NICK

That's not my problem. You should have thought of that before you decided to weasel your way in here.

Nick sits and begins to read his book.

BETH

(to audience)

At first I thought he had to be kidding. I mean I can understand wanting to see me sweat a little but he wasn't giving in. Not an inch.

Beth approaches Nick.

BETH

Excuse me, I realize that I'm not supposed to be here and all but don't you think you're carrying all of this a bit too far? I mean you've made your point. I get it *loud and clear*. So how about just opening the gate for me so I can go home?

NICK

Can't do that. Sorry.

BETH

What do you mean you can't? You can. You just won't. Fine. Be that way. I guess I'll just have to wait for someone else to let me out then.

She crosses her arms.

NICK

Then I guess I'm just going to have to sit here and guard the gate and let people know that you don't have a key and are *not* supposed to be here. They'll listen to me too. We are all very protective of our park. We don't take kindly to intruders.

Beth begins to look around for someone to help her. There is no one. She tries a different approach.

BETH
(flirty)
I didn't get your name, I'm Beth.

NICK
That's not going to work.

BETH
So what then? What? Am I to sleep here tonight?
I need to get home. It's getting late!

NICK
Screaming at me wont work either.

BETH
(containing herself)
Then would you mind telling me what will work?

NICK
You can start by having dinner with me.

BETH
(to audience)
That's how I met Nick. Looking back I suppose
being held hostage is not particularly the best
way to begin a relationship.
(she looks back at him)
But I have to give him credit. It was original.

Lights cross fade to a therapist's office. HELEN enters.

HELEN
.. yes, yes, the park story! You both met in
the park and fell in love. Blah, blah, blah!
We've covered this a million times. Beth, you've
got to stop getting caught up in all this romantic
meshuggaas. It's screwing you up. We need to
start dealing with the *real* problems in your
relationship.

BETH
I'm trying.

HELEN
Not hard enough.

Helen picks a piece of candy out of a bowl, unwraps it and eats it. Beth identifies the aroma.

BETH
Butterscotch, right?

HELEN
Yes it is. How did you know... oh right, I forgot. Your nose. Want one?

BETH
No thanks.

HELEN
(mouth full)
It's time we broke new ground Beth. You are hung up on too many things... Mmm! these are so good! So much better than those lousy peppermints my daughter gave me for my birthday. Anyway, moving on. Let's get back to your fear of Groucho Marx movies.

BETH
I don't want to talk about that now.

HELEN
Well if we're not going to talk about Groucho then what are we going to talk about? We can't make the entire session a complete waste of time.

BETH
I'm sorry but I don't think that talking about my fiancé with my therapist is a waste of time.

HELEN
Erstwhile fiancé and there's where you're wrong.

BETH
How so?

HELEN
You're a procrastinator Beth.

BETH
What's that supposed to mean?

HELEN
If you wanted to remove Nick from your life as much as you say you do then you would have done it already.

BETH
What are you suggesting?

HELEN

Have you done anything proactive at this point to make a permanent break from Nick?

BETH

Well, no. But that doesn't mean...

HELEN

Ah ha! Look Beth, all I'm saying is that it seems to be a pattern with you. Over the last few months, when you haven't been talking about Nick, we've uncovered and exposed many examples of you not finishing things. Not following through. We need to start working on *that* as your root problem and not Nick. He's just a byproduct.

BETH

A byproduct?

HELEN

Exactly. A byproduct.

BETH

You make my personal life sound like a can of dog food.

HELEN

Never mind that. We're going to give you an assignment.

BETH

An assignment?

HELEN

Don't you see? You're preoccupied Beth. And it's this preoccupation with unfinished business that is disrupting your life and holding you back.

BETH

It is?

HELEN

Absolutely. We need to start with something simple. Once we solved that we will move on to other unfinished business and eventually solve your dilemma with Nick.

(Helen gets out a pen and pad)

Now what do you want to start with?

BETH

I have no idea.

HELEN

Ah.

Silence. Helen gets out another candy.

HELEN

How about something from childhood?

BETH

What? Like school?

HELEN

Yes, like school. Excellent Beth! Now we're getting somewhere. Now, is there any event or situation from when you were in school that still haunts you?

(she becomes unsettled)

An event that relentlessly picks at your brain when you lay down at night while you're trying to go to sleep? Something so unnerving that it just gnaws at you night after night like a rabid animal until you feel totally used up and defiled...

Helen violently breaks her pencil in half. She regains composure.

HELEN

Sorry. Anything come to mind?

BETH

Well, yes. But it's stupid.

HELEN

Nothing in therapy is stupid Beth. Trust me.

BETH

Well, in High School...

HELEN

Yes, High School. Go on.

BETH

I always was a good student. I was on the honor roll, the student council, but...

HELEN

But what?

BETH

I do carry a little guilt about French class.

HELEN

French Class?

BETH

(reluctantly)

It was my third year and Madame LeChambre, that was my teacher's name, was very fond of me. She gave me lots of special attention. I could do no wrong.

HELEN

Did this special attention make you feel guilty afterwards?

(leaning in)

Did your teacher make you feel *dirty*?

BETH

(uncomfortable)

Um, no. Not really. I just think looking back I took advantage of the situation.

HELEN

Interesting. Go on.

BETH

Because she liked me so much I got away with many things that the other students couldn't.

HELEN

Like what?

BETH

Like for example if I didn't want to take a test I would prepare French food instead and bring it into class. By doing this I knew she would excuse me from the test and I'd get an "A" for the day. She loved to eat and I exploited it. I did this all 3rd semester. I brought in croissants, chocolate truffles, soup de l'onion... I don't think I learned a lot that last year. I really regret it now.

HELEN

Anything else?

BETH

Actually yes, there is. There was this one homework assignment that I just couldn't bring myself to do and I've never been able to forget about it.

HELEN

What was it?

BETH

For an entire month, we were supposed to collect newspaper articles about France and make a scrapbook out of them. The articles could be about politics, art, whatever. After the articles were in place we were then to write a summary, *in French*, explaining what the article was about. I never did the assignment. I made Quiche instead. I think about that damn scrapbook every day. I can't get it out of my head. I told you it was stupid.

HELEN

I don't think it's stupid at all.

BETH

You don't?

HELEN

No I don't. And do you know what Beth? You're going to make that scrapbook now as an adult.

BETH

I am?

HELEN

Yes you are. And not only are you going to make it, you're going to track down this Madame Le Camera...

BETH

LeChambre.

HELEN

Whatever. You are going to complete this scrapbook and present it to your teacher for a grade. This is going to be so good for you. It's going to give you the closure that you need. It's perfect.

A cuckoo clock goes off.

HELEN

That's our time for today. I want you to start this the minute you get home. No more procrastination.

BETH

You really think this will help?

HELEN

I do. Now scoot. I'll see you next week.

Skeptical, Beth exits. Helen is left alone in the office and picks up a small tape recorder. She speaks into it.

HELEN

Note to self: "pick up more Butterscotch."

BLACKOUT