

THE ONE- MILLIONTH MONKEY

A ten-minute play from the future by

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CHARACTERS

THOMPSON (Male or female)

EVEREST (Male or female)

MR. JINGLY

PEPE

THE BOSS

JANITOR

FRANCIS BACON

SECURITY GUARD

NEW MONKEY

Note: All characters are anthropomorphic monkeys except for FRANCIS BACON.

(LIGHTS UP.

Really far into the future. A LABORATORY, or at least one part of it. Scientific in feel, but more of a secretarial pool in execution. White walls, floor, furniture, very sterile. But there are several typing desks around the stage, with the implication that there are millions more filling the actual room offstage. THOMPSON and EVEREST, two monkey scientists in white laboratory jackets, take notes on clipboards and/or iPad-like tablets as MR. JINGLY and PEPE type away at regular typewriters [not computers]. There are piles of blank paper on one side of each typewriter, and piles of typed pages on the other side of each typewriter. The sound of typing fills the air.

MR. JINGLY finishes a page and yanks it out of the typewriter, sets it on the top of the "finished" stack, then clutches his heart, cries out in pain, and falls to the floor dead. The typing [and sound] stop. THOMPSON and EVEREST rush over to him.)

EVEREST. Mr. Jingly is down! (*Feels for a pulse.*)

THOMPSON. Is he dead?

EVEREST. Afraid so.

THOMPSON. Dammit! Of all the luck! How far did he get?

EVEREST. (*Leafing through the pile of Mr. Jingly's typed pages.*) Looks like he just finished something called *Cymbeline*.

THOMPSON. Where does that put us?

EVEREST. (*Scrolling through his iPad.*) Sixteen comedies, ten historical works, eleven tragedies, one hundred fifty-four sonnets, and five poems.

THOMPSON. I don't need the breakout numbers, I need to know where we are? Did he do it?

EVEREST. According to my notes, Mr. Jingly randomly typed for twenty-one years and typed all but one of the complete works of Shakespeare. He's one tragedy short.

PEPE. (*Victory.*) Yes!

THOMPSON. Are you fucking kidding me?! ONE tragedy short?! And then he dies?!

EVEREST. Maybe one of the other monkeys came up with *Titus Andronicus*. Couldn't we just slip it in the pile? Who would know?

THOMPSON. I would know! I would know! (*Throws Mr. Jingly's typed pages across the room.*) These are worthless! God, we were so fucking close!

EVEREST. Now, Thompson...

THOMPSON. Everyone back to work! And get this body out of here!

(The typing sounds resume. A JANITOR enters and removes MR. JINGLY'S BODY then cleans up the typing paper as the scene plays out.)

EVEREST. Thompson, we're going to be fine.

THOMPSON. Everest, we have less than a thousand years left of our "One Million Years, One Million Monkeys Shakespeare Project." If we don't get the complete works of Shakespeare typed up by one single monkey, we're going to lose our government matching funds. Which means we're out on the streets. And I refuse to go back to the circus. (*Shudders.*) God, I hate the private sector.

EVEREST. Well, I'll lodge my feelings on this again, for the record. If we were using computers and keyboards, I feel we'd be making much more progress.

THOMPSON. I don't disagree. But we invested in one million typewriters way before computers were invented, and we can't justify the expense to replace them. We just need everyone to type faster is all.

EVEREST. They're typing as fast as they can!

THOMPSON. Nonsense. (*Pulls out a bullhorn, talks to the typing monkeys.*) Alright everyone, you're doing a great job. But we have a very limited time left to complete this task. So, I'm instituting a new policy – Everyone must drink at least two "Twelve-Hour Energy" drinks per shift. (*Reacts to grousing.*) Look, don't complain to me. I'm not the one not typing the complete works of Shakespeare. The sooner we get this done, the sooner we can get back to taking over the planet and making humans our slaves.

EVEREST. You might want to use a little more carrot and a lot less stick.

THOMPSON. Everest, I really feel like all of this is lost on you. Did anyone complain when a monkey was used as a live crash test dummy for seat belts? Or when a monkey was shot into space to die in one of the first satellites? Or when thousands of monkeys had their eyes held open and shampoo poured into them to see if it would sting? Do you really not see the bigger picture here?

EVEREST. Well...

THOMPSON. Progress. Progress waits for no monkey. Do you really want shampoo that stings your eyes? No. Do you want to live in a world without a random monkey-typed complete works of Shakespeare? I sure don't. (*Gestures to typing monkeys.*) So I'm willing for them to do what it takes to make this a better world for when we take over and make the humans our slaves. Are you?

EVEREST. I guess...

THOMPSON. Good. (*Into bullhorn.*) Okay, break time! (*A beat.*) Back to work! (*To EVEREST.*) Let's go down and check on the typists in Block H. I haven't made it down there in a couple years.

(*THOMPSON and EVEREST exit. PEPE speaks to the audience.*)

PEPE. I'm so close. I only have, like, two sonnets to go and I'm done! Then I'll be that monkey everyone is talking about. Sorry, Mr. Jingly! Oh, I'm not happy that Mr. Jingly died, but I'm happy he didn't win. Oh, no, it's not a contest per se. I mean, technically they pay us. And it's definitely better than my old job – throwing my own feces at people. But I'm competitive by nature, so for me it's not a contest...unless I win. Or lose. Then it's definitely a contest. (*Types faster for a beat, then --*) I wonder who they'll move up to Mr. Jingly's desk? Probably some hungry intern who'll be happy with three-quarters of the salary the rest of us make. Thank you, union-busting politicians. Pretty soon they'll be able to pay us peanuts... If they existed anymore. (*Types for a beat, then --*) It's nice in here, considering. Temperature controlled, lights set so it always seems like daytime. They say the facility was designed by someone who created those Vegas casinos. I do miss being outside, though. I wonder if the nuclear winter is over yet.

(*A STRANGER [FRANCIS BACON] enters.*)

BACON. Hello, Pepe.

PEPE. Oh, hello. (*Realizes.*) Wait, you're not a monkey. Who are you? What are you doing in here?

BACON. My name is Francis Bacon, and I'm here from the distant past. I may or may not be an illusion.

PEPE. Well, you better get out of here, or they're going to enslave you. They haven't really announced the enslaving thing yet, but they're in the middle of a soft launch within a fifty-mile radius of the facility.

BACON. Well then I'll make this quick. You're on a fool's errand! You are not randomly typing the complete works of William Shakespeare!

PEPE. But I am! Look! I'm halfway through *Troilus and Cressida*!

BACON. You're halfway through Francis Bacon's *Troilus and Cressida*!

PEPE. What?!

BACON. This project is a sham! A ruse! A charade of epic proportions! They would have you believe you are randomly typing the works of William Shakespeare, but I wrote every word of every play, sonnet and web log entry accredited to that literary miscreant!

PEPE. Web log? Oh, blog! Got it. Is it written in iambic pentameter? Because that seems a little show-offy.

BACON. You must right this wrong! You must inform the world of the true author of these works.

PEPE. Why me?

BACON. If you do, I can go back to my time and show them proof that I wrote that hack's plays and poetry. And then I'll be entitled to a lifetime of royalties!

PEPE. But nobody really pays for Shakespeare's plays –

BACON. Right this wrong! Let the history books show that literature was saved from the false mask of deceit by Pepe, the typing monkey from the future!

PEPE. I do like the sound of that...

EVEREST. *(Off)* Well that was unfortunate.

BACON. I must flee! Remember what I told you! Save the world! *(Exits.)*

(EVEREST and THOMPSON enter.)

EVEREST. Thought we had it with Paulie Peanuts. How did you do?

THOMPSON. *(Off)* I found three typos in Janie's *As You Like It*. As I like it? I like it spellchecked, thanks.

PEPE. Boss! I need to talk to you!

THOMPSON. Yes?

PEPE. I think I have some important information for the project. I really need to talk to upper management.

THOMPSON. Pepe, nobody talks to upper management except middle management.

PEPE. But it's about Francis Bacon.

(A SECURITY GUARD instantly enters and grabs PEPE.)

SECURITY GUARD. Let's go, Pepe. We've had our eyes on you for a long time.

PEPE. Where are you taking me?

SECURITY GUARD. Exactly where you wanted to go – upper management. Move it!

(PEPE and the SECURITY GUARD exit as LIGHT SHIFT to OFFICE. SECURITY GUARD escorts PEPE in.)

PEPE. You don't have to shove.

(THE BOSS enters.)

BOSS. Hello, Pepe.

PEPE. Who are you?

BOSS. I'm The Boss. And it's my pleasure to make your acquaintance. *(Shakes PEPE's hand.)*

PEPE. Likewise.

BOSS. Have a seat.

(BOSS sits down on the one chair in the office. PEPE looks for another chair, confused.)

BOSS. So, you have something to tell me?

PEPE. Yes! It has come to my attention that the complete works of William Shakespeare were actually written by Francis Bacon!

BOSS. Correct.

PEPE. Uh, you know about that?

BOSS. Of course.

PEPE. But...shouldn't we tell people?

BOSS. Oh, no. No, that secret stays between you, me, and a handful of board members.

PEPE. So we just keep typing, pretending we're typing the works of Shakespeare?

BOSS. No. You're the only one pretending, because you know the truth. The rest of them, they're content to follow orders, put in a full day of honest work, go home, eat their own feces, and sleep well knowing they've done God's work for one more day.

PEPE. But I don't think I can do that. How can I look at my coworkers in the face knowing what I know?

BOSS. Let me explain something to you. Monkeys don't read well. They read, just not well. But now that we walk upright, and talk, and enslave humans, we need to be able to hold a civilized conversation. Which means we have to talk about literature without really reading anything too challenging. That's where Cliff's Notes come in. They're bite-sized versions of all classic literature that you can read in an hour. And what author do you think represents the bulk of the Cliff's Notes library?

PEPE. Stephen King?

BOSS. No.

PEPE. Danielle Steele?

BOSS. No.

PEPE. Oh, who wrote *Canterbury Tales* --

BOSS. Shakespeare, you idiot! Shakespeare. If you told the monkey population that Francis Bacon actually wrote the complete works of Shakespeare, three things would happen. One, the "One Million Monkeys, One Million Years Shakespeare Project" would immediately lose its funding, putting all million monkeys out of work. Two, Cliff's Notes would have to pull all copies of all Shakespeare reductions off the shelves and burn them. Three, society as we know it would be destroyed. So you see, it's absolutely imperative we keep this little secret between the two of us.

PEPE. And how would society be destroyed again?

BOSS. Keep your mouth shut. Go home, make love to your wife, get a good night's sleep, and come back to work tomorrow like the other nine hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine monkeys employed by the company and do the work. To do otherwise would force the company to do something...unfortunate.

PEPE. Are you threatening me?

(BOSS snaps his fingers and the SECURITY GUARD grasps PEPE. He hustles PEPE out as he protests. LIGHTS SHIFT to PEPE'S HOME. SHEILA, PEPE's wife, is making dinner, aka peeling and slicing bananas. PEPE storms in.)

SHEILA. Hi, honey! Wait, what's the matter?

PEPE. Awful day at work. I found out some information at the facility that I'm forbidden to tell.

SHEILA. Well, whatever it is, you should keep quiet about it and not rock the boat.

PEPE. Sheila, how can you say that? You don't even know what I found out.

SHEILA. I'm sorry, you're right. I was distracted by making dinner for you – bananas! Your favorite!

PEPE. *(Takes banana slice.)* I found out --

SHEILA. How about some peanuts on the side?

PEPE. Sure. So this guy shows up at the facility –

SHEILA. Drink?

PEPE. I'm good. Would you just sit down? I have something important to tell you.

(SHEILA reluctantly sits down.)

SHEILA. Of course.

PEPE. Today I was visited by a time traveler named Francis –

(SHEILA roughly claps her hand over PEPE's mouth. Her demeanor changes from housewife to hard ass.)

SHEILA. *(Fierce whisper.)* For the love of God, shut up! Got it?

(PEPE nods. SHEILA takes her hand off his mouth, puts a finger to her lips – “Be quiet” – then moves over and turns on a radio. Sound effect: monkey-themed music playing in the background. SHEILA sits back down next to PEPE.)

SHEILA. Listen to me. Don't speak. If they've heard you, we don't have much time. Yes, time-traveling Francis Bacon approached you. We're working with him, but he's gone rogue and refuses to play the long game.

PEPE. Who are you?

SHEILA. I'm part of an underground resistance movement against the "Million Monkey, Million Years Shakespeare Project." Our goal is to bring down the facility, the board, and the project. When we're through, monkeys will no longer live in a world of literary oppression. If we succeed, monkeys will be free to randomly type the works of any author they choose. Someday, I hope to type the complete works of Brad Andersen, creator of "Marmaduke."

PEPE. But you're my wife! I've known you for years!

SHEILA. Pepe, you aren't married. Or at least you weren't, until a few minutes ago. When we found out Francis Bacon contacted you too early, I time traveled into the past and infiltrated the project. I convinced them to set me up with you so I could keep an eye on you for the board. Little did they know I was a time-traveling monkey double agent.

PEPE. What am I going to do?

SHEILA. You'll know what to do when the time is right. We must bring down the project!

(SECURITY GUARD enters and grabs SHEILA.)

SECURITY GUARD. Miss Sheila, the Boss would like to see you in the main office.

SHEILA. About what?

SECURITY GUARD. A transfer to another department. Having a good evening, Mr. Pepe?

PEPE. Yes.

SECURITY GUARD. Good. Let's go. *(Pulls SHEILA out.)*

SHEILA. Do the right thing, Pepe! *(Exits.)*

PEPE. What am I going to do?

(LIGHTS SHIFT to the typing LABORATORY. A NEW MONKEY is sitting at Mr. Jingles' old desk. THOMPSON and EVEREST pace back and forth behind him. Sound effects: typing sounds.)

EVEREST. This one looks like he's going to make a good show of it.

THOMPSON. Does he? I don't know, Everest. I think I'm losing my spark for this work. I think I finally realized I don't care if a monkey types the complete works of Shakespeare.

EVEREST. Oh, stop it. You say that once a week, and then you eat lunch and you're fine. It's low blood sugar.

(PEPE enters.)

THOMPSON. Well, welcome back, Your Highness. I guess I must have missed the memo that said Pepe gets to come in whenever he damn well pleases.

EVEREST. See? You still care.

PEPE. Sorry. Traffic was a nightmare.

THOMPSON. Uh huh.

(PEPE sits down at his desk and begins to type.)

THOMPSON. Do I care?

EVEREST. Yes, you do. Because you know what we're doing here. We're not just supervising the random typing of the complete works of Shakespeare by a million monkeys. What we do here is the foundation upon which our monkey civilization is built. If we don't exalt Shakespeare's legacy to the level of an elaborate, centuries-long parlor trick, who will? And if no one will, what will become of us? Humanity won't be enslaved; monkeys will go back to being white collar, systems analyst middle class wage slaves; and if what the main office says is true, the world will explode. You of all people must understand this. We're doing God's work here.

PEPE. Francis Bacon wrote the complete works of Shakespeare.

(All noise and activity stops.)

THOMPSON. What did you say?

PEPE. Francis Bacon wrote the complete works of William Shakespeare!

THOMPSON. Pepe, shut your mouth and get back to work!

PEPE. I will get to work – the work of typing the complete works of Francis Bacon!

THOMPSON. Are you crazy?! What are you talking about?

PEPE. (*Stands on his desk.*) Stop typing! Everyone, stop randomly typing lies! I'm going to tell you what they don't want you to know! Your fingers are being used, abused, worked to the bone, and for what? To rewrite the English Literature 101 textbooks to take credit from a man whose true genius has been buried with the centuries. To type pages and pages of hollow sonnets, comedies of lies, and fallacious tragedies. But the real tragedy is what we've become. Do any of you really want to type the complete works of Shakespeare? Do you? (*Echoes of "No!" can be heard.*) No! Maybe you want to randomly type the works of Ibsen, or Durang, or even Neil Simon! (*Random dissent at Simon's name can be heard.*) Okay, maybe not a lot of takers for Simon, but still!

NEW MONKEY. I don't give a crap about random typing equality. Who cares? That's such an assimilationist point of view. And who cares who really wrote all the plays and sonnets? Randomly typing the complete works of Shakespeare, whoever they were written by, is what makes us unique!

PEPE. But don't you understand? We should have the choice to randomly type Shakespeare or not. If you want to randomly type Shakespeare, you can. But I should have the choice to randomly type whomever I want. (*Shouts to the crowd.*) Do you agree with me? Do you!

OFF STAGE CROWD. (*Shouts of agreement.*)

PEPE. Shakespeare is Bacon! Shakespeare is Bacon!

*****THE PLAY ISN'T OVER!!***
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