

Read Through

by Alex Austin

Accompanied by his assistant director Lilia and a diminutive but large-headed stranger, Darin entered. While Darin and Lilia sat at the conference table powering up their laptops, the man veered to a solitary chair in a corner of the room, resting his formidable noggin against a mirrored wall.

Annie nudged Philip and whispered, "Our producer you think?"

"Too handsome," replied Philip, but his heart wasn't in the barb. Annie's face, devoid of makeup, was radiant, flawless, but Sinela, her sharp dark lips, pierced Annie's perfection.

Darin stood and smiled warmly at the group of eight actors. " I welcome you to *House of Coincidence*. Every theatrical production is hell, and premiers are a special hell. Surviving, nay, triumphing will take a cast of this quality." Darin strode around the table and clutched the substantial shoulders of Victor Koontz, known for his role as an angry embalmer in *The Loved One Two* and licking Pierce Morgan's ear during the Brit's interview of the hit sitcom's cast.

Still kneading the actor's shoulders, Darin said, "Victor's been called an asshole—"

"On many occasions," Victor added.

"—but he's my kind of asshole."

"My kind of asshole, Victor is, Victor is," Victor vamped.

"And look who we have here!" said Darin, moving to Annie, drawing back her head and kissing her on the forehead. "Lured from Broadway. *Lured*, I say..."

"...and now, I proudly bring you the talent who became the most motherfucking badass detective in Primetime—well fuck that, anytime! Philip—*De*-tective Sinead—Raine."

After introducing the cast, Darin beckoned to the man who sat quietly in the back of the room. "Please join us, Karl Gosser." The little man ambled to Darin's side. Darin clapped his arm around Gosser, as if trying to support him. Darin said, "Now as you well know, playwrights are generally unwelcome at rehearsals. Shakespeare would have been persona non grata if he showed up at *King Lear* in rehearsal. *You've done your part now leave us alone to do ours.* So you ask, 'Why the fuck is Karl here?'"

Victor stood up and boomed, "Why the fuck is Karl here?"

"Because," Darin said, "he insisted."

"Ah, *insisted*," said Victor. "Well, that's different."

"You see, cast," Darin winked, "he wants to tell us what his play's about."

Annie stood, "I have never, and I will never, act in any play that I understand. This is outrageous!"

"Monsieur Gosser," said Philip, "this outraged woman is my cousin and nobody fucks with my cousin."

"You do, and he'll tear that bowling ball right off your neck," said Victor.

Darin laughed, "Sorry, Karl. Forgive the hijinks. Please give us some insight."

Gosser smiled shyly and said, "When I first mention Seriality to people ..."

Philip listened attentively as Gosser unfolded the arcane theory of coincidence that underpinned his play. He spoke more like a professor than a playwright, alluding to the work of numerous scientists and philosophers, not quite boring enough to put his audience to sleep...

"...Paul Kammerer thought all coincidences were related and explicable, and if analyzed in the correct way could reveal their source, that is the hidden event that radiated or more accurately generated the coincidences."

"*All* coincidences?" asked Victor.

"There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow," said Nick Narrow, an older actor with a full head of swept-back white hair and features so strong that they resisted age.

"Very nice, Nick," said Victor. "Did you play Hamlet before or after the Civil War?"

"Would the sparrow had fallen up your arse."

"Professor Gosser," continued Victor, "I once screwed three women in a row--I mean of course, time, not space—good one, huh? Well, each woman farted at the exact moment she climaxed. Would that qualify as coincidence? And did it have anything to do with the bean banquet and Golden Cadillacs I served them prior to the hanky panky?"

"Perhaps," said Gosser unmoved. "Consider the ocean under swell conditions. The ocean will be calm for a while and then there will be a huge wave. If you don't frequent the beach and you see the wave,

you will be impressed. Where did that come from? But a moment later another huge wave appears, followed by a third big wave, and then another, perhaps seven in a row. Wow, you think, seven huge waves one after the other. Isn't that a coincidence!"

Philip tried to remember if he had ever thought of waves that way. As he listened to the others speculate, he caught his reflection in the room's wall mirror. His face shivered. But his face had not shivered. Had the mirror moved? Had there just been an earthquake?

"But is it a coincidence? Storms far out at sea produce wind which generates the waves. Big and small are generated at random. But each has a wave length, and the various wave lengths travel at a set speed, so that the waves of the same size end up traveling together. It is the similarity of the waves' size that produces the set. If you can grasp that, you understand Kammerer's basic concept of Seriality."

"I'm confused," admitted Victor.

"Well, for example on any given day, you find two twenty dollar bills. One you find in a park at dawn, the other at noon in a restroom at Starbucks on the other side of town. Both have written on them: *Tensor*. Improbable, right? We would call this a coincidence: Two or more events, each one not individually improbable, but together highly improbable. Is there is no relationship between event one and event two?

"Now if those bills were found by two different people, both would think themselves lucky, and there would be no question of coincidence, but suppose you were the person who found both. You would have to ask yourself, why was I in both places that day at those times, and why was the person who dropped both bills there, unless you think it was two separate people who dropped the tensor bills. But let's think of the bills as the two waves. To one who understands the properties of ocean currents, the events are the

signs of something larger. There's something building beneath it all. But like the observer on the beach who thinks that the coincidence is for him, it may not be at all, just as the person who picks up the two bills thinks that he is part of the coincidence, perhaps he's not."

"Pretty thick," said Nick Narrow.

"You didn't have to understand the Theory of Relativity to enjoy *Einstein on the Beach*," said Darin.

"Great example, Darin," said Gosser. "In my play you can think of Seriality as Hitchcock's MacGuffin."

"So you don't really have to understand it," said Philip. "Just know that it motivates the characters."

"Right," said Gosser, "but you should also keep in mind that it unifies the play."

"What was this Paul Kammerer, the man, like?" asked Lilia.

"Physically, he might have been sent straight from central casting: Large forehead, curly retreating hair, strong chin, florid complexion. But unlike the stereotypical scientist, he was also quite athletic. In his younger days he pounded the pavement for twelve hours at a stretch in his hunt for coincidence: five bald men standing on a street corner each carrying a red-and-white striped umbrella; three young women with identical hats sobbing as they waited to board a train, which upon arriving discharged three identically hatted women also sobbing. Four mid-air collisions of biplanes over Vienna in the space of an afternoon.

"Can you imagine how much easier it would have been today? Today he would have hunted for coincidences on his computer: a real-time video feed of a street corner in London, a parade in Warsaw, Time's

Square at noon. Like peeking out one's bedroom window on almost any public space in the world. Couple that technology with the power of the search engines. Type in "semen-stained pink taffeta dress," and one can find a hundred references. "Accidents on May, 2009, involving red Mustangs that resulted in decapitated drivers: statistics available in an instant."

"But does it really all mean something?" asked Annie.

"According to Kammerer, it does. If you can read the tea leaves."

"And Samantha, my character in the play, she's got those tea leaves, right?"

"As the great-great granddaughter of Kammerer, she has acquired his unpublished research and notebooks, all of course in German, but Samantha is fluent in German, *ja?*"

"Ich spreche Deutsch ziemlich gut," said Annie.

"By the way," said Philip, "from all his research into coincidence, what were Kammerer's conclusions? Did he predict anything?"

Gosser smiled, "Only World War I, World War II and the Holocaust."

An hour later after further discussion on the characters, Gosser accommodatingly excused himself, leaving the cast to do its first read through.

"Let's get to it then," said Darin. "Open your scripts to page one. Lilia, please read the stage directions."

Lilia read, "Act 1, Scene 1. Day. A street corner. Four men in suits wait for a light. Each holds an umbrella. Bathed in Red Light. One man looks up at the sky. He puts out his hand. He carefully lifts his umbrella and opens it. The umbrella's color is red and white stripes. The second man also notices the rain. He puts up his umbrella. Same color. The last two men put up their umbrellas, All the same color. The stage is bathed in green. The men walk with their raised umbrellas. The suddenly point them downstage.

"Blackout."

