

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Mere Anarchy

Woody Allen

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ABOUT THE BOOK

'I am greatly relieved that the universe is finally explainable. I was beginning to think it was me.' Thus begins 'Strung Out', Woody Allen's hilarious application of the laws of the universe to daily life. *Mere Anarchy*, Woody Allen's first collection in over 25 years, features eighteen witty, wild and intelligent comic pieces - eight of which have never been in print before.

Surreal, absurd, rich in verbal play, bitingly satirical and just plain daft in the mode we have grown to love from his finest films, this flight-of-fancy collection includes tales of a body double who, mistaken for the film's star, is kidnapped by outlaws; a pretentious novelist forced to work on the novelisation of a Three Stooges film; a nanny secretly writing an expose of her Manhattan employers; crooks selling bespoke prayers on eBay; and how to react when you're asked to finance a Broadway play about the invention and manufacture of the adjustable showerhead.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WOODY ALLEN'S prolific career as a comedian, writer, and filmmaker has now spanned more than five decades. He writes frequently for *The New Yorker* and is the author of *Without Feathers*, *Getting Even*, and *Side Effects*, among other books.

Also by Woody Allen

The Insanity Defense

Three One-Act Plays

Complete Prose of Woody Allen

Three Films of Woody Allen

Hannah and Her Sisters

Four Films of Woody Allen

Floating Light Bulb

Side Effects

Without Feathers

Getting Even

Play It Again, Sam

Don't Drink the Water

WOODY ALLEN

MERE ANARCHY



EBURY
PRESS

TO ERR IS HUMAN—TO FLOAT, DIVINE



GASPING FOR AIR, my life passing before my eyes in a series of wistful vignettes, I found myself suffocating some months ago under the tsunami of junk mail that cascades through the slot in my door each morning after kippers. It was only our Wagnerian cleaning woman, Grendel, hearing a muffled falsetto from beneath myriad art-show invitations, charity squeezes, and pyrite contest jackpots I'd hit that extricated me with the help of our Bugsucker. As I was carefully filing the new postal arrivals alphabetically in the paper shredder, I noticed, amongst the profusion of catalogues that hawked everything from bird feeders to monthly deliveries of sundry drupe and hesperidium, there was an unsolicited little journal, banner-lined *Magical Blend*. Clearly aimed at the New Age market, its articles ranged in topic from crystal power to holistic healing and psychic vibrations, with tips on achieving spiritual energy, love versus stress, and exactly where to go and what forms to fill out to be reincarnated. The ads, which seemed scrupulously articulated to insulate against the unreasonableness of Bunco Squad malcontents, presented Therapeutic Ironisers, Vortex Water Energizers, and a product called Herbal Grobust designed to implement volumewise madam's Cavallons. There was no shortage of psychic advice either, from sources such as the "spiritual intuitive" who double-checks her insights with "a consortium of angels named Consortium Seven," or a babe

ecdysiastically christened Saleena, who offers to “balance your energy, awaken your DNA and attract abundance.” Naturally, at the end of all these field trips to the center of the soul, a small emolument to cover stamps and any other expenses the guru may have incurred in another life is in order. The most startling persona of all, however, has to be the “founder and divine leader of the Hathor Ascension Movement on Planet Earth.” Known to her followers as Gabrielle Hathor, a self-proclaimed goddess who is, according to her copywriter, “the fullness of source manifested in human form,” this West Coast icon tells us, “There is a quickening of Karmic feedback. ... Earth has entered a spiritual winter which will last 426,000 Earth years.” Mindful of how rough a long winter can be, Ms. Hathor has started a movement to teach beings to ascend to “higher frequency dimensions,” presumably where they can get out more and play a little golf.

“Levitation, instantaneous translocation, omniscience, ability to materialize and dematerialize and so on become part of one’s normal abilities,” the come-hither spiel lays on the unwary with a trowel, proclaiming that “from these higher frequency dimensions, the ascended being can perceive the lower frequencies while those on the lower frequencies cannot perceive the higher dimensions.”

There is a fervid endorsement by someone named Pleiades MoonStar—a name that would cause no end of consternation for me if I were told at the last minute it belonged to my brain surgeon or pilot. Acolytes in Ms. Hathor’s movement must submit to “a humiliating procedure” as part of a routine to dissolve their egos and get their frequencies jacked up. Actual cash payments are frowned upon, but for a little abject fealty and productive labor one can score a bed and a dish of organic mung beans while either gaining or losing consciousness.

I bring all this up because coincidentally, later that same day I was emerging from Hammacher Schlemmer, laid

waste by obsessive indecision over whether to buy a computerized duck press or the world's finest portable guillotine, when I bumped like the *Titanic* into an old iceberg I had known in college, Max Endorphine. Plump in midlife, with the eyes of a cod and sporting a toupee upholstered with sufficient pile to create a trompe l'oeil pompadour, he pumped my hand and launched into tales of his recent good fortune.

"What can I tell you, boychick, I hit it big. Got in touch with my inner spiritual self, and from there on it was Fat City."

"Can you elaborate?" I queried, registering for the first time his natty bespoke ensemble and advanced-tumor-sized pinkie ring.

"I guess I shouldn't really be jawing with someone on a lower frequency, but since we go way back—"

"Frequency?"

"I'm talking dimensions. Those of us in the upper octaves are taught not to squander healthy ions on mortal troglodytes of which you qualify—no offense. Not that we don't study and appreciate the lower forms—thanks to Leeuwenhoek, if you get my meaning." Suddenly, with a falcon's instinct for prey, Endorphine turned his head toward a long-legged blonde in a micro-miniskirt straining to locate a taxi.

"Clock the apparition with the state-of-the-art pout," he said, his salivary glands shifting into third.

"Must be a centerfold," I piped, feeling the sudden onset of heatstroke, "judging from her see-through blouse."

"Watch this," Endorphine said, whereupon he took a deep breath and began rising off the ground. To the amazement of both myself and Miss July, he was levitating a foot above Fifty-seventh Street in front of Hammacher Schlemmer. Searching for wires, the sweet young thing brought her show closer.

"Hey, how do you do that?" she purred.

"Here. Here's my address," Endorphine said. "I'll be home tonight after eight. Drop by. I'll have you off your feet in no time."

"I'll bring the Petrus," she cooed, stuffing the logistics of their rendezvous into the abyss of her cleavage, and wiggled off as Endorphine slowly descended to ground level.

"What gives?" I said. "Are you Houdini?"

"Oh, well," he sighed benevolently, "since I'm deigning to converse with practically a paramecium, I may as well give you the whole schmear. Let's repair to the Stage Deli and decimate some schnecken while I hold court." With that there was an audible pop and Endorphine vanished. I sucked in my breath and clasped my hand to my open mouth like a startled Gish sister. Seconds later he reappeared, contrite.

"Sorry. I forgot you bottom-feeders can't dematerialize and translocate. My error. Let's just hoof it." I was still pinching myself when Endorphine began his tale.

"OK," he said. "Flashback six months prior, when Mrs. Endorphine's little boy Max was at emotional ducks and drakes over a series of tribulations, which, if you count my misplaced beret, topped Job's. First, this fortune cookie from Taiwan I was tutoring in anatomical hydraulics eighty-sixes me for an apprentice pie maker, then I get sued to the tune of many dead presidents for backing my Jaguar through a Christian Science Reading Room. Add to that my one son from a previous connubial holocaust gives up his lucrative law practice to become a ventriloquist. So here I am, blue and funky, scouring the town for a raison d'être, a spiritual center as it were, when suddenly, out of the ether, I come across this ad in the latest issue of *Vibes Illustrated*. A spa type of joint that liposuctions off your bad karma, raising you to a higher frequency wherein you can at last hold sway over nature à la Faust. As a rule I'm too savvy to bite on a scam like that, but when I dig the CEO is an

actual goddess in human form, I figure what could be bad? And there's no charge. They don't take dough. The system's based on some variation of slavery, but in return you get these crystals, which empower you, and all the Saint-John's-wort you can scarf up. Oh, I'm leaving out she humiliates you. But it's part of the therapy. So her minions frenched my bed and affixed an ass's tail to the back of my trousers unbeknownst to me. Sure I was a laughingstock for a while, but let me tell you, it dissolved my ego. Suddenly I realized I had lived in previous lives—first as a simple burgomaster and then as Lucas Cranach the Elder ... or no, I forget, maybe it was the kid. Anyhow, the next thing I know, I wake up on my crude pallet and my frequency is in the stratosphere. I got like this nimbus around my occiput and I'm omniscient. I mean right off I hit the double at Belmont and within a week I draw crowds every time I show up at the Bellagio in Vegas. If I'm ever unsure about a nag or whether to hit or stick at blackjack, there's this consortium of angels I tap into. I mean, just 'cause someone's got wings and is made of ectoplasm don't mean they can't handicap. Clock this wad."

Endorphine extracted several bale-sized bundles of thousand-dollar bills from each pocket.

"Oops, excuse me," he said, fumbling to retrieve some rubies that had fallen out of his jacket when he produced the cornucopia of greenbacks.

"And she doesn't take any remuneration for this service?" I inquired, my heart taking wing like a peregrine falcon.

"Well, you know, that's how it is with avatars. They're all big sports."

That night, despite a welter of imprecations from the distaff side plus a quick call by her to the firm of Shmeikel and Sons to check if our pre-nup covered the sudden onset of dementia praecox, I found myself skying west to the Sublime Ascension Center with its divinity in residence, a

vision in Frederick's of Hollywood named Galaxie Sunstroke. Bidding me enter the shrine that dominated her compound, an abandoned farm curiously resembling the Spahn ranch of Manson lore, she put down her emery board and got comfortable on a divan.

"Take a load off your feet, honey," she said to me in tones less Martha Graham than Iris Adrian. "So, you want to get in touch with your spiritual center."

"Yes. I'd like my frequency turned up, the ability to levitate, translocate, dematerialize, and sufficient omniscience to divine in advance the randomly selected numerals that comprise the New York State Lottery."

"What do you do for a living?" she inquired, oddly un-omniscient for a creature of her reputed majesty.

"Night watchman at a wax museum," I replied, "but it's not as fulfilling as it sounds."

Turning to one of the Nubians who fanned her with palm fronds, she said, "What do you think, boys? He looks like he'd make a good groundskeeper. Maybe take care of the septic tank."

"Thank you," I said as I knelt, pressing my face to the ground in abasement.

"OK," she said, clapping her hands as a quincunx of loyal minions scurried forward from behind beaded curtains. "Give him a rice bowl and shave his head. Till a bed opens up he can sleep with the chickens."

"I hear and obey," I murmured, averting my eyes lest a direct look at Ms. Sunstroke could distract her from the crossword puzzle she had begun. With that I was hurried away, slightly apprehensive with the thought that I might be branded.

As far as I could discern in the days following, the compound was awash with losers of every description: poltroons and nudniks, actresses who guided their each move by the planets, the overweight, a man who had been involved in some kind of taxidermy scandal, a midget in

denial. All sought to ascend to a higher plane while they labored around the clock in lobotomized submission to the supreme goddess, who occasionally was seen on the grounds dancing like Isadora Duncan or inhaling from a long pipe and then laughing like Seabiscuit. In return for a few spells and passes now and then from the compound's chief shaman, an ex-bouncer I thought I recognized from a documentary on Megan's Law, the faithful were expected to toil twelve to sixteen hours a day harvesting fruits and vegetables for the staff to consume and to manufacture assorted salable commodities such as nude playing cards, foam-rubber dashboard dice, and restaurant crumbers. In addition to my responsibilities maintaining the drainage system, as groundskeeper I was expected to spear and bag the discarded carob-bar wrappers and cigarette papers that dotted the landscape. The daily fare, which leaned heavily on alfalfa seeds, miso, and ionized water, was a little difficult to get used to, but a sawbuck laid on one of the less committed lamas whose brother ran a nearby diner secured an intermittent tuna melt. Discipline was lax and one was expected to act responsibly, although breaking the dietary rules or shirking on the job could lead to a flogging or being hooked up to a field telephone. Humiliation followed humiliation as part of an ego-cleansing ritual, and finally when it was decreed that I was to make love to a karmic priestess who was a dead ringer for Bill Parcells, I decided it was time to pack it in. Inching on my back underneath the barbed-wire fence, I lit out in the dead of night and flagged down the last 747 to the Upper West Side.

"So," my wife said, with the benign tolerance of one addressing the prematurely senile, "did you dematerialize and translocate here, or is that a Continental Airlines cocktail napkin I see dangling from your collar?"

"I didn't stay long enough for that," I parried, fuming at her subtle contumely, "but I sweated enough to pick up *this*