

## **PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THIS PLAY IS FULLY PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT**

All plays, books, music and other materials published by Heartland Plays, Inc. are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries which the United States has reciprocal relations including, but not limited to all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, The Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention. All rights to the plays and materials on our website are strictly reserved including, and without limitation, professional and amateur performance rights; motion pictures; public reading; radio and television broadcasting; audio and video recording and reproduction of any type known or yet to be invented; information storage and retrieval systems of any type known or yet to be invented; and the rights of translation into any and all languages. No individual or organization whether amateur or stock may perform this play or any play published by Heartland Plays, Inc. without first obtaining advance permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. and paying the appropriate fees including Royalties and Single-Use Copyright fees. Heartland Plays, Inc. collects royalties on behalf of the Playwrights whose plays it publishes. Unauthorized copying, transcribing or reproduction of the play, or storage or transmittal in any form and by any means whether known or yet to be invented, is strictly forbidden except as provided by Agreement with Heartland Plays, Inc. Any unauthorized use is a violation of copyright laws and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

### **FIVE SIMPLE RULES TO REMEMBER**

1. DO take advantage of the free online perusal of our plays to help you make the best choice for your particular needs or production.
2. DO enjoy the convenience of our online purchase application for performance rights and single-use copyright.
3. DO understand that the plays in this play and all materials on our website are controlled by Heartland Plays, Inc. and fully protected by copyright.
4. DO NOT attempt in any way to copy, transcribe or reproduce this play by any means or perform the play or use any play or material from our website without first receiving permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. Any attempt to use this or any other work without first obtaining permission is a violation of copyright and punishable by law.
5. DO NOT rob this Author or any of the Authors we represent of their right to be paid for the use of their property. **It is a crime and it is wrong!**

Product Code A0810.3

# STRANGER ON THE PORCH

By Beth Dotson Brown

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
REPRODUCTION WITHOUT SPECIFIC WRITTEN PERMISSION  
PROHIBITED**

**Performance Rights Available Exclusively through  
Heartland Plays, Inc. at [heartlandplays.com](http://heartlandplays.com)  
[playsnow@heartlandplays.com](mailto:playsnow@heartlandplays.com)  
customer service: 406-431-7680**

**Copyright © 2007 by Beth Dotson Brown**

# STRANGER ON THE PORCH

By Beth Dotson Brown

2 W / 1 M

## **Setting:**

*The porch of a middle class house in a small, Midwestern town in the 1970s.*

## **Characters:**

**Abby Kanapple;** *Keith's wife of 20 years. A fading beauty who is not content with her life. For years she got what she wanted because of her looks; didn't attend college but learned to keep the books for Keith. She strives to make things better by almost constant cleaning.*

**Keith Kanapple;** *A former traveling salesman who settled down with the beauty Abby and is still happy to call her his wife. He's content to work a little during the days and spend his evenings watching television.*

**Emma Lowery;** *A young woman who shows up at their house.*

## STRANGER ON THE PORCH

By Beth Dotson Brown

*(AT RISE: ABBY and KEITH are reading the newspaper on the porch. ABBY looks up from the paper to watch a man, woman and two children walking on the sidewalk.)*

ABBY

There they go again. All five of them.

KEITH

I only see four.

ABBY

She's pregnant. In a few months you'll see number five. *(KEITH returns to his paper. ABBY continues to look after them.)* I don't understand. We would have made beautiful babies.

KEITH

*(Puts down the newspaper.)* What did you say Abby?

ABBY

I said we would have made beautiful babies, you and I.

KEITH

*(Smiling at her.)* You would have made the most precious babies in the world. It's not like we didn't try.

ABBY

*(Still serious.)* That's not the point, Keith. Why them and not us? We could give a good home to children. And them, well, just look at them!

KEITH

*(KEITH shrugs.)* You would have been a wonderful mother, Abby. I'm sorry we couldn't make it happen. Maybe if I hadn't traveled so much during the first 10 years of our marriage. But those days are gone.

ABBY

*(Looking wistfully after the family.)* I would give anything.

KEITH

I have sales calls to make this week on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but if I do well maybe we could take off on Thursday to that lake house of your sister's.

ABBY

That would be lovely.

*(EMMA LOWERY enters wearing a suit and low-heeled, sensible shoes and carrying a case of some sort. She looks at the house number then addresses them.)*

EMMA

Is this the home of Mr. Keith Kanapple?

KEITH

Yes ma'am. What can I do for you?

EMMA

You're him? Mr. Kannapel?

ABBY

He is.

EMMA

You don't look at all as I expected. Or as mother described you. But I supposed it's the distance of years and miles that make it so. *(ABBY and KEITH exchange glances. EMMA puts down her traveling bag and extends a hand, first to Abby then to Keith.)* My name is Emma Lowery. At least that's my given name. But I believe that if my mother had followed custom, she would have named me Emma Kanapple.

KEITH

*(Shakes his head and stares.)* What are you trying to tell me?

EMMA

That I believe I'm your daughter. *(KEITH stares at the young woman and ABBY straightens, stopping the movement of the porch swing. She first gapes at KEITH then at EMMA.)*

ABBY

You must be, what, 19?

EMMA

Oh, no. I'm 21. Rest assured, Mr. Kanapple was acquainted with my mother before he ever met you. And I don't mean to throw a disturbance into your relationship at all. It's just that . . . *(EMMA looks down demurely at her hands, then to ABBY then KEITH.)* It's just that my mother recently went on to her higher reward and I'm feeling somewhat rootless, having no other siblings, you see. And she always insisted that McGregor Lowery was my father, but the night he left her I heard him call me her bastard child and since then . . .

ABBY

Oh, you poor girl. Please sit down. *(ABBY scoots over to give EMMA space on the porch swing. Emma lightly drops herself onto the swing, barely moving it. Abby starts to put her arm around the girl's shoulders, but she hesitates and doesn't follow through. KEITH watches the two, shaking his head.)* You must miss your mother terribly.

EMMA

Oh, yes. We were such good friends. The best really. So without her, every day is a struggle. That's why I thought that if I could find my father, well, it wouldn't be the same as having Mama back, but it might be something.

KEITH

*(Clears his throat.)* I'm sorry to have to ask, but could you please tell me your mother's name?

EMMA

Marlene. Marlene Knight of Tupelo, Mississippi.

KEITH

Tupelo. I did work Tupelo and nearby for awhile. *(He counts on his fingers then studies EMMA's face.)*

EMMA

Your name was in her address book from that year, 1952. She got a new one every year and filled them in order, like it was some sort of record of her life, which it sort of is. I didn't see you listed after that.

ABBY

*(Scowls at her KEITH then turns lovingly to EMMA.)* Do you still live in Tupelo, Emma?

EMMA

Oh, I've been traveling around somewhat, educating myself about the world I guess you could say.

KEITH

How so?

EMMA

*(Speaking a very southern, storytelling cadence.)* Well, even though I didn't know my real father's family, I was well-acquainted with mother's family – six sisters and one brother. Most of them live in Tupelo still to this day, but Aunt Susie and Aunt Renny both moved to Mobile, Alabama. And the baby, Uncle Jacob, he settled near Memphis. He has a real sweet wife, Melody, who loves it when I come to stay. Unlike my aunts, she didn't grow up with sisters and since she and Uncle Jacob only have boys, at least so far, Melody just loves to have another girl around.

ABBY

That's lovely that you have your family, but it doesn't make up for not having parents, does it? *(EMMA'S eyes dropped to study her shoes and she answered only with silence. She puts her elbows on her knees and drops her face into them, as if crying. ABBY moves closer to encircle the girl with her arm. Quietly)* Have you eaten anything? I could fix you a sandwich now if you're hungry. Or you could join us later for supper. I'm making Keith's favorite, pot roast. *(ABBY glances over at KEITH. He stares blankly at the two women.)*

EMMA

*(She sits up slowly, wiping her cheeks dry of any tears she might have shed. She looks at KEITH.)* Would you mind very much if I stay for supper?

ABBY

Of course he won't mind, dear.

KEITH

Abby, isn't it time for you to start cooking? My stomach is beginning to growl.

ABBY

*(Looks at EMMA as if she's afraid to leave her.)* But this is such a good time to get acquainted, for all three of us. *(ABBY smiles at EMMA, appearing to be very happy.)* Tell us more about yourself.

EMMA

Well, I road the bus here. It was a long ride but without a car it was my only option. And as I'm sure you know, the bus station is a fair piece from your home so it was a little walk.

ABBY

But you really wanted to find us.

EMMA

Oh yes, I most certainly did.

KEITH

Abby, could you get me some iced tea. And I'm sure our guest would like some, also.

ABBY

*(Still unsure about leaving them.)* I'll hurry and be right back. *(ABBY departs and EMMA watches KEITH. She begins to push the swing lightly and its creaking fills the porch.)*

KEITH

I've sold a lot of things to a lot of people during my life. I went door-to-door with encyclopedias, vacuum cleaners and household cleaning products. Every one had some beneficial trait that would make the buyer happy.

EMMA

So you're a salesman?

KEITH

Born that way, I suspect. Sometimes traits are passed on from father to daughter.

EMMA

Sometimes.

KEITH

*(Gets up and walks to the far corner of the porch, counting on his fingers again.)* What did you say your mother's name was?

EMMA

Marlene Knight.

KEITH

Did she ever call herself Marly?

EMMA

Why yes, she did. Aunt Susie still refers to her as Marly.

KEITH

*(Shakes his head in remembrance.)* Yes, you do have a family resemblance. And your voice, the way you talk, it's just like her.

EMMA

So you do remember!

KEITH

I remember Marly. I remember a fun-loving, pretty little gal who talked a mile a minute to me about how she knew Hank Williams even before he got famous. That did impress me for some reason. *(He appears to be searching his memory, then speaks as if to himself.)* Marly Knight and I had a baby.

EMMA

You had a baby but now you have a grown daughter.

KEITH

*(Speaks in an accusing tone.)* Why me? There must be other names in the book that you could check.

EMMA

*(Looks hurt.)* There are dates. The dates by your name make the most sense. They fit.

KEITH

*(Pauses and considers her from across the porch.)* What is it that you want, Ms. Lowery? I'm sure you came here for a reason.

EMMA

*(Furrowing her brows.)* I came to meet my father.

KEITH

What's your birth date, Ms. Lowery?

EMMA

August 27, 1952.

KEITH

*(Pacing the porch.)* August. My first visit to Tupelo was earlier that year, maybe February. Then I went back in, let me see, I believe it was July. I saw Marly again then – dancing outside at the drive in with some girlfriends. She wore a summer sweater that

KEITH, *Continued*

looked mighty fine on her little figure. *(Turns directly toward EMMA.)* The dates might fit, but either Marly wasn't your mother or you were born later. I saw her in July and her stomach wasn't sheltering a baby. *(EMMA locks eyes with him, as if challenging him to go on.)* I'll ask you again. What is it you want?

## EMMA

It works all the time in the story books. Anne of Green Gables. That lost girl that Audrey Hepburn played in Breakfast at Tiffany's. Someone always takes them in and gives them something they've never had before, making their life better and more exciting.

## KEITH

What have you never had that you're looking for?

## EMMA

*(She drops her eyes to her feet then slowly raises them back to Keith.)* A father.

## KEITH

*(KEITH Looks away from her out toward the sidewalk while EMMA gazes at him hopefully. KEITH turns back to her)* How about a mother?

## EMMA

Oh, your wife is nice and all, but I don't need her. I learned from my mother that it's the man who holds the wallet.

## KEITH

*(Angrily)* You are the worst kind of liar. You're not just trying to get money, you're dealing with hearts here. *(He takes his wallet out of his back pocket, pulls out cash and hands it to her.)* Take this and get out of here. And don't come back. *(ABBY comes back onto the porch with two iced teas.)*

## EMMA

*(Snatches the money, folds it in half then stuffs it in her jacket pocket as she stands up.)* I was looking forward to that pot roast.

## KEITH

Abby makes a good pot roast, with fresh meat and vegetables, none of that fake stuff they try to sell you in packages in the grocery store. Abby is the real deal on everything. *(EMMA nods, picks up her case then walks past KEITH.)* Maybe you'll learn to be the real deal some day.

## EMMA

*(Stops and turns to look back at ABBY.)* I guess you can have my iced tea. *(She exits.)*

*(ABBY put the teas on the table next to KEITH, who returns to his seat. ABBY stands, dumbstruck.)*

KEITH

Please, Abby, sit down. (*ABBY returns to her spot on the swing and looks fondly at the spot where EMMA sat.*) She wasn't my daughter, Abby.

ABBY

But . . . but . . . the girl doesn't have any family, Keith. And neither do we.

KEITH

It's for the best, Abby.

ABBY

She doesn't have anyone. We could have at least given her a good, hot meal. (*KEITH shakes his head as if worried. Goes to sit next to ABBY, who is sobbing quietly.*) For a moment, I could just see us all together. You and I and our daughter, going to church on Christmas day, unwrapping gifts from under the tree, drinking hot chocolate together. Like a real family.

KEITH

(*Gently places his palm over his wife's hand.*) We are a family already, dear. I couldn't want anything more than you.

ABBY

But I could, Keith. And I almost had it.

KEITH

Abby, she's not my daughter.

ABBY

But she could have been. Could have been mine, too. Didn't you always tell me that salesmen know how to twist someone's fantasy into a truth?

KEITH

I don't think twisting a little fantasy into a tiny truth is the same as creating a family based on a lie. Besides, that girl was so slick that I wouldn't doubt if her mother is alive and breathing happily as she sends her out on these visits to raise money for the family.

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**