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Sour Plums

A Short Play
by

Jill Elaine Hughes

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CHARACTERS

2F

DAISY: *Over 50*

PEARL: *Her sister; wheelchair bound*

SETTING

1999

PREMIERE CREDIT

World Premiere Production June 2001 at Theatre of Western Springs, Western Springs Illinois, as part of their *Shorts for a Summer's Evening* festival.

Sour Plums
by Jill Elaine Hughes

SETTING: *PEARL and DAISY are sisters living together in a small apartment. They have hated one another since childhood but have never quite been able to sever their ties with one another. PEARL has been wheelchair-bound since she was a teenager.*

AT RISE: *PEARL and DAISY are in the kitchen. PEARL is looking for something to eat; DAISY is absently reading a newspaper.*

PEARL

(Wheels over to refrigerator and looks inside)

Where's the can of plums I had in here?

DAISY

Don't know what you're talking about.

PEARL

You very well do. The can of plums. The Valencia brand plums that Howard Mill brought me back from Burlington as a present. I left the can in the fridge to chill on the bottom shelf so I could reach it from my chair.

DAISY

Still don't know what you're talking about.

PEARL

I left it right here. A twelve-ounce can of fresh spring plums. You can't buy those around here. You can't get plums like that down here in Texas. It's a Northern thing. The Safeway don't carry 'em. They got cans of peaches, cans of pears, cans of mandarin oranges even, but nobody's got plums round here. Howard went right to the place they were grown and packed to get me that can. It even had the sweet syrup sauce. I can't believe you took it. You know I was saving it for a special occasion.

DAISY

(Doesn't look up from her newspaper)

Today's no special occasion.

PEARL

Yes it is. It's Friday. I love Fridays.

DAISY

You love Fridays.

PEARL

Yes, I do. You know that.

DAISY

Can't say as I do.

PEARL

Yes, you do. I love Fridays. Especially this Friday. It's the first Friday of the month, the day I get my disability check and watch the shopping channel.

DAISY

You never buy nothin' you see on that channel, so why do you watch it? Ain't nothin' on there but junk and all the hostess ladies look like they's made of shiny plastic.

PEARL

(Wheels back away from refrigerator)

You don't have to buy anything to enjoy the shopping channel.

DAISY

Don't see how that's possible.

PEARL

It is possible. *(Wheels her chair over to the table where DAISY is sitting; the refrigerator door slams behind her)* The ladies who model the jewelry all have such pretty hands. Their nails are all done with the shiny white tips and they all have the pretty jewelry and wristwatches on and they all smile like it's just the end of the world.

DAISY

You would like that. You think it's the end of the world all the time. *(Rises from table and goes to open the refrigerator)* You're like Chicken Little, always runnin' around saying "the sky is falling." You think it's the end of the world when you run outa cold cream.

DAISY rummages around in the refrigerator

PEARL

Well, you try spending all your time in a rickety wheelchair cooped up in a smelly clapboard apartment with your grouchy humpbacked sister, see what you start to say.

DAISY

I ain't grouchy. An' I ain't humpbacked, neither. That's just a little osteoporosis.

DAISY returns to the table with bread and jam; sits.

PEARL

Yes you are. Mercy. No, I was saying that the ladies on the channel are all just so lovely, with their pretty hands and their soft voices. All they do is smile and smile and laugh all the time. They get so thrilled over the smallest things. It don't take much to please 'em. Just show the Excalibur Jewelry Show hostess a sterling silver ring with aquamarine chips pretty enough to be the Selection of the Hour, and she talks like all the world's problems are solved.

DAISY

I wish you were pleased that easy. Then all my problems would be solved.

PEARL

Aw, shut up, you old coot.

DAISY

You're calling me the old coot. That's a laugh. You're two years older, and in that chair to boot.

PEARL

(Wheels to other side of the room, near the trash can)

I've been in this chair for forty-six years. *[Adjust for age of actors]* Think you'd be used to it by now.

DAISY

Well, I ain't. All you do is mark up the floors with your wheels and bang that thing into the paneling so it looks like we had the World War Three in here. I'll never be used to that.

PEARL

You should be. All I've done since the accident is wheel around under your nose. And all you do is stick your nose up in the air that much higher. Like you're so much better than me. Like since you can walk that makes you less of an old maid than me. Well, I'll tell you something, Daisy. When you figure out how to drag yourself up onto the toilet with two useless legs and not spill anything out onto the floor or mash it into the cloth of your dress while still navigatin' around a Deluxe Maidenform Girdle, and your only survivin' relative in the world won't even help you onto the toilet, we can talk about which one of us is better than the other.

DAISY

I do not need to listen to your toilet habits, Pearl. That's—well, that's just unladylike. You know I can't stand to be around you when you're like this. Out on your little tirades. I'm going in the back room to eat. I never saw such a. . . *(Starts to get up)*

PEARL

You're mad 'cause Howard Mill keeps comin' to visit me, aren't you?

DAISY

I ain't mad. Why would I be mad?

PEARL

Nobody ever comes to visit you.

DAISY

That's not true. Jeb Howard came to visit me a few times.

PEARL

That was three years ago. And he's dead now.

DAISY

Oh. Well. . .

PEARL

See, it's because nobody wants to come see you. You're so nasty and unpleasant that nobody wants to be around you. Least of all me, but I don't have a choice.

DAISY

I am not unpleasant.

PEARL

Oh you are so. All you do is ruffle everybody's feathers, all you think of is yourself. I can't even get my chair out the front door unless you help me, and when was the last time you did that?

DAISY pauses to think.

PEARL, *Continued*

See! What did I tell you. You can't even recall the last time you helped me. What does that say about you, you—you—*bugbat!*

DAISY

Goddamn a mercy—.

PEARL

See, there you go again with the foul language. Mama always said that a lady never. . .

DAISY

"A lady never bends or speaks below the waist." Yeah, I remember that. Lotta good Mama's advice did us, two old maids, an' one of us a cripple.

PEARL

You shouldn't speak ill of Mama.

DAISY

I'll speak ill o' whoever I please. Not like Mama's doin' anything about it. She's been dead since the week before Kennedy was shot. That was so like her—she had to mess up everybody's plans, even when she up and died. She sure knew how to kill the mood at a party.

PEARL

Daisy, now that ain't—now that just ain't nice.

DAISY

She did it every time—so much so that Dad wouldn't take her anywhere with him, not even to the country club. She even managed to take all the fun out of being let out of work for three days when the President kicked the bucket and LBJ took over since I had to plan the wake and the funeral and all. I didn't even get to see Lady Bird when she came through town on the entourage, 'cause I was holed up in that smelly ol' funeral home.

PEARL

It was Dad who planned most of the funeral.

DAISY

Well, I helped.

PEARL

See, that's what I mean about you, Daisy. You've got no respect for anyone, even the dead. No wonder nobody comes round here no more. You'd probably speak ill of poor Jeb Howard if he hadn't been sweet on you.

DAISY

He wasn't sweet on me. Man just had too much damn time on his hands. He didn't do anything but hang around and bother people. Wasn't his fault he lost his hands in the war, but it didn't really make him good for anything except ripping up weeds with his hooks and generally being the town freak. I never liked him much anyway. He had psoriasis on his scalp and he smelled like Ben-Gay.

PEARL

(Under her breath)

That was probably your own Ben-Gay you were smellin', not his. *(Out loud)* Well, it's no wonder you never married, Daisy. Your standards always were way too high.

DAISY

That's pot callin' the kettle black, ain't it? I don't see a ring on your finger!

PEARL

Well, I'm in this chair! I was lucky if anybody gave me the time o' day, let alone showed any romantic interest. You of all people should know that. Now I finally got somebody payin' attention to me for the first time since 1954 and I would sure appreciate it if you would stop gettin' in the way. *(Tries to wheel out of the room, but DAISY obstructs her path)*

DAISY

How exactly am I gettin' in the way?

PEARL

What I was startin' to say before we got off on this other—track. The plums that Howard brought me that I was savin'. I know you took 'em, don't even try to deny it.

DAISY

Why would I want to eat up your nasty cheap old can o' Yankee plums?

PEARL

I never said nothin' about you *eating* them. I said you *took* 'em.

DAISY

I—I mean, why would I—

PEARL

Oh—oh—there you go! Trippin' up on your words again! See, I caught you! You do that every time. You trip on your words and your eyes do that little flicker over to the right. I've seen you do it so many times I could recognize it in my sleep.

DAISY

Here you go again, imaginin' things.

PEARL

I am not imaginin' anything. I know what I see before my very own eyes, and what I've been seein' over and over since we was kids. You never could lie well. I can always see it in your eyes. My cataracts ain't so thick that I don't know what I see right in front o' my own nose.

DAISY

Now I *am* goin' in the back room. I don't have to listen to this.

DAISY picks up the bread and jam and exits, slamming the bedroom door behind her.

PEARL

(Calling offstage)

You think that I don't know about all you've done to me over the years? Well, you're wrong. I know everything. *Everything*. I even know what you did with Bob Booster in the back of the bus on that class trip to Houston we took senior year.

DAISY, *Offstage*

Will you please just be *quiet!* You ain't impressin' nobody.

PEARL

I ain't tryin' to impress anybody. I don't see nobody else here to impress besides you. And I don't want to impress you.

SFX: From off; the sound of old-time Big Band music begins to blare.

PEARL, *Continued*

Now you got your music a-blarin'. Think you can hide yourself from me, do you. Well, you can't. Not this time, little Miss Railroad Longhorn Queen 1952. (*Wheels over to the door and bangs on it.*) Daisy! DAISY! (*Continues to bang on door*) Don't you hide from me when I'm in the middle o' tellin' you off!! You know how much that aggravates me!

SFX: Music lowers for a moment.

DAISY, *Off*

You should be used to disappointment by now.

SFX: Music now plays even louder.

PEARL begins ramming her chair into the doorframe.

DAISY, *Off; Continued*

(Shouting)

Will you stop that??!! You'll break the door down!!

PEARL

I ain't gonna stop until you come out here and let me finish my say.

SFX: Music stops.

DAISY opens the door reluctantly.

PEARL, *Continued*

There now. That's better. Now I can get down to my business.

DAISY

Out with it.

PEARL

Like I said, I always know when you lie. You're lyin' now. You lied to Mama about Bob Booster, you lied to Mama and Papa about how you went down to Mexico to take care o' what you and Bob Booster done, and you're lyin' now.

DAISY

Prove it.

PEARL

All right, I will. In a minute. But I know you took them plums just like you've always taken everything else from me. And then you try to lie about it. Even after the accident, when you tried to tell the police you didn't see that other car coming, you couldn't even lie right about that.

DAISY

I . . .

PEARL

(Rummages in garbage bin and pulls out empty can of plums)

Here! I knew it! You ate these up yourself when you knew I was saving them! It's always the same with you. Always the same. Always jealous of my good fortune so you have to go and spoil it.

DAISY

Don't know what you're talkin' about.

PEARL

You very well do. It's been the same old story ever since we were in high school.

DAISY

I'm going back into the bedroom now. Can't take no more of you.

PEARL

Oh no you don't. *(Rams her with the wheelchair)* You stay right where you are. *(Continues)*

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