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Product Code A0801.3

Joanna

On My Mind

A One Act Play for One Man & One Woman

by

Lynn-Steven Johanson

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Joanna on My Mind

by Lynn-Steven Johanson

SETTING:

The present; at or near a park bench in a small Midwestern city

CHARACTERS:

BILL; 60, *a retired writer living in New York*

PEARL; 60, *Bill's former high school sweetheart*

ETC

Original production credits

JOANNA ON MY MIND was first presented by the Brief Acts Company, a division of Love Creek Productions Network, in New York City as part of its Annual Short Play Festival Series on October 22, 2004, with the following cast:

BILL.....John Montague

PEARL.....Babara Miluski

It was directed by Linda Loren.

Joanna on My Mind

by Lynn-Steven Johanson

(AT RISE: A park in a small Midwestern city on a mild summer day. There are two benches, the type with metal frames and wooden slats. Nearby is a trash receptacle. BILL, a polished man of 60, sits on a bench reading a newspaper and sipping coffee from a paper cup. PEARL, a well-kept woman of 60 enters. She has been out walking. BILL lowers his paper and makes eye contact with PEARL before going back to his reading. She walks to the other bench and sits. She opens a small bottle of water and takes a drink. BILL turns the page of his paper and PEARL studies his face.)

PEARL

(After a few moments) Excuse me. *(Pause)* Excuse me. *(BILL lowers the paper.)* Are you reading the paper?

BILL

Uh, yes.

PEARL

Oh.

BILL

Would you like part of it?

PEARL

No, I've read it already.

BILL

Ah.

(BILL goes back to his paper but PEARL continues to stare at him. He lowers the paper slightly, looking over the top of it.)

BILL, *Continued*

Is there something I can help you with?

PEARL

No, it's just...

BILL

What?

PEARL

Nothing. Sorry. Never mind.

Mm. BILL

(BILL returns to his paper.)

(After a moment) Actually... PEARL

(Lowering his paper) Yes? BILL

You remind me of someone. PEARL

I do? BILL

Uh-huh. PEARL

(Smiling) Well, I should. BILL

Bill? PEARL

Uh-huh. BILL

Bill Harrigan! I can't believe it. PEARL

Pearl. BILL

It's me. PEARL

It's been a long time. BILL

Forty-two years. PEARL

Yes, it has. Well, you look wonderful. BILL

PEARL
Always the charmer.

BILL
No, I'm serious. You look wonderful.

PEARL
Thank you.

BILL
How have you been?

PEARL
Just great.

BILL
Just great. I'm glad.

PEARL
Well, maybe not great. Fine. I've been fine.

BILL
Terrific.

PEARL
Actually, I've been pretty good. Fine sometimes but pretty good most of the time.

BILL
Well, that's better than "not so good", huh?

PEARL
For certain. I've been pretty good for a long time now.

BILL
Good.

PEARL
What about you?

BILL
Me?

PEARL
Yes.

BILL
Fine. Just fine.

PEARL
That's...fine. I mean...

BILL
I think fine is comparable to pretty good, don't you?

PEARL
Close. It's close.

BILL
Well...Tell me about yourself.

PEARL
Oh, gee...

BILL
Married? Children?

PEARL
I was married for thirty-four years—to Doctor Morris Hart. He was a dentist—took over Doctor Gleason's practice.

BILL
I don't think I knew him.

PEARL
Sure you did. Skinny, gray-haired man with pockmarks—used to go to our church.

BILL
Your husband?

PEARL
No. Dr. Gleason.

BILL
I meant your husband.

PEARL
Oh.

BILL
I don't think I knew your husband.

PEARL
No, you wouldn't have. He was from Florida.

I see. BILL

Tallahassee. PEARL

Mm. BILL

He passed away eight years ago. PEARL

I'm sorry. BILL

Fifty-four years old. PEARL

Young. BILL

Liver disease. PEARL

Too bad. BILL

PEARL
He was a good provider but he loved his martinis—always had one in his hand. But he never seemed to get drunk or out of control.

Hm. BILL

PEARL
Didn't discover he had liver damage until it was too late. So, he sold his practice and we traveled some while he still could...

I see. BILL

PEARL
Fortunately for me, he had a good accountant, so I've been able to live comfortably.

Children? BILL

PEARL

Two. A boy and a girl.

BILL

You're very lucky.

PEARL

Bill works in South Africa for the American Embassy.

BILL

Bill?

PEARL

Yes. And Eileen works as a militant lesbian.

BILL

Uh—

PEARL

Does that shock you?

BILL

Well, no. I just didn't realize it had become a profession.

PEARL

She's an activist. I think she still lives in Colorado. But with her, you're never quite sure.

BILL

So, I take it you don't get to see them very often.

PEARL

I see Bill once a year or so. He's been after me to fly down there during the winter, but I don't know...

BILL

That would be a spectacular trip. I've been there, its breath-taking.

PEARL

Oh, I don't know. I guess I could use a little of Eileen's devil-may-care attitude.

BILL

Well...

PEARL

She's very independent—I don't hear from her for months at a time, and then one day she just shows up out of the blue.

BILL

Sounds like a very unique person.

PEARL

Oh, yes. That she is. Marches to her own beat, that's for sure.

BILL

Mm.

PEARL

Not my kind of music, you understand.

BILL

You have to do what makes you happy, right?

PEARL

I guess...

BILL

Must get a little lonely not seeing them.

PEARL

Yes. Yes, it does. But my cats keep me company.

BILL

You always had a fondness for cats, if I remember correctly.

PEARL

Yes. Igor and Chen—my babies. He's a Russian Blue and she's a Himalayan.

BILL

Purebreds?

PEARL

Oh, yes. What about you? What brings you back to town? The Alumni Banquet was last month.

BILL

Actually, I'm in the process of moving back here.

PEARL

You are?

BILL

I decided to take an early retirement. Got tired of all the traveling and it's become too expensive to live in New York. So when I heard that the family house was up for sale, I decided to buy it and move back home. I closed on it yesterday.

PEARL

So, we'll have a famous person living in town.

BILL

I'm hardly famous.

PEARL

Of course you are. Traveling the world; writing for all those magazines and such.

BILL

It was a great job. I got to do some exciting things, and was well paid for it.

PEARL

You and Charles Winebrenner are the town's most famous native sons, you know that?

BILL

Charles Winebrenner?

PEARL

Yes. He graduated from high school here twenty years ago or so.

BILL

I'm afraid I've never heard of him.

PEARL

He's a chemist—invented Soft Scrub.

BILL

Soft Scrub—well, I guess someone has to devise those sorts of things.

PEARL

Sold the formula for millions. Built his parents a lovely home on the north side of town.

BILL

It's an honor to be mentioned in the same breath with such a distinguished individual.

PEARL

Moving back home, huh?

BILL

Yeah. Back home.

PEARL

You said you live in New York?

BILL

Manhattan. I have an apartment there.

PEARL

This will be a big change from New York.

BILL

I think I can fit back into the swing of things. You can never take the small town out of the boy. Of course, I'll miss many of the city's unique charms.

PEARL

Not many art galleries, museums or theatres here, I'm afraid.

BILL

Not very many muggings, shootings, and homeless people either.

PEARL

Oh. I'm afraid we're rather dull by comparison.

BILL

That's fine with me.

PEARL

You might have to visit Omaha or Des Moines if you start longing for those kinds of things.

BILL

I'm looking forward to something a little quieter, more laid back.

PEARL

We have a surplus of quiet and laid back around here.

BILL

Perfect. That's what I was hoping for.

PEARL

Just think, that beautiful old brick house is back in the family.

BILL

Yes.

PEARL

It's been well cared for.

BILL

Certainly has. The kitchen's been redone, and they've added a new garage out back. But it still feels like home.

PEARL

So, when are you moving?

BILL

Next month. Pearl offered to fly in and help me.

PEARL

Pearl?

BILL

My daughter.

PEARL

Oh.

BILL

She lives in Phoenix—she's an artist—a painter.

PEARL

A painter?

BILL

Yes. Does beautiful work—landscapes of the southwest mostly.

PEARL

Phoenix, huh?

BILL

Ever been there?

PEARL

Oh, yes. Lovely place if you can stand the heat.

BILL

Her mother moved back there after the divorce.

PEARL

Oh.

BILL

Pearl was just two years old at the time so I never really got to enjoy seeing her grow up.

PEARL

That's too bad.

BILL

One of those things, you know?

PEARL

Yes.

BILL

But, we rediscovered each other when she was in college, and she lived with me in New York when she was going to art school.

PEARL

Bill's divorced, too. But he's remarried again.

BILL

So is Pearl. Twice as a matter of fact. No kids. She's been living with a university professor for the last seven years, but I don't know if they'll ever make it official.

PEARL

She's a lovely person.

BILL

Who is?

PEARL

Bill's wife.

BILL

Oh.

PEARL

Very nice.

BILL

He's lucky to have found someone else.

PEARL

Yes.

BILL

I never did—came close once, but...

PEARL

Well...

BILL

Fate.

PEARL

Yes.

BILL

Maybe...

PEARL
Mm.

BILL
Maybe it's fate that I'm moving back here.

PEARL
You know, when your family moved away, I had no idea that I would never see you again.

BILL
I never wanted it to be that way.

PEARL
I was devastated.

BILL
So was I.

PEARL
You were?

BILL
Mm-hm.

PEARL
I thought you just forgot about us.

BILL
No, it was—

PEARL
You never wrote. You never called.

BILL
Well, I—

PEARL
I was waiting to hear from you. I guess...

BILL
When Dad got that job in Connecticut—it was like moving to a different world. My entire life was disrupted—and if that wasn't enough—you were going to Iowa State that fall and I was going to Brandeis...the distance didn't give me much of an opportunity to return. And since we no longer had family here, there was nothing pulling us back.

PEARL
You're the last of the Harrigans, aren't you?

BILL

Only child of an only child. No aunts, uncles, cousins, or sons. I'm it.

PEARL

Most of our friends went their own way. Not many from our class stuck around.

BILL

You did.

PEARL

I had no idea I would be coming back here after college. That was a fluke.

BILL

I wish I could have come back, but back then you couldn't simply jump on a plane like you can now.

PEARL

Things may have—

BILL

I thought about it.

PEARL

You did?

BILL

Mm-hm. A lot.

PEARL

So did I.

BILL

But college, the job, the lure of the big city, all the traveling I was doing...

PEARL

Other people.

BILL

Yes. Met my wife when I was on one of my excursions to Mexico. She was from Arizona—an anthropologist—hated New York. I was gone a lot, she was gone a lot, and well...it was inevitable, I suppose. *(Pause)* What are you thinking about?

PEARL

You remember the day we spent up at the lakes, just after we graduated from high school?

BILL

Like it was yesterday.

PEARL

The Buckingham were playing at the Roof Garden that evening.

BILL

I can still hear them. "Hey, baby, they're playin' our song."

PEARL

And the scandal.

BILL

I remember.

PEARL

(Laughs) My father called them a bunch of communists.

BILL

I wonder what he would think of today's rock and roll.

PEARL

Oh, I would hate to think...

BILL

The Buckingham.

PEARL

That night is one of my most cherished memories.

BILL

Mine, too.

PEARL

And that last summer we spent together was probably the happiest that I've ever been.

BILL

That was very special.

PEARL

Mm.

BILL

It made moving away especially hard.

PEARL

Painful.

BILL

I know.

PEARL

And it's what—

BILL

It isn't that I didn't want to see you. It just seemed hopeless.

PEARL

Hopeless.

BILL

I figured why prolong the suffering—I should just let you get on with your life and...I know it probably seemed cruel, but I could only deal with it by going to college and burying myself in my studies. Made new friends. It's how I was able to cope.

PEARL

I see.

BILL

You went to the university—is that where you met your husband?

PEARL

I started school there that fall, but I dropped out at the semester. The next year I transferred to Florida State. That's where we met.

BILL

You dropped out?

PEARL

Uh-huh.

BILL

That's not like you.

PEARL

(Becoming upset) I know.

BILL

Didn't you like it?

PEARL

I liked it fine.

BILL

I don't understand.

PEARL

Well, I couldn't continue second semester.

Couldn't continue?
No.
What happened?
I was pregnant.
Pregnant?
I was due in April, so I couldn't attend.
Oh my god. The weekend at the lakes?
Mm.
Oh . . .
I know I—
Why didn't you tell me?
Because I didn't think you cared. You didn't—
Ah, Jeez.
—stay in touch, you—
Did it ever occur to you I had a right to know? I wasn't just—
I felt alone, betrayed and—

BILL

PEARL

BILL

PEARL

BILL

PEARL

BILL

PEARL

BILL

PEARL

BILL

PEARL

BILL

PEARL

BILL

PEARL

BILL
I would have married you.

PEARL
I didn't want you that way.

BILL
Ugh.

PEARL
You disappeared so I convinced myself that it was just some little fling that meant more to me than it did to you.

BILL
Pearl.

PEARL
And I didn't want the humiliation of having to get married—people never forget such things. Back then you were marked for life—especially in a small town. They look at you and see a red letter "A".

BILL
But it didn't have to be that way.

PEARL
I figured I'd simply made a mistake—young and foolish.

BILL
So what happened, I mean—

PEARL
When I discovered I was pregnant, I thought out my options. I went to the father of a classmate—an attorney—and he made arrangements for an adoption. He took care of everything.

BILL
My god.

PEARL
She was born April twenty-ninth.

BILL
A girl.

PEARL
Uh-huh.

BILL

A girl.

PEARL

I only saw her for a few moments before they took her away. They wouldn't even let me hold her.

(PEARL cries.)

BILL

(Handing her his handkerchief) Here.

PEARL

My own baby.

(PEARL takes his handkerchief, dabs her eyes and blows her nose.)

BILL

What about your parents?

PEARL

They never knew.

BILL

Your parents never found out?

PEARL

They just thought I was going through some rebellious phase and wanted to live my own life. I was able to cover it up when I came home during Christmas.

BILL

But what about the bills, all the—

PEARL

The adoptive parents took care of it. They were well off. It was all arranged through the attorney—he got me a part-time job, a place to live—everything—no questions asked. Even helped get me into Florida State the next year.

BILL

But you were still a minor.

PEARL

Wealthy people have the power to pull strings.

BILL

Did you know anything about them?

PEARL

Only that they were from California, wealthy, and couldn't have children of their own. That's all the attorney would tell me. He said the baby would have the best of everything.

BILL

And you've kept this secret for all these years.

PEARL

Mm-hm.

BILL

No one else knew?

PEARL

Only the attorney, and he's probably dead by now.

BILL

Why did you decide to tell me? I mean, we've—

PEARL

Because she contacted me a month ago. Wants to know if she can meet me.

BILL

She found you?

PEARL

A lot of adopted children are seeking their birth mothers nowadays.

BILL

I thought court records were sealed.

PEARL

She hired someone who specializes in locating people. They have their ways...

BILL

What did you say?

PEARL

I haven't said anything yet. If Morris was still alive and he found out, oh dear lord! There'd be hell to pay.

BILL

What do you mean?

PEARL

He wouldn't have been able to handle it.

But you said "hell to pay."

BILL

Just an expression.

PEARL

No, it's more than that—

BILL

You're making more—

PEARL

I saw it in your eyes.

BILL

Saw what?

PEARL

Don't brush it off. I've seen that look before.

BILL

What are you talking about?

PEARL

Abused women.

BILL

Look, I—

PEARL

Am I right?

BILL

It's none of your business.

PEARL

You're right. But you were always the kind of person that would speak the truth, Pearl. I could—

BILL

All right, damnit. What do you want me to say? That he was a bastard?

PEARL

Pearl, I—

BILL

PEARL

Well, he was. Oh, he could be such a charming guy in the office or with his friends. But no one really knew what he was like at home. He was mean to his family, a real monster when he drank, and may God forgive me, I'm glad he's dead.

BILL

He didn't beat you or the...

PEARL

No, his abuse was mental, and over the years he damaged all of us. Cynical, sarcastic, never a compliment, always harped on what was wrong. The children and I could never do anything to please him.

BILL

I'm sorry.

PEARL

He drove the kids away so... They didn't even come home for his funeral.

BILL

(Pause) I don't know quite what to say, I uh...

PEARL

I took me a long time to get over the guilt feelings I had about being glad he was gone. But I got over it. I've been getting along pretty well, and then I get a call from Joanna and those feelings have come back to haunt me.

Bill

Joanna?

Pearl

Her name is Joanna.

BILL

So, what was she like?

PEARL

She seems nice enough. And she sent me a letter with pictures.

BILL

You gave her your address?

PEARL

She already had it. She's beautiful. Stunning woman. Has your coloring, reminds me of your mother a little.

BILL

My mother.

PEARL

Would you like to see?

BILL

Sure.

(PEARL begins digging in her shoulder bag for the photographs.)

BILL, *Continued*

Where does she live?

PEARL

California. She and her husband own a small vineyard in the wine country. Here.
(Handing him the photograph) That's her—and that's her husband, Trevor. She just turned forty-one years old a month before she called.

BILL

Very attractive woman.

PEARL

The other picture is her two boys. Jess is fifteen and Jared's eighteen.

BILL

My god—grandchildren.

PEARL

Uh-huh.

BILL

Oh, my.

PEARL

Her adoptive parents are both dead now. They were a lot older than we were. They explained to her she was adopted so she's known all along. Now that they're gone, she said she felt a need to search for her biological parents. *(Hands back the handkerchief)* Thanks.

BILL

(Placing it back in his pocket) You...think you're going to meet her?

PEARL

It's one thing to speak with someone on the phone, but meeting in person is something else entirely. I'm so torn... What if she's going to blame me for abandoning her? I don't think I could take it. But Joanna's been on my mind every day for forty-one years. There hasn't

PEARL, *Continued*

been a day gone by that I didn't wonder about her—what she'd become, whether she has a good life, those kind of things. I just don't know...

BILL

Here. (*Handing back the photos*) If she seemed nice on the phone and she sent you photos...it sounds like it might be worth the risk, don't you think?

PEARL

I'm just a little scared. I'm such a chicken!

BILL

Did you tell her anything about me?

PEARL

No. Only that I was quite young and very much in love at the time. But I'm sure if she wants to meet her mother, she would want to meet her father, too.

BILL

Mm.

PEARL

What is it?

BILL

This is all a little overwhelming, isn't it?

PEARL

Uh-huh.

BILL

I come back to my hometown and find I have a daughter, a son-in-law, and two grandsons.

PEARL

I'm sorry. I haven't seen you for ages and I go and "dump on you", as my daughter would say.

BILL

You know, the best way to deal with this stuff is to meet it head on. There's no other way. Would it make you feel any better if I was there? You know, if and when you meet?

PEARL

You'd do that?

BILL

Uh-huh.

PEARL

Really?

BILL

I'd feel better if I knew she was on the up and up, wouldn't you? I mean, in this day and age, it's better to err on the side of caution.

PEARL

You think she could be—

BILL

There are a lot of shysters out there who prey on people our age. I could call a friend of mine in New York. He could run a background check.

PEARL

Well...

BILL

Of course, we could always jump on a plane for California and check her out this winter. Escape those brutal freezing temperatures. I've never liked cold weather all that much.

PEARL

Then why are you moving back here? I mean, this isn't the most conducive climate for a guy who doesn't like cold weather.

BILL

I know.

PEARL

I should think the southern states might be more attractive.

BILL

Well—

PEARL

Texas, Arizona...

BILL

The truth?

PEARL

Uh-huh.

BILL

Partly because I wanted a simpler life. Partly because of you.

PEARL
I beg your pardon?

BILL
You.

PEARL
Me?

BILL
Mm-hm.

PEARL
I don't understand.

BILL
I came to the park today because I was told you walk here, and I was hoping to get a glimpse of you. I had no idea we would actually meet and strike up a conversation.

PEARL
You knew who I was when I sat down?

BILL
Pretty sure, but when you spoke, there wasn't any doubt.

PEARL
So, you were just acting? Playing me along?

BILL
No, I meant every word. I was taken aback, that's all. I didn't know what else to do. I wasn't really prepared to meet you face to face.

PEARL
Why did you want to see me?

BILL
Well—

PEARL
Look how long it's been.

BILL
Forty-two years.

PEARL
You don't know anything about me anymore.

Not so. BILL

What do you mean? PEARL

I've kept up. BILL

Kept up? PEARL

Uh-huh. BILL

How? PEARL

The local weekly paper. BILL

The Register? PEARL

I've had it sent to me—once a week for the past twenty-five years. I knew you were married and were living back here. BILL

You kept track? PEARL

Uh-huh. BILL

Why? PEARL

I guess it's because...I never stopped caring. BILL

About me? PEARL

Mm. BILL

PEARL
But things have changed so much.

BILL
I know.

PEARL
We've changed.

BILL
Not as much as you might think.

PEARL
Oh!

BILL
Really.

PEARL
But look at me.

BILL
What?

PEARL
If you haven't noticed, I've gotten old.

BILL
Older, maybe. Not old.

PEARL
I may have all my original equipment but look at it—my hair's gone gray, I've got wrinkles and liver spots and—

BILL
In case you haven't noticed, so have I. It goes with the territory.

PEARL
But they look better on you.

BILL
(Amused) Thanks a lot.

PEARL
Gives you character, makes me look old.

BILL

You're still an attractive woman, Pearl. And the important thing is, you're still you. I could tell that the moment we began talking.

PEARL

Well...

BILL

I know you can never go home again. But I was hoping that when I moved back here, we could be friends. Enjoy each other's company once in a while.

PEARL

I see.

BILL

If not, I'll understand. I'll respect your wishes and stay out of your way.

PEARL

Bill, I...

BILL

You don't have to say anything, just let it percolate for awhile.

PEARL

This was quite a gamble—deciding to move back here. What if I would say that I never want to see you again?

BILL

Then I would only be left with a wonderful place to live.

(Beat.)

PEARL

I never thought I would ever see you. And here you are.

BILL

Are you disappointed?

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes