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 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 this or any play or excerpt, 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 this play and all plays and 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 this 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!
Joanna
On My Mind

A One Act Play for One Man & One Woman

by

Lynn-Steven Johanson

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
REPRODUCTION WITHOUT SPECIFIC WRITTEN PERMISSION PROHIBITED

Performance Rights Available Exclusively through
Heartland Plays, Inc. at heartlandplays.com
playsonow@heartlandplays.com
customer service: 406-431-7680

Copyright © 2012 by Lynn-Steven Johanson
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.
(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

Mm.  

(*BILL returns to his paper.*)  

(After a moment) Actually…  

(*Lowering his paper*) Yes?  

You remind me of someone.  

I do?  

Uh-huh.  

(*Smiling*) Well, I should.  

Bill?  

Uh-huh.  

Bill Harrigan! I can't believe it.  

Pearl.  

It's me.  

It's been a long time.  

Forty-two years.  

Yes, it has. Well, you look wonderful.
Always the charmer.

No, I'm serious. You look wonderful.

Thank you.

How have you been?

Just great.

Just great. I'm glad.

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

Terrific.

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

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

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

Good.

What about you?

Me?

Yes.

Fine. Just fine.
That's…fine. I mean…

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

Close. It's close.

Well…Tell me about yourself.

Oh, gee…

Married? Children?

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

I don't think I knew him.

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

Your husband?

No. Dr. Gleason.

I meant your husband.

Oh.

I don't think I knew your husband.

No, you wouldn't have. He was from Florida.
BILL
I see.

PEARL
Tallahassee.

BILL
Mm.

PEARL
He passed away eight years ago.

BILL
I'm sorry.

PEARL
Fifty-four years old.

BILL
Young.

PEARL
Liver disease.

BILL
Too bad.

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.

BILL
Hm.

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…

BILL
I see.

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

BILL
Children?
Two. A boy and a girl.

You're very lucky.

Bill works in South Africa for the American Embassy.

Bill?

Yes. And Eileen works as a militant lesbian.

Uh—

Does that shock you?

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

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

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

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…

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

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

Well…

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.

Yes.

BILL
It's been well cared for.

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

BILL
So, when are you moving?
Next month. Pearl offered to fly in and help me.

Pearl?

My daughter.

Oh.

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

A painter?

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

Phoenix, huh?

Ever been there?

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

Her mother moved back there after the divorce.

Oh.

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

That's too bad.

One of those things, you know?

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…
Mm.

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

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

I never wanted it to be that way.

I was devastated.

So was I.

You were?

Mm-hm.

I thought you just forgot about us.

No, it was—

You never wrote. You never called.

Well, I—

I was waiting to hear from you. I guess…

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.

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.

You did.

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

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

BILL
I thought about it.

PEARL
You did?

BILL
Mm-hm. A lot.

You did?

BILL
So did I.

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

BILL
Other people.

PEARL
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?

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

BILL
Like it was yesterday.
The Buckinghams were playing at the Roof Garden that evening.

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

And the scandal.

I remember.

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

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

Oh, I would hate to think…

The Buckinghams.

That night is one of my most cherished memories.

Mine, too.

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

That was very special.

Mm.

It made moving away especially hard.

Painful.

I know.
PEARL

And it's what—

BILL

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

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.

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.

You dropped out?

Uh-huh.

BILL

That's not like you.

( 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.
BILL: Couldn't continue?

PEARL: No.

BILL: What happened?

PEARL: I was pregnant.

BILL: Pregnant?

PEARL: I was due in April, so I couldn't attend.

BILL: Oh my god. The weekend at the lakes?

PEARL: Mm.

BILL: Oh . . .

PEARL: I know I—

BILL: Why didn't you tell me?

PEARL: Because I didn't think you cared. You didn't—

BILL: Ah, Jeez.

PEARL: —stay in touch, you—

BILL: Did it ever occur to you I had a right to know? I wasn't just—

PEARL: I felt alone, betrayed and—
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.
A girl.

BILL

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.
BILL
But you said "hell to pay."

PEARL
Just an expression.

BILL
No, it's more than that—

PEARL
You're making more—

BILL
I saw it in your eyes.

PEARL
Saw what?

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

PEARL
What are you talking about?

BILL
Abused women.

PEARL
Look, I—

BILL
Am I right?

PEARL
It's none of your business.

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

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

BILL
Pearl, I—
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.
I beg your pardon?

You.

Me?

Mm-hm.

I don't understand.

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.

You knew who I was when I sat down?

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

So, you were just acting? Playing me along?

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.

Why did you want to see me?

Well—

Look how long it's been.

Forty-two years.

You don't know anything about me anymore.
BILL
Not so.

PEARL
What do you mean?

BILL
I've kept up.

PEARL
Kept up?

BILL
Uh-huh.

PEARL
How?

BILL
The local weekly paper.

PEARL
The Register?

BILL
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.

PEARL
You kept track?

BILL
Uh-huh.

PEARL
Why?

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

PEARL
About me?

BILL
Mm.
But things have changed so much.

I know.

We've changed.

Not as much as you might think.

Oh!

Really.

But look at me.

What?

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

Older, maybe. Not old.

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

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

But they look better on you.

(Amused) Thanks a lot.

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.

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