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The Runaway

A Play in One Act by

Mike Willis

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The Runaway
by Mike Willis

CAST OF CHARACTERS
1W / 1M / 1 Teen

BENJAMIN “BEN”:
BEN, is in his late sixties or early seventies. Ben is a very successful screenwriter. Ben is disgusted with the world and life in general. A condition brought on by the death of his wife. He is gruff and outspoken and tends to drink whenever the urge hits him, which is often. Ben dresses in old jeans, flannel shirts and his beat up Los Angeles Laker’s ball cap, which he sometimes wears backwards. He needs a haircut and a shave.

MADELINE “MADDIE”:
MADDIE, is an attractive woman 30 to 50 years old. She is a successful lawyer and Ben’s agent. She is also his daughter, a connection that would not be apparent to anyone who might see them interact. She is very professional and dresses appropriately.

AUGUSTUS “GUS”:
GUS, is a clean-cut young man of nineteen. He is quite intelligent, but is struggling about what to do about His future. He still lives at home with His mother and sister whom he helps support by doing odd jobs. Gus, is friendly by nature and likes helping people. His wardrobe consists of jeans, sweatshirts and sneakers.

TIME/SETTING
The present: The front yard of an old Airstream trailer or hunting shack in a remote portion of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

HISTORY
A winner of the Village Playhouse of Wauwatosa’s 30th One-Act Play Writing Festival, The Runaway premiered at Inspiration Studios in West Allis, WI on June 5th, 2015 directed by Scott Sorensen and with the following cast:

BET/BEN……………… JESSIE BARR
MADDIE……………… ELIZABETH HAVICAM
GUS………………… PAUL ZARAGOZA

DIRECTOR’S NOTE
Alternative language choices along with flexible casting options can be found on the final page of the script. These language changes make the play suitable for most audiences. Minimal set requirements: the play can be played on a bare stage with props.
The Runaway
by Mike Willis

SCENE 1

SETTING: The front yard of an old Airstream trailer or hunting shack in a remote wooded area of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. A picnic table and a couple of old webbed lawn chairs sit in the yard as well as a fire pit and an old charcoal grill. The following signs are posted around the property, Keep Out, No Trespassing, Beware of Dog and Posted.

AT RISE: CLASSICAL MUSIC can be heard coming through the screen door of the trailer. MADDIE enters from SR, crosses to the screen door and knocks.

The MUSIC STOPS as MADDIE continues knocking.

BEN, Off
(From Inside) Go away! Can’t ya read the goddamn signs?

MADDIE
Ben, it’s Madeline. Now, open up or come out here.

BEN, Off
What the hell do you want? Go away, I’m busy.

MADDIE
Ben…

BEN, Off
If you don’t leave now, I’ll sic my dog on you.

MADDIE
You don’t have a dog.

BEN, Off
Sure I do. Don’t ya see the goddamn sign?
MADDIE
Yes, I see the sign, but you still don’t have a dog.

BEN, Off
Bullshit! You better leave or I’m going to let Butch out of his cage. Here Butch.

_Barking can be heard from inside the house._
_MADDIE doesn’t leave._

MADDIE
Ben, stop with the games, I’m not leaving until you come out here. We need to talk.

_BEN enters from the house carrying a remote control. The barking continues. BEN holds up the remote control and pushes a button and the barking stops._

MADDIE, Continued
_(Indicating the remote control) Butch?_

BEN
Yep, he doesn’t eat much and he doesn’t get me up at 5 A.M. so he can piss or crap in my yard.

MADDIE
You know, I wasn’t fooled by the Beware of Dog sign for a minute.

BEN
Why not? I can get a dog if I want one.

MADDIE
If you brought home a dog, he wouldn’t last twenty-four hours before he would decide to run away.

BEN
Like you did?

MADDIE
Ben!

BEN
Sorry. Look, are you here as my daughter or as my lawyer, slash, agent?

MADDIE
Lawyer, slash, agent.
BEN

Figures.

MADDIE

Don’t make this any harder than it has to be. (Pointing to the picnic table) Can we sit down?

BEN

Suit yourself. Make yourself comfortable while I take Butch back inside and put him in his cage. You want anything to drink?

MADDIE

No, thank you. I won’t be staying long.

BEN

Ahhh. The subtle but effective way of saying, I don’t want to be here, I just want to get this over with as quick as possible. Well, I hope you don’t mind if I have one, I haven’t had one since breakfast.

BEN exits inside and MADDIE sits at the picnic table and opens HER briefcase. BEN re-enters carrying a bottle of beer and crosses to the picnic table.

BEN, Continued

So, what do you think of my humble homestead?

MADDIE

You have money. You don’t have to live here.

BEN

Quite right, but Butch and I prefer it here. No people, no traffic, just the sweet ambiance of the woods. The rustling of gentle breezes through the trees, the friendly chirping of the insects… to say nothing of the added benefit that I can pee off my back porch without offending anyone.

MADDIE

What else could you want?

BEN

Can’t think of a thing. So, my counselor, slash, agent… what brings you to the end of the earth?

MADDIE

I have been contacted by a studio along with some producers regarding the new screenplay that you have been working on and I just wanted to see where you were with it. They are quite anxious to read it.
Of course they are. But alas, said screenplay, she is no more.

What do you mean it is no more?

She died.

What do you mean it died? Dad…

She. The dearly departed screenplay was female. And what’s with the Dad? Not, lawyer, slash, agent?

You were almost finished with it six months ago when we talked.

She got ill.

What do you mean, she got ill?

I’m afraid the aforementioned young screenplay came down with a terminal case of… SUCKS.

You have got to be kidding.

Afraid not. Unavoidable really without your mother here to nurture her properly.

That’s ridiculous. You’ve written other things since Mom died.

Nothing good.

Why don’t you just give me the screenplay and I’ll show it to the producers and we’ll let them decide.

No can do. I buried her.
MADDIE
Buried, her?

BEN
Cremated, actually. It’s cheap and good for the environment.

MADDIE
You burned your manuscript? But you still have it on your computer, right?

BEN
I had her on my computer and didn’t like her there. So, I printed a copy off just to double check and still didn’t like her. That’s when I deleted her from my computer and cremated the manuscript in my charcoal crematorium over there.

*BEN points to the old grill.*

MADDIE
You didn’t?

BEN
I did… held services for her and everything. Butch and I attended. He sat quietly while I said a few words over the dearly departed.

MADDIE
Why didn’t you tell me?

BEN
It happened quite suddenly. I didn’t want you to have to grab a flight out of LAX just to rush out here for the service. Besides, you didn’t know her as well as I did.

MADDIE
I didn’t get a chance to know her. You never even showed me the manuscript.

BEN
Well, she was never healthy. I tried to nurse her back to good health, but… alas, she died. Went peacefully as I sat by her side comforting myself with a cold Miller Lite.

MADDIE
You are a piece of work, you know that? The studios may have had a different opinion after reading it and went ahead and produced it anyway.

BEN
I’m sure they would have. But, she was shit.

MADDIE
You’re an Academy Award winner, you’ve got clout, the studio may have thought differently.
BEN
Probably. They do know their shit… and continue to produce a lot of it. But, I reserve the right to not have them put any shit out there with my name on it.

MADDIE
So, what do you propose we do now?

BEN
Well, I don’t know about you, but I’m going to finish my beer and then go get another one. Want anything?

MADDIE
No, I don’t. I guess since there’s no screenplay to discuss, our business here is finished. I best be getting back to L.A.

*MADDIE closes her briefcase and prepares to leave. BEN starts toward the door, stops and turns.*

BEN
Sorry if I disappointed you. I’ve lost my edge, Madeline.

*BEN starts to open the door as MADDIE speaks.*

MADDIE
You miss her that much, huh?

BEN
(Turning) More every day.

MADDIE
Me, too.

BEN
It was good to see you, Maddie. You take care.

*BEN exits through the screen door.*

MADDIE
(After BEN exits) You too, Dad.

*MADDIE exits SR as the classical music resumes playing from inside the house and the LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.*

END OF SCENE
SCENE 2

SETTING: Same as Scene 1; the following day.

AT RISE: BEN is asleep in one of the lawn chairs. The ground around HIM is littered with beer bottles. GUS enters from SL and sees BEN passed out in the lawn chair. GUS starts to cross to BEN, but stops when HE notices all of the warning signs. Finally, not sure whether BEN is asleep or dead, GUS crosses to HIM and shakes HIM.

GUS

(Shaking BEN) Hey Mister, you okay?

BEN

(Waking with a start) What… (To GUS) Who the hell are you? What do you think you’re doing, scaring the crap out of me like that? Can’t you read the signs?

GUS

Of course I can read the signs. I’m not stupid. I thought maybe you were dead.

BEN

Well, as you can see, I’m not dead.

GUS

You smell like you could be dead. I just wanted to make sure.

BEN

So, now you’re sure. Now, get the hell out of here before I sic my dog on you.

You don’t have a dog.

GUS

I do so, his name is Butch.

BEN

(Calling) Butch! Here, Butch! (To BEN) See, no dog.

GUS

(Calling) Butch! Here, Butch! (To BEN) See, no dog.

BEN

He’s inside.
GUS
Then why isn’t he answering me or charging out here to tear me limb from limb? The door is wide open.

BEN
Shit…. he must have run off.

GUS
Yeah, right. I walk by here almost every day and I’ve never seen a dog here. I think you just put that sign up to keep people away.

BEN
Think you’re pretty smart, don’t you.

GUS
I’m not stupid.

BEN
That has yet to be determined.

GUS
So, you okay or not?

BEN
Of course I’m okay. Why wouldn’t I be okay?

GUS
(Looking at the beer bottles) Looks like you had quite a night.

BEN
What? Those bottles? They were here when I bought the place. Red-neck yard ornaments, I happen to like ‘em, so I’m fixing to install more.

GUS
If you say so.

BEN
Of course I say so. What did you say your name was?

GUS
I didn’t.

BEN
Right, you didn’t.

GUS
It’s Augustus. My name is Augustus.
BEN
Augustus!? What the hell kind of a name is that? What kind of person would do that to their kid?

GUS
I’m named after my grandfather. His name was Augustus.

BEN
Jesus, it happened more than once. How about I just call you Gus?

GUS
Fine, and what do I call you besides, ornery old man?

BEN
Call me Ben… it’s short for Benjamin. I’m named after the guy on the hundred dollar bill.

BEN holds out his hand to shake hands. GUS hesitates.

BEN, Continued
Don’t be a prick. I’m a drunk, not a leper.

GUS grabs BEN’s hand and THEY shake.

GUS
Well, now that I can see that you’re not dead, but only smell like it… I’ll get off your property.

GUS starts to leave.

BEN
Wait, don’t get your tit in a wringer.

What?

GUS
I guess I should thank you… for stopping to see that I wasn’t dead, that is.

Forget it.

BEN
Where I come from most people would just walk by some old drunk wallowing in his own piss and puke and not give him a second glance.
GUS
Well, this isn’t L.A., I guess we just haven’t advanced to that level of ambivalence yet out here in the boonies.

BEN
Well said, my young Augustus. How did you know I was from Los Angeles?

GUS
My Mom told me some big shot Hollywood type bought this place.

BEN
Big shot Hollywood type… hmmm, I didn’t always live in L.A. I grew up in rural Wisconsin.

You, grew up in Wisconsin?

GUS
Yep. Say, as a peace offering, would you like something to eat… some breakfast maybe?

BEN
It’s one o’clock in the afternoon. I ate breakfast at seven this morning.

Time for lunch then. I’m hungry. You like Cheerios?

GUS
Cheerios?

BEN
Yeah, the breakfast of champions.

That’s Wheaties.

BEN
Same thing. I’d offer you something else, but Cheerios is all I’ve got. Sit at the picnic table and I’ll go get us some.

*BEN starts to get up, but stumbles into the picnic table. GUS steadies BEN.*

GUS
I don’t care for any, but if you can just sit there without falling over I’ll go get them. Where are they?

BEN
There’s a box on the counter by the sink and some bowls in the dishrack.
GUS
I’ll be right back

*GUS exits through the door and BEN sits at the picnic table.*

**GUS, Continued**

*(From inside)* Where’s your milk?

BEN
Don’t have any. Just bring me a bowl and the Cheerios. I’ll need a spoon too.

*GUS enters with a bowl and a box of Cheerios and crosses to BEN at the picnic table. BEN pours some Cheerios into the bowl and then grabs an open beer bottle off the table and proceeds to pour beer over HIS Cheerios.*

GUS
You use beer on your Cheerios rather than milk?

BEN
Sure, milk doesn’t get me drunk. You want a beer? I’ve got some more in the fridge.

I’m only nineteen.

So?

GUS
I can’t drink. I’m not old enough.

BEN
Misstated, my young Augustus. You see, even infants can drink. First from their mother’s breast or a bottle, then progressing to a sippy cup, later to a regular cup, glass, bottle or can. What you meant to say is that, as per the laws of our land, you cannot legally drink. One of the great ironies of our legal system Gus… is that a young man of nineteen cannot legally get drunk, but he can be required to lay down his life for his country. Now, if I were being asked to charge into a hail of bullets, I might appreciate a nice cold one to take the edge off first.

GUS
I can assume then that you were never in the service?

BEN
BEN salutes GUS.

BEN, Continued
Private Benjamin… funny, I never caught that before.

GUS
What?

BEN
Private Benjamin, it was an old movie with Goldie Hawn in it. Now, she was hot. I might have stayed in the army if there were more privates like her in there.

GUS
(Rising) I should be going.

BEN
Antsy little do-gooder, aren’t you?

What?

GUS

BEN
Ya stop to help, then ya pry my life story out of me… now, you can’t wait to get your ass out of here.

GUS
Pry? I didn’t pry anything, you…

BEN
Sure you did. How else would you know I’m a farm boy from Wisconsin who is now some big-shot Hollywood type living in L.A. and that I was in the army and I had the hots for Goldie Hawn?

GUS
You told me. I didn’t ask.

BEN
Bullshit. So, what’s your story?

GUS
My story?

BEN
Yes, I showed you mine, now you show me yours. What’s a not so-ugly, semi-intelligent sounding nineteen year old male with a willingness to help drunks doing living out here on the brink of nothingness?
GUS
I’m helping to take care of my mother and my sister. What are you doing here?

BEN
Escaping.

GUS
Escaping from what?

BEN
Society.

GUS
You trying to tell me you came out here to get away from civilization?

BEN
Wrong. To escape civilization, one would need to establish a parameter where those he or she was attempting to escape from where themselves indeed civil. Just look at the news, Gus. The news is full of uncivil acts… lying, cheating, murders, racism… the world out there is full of that shit, and I’m running away from it.

GUS
You’re a runaway.

BEN
(Laughing) Ha, that’s it! A runaway…. I like that. You nailed it Gus, I’m running away from society in the hope of finding civilization.

GUS
Well, good luck with that.

BEN
I’m getting close, Gus. You stopping to make sure I wasn’t dead, instead of dead drunk, now that was a civil act. A genuine concern for a fellow human being regardless of how bad he smelled.

GUS
That was nothing. Any one of your other neighbors would have done the same thing.

BEN
If that’s so, then I’ve discovered a lost civilization. My running days are over and I’m going to plant my sorry drunken ass right here and revel in the pure civility of the north woods in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Now, what about you? What is your quest young Lancelot? What is your Holy Grail in life, Gus?
GUS
I’m just hoping to find enough work cutting firewood for the next year and a half so I can keep helping my Mom out with the bills until my little sister gets out of high school and either gets married or gets a job. Then, maybe I’ll apply for a student loan and go to college or vocational school.

BEN
Working on a merit badge are we?

GUS
What?

BEN
The good son badge. Taking care of Mom and Sis before getting on with your own life.

GUS
You don’t know anything about me, or my family.

BEN
I know your kind Augustus. The world’s full of nineteen year old bull-shitters just like you. BS’ing themselves into believing they’re needed at home so they don’t have to leave the nest and get on with their lives.

GUS
You’re full of shit.

BEN
Aren’t we all, Gus. You can’t bullshit an old bull-shitter like me. Two years from now, you’ll still be cutting wood and Sis will have gotten herself knocked-up and run off with some loser and you won’t want to leave Momma right now, because she’s depressed over Sissy and if you leave, whatever will happen to…. 

GUS
Shut up! I don’t know why I even stopped here.

BEN
Nor do I. But, you’re here, so hand me the box of Cheerios.

GUS
hands the box of Cheerios to Ben and starts to leave.

BEN
Well, enjoy your Cheerios and beer. And, if tomorrow I see you face down drunk in your yard, I’ll be sure to keep on walking.
BEN
Jeez, don’t be so damn touchy. I was just stating an observation, Gussie. You know what Moms really like? They like sons who make something out of themselves. They want to be able to say to their friends, there’s my son Augustus, he’s up at the University studying to be something. Take my word for it Gus… seeing her son making a difference in his life is more important to your mother than that hundred bucks you give her every week.

GUS
Two hundred.

BEN
Oh, excuse me, two hundred.

GUS
And, you don’t know shit.

BEN
That’s where you’re wrong Gus. I definitely know shit. I write it. I am an expert in the written media of shit.

GUS
You’re still drunk.

BEN
I certainly hope so. But, drunkenness aside, I still know crap when I see it and when I write it.

GUS
My Mom said you were a writer. What do you write?

BEN
Screenplays… at least I used to. Now, all I write is fertilizer.

GUS
Maybe if you sobered up, you’d write better.

BEN
Hah! Wrong. When I’m drunk I write better… not much, but … I lost my purpose Gus. In order to be a good writer one needs to have a purpose… something or someone worth writing for.

GUS
And you don’t have a purpose?

BEN
Not anymore. My purpose died. For forty-eight years she was my reason and my inspiration for writing.
Your wife?

Wife, muse... my purpose. Cancer robbed me of my purpose Gus. It is a take-all, heartless, son-of-a bitch, Augustus. It took my purpose and left behind a bitter drunken old manure spreader.

I'm sorry about your wife.

Me too. You know, you are one of the few people who have said that to me that I really believe, Augustus. You cut wood, huh?

Yeah. You have a problem with that?

Apart from the fact that you’re wasting your life? Not at all, I have a deal for you.

What kind of a deal?

Have you seen that woods I have out back between my place and my pond?

Yeah, I’ve seen it.

I want it thinned so I can see the pond from my back porch.

What’s in it for me?

You get to keep all of the firewood and sell it.

That’s it?

No. I want you to check on me each time you stop by to see that I’m not face-down in my own feces and that I have enough beer for my Cheerios. If you’ll do that, I may have a little bonus for you when you’re done.
What kind of bonus?

BEN
I haven’t decided yet. That’s the thing about bonuses they’re usually a surprise.

GUS
I’ll think about it.

BEN
Think away, Gus.

GUS
I have to be going. I’ll stop by tomorrow and let you know about thinning your woods.

BEN
(Handing GUS money) Here’s a ten, bring me some more Cheerios, will you? I’m almost out.

GUS
What about some milk?

BEN
What for? You trying to ruin my love for Cheerios?

GUS
(Taking the money) I’ll see you tomorrow.

BEN
Hasty mannyawna, Augustus.

GUS
Right.

GUS exits and BEN pours more beer on HIS Cheerios as the LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

END OF SCENE
SCENE 3

SETTING: Same; two months later.

AT RISE: The door to BEN’s place is standing open and noise can be heard coming from within. GUS enters carrying a brown paper grocery bag full of boxes of Cheerios. He crosses to the doorway and calls out.

GUS (Calling) Ben! Ben, you in there? I brought you some Cheerios. Now, drag your ornery ol’ ass out here, will ya?

Noise can be heard coming from inside, but no one comes out.

GUS, Continued
Hey Ben, don’t make me come get you…. I don’t particularly like the smell in there.

MADDIE enters from the shack.

GUS, Continued
Oh, I’m sorry… I was looking for Ben.

MADDIE
Ben’s not here.

GUS
He’s not? Where is he?

MADDIE
You must be Augustus.

MADDIE holds out HER hand to shake with GUS. GUS hesitates.

MADDIE, Continued
I’m Madeline, Ben’s daughter.

GUS accepts the handshake from MADDIE.

GUS
Gus. Ben told me about you, he said you were also his lawyer and agent.
MADDIE
That’s right. What else did he say? I’m sure he had more to say on the subject.

GUS
He said you could be a real ball-breaker.

MADDIE
Now, that I believe. That sounds like my Dad.

GUS
If it’s any consolation, he did say that you were pretty and reminded him of his wife. Where’s Ben? I brought him some Cheerios and I have some things I need to talk to him about.

MADDIE
(Pointing to the picnic table) Maybe we should sit down, Gus.

GUS
Why? Why do we need to sit down? Nothing has happened to Ben, has there?

MADDIE
That’s what I need to talk to you about, Gus.

GUS
Where is he? I need to talk to him about my visit to the university.

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

Continue to Next Page for
Alternative Language and Casting Choices
**Alternative Language Choices**

**Scene #1**

Page #1  Ben:  Go Away!  Can’t ya read the signs?

Ben:  What do you want?

Page #2  Ben:  Yep, he doesn’t eat much and he doesn’t get me up at 5am so he can do his business in my yard.

Pages 5 and 6  Change the word shit to either crap or junk.

**Scene #2**

Ben:  Who are you?  What do you think you’re doing scaring me half to death?  Can’t you read the signs?

Ben:  Don’t be such a hard-case.  (hard-case substituted for prick)

Ben:  Wait!  Don’t get your undies in a bundle.  (substituted for “tit in a wringer”)

Bullshit can be changed to Bull

Shit can be changed to crap or junk

Bull-shitters can be changed to BS’ers

Son of a Bitch can be changed to SOB

**Scene #3**

Ass can be changed to butt or behind

Ball-breaker can be changed to slave driver

**Alternative Casting Choices**

The Characters Ben and Maddie can be played by either male or female actors.  If a female actor is substituted for Ben the character name can be changed to Bet/ Betsy.  If this casting change is made then apart from the apparent word changes such as Mom for Dad, Ben’s line in scene two can be changed as follows:

Bet:  Call me Bet… it’s short for Betsy, after the woman who sewed the first flag.