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Past Present Tense

Four Plays at a Park Bench

by

Lynn-Steven Johanson

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Past Present Tense

by Lynn-Steven Johanson

SETTING:

All plays take place in the present at or near a park bench in a small Midwestern city

PLAYS AND CHARACTERS:

AGING GRACE

GRACE; 82, *and in early stages of Alzheimer's disease*

LAINIE; 47, *a university professor; her daughter*

SUZANNE; 44, *her other daughter*

BUFORD AND LEROY

BUFORD KOONTZ; 29, *works in an auto parts store*

LEROY FUNT; 29, *Buford's best friend since grade school*

JOANNA ON MY MIND

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

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

SHOOTING POOL WITH A ROPE

AL; 68, *a retired businessman*

STACEY; 16, *a troubled teenager*

"Shooting Pool with a Rope" is dedicated to the memory of Herman F. Hansen"

ETC

Original production credits including original cast listed at the top of each play

Past Present Tense
by Lynn-Steven Johanson

AGING GRACE

CHARACTERS:

Grace; 82, and in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease

Lainie; 47, a university professor, her daughter

Suzanne; 44, and Madge's other daughter

SETTING:

Time: the present

Place: a small Midwestern city

AGING GRACE was first presented by Catch A Star Theatrical Players as part of their National One Act Play Festival in Beaumont, California, on June 22, 2012 with the following cast:

Grace..... Sallie Smelker

Lainie.....Pam Bernard

Suzanne.....Paige Polcene

It was directed by Donnell Powell.

(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. LAINIE, a trim, well-kept woman of 47, enters with a high-end digital camera slung over her shoulder and carrying a grocery bag and a cup of coffee. Beneath her seemingly easy-going exterior lies an intensity and anger that she carefully suppresses. Accompanying her is her mother, GRACE, who is 82 years old. She carries a paper coffee cup with a lid on it. Physically GRACE seems spry for her age, but her short-term memory loss belies the fact that she is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. LAINIE consults her watch, stops, and sets the grocery bag and coffee cup on the bench. She pulls a cellular phone from its holder on her belt.)

LAINIE

Let's stop a second, okay?

GRACE

How come?

LAINIE

I have to make a call.

GRACE

What? You can't do it from home? (*LAINIE ignores her question; pause*) Seems like everybody's got one of those things nowadays.

LAINIE

You want one? I'll get you one if—

GRACE

Good heavens, no. What would I do with something like that?

(*LAINIE dials a number and places the phone up to her ear.*)

LAINIE

Talk to people.

GRACE

My regular phone is just fine. Besides, those things are going to give everybody brain cancer.

LAINIE

Brain can—?

GRACE

You wait and see. There will be an epidemic of brain cancer twenty years from now—mark my words.

LAINIE

Where'd you hear that?

GRACE

I don't know. Must've read it somewhere.

LAINIE

Mm.

GRACE

Or maybe Beatrice told me. I don't remember.

LAINIE

She ought to know. She knows everything else.

(GRACE laughs. LAINIE flips her phone shut.)

GRACE

What's the matter?

(LAINIE takes a drink from her coffee. She makes a face as it is much too strong for her liking.)

LAINIE

No answer.

GRACE

Who you trying to call?

LAINIE

Suzanne.

GRACE

Well, she's at the house.

LAINIE

You said she was out jogging. So, I'm calling her cell phone.

(GRACE puts her coffee cup down on the bench.)

GRACE

Oh, yeah. She has one, too, doesn't she? *(Looks into the grocery sack)* What did you say you wanted this stuff for?

LAINIE

Chinese food. Kung-Pao chicken.

GRACE

That's right. You going to make it tonight?

LAINIE

You said you wanted me to stir-fry, remember?

GRACE

Good. I like Chinese food. But I don't like it too spicy.

LAINIE

I know. Not too spicy.

GRACE

(Rising) Well, we should probably get home.

LAINIE

(Looks offstage and waves) There she is.

GRACE

Runs every day. She's going to wear out her knees. I tried to tell her but you know how she is.

LAINIE

Well, they're her knees. If she wants to wear them out ...

GRACE

I guess they are...

(LAINIE turns on her camera, removes the lens cap, and starts shooting photos offstage. SUZANNE enters walking, cooling down from her run. She is 48 and prettier than her sister. She wears expensive running clothes and looks professionally manicured even through her perspiration.)

SUZANNE

Hi, Lainie.

LAINIE

(Snapping another photo) Hi.

SUZANNE

Don't take pictures of me. I look like hell.

LAINIE

You never know when and where you might find an interesting composition. Maybe I'll do a new series called... "The Sweat of a Woman."

SUZANNE

I thought maybe you'd done that one already.

(LAINIE laughs, crosses to SUZANNE, and they hug. GRACE walks over and puts her arms around both LAINIE and SUZANNE at the same time.)

GRACE

It's nice to have you two girls home again.

LAINIE

At the same time, no less.

SUZANNE

It's always good to be here, Mom.

GRACE

I should be getting home. The chicken might spoil if I don't put in the refrigerator.

LAINIE

You want me to walk with you?

GRACE

What for? You think I'm an old lady or something?

LAINIE

Of course not.

GRACE

Well, I am. But it's only three blocks so I think I can manage.

SUZANNE

I'll be home in a little bit.

LAINIE

So will I.

GRACE

Don't worry about me. Come home whenever you're ready.

(GRACE starts to exit.)

LAINIE

(Grabbing GRACE's coffee cup) Oh, you want your coffee?

GRACE

No. Too strong for me.

(GRACE exits with the grocery bag. SUZANNE and LAINIE watch her leave.)

SUZANNE

Give it to me, I'll drink it. *(LAINIE hands her the coffee cup.)* How have you been?

LAINIE

Can't complain. Wouldn't do any good if I did.

SUZANNE

And the university's been treating you well?

LAINIE

Mm-hm. I was asked to apply for the Dean of Fine Arts position last month.

SUZANNE

Really!

LAINIE

Yeah. But, I told them to go to hell.

SUZANNE

Why would you do that? Wouldn't that mean a large boost in salary?

LAINIE

It would, but who needs all that political bullshit, you know? Besides, I don't want to be behind a desk.

SUZANNE

You're an artist, not a paper pusher.

LAINIE

Precisely. *(Beat)* Oh, I had two photographs accepted for a show in New York in January.

SUZANNE

That's exciting.

LAINIE

And we're going to visit Arizona next month. I want to shoot some desert sunsets, and Jane wants to hike the Grand Canyon, so...

SUZANNE

Ew—hot.

LAINIE

I know, but the best sunsets are the ones during the summer months. It should prove interesting. Jane's never been to the desert, so she doesn't know about the heat...yet.

(SUZANNE takes a swig of coffee.)

SUZANNE

That's good coffee. *(Beat)* I take it Jane didn't come with you.

LAINIE

No. You know how Mom is. She's still under the impression that Jane is my "roommate." Besides, she's teaching a writing workshop at the moment.

SUZANNE

I read her article in *The Nation* last year.

LAINIE

Really. I didn't think you approved—or cared.

SUZANNE

No, that's not it at all. I'm not the homophobe in the family. She's a good writer.

LAINIE

Yeah, she is. She had an article published in the *Windy City Times* last month, and she has another one scheduled for publication in *Vanity Fair* this fall.

SUZANNE

Wow! Busy lady.

LAINIE

And how's that pet Neanderthal you have at stud? "Craig" I think you call him?

SUZANNE

He's home.

LAINIE

Have the drag marks on his knuckles calloused over?

SUZANNE

Come on, Lainie! He's gotten better.

LAINIE

You mean he no longer thinks of me as "Twatasaurus Rex?"

SUZANNE

No, he still thinks of you that way.

LAINIE

Ah.

SUZANNE

He's no longer vocal about it. He's learned to keep his opinions to himself.

LAINIE

Well, it's nice to know he's evolved.

(LAINIE sets her camera down on the bench, picks up her coffee cup, and takes a swallow.)

SUZANNE

He had to stay home—keep on top of the kitchen remodeling.

LAINIE

Remodeling—congratulations on your mess.

SUZANNE

No kidding. It's turned into a real pain.

LAINIE

It usually does.

SUZANNE

He called and said when he came downstairs this morning, the two tile guys were grouting the backsplash with the wrong color grout. They're Russian, and they don't speak much English, so he had to call their supervisor in to translate. They weren't too happy about scraping it out and starting over.

LAINIE

Too bad I wasn't there. I speak Russian pretty well. Tell Craig he should say to them, "Kakogo cherta ty delaesh?"

SUZANNE

(Enunciating it badly) Kakogo cherta ty delaesh. What's that mean?

LAINIE

Basically, "What the hell are you doing?"

SUZANNE

Oh, yeah, right! Probably get him beaten up.

LAINIE

That's the point.

SUZANNE

Anyway, I had to go for a run to calm down.

(SUZANNE puts her foot up on the edge of the bench and begins loosening her shoe laces.)

LAINIE

I wish I had your discipline. Every time I think about exercising, I pour myself a glass of wine and sit down until the urge goes away.

SUZANNE

Whatever works... What time did you get in?

LAINIE

About two hours ago.

SUZANNE

Two hours?

LAINIE

Before I took Mom to the grocery store, I stopped at Thelma's Cafe and drank coffee with all the retired farmers.

SUZANNE

Is that dive still open?

LAINIE

Oh, yeah. Hasn't changed a bit. Looks the same, smells the same. You're drinking her coffee.

SUZANNE

Really. Hm. She knows how to make good coffee, I'll give her that.

LAINIE

(Laughs) The clientele is interesting. This morning, some guy with "Darrell" written on his shirt, was showing his buddies some smut magazine...

SUZANNE

Dear god!

LAINIE

...acting like a bunch of twelve-year-olds with a Playboy.

SUZANNE

Grown men.

LAINIE

"Men"—yes. "Grown"—that may be a stretch. *(Pause)* Time has really taken its toll on Dad's old cronies. Only a handful left.

SUZANNE

Ten years.

LAINIE

Ten years?

SUZANNE

Since Dad's been gone.

LAINIE

Oh. Yeah. September twenty-ninth.

SUZANNE

Twenty-sixth.

LAINIE

Sixth?

SUZANNE

Yeah. Funeral was on the twenty-ninth.

LAINIE

Oh. Yeah, you're right.

SUZANNE

How could you forget that?

LAINIE

I didn't forget. I just don't like thinking about it, although he insists on wandering in and out of my thoughts every day. *(Pause)* So...What about Mom?

SUZANNE

Ugh! This whole thing is driving me crazy.

LAINIE

What...in particular?

SUZANNE

I called her last week, and she was making absolutely no sense. I asked her if she was going to go to Ida's birthday party, and she said she couldn't because she had to answer the phone for the funeral home.

LAINIE

The funeral home.

SUZANNE

Yeah.

LAINIE

Mom and Dad stopped working for the funeral director twenty years ago.

SUZANNE

I know that. So, I got to thinking, maybe she got bored and needed something to do, and I called the funeral home. They didn't know anything about it.

LAINIE

She sounds okay when I call her, but she doesn't talk about much anymore. Asks how I'm doing over and over again. Last month she asked about Chuck—which I thought was strange because we've been divorced for twenty years. And she liked him even less than I did.

SUZANNE

Well, she was just "out of it" when I talked to her. So I called Dr. Henderson, and we had her taken off that new Alzheimer's medication. It was making her worse instead of better.

LAINIE

Worse?

SUZANNE

It does that to some people.

LAINIE

So, has there been any improvement?

SUZANNE

Some. I mean, she's not talking crazy anymore.

LAINIE

Thank goodness for that.

SUZANNE

And her friends...

LAINIE

What about them?

SUZANNE

They've practically abandoned her. They don't stop by to see her or to invite her places.

LAINIE

Really.

SUZANNE

And I'm so angry at Jolene I could just about... About six months ago, I started paying her a hundred dollars a month to look in on Mom now and then, you know, call her every day to make sure she's all right, help her out if she needs anything, take her to the doctor, things like that.

LAINIE

Yeah?

SUZANNE

And she hasn't done a damn thing.

LAINIE

Nothing?

SUZANNE

No.

LAINIE

What's she do? Just cash your checks?

SUZANNE

Yes!

LAINIE

What a— Maybe I should talk to her.

SUZANNE

Too late. I fired her.

LAINIE

You fired—

SUZANNE

That's what I said.

LAINIE

I don't know if I would have done that. I mean, shouldn't you have had a talk with her—

SUZANNE

Let me tell you something. That woman is a piece of work.

LAINIE

Given how much Jolene needs the money, you'd think that a simple threat to stop the checks would have motivated her.

SUZANNE

Mom thinks she's such a good friend, but she's really just a lazy, self-centered bitch who could care less about anyone else.

LAINIE

I still think you were a little too abrupt.

SUZANNE

I'm not putting up with it, Lainie.

LAINIE

I assume she wasn't amused.

SUZANNE

Oh, she got all huffy with me because she's not going to get her monthly stipend anymore. Must think she deserves a free ride or something.

LAINIE

What about Louise?

SUZANNE

She does a lot for Mom the way it is. She's a great neighbor, but I don't want to impose on her anymore. And she goes to visit her daughters out in Boston and stays for a month or more. So, she's not always around.

LAINIE

If mom was ready for a nursing home that would be one thing...

SUZANNE
I don't know about that.

LAINIE
What?

SUZANNE
She's got other problems.

LAINIE
What are you talking—?

SUZANNE
She doesn't eat.

LAINIE
What do you mean she doesn't eat?

SUZANNE
Just what I said. Instead of fixing a meal, she eats a bowl of cereal. She's lost eight pounds since the last time I was here.

LAINIE
Maybe her appetite problem has something to do with the medication she's taking.

SUZANNE
No, it's her age. She doesn't have an appetite anymore.

LAINIE
Well, she seems to eat when I visit. And she cooks.

SUZANNE
For you. She cooks and eats when I'm here too. But she won't do it for herself.

LAINIE
And you know this how?

SUZANNE
She told me! She said she isn't hungry. I looked in her refrigerator and there was nothing to eat. Nothing! No vegetables, no fruit, no meat. I went up to the grocery store and bought

SUZANNE, *Continued*

her some food yesterday. And she won't drink her supplement either. If she would just drink a can of that every day, she would be getting some good nutrition. I'm telling you, I'm at my wits end.

LAINIE

She can't keep her blood sugar in check if she doesn't eat.

SUZANNE

I know. Her diabetes is going to get worse if she doesn't take better care of herself. And when she does eat, it's stuff she shouldn't—like ice cream, canned peaches in that syrupy sauce.

LAINIE

God.

SUZANNE

Oh, something else. The county health nurse said she has been hiding her medication in the hall closet.

LAINIE

Hiding her medication?

SUZANNE

She found a plastic bag full of her pills on the closet floor.

LAINIE

For god's sake!

SUZANNE

That's what I thought.

LAINIE

Well, did she ask her about it?

SUZANNE

Yeah, and she said, "I don't know how they got there."

LAINIE

Jesus Christ!

SUZANNE

It's embarrassing. She's so stubborn, and I can't seem to get her to do a thing.

LAINIE

That's crazy!

SUZANNE

I know.

LAINIE

Sounds like she needs daily monitoring.

SUZANNE

She does. But it's not like either one of us can move in with her.

LAINIE

We need to get somebody.

SUZANNE

Like who? How are you going to find somebody willing to move in just to look after her? We can't afford a live-in nurse. Besides, she wouldn't have it.

LAINIE

Maybe I should have a talk with her.

SUZANNE

It won't help. She'll get mad and tell you to mind your own business.

LAINIE

Oh, come on—

SUZANNE

That's what she told me.

LAINIE

You're kidding!

SUZANNE

She accused me of "meddling" and told me to stop being so bossy.

LAINIE

Well, you are bossy.

SUZANNE

I know I can—

LAINIE

And pushy. She doesn't like that either.

SUZANNE

What do you suggest I do?

LAINIE

Try another tactic.

SUZANNE

I tried every tactic known to man. I've pleaded, I've cajoled, I've reasoned, I've humored, I've nagged. Hell, I even broke down and cried once. Nothing works.

LAINIE

She's a proud, stubborn woman, and she's not about to give up her independence—not without a fight, anyway.

SUZANNE

You can see that I am frustrated to the point of...

LAINIE

So, you want her to go into a nursing home.

SUZANNE

I think it's come to that.

LAINIE

Jesus.

SUZANNE

I'm not kidding.

LAINIE

It's that bad?

SUZANNE

Yes. If she was in a nursing home, at least I would know she was getting good care, supervised care.

LAINIE

It would break her heart if she had to leave her house and move into the nursing home. Her home is everything to her.

SUZANNE

Don't you think I know that?

LAINIE

And, how much savings does she have—enough to keep her for what? Six months?

SUZANNE

If that.

LAINIE

And when that money's gone, the state will step in and sell off her house, her belongings, cash in her life insurance... And when she's gone—nothing. They will have sucked up everything except for the few keepsakes and mementos we would take.

SUZANNE

I could care less about any inheritance. It's mom's—

LAINIE

That's easy for you to say. You make over six figures a year. I don't.

SUZANNE

(Beat) I can't believe you—

LAINIE

Look. I'm not planning to get rich off my mother's estate, but it would be nice to have something left to give her a decent burial and leave a memorial to her church or the community center. Hell, she's lived here since she was nine years old!

SUZANNE

I need to talk with an attorney about that. I think there's some provision for a funeral fund.

LAINIE

We should have had her transfer the house to our names right after Dad died.

SUZANNE

I know.

LAINIE

What's it been? Three years since we had the deed transferred?

SUZANNE

Something like that.

LAINIE

And it doesn't become officially ours for five years, right? So that means we have another two years to go.

SUZANNE

Right.

LAINIE

Wonderful, just fucking wonderful!

SUZANNE

Lainie—

LAINIE

It's unfair. We should have—

SUZANNE

Maybe an attorney can figure out some legal way to—

LAINIE

I can understand that there are people who try to protect their assets so they can leech off the government. But this is different. She doesn't own three farms or have a huge stack of treasury notes sitting in a safety deposit box.

SUZANNE

I know that. You don't have to preach at me.

LAINIE

I'm not preaching!

SUZANNE

Okay then. Ranting. There's no sense "ranting" over something we have no control of.

LAINIE

Ranting...Christ!

SUZANNE

We wouldn't have this problem if her attorney had been doing his job. He should have been advising her about this kind of stuff.

LAINIE

Is old man Morris still her attorney?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

He's getting long in the tooth—he should have retired years ago.

SUZANNE

He's incompetent and he's a misogynist. I swear, he hates women.

LAINIE

What?

SUZANNE

After dealing with him over the transfer of the house, I never want to see him or speak to him again. He was rude, I mean rude!

LAINIE

He's always had the warmth and charm of a boa constrictor but—

SUZANNE

It goes way beyond that.

LAINIE

He's always treated me all right, though.

SUZANNE

You're lucky.

LAINIE

Maybe it's pushy women like you that trip his trigger.

SUZANNE

There's that word again.

LAINIE

What?

SUZANNE

"Pushy."

LAINIE

Well, you are. I don't mean it badly.

(LAINIE starts making adjustments on her camera and walks over to the trash receptacle.)

SUZANNE

Since when did "pushy" have a positive connotation, Lainie? *(LAINIE ignores her; pause)*
Hey! Don't ignore me. Since when did "pushy" become an attribute?

LAINIE

(Turning) Okay! Poor choice of words! How about...

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

"Assertive." Some men can't deal with assertive women. They feel threatened and they don't respond well. I'm not making excuses for the old snake, it's just the way some guys are.

SUZANNE

I know I can come off demanding sometimes, but when you own a business like I do, you have to be tough. People are always trying to jerk you around, run you over, and harass you by threatening law suits. If they're competitors, you can hand it back to them in spades,

SUZENNE, *Continued*

but if they're customers, you just have to take it. You have no idea how many nasty, obnoxious people I have to contend with.

LAINIE

I can imagine.

SUZANNE

No, I don't think you can. I have to deal with that crap day in and day out.

LAINIE

(Pause) Look, not to change the subject or anything, but is Mom still driving?

SUZANNE

Only to go up town to get the mail and to go to church. Why?

LAINIE

Did you know she forgot to renew her driver's license?

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

She forgot to renew it.

SUZANNE

How did you know that?

LAINIE

She told me. She's taken the exam and she's failed it twice.

SUZANNE

She'll never pass it. She can't remember all that stuff anymore.

LAINIE

Well...

SUZANNE

So she drives without a license?

LAINIE

Yeah.

SUZANNE

That's it. I'm taking away the keys.

LAINIE

Now, wait. I don't think you should do that.

SUZANNE

Why?

LAINIE

Because she will be totally isolated and dependent on other people for everything.

SUZANNE

She's not legal. Her insurance will—

LAINIE

It can't hurt anything.

SUZANNE

Lainie, it's—

LAINIE

It's a little town. Everybody knows everybody. They take care of each other. What does it hurt if she drives five blocks to church or six blocks to the post office when the weather isn't suitable for walking? Nobody's going to rat her out to the cops.

SUZANNE

She's breaking the law.

LAINIE

So.

SUZANNE

She should have a mailbox put up on her house—next to her front door like mine. And there's somebody who can pick her up and take her to church.

LAINIE

The mailbox on the house might be a good idea. But that's not the point. It's important to her to get out of the house—so she doesn't have to be alone all the time. Up town for the mail or Thelma's for a cup of coffee—it's a major social event. It's important she does that while she still can.

SUZANNE

It scares me that she's driving anyway. What if she forgets to buckle her seat belt? Or fill the car with gas? What if she has an accident? Or hurts somebody?

LAINIE

She doesn't drive out of town anymore. She probably doesn't drive over twenty miles an hour. What's it going to get hurt?

SUZANNE

She's eighty-two years old and her mind is failing.

LAINIE

She still functions fine at home, doesn't she?

SUZANNE

Well—

LAINIE

Okay. Does she keep the house clean?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Does she pay her bills?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Does she do her laundry?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Can she still cook?

SUZANNE

If she feels like it.

LAINIE

It doesn't sound like she needs to be put into a nursing home to me. She functions adequately in her own home. Instead of a nursing home, what about some sort of assisted care facility?

SUZANNE

There aren't any close. She told me she absolutely did not want to move to one of those places. And she would only consider moving into a nursing home because she could be close to people she knows—"when the time comes."

LAINIE

When the time comes.

SUZANNE

And believe me, she does not think the time has come.

LAINIE

Well, I—

SUZANNE

And you know what? Pleasant Plains doesn't have anything but the nursing home.

LAINIE

What about the new addition? I thought that was supposed to be some new assisted living residence for—

SUZANNE

No.

LAINIE

So, what's the new addition for?

SUZANNE

It's for retirees but it's not assisted living.

LAINIE

Great.

SUZANNE

The closest assisted care facilities are thirty miles away. She wouldn't know a soul.

LAINIE

Christ! Richest country on the face of the earth and they would rather spend billions making weapons and give tax cuts to the rich rather than take care of its people. It's a god damned disgrace!

SUZANNE

Don't go off on one of your liberal tangents.

LAINIE

Hey, it's—

SUZANNE

I'm just saying—

LAINIE

Liberal, hell! It's a humanitarian issue. It's a question of responsibility to some of our most vulnerable citizens. If that's liberal, then I'm damned glad I am one.

SUZANNE

(Beat) Lainie . . .

LAINIE

If Dad's health problems hadn't eaten up most of their savings, it would be different.

SUZANNE

Please.

LAINIE

His medication alone was over eight hundred a month.

SUZANNE

I know that. You don't have to—

LAINIE

How are you supposed to get by when your social security check is nine hundred dollars a month?

SUZANNE

(Pause; changing her tone) I called the administrator at Pleasant Plains. They have an opening. But they won't hold it more than a week because someone else wants it if we don't take it.

LAINIE

No.

SUZANNE

She would be better off.

LAINIE

What are you going to do, drag her down there kicking and screaming?

SUZANNE

If we have to.

LAINIE

"We" is not the appropriate pronoun. *(Pointing)* You should use first person.

SUZANNE

So we leave her to waste away from neglect and die in her own home?

LAINIE

Of course not.

SUZANNE

Then what?

LAINIE

What's available? The county health nurse sees her once a week right now, right?

SUZANNE

Yes.

LAINIE

Sounds like all she needs is monitoring. At least for the time being.

SUZANNE

Who's going to do it?

LAINIE

Well...

SUZANNE

Neither one of us can move in with her. Do you want her living with you?

LAINIE

Hypothetically, if she had no place else to go, then she could come live with us. Do you want her living with you?

SUZANNE

No. That simply wouldn't work. We're gone too much of the time.

LAINIE

It doesn't matter. She would never agree to leave her house and live with either of us full time anyway. So the question is moot. Can't we get someone here in town?

SUZANNE

Like who? They don't have baby-sitters for adults.

LAINIE

There ought to be some kind of—elder day care for those who—

SUZANNE

In the best of all possible worlds, yes. But there isn't, so stop getting yourself all worked up.

(Beat)

LAINIE

Aren't there some kind of services provided by the state? You've looked into this, right? I mean, what's available?

SUZANNE

There's a program for the elderly and disabled who can't get out to do their grocery shopping. A provider will come in once a week to help make out a grocery list and do their shopping for them. And they also have a program where a home health care worker comes in and sees to any hygiene needs—they help them bathe, shampoo their hair, change their bedding...

LAINIE

That would help. Are there any restrictions regarding income?

SUZANNE

She qualifies. I checked.

LAINIE

Good. Then don't you think we should try out these programs before we take more drastic measures?

SUZANNE

She'll resist. She won't cooperate.

LAINIE

She'll have to.

SUZANNE

How are you going to make her?

LAINIE

Tell her she'll have to cooperate and let people help her.

SUZANNE

She'll throw a fit.

LAINIE

How do you know?

SUZANNE

She will.

LAINIE

Maybe she won't if I do it. She's already pissed off at you. She might be more inclined to listen to me.

SUZANNE

Go ahead. But I don't want you getting angry and hurting her feelings. She's a sensitive person.

LAINIE

I know she's sensitive. What makes you think I would do something like that?

SUZANNE

Because you have a short fuse—always have had.

LAINIE

Come on—

SUZANNE

I grew up with you, remember?

LAINIE

That was then.

SUZANNE

(Scoffing) Ha.

LAINIE

I get frustrated with myself—that's when I blow. I don't let it show around others. Not anymore.

SUZANNE

Okay.

LAINIE

And speaking of hurting her feelings, I think plopping her into a room in a nursing home is pretty insensitive.

SUZANNE

I'm not planning on "plopping" her anywhere. You make me sound like the Queen of Mean!

LAINIE

That's not what I meant at all. What I meant—

SUZANNE

I know what you meant.

LAINIE

No, you don't. Only I know what I meant—you can only interpret. And you interpreted incorrectly.

SUZANNE

All right. I misinterpreted. I was wrong. I should be whipped with a cat o' nine tails.

LAINIE

Flogged.

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

The technical term is "flogged" not "whipped."

SUZANNE

Okay, Professor Jacobson. I stand corrected...again!

LAINIE

(Getting the last word) Sorry. I have a thing for accuracy

SUZANNE

You can't keep it to yourself?

LAINIE

I guess not. *(Pause)* I have a question for you, if you don't mind.

SUZANNE

By all means.

LAINIE

If you were planning to put Mom in the nursing home, how were you going to get her there?

SUZANNE

I thought I would take her down there to visit Ida, and as we were about to leave, I would show the room to her and tell her she was staying.

LAINIE

Jesus H. Christ!

SUZANNE

What?

LAINIE

That's cruel!

SUZANNE

Cruel?

LAINIE

Yes, cruel. To trick her like that. And you don't want to upset her?

SUZANNE

I wouldn't just say, "Here's your room, Mom. See ya."

LAINIE

I would hope not. For crying out loud, I—

SUZANNE

Do you have a better idea? *(Pause)* Well?

LAINIE

Not at the moment. But I think I could come up with one.

SUZANNE

You'd better start thinking about it because it's going to come down to that at some point. And it's not far away.

LAINIE

When the time comes, we can talk about it with her and gradually move her toward accepting it. If Dr. Henderson would talk with her, and the county health nurse would discuss it with her, and maybe her minister—what's his name?

SUZANNE

Pastor Holmes.

LAINIE

Then maybe she will come to grips with the fact that it's inevitable, and she'll be more inclined to accept it.

SUZANNE

She already knows it's inevitable. Besides, she probably won't remember those conversations anyway, given how bad her memory is getting.

LAINIE

I simply think we're overreacting here.

SUZANNE

We? You mean "me," don't you?

LAINIE

Come on.

SUZANNE

Go ahead and say it.

LAINIE

Okay. You're overreacting. Are you happy now?

SUZANNE

Just say what you mean.

LAINIE

(Pause) Bickering like this is getting us nowhere. *(Beat)* Let's just stop it, okay?

SUZANNE

Bickering?

LAINIE

Yeah.

SUZANNE

(A laugh without mirth) You know something? We're still no different than we were when we were kids.

LAINIE

Fighting, you mean?

SUZANNE

Yeah.

LAINIE

I guess we're not.

SUZANNE

Why did we fight all the time, anyway?

LAINIE

I'm forty-seven years old. I can't remember specific instances thirty-five years after the fact. Jesus!

SUZANNE

You just don't want to remember.

LAINIE

Maybe I don't want to be responsible for giving a forty-five-year-old woman an inferiority complex.

SUZANNE

Forty-four!

LAINIE

Sorry.

SUZANNE

I won't be forty-five until—

LAINIE and SUZANNE, *Together*

January.

LAINIE

I know. I know. Forget I said it.

SUZANNE

I will.

LAINIE

Good.

SUZANNE

And something else. You always got the last word. You still do. (*LAINIE shrugs; SUZANNE points at her.*) That shrug counts as a word!

LAINIE

Does not!

SUZANNE

Does too!

LAINIE

It does not!

SUZANNE

I'll bet you don't do that with Jane.

LAINIE

I'm not aware if I do or don't. If it bothered her, I can tell you that she would have called me on it.

SUZANNE

Maybe you only do it with me.

LAINIE

Oh, bullshit!

SUZANNE

Well, you don't act as though you like me very much.

LAINIE

How can you say that? I like you, for Christ's sake! You're my sister, my only sibling.
What do you want me to say?

SUZANNE

Never mind.

LAINIE

If you have issues...

SUZANNE

Issues?

LAINIE

Yeah. "Issues."

SUZANNE

You're talking to me about issues?

LAINIE

Yeah. Maybe you should see a counselor or something. Get it figured out.

SUZANNE

I don't need a counselor.

LAINIE

It couldn't hurt.

SUZANNE

I said, I don't need a counselor. End of subject!

LAINIE

Fine.

(Again, LAINIE got the last word.)

SUZANNE

Ugh!

LAINIE

I'm sorry. I got the last word again, didn't I? (*SUZANNE gives her a glance.*) All right! I should be "flogged".

SUZANNE

God!

LAINIE

I'm sorry. I apologize. (*Pause; SUZANNE is silent.*) Seriously, I don't even know I'm doing it. (*Pause*) I mean it. I apologize.

(*Another pause; finally, SUZANNE speaks.*)

SUZANNE

We are so different. I can't understand you.

LAINIE

Nothing complicated about me.

SUZANNE

Everybody's complicated.

(*LAINIE stifles a verbal response. Instead she gives a non-verbal "whatever" gesture.*)

LAINIE

(*Beat*) So... What about Mom? What are we going to do?

SUZANNE

We seem to be at an impasse. You don't want her in a nursing home, so...

LAINIE

I think it's best if she stays in her own home—at least for now. Keep an eye on her—monitor her condition. And we go from there. Think of it as a test. She'll either pass or she'll fail. If she can manage fine. If she can't, then...

SUZANNE

(*Pause; then*) All right. Fine. We can try it and see. But I can't do it all by myself.

LAINIE

I'll make a more concerted effort to get up here to visit more often. I think I can do about every other month. Maybe a little more if I need to. What about you?

SUZANNE

The same.

LAINIE

You've looked into the social services, so...do you want me to get that set up or...?

SUZANNE

I have all the phone numbers. I'll arrange everything.

LAINIE

Okay.

SUZANNE

But she's not going to like it.

LAINIE

Tough shit! She doesn't have a choice.

SUZANNE

Lainie!

LAINIE

I'll let her know that we want her to have some help and that it's for her own good—like it or not. But I'll do it gently using all the personal charm I can muster.

(SUZANNE puts her foot up on the bench and begins tying her shoes.)

SUZANNE

I hate to take off for home tomorrow morning, but...

LAINIE

I'll tell her after you've gone. Don't worry about it. That way, maybe we can have a pleasant evening together.

SUZANNE

I'll call today and set up a meeting with the social worker. She's Bill Hagemeyer's wife.

LAINIE

Bill Hagemeyer. God! I haven't thought about him for years. The last time I saw him was— oh, man— ten, fifteen years ago? And he was three sheets to the wind. He told me if I went out with him he could cure me of my "deviant lifestyle." Barf!

SUZANNE

His wife's nice. They go to Mom's church. She said she could be at the house if I just give her a day's notice.

LAINIE

I'm staying through Saturday, so I'll be here to make sure she goes through with it.

SUZANNE

Good.

LAINIE

Are you okay with this?

SUZANNE

If it works out, I'm fine with it. Really. And if it doesn't work out...

LAINIE

Then we will have to explore the alternative. You know I just want what's best for Mom, right?

SUZANNE

Of course.

LAINIE

I mean, you do, too. I know that.

SUZANNE

God! I think what Bette Davis said was right.

LAINIE

What's that?

SUZANNE

"Age is no place for sissies."

LAINIE

She said that?

SUZANNE

(Nodding) She did. And you know what? I'm a sissy. *(LAINIE chuckles)* I am...Seriously.

LAINIE

I suspected that.

SUZANNE

I'm telling you...If I get Alzheimer's, I think I'll just buy a gun and...

LAINIE

Ah, you'll probably forget what you bought it for and start shooting the neighborhood cats.

SUZANNE

(Smiles) You may have a point. Look, I'm going to jog a little while longer. You going to the house?

LAINIE

Uh-huh.

SUZANNE

Nothing to Mom about this, okay?

LAINIE

Yeah, yeah. *(SUZANNE tosses her a look.)* I mean, yes. My lips are sealed.

SUZANNE

Good.

(LAINIE catches herself about to utter the last word and stops and executes a "button my lip" gesture. SUZANNE begins to jog off.)

LAINIE

See you later.

(LAINIE picks up her camera and begins to take a few shots of her coffee cup sitting on the park bench. GRACE enters, still carrying the grocery bag. She looks a little confused.)

LAINIE, *Continued*

Mom? Are you all right?

GRACE

Yes.

LAINIE

I thought you were going home.

GRACE

Well, I was...but I guess I got a little turned around.

(LAINIE realizes her mother's condition is worse than she thought, and it hurts.)

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

Please continue to next page for “Buford and Leroy”

BUFORD AND LEROY

CAST

Buford Koontz; 29, works in an auto parts store

Leroy Funt, 29; Buford's best friend since grade school

SETTING

Time: the present

Place: a small Midwestern city

BUFORD AND LEROY was first produced by the Attic Theatre Ensemble as part of its One Act Marathon in Hollywood, California, during June and July, 1998, with the following cast:

Buford.....Michael Groh

Leroy.....George Spelvin

It was produced by James Carey and directed by Michael Cervin.

(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. BUFORD and LEROY'S voices are heard from off-stage. Although BUFORD and LEROY may seem southern, they are really examples of young men from the underbelly of many small Midwestern towns and cities.)

BUFORD (O.S.)

Holy shit! What do you mean you ain't going to go?

LEROY (O.S.)

You heard me.

(LEROY enters followed by BUFORD. LEROY, dressed in a T-shirt and jeans carries a large plastic coffee mug, the type sold by convenience stores. BUFORD, dressed in an auto parts store shirt and slacks, is carrying a bottle of Coke and a small sack of peanuts which he eventually pours into the Coke and eats them as he drinks from the bottle.)

BUFORD

You asked me if I wanted to go the hospital to visit Skeeter, and then you go and drop this on me.

LEROY

Come on.

BUFORD

You've been looking forward to this for months.

LEROY

So.

BUFORD

That's why I sent in for a pair o' tickets.

LEROY

Well, you should of asked me first.

BUFORD

You can't wait if you want to get first class tickets to an event of this magnitude. This thing is big! You ain't going to get a decent seat at any monster truck challenge, much less this here one, if you don't get your tickets right away. Bigfoot and King Kong'll be packing them in like sardines.

LEROY

I know that. But I never told you to order me a ticket.

BUFORD

Well, you made it sound like you wanted to go last week.

LEROY

That was then.

BUFORD

Hell, Leroy. *(Pulling two tickets from his shirt pocket)* I got us two prime seats right on the starting line. Just think—you get to see that state-o'-the-art machinery, smell that hi-tech exhaust, hear that raw, brute horsepower. Why, it's enough to make your dick hard!

LEROY

I know.

BUFORD

(Replacing the tickets into his shirt pocket) And if that ain't enough to get you excited, Monster Truck magazine's Miss April pinup will be there signing autographs. You remember her from the April issue, don't you?

LEROY

The one with the big tits?

BUFORD

Big tits? Christ Leroy, all them pinup girls have big tits. You ever heard anybody say, "You know, that pinup girl with the tiny tits?" You ever heard anybody say that?

LEROY

Well, no. I guess I—

BUFORD

Cuz there ain't such a thing. You can't be a pinup girl without big tits. They're sort of—

LEROY

Okay, okay. You made your point. You mean the blonde with that big honkin' gear shifter between her legs.

BUFORD

Yeah! That's the one.

LEROY

She's really going to be there, huh?

BUFORD

Yup, she sure is.

LEROY

How come you never told me that last week?

BUFORD

Didn't know last week. Heard it on a radio commercial yesterday. Just think. You could get her autograph, maybe even get your picture taken with her.

LEROY

Look, I feel bad about it, Buford. I do. But I can't.

BUFORD

How come?

LEROY

I can't, that's all.

BUFORD

You got to have a reason.

LEROY

I do. I got a damn good reason.

BUFORD

Well, what is it?

LEROY

I don't see that's any of your business.

BUFORD

Come on, Leroy. I'm your buddy.

LEROY

So?

BUFORD

And being your buddy, I think you owe me a little consideration. Hell, I mean, I spent twenty-two god damned dollars on a ticket for your sorry ass, and now you say you can't come with me. And to top it off, you won't even tell me why. "I don't see that's any of your business". That's mighty rude, that's what it is. Mighty rude. And another thing—

LEROY

All right, all right. But you gotta promise me one thing, will you do that?

BUFORD

Okay. What is it?

LEROY

You will not repeat what I tell you to nobody.

BUFORD

Okay. I promise.

LEROY

I mean it.

BUFORD

I can keep a promise. You know that. What is it?

LEROY

I have to go into the city and get my brother out of jail.

BUFORD

That twerp Billy in trouble again?

LEROY

It ain't Billy this time. I wish it was but it ain't. It's Orel.

BUFORD

Orel?!!

LEROY

Uh-huh.

BUFORD

Orel's in jail?!!

LEROY

Not so damned loud, okay?

BUFORD

Sorry.

LEROY

Don't want the whole town to know.

BUFORD

Oh, they'll know. Sooner or later they're going to know.

LEROY

Well, later is better than sooner.

BUFORD

When did it happen, anyway?

LEROY

Last night.

BUFORD

My, oh my.

LEROY

Can you believe it?

BUFORD

Orel Funt in jail. Now that could be a small scandal.

LEROY

Oh, no. There ain't no way this'll be a small scandal. This has the makin's to be the biggest scandal to hit these parts for a long time.

BUFORD

That big? What the hell did he do?

LEROY

He claims he didn't do nothin'. Says it's all a big misunderstanding.

BUFORD

Oh? So, what'd they throw him in for, anyway?

LEROY

I was just shocked to the gills.

BUFORD

What was it?

It's just so unbelievable.

LEROY

What is?

BUFORD

This thing with Orel.

LEROY

What thing?

BUFORD

It hurts me to even say it.

LEROY

Well, it's going to hurt a helluva lot more if you don't.

BUFORD

Oh, all right. He got arrested last night for...soliciting.

LEROY

Orel?

BUFORD

Uh-huh.

LEROY

For soliciting?

BUFORD

Uh-huh.

LEROY

Well, I'll be...What's "soliciting?"

BUFORD

Don't you know nothin', Buford? Christ! Soliciting means, uh...asking for something.

LEROY

BUFORD

You mean he was arrested for trying to get contributions?

LEROY

Well, not exactly contributions. More like "services."

BUFORD

He got arrested for holding an illegal prayer meeting?

LEROY

No.

BUFORD

What do you mean then?

LEROY

He got arrested for asking for sexual favors—from a prostitute.

BUFORD

For himself?

LEROY

Well, of course for himself. You don't think he was trying to hire one for you, do you?

BUFORD

We're not that friendly. Besides, I'd kind of like to see the merchandise first.

LEROY

Jesus.

BUFORD

I mean, you don't go surprising somebody you hardly know with something like that.

LEROY

It was for himself, or at least, that's what the police think. They arrested him.

BUFORD

Well, I'll be go to hell.

LEROY

An upright man with his reputation—

BUFORD

Maybe you don't know him as well as you think. Maybe he's got this dark side nobody knows about.

LEROY

I doubt it. When he called me last night he told me that it was all some kind of mix up. Said he got lost and was just asking for directions. And before he knew—

BUFORD

Yeah, right. Likely story. I can just hear it now. "Excuse me miss, but I'm kind of lost. Can you tell me how I can find a blow job?"

LEROY

It ain't funny. Orel practices abstinence.

BUFORD

Abstinence. Shit! That's just a fancy word for whacking your carrot.

LEROY

Come on, Buford.

BUFORD

Maybe he got tired of playing the lone hand.

LEROY

Just shut up, will you?

BUFORD

Aw right. Aw right. How'd it happen?

LEROY

The hooker turned out to be a cop.

BUFORD

A cop?

LEROY

You know, one a them police decoys.

BUFORD

No lie?

LEROY

No lie!

BUFORD

Uhhhh... Was the cop male or female?

LEROY

(Pause as he stares at BUFORD) Are you insinuating my brother Orel is strange? Cuz if you are—

BUFORD

No. I was just curious that's—

LEROY

Because he ain't strange.

BUFORD

I didn't say he was. I only wanted to—

LEROY

Them rumors awhile back was started by a few mean-spirited people who were out to ruin him. Just because he's thirty-six years old, isn't married, and livin' at home with his mother doesn't mean he's some kind of pervert.

BUFORD

I know that, but—

LEROY

But what?

BUFORD

You have to admit he does walk kind of funny.

LEROY

What do you mean "walks kind of funny?"

BUFORD

You know, it's sort of like he's...holding his butt cheeks together.

LEROY

He can't help that. He walked perfectly normal up until he had that operation.

BUFORD

What operation was that?

LEROY

Adenoid operation he had a couple years ago.

BUFORD

I didn't know he had an operation.

LEROY

Well, that ain't something a person announces on the local radio station. Especially when that god damned hospital bungled the operation and left him deformed.

BUFORD

Deformed?

LEROY

Uh-huh.

(Pause)

BUFORD

Deformed, you say?

LEROY

Yeah.

BUFORD

So, uh...what you're saying is...it's this deformed adenoid that makes him walk funny?

No.

LEROY

What do you mean?

BUFORD

I shouldn't be talking about it.

LEROY

Why?

BUFORD

There's a lawsuit pending over the whole deal. It's going to be a real mess.

LEROY

I don't understand.

BUFORD

He was supposed to have had an adenoid operation. But somehow the hospital got him mixed up with another patient, and the doctor took out one o' Orel's testicles by mistake.

LEROY

Holy shit!

BUFORD

You ain't tootin'.

LEROY

One of his—balls—?

BUFORD

Uh-huh.

LEROY

That's terrible. What the hospital do when they found out?

BUFORD

Nothin'. They said they was sorry.

LEROY

BUFORD

Is that all? I mean, the least they could of done was offer to put him back the way he was.

LEROY

Can't. Once it's done, it's done. There ain't no putting it back. Probably wound up in a can of dog food.

BUFORD

No. I mean, couldn't they put in one of those fake ones. You know, so it'd still look like he had two hanging there. Don't they have fake ones made out of silicon or something?

LEROY

He wouldn't want any silicon inside him. They could of maybe put one in made out of stainless steel, but that would up his chances of getting hit by lightning.

BUFORD

Or picking up a radio station. Wouldn't that be something? I heard about this guy that could pick up—

LEROY

The hospital's lawyer wanted Orel to sign some papers to let them off the hook, but he wouldn't do it.

BUFORD

What he do?

LEROY

Sued them, that's what. Once it goes to court, a jury will have to figure out damages—you know—figure out exactly what his testicle was worth.

BUFORD

That ain't going to be easy, Leroy. *(Beat)* What do you suppose a man's testicle is worth, anyway?

LEROY

I don't rightly know, Buford. What's one a your testicles worth to you?

BUFORD

Ain't never really given it much thought. I always sort of took them both for granted.

LEROY

Well, a person never seems to appreciate things 'til they're gone.

BUFORD

That's a fact. That's a fact. Poor Orel.

LEROY

This has been a terrible cross for him to bear.

BUFORD

Say. Was it his right one or his left one?

LEROY

I don't know. What difference does it make?

BUFORD

I was just wondering, that's all.

LEROY

He ain't exactly whipped off his pants to show me.

BUFORD

(Touches his groin) Damn!

LEROY

It's made him more self-conscious and shy around women. He don't think a woman would want a man that's not all there. Sooner or later she'd get to feeling around, notice something ain't right, and start asking questions.

BUFORD

That could ruin a romantic evening all right.

LEROY

Might think she got a hold of defective merchandise.

BUFORD

Something like that could even lead to a divorce.

LEROY

Yeah. And it'd be all over the country that she was divorcing him because he's missing one of his goyones. [Note: goyones is pronounced "goi`onz"]

BUFORD

That'd be bad. Real bad.

LEROY

Anyway, the pain and suffering he's already gone through is just terrible. At first, any little thing would set him off. Why, we were watching a baseball game on the TV over at Mom's house a couple a months after it happened, and when the announcer said the batter had one ball and two strikes, he just burst into tears.

BUFORD

My!

LEROY

And that's the only time in my life I ever heard Mom use the "f" word.

BUFORD

Your Mom said the "f" word?

LEROY

She surely did. She said, "That f'n hospital is going to pay for this."

BUFORD

I'm glad I wasn't around. I wouldn't want to see her p.o.'ed like that.

LEROY

Who can blame her, you know. Orel and her have always been real close.

BUFORD

Say, Leroy. Is that all they did to him—take out one of his testicles? I mean, they didn't do anything else did they?

LEROY

What do you mean?

BUFORD

Well, you know. Like did they change any o' the rest of his "parts?"

LEROY

Well, they didn't sew his peter to his knee if that's what you're thinking.

BUFORD

No, Leroy. That ain't what I was wondering about—exactly. I was just wondering sort of, in general. You know.

LEROY

I hope you keep this stuff to yourself, okay?

BUFORD

Oh, sure. But you know, it ain't exactly unusual for a person to have just one. Some people are born with only one and they live perfectly normal lives.

LEROY

Like who? Who do you know that only has one?

BUFORD

Well...Hitler. He only had one.

LEROY

Hitler?

BUFORD

Yeah.

LEROY

You call him perfectly normal?

BUFORD

No. But he only had one.

LEROY

Christ! Just forget about it, okay? I don't want to hear anymore about Orel not being a normal guy.

BUFORD

I understand. Really. When I asked about the cop, I wasn't meaning to insult him. I was just curious if it was a woman or some guy dressed up like a woman—you know—"undercover cop"—like on the TV?

LEROY

He said it was a woman. That's all I know. He wasn't too keen on the details.

BUFORD

Asking a lady police officer for sex.

LEROY

I know.

BUFORD

Was she a looker?

LEROY

How the hell should I know? You think I asked him that over the phone?

BUFORD

Just thought he might of volunteered the information, that's all. I mean, if she was real good looking and everything, maybe she lured him into it—there's a special word for that.

LEROY

It's embarrassing.

BUFORD

No, that ain't it. It's like, uh... "enchantment"... or something like that. They can't do it, it's illegal for them to use enchantment in order to arrest people.

LEROY

That's "entrapment", Buford. "Entrapment."

BUFORD

Yeah. That's it.

LEROY

They can use enchantment all they want, but they can't entrap people.

BUFORD

"Entrapment." I knew that. Just had a momentary brain fart, that's all.

LEROY

Be getting his name printed in the newspaper, I suppose.

BUFORD

That's for sure. Right in the arrest column. He'll be famous around these parts for a long time.

LEROY

Orel Elvis Funt arrested for soliciting prostitution. Disgrace the whole family.

BUFORD

Orel Elvis Funt?

LEROY

Well, yeah. They're always using a person's full name whenever they get into trouble.

BUFORD

Orel Elvis Funt?

LEROY

You know, like Lee Harvey Oswald. It's never Lee Oswald or Lee H. Oswald. It's always Lee Harvey Oswald.

BUFORD

Something tells me that people ain't likely to be speaking the names Lee Harvey Oswald and Orel Elvis Funt in the same breath.

LEROY

I know that, but—

BUFORD

Where'd he get a name like Orel Elvis, anyway? It's kind of a stupid sounding name, if you don't mind me saying so.

LEROY

For your information, Dad and Mom named him after things they loved most. Dad loved Orel Roberts and Mom loved Elvis Presley. So, they named him Orel Elvis.

BUFORD

It's a damn good thing your mom didn't love sex, that's all I gotta say.

LEROY

Christ, Buford. Nobody in their right mind would name their baby Oral Sex. Course, his name could of been Orel Tex . . . Mom said she liked listenin' to Tex Ritter before Elvis come along.

BUFORD

What I can't figure out is this. If he had the "urge," and playing the lone hand just wouldn't do, why didn't he pay a call on Myrna Mae Hinkle. Half the town knows she ain't a real blonde. Besides, I—

LEROY

Oh, like that's a real hard one to figure out. It ain't exactly natural to have blonde hair the color of a chicken's foot.

BUFORD

What I'm getting at is, Orel didn't need to go out of town for a woman. Hell, Myrna Mae lives only four blocks away.

LEROY

Buford.

BUFORD

She's hotter than a popcorn fart.

LEROY

Buford!

BUFORD

I heard she can damn near suck the brass off a door knob!

LEROY

God damnit! If you keep going on like this, I'm going to beat you like a red-headed stepson.

BUFORD

Sorry, Leroy.

LEROY

I happen to like Myrna Mae. All of those rumors come from that lying scumbag, Leo Whipperling. I'll bet that's where you heard em, ain't it?

BUFORD

Well, yeah.

LEROY

When he used to work with me down at the toilet seat factory, I heard him talking to the guys about her. He was bad-mouthing her something awful after she broke up with him, and those stories have been dogging her ever since. You can't always believe what you hear, Buford.

BUFORD

I know.

LEROY

She's probably a nice person when you get to know her.

BUFORD

Well, okay. I mean, I guess I stand corrected.

LEROY

Good.

BUFORD

So, it's sort of like those rumors 'at got started about Orel, huh?

LEROY

Yeah.

BUFORD

You don't have to get so upset about it. It ain't going to help.

LEROY

Sorry, Buford. I guess I just needed to get it out of my system.

BUFORD

It's all right.

LEROY

Anyway...Now you know the reason why I can't go see Bigfoot 'n King Kong duke it out with each other tonight. I have to drive an hour and a half into the city to bail Orel out of

LEROY, *Continued*

jail. And you better not tell a soul about this, you hear. Cuz if it gets around that Orel got arrested for trying to buy sex, he'll more than likely lose his entire congregation.

BUFORD

Yeah. Ain't nobody going to listen to a man of god who keeps company with a prostitute. I'd say his preaching days would definitely be numbered if it ever gets out.

LEROY

That's the god's truth. *(Pause)* Damn!

BUFORD

What's the matter?

LEROY

You know what's bothering me the most?

BUFORD

What's that?

LEROY

I don't know what to do.

BUFORD

What do you mean?

LEROY

It's just that I—I ain't ever bailed nobody out of jail before. I don't know how to—you know—go about it.

BUFORD

What about all them times Billy was in trouble?

LEROY

Orel always took care of it.

BUFORD

Oh. Well, it's no big deal, really. I bailed my Uncle Snoose out of jail a coupla times.

LEROY

I don't even know where to go or who to see. And all that traffic. I always end up getting lost when I drive downtown. God, I hate that place.

(LEROY pauses as he takes a swig of his coffee.)

BUFORD

You need me to go with you, Leroy?

LEROY

Go with me?

BUFORD

That's what I said.

LEROY

You can't do that.

BUFORD

How come?

LEROY

You'd miss seeing Bigfoot and King Kong duke it out.

BUFORD

I know.

LEROY

And Miss April Monster Truck. What about her? You wouldn't be able to get her autograph on a poster for your garage.

BUFORD

I know.

LEROY

I don't understand. You'd do this for me?

BUFORD

Course. We're friends, ain't we?

LEROY

Yeah.

BUFORD

You did the same thing for me, didn't you?

LEROY

I did?

BUFORD

Yup.

LEROY

What do you mean?

BUFORD

Well, like last January when they took me to the hospital—you know—when I had that accident with the electric drill? You remember when I was—

LEROY

Oh, yeah.

BUFORD

Well, what I'm—

LEROY

You know, you never did tell me why you were drilling a hole in a two by four buck naked.

BUFORD

It seemed to be the right thing to do at the time. Well, what I'm getting at is...The next day it was Super Bowl Sunday, the most important football game o' the year, but you came to the hospital to be with me—instead o' watching the TV. Remember?

LEROY

Yeah.

BUFORD

That's what I call sacrifice. This ain't no different.

LEROY

Well...Thanks, Buford. I'd feel a lot better about this if you was to come along with me. I could really use a little a your know-how.

BUFORD

Good.

LEROY

I'll be glad to pay you for the tickets.

BUFORD

It's all right. I'll give them to the boss. That way when I tell him I gotta leave work at two, he won't be pissed.

LEROY

Maybe he'll get a charge out of Miss April.

BUFORD

I doubt even she can charge his dead battery. But he'll like the trucks.

LEROY

Your one generous guy, Buford. I—uh—I don't know how to thank you.

BUFORD

Don't worry about it.

LEROY

Thanks. I won't forget this, you know.

BUFORD

Hey, why don't you drop by the parts store after lunch? Darrell just got his new issue of International Stud. He was showing it to us at Thelma's this morning. I'm tellin' you, it's beyond words.

LEROY

I'll do that.

BUFORD

Okay. And at two o'clock we'll go get Orel out of jail. Okay?

LEROY

Sounds good to me. Thanks.

BUFORD

Who knows, maybe we'll get back in time to hear a little o' that earthshakin', ground poundin' horsepower. Suppose?

(BUFORD tosses his empty Coke bottle into the trash barrel.)

LEROY

Hope so.

BUFORD

(Looks at his watch) Say, I gotta get some real food before I go back to work. You want to join me for one o' Thelma's greaseburgers over at the cafe?

LEROY

I'll get something later. I should go visit Skeeter for a minute—see how he's feeling after his operation.

BUFORD

Tell him "hi" for me.

LEROY

I'll do that.

BUFORD

Oh—And ask him what he's going to do with that blow-up donut he's been sittin' on.

LEROY

Why? You need it?

BUFORD

It's not what you think. But I have an idea how I could use it.

LEROY

Then, you ask him. He likes you better than me. *(Beat)* Which reminds me—I'm supposed to have the oil changed in my pickup over at his place in half an hour.

BUFORD

Make sure you have Dutch do it, 'cuz Skeeter's kid don't know sick 'em. Yesterday Dutch sent him over to the store to pick up a muffler filter and a box of rubber welding rods. Stupid shit.

LEROY

What did you tell him?

BUFORD

That we got them on back order.

LEROY

Dutch is always screwing with somebody.

BUFORD

Yeah. A couple of weeks ago he had him all ready to up and join this club called Sex without Partners.

LEROY

Jeez!

BUFORD

You, know, Thelma fired him at the cafe for the "indecent" way he was making hamburger patties.

LEROY

I know he stopped working there, but I had—

BUFORD

That boy ain't right. Now, this is just between you 'n me, but—

LEROY

Indecent?

(BUFORD pantomimes as he describes the following act of indecency.)

BUFORD

Oh, yeah. *(Confidentially)* He took a ball 'o hamburger and put it under his arm—
(He raises his bent arm exposing his armpit and with his other hand, takes the ball of hamburger and places it in his arm pit.)—and goes like this.

(BUFORD pulls his elbow down to his ribs so his arm pit squeezes the ball into a hamburger patty)

LEROY

Who told you that?

BUFORD

Dutch.

LEROY

Christ, Buford!

BUFORD

What?

LEROY

He's pulling your leg. That joke is old as the hills.

BUFORD

I know it's a joke. But he really did it.

LEROY

No way.

BUFORD

You go ask Thelma.

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

Please continue to next page for “Joanna on My Mind”

JOANNA ON MY MIND

CAST

Bill; 60, a retired writer living in New York

Pearl; 60, Bill's former high school sweetheart

SETTING

Time: the present

Place: a small Midwestern city

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
Nothing. Sorry. Never mind.

BILL
Mm.

(BILL returns to his paper.)
PEARL

(After a moment) Actually...

BILL
(Lowering his paper) Yes?

PEARL
You remind me of someone.

BILL
I do?

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

Always the charmer. PEARL

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

Thank you. PEARL

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.

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?

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.

That's not like you. BILL

(*Becoming upset*) I know. PEARL

Didn't you like it? BILL

I liked it fine. PEARL

I don't understand. BILL

Well, I couldn't continue second semester. PEARL

Couldn't continue? BILL

No. PEARL

What happened? BILL

I was pregnant. PEARL

Pregnant? BILL

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

Oh my god. The weekend at the lakes? BILL

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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?

PEARL

No.

BILL

Good.

PEARL

You said you're moving—when?

BILL

Couple of weeks.

PEARL

Ah.

BILL

It'll take me a while to get settled once all my stuff arrives.

PEARL

If you need help unpacking...

BILL

Yes?

PEARL

I know some people who could help.

BILL

Thanks.

PEARL

How long do you think you'll be staying?

BILL

For the rest of my life, I hope.

PEARL

No, I mean right now.

BILL

Oh. I'm flying back on Monday.

PEARL

Ah.

BILL

There's someone who is interested in buying my apartment so I have to get back.

PEARL

I see.

BILL

And I have a lot to do. I've accumulated quite a bit of junk over the years, and I have to sort through it.

PEARL

Well—what I was wondering was—do you have anything planned for tomorrow?

BILL

No.

PEARL

Do you remember Mrs. Buchwalter, our sixth grade teacher?

BILL

Mrs. Buchwalter? How could I forget her?

PEARL

The church is having an open house for her in the afternoon. I thought maybe you'd be interested in attending.

BILL

My god, she's still alive?

PEARL

Uh-huh.

BILL

She must be ancient.

PEARL

Ninety.

BILL

My!

PEARL

And sharp as a tack. It's a reception honoring her on her ninetieth birthday.

BILL

I remember we used to refer to her as "the Field Marshall."

PEARL

Strict.

BILL

That's an understatement. I had this nightmare vision of her goose-stepping into our classroom in the morning, snapping a riding crop and barking an order like, (*In a German accent*) "Today you will learn long division, und you vill like it!"

PEARL

She was a good teacher.

BILL

Yes, after she put the fear of god into you. It only took one rap of her ruler across your knuckles to get your undivided attention.

PEARL

It took two raps for you, if memory serves.

BILL

Yes, and she made me stay in for recess and do arithmetic problems for a month for throwing snowballs.

PEARL

You broke the rules.

BILL

Yes. Yes, I did.

PEARL

She remembers everybody.

BILL

Really.

PEARL

You'll come?

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

Please continue to next page for “Shooting Pool with a Rope”

SHOOTING POOL WITH A ROPE

Dedicated to the memory of Herman F. Hansen

CAST

AL; 68, a retired businessman

Stacey; a troubled teen

SETTING

Time: the present

Place: a small Midwestern city

SHOOTING POOL WITH A ROPE was first presented by the Old Opera House Theatre Company as part of their 10th Annual New Voice Play Festival on June 25, 2010, in Charles Town, West Virginia, with the following cast:

AL.....Steven Brewer

STACEY.....Rob Madden

It was directed by James P. Whipple.

(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. AL crosses to the bench and sits down. He is a slightly overweight man of 68 who has a keen eye and a sharp wit. He pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and pats his forehead. After returning the handkerchief to his rear pants pocket, he picks up his magazine and begins to thumb through it. Not interested, he tosses it on the bench beside him. He breathes a big sigh and places his hands together in his lap and unconsciously begins twiddling his thumbs. He notices what he is doing and pulls his hands away in disgust. He doesn't know what to do with himself. A moment later, STACEY, a sixteen-year-old boy walks in wearing pants looking as if they are ready to fall off. Something is weighing heavily on his mind. STACY sees AL but ignores him. AL observes STACY for a moment.)

AL

(To STACEY) Hey, kid... (No response; trying again with more volume) You, kid...

(STACEY turns to AL.) Mind if I make an observation?

STACEY

You talking to me?

AL

No, I was talking to that spirea bush over there. Yeah, I'm talking to you. (*Beat*) Mind if I make an observation? (*STACEY does not answer; pause*) It's important.

(*Annoyed, STACEY turns; their eyes lock.*)

STACEY

Yeah?

AL

Your pants are gonna fall off.

STACEY

(*Half under his breath*) You asshole.

AL

And people can see your underwear.

STACEY

Did I ask you to talk to me?

AL

Mmm. I don't know. My memory isn't what it once was.

STACEY

Well, I didn't.

AL

Ah.

STACEY

And if you're some kind of pervert, I'm not interested. So you can just go fuck yourself.

AL

Interesting concept. (*STACEY glares at him.*) A rare ability like that could have alleviated a lot of frustration during my misspent youth.

STACEY

You're asking for it.

AL

For what?

STACEY

An ass-kickin'.

AL

You know, I experienced one of those once. On the streets of Melbourne—that's in Australia.

STACEY

I know where Melbourne is.

AL

Are you always this hostile? I mean, it's a terrible way to go through life.

STACEY

Will you just...

AL

What?

STACEY

Leave me alone!

(STACEY crosses away.)

AL

All right. I apologize. I should respect your wishes. Sorry, I didn't mean to get you upset. *(Silence; AL studies STACEY.)* Do girls think it's sexy to see your underwear?

STACEY

(Turns to stare at AL) They think it's sexy to see what's underneath.

AL

Ah-hah. I guess it was only a matter of time before butt cracks were elevated to the stature of cleavage. Tit for tat, so to speak.

STACEY

What the hell are—

AL

I guess I shouldn't be surprised given the visual similarities.

STACEY

Why are you talking to me?

AL

Why?

STACEY

Yeah, why?

AL

Well...

STACEY

You don't know me.

AL

True.

STACEY

How do you know I'm not going to pull a knife and steal your money?

AL

I don't.

STACEY

Or maybe I could be one of those thrill killers you read about. Kill just for the hell of it.

AL

You read?

STACEY

Well, duh...

AL

No, I mean that's good. Over the years, I've read everything I could get my hands on—still do. It's important to have command of one's language.

STACEY

So?

AL

You read, you speak well; you're personable—to a degree. Peel away the attitude and you have...possibilities.

STACEY

Oh?

AL

I find people like you interesting. *(Pause)* More or less.

STACEY

So, you just talk to anybody?

AL

Pretty much.

STACEY

Why?

AL

I could talk to that peony bush over there about how it feels to have ants crawling all over it, but I'm afraid it would—for the most part—be a one-way conversation.

STACEY

You talk to bushes?

AL

Only on "Tuesdays, Thursdays and Tuesdays."

(STACEY tosses AL a bewildered look as AL laughs at his own joke.)

STACEY

You're weird, man.

AL

That I am. I'm not afraid to admit it. But being weird isn't necessarily a bad thing, do you think? You can enjoy it. I always have. If people think I'm a little weird, I take that as a compliment. There's nothing worse than being beige.

STACEY

Beige?

AL

Beige. You know, "bland...boring."

STACEY

Oh.

(Beat.)

AL

I wasn't making fun of your clothes. *(STACEY does not answer.)* If I was your age, I'd probably dress just like you.

STACEY

You still can. Your pants are baggy enough.

(AL gets up and pulls his pants down like STACEY's pants.)

AL

What do you think? *(STACEY looks but does not respond.)* Pants—maybe. Still can—no way.

STACEY

Why not?

AL

I don't have what you've got to keep them up. My pants would be around my ankles—probably get me arrested. Or I'd fall down, and hurt myself. You see, you're in fashion. But me—I'd look like some old degenerate. Besides, my naval has moved up to here—*(Points to his solar plexus)*—and my boxer's aren't as attractive as yours.

(AL pulls his pants back up.)

STACEY

Maybe you'll turn on your wife.

AL

Not married.

STACEY

Some old lady might find you sexy. You could get laid.

AL

Get laid. Ha! You can't shoot pool with a rope, kid. Besides, it's been so long...

STACEY

It's like riding a bike.

AL

I'd probably fall off and chip a tooth. (*STACEY smiles.*) You can smile! Good. That's important. Now if you can laugh—hey—you'll live a longer, happier life.

STACEY

You know, they've got drugs now that will stiffen your rope.

AL

Oh, yeah?

STACEY

Don't you ever watch TV?

AL

Oh, that stuff. It would just aggravate the arthritis in my wrist. (*STACEY laughs.*) Ah-hah. See! Time spent laughing is time spent with the gods.

STACEY

I haven't had much to laugh about lately.

AL

Why's that? If you don't mind my asking. (*STACEY shrugs*) Since this park is across the street from a hospital, and since you should be in school but aren't, can I assume you might be visiting a loved one?

STACEY
(*Nodding*) Maybe.

AL
I figured. Me, too.

STACEY
Who?

AL
My daughter. And you? (*STACEY does not answer.*) It's all right. It's none of my business.

STACEY
Then why aren't you inside?

AL
If I have a choice of spending time in a park or in the waiting room of a hospital, the park wins hands down.

STACEY
Yeah.

AL
I'm not fond of hospitals.

STACEY
Why's that?

AL
If you've ever gone under the knife, you'll want to stay as far away as possible.

STACEY
You had an operation once?

AL
Once. Ha!

STACEY
More than once?

AL

Gall bladder, hemorrhoids, knee surgery, not to mention prostate cancer.

STACEY

But you're all right now.

AL

So far. I got radiation treatments every day for three and a half weeks. I now have my own built-in flashlight—I can find my way to the bathroom at night without turning on the lights. But don't ask me to demonstrate, I'm shy.

STACEY

You're shittin' me.

AL

Well... Maybe about the glow-in-the-dark part.

STACEY

I don't think cancer is very funny.

AL

It's not, no siree. Serious stuff. But you've got to have a good attitude about it. Otherwise it will get you. And the Big C isn't going to get me any time soon. I had an old gypsy woman tell my fortune once, and she predicted I would be shot during a lovers quarrel in a cathouse on my ninety-ninth birthday.

STACEY

Shooting pool with a rope?

(AL laughs.)

AL

Shooting pool with a rope. That's right. I think there's hope for you, kid.

STACEY

Will you knock off that "kid" stuff? My name is Stacey not "kid."

AL

I thought Stacey was a girl's name.

(STACEY glares at AL.)

STACEY

Sometimes it is. Sometimes it's not.

AL

Ease up. I'm just giving you a hard time.

STACEY

Well don't. I don't like it.

AL

Fine.

STACEY

What's your name?

AL

AL. Short for Alvin. *(Beat)* And no, I'm not one of the friggin' chipmunks.

(AL rises and offers his hand which STACEY shakes.)

STACEY

Chipmunks?

AL

You know—Alvin the Chipmunk.

STACEY

No.

AL

You've never heard of Alvin and the Chipmunks?

STACEY

No.

AL

Cultural icons of the 1950's?

STACEY

No!

AL

They were seminal in the development of heavy metal rock and roll.

STACEY

In the 1950's?

AL

Yeah.

STACEY

Really?

AL

No.

(AL laughs.)

STACEY

Jerking me around again.

AL

Sorry. I couldn't help myself. It's this ornery streak that surfaces every now and then.

STACEY

I hadn't noticed.

AL

Oo! Sarcasm. I like that. *(Pause; STACEY sits on the bench.)* What's the matter?

STACEY

Nothin'.

AL

Nothin', huh?

STACEY

Yeah.

AL
You want to talk about nothin'?

STACEY
No.

AL
I see.

STACEY
(Pause; then) It's kind of personal.

AL
Personal like in a loved one?

STACEY
(Nodding) Yeah.

AL
Parent?

STACEY
(Nodding) Mm.

AL
Getting it off your chest might make you feel better.

STACEY
I doubt it.

AL
You never know... I went to a priest once—to talk about a problem I had—and I found it very helpful.

STACEY
Big deal—you're Catholic.

AL
No, I'm not.

STACEY

And you saw a priest?

AL

Yeah.

STACEY

You're just shitting me again.

AL

No, honest to God. I walked into the church and told him I needed some help. It didn't matter to him that I was raised a Methodist. Father Intagliata—that was his name—he took time to teach me about the power of redemption, and for that, I'll always be grateful.

STACEY

I could never do that.

AL

Talk to a priest?

STACEY

Yeah.

AL

Well, at your age I wouldn't have either. But I did something once I'm not very proud of, and it had been eating away at me most of my life. It's taken me over forty years to gather up the courage and the conviction to do something about it, and now I'm afraid it may be too late. I guess that's my punishment for being a coward.

STACEY

You don't seem the cowardly type to me.

AL

Well, I was—then. And now, I would rather face a burglar with a gun than to go into that hospital and face my daughter.

STACEY

That bad.

AL

You don't know the half of it. (*Pause*) So, you got any ugly little secrets?

STACEY

I'm not old enough yet.

AL

You want a couple of mine? (*STACEY shrugs.*) They're pretty horrible—I'll allow you only one.

STACEY

How horrible are they? (*AL mimics STACEY's shrug.*) Ever been in prison?

AL

Nope.

STACEY

Committed any crimes?

AL

No.

STACEY

You a mean person?

AL

No.

STACEY

A liar?

AL

No, but I'm prone to exaggerating.

STACEY

An asshole?

AL

Depends who you talk to.

STACEY
You don't sound so bad.

AL
So, is it your mother or father?

STACEY
Mother.

AL
How is she?

(STACEY pauses as he tries to formulate the word he has not had to say until now.)

STACEY
Dying.

(Beat.)

AL
I'm sorry.

STACEY
She's been fighting cancer for the last five years.

AL
That's tough.

STACEY
It would go into remission, and then it would just come back.

AL
You have a father?

STACEY
No, he was killed in a car accident—when I was four.

AL
No brothers, sisters? Aunts or uncles?

STACEY

No. My grandparents are all dead—except for one. He disappeared a long time ago...He could be dead too for all I know.

AL

(Pause) What's your name?

STACEY

I told you. Stacey.

AL

Stacey what?

STACEY

Miller.

AL

And your mother—what's her name?

STACEY

Why?

AL

Just humor me, okay. I'm an old man. Guys my age have been known to drop dead for no reason.

STACEY

All right.

AL

Your mother's name?

STACEY

Diane. Diane Mason.

AL

And her maiden name?

Crawford. STACEY

AL
(Sighs deeply) That's what I thought.

STACEY
What's with all the questions?

AL
I just had to make sure.

STACEY
Make sure of what?

AL
Look kid, I—

STACEY
Stop calling me kid, will yuh?

AL
All right, all right.

STACEY
The name is Stacey.

AL
All right, Stacey. (Beat) You can call me "Al." I prefer that to "Hey, you!" or "Dumb ass."

STACEY
Al what?

AL
Crawford.

STACEY
Crawford, that's my...

AL

Yeah.

STACEY

Are you messing with me?

AL

No. Honest, I'm not. *(Beat)* You see, I'm your grandfather—the one that "disappeared" as you put it. As you can see, I'm very much alive—at least for the time being.

STACEY

I don't believe you!

(STACEY begins to leave. AL rises to stop him.)

AL

Now, wait a minute. Hear me out.

(STACEY stops.)

STACEY

Why?

AL

All I ask is for a couple of minutes. Then you can leave, tell me to get screwed, whatever. But please, just—just a minute of your time. *(Beat)* What will it hurt? *(STACEY turns to AL.)* I was married to your grandmother, Frances Ingles Crawford. And we had a daughter named Diane Louise. Louise is your mother's middle name, is it not?

STACEY

Yeah.

AL

I'm not trying to pull some kind of scam, take advantage or otherwise mess with your head. I really am your grandfather. Long, lost grandfather, god help me.

STACEY

What're you doing here?

AL

Well... *(Pause)* I guess you could say I'm exorcising my guilt.

STACEY

Your guilt?

AL

A writer once described guilt as an "avenging fiend that follows you with a whip." There comes a time when you can't stand the lashings any longer and you have to clear your conscience. In order to do that I had to seek out my daughter and try to find some... measure of redemption.

STACEY

After all this time.

AL

Yeah.

STACEY

You have a lot of nerve coming here.

AL

Yeah. But not much courage.

STACEY

Why did you run away? *(AL does not answer.)* I think I have a right to know.

AL

Yeah, I suppose you do... I took off when your mother was three months old. Left your grandmother high and dry with a baby to raise. Nice guy, huh?

STACEY

Pretty shitty thing to do.

AL

And now you know why I'm experiencing some anxiety over going into that hospital room and seeing your mother. "Hi! You don't remember me but I'm your father, the shitheel." God!

STACEY

You didn't answer my question.

AL

What question?

STACEY

Why did you run away?

AL

Well, let's see. Immature...selfish...scared...irresponsible. Maybe all of the above.

STACEY

And you never contacted her?

AL

Nope.

STACEY

And she never tried contacting you either?

AL

When she divorced me, she sent me a letter saying she never wanted to see me again. So... I respected her wishes.

STACEY

She never talked about you that I remember.

AL

Understandable.

STACEY

After my dad died, Grandma came to live with us, and I asked her one time, "Why don't I have a grandpa?" She said, "Oh, he disappeared a long time ago and nobody knows where he is." That's all she'd say.

AL

I'm glad to know she didn't rave on about me ruining her life.

STACEY

Yeah, but you did. *(Letting him have it)* You know what she did for a living? Cleaned people's houses. Worked her ass off. And she never made much money so Mom had to start working when she was fourteen—after school and on weekends. And she's worked her ass off, too. She wanted to be a teacher but she couldn't afford to go to college. But she managed to take night classes at the community college and got an Associate's degree while she was working as a secretary to a fat-ass boss that treated everybody like shit. And then she gets cancer... *(Barely holding back tears)* It's not fair. It's not...

(Emotionally spent, STACEY collapses onto the bench in tears. AL crosses and sits beside him, comforting him.)

AL

Life isn't fair. If it was, your mother would be healthy and her boss would have cancer. *(Handing STACEY his handkerchief)* Here. *(STACEY takes it and dries his eyes.)* Look, it seems bleak right now—you're a victim as much as your mom, and the injustice of it all is burning a hole in your gut. But don't let all this put a chip on your shoulder so you end up bitter, blaming the world for what it did to you. If you do, that chip will become a millstone around your neck, and it will pull you forever into the depths. You have to defy it—stand up, look tragedy in the face and say, "You not going to beat me, damnit. You're never going to beat me."

STACEY

How do you know all this stuff?

AL

You'll find that time is one of life's great teachers, Stacey.

(Silence.)

STACEY

When you ran away, did you ever think about my mom?

AL

Of course I did.

STACEY

I'll bet.

AL

No, really. I did. I joined the navy and traveled aboard ships all over the world. Had a lot of things to occupy my time. But when I was alone in my bunk at night, yeah, I thought about her—what she was like—what she was doing. But I've always been able to compartmentalize things. And that was a compartment I seldom wanted to open and would never share with anyone else.

STACEY

So what about me? You gonna freak out and run away now you've seen me? Or stuff me into one of your compartments?

AL

I couldn't do that. I'm concerned about what will happen to you.

STACEY

Nothin'. That's what's gonna happen to me.

AL

What do you mean, nothin'?

STACEY

Mom's been talking with some of her friends—about taking me in. And you know what? *(Pause)* Nobody's interested.

AL

Nobody. *(STACEY shakes his head.)* If nobody takes you in, what will happen to you?

STACEY

I'll become a ward of the state. Child and Family Services will stick me with a foster family until I turn eighteen.

AL

Foster family.

STACEY

Mom and I have always talked about me going to college, but...I don't know—maybe I can join the army or something. Pretty tough to go to college if you're a homeless person.

AL

You want to go to college, go. I can help you get this all arranged. I can—

STACEY

You say that now—but who's to say you won't just take the easy way out like you did before.

(STACEY rises and moves away.)

AL

I understand why you're skeptical. Words are cheap and promises are conveniently forgotten. But if you let me, I'll show you that I mean what I say.

STACEY

Yeah?

AL

All I ask is that you give me a chance.

(Once again, it is silent.)

STACEY

Why did you decide to come back here, anyway? Forget about the guilt and the need for redemption and all that dipshit stuff.

AL

Dipshit stuff?

STACEY

Yeah.

AL

All right. I don't have any relatives. None. I'm all alone in the world—except for you two. And I started thinking about what would happen if one day I just toppled over in the street.

STACEY

Toppled over.

AL

Yeah. Like I told you, guys my age have been known to up and drop dead.

STACEY

For no reason.

AL

Yeah. Walking, thinking, talking one moment and boom!—dead the next. I mean, who would care? So I thought this might be my last chance to connect with my daughter, and try to make amends—you know—before the "boom."

STACEY

I thought that gypsy said you were going to live to be ninety-nine.

AL

True, but what if her crystal ball had a systems failure? That could have screwed up her prediction. Stranger things have happened.

STACEY

Mm.

AL

(Beat) I guess you could say that it all boils down to "What good has my life been?" I saw the world, enjoyed myself, went into business. So what. It was all for me. But have I ever really done anything important, anything that really matters? Made any difference? Then, late one night that old compartment came open and I thought about... The next day, I hired an agency to find you, and eventually I worked up enough nerve to come here and check things out. When I arrived at your house and found no one home, I spoke with one of your neighbors who told me your mother was in the hospital. God! My heart jumped into my throat. Am I too late? Why didn't I do this sooner?

STACEY

I thought you said you were in the Navy.

AL

I was, but after I retired, I went to work for a dry cleaning business in San Diego. A few years later, I bought the place when the owner died. And then I bought another, and then another until I had six of them. "The San Diego Dry Cleaning Mogul." Sold them all five years ago, so I have more than enough money to keep me in Depends. *(STACEY suppresses a smile.)* I was planning on moving to Hawaii and simply enjoying myself. Then prostate cancer hit. After I finished my treatments, I started traveling. But having cancer changes your outlook on life—makes you reflect on what's important.

STACEY

And by coming back here after all these years, you think you can make us all feel better.

AL

Look, I can't make up for the pain I caused. Nothing can ever undo that. I'm just interested in doing what's right. I wanted to make sure my daughter had a future. Ironic, huh? But I'm still hoping it may be possible for us to get to know one another—and maybe—be a family before it's too late.

STACEY

It's already too late.

AL

What do you...how long does she have?

(Again, STACEY is about to speak something he has never had to say before. It's not easy.)

STACEY

Doctor says a month, maybe less.

(AL lets out a breath.)

AL

Even so, it's not too late. You have to make the best of the time you've got, right?

STACEY

I guess.

AL

How old are you, anyway?

STACEY

Sixteen. How old are you?

AL

(Chuckling) Sixty-eight.

STACEY

Wow.

AL

That's what I say when I look in the mirror. "Wow" followed by "What the hell happened?" (*STACEY smiles; pause*) You were talking about foster families. I know they serve a valuable purpose, but they can never replace your own family.

STACEY

I don't have much choice, do I?

AL

Well, actually...you do.

(*Pause; STACEY focuses on AL.*)

STACEY

What do you mean?

AL

You've got me.

STACEY

You don't even know me.

AL

Not yet.

STACEY

Thanks for the offer, but I don't want to move somewhere far away, make new friends, shit like that.

AL

You could still live here.

STACEY

I could?

AL

Uh-huh.

STACEY

That means you'd have to move, stop traveling...

AL

Let me tell you something—traveling isn't all it's cracked up to be. Hotel beds give me a backache, strange food makes me constipated...I'd welcome the opportunity to stay home and give my colon a rest. *(Pause)* I'm not trying to push you into anything. You have time to see if we might be a good fit. It's your decision and I'll respect your wishes—whatever you might decide.

STACEY

This is pretty sudden. Why should I trust you, anyway?

AL

You shouldn't. Trust is something that has to be earned. It doesn't happen overnight. If I were you, I'd have me checked out.

STACEY

What am I supposed to do, hire a private detective?

AL

If you want. I can provide references. You'll find I'm a pretty decent guy.

(Silence; STACEY contemplates.)

STACEY

I think I'd better talk to Mom.

AL

(Pause; then) Good idea.

STACEY

(Rising) Are you coming?

AL

Well...

STACEY

Come on.

AL

Maybe you should go first, you know. Prepare her for the shock of seeing...

STACEY

You?

AL

Yeah. I scare people.

STACEY

We're going together.

AL

What's the matter? Think I'll run away.

STACEY

Trust has to be earned, remember?

AL

(Smiles) Yeah. *(Rising)* You're right. You're absolutely right.

STACEY

She's kind of like you in some ways.

AL

You mean stooped, pot-bellied, and balding?

STACEY

Yeah.

(AL stops dead in his tracks.)

AL

Really?

STACEY

No. Her sense of humor.

AL

Mm. Maybe you really should go first. That way I could stop by surgical supplies and sharpen my wit.

STACEY

I don't think so.

AL

All right. Well, I assume you know the way?

STACEY

Third floor, room—

AL and STACEY, *Together*

Three-twenty-six.

STACEY

You already know—

AL

The room number, not the way.

STACEY

Hey! What am I supposed to call you, anyway? Grandpa, Al, or what?

(As they begin to leave, AL smiles.)

AL

I don't know—what do you think?

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes