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# **A Complicated Hope**

By

JOHN MABEY

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(A COMPLICATED HOPE)

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*A Complicated Hope* premiered at Northern Michigan University’s James A. Panowski Black Box Theatre on June 8, 2022.

CAST:

ARNIE.....Adam Maslak  
MARIE .....Devon Grice  
ROSE MARIE .....Maya Moreau

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Paul Truckey  
Scenic Designer ..... Lex van Blommestein  
Lighting Designer ..... Marla Alden  
Costume Designer.....Joel Shinavier  
Sound Designer..... Dan Zini  
Properties Designer.....Keli Crawford-Truckey  
Production Stage Manager..... Emma Block  
Technical Director.....Braeden Ingersoll  
Assistant Technical Director ..... Ethan Rickert  
Master Electrician ..... Lex van Blommestein

*A Complicated Hope* won the Mildred and Albert Panowski Playwriting Award, the Essential Theatre Playwriting Award and the Charles M. Getchell New Play Award. It received developmental support from Working Title Playwrights in Atlanta with dramaturgy from the Rev. Dr. Candi Dugas. The play later received regional premier productions with Essential Theatre in Atlanta (Peter Hardy, Artistic Director) and The Left Hand Productions in Los Angeles (Shawn Patrick, Producer).

# A Complicated Hope

## CHARACTERS

ARNIE (m): 40s or 50s; white.

MARIE (w): 40s or 50s; Black.

ROSE MARIE (w): Early 20s; Black.

TIME: The early 21st century.

PLACE: The South, USA.

NOTE: This play is nonlinear and covers a span of 10 years.  
A minimal or implied set is intended.

For Dad

# A Complicated Hope

## SCENE 1

*(A private room in a funeral home. There's a table with an envelope on top.)*

*MARIE stands on one side with a door leading to the viewing while ARNIE stands on the other side with a door leading to the street.*

*MARIE is dressed in expensive attire, wearing a necklace with a heart pendant. ARNIE is dressed in well-worn, mismatched and wrinkled attire with a rag in his pocket. He uses this same rag while cleaning throughout the play.)*

ARNIE. Sounds like a lotta people in there. How 'bout his Momma, she come?

*(MARIE doesn't reply.)*

ARNIE *(cont'd)*. Dunno why they call these funeral "homes." No one lives in 'em—that's kinda the point.

*(MARIE doesn't reply.)*

ARNIE *(cont'd)*. Your dress is real pretty. I know I don't look how I should, but he liked this shirt. Said it made him think of a blanket—stuff you wanna wrap around yourself to feel safe.

MARIE. This was a mistake.

ARNIE. Maybe, but you always gotta follow through on people's wills. It's not right if we don't.

MARIE. None of this is "right."



ARNIE. Look, I just wanted to say—

MARIE. My family is waiting for me in there, so this needs to be brief.

ARNIE. I wanna—I need to see him. Maybe I can go in, too—once everyone's gone?

*(MARIE places herself in front of the doors leading to the viewing. She glares at him.)*

ARNIE *(cont'd)*. I hate when it's quiet. I wanna hear out loud all the stuff people say with their eyes, even if it hurts. Better if it does. I miss him too, Marie.

MARIE. Twelve years of marriage doesn't compare to a yearlong affair.

*(MARIE touches her necklace, holding the heart pendant between her fingers.)*

ARNIE. That what he told you?

*(MARIE grabs the envelope off the table.)*

MARIE. I almost threw this away.

ARNIE. But you didn't. That means somethin'. You and me—

MARIE. "You and me?" Arnie, you were part of Michael's disease—just another symptom, like the weight loss. Or the tears. *(Raising envelope.)* But having me endure this—today—is especially sick, even for him.

ARNIE. Nobody misses him like us.

MARIE. There's no money for you here, I made sure of it. So stop batting those pretty little eyes and pretending to care. Won't work on me.

ARNIE. Never asked for any.

MARIE. You will.

ARNIE. All I care about is what he wanted—for us to open this letter. Together. There's a reason for that.

MARIE. Because he wasn't in his right mind. He wasn't in his right mind for a long time. At best you were a delusion, at worst a predator.

ARNIE. Him 'n' me were in love.

MARIE. Don't.

ARNIE. You think I planned on this? I never even been with a guy before him.

MARIE. So he was your first con?

ARNIE. You don't know how we tried to fight it. You think it was easy?

MARIE. I don't think about you at all.

ARNIE. Well, I thought about you a ton. I did—you and his baby girl. "Name like a flower but sharp as the thorns."

MARIE. Rose Marie's not a baby. And she's mine.

ARNIE. Seen a lot for ten years old. It's why I told him I'd go. If he wasn't gonna be honest with y'all, I couldn't see him no more.

MARIE. You're a liar.

ARNIE. He loved us both, you and me. Just different.

MARIE. So where were you? As he floated away?

*(ARNIE goes to the table, cleaning dust that never seems to wipe away completely, at least to him. MARIE observes.)*

ARNIE. The sad always lies to you with a smile. I tried to go—the same as him. Later.

MARIE. I am not your friend, Arnie. So don't tell me any of—

ARNIE. OK.

*(Beat.)*

MARIE. Are you still—do you still want to hurt yourself?

ARNIE. No. Don't think so.

MARIE. You "don't think so," or you don't intend to?

ARNIE. Sounds like you care.

MARIE. I'm not having you on my conscience, too.

*(Beat. MARIE looks to the door leading to the viewing.)*

MARIE *(cont'd)*. She's here—his mother. Sits herself in the front row, the seat clearly reserved for me. So I sit behind, in the seat clearly reserved for her. No clapping, amens or church hats at this one—by design. Left all the spectacle to her church service, but she still shows up to mine.

ARNIE. How was the church thing?

MARIE. I wouldn't know. Although she did bring Rose Marie home with a head full of nonsense even Michael rejected. Eventually.

ARNIE. She bring her cat to this one?

MARIE *(tries to hide her amusement)* No. Thank God.

ARNIE. Mickey said that cat of hers eats better than he ever did growin' up.

MARIE. "Mickey."

ARNIE. Yeah.

MARIE. Michael hated nicknames.

ARNIE. He liked "Mickey."

MARIE. Called him "Mike" when we started dating, and he gagged.

ARNIE. It probably made him think of his daddy.

MARIE. Most people wouldn't know that.

*(A moment between them over shared knowledge of Michael. MARIE motions to the rag in ARNIE's hand.)*

MARIE *(cont'd)*. I hated the shirt that came from.

ARNIE. He wore it all the time.

MARIE. Exactly.

ARNIE. Got worn-out, full of holes. Some things never get clean. I'm sorry, Marie.

*(She waves him away.)*

ARNIE *(cont'd)*. I just wanna say that to you.

MARIE. You weren't the end of my marriage, Arnie. You were simply what came next. What I do blame you for is making him move out.

*(ARNIE shifts in demeanor. MARIE notices.)*

MARIE *(cont'd)*. I always assumed it was because of you.

*(ARNIE shakes his head.)*

MARIE *(cont'd)*. Taking away reasons to hate you makes me hate you even more.

ARNIE. Why?

MARIE. Because I need you to hurt. The giant ball-in-your-gut pain that throbs every time you wake up and only goes away when you close your eyes again. The pounding in your head when you—when I—think what to tell Rose Marie when she asks about her father one day. Because living with an uncomfortable lie is so much better than a truth I don't understand. And don't you dare go killing yourself over that man in there because—look around you. Look what it's worth. I can't let go. The hurt. Who the hell knows what's on the other side of it?

*(ARNIE approaches her closer.)*

ARNIE. I ripped up a picture of him 'n' me, a real nice one— then taped it back together. Then tore it up again into bits so tiny I wouldn't be able to save it. Now I just keep the bits in my pocket, even though I can't tell what they used to be.

MARIE. Anger always needs a home.

*(Beat. MARIE hands ARNIE the envelope. He opens it and looks inside, revealing a piece of paper.)*

ARNIE. Makes no sense.

*(MARIE takes the paper and looks for herself. She laughs as ARNIE looks inside the envelope, too.)*

ARNIE *(cont'd)*. But it's blank. Nothin' else inside.

MARIE. Correct.

ARNIE. I don't get it.

MARIE. Neither do I.

ARNIE. Maybe he put the wrong paper in there? Or maybe we got the wrong envelope? Or—

*(MARIE tears the paper into bits.)*

MARIE. Or maybe it's just blank.

ARNIE. What's that supposed to mean?

*(MARIE releases the bits of paper onto the floor.)*

MARIE. That it's over.

*(Beat. ARNIE starts exiting.)*

MARIE *(cont'd)*. Arnie?

*(ARNIE stops.)*

MARIE *(cont'd)*. Um, there's some old things at the house.

Michael's things. I don't want any of it, but maybe you—I was just going to donate what I could and throw out the rest.

ARNIE. Why?

MARIE. Because it talks to me—from when it was bought, or used, or loved. Or thrown. And I need my house to be quiet again.

ARNIE. I mean why give any of that to me?

MARIE. It's not a gift. It's a haunting.

ARNIE. Not all ghosts are bad.

*(ARNIE exits to the street through the door on his side of the room. MARIE then starts to exit through the door on her side of the room, leading back to the viewing, but stops. She walks back to the torn bits of paper on the floor, putting each piece in her pocket.)*

## SCENE 2

*(A tripartite scene. MARIE, ARNIE and ROSE MARIE are all onstage together but at different locations and points in time. We hear snippets from each scene:*

*MARIE is in her house. She holds a legal pad, talking to Michael on the other side of the bathroom door.*

*ARNIE is in his house. He repairs a door lock, talking to Michael on the other side of the bathroom door.*

*ROSE MARIE is in a church confessional holding bright red rosary beads. She talks to a priest on the other side of the confessional, reading something from her phone.)*