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*Dramatic Publishing*

# TWILIGHT SERENADE

By  
John Green

*(Developed in part through readings at Chicago Dramatists)*



**Dramatic Publishing**  
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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For Velma, Bernice, Harold, Rebecca, Jim, Irene  
and all of our parents.

\* \* \* \*

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TWILIGHT SERENADE’s Midwest premiere was produced by Red Hen Productions, Chicago, Illinois, March 27, 2003. It was directed by Ted Hoerl and included the following:

### CAST

Tom . . . . . MICHAEL HUGHES  
Ruby . . . . . RACHEL STEPHENS  
Virgie . . . . . MARY SEIBEL  
Molly . . . . . ANNE JACQUES  
David . . . . . JOHN GAWLIK

### PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

Stage Manager/Light Design . . . . . TOM HAGGLUND  
Set/Graphic Design . . . . . ROBERT A. KNUTH  
Sound Design . . . . . VICTORIA DE IORIO  
Assistant Director . . . . . ALEXANDRA GOODMAN

# TWILIGHT SERENADE

A Play in Two Acts  
For 2m. and 3w.,  
(may be expanded to 4m., 5w., see p6.)

## CHARACTERS:

**TOM:** Molly's husband, Ruby's son-in-law. A middle-aged businessman. A bit gruff, but only on the surface. He is the new man in this triangle of women, doing his best to take care of them all.

**RUBY:** Tom's mother-in-law, Molly's mother. In her seventies/eighties. A sweet woman with a will of steel. Her eccentric nature is both charming and infuriating.

**MOLLY:** Tom's wife, Ruby's daughter, Virgie's niece. Middle-aged teacher. She is a poetic soul in deep mourning for her beloved father.

**VIRGIE:** Ruby's sister-in-law, Molly's aunt. In her seventies/eighties. A stubborn, educated woman with the soil of Southern Illinois rooted deep in her veins.

**DAVID:** Molly's father, Ruby's husband, Virgie's brother. Late twenties/early thirties. He is both the living spirit and longed-for memory of Molly's recently deceased father. His is a journey of slowly detaching; making sure that his family is okay. He should remain ambiguous: Is he real, a dream or a memory? It is important to cast an actor who is young but radiates an ageless maturity. He

must move well but not come off as a “mime” or “dancer.”

### EXPANDED CASTING:

A company could expand the cast by adding a young actress and actor to play MOLLY and TOM during the college flashback scene. A mature actor could be added to play OLDER DAVID (in his seventies/eighties). He would interact with the young actor playing DAVID, trading off sections when appropriate to the material. Finally, the director could experiment with either bringing in a child to pantomime MOLLY during her childhood memory and dream sequences or have the young actress doing the college scene portray MOLLY as a child.

### TIME & PLACE:

The present and past. A mountaintop in Colorado. Chicago: various locations.

### THE SET:

The set should be designed with simple areas allowing for fluidity from scene to scene, present to past, done mostly through subtle shifts in lighting and sound.

Upstage right (UR) is a small, gradual rise referred to in the script as “the mountain area” representing the mountaintop in Colorado where Molly is camping. There is an entrance upstage behind the rise. The slope is gradual enough so that David and Molly can easily walk off of it downstage and into the main playing area.

Upstage center (UC) is a dining-room table that represents VIRGIE's dining room as well as the restaurant where they eat. The change in setting from dining room to restaurant can be indicated by simply changing the tablecloth.

Next to the dining area, upstage left (UL), is VIRGIE's living room. Two or three chairs and a throw rug will suffice in terms of decorations.

Downstage right (DR) are two chairs set up to represent TOM's car as well as the hospital waiting room.

All other scenes can be played in the DC and left areas.

A small rack with greeting cards can be carried in and out for the drugstore "greeting card" scenes.

Finally, DAVID sits in a wheelchair to represent his hospital bed. The actor playing DAVID can bring the wheelchair on and set it up in the dark or be wheeled in by another actor.



“To live is to love  
To love is to choose  
To open your heart  
To the ones you will lose—”

John Green

#### WEBSTER’S DICTIONARY:

**twilight** **1.** The light from the sky between full night and sunrise or between sunset and full night produced by diffusion of sunlight through the atmosphere and its dust. **2.** A state of imperfect clarity: a period of decline.

**serenade** **1.a.** A complimentary vocal or instrumental performance; esp. one given outdoors at night for a woman **b.** a work so performed. **2.** A work for chamber orchestra resembling a suite.

#### AUTHOR’S NOTE:

The image of a twilight serenade represents the possibility of two worlds, physical and spiritual, reality and dream, connecting in the shadowy light between day and night. It is the quiet voice of the eternal that can only be heard at that time of day.

## ACT ONE

*(TOM, a middle-aged man, is standing center stage speaking on his cell phone.)*

TOM. Six months. Barry, it's gonna take at least six...I know...I appreciate...of course they do. They'd like it to take six weeks. The plumbing alone is gonna be two months. And that's *if* we can get electric...exactly. Piss them off now. Build the houses correctly...exactly. Tell them right after Thanksgiving. Grand opening. They'll be telling us how glad they are they decided to wait... They'll sign, Barry... We won't lose them. Honesty is the best... Can you hold? I've got another... *(Firmly.)* It might be her. It might—be—her. *(He lowers the phone addressing the audience.)* My wife was up a mountain. She disappeared suddenly, without a trace. Without telling anyone. They had to scramble to cover her classes at the junior college. It was totally out of character. We hadn't had a fight. She didn't run off with a man. *(Beat.)* Or a woman. She just—took off. *(Lights change.)* Leaving me to look after her aunt. *(RUBY, a woman in her seventies/eighties, enters carrying a shopping basket. He sighs.)* And her mother.

*(RUBY pulls a shopping list from her purse. TOM's eyes widen, but he tries to be patient. They are in a drug-store.)*

RUBY *(reading from her list)*. I need the Aleo...um, Al...Green...it's...on sale, in a green bottle.

TOM *(takes the list)*. Aleo? Aloe...Vera? Aloe Vera, Ruby? It's *(He takes a bottle off the rack.)* Here. *(He hands it to her. She puts it in her basket.)*

RUBY. Thank you. I get so forgetful. Thank you, Tom.

TOM. Sure.

RUBY *(reading from her list)*. Cards. I need three birthday cards.

TOM. Three?

RUBY. Well, yes. There's Josephine and Jack and, um, oh damn...

TOM. You're doing fine.

RUBY. I can't remember...

TOM. Marsha?

RUBY. Marsha. Marsha. Oh, Lord.

TOM *(addresses the audience)*. I don't mind taking her shopping. Really. But the greeting cards. She reads them. Out loud! *(She takes greeting cards from a rack, carefully reading each one aloud.)*

RUBY. "Each season is unique and beautiful beyond expression. So too is every age. To look with pride on every year to dream and plan anew..."

TOM. Slowly.

RUBY. "To treasure friendships you hold dear. To think and hope and do..."

TOM. One—at—a—time.

RUBY (*reading the second card*). “With special thoughts of you. Thinking of you on your birthday. Hoping that today brings you the best. Wishing you much joy and happiness in the future. Because you deserve nothing less...”

TOM. It’s like Chinese water torture.

RUBY (*reading the third card*). “A lifetime friend is one who shares both sad and happy days. She shows how much she cares for you. In many thoughtful ways. A lifetime friend will stand by you whatever life may bring. And having her to trust in turn. Means just everything...”

TOM. As if anybody cares what they say!! (*He looks at his watch.*)

RUBY. I’m sorry. Do you have an appointment?

TOM (*to her again*). No. No no, take your time. It’s fine.

RUBY. So many choices.

TOM. Let’s see. (*He glances at the cards.*) This looks good. That’s nice. These are fine.

RUBY. Okay. (*Starts to put them in her basket, stops.*) But Josephine just lost her husband. This might be too emotional. What do you think?

TOM (*reads it*). “A lifetime friend is one who shares both sad and happy days.” Well, maybe you’re right. Why don’t you go ahead and look some more.

RUBY. You sure?

TOM. No problem. (*She does. He faces the audience and screams silently, regains his composure and turns back to her.*) What else is on your list? (*She reads it.*)

RUBY. Just the Tylenol.

TOM. I’ll get it. (*He starts off.*)

RUBY. The caplets. Not the, um...

TOM (*stops*). Gel tabs?

RUBY. They're too large for my throat. I have trouble swallowing them.

TOM. Right. (*Starts again.*)

RUBY. Regular. (*He stops.*) Not extra-strength. I'm sorry.

TOM. Regular. It's no problem, Ruby. Really. (*He exits. She addresses the audience.*)

RUBY (*with humor*). Don't grow old—if you can avoid it. Oh, he tries so hard. I know he gets impatient. But he's a good man. My daughter's lucky. She's on vacation. Took a visit to Colorado. She loves it there. She used to go camping with David. Her father. My...I just...I lost my David. Six weeks ago today. I wish you had known him. He was handsome. And tall. (*Coy.*) Well, taller than me.

*(DAVID, a handsome young man in his late 20s/early 30s, enters, dressed in a stylish suit from the 1940s. Throughout the play, even when he is old, DAVID is seen as a young man, representing both spirit and memory. He stands watching her.)*

RUBY. I met him at Borden's. The dairy company? He was in sales. I worked the switchboard. All the girls had their eye on him. (*She turns and mimes working an old-fashioned switchboard. He approaches and tries to kiss her. She blushes, turns away. He exits. She turns back to find him gone. Reluctantly, she picks up another greeting card and starts to read.*) "As days go by and we recall..." (*Sighs.*) Too sad.

*(Lights crossfade as transitional music plays, and then come up full on RUBY and TOM, seated at a restaurant table, eating Greek salads.)*

TOM. No. No, it's on the tip of my tongue.

RUBY. It's not herring, is it?

TOM. I don't think so. *(Looks at salad.)* No. Herring's creamy. You know, with that white sauce?

RUBY. Of course. Of course. What am I thinking? *(She picks up the anchovy with her fork.)* But it is a fish...

TOM. Salty...

RUBY. Caviar?

TOM. Not in this place. *(They share a laugh.)*

RUBY. Any news?

TOM. Pardon?

RUBY. From Molly. How's her trip?

TOM. Oh, fine. I told you about the call. And, um...she's having a good time.

RUBY. That's nice. *(Beat.)* She should've taken you with her.

TOM. Yes. Well, she needed some time alone I guess.

RUBY. Well, it's a bit odd is all. *(Deep emotion.)* And it's terrible to be alone.

TOM. Yes. It is. *(Long pause.)*

RUBY. How's the search going?

TOM. Pardon?

RUBY. The job search.

TOM *(defensive)*. I'm trying.

RUBY. Oh, I know you are. It takes time.

TOM. I'm not really looking for a job. I'm trying to... Remember, David always said, "You can never be happy working for someone else." He was right. That's why

Barry and I started our own company. We're close, I mean really close to signing on that Waukegan deal.

Things are starting to develop. (*Chuckles.*) Develop.

RUBY. Is that a joke? I don't...

TOM. Develop? Developer? You know, I'm in real estate so...

RUBY. Anchovies.

TOM. What?

RUBY. Anchovies. These are anchovies.

TOM. Right. Right. Of course. (*Announcer.*) And the winner is—Ruby Winchester from Chicago, Illinois! Where's The Prize Patrol when you need them?

RUBY. Prize Patrol?

TOM. The Publisher's Clearing House. You know, they give away those prize deals?

RUBY. Oh, yes. Yes, of course. (*Trying to joke.*) Develop. (*They eat in silence. TOM stands, addressing the audience. RUBY exits.*)

TOM. I grew up with brothers. You know? I mean, we'd do the lawn and dishes and stuff. Play sports. Joke. And we'd talk. About everything. (*Slightly defensive.*) I mean, we could get deep if we needed to. But...I don't know, with older ladies it's awkward... (*Sighs.*) Molly's aunt lived alone. Molly used to check in on her now and then. To chat. (*Agony.*) To "chat." I thought I'd give it a shot.

(*VIRGIE, a spirited woman in her 70s/80s, hobbles in on her cane, holding a tray with two teacups in her free hand. TOM rushes to her.*)

TOM. Here. Let me help you.

VIRGIE (*acting old and feeble*). I've got it. I'm old but I'm not helpless.

TOM. Oh, no. I didn't mean...

VIRGIE (*heartily laugh*). I'm just pulling your strings, kid. (*Whacks him lightly with her cane.*) Just pulling those tightly wound strings.

TOM. Oh, well, that's fine then. (*She puts the tray down and slowly sits. Silence. They sip tea in unison. Long pause.*)

VIRGIE. Up a mountain, huh?

TOM. "Rocky Mountain High."

VIRGIE. That girl.

TOM. I kept telling her, "If you need a break, go. Just take off." (*Beat.*) I didn't think she'd actually do it.

VIRGIE (*laughs*). Well, sir, she comes by it honestly. Her father was the same way. Always taking off. Playing pranks. Unpredictable.

TOM. That sounds like David.

VIRGIE. Poor David.

TOM. Yeah.

VIRGIE. I ever tell you the outhouse story?

TOM. Uh, I'm not sure.

VIRGIE. I must've been eight. So David was twelve. I'm sitting on the crapper. You know, back then we didn't have indoor. Not in Southern Illinois. Well, I'm sitting there doing my business when suddenly I feel this—something—crawling on my behind. (*She howls.*) Well, I ran screaming out that door. My drawers flapping in the wind. I finally look back and there's David and Cousin Irvy grinning from ear to ear. They'd stuck an old turkey feather through a hole in the wall and tickled my butt.

TOM (*laughing*). Oh, my God. That's...that's great.



VIRGIE. David.

TOM. Yeah. (*Long pause.*) So, do you have everything?  
Food and...everything you need?

VIRGIE. Irmgard shops for me every week. Marsha does  
the laundry.

TOM. That's wonderful.

VIRGIE. Yep. Good neighbors are gold. Especially when  
you don't have children.

TOM (*strikes a chord*). That's true.

VIRGIE. Listen, Molly was taking me to the eye doctor  
Monday. Irmgard's going to be out of town and Marsha  
teaches. I could take a cab...

TOM. No. No. Monday. That should be fine. I just need to  
check with Barry.

VIRGIE. I wouldn't ask except with this eye—it's getting  
hard to see. It's all blurry.

*(The following four lines are overlapping.)*

TOM. I just need to check with him—

VIRGIE. It's a little blurry—

TOM. I know we have a meeting—

VIRGIE. Probably a cataract—

TOM (*cutting her off*). Let me check with him. (*Pause.*)

VIRGIE. That Irmgard. Her bird. Casey? Oh, Lord, he is  
an ornery devil. (*She cracks up.*) She was doing dishes.  
The doorbell rings. It's Marsha wanting to borrow sugar  
or whatever. She comes back to the sink and her sponge  
is gone. (*She looks at TOM for a response.*) Gone!

TOM (*forced*). Gone.

VIRGIE. She looks here. She looks there. She searches ev-  
erywhere. The sponge has disappeared.

TOM (*forced laughter*). That's funny. That's just plain—  
funny.

VIRGIE. I'm not finished.

TOM. Oh.

VIRGIE. Guess where it was?

TOM. I...no idea.

VIRGIE. In the cage. That damned Casey had grabbed that  
damned sponge and put it in his own damned cage! (*She  
roars with delight. He turns to the audience, upset.*)

TOM. This woman used to be a vice president at Sears.  
One of the first female executives in America and now  
her life is reduced to sitting in her condo being enter-  
tained by the wild, exotic tales of Casey the cockatiel!  
(*To himself.*) I have got to close this Waukegan deal.

VIRGIE. Any news?

TOM. Well, actually, yes. I finally received a letter.

VIRGIE. You did.

TOM. Yes. Can you not tell Ruby? You know how Molly  
gets with her. That mother-daughter stuff.

VIRGIE. She's on vacation.

TOM. Does Ruby...

VIRGIE. Ruby always believes what she wants to believe.  
“On vacation” suits her just fine. (*Beat.*) Is Molly all  
right?

TOM. Well, I think so. She says...

*(We hear the sound of the wind blowing through the  
pines. Lights shift to a soft blue moonlight effect.  
MOLLY, a middle-aged woman, sits in the mountain  
area in front of a campfire. She looks out front, speaking  
her letter.)*

MOLLY. And the air is so clear. Pure. And the silence. You don't realize how much noise we live with until you hear such silence. I feel almost peaceful at times. Things start to make sense. For a moment or two. I want to feel safe, Tom. Just a little. I told you on the phone I'm camped by Half Moon Pass. You remember I took you there? It's eleven thousand feet. Near the top of Mount Cisco. I saw two moose this morning. At sunrise. You know how magic the light can be that time of day. A mother and her calf. They reintroduced moose to Colorado awhile ago. Do you remember? *(Deeply felt.)* They looked so happy together. So natural. Just the two of them. Eating together. Walking.

*(DAVID enters, and stands behind his daughter, watching her, filled with longing and love.)*

Just living. Moving side by side. In the middle of their lives. Nothing special. *(Tears welling.)* Just living. Living their lives. *(She stops, longing for her father, then continues.)* I'll send this along when I meet some hikers I can trust. Thank you, Tom. I just need a little more time.

*(As lights fade, her voice continues to repeat in the dark: "Time. I just need time. Time..." Lights up on TOM. He is talking on his cell phone.)*

TOM. I'll be there as soon as I can. I will. Barry, listen... Listen to me! We had to wait an hour. Over an hour to see her doctor. They treat old people like children. These H.M.O.s, I swear to... Half an hour... I'm sorry. She's

eighty years old, Barry! No. No, don't cancel. Keep them there. Okay? Okay, I'll talk to the receptionist. I'll have them put her in a cab... I will be there. Bye. *(He hangs up and walks downstage to address a receptionist.)* Excuse me. Ma'am? Excuse me! I'm here with Virgie Winchester. She's been in there forty-five minutes. We waited over an hour and I have a meeting in Waukegan. So, I need you to tell her...

*(VIRGIE enters.)*

Virgie. Jesus Christ, it's been forty-five minutes. I've got a meeting in Waukegan. *(Beat.)* Anyway. You okay? *(She barely nods.)* Okay. Good. Let's get going.

*(She hobbles as fast as she can. They approach two chairs DR that now represent car seats. She mimes slowly, painfully getting into the car. He is chomping at the bit to get going. She is fighting to be quick. But the more she tries the harder and slower it goes. Finally, they are seated.)*

TOM. Seatbelt.

VIRGIE *(fumbles nervously. Bewildered)*. What?

TOM *(shouts)*. Seatbelt! *(She bursts into tears.)* I'm sorry.

Oh, my God, I shouldn't yell like that. I've got this meeting. It's... I have no right to yell like that. I'm...

VIRGIE. It's not that. It's not. It's...Doctor Bernstein...

It's...my eye. I've lost the eye. *(She cries.)* I've lost the sight in my eye. My right eye.

TOM. Virgie. Oh, my God. *(His cell phone rings. He looks at it, considers answering and then turns it off.)*