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**Dramatic
Publishing**

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Wash, Dry, Fold

By

NEDRA PEZOLD ROBERTS

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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1300 Gendy St.
Fort Worth, Texas 76107 • Phone: (817) 732-3177

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“*Wash, Dry, Fold* was premiered in the American Association
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in Valparaiso, Ind.”

Wash, Dry, Fold was premiered by Chicago Street Theatre in Valparaiso, Ind., on May 20, 2016, with the following cast:

Mick MahoneyDavid Pera
Trudy Mary De Boer
Arlene..... Caity Mullen
Uncle Slack Ed Hubbard
Enola Barbara Malangoni

Production:

Directors..... Traci Brant and Jonni Pera
Scenic Design..... Eric Brant
Lighting Design Bob Cooley
Costume Design..... Tevlyn Schwerd
Sound DesignPaul Braun
Stage Manager Daena Sisk

Wash, Dry, Fold

CHARACTERS

TRUDY: Enola's younger sister and Uncle Slack's niece. She is 40 years old. Trudy has killed a man, and even though she has served her prison sentence, the bars still close around her when she tries to sleep. To her, freedom seems little more than a mirage. Feisty and practical, she is a woman who knows what it means to lose everything, even herself. She usually wears flip-flops, old jeans and T-shirts with humorous or provocative sayings across the chest.

ENOLA: Trudy's older sister and Uncle Slack's niece. She is 42 years old. Enola latches onto Jesus when a tragic illness leaves her sterile, unable to have children. Religion is her solace, but she has a hard time letting anyone, including herself, move beyond sin to forgiveness. Frumpy and set in her ways, she has clung to a sense of duty in taking care of both Trudy and Uncle Slack, and she reminds them frequently of that fact. She wears boring, shapeless dresses and sensible shoes.

UNCLE SLACK: He is King Lear's Fool, a tormented Vietnam veteran who has looked into the darkness and lived to tell the tale. Whatever he says is the truth, although it may often defy reason. He has always had a gentle side but now seems beaten, as if suspended in familiar but inescapable dread. While his nieces, Trudy and Enola, often bicker and argue, Slack never raises his voice. When his darker memories lure him back into painful terrain, his voice becomes devoid of emotion, almost flat, as if he is quietly mulling over his own thoughts and speaking to himself. At about 60 years old, he is damaged and detached.

ARLENE: A confident and unspoiled 28-year-old who has had many of the advantages in life. She sets out to look for someone else but ends up finding herself. She often sketches in an artist's sketchbook while observing those around her. Watchful eyes!

MICK MAHONEY: A good man and a good friend. His voice of reason is an ironic bookend to Slack's comments on reality. An honest lawyer who understands human frailty, he tries to find the best in everyone. He is 56 years old.

PLACE

New Orleans in July, two years after Hurricane Katrina.

TIME

Act I

- | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|
| Scene 1 | A Monday afternoon |
| Scene 2 | Afternoon, a few days later |
| Scene 3 | Afternoon, a week later |
| Scene 4 | Afternoon, a few days later |

Act II

- | | |
|---------|---------------------------|
| Scene 1 | Morning, the next day |
| Scene 2 | Morning, a few days later |

Movement from one scene to another should be as fluid as possible. Lights dimming in a cross-fade from one area to illuminate another will enhance the element of memory that overarches the play. Blackouts should be reserved for the end of Act I and the end of the play.

SET

R is the exterior of the Mahoney law office, located in one side of a lovingly restored duplex shotgun house on Magazine Street. Two brief steps lead up to a narrow porch that spans the front of the building. The other side of the shotgun exterior holds an inking parlor, the VooDoo Tattoo. The law office signage is tasteful; the inking parlor's sign is garish. Both are visible across the shotgun's shared porch overhang. These businesses are next door to a laundromat, Grace's Place. It is a family business, its interior tired and bearing the marks of years of customer use. It is now owned and operated by ENOLA. Behind the battered main counter, shelves hold clean laundry, wrapped and ready for pick-up. These parcels can be rearranged between scenes to suggest the flux of time and customers that move through the laundromat. A row of washers and dryers is fronted by a line of mismatched chairs. An old sewing machine is tucked in a corner, and two vending machines and a table and chairs are visible. Throughout the play, TRUDY is mending clothes, sewing on buttons, folding clothes or sweeping floors. When she takes a break, nothing interrupts it.

For my Uncle Cliff

Wash, Dry, Fold

ACT I

Scene 1

AT RISE: *Sometime after 3:00 p.m. on a Monday afternoon.*

(Lawyer MICK MAHONEY barrels into the laundromat, frustrated and ready for a confrontation. On her break now, TRUDY is sitting, legs cocked on another chair, polishing her toenails. As MICK strides back and forth—gesticulating—she is unruffled, calmly painting away.)

MICK. He's done it again! I'm warning you, Trudy, you've got to put a stop to your uncle's shit. That new young cop is running out of patience, and I don't see this whole thing ending well for anybody.

TRUDY *(not looking up)*. Officer Baby Face has a billy club up his little Gestapo ass. He gets off on bossing people around. Makes him feel important.

MICK. He's the police, damn it! And you better not let him hear you call him "Baby Face." Seriously, Trudy, you've got to tell Slack to stop walking up to use the bank's drive-up window. It's for cars only, for chrissake. The cop gave him another ticket not five minutes ago. That makes three this week alone, never mind the eight from the past two weeks.

TRUDY. Uncle Slack likes the open air and chatting with Louise at the outside teller's window. And he's not gonna pay those tickets anyway. Officer Baby Face is wasting his time.

MICK. So are *you* going to pay them? I know you don't have that kind of money. If Enola finds out about this—

TRUDY (*spears him with a look*). She won't.

MICK. But if she does—

TRUDY (*letting a moment of concern creep in*). She won't. Not if you don't tell her. You gotta promise me, Mick. Please. Something's going on, got her all tensed up and sniping like a cornered animal. Don't know what it is, but I got a feeling it's not good.

MICK. Trudy, I'm warning you. If Slack wants to keep robbing that bank, he needs to go *inside* to do it. The drive-up window is off-limits to foot traffic. Arthur never did have much patience, and Slack is testing what little is left of it.

TRUDY. Arthur thinks being branch manager makes him somebody. The truth is he's short, a little man who's still licking his wounds over Enola's rejection. Why can't you just ignore Uncle Slack's little quirk? Everybody else does.

MICK. Everybody except Arthur and that cop. And I'm not interested in Arthur's love life. I'm Slack's lawyer, damn it, and I'm giving you my best advice because trouble's brewing. The kind of trouble I might not be able to fix. Hell, woman, I'm an officer of the court, sworn to uphold the law.

TRUDY. Uncle Slack's just an old man who likes to rob the bank. He's not hurting anybody, Mick. Can't you tell Officer Baby Face to leave him alone?

MICK. Haven't you heard anything I've said?

TRUDY. I'm not taking away the one pleasure that old man has.

MICK. That young cop is digging in his heels.

TRUDY. If there's one thing I've learned, it's you can't fix stupid. And Officer Baby Face is proof of that.

MICK. I can't protect him from everything, Trudy. Actions have consequences.

TRUDY (*sears him with a look. Quietly controlled*). That's not something I'm likely to forget, Mick.

(MICK growls and exits in a huff, just as ARLENE exits the VooDoo Tattoo. It is clear they are friends.)

MICK. Hey, are you done for the day already? Business must be slow.

ARLENE. No, I just finished phase three of a really complicated design, so I'm taking a break. Thought I'd come outside for a little fresh air.

MICK. In New Orleans in July? This air is too hot and humid to breathe. Stay out too long, and your lungs will collapse from sheer exhaustion.

ARLENE. Looks like that exhaustion has gotten to you.

MICK. Not the heat. Trudy. The woman can't have a rational conversation about her uncle.

ARLENE. Uh-oh. Is Mr. Slack in trouble?

MICK. Constantly.

ARLENE. But he's such a sweet old guy.

MICK. He's a pain in the ass. A stubborn streak wrapped in a muddled mind. The man saw way too much in Vietnam.

ARLENE. Trudy told me the war changed him.

MICK. Yeah, from potentially crazy to absolutely insane.

ARLENE. Oh, Mick, you can't mean that. He's a little eccentric, I'll admit, but harmless. (*Checking to make sure.*) Isn't he?

MICK. OK, maybe he's not totally insane, but I haven't had a peaceful day in four years since I took him on as a client. Now you're here, working in that tattoo parlor twenty feet closer to them, with all your defenses down. You've only been in the neighborhood a few weeks, but stay around Slack long enough, and you'll be losing brain cells before you know it.

ARLENE. I'm tougher than you think, and I've been on my own long enough to take care of myself. You worry too much.

MICK (*indicating the tattoo parlor*). Tough or not, you've still got no business working in that freak show with a sketchy clientele. The job is a total waste of your talent and training. I can only imagine what your parents would say if they were alive to see you there. You're an artist, for heaven sake. Listen, I can talk to some friends of mine who own a gallery on Royal Street in the Quarter, maybe get you on there until you find where you want to be.

ARLENE. That's sweet of you, Mick, but I'm already where I want to be. I like the funky vibe of Magazine Street. Plus I like what I'm doing. I get to draw something different every day, even sketch my own designs. And I meet interesting people. The tattoo parlor is perfectly safe. Besides, there's a police station right down the street. I'm fine, really.

MICK. I know you say that, but I can't understand your attraction for that place. When you told me you wanted to leave Florida and relocate here, I mentioned the VooDoo as a joke. Just a joke, Arlene. I never would've said anything if I'd thought you'd actually go after the job.

ARLENE. It might have been a joke to you, but to me it was a perfect opportunity. The chance to move on from ... well, you know.

MICK. What I know is your parents were my friends. They'd want me looking out for you. And that tattoo parlor is no place for you. You're too—

ARLENE (*smiling to soften the scold*). I have my reasons for wanting to be right where I am, so stop worrying.

MICK. Not sure I can do that, but I need to get to work. Got a brief to prepare but I'll break for dinner around five. You want to come?

ARLENE. I'll be finished around five, too, but you don't have to babysit me, you know.

MICK. Just looking out for you until I'm satisfied you're settled.

ARLENE. Can we go someplace for a beer and a fried oyster po boy?

MICK (*grinning*). Arlene, today's Monday.

ARLENE. So?

MICK. Red beans and rice.

ARLENE. What?

MICK. New Orleans tradition. In the old days, Monday was wash day. Women would put a pot of beans on to simmer, and then do their laundry. The tradition stuck.

ARLENE (*cocking her head toward Grace's Place*). But I want seafood. And as you can see, people use laundromats now.

MICK. Fridays are for fish. Mondays it's red beans and rice.

ARLENE. So what do the natives do the rest of the week?

MICK. Start drinking early and eat whatever they want.

ARLENE. Well, I'm pretending it's Tuesday and ordering a fried oyster po boy.

(MICK laughs, and ARLENE enters the laundromat as MICK disappears inside his office. TRUDY is folding clothes.)

TRUDY (*smiling*). If you're planning on doing laundry, hon, you forgot your clothes.

ARLENE. What?

TRUDY. Never mind. Come on in and take a load off. Slow time at the tattoo parlor?

ARLENE. Not really. I'm taking a break from Wild Man Harley. I've done all I can for him today.

TRUDY. Aren't you finished with that biker yet? How long you been working on his design, girl? Two weeks?

ARLENE. Almost three. He's the guy whose wife was killed up in North Carolina. She wiped out riding the Tail of the Dragon, north of Robbinsville.

TRUDY. Yeah, I remember. Sad story, that one. He must have loved her something fierce.

ARLENE. No doubt about it. He had her cremated so he could have her ashes mixed in with the ink I use in the drawing. He told me he wanted her alive inside him.

TRUDY. Is that legal? Mixing in the ashes, I mean.

ARLENE. Guess so. At least, when I asked Mick, he said there's no law against it here. But I know he thinks there ought to be.

TRUDY. Some people got a strange way of grieving. But it takes all kinds, I guess.

ARLENE. Yeah. I'm inking her picture over Wild Man's heart, and I've had to do it in stages, shaving that spot on his chest clean each time I lay down the next layer. And, man, he's a hairy one. But the sentiment is sweet and romantic, I'll have to give him that. She was a pretty woman. Only, she's going to look a little creepy with all that hair growing out of her face.

TRUDY. Well, long as he's happy.

ARLENE. I guess so. I'm actually kind of proud of the design. It's some of my best work. I just hope it brings him some peace.

TRUDY. If it keeps him connected to her, I'm betting it will. (*Studying ARLENE thoughtfully.*) You know, you're the first tattoo artist I've known who doesn't have a single tattoo on her own body.

ARLENE. I like tattoo art, but I'm not the sort of person who can wear it. I'm not that brave.

TRUDY. But you're working at The VooDoo Tattoo. How can you be inside that world and keep a distance at the same time? It don't make sense to me.

ARLENE (*shrugs*). It's simple. When I moved here, I needed a job, and I like to draw. Actually, this job has taught me a lot about tattoos—and people, too.

TRUDY. What, that people will decorate any damn thing?

ARLENE. No, tattoos aren't decoration. They're a declaration. I mean, the designs my clients choose are really a part of them, if you think about it. And not just because inking sets the tattoos on the skin. What I'm drawing are stories, maybe about a memory or something else that's important to the client, stories that speak to anyone who sees them. And I like giving voice to what they have to say.

(UNCLE SLACK comes in, a bottle of beer hanging loosely from one hand. He's silent, staring off into space, just standing there until TRUDY speaks.)

TRUDY (*to SLACK*). Number three machine.

ARLENE. Hi, Mr. Slack. How're you doing today?

SLACK. Hot out there. Hot like the Mekong Delta. Air's so thick you can lean against it.

(He sits in front of one of the dryers, sipping his beer, a silent sentry as the clothes go round and round. The machine sputters and stops.)

TRUDY (*moves to give the machine a whack*). Damn. Not you again. I swear, just one more time and you're out there at the curb, waiting for the junk man.

(SLACK gets up, gently pushes her aside, and begins his practiced work on the machine.)

ARLENE (*to SLACK*). Can you fix it?

TRUDY. Be easier to shoot the thing and be done with it.

SLACK (*focused on the problem inside the machine*). Enola don't like guns, Trudy. She just likes Jesus.

(*He manages to get the machine started again, and TRUDY sighs in relief.*)

TRUDY (*to ARLENE*). Want a Coke or something, hon?

ARLENE (*watching SLACK, who sits again as he stares at the clothes*). Um ... no, I'm good, thanks.

TRUDY (*watching ARLENE*). You can go sit next to him if you want. He don't bite.

ARLENE. Huh? Oh, sorry. Didn't mean to stare. What's he doing?

TRUDY (*giving SLACK an off-hand glance*). Nothin' much. Working the night shift washing dishes down at Mudbugs doesn't let him sleep regular, so in the day if he still can't sleep, he likes to look. Comes by to watch ladies underwear spin in the machines.

ARLENE (*disbelief*). What?

TRUDY. He's a pervert, hon. Luckily, just a lazy one.

ARLENE. You're kidding.

TRUDY (*grins*). Maybe. (*Still folding clothes.*) Maybe the spinning soothes him. He gets awful quiet when he watches. So, who knows? It don't hurt anybody, and he seems to enjoy it.

ARLENE. I guess. (*Still watching SLACK.*) Trudy?

TRUDY. Yeah, hon?

ARLENE. What's his real name?

TRUDY. Uncle Slackjaw?

ARLENE. Yes. That can't be his given name.

TRUDY. Oh, well. He used to have a name, but nobody ever used it, so we let it go.

ARLENE. But what was it?

TRUDY (*glancing at SLACK and considering*). Leonard. Now I ask you, does he look like a Leonard? Hell, no. He's Slackjaw.

SLACK (*subdued. Eyes still on the spinning clothes*). Leonard's gone. Got lost in the jungle. Ain't nobody can find him now.

TRUDY (*kindness in her voice*). I can, Uncle Slack. Leonard's safe right here with me.

SLACK. That's his face in the glass. Tangled up with those clothes. You gonna let him out, Trudy? You gonna let him out before Enola comes?

TRUDY (*she crosses to him, rubs his shoulders*). Don't worry about Enola, sweetheart. Trudy's got your back.

SLACK. Enola's twisted. Pain twisted her. Now she can't get straight.

TRUDY. I know darlin'. You finished with that beer? (*She takes the empty bottle from him, puts it on a back shelf and sends him toward the door.*) Why don't you go outside and let the birds sing for you. They're out there waiting. But don't be robbing the bank again today, OK? You already got your beer.

SLACK (*notices ARLENE and nods knowingly*). The next-door angel came visiting again. Got them watchful eyes.

ARLENE. Take care, Mr. Slack.

(He pats her head and then exits, lost in his own thoughts. The phone rings, and TRUDY answers.)

TRUDY. Grace's Place. (*Pause.*) We expected delivery on those packets this morning. (*Pause.*) No, that's gotta be a mistake. My sister already paid that bill. (*Beat.*) Sure, I'm sure. She pays every bill on time and in full. Always has. (*Pause.*) Then they better be here tomorrow. (*Beat.*) Yeah.

(TRUDY hangs up the phone. A bit puzzled now.)

ARLENE. Is something wrong?

TRUDY. Distributor for our laundry detergent. Delivery is gonna be late, and I'm the one who's gonna have to tell Enola it was a bookkeeping screw up. At least I hope that's what it was.

ARLENE. Why would she be upset with you if they're the ones who messed up?

TRUDY. Honey, you don't know Enola very well, but if you're around when she hears this news, I'd advise you to stand back.

ARLENE *(smiles, but another thought disturbs her)*. Trudy, what was that about a bank robbery? Mr. Slack didn't really rob the bank, did he?

TRUDY. Hon, he robs Crescent City Bank every day at 3:00. You can set your watch by it. He walks up to the drive-up window, hands Louise a stick-up note, and she gives him money for his beer.

ARLENE. You're telling me he robs the bank every day? Do the police know this?

TRUDY. In a manner of speaking. I give Louise ten bucks a week; she lets him steal two a day for a beer. Plus, she chats with him a while at the drive-up window and lets him watch those pneumatic tubes go up and down. And *that* sends Officer Baby Face into orbit. He claims Uncle Slack is loitering and *(Using finger quotation marks.)* "interfering with the legal flow of traffic." Says he's creating a hazard by blocking the drive-up lane. So he writes Slack out a ticket just for spite. The little shit.

ARLENE. Is that what has Mick so worried? All those tickets?

TRUDY. Mick was born to worry. He's got a double dose of the protective gene mixed with a side of testosterone. It's the man-version of maternal instinct.

ARLENE. That sounds sweet.