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Dramatic Publishing



ALIVE AND KICKING

A Comedy in Two-Acts

By
JULES TASCA

This excerpt contains strong language.



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(ALIVE AND KICKING)

ISBN: 1-58342-399-0

ALIVE AND KICKING

A Full-Length Play
for Two Men, Two Women

CHARACTERS

GLORIA NIX. *an easily-worried grandmother figure*

JOHN NIX. *Gloria's husband*

JOHNNY NIX *Gloria's son*

VIVIAN NIX *Gloria's daughter-in-law*

TIME: The Present

PLACE: The Nix home in
suburban New York

How oft when men are at the point of death
Have they been merry! Which their keepers call
A lightning before death. Oh, how may I call
this a lightning?

Romeo at Juliet's Grave

For Jennifer

PRODUCTION NOTES

The furnishings in the Nix living room should be old, with some old-fashioned. They have been spent on an entire family and show wear, use, and abuse.

There should be a front door, a stairway leading to an offstage bedroom, and an entrance to the kitchen which is partially visible but mostly offstage.

A huge grandfather clock should be in a prominent position DL, ineluctably ticking away.

A golf caddy with an assortment of clubs should be placed DR near the front door.

Act One

SCENE: The living room of the Nix home in suburban New York.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: GLORIA NIX flits through the living room with a rolled-up newspaper, slapping walls and furniture in an effort to kill a fly. She finally kills her nemesis on the mirror with a good, popping blow. She sighs, pleased with her work. She lingers at the mirror, looks in it at herself, and circumnavigates her face slowly with her empty hand. JOHN NIX comes down the stairs.

JOHN. I was taking a nap, Gloria. What is all that damned banging?

GLORIA. I killed a fly. It came in through the kitchen window. Johnny always has to open that window in the morning and take those ten deep breaths before breakfast.

JOHN. I think you need something to do. (He looks around the room for his newspaper.)

GLORIA. Something to do, John? I just bumped my knees through three rooms to kill that little bitch. I didn't do it for myself. I did it for all of us. Flies carry filth and filth kills you.

JOHN. Why don't you knit? All of a sudden you stopped knitting and . . . where's my newspaper? (GLORIA slowly

hands him the paper with the smashed fly on it.) This morning's? How the hell am I gonna read this? The front page story. The biggest news in the world splattered with fly.

GLORIA (looking over John's shoulder). It says "Cost of living goes up one and a half percent." You could read around the fly if you're really interested.

JOHN. I am not reading around fly guts, dear. (He sits and opens the newspaper, careful not to let the death on the front page touch his hand.)

GLORIA. A lot cost-of-living increases mean to us with nobody here anymore.

JOHN. Hmmm.

GLORIA. John.

JOHN. All the old times in baseball are gone. I don't know the names anymore. Louis Ritzer, shortstop on the Mets. What do you think a man with a name like Louis Ritzer should be doing?

GLORIA. Selling real estate.

JOHN. Why do you pick that?

GLORIA. Real estate's been on my mind. I was thinking that . . . that we should sell this place.

JOHN. The house? (GLORIA nods affirmatively.) What put that into your head? Where would we live?

GLORIA. Johnny will be moving out soon. I mean, it has to come. After that, we'll be . . . we'll be all alone and it's such a big house.

JOHN. Johnny's still a kid. He won't move out for a while. You just still haven't gotten over Ted's marriage. It's a good month now and you're acting as if the damned world came to an-end.

GLORIA. I don't know. It seemed we had more children than anybody in our family. Four noise-makers and now the house . . . the house seems so quiet as if all the batteries were pulled out. When Johnny goes . . .

JOHN. Johnny's still in college.

GLORIA. But one day soon he'll come in here and our youngest and last will say "Mom, I've met a nice girl and this is it."

JOHN. He's got so many girlfriends. I think he takes after me.

GLORIA. Okay, lover, but suppose he does come home and say —
JOHN (interrupting). What makes you think that? Don't tell me you have another presentiment.

GLORIA. Yes.

JOHN. Oh, God!

GLORIA. I do. He's just in and out of here to change clothes. He seems so happy.

JOHN. He does?

GLORIA. He smiles. When the hell did he ever walk around here smiling so much? Lately he doesn't come right in when he pulls up the driveway. He sits out in the car with the radio on and he smiles.

JOHN. What is it? You want me to speak to him privately about all this damned smiling?

GLORIA. You refuse to take me seriously. We are going to be alone and soon. Yes, okay, I have a presentiment.

JOHN. These presentiments, these feelings you get, are just . . . are just part of your love affair with doom, Gloria.

GLORIA. Doom? I'm trying to be logical with you. He's got a new girl. A steady. There's no more Joan, Roberta, Rosemary, Hilda, every night. It's just one name now — Viv. Viv this. Viv that. Then he chuckles when he says good-bye. Chuckles, John.

JOHN. So it's more than a presentiment. Ever since Ted got married, you've changed. You don't knit. You don't tinker in the garden anymore. You listen to Johnny's conversations on the phone. You don't even put any imagination into your cooking — t.v. dinners three times a week.

GLORIA. Since Johnny's taking up nutrition at Columbia, he's filled your head with a lot of crap about food.

JOHN. Johnny showed me in his textbook where they pack t.v.

dinners in polysaturated fats so the slop won't spoil.

GLORIA. They do?

JOHN. Sure. You know what polysaturated fats do to your arteries.

GLORIA. I guess people at our age should be careful. Okay, no more t.v. dinners. You know, maybe it's too late for us. Just when we've spent our lives eating everything they ever sold, they put a skull and crossbones above the A&P.

JOHN. It's not too late to change.

GLORIA. That's how I feel about apartment living. Would you consider selling this if Johnny did get married?

JOHN. I don't think so. I'm retiring. Worked all my life for it. I worked so I could spend more time around the house, and I've got that luxurious golf course across the street. Where would you move me, Gloria?

GLORIA. A small apartment. No garden to weed. No lawn to cut. No rooms to clean. No roof to fix. John, you're not facing life. We're getting too old for all of this. Sometimes I feel guilty that we have such a big place here for the two of us.

JOHN. What about Johnny? I don't have a presentiment about him moving out.

GLORIA. If it wasn't for Johnny, it'd be a tomb in here. You know there's an echo in this house.

JOHN. What echo?

GLORIA. I'm in here. It was always so noisy in here with four kids and their friends. Radios. Televisions. Record players. Them shouting. Sure you couldn't hear it. But now it's a fact; there's an echo here.

JOHN. Oh, get out.

GLORIA. There is, too.

JOHN. There's no echo in this house.

GLORIA. I'll show you. (She moves JOHN to the center of the room.) All right, yell something.

JOHN. This is so silly.

GLORIA. The other day I was calling Johnny. I didn't know he was out jogging. So after I called a few times normal, I shouted and I got the echo.

JOHN (after a pause). I spend my days at work breaking my rear, pulling my hair out, trying to keep the Todman Milk Company's books balanced and you're home yodeling in the living room.

GLORIA. Just try it. Try it.

JOHN. Hello.

GLORIA. You call that a yell? Listen. *Hey, Johnny!* You hear it? *Hey, Johnny!* Huh? *Hey, John* –

JOHN (interrupting). You'd get an echo in a lead box yelling like that. That's no echo.

GLORIA. It is an echo. The place is so empty, it echos.

JOHN. It's the sound from your big mouth bouncing off the walls.

GLORIA. That's what an echo is. And you never hear it when there are people, when the family's in the house. But when you're alone, the house, John, becomes a big cavern, an empty shell.

JOHN. You made the echo by shouting. You'd never hear an echo with just a routine call. Watch.

(The front door opens and JOHNNY NIX enters. He has VIV, a young girl, with him. JOHN and GLORIA, their backs to the door, do not see them.)

JOHN. Johnny. Hey, Johnny. Hey, Johnny. See?

GLORIA. *Johnny!* There. You had to hear it.

JOHNNY (after giving VIV a puzzled look). Mom. Dad.

GLORIA. Oh! Oh, Johnny.

JOHNNY. What . . . what're you doing?

GLORIA. A little noise never hurt a wedding.

JOHN. All right, Gloria. When, Johnny?

VIV. This morning.

JOHN. This is your wedding day? Just like that in a short-sleeved shirt? Sweet God! We went along with the soy bean soup, the sassafras tea, the dehydrated fruit, the three hundred and fifty dollars for the juicer, the tuition money and when something this important comes up, you shoot off on a Saturday morning in a short-sleeved shirt?

GLORIA. Don't shout, John. This is their *honeymoon*.

VIV. Let me explain. He didn't do it like this to slight you or anybody. He did it this way for me. See, my father is a very old-fashioned Italian, and if I had a wedding and all that, all the uncles and aunts would count on their fingers, and he'd be disgraced when the baby is born.

GLORIA (rising). When the baby is born?

VIV. He said you two are very open-minded about —

JOHNNY (interrupting). Okay. Okay. Yes. Viv's two months pregnant and . . . I mean . . . I can't say I'm sorry. That's just how it is.

VIV. If my father'll have us, we'll live with him until we can get a start on our own. See . . . see . . . my mother's dead and my brothers and sisters are all out of the house and . . . well, I just think he'd like to have us and . . . (GLORIA starts to cry. JOHNNY goes to her and embraces her. JOHN kisses VIV.)

JOHN. I wish . . . I wish you the best. Welcome to the Nix family. I wish us all the happiest. (GLORIA continues to cry as the lights slowly fade. ALL exit in the darkness.)

(It is late July as GLORIA and JOHN enter slowly through the front door. JOHN selects one of the golf clubs from the caddy

near the door and simulates chipping.)

JOHN. I don't want to sell it.

GLORIA. Fifty-one thousand dollars.

JOHN. I don't care how much. I don't want to give it up.

GLORIA. Thirty seconds ago, you told that real estate guy who's pulling away that you'd think it over.

JOHN. I'm a quick thinker.

GLORIA. Then why'd you let him come out here and see the house and the grounds?

JOHN. To keep you from talking at me morning, noon and night about selling our home.

GLORIA. Fifty-one isn't a bad price.

JOHN. You love this house. After all this time, you're the turtle and this is your shell. You want to sell it so, so fast. Then you're gonna feel bad. In some cramped apartment, we'll go through the John-why-did-we-ever-sell-our-house gloom. You want to spite yourself because he moved out? Is that it?

GLORIA. Of course not. Somebody here has to think about our future.

JOHN. I don't want to give up my house. Listen, I've spent my whole life in this place. I feel right here. The memories that crowd every corner are in my head. The rooms sort of become extensions of people: Ted and Will's room, Johnny's room, Margaret's room. We never call them anything else. A house you love is magic, Gloria. The moment we move out, it's gone. Dead. For me, the old joint is still alive. It . . . it . . . it breathes. It . . . it breathes the ghosts of . . . of the kids still running through it. I'm still in some part of the place now taking out splinters and stopping bloody noses. Look, I miss them all, too. This is where it all happened. Here. I want to stay right here on the battlefield.

GLORIA. But . . .

JOHN. But nothing. God, their broken toys are still in the basement waiting for a new life. Bikes. Games. Rocking chairs. When I retire, I'm gonna fix 'em all up for the grandchildren. This is a place for them to come back to.

GLORIA. When? When do you see them? Christmas? One in Washington. Another in Atlanta and Ted had to take the teaching job in Wilmington, Delaware. I guess I should be glad you're soft about the house. I just thought . . . I just hope I make it 'til Christmas.

JOHN. And what's that about?

GLORIA. Just what I said.

JOHN. This is a new corner you turned. Why aren't you gonna make it until Christmas?

GLORIA. I don't know.

JOHN. You been to Doctor Minkus?

GLORIA. No.

JOHN. You sick?

GLORIA. No.

JOHN. Then why in hell are you talking like that?

GLORIA. Remember how I had a presentiment about Johnny getting married?

JOHN. How could I forget? You told everybody we've met since then. Not one day goes by without you telling me. Somehow you need to bring it up every day the way some people need alcohol. Presentiments!

GLORIA. John, I want to be taken seriously. I have a presentiment that . . . that I am going to pass on very soon.

JOHN (after a pause). What?

GLORIA. I feel . . . I feel I'm gonna pass on very soon.

JOHN. Will it be today? I took two steaks out of the freezer. I'll put one back.

GLORIA. Damn it, John, I want to be taken seriously!