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Dramatic Publishing

YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

by
PAT COOK



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(YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE)

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YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

**A Full Length Play in Two Acts
For Five Women and Two Men**

CHARACTERS

LIZ in her late 50s
MYRTLE her younger sister
ANN their great-niece, a school teacher, mid-20s
ARTHUR a reporter
QUEENIE newspaper editor, in her 40s
DOLORES VAN DAMM Arthur's boss
HORACE McCLINTOCK Dolores' chief, early 50s

TIME: The present.

PLACE: The Mavis Garner Bed and Breakfast
in Shadow Falls.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The lobby/living room of the Mavis Garner Bed And Breakfast.*

AT RISE: *Morning. LIZ is sitting behind the reservations desk, reading a newspaper. After a slight pause, MYRTLE comes down the stairs. She arrives on the first floor and stands a moment, looking blankly into space. LIZ puts down her paper and looks at MYRTLE.*

MYRTLE (*remembering*). Oh, yeah! (*She marches back up-stairs. LIZ resumes her paper.*)

(*ANN enters from kitchen, wiping her hands with a dish towel.*)

ANN. Tyrant!

LIZ. Thank you, dear. (*She picks up a pen and writes it down.*) Now, what's a seven-letter word for skunk?

ANN (*crosses to LIZ*). I'll think about it. Been any calls?

LIZ. Not since World War II.

ANN. Oh, stop it, you old faker. (*She hugs LIZ.*) Business isn't *that* slow.

LIZ. Yeah? Look at the big news item for the week. (*She holds up the paper.*) Lindy made it.

ANN (*mock seriousness*). Well, I always knew he would. The Lone Eagle. Think women'll get the vote? (*She sits on the couch to catch her breath.*)

LIZ. You expecting a call, dear?

ANN. Yes. Aunt Myrtle left a message with the vet.

LIZ. Oh, yeah. That's going to be a grand time, I bet. That's the *only* call you're expecting?

ANN. (*playfully*). And just what do you mean by that?

LIZ. (*good-natured kidding*). No boy friends? No potential grooms? (*She leans forward.*) We're trying to unload you, dear, haven't you gotten that yet?

ANN. Well, you're stuck with me. (*She rises and moves back toward kitchen.*) 'Sides, you'd never finish your cross-words without me.

LIZ. 'Sez you. By the way...

ANN. Yes, ma'am?

LIZ. What's a seven-letter word for skunk?

ANN. I'm working on it, I'm working on it. (*She exits into kitchen. LIZ picks up the paper again. The phone rings. She looks at it. It rings again.*)

LIZ. It *does* work. (*She picks up the receiver.*) Hello. Mavis Garner Bed and Breakfast. Our answering machine is out of order, you're speaking to a real human being. Deal with it.

(*MYRTLE comes down the stairs again, carrying a large framed picture which she places on the desk next to kitchen door.*)

LIZ. What? Oh, hi, Mac. Customer? This way? Right. Call when his car's ready. (*She hangs up and crosses to MYRTLE.*)

MYRTLE. I *knew* I had this picture somewhere. There. It brightens up the whole room.

LIZ. It does for a fact. What part were you playing there?

MYRTLE. One of the witches in *MacBeth*.

LIZ. They don't write them like that anymore.

(ANN enters from kitchen.)

MYRTLE. That's for sure. *(She strikes a pose.)* "Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten her nine farrow; grease that's sweaten from the murderer's gibbet throw into the flame!" *(She bows deeply. LIZ and ANN applaud gently.)*

LIZ. That's wonderful.

ANN. Macbeth. One of the witches, right?

MYRTLE. Of course.

LIZ. Now. A seven-letter word...

ANN. For skunk, I know. *(She exits into kitchen again. LIZ crosses back to her desk.)*

MYRTLE. I'm thinking about making a comeback.

LIZ. Sure, why not? What's it been now?

MYRTLE. Twenty-two years. I've been boning up on Shakespeare, though.

LIZ. I wouldn't audition for Juliet if I were you.

MYRTLE *(hurt)*. Why not?

LIZ. Too tall.

MYRTLE. Oh.

(ARTHUR enters through front door.)

ARTHUR. Hello?

LIZ. Yes sir, can I help you?

ARTHUR. I think so. I was sent over here by the guy at the garage. The thing is, I hit this pothole.

LIZ. At the end of Elm Street.

ARTHUR. Uh...that's right. How'd you know?

LIZ. It's the only pothole we have.

ARTHUR. Then you *know* about it?

LIZ. Know about it? We *voted* on it.

ARTHUR. You voted to have a pothole?

LIZ. Well, *we* did. I think there were two or three people that voted against it. We would've assigned a committee to investigate...

ARTHUR. No, you miss my point. You *want* the pothole?

LIZ. Yeah. See, years ago there was a movement under foot to repave the street. Well, that was decided on and then, before the repaving began, it was pointed out that a newer street would just urge people to drive faster. Well, then somebody suggested we put in a speed bump on top of the repaving to slow down the speeders. So, while the council was arguing over where to get all the money for the repaving and speed bump, Mayor Cassidy took a shovel and dug out the pothole. It was so simple, we voted to keep it.

ARTHUR. I bet that saved a bundle of cash.

LIZ. Well, yes, but he charged us for the shovel. (*MYRTLE rises and begins emoting again as she crosses to ARTHUR.*)

MYRTLE (*very broadly*). "Of all thy suitors, here I charge thee, tell whom thou lov'st best: see thou dissemble not."

ARTHUR. Huh?

MYRTLE. "Minion, thou liest; is't not Hortensio?"

ARTHUR. No, my name's Arthur.

MYRTLE. "Ha! If that be jest, then all the rest was so." (*She makes a brief bow and returns to her desk.*)

ARTHUR (*after a slight pause*). What was that?

LIZ. *Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare.

ARTHUR (*dumbfounded*). No.

LIZ (*surprised*). It's *not* by William Shakespeare?

ARTHUR. Uh...let me start again. The mechanic sent me over here. He's working on my car. The thing is...

(*ANN enters, moves to center of the room and announces to LIZ.*)

ANN. Polecat! *(She nods and exits into kitchen.)*

ARTHUR *(again pausing)*. Did...did she call me a polecat?

LIZ. Yeah, what'd you say to her? *(She writes the word in her crossword puzzle.)*

ARTHUR. I just got here! What's a polecat?

LIZ. A seven-letter word for skunk.

ARTHUR. That's what I thought. Does this place have a back door?

LIZ. Courage, man. You were saying...?

ARTHUR. Uh...oh yeah! Anyway, when I hit the pothole my car skidded and I ran into a light pole. The mechanic sent me here.

LIZ. Of course. You need to report that to our Power and Water Department.

ARTHUR. Is that you?

LIZ *(indicates MYRTLE)*. No, that's her.

ARTHUR. I was afraid you were going to say that.

LIZ. Go on over. I'll watch from here.

ARTHUR. Thank you. *(He crosses to MYRTLE.)* You're Power and Water?

MYRTLE *(very business-like now)*. Only to my close friends. Sit down.

ARTHUR. Uh...right. *(He pulls one of the dining chairs over and sits.)* The thing is, I hit a pothole...*(MYRTLE takes out a pad of legal pages and picks up a pen.)*

MYRTLE. Name?

ARTHUR. Oh, Arthur Lyman. L-Y-M-A-N.

MYRTLE. Occupation?

ARTHUR. Journalist.

MYRTLE. Married?

ARTHUR. No. *(MYRTLE stands and shouts at LIZ.)*

MYRTLE. Live one! *(Back to ARTHUR.)* Fill out your address here at the top of this form.

ARTHUR. Uh, sure. *(He begins writing on the form. MYRTLE crosses to LIZ.)*

MYRTLE. You heard me over here?

LIZ. They heard you in Alaska!

MYRTLE. Go get Ann.

LIZ. I don't know. I think we need to find out more about him.

MYRTLE. He's not married.

LIZ. Good enough. No sense draining the man. *(She crosses to kitchen and, pausing to smile at ARTHUR, exits. MYRTLE resumes her seat.)*

ARTHUR *(gives her the form)*. There you are.

MYRTLE. Good, good. Now, in your own words, tell me what happened.

ARTHUR. I was driving down Elm Street, hit this pothole and banged my car into a light post and...

MYRTLE. Five dollars.

ARTHUR. Good thing I didn't finish the sentence. What's the five dollars for?

MYRTLE. Cosmetic repairs to the light post.

ARTHUR. Oh, very well. *(He takes out his wallet and hands a bill to MYRTLE.)* There you go. Anyway, I had to take my car over to the mechanic.

MYRTLE. What? You left the scene of an accident?

ARTHUR. Well, I took the car with me.

(LIZ enters.)

LIZ. She won't come out. Would you believe she thinks we're trying to fix her up?

ARTHUR. What? Who?

LIZ *(charmingly)*. Never mind. *(Crosses back to her desk.)*

MYRTLE. So, you carelessly drove your car away and didn't think any more about it, is that about it?

ARTHUR. Well, no, I'm reporting it.

MYRTLE. That shows a good spirit. But I'm not the one you report it to.

ARTHUR. Who do I report it...?

MYRTLE. Department of Traffic and Safety.

ARTHUR. Where's that?

MYRTLE. That desk over there. *(She points at LIZ.)*

ARTHUR. Oh, well, that's convenient. *(MYRTLE stamps his form and hands it to him.)*

MYRTLE. Take this form and stand in line.

ARTHUR. Line? Right. *(He takes his form and crosses to LIZ.)* Excuse me, I was sent over here...

LIZ. What's your number?

ARTHUR. Number?

LIZ. You have to take a number to be served. Regulations.

ARTHUR. Where do I get a number?

LIZ. My secretary.

ARTHUR. Who's that?

LIZ *(points to MYRTLE)*. Right over there.

ARTHUR. Uh *huh*. Couldn't I just make up a number?

LIZ. Well, that would be perjury. Were you sworn in?

ARTHUR. No, but I was sworn at and that was by the mechanic.

LIZ. Right over there.

ARTHUR. Of course. *(Crosses back to MYRTLE.)* I'm back.

MYRTLE. I bet I know why you're here. I got your number.

ARTHUR. You sure do. *(MYRTLE hands him a form.)* Nine hundred and ninety-eight?

MYRTLE. Right over there. Get in line.

ARTHUR. Awfully nice to see you again. *(He crosses back to LIZ. He stands and waits. Finally, she looks up.)*

LIZ. Eight!

ARTHUR. Oh my God!

LIZ. Just kidding. *(She takes his number.)* What can I do for you?

ARTHUR. I was just telling Water and Power about having to take my car to the garage...

LIZ. Leaving the scene of the crime. Five dollars.

ARTHUR. Yeah, I had a feeling. Got change for a twenty?
(He takes out a bill.)

LIZ. I *knew* you were going to ask that. No, I don't.

ARTHUR. I *knew* you were going to say *that*.

LIZ. Tell you what. Give me your form. *(He hands his form to her and she stamps it and gives it back.)* Now, take this over to the cashier.

ARTHUR. I'm guessing it's over there.

LIZ. You catch on fast.

ARTHUR. I think I saw this on "I Love Lucy" once.

LIZ. Come back again.

ARTHUR. I'm sure I will. *(He crosses to MYRTLE.)* You know, a hot-dog stand would clean up here.

MYRTLE. Let's see your form. *(He hands the form to her.)*
Let's see now. Pole damage, leaving the scene of an accident... You must have really been cruising.

ARTHUR. I was only doing twenty-five.

MYRTLE. Speeding! *(She stamps his form again.)* Five dollars.

ARTHUR. Speeding? Look, why don't you just keep the twenty bucks?

MYRTLE. But I owe you money.

ARTHUR. Ironic, isn't it? Just keep it.

MYRTLE *(writes)*. "Tries to bribe a city official."

ARTHUR. I don't believe this. *(MYRTLE hands him the form.)* Aren't you going to stamp it? *(MYRTLE takes the form back and stamps it again. Then she returns it to him.)*

MYRTLE. Pay the treasurer for the bribery charge.

ARTHUR. How much?

MYRTLE and ARTHUR. Five dollars!

ARTHUR. Where *is* the treasurer, like I didn't know?

MYRTLE. Go straight till you see a desk and take a left.

ARTHUR. Should've worn my track shoes. (*He crosses back to LIZ.*) You know, I almost *missed* this town?

LIZ. We'd have missed you, too.

ARTHUR. I bet. (*He hands her his form.*) I should've just mailed this in.

LIZ. Oh, you want a stamp?

ARTHUR. Yeah!

LIZ. Go right over there...

ARTHUR. Never mind! I can't believe this! All on account of one stinking pothole.

LIZ. You want to file a complaint?

ARTHUR. You *bet* I do! (*He takes his form and starts to cross the room.*)

LIZ. Where you going?

ARTHUR. Complaint department's over here, right?

LIZ. Now, *that* would be silly, wouldn't it?

ARTHUR. Oh, we're *way* past silly now. (*He moves back to LIZ.*) You're the complaint department?

LIZ. Right. (*She takes his form and stamps it. Then she writes on it.*) "Complaint regarding pothole."

ARTHUR. Right. And I want to sign it.

LIZ. That'll be five dollars.

ARTHUR. I don't know why I didn't see that coming. (*He hands the twenty to her.*) That's it, right?

LIZ. That's it.

ARTHUR. Finally!

LIZ. Uh oh.

ARTHUR. Now what?

LIZ. This has to be notarized.

ARTHUR. And that's...

LIZ (*finishes his sentence*). ...over there.

ARTHUR. I think I know why people move here now. They can't afford to pass through.

LIZ. It is pretty this time of year, isn't it? (*The phone rings. She picks it up.*) Hello, Mavis Garner Bed and Breakfast. Hm? Yeah, he's right here. (*She holds out the receiver.*) It's for you.

ARTHUR. Does it cost five dollars?

LIZ. Cheer up, it's early.

ARTHUR (*takes the phone*). Yeah, but it's getting later all the time. (*Into the receiver.*) Hello?

(*ANN enters from kitchen.*)

MYRTLE. That's him. Cute, isn't he?

ANN. Oh, Aunt Myrtle! Sometimes I feel like a prize hog. (*LIZ crosses to MYRTLE and ANN.*)

MYRTLE. You're not getting any younger and men are scarce around here.

ANN. Probably because you two are running them off.

LIZ. Now, you're just not giving us a chance.

MYRTLE. Or him.

LIZ. Right. If I was twenty years younger...

MYRTLE. Better make that thirty.

ANN. Look, you two, can't you just settle for being my great-aunts and leave it at that? Do you have to be matchmakers as well?

LIZ. Look at it as a gift.

ANN. Give it back.

ARTHUR (*hangs up phone*). Well, that figures. (*LIZ crosses over to him.*)

LIZ. Bad news?

ARTHUR. That was the mechanic. When I hit that pole I punctured my radiator. He's going to have to send out of town for a new one. Won't get here until tomorrow.

LIZ. Well, then you'll be needing a place to stay.

ARTHUR. So it goes. Do you have a room, he asked innocently?

LIZ. Well, let's see. *(She looks through her files.)* We have one with a view of the river, one with an adjoining shower, one with a southern plantation motif and one with a queen-size bed.

ARTHUR. I didn't think this place was all that big. How many rooms do you have to rent?

LIZ. One. But it has a view of the river, an adjoining shower...

ARTHUR. I'll take it. May I use the phone?

LIZ. Be my guest. *(She crosses to ANN and MYRTLE.)* We have a winner!

ANN. I'll go up and make sure the room is ready. *(She crosses to the stairs.)*

LIZ. Wait a minute. *(She pulls ANN over to ARTHUR.)* Arthur, this is Ann. She'll make sure your room is fresh.

ARTHUR. Oh, you mean your rooms aren't fresh?

LIZ. No, but the maids are.

ARTHUR. And who're they? *(LIZ and ANN put their heads together and smile at him.)*

ANN. Oh, pay no attention to my aunt. I'll just run up and get everything ready.

ARTHUR. That'll be fine. *(She moves to the stairs. He eyes her appreciatively.)* Real fine.

LIZ. I'll just give you a little privacy. Myrtle?

MYRTLE. Coming. *(ANN and LIZ exit up the stairs. MYRTLE stops at the base of the stairs and looks back at AR-*

THUR.) Thanks for staying with us. Don't forget to tell your friends. *(She smiles and exits up the stairs.)*

ARTHUR. Don't worry. *(He finishes dialing.)* Thank God they don't have a switchboard. *(Into receiver.)* Hello? Yes, Janet, I know it's the American Tattletale. Right, it's me. Put Dolores on. *(Slight pause.)* Dolores? Arthur. Listen, I got sidetracked. No, it's someplace called Shadow Falls. I blew a radiator. Listen, I think I got a better story for you. I'm staying at the...*(Picks up a card.)*...Mavis Garner Bed and Breakfast. *(Pause.)* I know I'm supposed to find Lillith Mansfield. *(Longer pause.)* Right, Pulitzer Prize nominee, I know. It's just I haven't come up with anything so I thought I'd at least give you something for your money. Well, right here! *(Pause.)* No, I'm not doing a story on small town beds and breakfasts. Well, how's this sound for a title. "Speed Traps." Or "How A Town Gets Rich By Going In The Hole." *(Smiles and nods.)* These yokels will never know what hit them. Right. *(Lights fade out.)*