

# Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

---

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

---

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

# **The Great Beyond**

By

STEVEN DIETZ

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: [www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com), or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play that are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXXII by  
STEVEN JOHN DIETZ

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(THE GREAT BEYOND)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-284-1

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“*The Great Beyond* was originally commissioned and first produced by  
Actor’s Theatre of Charlotte in March 2019,  
Chip Decker, Producing Artistic Director.”

*The Great Beyond* was originally commissioned and first produced by Actor’s Theatre of Charlotte on March 14, 2019.

CAST:

MONICA..... Tonya Bludsworth  
REX ..... Scott Tynes-Miller  
EMILY..... Robin Tynes-Miller  
RENE..... Tania Kelly  
COACH MAYES ..... Rob Addison  
BOY ..... Finn Stern

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Chip Decker  
Scenic Design..... Evan Kinsley  
Costume Design..... Magda Guichard  
Lighting Design ..... Hallie Gray  
Sound Design ..... Rob Witmer  
Stage Manager ..... Katy Harding

For my sister

AUTHOR'S NOTE  
ON THE COMPANION PLAY

This play was written as one of two stand-alone, yet interlocking plays. The events going on downstairs with the kids—in this same house, on this same night—may be found in its companion play: *The Ghost of Splinter Cove*.

More information on the development and collaboration of these two plays is provided in the back of the book.

# The Great Beyond

## CHARACTERS

MONICA: 40s.

REX: Her ex-husband, same age.

EMILY: Monica's sister, four years younger.

RENE: Emily's partner, Monica's age.

COACH MAYES: 40s. (Not listed in playbill, if possible.)

KIDS' VOICES: Prerecorded voices for Nate, Cora and Sydney.

BOY: 8 years old, nonspeaking. (Not listed in playbill, if possible.)

TIME: The present.

PLACE: An American city.

SETTING: The main room of an older, 1940s-era home. This is not a large place. On a good day, it is cozy; on a bad day, it is small. Furnishings are basic, worn, older—but the room is not cluttered in the least. The most prominent feature of the room is a simple, round oak table. Made by hand, it is old, oft-used and well-loved. Still in good shape. An upstage door leads to the kitchen. A downstage door leads to the basement. A hallway leads to the bedrooms and bath. The front door is either visible or just offstage through a small entryway.

SOUND: The score from the premier production is available from composer and designer by Rob Witmer. Producers may contact Rob directly at robertsonwitmer@gmail.com.



Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget the perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in

—Leonard Cohen

# The Great Beyond

## ACT I

*(A light on EMILY.*

*She speaks to the audience. She is friendly, casual and has an appealing sense of humor about herself.)*

EMILY. So here's a question for you: In your life—to this moment—who are the people you have hurt? *(Smiles.)* Yes, there are probably happier games to play, but bear with me. Because as you think of that question, it may lead you to other questions. Did you hurt that person on purpose? Or by mistake? Did you apologize to them? Or did you not?

And that gets you to where I am right now. I have been on the Grand Tour. Not the kind where you go to London, Paris and Rome after college. No—my Grand Tour is the one where *you apologize to all the people you have ever hurt*. And you try to make amends.

I've been at it for five years. I've now apologized to ninety-seven people in twenty-three states and two foreign countries.

Yes, it started because I was a drinker and was working through the steps. But then it grew. Apologies have now taken over my life in a much bigger way than alcohol ever did.

I fly or drive to whatever city the person is in. I do each of them face to face. My obsession with this tour has completely bankrupted me, but I can't imagine ever stopping. I get such a *high* out of it.

My girlfriend, Rene, asked me if I'm going to start *hurting new people* so I don't run out of "marks." She calls the targets of my apologies my "marks"—which I love about her—though it does sound like maybe I am *using* these people. Maybe I am using these people.

The other thing I've learned: if you think an apology will close the door on something, you're wrong. An apology opens a new door. A door to something you never saw coming.

*(REX's voice is immediately heard as he calls down to the unseen kids from the open basement door:*

*Late afternoon.)*

REX *(calling down)*. How's it going, you two?

*(No response.)*

REX *(cont'd, calling down)*. Cora?—Nate?—Everything OK down there?

NATE'S VOICE. Yes, Dad.

CORA'S VOICE *(stop bugging us)*. We're fine.

*(MONICA enters, carrying a banker's box. During this scene, she will fill it with paperwork and small items from around the room.)*

REX *(calling down)*. Your Aunt Emily's not here yet, but she's bringing her girlfriend—

MONICA *(correcting him)*. Partner.

REX *(calling down)*. She's bringing her partner—

MONICA. Rene.

REX *(calling down)*. Her partner, Rene—and Rene has a daughter who we thought could play with you.

MONICA. Sydney.

REX (*calling down*). Her name is Sydney and—

MONICA. She's nine.

REX (*calling down*). And Sydney is nine—and we'll just send her down when she gets here, OK? Won't that be fun?

(*No response.*)

REX (*cont'd, calling down*). I SAID, "WON'T THAT—"

NATE & CORA'S VOICES. YES—GREAT—BYE, DAD.

REX (*calling down, a rueful smile*). Umm ... bye ...

(*REX closes the basement door.*)

MONICA. I can't believe they want to play down there.

REX. Kids are resourceful. Didn't you and Emily play down there when you were kids?

MONICA. No—that was the Captain's territory.

REX. It's still a great old house.

MONICA. It's empty, is what it is.

(*MONICA busies herself.*)

REX. Will you sell it?—You and your sister.

MONICA. I really don't know. Like I don't know what you were thinking when you offered to take the kids *camping*. Thank God for the bad weather in the forecast.

REX. Look—

MONICA. What a terrible idea, Rex! You of all people should know *this family does not go camping!*

REX. Would you please—

MONICA. But then you go and buy him a tent! God—that is such a "divorced single father" thing to do.

REX. He wanted camping gear for his birthday—and I got him camping gear—because last time I checked I was still able to do that without your permission.

*(This lands with MONICA.)*

REX *(cont'd)*. OK? *(Beat.)*

MONICA. OK. Did you get ahold of Coach Mayes? We were supposed to pick up Nate's soccer jersey—

REX. Oh, right.

MONICA. But I guess we—*you*—forgot to do that. I wrote the check and you were going to pick up the soccer jersey, remember?

REX. Can't the coach just bring it to the field?

MONICA. They have pictures beforehand or something. *(Before REX can respond.)* This is important, Rex. It's important to Nate.

REX. OK. I'm on it.

MONICA. Is he liking soccer so far?

REX. Absolutely. He has his father's slow foot speed—but he makes up for it with his mother's killer instinct.

MONICA. That's my boy. And you'll text the coach?

REX. Yes. I'll need your phone. *(Off her look.)* I gave mine to Nate.

MONICA. You did what?

REX. In case he needs it tonight.

MONICA. In the basement? Why would he—

REX. Just let me use yours.

MONICA *(gestures off)*. OK—it's in my—

REX. And the passcode? To open the phone?

MONICA. Twelve-fourteen.

*(Beat.)*

REX. Still?

MONICA. Yes. *(Off his look.)* Yes, my passcode is still the date we got married.

REX. OK.

MONICA. Don't worry.

REX. I'm not worried!

MONICA. I'll change it. I'm going to change it.

*(REX sends the text. Then, he watches MONICA sort more papers.)*

REX. So ... what do we know about the new girlfriend?

MONICA. Partner. *(Off his look.)* I really don't know.

REX. Oh, c'mon—

MONICA. It's not like I'm snooping around on social media to find out who my sister is dating.

REX. Sure. Of course. What did you find?

*(MONICA drops what she is doing.)*

MONICA *(eagerly)*. OK, it's interesting, because it seems that Rene ... is some kind of *medium*. A spirit guide—or whatever you'd call it. She does *séances*.

REX. For real?

MONICA. She has a website. There are testimonials.

REX *(with a laugh)*. Oh, I love this.

MONICA. I just hope that when we meet her she is not wearing, like, robes—bracelets—“dream-catcher” earrings.

REX. Telling us stories about Burning Man.

MONICA. Emily always falls for stuff like that. The exotic new thing. The great, crazy adventure. It always ends badly.

*(MONICA is holding a well-worn photo album.)*

MONICA *(cont'd)*. You think she'll want the family album?

REX. You don't want it?

*(MONICA puts the photo album in the box with intent.)*

MONICA. Nope.

*(MONICA continues her work.)*

REX. Did you want me to stay?

MONICA. It's up to you. Emily will want to see you *way more* than she'll want to see me. And she'll want you to meet Rene.

REX. OK, but it's important that the two of you get some time alone.

MONICA. Wow, you really think everything's gonna be different—

REX. No, I didn't—

MONICA. Everything's gonna be peachy now? That our dad's death is somehow going to “bring us together”?!

REX. All I'm trying to say—

MONICA. I mean—*if only*. If only that were true.

*(MONICA turns/moves away. REX seems to know she needs some time alone.)*

MONICA *(cont'd, as REX starts off)*. Stay a little.

*(REX stops.)*

MONICA (*cont'd*). Stay tonight.

(*REX turns to her. MONICA clarifies.*)

MONICA (*cont'd*). I mean ... not *overnight*. We're through with that. Right?

REX. I have signed papers to that effect.

(*MONICA smiles a bit. The mood shifts.*)

REX (*cont'd*). You have any decent beer?

MONICA. No.

REX. You used to buy decent beer.

MONICA. I used to be married to you. Now I can buy crap.

(*REX heads to the kitchen.*)

MONICA (*cont'd, calling off*). I have no idea what she's doing for work. There's a lot of traveling. At least according to her Facebook page. Peoria, Wichita Falls, Little Rock. Those can't be vacations. Oh and she's drinking again. Did I tell you that?

REX (*off*). Who?

MONICA. Emily. My alcoholic sister. She is drinking again.

REX (*off*). Wow. OK.

MONICA. I found out on Facebook. Along with thousands of people I don't know at all, I found out on Facebook that my alcoholic sister is dating a medium and drinking again.

(*REX enters with a beer.*)

REX. How long had it been?

MONICA. Fifteen years—sixteen? I don't know. She got a bunch of those little “sobriety chips.”



REX. I think they're medallions.

MONICA. Who knew you could "medal" in drinking?

REX. Mon—

MONICA. But if anyone could, it would be my sister. All hail the champ!

REX. All right—maybe we can talk to her. Get her back in a program—

MONICA. *Rex.*

REX. *What?*

MONICA. I don't need you to *solve this*. I just need you to *listen*. (*Off his look.*) Does that ring a bell?

REX. So many bells. What time will they be here?

MONICA. Emily said five, so I'm thinking around eight. I'll ask them what sounds good for dinner. I'm going to be *completely open* to whatever they want—

REX (*with a smile*). Wow, that's very evolved of you—

MONICA. I plan to leave the choice *completely up to them*. I can order in, or we can—

REX (*enjoying this*). Sure—

MONICA. You know—

REX. Sounds great—

MONICA. I'm serious—!

REX. I know you are!

MONICA. I really need your support, Rex. We have to go through some of Dad's paperwork—talk about the house, the will—

REX. And the ashes. I know you don't want to talk about the ashes, but the two of you should decide something.

*(MONICA does not like this conversation. She turns away, stays busy.)*

REX (*cont'd*). What if we took them up to Splinter Cove? (*Off her look.*) Yes, I know you hate that idea—but the Captain loved that place. Despite everything—all that happened—he still always talked about Splinter Cove. What if we all made a trip—the kids, too—made a kind of adventure out of it.

(*REX gets a hard, sharp look from MONICA.*)

REX (*cont'd*). Or not.

(*MONICA returns to her work.*)

REX (*cont'd*). Where are they?

MONICA. *Jesus, Rex—*

REX. In case the kids ask.

MONICA. The kids are not going to ask. I am not talking about the ashes with the kids.

REX. Just tell me, OK? I don't plan to—

MONICA. *The ashes are under the sink.* Under the kitchen sink. In a little gray box. With a plastic liner. A cardboard box. Like they couldn't find anything better. Like we were too cheap to— (*Stops, beat.*) And they're heavy. Why are they so heavy?

(*REX is silent.*)

MONICA (*cont'd*). You'd really *take the kids up there*?

REX. Sure. Why not? It's time we told them *something*.

MONICA. They were not close to the Captain. You know that. He might have been their grandpa, but they never—

REX. You never gave them a chance. When I would try to talk to them—tell them stories about him—

MONICA. They got nightmares.

REX. No, they didn't!

MONICA. Nate had nightmares about deep water, and Cora had nightmares about falling—

REX. All I'm saying is—

MONICA. So let's maybe *let it go, huh?!*

REX. I know he was sick—I know you were here taking care of him—but you never wanted any of us to come visit.

MONICA. The kids would not have understood—

REX. What about me? What about my chance to say goodbye to him? I know he was your dad, not mine. But still—why you wanted him all to yourself, I have no idea. You complained about doing everything on your own and then you made sure *none of us could help you*.

MONICA. Emily was on the other side of the country! When she wasn't in Peoria or Wichita or wherever—

REX. She would have come.

MONICA. She didn't.

REX. You didn't ask her.

MONICA. Since when do you have to ask someone *if they want to come see their dying father?!*

REX. All I know is that you're going to lord it over Emily that she wasn't here— (*As MONICA starts to respond.*) *Yes—yes, you are*—how it all fell to you, and that she did nothing to help. You're going to expect some *big apology* from her, am I right?

(*MONICA stares at him.*)

REX (*cont'd*). Don't wait for it, Monica. I promise you, that apology is never going to come.

(*MONICA stares at him. Truce.*)

REX (*cont'd*). The kids were great—these last couple weeks. I enjoyed having them, while you were here. We ate vegetables. They missed you.

MONICA. Thank you.

(*REX nods.*)

MONICA (*cont'd*). And don't mention the table.

REX. Why not?

MONICA (*standing near it*). I know my sister—and I know if we talk about this table we are going to argue about this table.

REX. Does Emily want the table?

MONICA. Yes—but she'd never say that. She'd try to get *me* to offer it.

REX. But you want to keep it?

MONICA. It belongs in this house.

REX. So, you don't really want it—

MONICA. Rex—

REX. You just don't want your sister to have it.

MONICA. That is not true. (*Pause.*) OK, that's true. I'm a terrible person. (*Pause.*) This is where you say, "You're not a terrible person."

(*He just stares at her. Smiles a bit.*)

REX. Trisha is fine. Thank you for asking. And Trisha doesn't think you're a terrible person.

MONICA. You speak well of me to Trisha.

REX. Yes, I do.

MONICA. Thank you. It's been five months. You and Trisha.

REX. You're keeping track?

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

### ON THE SECOND STORY PROJECT

How many times in my childhood—as I played with friends in the basement—did I wonder: “What on earth are the adults doing upstairs?” How many times as a parent—as we busied ourselves upstairs—did I wonder: “What on earth are the kids doing in the basement?”

Childhood and adulthood are different continents, separated by a sea of time. And so, too, our fields of plays for the “grown” and the “young” have long been separated by a similar, seemingly intractable gulf.

In an attempt to bridge this gulf, two artistic directors—Adam Burke (Children’s Theatre of Charlotte) and Chip Decker (Actor’s Theatre of Charlotte)—approached me about creating what we came to call The Second Story Project. The goal was for me to write two plays that would *stand on their own*, individually—but that could *also be seen in tandem*, as a way to tell the stories of the children and the adults in a unified way. We took it as a point of faith that the story of a family is the story of *all* its members, and that these stories can and should be shared across generations.

Family is the ultimate mystery: a strange and shimmering construct of choice and chance, held together by the narrative it tells itself. And, inevitably, there are gaps in what we tell ourselves about our own family, uneven knowledge between siblings and parents, events lost to history or covered by silence over time.

The adults upstairs in *The Great Beyond* are dealing with a loss. This loss has led to a reunion, and this reunion will lead them on a quest. The children at the heart of *The Ghost of Splinter Cove* are dealing with an age-old conundrum: find

something to do in the basement until the adults are “done” upstairs. And—of course—being children (the legislators of the imagination), they turn a barren basement into an adventure.

Both the adults and the children in these two plays gain an insight on the story of their own family. But—fittingly, I think—this knowledge is different in each play. And like the story of any family, it is beautifully incomplete. Only *you*, as the possible audience to *both plays*, are given the full picture of what has transpired on this night.

It has been my honor and delight to write and premiere this intergenerational story. I wish to thank the commissioning theatres for their embrace of radical collaboration.

Let’s keep talking about families.

—Steven Dietz  
March 2019