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**American Association of
Community Theatre AACT
NewPlayFest Winning Plays:
Volume 2 (2016)**

Lighthouse by
WILLIAM BAER

Laguna Beach, Ohio by
MALCOLM MACDONALD

Wash, Dry, Fold by
NEDRA PEZOLD ROBERTS

Gracefully Ending by
A.J. DELAUDER

The Emperor of North America by
THOMAS HISCHAK

Shades of Valor by
KAREN L. LEWIS

Get Out of Dodge by
JEANNE DRENNAN



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Foreword.....	7
<i>Lighthouse</i>	9
<i>Laguna Beach, Ohio</i>	81
<i>Wash, Dry, Fold</i>	147
<i>Gracefully Ending</i>	195
<i>The Emperor of North America</i>	263
<i>Shades of Valor</i>	319
<i>Get Out of Dodge</i>	367
Author Biographies.....	424

INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Community Theatre (AACT) is proud to present the seven winning scripts and playwrights of the second AACT NewPlayFest cycle. AACT NewPlayFest is an initiative by AACT to address the critical need for new, high-quality plays for community theatre audiences around the globe. It has been embraced by playwrights and theatres across the country, bringing exciting theatrical journeys to producing companies and joyful realization and anticipation to playwrights and their work.

AACT is pleased to partner with Dramatic Publishing Company for this program. AACT NewPlayFest is unparalleled in new play competitions, providing full productions of the winning scripts, plus publication and rights representation by a major theatrical publisher. Also thanks to Texas Nonprofit Theatres, Inc., for pioneering the way. Its TNT POPS! New Play Project served as the model for AACT NewPlayFest.

This second cycle of AACT NewPlayFest, ending in 2016, proved even more successful than the first. More scripts were submitted, and seven theatres across the country produced world premieres of winning scripts. This festival continues to benefit the producing theatres by giving them the excitement of bringing new works to their patrons, and the playwrights by experiencing quality productions of their work, and publication and representation by Dramatic Publishing. The benefits of AACT NewPlayFest will expand as additional theatres produce these top-notch plays.

We hope you will consider one of these plays for your next season.

Break a leg,

Julie Crawford, Executive Director
American Association of Community Theatre

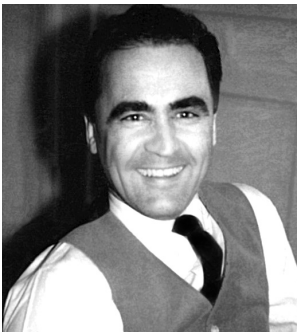
The American Association of Community Theatre is the resource connection for America's theatres. AACT represents the interests of more than 7,000 theatres across the United States and its territories, as well as theatre companies with the U.S. Armed Services overseas. To learn more about AACT NewPlayFest and AACT go to aact.org.

FOREWORD

Jack K. Ayre, born in Pittsburgh on July 9, 1921, celebrated his 90th birthday before passing away in December 2011. At his birthday party in Sunnyvale, Calif., he sang with a barbershop quartet—one of his favorite activities—and celebrated with his cousin and lifelong friend, Frank Ayre Lee. Though as adults they lived on opposite sides of the country, the cousins kept in touch through letters that displayed a love for the written word and an irreverent sense of humor. Jack had participated in theatre productions at Drew University in New Jersey and at a community theatre in Connecticut in his younger years, and continued that interest when he moved to California.

Frank, a chemical engineer by profession, was also an avid aficionado of theatre and had dabbled in playwriting, adapting Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* for a children's theatre production, and penning *McSteg*, a tongue-in-cheek discourse ribbing his cousin Jack and based on a scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation has been created by the children of Frank as a tribute to their father, who passed away in August 2012, and a legacy for the creative endeavors of Jack, who was an advertising executive and public relations director. The family is pleased to honor both men through a lasting legacy promoting new works for theatre.



Jack K. Ayre



Frank Ayre Lee

Photos: Courtesy of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation.

Lighthouse

By
WILLIAM BAER

Lighthouse was premiered by Windsor Community Playhouse in Windsor, Colo., on September 25, 2015, with the following cast:

Luce.....	Sarah Robertson
Michael	Barry Bartram
Amber	Julie Legg
Alice.....	Lindsay Savage
Dr. Ramsey.....	Dennis Conmay
Luke	Steven Haas
Nurse	Eika Haas

Production:

Director	Tim Bernhardt
Assistant Director/Stage Manager	Terri White
Set Dressing/Props/Graphic Designer.....	Laurie Ray
Tech Director/Lights/Sound.....	Eika Haas
Costumes.....	Miranda Lohry
Set Construction.....	Steve Ezinga

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), 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:

“*Lighthouse* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Windsor Community Playhouse in Windsor, Colo.”

Lighthouse

CHARACTERS

LUCE (LUCINDA) FOUCHET: A travel writer using the pen name “Stella Chase” and keeper of the Beach Haven Lighthouse. She is attractive and in her mid-20s.

HELEN DOUGLAS: A local travel agent in her late-50s.

MICHAEL BRAXTON: A Bronx homicide detective. He is a widower in his early-30s.

ALICE PALMER: A part-time college student in her early-20s who suffers from the rare genetic disorder known as Xeroderma Pigmentosum (XP).

DR. ELLIS RAMSEY: A world-renowned dermatological physician and researcher. He is in his early-50s.

LUKE (LUCAS) RIKER: Caretaker of the Beach Haven lighthouse. He is a former sailor in his 60s.

PLACE AND TIME

The Beach Haven Lighthouse on Long Beach Island along the New Jersey shore. The present.

ACT I: Early morning

ACT II: Early morning, three weeks later.

NOTES ON THE SET

The setting is Luce’s lighthouse workroom, which is high in the lighthouse tower, directly beneath the beacon room and right above her bedroom. The workroom is neat and comfortable but somewhat cramped. If possible, some sense might be given that the room is circular and the walls are curved. The workroom is mostly white, trimmed with green and somewhat old-fashioned—with a kind of chic cuteness or quaintness about it.

Center stage (C): A large comfortable couch with padded arms and a dark blanket sits at C facing the audience. To the left of the couch is a small table with (if possible) a frog ornament resting on top of it.

Stage right (R): The door to the workroom is downstage. Beyond it, there's a small mirror, a coat hook and a stairwell (the stairs themselves need not be seen). Behind the couch at R is the computer stand—with a desk, wooden chair, computer, CD player and a phone with a cordless receiver.

Back wall: At the center of the back wall is a small, fairly narrow window. The window has an automatic descending shutter. Nearby, on the back wall, there's a large photograph of a Central American red-eyed tree frog. At R from the window is the wall panel that controls the upstairs beacon, the window shutters and the lighthouse intercom.

Stage left (L): Behind the couch at L, there's an amateur telescope on a tripod. Beyond it, against the side wall, there's a small coffee stand. There could also be a wooden chair or a small bookcase downstage from the coffee stand.

Lighthouse

ACT I

(Beach Haven Lighthouse on Long Beach Island along the New Jersey shore.)

High in the lighthouse, the dark workroom is intermittently flushed with light from the small window upstage and from an unseen window downstage. As the lighthouse lens rotates in the beacon room upstairs, there's a very slight hum in the workroom.

Eventually, footsteps are heard ascending the lighthouse steps at UR, and LUCE FOUCHET enters the room and switches on the lights. She wears blue jeans, all-white deck sneakers and a Columbia sweatshirt over a blouse with a buttoned-down collar.

LUCE is also wearing a pair of shades with side shields and carrying the glasses case in her hands. Stopping at the mirror, she looks herself over and smiles. Then she takes off the glasses, puts them in the glasses case and places them in a small, open pocket on her packed suitcase—which is waiting on its wheels near the workroom door. As she does so, a timer goes off, announcing the time of day.)

FEMALE VOICE *(from CD player)*. 6:45 A.M.

(The opening of “Good Morning Starshine” from Hair, or something similar, begins to play.)

Enjoying the music, which quickly fades out, LUCE walks over to the control panel and shuts off the upstairs beacon light. As the slight hum of the beacon fades away, a buzzer goes off.)

HELEN *(voice from the intercom)*. I'm coming up, Luce. *(Edgy.)* I hope this damned elevator is behaving itself.

(LUCE smiles to herself as she hits another switch on the wall panel, and a dark shutter comes down over the small upstage window.)

HELEN (*cont'd, voice from the intercom*). Don't smile, Luce! I know you're smiling!

(Amused, LUCE hits another button and watches as an unseen shutter comes down over the unseen downstage window. When she's done, LUCE glances down at her computer desk and picks up a white envelope. She thinks about it for a moment and places it face down on the desk. Then she hears the sound of the elevator arriving and its inner door opening.)

HELEN (*cont'd, offstage, calling out*). I hate this thing!

(As soon as LUCE hears the sound of the elevator door close, she opens the door to the workroom, and HELEN DOUGLAS enters.)

HELEN (*cont'd, agitated*). It's like a coffin!

(HELEN, dressed for the cold weather, wears a large winter coat with a hat and mittens. LUCE helps her take the coat off.)

LUCE (*kidding*). You should take the stairs.

HELEN (*kidding*). Don't make fun of an old woman, Luce. Claustrophobia's *very* unpleasant.

LUCE (*sympathetically*). I know.

(Under her heavy winter coat, HELEN is fashionably dressed in a business suit.)

HELEN. I don't know what's worse, this hellish weather or that damned elevator. At least there's no snow yet. Did I ever tell you how much I detest February?

LUCE (*smiles*). Yes, you have.

HELEN (*tells her anyway*). It's such an ugly little month. I always diet in February because it's so miserable anyway—except, of course, for Valentine's Day.

LUCE. Tea?

HELEN. No thanks, and I can't stay long.

(LUCE nods. HELEN walks behind the couch, rests her hand on the telescope and looks up.)

HELEN (*cont'd*). I was hoping it might be clearer tonight—so we could go up (*Gestures upward.*) and look at the stars. (*Kidding.*) What good's a lighthouse, if you can't see the stars? Instead, we get pictures of frogs!

(*HELEN gestures first to the frog picture on the back wall and then to an unseen frog picture on the [also unseen] downstage wall.*)

LUCE (*smiles*). I like frogs! Besides, it's almost dawn.

HELEN. I know. And the light was on anyway. Some problem at sea?

LUCE. I guess so. Captain Edwards called about three o'clock.

HELEN. What did he say?

LUCE. Not much—just when to turn it on and when to turn it off. I don't ask questions.

HELEN. You're a good soldier, Luce—or sailor. (*LUCE nods.*)

Well, it's mighty rough out there this morning. Did you see the waves crashing on the cliffs?

LUCE. No, I've been down in my bedroom reading.

(*For the first time, HELEN takes a good look at LUCE.*)

HELEN. You don't look so hot.

LUCE (*smiles*). Thanks.

(*LUCE sits down on the couch.*)

HELEN. You sure you're up for this trip?

LUCE (*determined*). I'm very up for this trip.

(*Then HELEN reaches into her pocketbook and takes out LUCE's plane tickets and flight itinerary.*)

HELEN. It's direct to Lisbon, unless there's a delay, with train tickets for Fátima and the Algarve. And I got you one of the best rooms at the Palácio in Estoril.

LUCE. Great.

HELEN. It sounds wonderful. And Fátima too. (*Pause.*) But maybe you should try Lourdes sometime.

LUCE. I did.

HELEN (*remembers*). That's right! I should have gone with you.

LUCE (*laughs*). You? You never go anywhere! The travel agent who never travels.

HELEN. I've done enough traveling in my life, thank you, ma'am.

I like it right here—on the Jersey coast. (*Also sits down on the couch.*) Who you writing for this time?

LUCE. I'll be doing a piece on the Fado clubs for the *Times*, and one on Fátima for *St. John's Review*.

HELEN. It sounds perfect. I look forward to the both of them, darling.

(*LUCE nods, and HELEN leans over and puts the flight tickets on the couch table.*)

HELEN (*cont'd*). Now, if you're delayed at Newark tonight, for any reason, just go to the Marriott. They're holding a room. I'll call from New York sometime tonight and check. If you're still there, I'll stop by and see you on the way home.

LUCE. What's happening in New York?

HELEN (*sighs*). We're setting up a special Cannes package with those Film Festival people. (*Rolls her eyes.*) Dealing with the French is just about impossible. They're so damned smug, you'd like to beat them with a stick. (*Pause.*) I know I can say that to you, dear, since we both have French blood. Thank God, it's been diluted.

LUCE (*smiles, then more serious*). Well, you be careful driving to the city.

HELEN. I will. But I hate it.

LUCE. Why don't you go with Dr. Ramsey?

HELEN (*horrified*). In that helicopter?! In that ridiculous, flying tin can?! Are you out of your mind? (*Pause.*) Besides it's a little bit pretentious, isn't it? Being chauffeured to the city in your own helicopter three days a week.

LUCE. He's a very important man, Helen, and he helps an awful lot of people.

HELEN. I guess so. (*Checks her watch*) Oh well, I better get going.

(*HELEN stands up and walks over to where her coat is hanging. As she does so, she glances down at the computer table, sees the envelope and picks it up.*)

LUCE (*teasing*). That's *not* for you.

(*Undaunted, HELEN reads the front of the envelope before she puts it back down. Then she turns around to LUCE.*)

HELEN. You need a lot more than *that* in your life, young lady. (*Remembers.*) You know, I think I saw some young lovers parked over by the cliffs. (*She points downward.*)

LUCE (*kidding*). How romantic! I hope they haven't asphyxiated themselves.

HELEN. I'm surprised Luke hasn't chased them off.

LUCE. He will soon. He's probably just getting up.

(*HELEN nods and thinks for a moment.*)

HELEN (*more seriously*). I mean it, Luce. You need some love in your life. Don't be so afraid of it.

LUCE. Why? Do I seem depressed?

HELEN. You *never* seem depressed, but that doesn't mean you're really satisfied. You should let yourself have what you *really* want, and *I* know what you really want.

LUCE. I tried it once.

HELEN. But that wasn't fair, Luce, and you know it. You've even told me so yourself. It was puppy love, and the poor boy died. (*Pause.*) Working with sick kids and trying to help Alice isn't enough.

LUCE. She needs someone.

HELEN. Yes, she certainly does. We all do.

(*The phone rings.*)

LUCE. Hit the speaker phone.

(*HELEN hits a button on the phone.*)

LUCE (*cont'd, louder*). Hello?

NURSE (*voice from phone speaker*). Hello, hon, it's Marsha. Dr. Ramsey's driving over. He'll be there soon. Sorry to keep you up.

LUCE (*smiling*). You *like* keeping me up.

NURSE (*voice from speaker phone*). No, hon. Nurses like people to go to sleep, so we can have the *pleasure* of waking them up. Take care, sweetheart, and have a great trip to Portugal—and buy me a present.

LUCE. I will.

(The NURSE hangs up.)

HELEN (*worried*). What's *he* want at this hour of the morning?

LUCE. I guess he wants to see me off before he flies to the city.

HELEN (*irritated*). Maybe he should spend more time helping that suicidal niece of his.

LUCE (*shrugs*). What can he do?

HELEN. Well, he could talk to her at least. Like you do.

LUCE. But she always cuts him off. You know that, Helen.

HELEN (*admits*). I suppose. (*Pause.*) Well, I think she's "putting on" anyway. Just for the attention.

LUCE (*reminds her*). She tried it once.

HELEN. But she failed. Doesn't that mean she *wanted* to fail?

LUCE. Not necessarily.

(Then both women are startled by an unexpected noise from below.)

HELEN (*concerned*). What was that?

LUCE (*calmly*). I don't know.

HELEN. The elevator's coming up! Is it Luke? Or the doctor?

LUCE. No, they always buzz first. (*Realizes.*) Did you prop that front door open again?

HELEN (*admits it*). You know I always leave it open. It helps me get into that tiny elevator. (*Tries to explain.*) It's like having an escape hatch or something. It's a psychological thing.

(The women listen to the sound of the elevator arriving and the inside elevator door opening. Suddenly, someone bangs on the workroom door.)

HELEN (*cont'd, frightened, softly*). Buzz the Coast Guard, Luce.

LUCE (*not overly concerned*). Who is it?

PRIVATE DETECTIVE (*offstage*). I'm a private investigator, and I'd like a minute of your time.

HELEN. Don't trust him, Luce. Call Luke.

PRIVATE DETECTIVE (*offstage*). Alex Hardon, the Chief of Police knows I'm here. If you'd like to call the station, I can give you his number.

LUCE (*steps forward*). Shut the elevator door behind you—and be sure it's tight.

(The women hear the sound of the elevator door closing. LUCE opens the door to the workroom, and MICHAEL BRAXTON steps into the room. He's an imposing figure, sharply dressed in dark jeans and a leather jacket over a tinted dress shirt. He holds up his identification for HELEN to see.)

MICHAEL (*kidding to HELEN*). It's like a bloody fortress!

(Then the DETECTIVE sees LUCE, and he seems momentarily overwhelmed.)

MICHAEL (*cont'd*). You're very beautiful.

HELEN. Now, I *definitely* don't trust him.

MICHAEL (*to LUCE*). Do you?

LUCE (*not responding to his question*). What do you want?

MICHAEL (*more businesslike*). I'm looking for Stella Chase. She's a travel writer for *The New York Times*, *Travel Magazine* and several other journals.

LUCE (*wary*). Who wants to know?

MICHAEL. My client.

LUCE. And who's that?

(MICHAEL doesn't respond to LUCE's question. Then he remembers something else and changes the subject.)

MICHAEL. Why's that girl sitting down there in the car?

(LUCE is suddenly horrified.)

LUCE. What kind of car?

MICHAEL. A blue Lexus.

HELEN (*frightened*). Oh, no! Is it Alice?

(LUCE calmly checks her watch, pulls a dark blanket off the couch, walks up to MICHAEL and speaks to him directly.)

LUCE (*with intensity*). Don't even think about what I'm telling you to do. Just go back down, get that girl, cover up her face, (*She hands him the blanket.*) and bring her right back up here.

(MICHAEL takes the blanket, nods and turns to the elevator.)

LUCE (*cont'd, pointing*). Take the stairs, and don't waste a moment.

(MICHAEL takes off.)

LUCE (*cont'd*). Break the windows if you have to.

(As MICHAEL exits down the stairwell, LUCE steps over and calls down after him.)

LUCE (*cont'd*). Use the elevator coming up. It's tight, but you'll fit.

(Then LUCE opens the workroom door and sends the elevator back down. As it's heard descending, she walks back to her computer stand, picks up the phone and hits a button.)

LUCE (*cont'd, calmly*). Lucas. Alice is outside in the car. Hurry!

(Then LUCE hangs up the phone and sits down on the arm of the couch facing the door.)

HELEN (*very upset*). That poor, stupid girl. What's happened? Why would she come here to kill herself?

LUCE (*softly*). I don't know. (*Pause.*) Dear God, help the little fool.

HELEN (*very agitated*). I can't stand the waiting. It's terrible!

LUCE (*reflecting*). We're always waiting for something, aren't we?

HELEN (*nods, but she needs to be distracted*). Talk to me, Luce.

LUCE. About what?

HELEN. About anything. About "waiting."

LUCE (*nods*). I was just thinking about something that happened to Alice when she was a little girl. When the whole, huge, immensity of her "problem" finally dawned on her for the very

first time. I think it was her fifth birthday, and her parents had arranged a little party over at the house, and it was wonderful. But when it was all over, and her little guests had gone outside to get their rides home, Alice heard a tremendous crash from out on the street—it was definitely a car crash. *(Pause.)* But, of course, Alice couldn't go outside—she couldn't even *look* outside. She couldn't do anything. Except wait. And wait some more.

HELEN. What about her parents?

LUCE. They'd gone outside—to make sure the little kids got their rides home.

HELEN *(understands)*. So Alice was all alone?

LUCE. She was all alone—and trapped—and all kinds of terrible things raced through her mind. She's told me about it a number of times: all her fears, and her imaginings, and the endless waiting—and that horrible feeling of restraint, of entrapment—and the sudden realization that she'd *always* be trapped.

HELEN *(comforting)*. You understand her so well, Luce, that's why you've helped her so much.

LUCE *(nods)*. Yes, but we *all* have to wait, Helen. We all have to be patient.

HELEN. So what happened?

(LUCE has lost her train of thought.)

HELEN *(cont'd)*. With the kids? And her parents?

LUCE *(remembers)*. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. It was just a loud fender-bender with a parked car across the street, and no one was hurt.

HELEN. Except for Alice.

LUCE. Except for Alice.

(Then the women hear the sound of the elevator ascending again, and LUCE faces the door. As soon as the elevator door opens and closes, she opens the workroom door, and MICHAEL carries ALICE PALMER over to the couch. ALICE, dressed in a ski jacket and jeans, seems unconscious.)

LUCE *(cont'd, to HELEN)*. There's a small towel and some water on the coffee stand.

(HELEN goes to the coffee stand as LUCE steps over to the couch and looks down at ALICE.)

LUCE *(cont'd, calmly, to MICHAEL)*. Is she breathing?

MICHAEL. Yes.

(As MICHAEL opens ALICE's coat and undoes the top button of her blouse, LUCE studies her friend very carefully. Then MICHAEL gently lifts ALICE's legs and feet onto the couch.)

MICHAEL *(cont'd, confused, to LUCE)*. What's going on?

(As LUCE responds, there's noise from the stairwell, and eventually LUCAS RIKER, wearing an old navy peacoat, rushes into the workroom. Out of breath from running up the stairs, LUKE stops by the computer stand and watches with concern.)

LUCE. Do you think she's had a seizure of any kind?

MICHAEL. I don't think so, but she seems pretty stiff—kind of spastic. And she might have fainted; she was definitely awake when I broke in the car.

(LUCE says nothing and reaches down to feel ALICE's forehead. Then HELEN arrives with a small wet towel.)

LUCE. Try to talk to her, Helen.

(Then LUCE steps over to the phone, hits a number and presses the button for the speaker phone. All the time, her eyes are on ALICE.)

HELEN *(patting ALICE's forehead with the towel)*. Alice? Are you all right, dear?

ALICE *(suddenly opens her eyes in anger)*. Leave me alone, you bitch!

(Then ALICE knocks HELEN's hands away, and HELEN backs away from the couch.)

NURSE *(voice from speaker phone)*. Dr. Ramsey's office.

LUCE *(calmly)*. Marsha, it's Luce. Alice was outside for awhile. Should I call an ambulance?

Laguna Beach, Ohio

By
MALCOLM MACDONALD

Laguna Beach, Ohio was premiered by Stage Right Productions at 2nd Street Theater in Bend, Ore., on March 25, 2016, with the following cast:

Will..... Jim Wurm
Eva Martinez..... CJ Wurm
Archy.....Shane Ketterman
Dove..... Fred Giacomini
Marsha..... Patricia West-Del Ruth
Lizzy Kate Andrews

Production:

DirectorRick Jenkins
Assistant Director/Production Designer Kelley Ryan
Music ConsultantMike Ficher
Technical Director/Sound and LightsShaun Limbocker
Lighting Assistant Jaje Fischer
Stage Manager Lori Lampe
Set Design Sandy Klein, Gary Loddo, Suzan Noyes
Costumes/Props..... Kelley Ryan
Running Crew Raechel Gilland
Set Painting and Construction..... Suzan Noyes, Sandy Klein,
Gary Loddo, Ed Dickey, Lori Lampe,
Kim Page, Greg Thoma, Kelley Ryan,
Nancy Scher, Samantha Mooney

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“*Laguna Beach, Ohio* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Stage Right Productions at 2nd Street Theater in Bend, Ore.”

Laguna Beach Ohio

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

LIZZY: Smart, sharp, manic.

ARCHY: Stylish, dramatic, fabulous.

DOVE: Lifelong surfer and stoner.

WILL: Solid, stoic, thoughtful.

MARSHA: Will's wife. Plump, happy.

EVA: An old classmate who was a sexpot in high school.

CHARACTER NOTES

All characters are in their 50s. LIZZY, ARCHY, DOVE and WILL were best friends in high school.

SETTING

The living room of an old Spanish-style bungalow in Laguna Beach, Calif. The decor is shabby, comfy and artistic. The living room spills downstage to a veranda with deck chairs, potted succulents and surfboards.

The house sits on a bluff, so when the actors look out toward the audience, they are looking out at the ocean.

Laguna Beach, Ohio

ACT I

Scene 1

(January 2, 2013. An old Spanish bungalow in Laguna Beach, Calif., filled with art, mementos and shabby furniture. The living room spills out onto the veranda.)

LIZZY enters, carrying bags.)

LIZZY. Hellooo! We made it. Anyone here? Dove? *(Stops to admire the view.)* Oh, my god.

(Offstage, ARCHY is belting a classic Broadway show tune timed to make his grand entrance, which he makes clutching a bottle of champagne. LIZZY ignores him.)

ARCHY. Where is everyone?! Some grand entrance! Why do I bother?

LIZZY. Archy, shut up and look at this view!

ARCHY. Gorgeous! The ocean is glittering. Gonna be a spectacular sunset. I can't believe we're here. Look at this house!

LIZZY. Everything's the same. Like his parents still live here.

ARCHY. Frozen in time like a Bohemian butterfly wing in amber. While the rest of the OC has become hideous, condo by condo. *(He flops on the couch.)* Lizzy, be a doll and open the bubbly. I have to unwind from that insane traffic.

LIZZY. Nothing's changed: the paintings, the fireplace, even the smell. Such memories. I lost my virginity here—

ARCHY. In this house?!

LIZZY. On this couch.

ARCHY. Aaagh! *(Jumps to his feet.)* Sorry, I just find hetero sex a little gross.

LIZZY. Yes, it was.

ARCHY. It's the same damned couch thirty years later?! Oh well. *(Flops back down.)*

LIZZY. Being here ... I feel like I'm seventeen again. *(She pops the champagne.)*

ARCHY. Happy New Year! Happy new life in paradise. Where's your glass?

LIZZY. I'm back on the wagon.

ARCHY. How dreadful! You're so much more pleasant after a cocktail or two.

LIZZY. Isn't everything? No, at Thanksgiving, my sweet little niece said, "Aunt Lizzy, you are a messy and obnoxious drunk."

ARCHY. What a horrible creature! Young people today don't know how to have fun! No smoking, no drinking, no gluten ...

LIZZY. I know, but ... I just can't anymore.

ARCHY. Well, good for you, Elizabeth.

LIZZY. Thanks for your faux compassion.

ARCHY. Is there any other kind? Cheers! *Toujours gai, toujours gai!* *(Savors the champagne.)* God, this is heaven. I can feel my shoulders un-knotting like reverse macramé.

LIZZY. Where is everyone?

ARCHY. Maybe Dove took Will and Marsha down to the beach.

LIZZY. Marsha. Darling Marsha. *(She imitates MARSHA's giggle.)*

ARCHY. Now, don't be mean.

LIZZY. I just hope she doesn't get all "praise the Lord" on us.

ARCHY. I love Marsha.

LIZZY. Oh, come on. That giggle?! *(She imitates MARSHA's giggle again.)*

ARCHY. I like it! She's enthusiastic.

LIZZY. Cut the PR spin. She's a cow ... A nice cow.

ARCHY. She raised three kids in Ohio, what do you expect?

LIZZY. Let's just agree to disagree. I know you two have this "thing."

ARCHY. You'd better get over it, girl, or this whole plan will go up in smoke—

LIZZY. I know. I'll be good. *(Beat.)* I just always thought Will would end up with someone more ... exotic.

ARCHY. Ohio is very exotic! I opened a ballet with Baryshnikov in Cincinnati. Trust me, it's another world.

LIZZY. Said the man who lives in a penthouse on Manhattan's Upper East Side. That's another world.

ARCHY. Darling, that's the *only* world. That, and Paris ... and this house.

LIZZY. Have you ever been to Thailand? You would love it. I did a month-long meditation retreat above Chiang Mai—

ARCHY. I'm more of a Western Hemisphere boy. Just promise me you won't get into it with Marsha. She was so adorable back in the day. She just hasn't aged well. Anyway, Will's put on a few pounds himself.

LIZZY. I guess that's all you can do in Ohio—eat.

ARCHY. That is one of the great tragedies of our time. Will had the hottest body in high school ... To let that go. Such a pity.

LIZZY. I was too intellectual to notice those things back then.

ARCHY. Oh, puh-leeze! You don't remember his chest, his abs, his thighs ... Our champion swimmer. Remember the state finals?

LIZZY. When he pulled off his swim cap, and his long blond hair tumbled down like a Botticelli angel.

ARCHY. The Golden Boy. (*Indicating with his fingers.*) He beat Dove by *this* much. I was so proud to be their friend.

LIZZY. Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack.

(DOVE enters in a wetsuit, holding a surfboard. He is still wet.)

DOVE. Texas Jack, at your service, ma'am.

ARCHY. Dove! Darling Dove! Look at YOU! I would hug you, but this is a \$400 shirt.

DOVE. Seriously?!

LIZZY. I'll hug you! (*She does.*) Oh, what a beautiful man-child you are.

DOVE. I meant to be here to greet you. But the waves got too good. Where's Will?

ARCHY. Apparently, everyone's on "Surfer Time."

DOVE. Right on! So psyched to see you guys. Let me jump in the shower, then I'll make some margos.

(DOVE puts his board on the veranda and sheds his wetsuit.)

ARCHY. Dove's margaritas! So many wonderful memories.

LIZZY. And a few horrible ones.

ARCHY. Lizzy has made a Middle Eastern feast. Our car is filled with hummus and pita and baba ghanoush!

DOVE. Sweet! Did you do grape leaves?

LIZZY. Of course, sweetie, just for you.

DOVE (*rubbing his flat belly*). Mmmmmmm mmm ...

ARCHY. Dude!

DOVE (*cutely mocking him*). Yes, dude.

ARCHY. How is it possible that you have zero percent body fat?
And abs!! It's not fair.

DOVE (*teasing*). What's it like, Archy ... being in your fifties?

ARCHY. Screw you! You're older than all of us.

LIZZY. But he looks ten years younger.

ARCHY. Speak for yourself, bitch!

LIZZY. Go get ready Dove. Should I try to call Will?

ARCHY. No!! Put your phone away. Turn it off! There were never any cellphones in this house. I turned mine off hours ago. Let those drama queens fill up my voice mail.

DOVE (*exiting*). Far out! I LOVE that. Let me throw on some clothes so I can get the margos ready before Will and Marsha— (*Stops.*) Oh, and by the way, we might have another special guest drop by: Eva Martinez.

ARCHY. NO! Eva Martinez!!

LIZZY. Who's Eva Martinez? I don't watch TV.

DOVE. "Eve."

ARCHY. Eve ... "Eve Mártiness!"

LIZZY. Eve Mártiness?! That slut from high school with the big boobs that all the boys were drooling over?

ARCHY. Not all the boys!

LIZZY. How is this possible, Dove?

DOVE. I bumped into her yesterday in the health food store. Is that a trip?! She's here in Laguna for the weekend, so I told her to drop by for a drink.

LIZZY. But ... why is she "Eva Martinez"?

ARCHY. She's Mexican. I always liked her. Such a naughty girl.

LIZZY. Eve Mártiness was Mexican?? Does Will know about this?

DOVE. That she's Mexican?

LIZZY. That she's coming over. Today!

DOVE. No, it was just spur of the moment. No biggie. She seems really cool.

ARCHY. Forget that. How does she *look*? She wasn't the most beautiful girl in school, but she was definitely the hottest.

LIZZY. It wasn't a very big school.

ARCHY. What's she look like, Dove?

DOVE. I don't know ... like a middle-aged woman, I guess. Baggy sweatshirt, baseball cap ... She's cool—

LIZZY. I hate to be the mother hen here, but this is so important.

We've got business to discuss, and ... Will is going to freak—

ARCHY. Calm down, Lizzy. I agree with Dove, it's no biggie.

(ARCHY sits on the couch.)

LIZZY. It is a massive biggie! Will and Marsha ... and Eve! I mean, she was Will's "first" ... She deflowered him right here—

ARCHY. Here!?! *(Jumps up from couch.)*

LIZZY. No, on the terrace.

DOVE. What? Are you shittin' me?

ARCHY. Oh come on, Dove, you knew that.

DOVE *(trying to be cool)*. No. I didn't. When was that?

ARCHY. Prom night. It was a total scandal!

DOVE. Wow. Can't believe Will never told me!

LIZZY. He never told anyone. I told Archy. Will was embarrassed. I mean, Eve was hot, but dumb as wood.

ARCHY. She *was* hot. Like a horny little Raquel Welch.

DOVE. He told you, Lizzy?

LIZZY. What difference does it make! The point is, Will and Marsha and Eve ... It's not a good idea!

DOVE. Yeah, fine. I'll just call her and tell her not to come.

LIZZY. Yes.

ARCHY. No! There's nothing better than a surprise guest. It'll be fine. One drink—just to get a look at her. Believe me, Marsha won't care.

LIZZY. But Will *will*!! Call her Dove.

ARCHY. No! I absolutely forbid it! Can't we just "be here now," communicate face to face. I mean, isn't that why we're all here tonight? To let it all hang out and see if we can do this thing? Now, go! I'm desperate for a margarita.

(DOVE exits.)

LIZZY. Eve Mártiness was Mexican? But she was kind of blonde.

ARCHY. So was I.

LIZZY. This is a terrible idea. What is with you? “No phones!” “Be here now.”

ARCHY. Oh come on, it will be fun. Aren’t you just a little curious to see how her body has ... evolved?

LIZZY. No, I’m not! Stop being such a fag. (*Nervous, vulnerable.*) I hated that girl in high school— And, Archy, this is too important. (*Beat.*) Tell me the truth. Do you honestly believe this deal can happen?

ARCHY. Yes! Would I fly out here if I didn’t? Will and I have been in communication for months and he’s filled me in—

LIZZY. So fill me in, please!

ARCHY. You have to relax, darling. Seriously. I just want Will to explain it. He’s figured it out ten different ways with spreadsheets and contracts. My lawyer was very impressed. (*Taking her hand.*) It’s totally doable. But ...

LIZZY. But what?

ARCHY. Just that, ultimately, it’s all up to Will.

LIZZY. And Marsha.

WILL. Hello! We made it.

(WILL appears at the door, followed by MARSHA, who lets out a squeal and runs to hug ARCHY.)

ARCHY. Marsha!

MARSHA. Archy, you gorgeous beast!

(WILL and LIZZY embrace.)

LIZZY. Oh, Will. Look at you.

MARSHA. Hi, Lizzy. It’s been too long. You look wonderful.

LIZZY. And you ... Your hair is perfect.

MARSHA. You’re too kind. (*Giggles.*)

LIZZY (*aside*). It wasn’t a compliment.

WILL (*embracing ARCHY*). Marsha’s right. You are a gorgeous beast.

MARSHA. Oh ... this house! The view! It’s just ... heaven. And look at us, January second and we’re in shirtsleeves! (*To ARCHY.*) And that shirt is divine, by the way.

WILL. So ... tell me everything you guys. What are we drinking?

ARCHY. Champagne.

WILL. Bring it!

LIZZY (*exiting to the kitchen*). I'll find some more glasses.

ARCHY (*following her out*). I want to see the kitchen.

(*MARSHA savors every detail.*)

MARSHA. I love this fireplace. Look at these tiles.

(*WILL stands in the center, taking it all in, transfixed.*)

WILL. This house ... this house.

(*MARSHA smiles radiantly.*)

MARSHA. I love it.

ARCHY (*entering with glasses*). The kitchen is exactly the same.
I'm dying!

WILL. Where's Dove?

ARCHY (*pouring champagne*). In the shower. He just arrived five minutes ago, dripping wet like Venus on the half-pipe. He's going to make margos, but let's have a quick toast.

MARSHA. Oh, yes! And Lizzy?

LIZZY (*entering*). Lizzy is drinking Tab.

(*ARCHY makes an "ugh" face.*)

MARSHA. Good for you, Lizzy.

LIZZY. Dear, lord!

MARSHA. Oh, and we just bought a dozen tamales—

ARCHY. I *live* for tamales.

WILL. That's what I love about California. This neighborhood is filled with million dollar houses, but you can still buy homemade tamales out of the back of someone's pick-up.

LIZZY. NO tamales! Don't even *think* of taking them out of your car.

MARSHA. You don't like tamales?

LIZZY (*agitated*). I love tamales, Marsha. But I told you guys I was making Middle Eastern food.

WILL. We just happened upon them. They're fresh.

MARSHA. No, Will. Tamales don't fit. Sorry, Lizzy, we'll keep them in the trunk.

ARCHY (*raising his glass*). Well, that's settled ... Here's to dear old friends.

WILL. Should we wait for Dove?

ARCHY. Darling, this is just a little "pre-toast." Like when we used to "pre-drink" before going to a party.

(MARSHA giggles.)

LIZZY. To the best friends I ever had, and ... Marsha.

ALL. Salud! Cheers! Hear, hear!

WILL. This champagne is amazing.

ARCHY. It better be, Bernadette Peters gave it to me.

MARSHA. Oh, I love her.

LIZZY. So where are you guys staying?

MARSHA. At the Ritz Carlton—just a few miles down the road. It is gorgeous!

LIZZY. Wow, I guess teachers do pretty well in Ohio.

WILL. Archy got us a ridiculous price. Why aren't you guys staying there?

LIZZY. Because we're staying here!

MARSHA. Archy, can I see the kitchen?

ARCHY. You must! Classic 1920s California ... (*Leading her off.*)
But you've been here before ...

(LIZZY and WILL take each other in. She gives him another quick hug.)

LIZZY. So, this house, huh? When was the last time you were here?

WILL. Fifteen years ago. That time we brought the kids to Disneyland.

LIZZY. That was fifteen years ago?! We haven't seen each other in fifteen years? How is that possible?

WILL. Well ...

LIZZY. But it feels ... the same, doesn't it? Being in this house.

WILL. It does.

(A moment.)

LIZZY. So all three kids are in college now?

(They migrate to the terrace.)

WILL. Our oldest already graduated and is now a financial advisor. Susie's a senior at SMU, and Jake is a freshman at Ohio State. So the nest is empty.

LIZZY. I just got a new kitten, since Sasha died. Did you know Sasha died? She was 17 years old. Boy, I forgot how much work kittens are. You can't imagine.

WILL. No.

LIZZY. I'm just so happy we're all here together.

(MARSHA and ARCHY return.)

LIZZY *(cont'd)*. The four Musketeers reunited—

MARSHA. DOLPHINS! Look, you guys, DOLPHINS! *(They all react.)* I have never seen dolphins in nature!

ARCHY. They're so sleek. Look, a baby!

MARSHA. Ooooh.

LIZZY. I think this is a cosmic sign. The dolphins are blessing this reunion ... this union.

(DOVE enters, sneaks up on WILL and grabs him hard as if to push him off the edge.)

WILL *(shaken, but grinning)*. Damn you! Give me a heart attack! *(They share a warm bear hug.)* Look at you, you dick. You look ten years younger than us.

ARCHY. Speak for yourself!

MARSHA *(hugging DOVE)*. Oh ... It's so good to see you! I'm just over-flowing right now. Look, dolphins!

DOVE. Yeah, they cruise by every afternoon.

ARCHY. We have to go down to the beach for sunset.

WILL. Definitely!

DOVE. Of course!

LIZZY *(smelling DOVE)*. Is that patchouli or weed?

DOVE. Welcome to the Hotel California! *(They laugh.)* Who's ready for a margo?

WILL. Relax, we're fine.

DOVE. No, I already squeezed the lemons, it's ready to go.

(DOVE exits, followed by MARSHA.)

MARSHA. I want to see how you make them.

LIZZY. So, Will ... You tell him, Archy. Before she gets here.

WILL. Before who gets here?

ARCHY. Darling Dove, always one to keep us on our toes, ran into an old high-school friend yesterday, and invited her by for a quick margo.

WILL. That's great. Honestly, that's what I miss about this life, random people dropping by, adding to the mix.

(ARCHY smiles "I told you" at LIZZY.)

LIZZY. Yes, Darling Dove invited Eve Martínez.

WILL. Funny. You're messing with me, right?

(Sound of the blender from the kitchen.)

LIZZY. Archy thought it was a fabulous idea.

WILL *(anger bubbling up)*. How did that happen? Jesus, Dove! What an idiot.

LIZZY. I told him to call her and tell her not to come.

WILL. Thank god!

(Doorbell rings.)

ARCHY. But, he didn't. *(Calling out.)* I'll get it!

(DOVE and MARSHA come out with drinks. ARCHY opens the door.)

ARCHY *(grandly)*. Eva? Eva Martinez?!

EVA. Archy?! Oh my god!

(They kiss on the cheeks while everyone else is paralyzed.)

Wash, Dry, Fold

By
NEDRA PEZOLD ROBERTS

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

Mick Mahoney David 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 Design Paul Braun
Stage Manager Daena Sisk

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), 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:

“*Wash, Dry, Fold* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Chicago Street Theatre in Valparaiso, Ind.”

For my Uncle Cliff

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 One 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.

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.

TRUDY. Sweet can rot your teeth, kid.

(ENOLA enters, scowling but bristling with energy. She glances at ARLENE, then aims her impatience straight at TRUDY.)

ENOLA. Did the detergent supply come this morning?

TRUDY. It'll be here tomorrow.

ENOLA. Tomorrow? We can't wait till tomorrow; our inventory's almost gone. We need an order of bleach, too. Did you speak to our supplier, tell them we need that delivery?

TRUDY. The guy said they'd be here tomorrow.

ENOLA. What time tomorrow? Did you tell him we need that shipment first thing?

TRUDY. Why no, Enola. I told him to take his sweet time. We didn't want to inconvenience his driver.

ENOLA. This ain't funny.

TRUDY (*sighs*). They had another mix up with our account. Claimed your last two payments were late. I told them to check again because you pay all your bills on time.

ENOLA (*slapping things around in frustration*). Tomorrow. That's no way to run a business. You promise a delivery, you make that delivery on time. People are supposed to live up to their commitments, do what they said they'd do.

TRUDY. Relax. He said the delivery will be here tomorrow. If it isn't, you can shoot him.

ENOLA. You're the one who likes to shoot people.

TRUDY. Thanks for that reminder. (*Faking confusion.*) By the way, where did I put my gun again?

ENOLA (*grabbing a broom and vigorously starting to sweep*). Don't joke about serious faults, Trudy. No amount of smart mouth makes them funny. That kinda sass only leads to trouble, something you're way too familiar with and I just don't need anymore.

TRUDY. Just trying to save you from boredom around here.

(Grabbing the dustpan and following alongside ENOLA's broom, ARLENE studies the two women as if watching a tennis match.)

ENOLA. Hmmpf. As for savin', I've been savin' *you* from yourself for years. Bailin' you out of your messes since you were eight and you tried usin' Momma's cotton underpants as cleanin' rags at the church service day. I'm tired of it. You're too old to be this needy.

TRUDY (*deadly quiet*). Say again?

ENOLA (*not backing down from the familiar quarrel*). You heard me.

TRUDY (*standing, her body locking tight*). Just what is it you think you've saved me from?

ENOLA (*ready and eager to deliver the list of TRUDY's sins*). Oh, I don't know. How about the time you released the parking brake on Daddy's car and rolled it into a telephone pole. *I had to take the blame because I was supposed to be watching you.*

TRUDY. I was four years old, for chrissake!

ENOLA. Don't take the Lord's name in vain. (*Warming to a familiar subject.*) Then there was that little matter of you liftin' twenty dollars from Mama's purse when you were in high school so you could sneak off to hear that blues band at Jazz Fest. I had to convince her she musta misplaced that money. Then I used twenty of my own hard-earned dollars to let her think she "found" her misplaced money in our refrigerator. (*Smugly superior.*) I got a good memory, you know.

TRUDY (*grumbling*). That's not memory. That's holdin' a grudge.

ENOLA (*spies SLACK's empty beer bottle and her temper engages. Holding it up as a disgusting and damning piece of evidence*). And just what do you call this?

TRUDY. Why, Enola, that's called a bottle. They were invented a while back—when the earth was cooling. You must have missed that.

ENOLA. Did Slack bring this beer into my laundromat?

TRUDY. The beer is gone, Enola. That there is the empty bottle.

ENOLA. You know good and well I don't allow this sinfulness in my place of business! I told both of you that a million times. No discussion!

TRUDY. Calm down, Enola. Slack's got a weakness, but it's not sinful.

ENOLA. This is a place of *business*. I've rubbed my knees raw prayin' for that man's salvation—yours, too—every mornin' at six o'clock mass. Every mornin'. But I can't save someone who won't repent and ask for forgiveness.

TRUDY (*aside*). Well, thank the Lord for that.

ENOLA (*glowers at TRUDY for a long moment*). I'm goin' to check what's left of our supplies in the store room. You can put those idle hands to use and finish sewin' on those missing buttons.

TRUDY (*muttering*). Idle my ass.

ARLENE (*as ENOLA exits, ARLENE lets out a long breath*). Wow. Somebody must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed.

TRUDY. Every side of the bed is the wrong side in Enolaland.

ARLENE. She seems really upset.

Gracefully Ending

By
A.J. DELAUDER

Gracefully Ending was premiered by Theatre Arlington in Arlington, Texas, on July 1, 2016, with the following cast:

Beth.....Lindsay Hayward
Andrew.....Parker Fitzgerald
Margret..... Sherri Britton
Hank.....Dave Harper
Dr. Jimenez Omar Padilla

Production:

Director Jim Johnson
Stage Manager Ashley Moseley
Scenic Design/Technical Director..... Anthony Curtis
Lighting Design Kyle Harris
Sound DesignBill Eickenloff
Costume Design Costumes by Dusty
Properties Cathy Prichett
Scenic Artist..... Roxanne Mather
Sound Operator Fay Brewer
Backstage CrewMaria Pope
Graphic DesignerJewel Kissell
Photographer Eric Younkin

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), 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:

“*Gracefully Ending* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Theatre Arlington in Arlington, Texas.”

Gracefully Ending

CHARACTERS

BETH: A middle-aged woman.

ANDREW: Beth's adult son.

MARGRET: Beth's elderly, widowed mother.

HANK: Margaret's deceased husband.

DR. JIMENEZ: A local practitioner from Nicaragua.

TIME: 2009

PLACE: Margaret's rural, mountain home in West Virginia.

For Dorotha and Donna

Gracefully Ending

ACT I

SCENE 1

(December, 2009.

As the lights come up, BETH is sweeping in the kitchen. She sweeps up a pile of dirt and looks around for a dustpan. Eyeing the dustpan across the room, she retrieves it and begins struggling to single-handedly sweep the pile into the dustpan.

After three or four attempts, she succeeds and empties the pan into an empty trash bag.

ANDREW enters during the process and watches her strained efforts. He holds several boxes in his arms. BETH finishes, stands up and catches his stare.)

BETH. No, it's fine. I'll take care of it. Don't worry about helping.

(Looks at her watch.) Something happen to your car?

ANDREW *(sets down the boxes)*. No. My car is fine.

BETH. I thought we agreed to meet at six.

ANDREW. There wasn't any agreement. You commanded me to be here.

BETH. Well, I release you. Go on home.

(BETH crosses into the bedroom, retrieves some clothes and reappears a few seconds later. She dumps the clothes on the floor of the living room. ANDREW stares, unmoving.)

BETH *(cont'd)*. Bring me one of those boxes.

(He does so.)

ANDREW. It's a forty-five minute drive back. I didn't come all the way over here just to drop off a few boxes. *(He takes off his jacket and puts it on the coat rack by the door.)* Where do you want me to start?

(BETH points to a pile of magazines in the middle of the living room.)

BETH. Take a trash bag from the kitchen and go through those.

(He does so.)

ANDREW. What do you want to do with them?

(BETH begins folding clothes and resolutely stuffing them into the box as she speaks.)

BETH. Throw them away or keep them, doesn't matter to me.

(ANDREW sits down and examines the magazines.)

ANDREW. What would I do with an *AARP Monthly*?

BETH. Then it's trash.

ANDREW. Just like that? You're not keeping any?

BETH. There's no room for nostalgia. Toss 'em.

ANDREW *(reading)*. What about *Better Homes and—*

BETH. I don't want them, Andrew. Unless you want one of them, they all go in the trash. Everything goes in the trash. *(She forcefully continues stuffing.)* Are you going to be decent and tell me your excuse?

(ANDREW tosses a magazine away.)

ANDREW. For what?

BETH *(stops and looks at him)*. Showing up an hour late.

ANDREW. I had to stop in town to get gas.

BETH. I didn't know filling up a car took so long.

ANDREW. You know how that place is—you walk in and see everyone. I got sucked into conversations.

BETH. With who?

ANDREW. Lots of people. Dane Sanders was there. Tim Stemple from out on Horton's ridge. Jessie was there with his dad checking in a deer ...

BETH *(begins throwing clothes in the box again)*. Jessie, of course Jessie was there. I'm glad to know plans with your mother fall second to gas station conversations with people like him.

ANDREW (*stops sorting*). You want help or not?

(BETH finishes packing the first box, folds it closed and begins packing a second box. Her head is down and her voice quietly seethes.)

BETH. I want a son who lives up to his word. You know, I'm flexible. I can adjust. But you have to tell me. I don't want to be out here by myself, working like an idiot, when I've got other things to do. And I especially don't want to do it when the one person who was supposed to help me is screwing around with his friends down at the gas station ... And hurry up with those magazines.

ANDREW. I'm working! I'm working! (*He resumes his work.*) Did you want an apology or something?

BETH. This past month hasn't been enjoyable for me, Andrew. And tonight's work was probably going to be the hardest.

ANDREW. It hasn't been all flowers and parties for me, either.

BETH. Oh no?

ANDREW. No ... I broke up with Chelsea yesterday.

BETH. The Lord answers prayers after all!

ANDREW. You know, if you aren't unhappy with my choice in friends, you're moaning and complaining about my choice in girls. If both of those seem to fit your bill, for some mysterious reason, then you complain about where I'm working or my job or going back to school or ... or ... anything! It just never stops with you! And I'll say this much for Jessie—at least *he* knows how to pick up a phone when I call him and ask for help.

(BETH and ANDREW continue to stuff magazines and clothes into their respective containers, the force of their efforts gradually increasing as the conversation heats.)

BETH. You shouldn't have been making that call in the first place.

ANDREW. You could've at least picked up the phone.

BETH. I don't answer calls after midnight, Andrew.

ANDREW. I don't usually make them!

BETH. Let's hope so. Getting rid of that girl was a good start. She was trailer park trash, Andrew. Plain and simple. You deserve better than that.

ANDREW. Maybe I do, maybe I don't. Either way, she wasn't trash. You made her into that *after* you found out she grew up in a trailer park. You wanted to make her into a stereotype for your own convenience.

BETH. Andrew, there's a fine line between living in a trailer park and acting like you live in a trailer park. Don't get the two confused. I never said there was anything wrong with growing up poor—there's even some pride in it. But that girl falls on the wrong side of the fence! And those tattoos! What kind of a self-respecting girl gets those? If your grandmother caught me with something like that on my body, she would have carved it off with a steak knife!

(BETH finishes packing the second box and closes it up.)

ANDREW. And everyone knows how happy she made you.

BETH. Andrew ...

ANDREW *(cinches the garbage bag)*. Don't shoot the messenger. I'm just callin' it like I see it. Or saw it, rather. And it's a little hypocritical for you to judge anyone's home situation when you barely have one yourself.

BETH. I don't need reminders.

(BETH crosses into the kitchen, grabs some plates from a cabinet, brings them back to the boxes in the living room and begins opening a third box. ANDREW also crosses to the kitchen, where he grabs an unopened garbage bag off the kitchen table. He speaks as he walks back.)

ANDREW. I wouldn't want reminders, either. Who wants to be reminded of their own faults when they're busy enjoying the troubles of others? That takes all of the fun out of it. *(Stuffs a magazine in violently.)* How is the half-way house, by the way?

(She slams a plate back on its stack, creating a loud noise.)

BETH. Stop it!

ANDREW. Oops. I said something I wasn't supposed to, didn't I?

(BETH puts her head down and then goes back to work. ANDREW watches for a second before doing the same.)

BETH (*softly*). Did you come all the way up here to belittle me?

ANDREW. You *made* me come up here, remember?

BETH. No, I *asked* you to come up, and I *told* you a time so we could meet. And because I thought you cared about your grandmother! Because I thought you might want to remember her in some way.

ANDREW. Where did you get me not caring about her? I cared about her. I still do.

BETH. You didn't seem enthused when I called.

ANDREW. You called on short notice and on the same day that I broke up with my girlfriend. I'm sorry if I didn't jump at the chance to rifle through a bunch of my deceased grandmother's magazines. I'm sorry I'm not jumping for joy over the prospects of divvying up a bunch of ancient khakis from the seventies. Then again, I'm not the one who needed a place to live, am I? But, I'll tell you what—I did at least pick up the phone when you called.

BETH. Please. I don't want to fight, just a reason.

ANDREW. But you wanted an apology. You always want me to apologize.

BETH. I just wanted some help. But you're right—this is going to be my house and it's my responsibility. So, if you're unhappy, you don't have to stay.

ANDREW. Fine.

(ANDREW goes to exit and is nearly out the door before BETH speaks.)

BETH. Wait, Andrew ... I ...

ANDREW (*turning*). What is it now? You got something else you need to get off your chest? Don't like my clothes? Maybe my shoes aren't the right color? What?

(BETH reaches into her pocket and pulls out a bottle of prescription pills.)

BETH. No. I—I found this under the counter.

ANDREW. What are those?

BETH. They're the meds I got for Mother, the ones she got so upset about.

ANDREW. I'm surprised they're not in the garbage.

BETH. They probably should be. Things got a bit crazy.

ANDREW. So? Big deal. Throw them away.

BETH. They were a mistake, weren't they?

ANDREW. It was a wild night. A lot of things happened ... I don't think it was a mistake. Then again, I didn't order them up, so that's for you to decide.

BETH. You know, after she passed, I blamed myself. I thought, oh my god, what if I did something that contributed to her passing away? What if they caused it? I didn't know any of the side effects.

ANDREW. There's not a jury in the world that would convict you.

(BETH sits back down at the boxes of plates and begins gently folding them shut.)

BETH. I'm not worried about going to jail, Andrew. It's not like that. I simply wanted to, I don't know—It was all I could think of. Maybe it was unoriginal ...

ANDREW. The whole country is messed up, believe me. It's totally unoriginal. But giving an old woman anti-depressants isn't illegal.

BETH. There's just so much that you didn't know about her and I did.

(She finishes closing up the boxes and tries to lift the plate box. He crosses to her and takes it. She then grabs the remaining two boxes of clothing.)

ANDREW. You can't know everything ... Where are we taking these boxes?

BETH. Out to the porch. I'm taking them to the Salvation Army tomorrow ... Andrew, I knew more about her than she knew about herself, especially at the end. She was losing it. I had to do something.

ANDREW. I know. I was there.

(They walk into the mudroom and set down the boxes.)

BETH. But it was so much more. *(Turning back around and looking inside.)* Oh, grab those magazines. We'll take them down to the fire pit. I don't want to trip over them all night.

ANDREW. OK.

(ANDREW crosses back into the living room and grabs the bags of magazines. She speaks to him as he crosses.)

BETH. Now, like I was saying, you only witnessed a portion of it. I was the one who came over first and discovered her ... Well, you wouldn't believe it, but I'll get to that. Anyway, I had gotten a call that morning from Tom and Anita, from down the road, and they said that the night before they saw her lights on at two in the morning and became concerned ...

(ANDREW crosses out of the living room and the stage lights go down slightly. MARGRET appears opposite and slowly begins entering while holding an old military jacket. BETH closes the door behind ANDREW once he crosses, and they slowly begin exiting through the mudroom.)

BETH *(cont'd)*. Tom came over and found her face down in the middle of the kitchen floor. She had ... dooty on herself, I suppose that's the polite terminology, and she wasn't in her night gown. He cleaned her up and put her into bed.

(BETH and ANDREW exit. BETH continues in voice over.)

BETH *(cont'd, V.O.)*. But she never gave a reason for the accident. I was scared when I found out, because Tom and Anita were going South the next day, and Mother would've been left alone out here on the farm, not to mention there was that horrible snowstorm coming in. I knew I had to help her in some way ...

(Lights fade.)

SCENE 2

(November, 2009. One month before.

The stage is now set without the magazines and without the boxes. A wild, almost jazz-like clarinet solo begins. MARGRET sits in her chair, staring at the jacket and slowly swaying back and forth.

BETH enters unnoticed, holding two white lunch bags, watching the dance. As BETH speaks, the music slowly dies out.)

BETH (*loudly*). Mother?

(*MARGRET stops swaying.*)

MARGRET. Oh.

(*BETH comes to her side.*)

BETH. What are you doing with Daddy's jacket?

MARGRET. What?

BETH (*loudly*). I said, what are you doing with Daddy's jacket? It shouldn't be out.

MARGRET. I was just ... What are you doin' here?

BETH. It's Saturday.

(*MARGRET hangs the jacket on a coat rack near the kitchen door.*)

MARGRET. It's what?

BETH. It's SATURDAY. I BROUGHT FOOD.

MARGRET. Say again? I didn't realize it was—

BETH (*still loudly*). Mother, where is your hearing-aid?

MARGRET. I put it on the ... it's on the ... (*Looks around and gestures.*) It's on the table.

(*BETH gets it for her.*)

BETH. Will you put it in? For my sake, please?

MARGRET. I don't need it. (*She puts the device in anyway.*)

BETH. There. Better?

MARGRET. I didn't need it.

BETH. Sure. Let's try this again. I said I brought food.

MARGRET. Well, good. Is it from the Woodmill?

BETH. Yes, but I want you to know I had to wait for nearly half an hour to get it. The place was packed to the gills.

(*MARGRET sits at the kitchen table.*)

MARGRET. It's morning time. Fannie always has a good crowd in the morning.

BETH. She needs to hire more staff. Why don't we try the new place out on Lake road?

MARGRET. Absolutely not. I've been eatin' food from the Woodmill for a long time, and I don't have any plans on changin' now. What'd you get me?

(BETH joins her at the table and hands her one of the food bags.)

BETH. A BLT, what else? Fannie put an extra pickle in there.

MARGRET. Of course she did. She always does. She's a sweetheart, that Fannie.

BETH. She'd be more of a sweetheart if she hired a few staff members.

(MARGRET begins eating with moderate success. BETH watches for a second and then unwraps her food.)

BETH *(cont'd, looking at MARGRET's bandaged arm)*. What happened to your arm?

MARGRET. What?

BETH. Don't start playing that again. I know you can hear me. I said what happened to your arm.

MARGRET. It's nothin'. Nothin' to worry about.

BETH. Mother!

MARGRET. I said not to worry about it. Eat your food.

BETH. I'm not ten years old. I want to know what happened.

MARGRET. If I tell you, will you let it be?

BETH. Probably not.

MARGRET. Well, I was walkin' back to the bedroom, and I ran right into the bedroom door frame. I suppose I lost my balance a bit. Didn't realize I'd hurt myself till I looked down and saw a little blood drippin' out. Then I went into the bathroom and bandaged it up ... And that's all there is to it. See? Nothin' to worry about.

BETH. Uh huh.

MARGRET. Did you happen to talk to Fannie today?

BETH. She was too busy. Sent the food out. I'll try and talk to her the next time I'm in ... So, you just bumped into the door frame?

MARGRET. Yep.

BETH. Seems like you must've bumped it pretty hard to draw blood.

MARGRET. I guess I did. Like I said, I didn't realize it until I looked down ... Did I ever tell you that Fannie and me accidentally got goosy once at the Harvest festival? We were there to meet this fella by the name of Rod from Tunnelton—

BETH. Yes, you've told me. At least a dozen times. Now, how did you wrap up your arm? Are there blood marks on the floor between the bedroom and the bathroom?

MARGRET. Why, no ... I suppose I wrapped my hand around it and hurried to the sink. There wasn't much blood. It's just a scrape.

BETH. But you said you saw it dripping?

MARGRET. I know what I said. How is work at the bank?

BETH. It's great. Fine. Business as usual. But—

MARGRET. How is everything else? You seein' anybody?

BETH. Only you, if that counts.

MARGRET. You oughta find yourself a nice fella, like that Shaffer boy. You ever call him like I told ya to?

BETH. Daniel Shaffer wouldn't stoop to pay me attention.

MARGRET. But he's a good man, got a good job at the university. He's smart.

BETH. I wouldn't know the first thing to say to him.

MARGRET. How about starting with "hello"?

BETH. Drop it, Mother.

MARGRET. But it wouldn't hurt you to—

BETH. Mother.

MARGRET. All right. Then read me the paper.

BETH. Right now?

MARGRET. No, next month.

BETH. I don't appreciate being commanded.

MARGRET. Are ya gonna read me the paper or not?

(BETH pulls out the newspaper.)

BETH. Give me a second ... *(She opens it.)* The headline reads: Giant snowstorm bearing down on—

MARGRET. No, no, I don't want to hear that. Read me the obituaries.

BETH. Why? There's happier news on the front page. This snowstorm is a big deal.

MARGRET. I'm not concerned about it. Storms only matter to those out in 'em, and I ain't got plans. 'Sides, there won't be no snowstorm. The first big snow of the year can't come until the river is high, and it ain't been rainin'.

The Emperor of North America

By
THOMAS HISCHAK

The Emperor of North America was first produced by the Silver Spring Stage in Silver Spring, Md., on September 16, 2016, with the following cast:

Norton I..... Ted Culler
LeoBrendan Murray
Sylvia Pamela Northup
Rita..... Lena Winter
Molly..... Lenora Spahn

Production:

Director Scott Bloom
Scenic Design..... Andrew S. Greenleaf
Costume Design..... Erin Bone Steel
Lighting..... Jim Robertson

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), 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 Emperor of North America was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by the Silver Spring Stage in Silver Spring, Md.”

The Emperor of North America

CHARACTERS

JOSHURA NORTON: the emperor.

LEO: a writer.

SYLVIA: his agent.

RITA: his lover.

MOLLY: his daughter.

NOTE: All except the actor playing Leo also appear as other characters. These characters can be played by additional actors if a larger cast is desired.

PLACE: Upstate New York and New York City. Today.

PRODUCTION NOTES: The action takes place in various locales, most of which do not require any specific set pieces or furniture. The most frequently recurring location is Leo's home, a cider mill now rustically but comfortably converted into a country house. Only the living room/study is seen. It can remain visible throughout the whole play. Lights, sound effects and sometimes a costume will indicate other locales and time periods.

The names of movie stars throughout the script should be changed, if necessary, so that they are current. There is no such thing as a translation of Tolstoy by Ellery. The passages from *War and Peace* in the script are adapted by the playwright.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Joshua Norton did exist, as did his proclamations, letters to and from famous people, promissory notes, plans for a bridge and other details. The rest of the play is fiction.

The Emperor of North America

ACT I

(Lights rise on JOSHUA NORTON, a bearded old man in a shabby 19th-century dress suit.)

NORTON. *San Francisco Bulletin*. September 17, 1856. At the peremptory request and desire of a large majority of citizens of these United States, I, Joshua Norton, formerly of Algoa Bay, Cape of Good Hope, and now for the nine years and ten months past of San Francisco, California, declare and proclaim myself Emperor of these United States; and in virtue of the authority thereby in me vested, do hereby order and direct the representatives of the different states of the Union to assemble in Musical Hall, of this city, on the first day of February next, eighteen hundred and fifty-six, then and there to make such alterations in the existing laws of the Union as may ameliorate the evils under which the country is laboring, and thereby cause confidence to exist, both at home and abroad, in our stability and integrity. Signed: Norton the First, Emperor of the United States.

(Lights down on NORTON, who exits, and lights up on LEO and SYLVIA sitting at a table in a crowded, noisy restaurant in present day New York City. LEO is late 40s, casually dressed and always a bit hyper when visiting the city. SYLVIA is late 30s, fashionably dressed, blunt of speech and a sharp native New Yorker.)

LEO. And the numbers are so confusing! They're like SAT scores. Math and verbal.

SYLVIA. I remember those tests. You never passed or failed. You just never did well enough.

LEO. Same thing with cholesterol. There's numbers for good cholesterol and numbers for bad cholesterol.

SYLVIA. Math and verbal. Sure.

LEO. If you have low numbers for the good cholesterol, it doesn't count if you have high numbers for bad cholesterol.

SYLVIA. I was always high in verbal. I'm a verbal person.

LEO. It's cockeyed math, that's what it is. One and one don't necessarily add up to two.

SYLVIA. But because my math was low it screwed up my chances for a scholarship.

LEO. I've worked with the numbers. You can't win!

SYLVIA. What are you saying, Leo?

LEO. I'm a heart attack waiting to happen. If I was fifteen years older and thirty pounds heavier, I'd already be dead.

SYLVIA. Get a better doctor, Leo. A New York doctor. Isn't that what I told you?

LEO. This woman is the best in the city.

SYLVIA. She's in Staten Island. How good can she be? Get a Manhattan doctor.

LEO. I think I'm afraid of her. She's some kind of Asian, no more than four feet high, yet she intimidates me.

SYLVIA. Get someone in Manhattan. Someone taller and not so frightening. Then you don't have to drive in. One train ride and you can see your doctor and me in one trip.

LEO. I don't know. Maybe I should get some horse doctor near home, and you can drive out to my place once in a while.

SYLVIA. I'm allergic. The one time I visited you in your grist mill, I broke out in a rash.

LEO. It's a cider mill, not a grist mill.

SYLVIA. Whatever. It's beautiful what you've done with it, but I'm allergic to something in the place.

LEO. I don't even know what grist is. It's a cider mill!

SYLVIA. Relax, Leo. You're all tense from that doctor. We've got business to discuss. I hate how we always get together right after you've just seen your doctor or been visiting your father in the old folks home or—

LEO. Nursing home.

SYLVIA. Call it what you want. But you're always a mess when you come from there. How is he, by the way?

LEO. Dad? Being nursed. That's what they do in a nursing home. He's no better, no worse.

SYLVIA. So is everybody I know. Can you relax for five minutes, stop counting your cholesterol and listen to me? If I was a lawyer this would be costing you a bundle. Unfortunately agents don't get paid by the hour. Otherwise you couldn't afford me.

LEO. He still recognizes me. But he calls me Sonny rather than Leo.

SYLVIA. Sonny. How sweet.

LEO. Sonny was our dog. The family mongrel who died thirty years ago.

SYLVIA. How old people can remember! And how is your daughter? Molly?

LEO. She's seeing some high-school dropout who takes her out in his snowmobile.

SYLVIA. Well, it'll be spring soon. Can I ask about Rita?

LEO. If you like.

SYLVIA. How is Rita?

LEO. None of your business.

SYLVIA. You ought to marry that woman. She's good for you.

LEO. Thank you, doctor. I think we've covered all civilities—dad, Molly, Rita—so we can get down to business. Unless you want to ask about my parrot Pierre.

SYLVIA. I think it was Pierre I was allergic to. Can we talk now?

LEO. Yes. Tell me how well we're doing.

SYLVIA. We're doing very well.

LEO. So you said on the phone.

SYLVIA. Your novelization of the Julia Roberts movie is selling briskly. Not like hot cakes, but briskly. If she gets nominated, we expect to see big numbers in the spring. I was in L.A. and Chicago around Christmas, and copies were on sale in every airport.

LEO. Best place for that sort of thing.

SYLVIA. Don't get snide, Leo. Especially about your own work. And Bantam Dell is going to get Bernie to design the cover for the novelization you did of Clint's movie.

LEO. Bernie Martin? Bernie "the bodice-ripper" Martin?

SYLVIA. His covers are the best. Don't carp. And Paramount wants to do a sequel to *Married Treasure* if they can get Bruce to do it for less than twenty million. But you know how he hates to do sequels, so I wouldn't hold my breath.

LEO. Better to breathe a sign of relief. *Married Treasure* was garbage.

SYLVIA. Hold your tongue, Leo, and just cash the checks like a good boy.

LEO. Actually, I've had an idea for a book—

SYLVIA. I'm not finished. There's more. (*Excited.*) I was saving it for last. Another novelization of a film. But what a film! You're going to love it, Leo. It's literary. It's big. It's perfect for you!

LEO. Let me guess. Kim Kardashian is going to play Joan of Arc.

SYLVIA. Are you going to make snide jokes or are you going to listen to me?

LEO. You'll tell me anyway.

SYLVIA. You bet I will. Are you ready for this? Three words. All I need to say is three words. *War ... and ... Peace!*

(*Pause.*)

LEO. *War and Peace.*

SYLVIA. A new movie version of *War and Peace!* I heard about it from my masseur, who got the word from a Universal exec who's in town for the Tribeca Film thingy. I called Jerry, and I think we might get in! Just think of it!

LEO. *War and Peace.*

SYLVIA. It'll be big. It's *Gone With the Wind* with snow! It's *Doctor Zhivago* without that annoying revolution! It's *Lord of the Rings* with Russian accents!

LEO. Haven't there been plenty of movie versions of *War and Peace* already?

SYLVIA. Hollywood hasn't done one since forever. And they're talking big stars, Leo. Brad with a mustache! Jennifer with her hair up!

LEO. How about Eddie Murphy as Napoleon?

SYLVIA. Laugh if you must, but this can turn into the biggest deal I've ever made for you! A giant spectacle like this ... box office bonanza ... see the movie then read the book! Can you grasp it, Leo?

LEO. Sylvia, I don't know how to tell you this but ... there's already a book version of *War and Peace.*

SYLVIA. I know. And have you picked it up lately? It's a million pages at least! No one is going to read that. Besides, the film will be different. More sex, for one thing. Computerized battles. French can-can girls. You name it, they'll put it in there. It'll sell and people will want to read it.

LEO. You want me to write a novelization of a movie based on a novel?

SYLVIA. It happens all the time. And you would be perfect for it,

Leo. You could write it. I can make this deal, you will do a terrific job, and we'll both make enough money to buy five grist mills!

LEO. I've got to think about this, Sylvia. I'm used to hack work but this ... this is a whole new level of stupidity.

SYLVIA. Think your head off if you must. But if I can snag this deal with Universal, I expect you to jump on it with me. You know how I've always looked out for you, Leo. Didn't I get you that novelization of Robin's movie just when your divorce bills came in? And the James Bond series when you needed to pay for Molly's college tuition?

LEO. Yes, Sylvia. You saved my life. You made me what I am today. Whatever that is.

SYLVIA. But keep this *War and Peace* thing under your hat. It's all in negotiation still. I hear they're trying to get Stephen King to do the screenplay.

LEO. Perfect.

SYLVIA. Before I run for my two o'clock, tell me about this idea you have for a book.

LEO. I don't want to make you late—

SYLVIA. Talk! I got three minutes. (*Looks toward window.*) Oh, it stopped raining. I'll give you five.

LEO. It probably won't interest you very much. It's nonfiction.

SYLVIA. They make movies of nonfiction. I saw *Beautiful Mind*. Pitch.

LEO. There was this man ... a lunatic, really. He lived in the middle of the 19th century—

SYLVIA. A period piece. OK ...

LEO. His name was Joshua Norton. He was a Jew, born in England, and he became a successful shipping merchant for a time. He settled in San Francisco, where he was a big name in the rice market. But poor old Norton was wiped out in the depression of 1854. Lost everything. Ended up living in a cheap boarding house where, it seems, he lost his reason.

SYLVIA. Sounds depressing. Unless Anthony plays the old guy—

LEO. Sylvia ... please.

SYLVIA. I'm listening.

LEO. One day, out of the blue, he decided to proclaim himself the Emperor of the United States. Wrote up a proclamation and sent it to all the papers. A San Francisco editor was desperate for something to amuse his readers, so he printed it, as well as all of Norton's other proclamations. It was all a joke, yet it seems that the whole city went along with the old guy. Bowed to him when he walked down the street, let him dine in restaurants without paying, that sort of thing. He even got himself a fancy uniform with a big hat and paraded around like he was ... well ... emperor.

SYLVIA. Definitely Anthony. Maybe Patrick or Sean.

LEO. Sylvia, it's a book. Just a nonfiction book. I've only begun to get into the research but I can tell you already there is no sex or violence or car chases. Just a book.

SYLVIA. Well, it sounds like interesting stuff. Let me know where it goes. It might lead to something big.

LEO. I doubt it. But it feels good to work on something that's for ... something that's my own idea. Just like a real writer.

SYLVIA. You're a real writer, Leo. You just need guidance. (*Looks off.*) Is it starting to rain again? (*Rises.*) I'll never get a cab if it does. (*Kisses LEO on the cheek.*) Must run, Leo. Keep thinking *War and Peace*. But not a word to anyone.

LEO. My lips are sealed. (*Rises.*)

SYLVIA. Love you, dear. I'll call you next week. (*Exits.*)

LEO (*sits again, heaves a sigh*). *Gone With the Wind* with snow ...

(Lights down on the restaurant, and LEO exits as lights rise on NORTON. He is now in fancy uniform.)

NORTON. October 12, 1859. In our continued effort for domestic and international stability and well being, and after sustained and vigorous self contemplation, I, Norton the First, Emperor of these United States, do hereby abolish Congress. This ineffectual body of personages has long proven to be more a detriment than a boon to the people of the nation, and it is in the best interests of all that I announce their demise. Future generations will look back on this date as a new and embracing Independence Day in which the Union was freed from the shackles of oppression. It will be written that from this day on, justice and peace prevailed during the reign of Norton the First.

(NORTON exits, and lights rise on LEO's home. The furniture is quaint without being cliché. There is a desk littered with computer equipment and papers, some solid wooden beams to remind one of the old mill's original use, and a cage with a parrot in it. LEO sits, and RITA enters with two filled wine glasses. She is in her 40s, attractive, a good listener and calming influence.)

RITA. Everyone has high cholesterol, Leo. It's the American way of life.

LEO. It's not just high cholesterol. It's all those numbers!

RITA. Good and bad. I know.

LEO. And according to the numbers, I am doomed!

RITA. But how do you feel?

LEO. Feel?

RITA. Do you feel sick?

LEO. Of course not! What does that have to do with it?

RITA. Leo, if you are going to turn into a hypochondriac, I don't know what I'll do. With all your other faults, you'll be impossible to live with.

LEO. I always warned you that I was a difficult person.

RITA. You didn't have to warn me. I knew it after ten seconds. *(Kisses him.)* Drink your pinot grigio.

LEO. Isn't this stuff poison for cholesterol?

RITA. A little wine helps you live forever. What did your doctor say about the pills?

LEO. They aren't working. In fact, they've affected my liver. I've now got the constitution of an eighty-year-old alcoholic. We're going to try new pills.

RITA. The new pills will work, they'll get your cholesterol under control, then you can get back to writing. How's Norton coming?

LEO. He's fascinating. I love the research. I just hope I can capture him on paper.

RITA. Did you tell Sylvia?

LEO. She wants either Sean Connery or Anthony Hopkins to play Noton.

RITA. I thought this was a book.

LEO. To Sylvia, a book only exists in order to be made into a movie. I'm just relieved she didn't suggest Jim Carrey.

RITA. Drink your wine. Leo, I'm afraid it's you and the microwave for dinner tonight. I've got a client who wants to see the Tudor on McCavity Drive at six o'clock.

LEO. I thought we could have dinner together.

RITA. You mean you thought I would cook dinner for you. Not tonight, love.

LEO (*testy*). If that house on McCavity is Tudor, I'm Winston Churchill.

RITA. Don't be difficult. There's plenty of choices in the freezer you can nuke.

LEO. Four half-timbered beams and two stained glass windows do not a Tudor mansion make!

RITA. I might not be back until late. The last time I showed this couple a house, we ended up counting the number of slots in the wine cellar.

LEO. I suppose these people think actual Tudors lived in upstate New York.

RITA. The man is a college professor. Cornell, I think.

LEO. For your sake, I hope he's not history. Or architecture.

RITA. Computers. What else?

LEO. Then by all means tell them it's real Tudor. Let it slip out that Anne of Cleves spent the Fourth of July weekend there once.

RITA. You are truly in a foul mood today, Leo. Is it because of dinner?

LEO. Who can think of eating when one is dying of cholesterol overdose?

RITA. Try to keep breathing until I come back later tonight.

LEO. Are you coming back later tonight?

RITA. Do you want me to come back later tonight?

LEO. Yes, actually.

RITA. And stay the night?

LEO. Yes, to be truthful.

RITA. How sweet. I didn't think you were in a romantic mood.

LEO. I'm not. I'm scared.

RITA. Honestly?

LEO. Cross my heart. My cholesterol-saturated heart.

(The sound of the front door opening and slamming, and MOLLY enters. She is twenty-two years old, looks younger, acts older. She is pleasantly surprised to see RITA.)

MOLLY. Oh, Rita! I didn't recognize the car outside.

RITA. The company car. I hope you didn't block me. I've got to run in a second.

MOLLY. No, I'm parked behind Dad. (*Goes to the birdcage.*) Hello, Pierre. What have you got to say for yourself? (*Silence.*) Nothing.

LEO. I thought you weren't coming home after work, Molly. (*MOLLY kisses him on the cheek.*) I hope you didn't come back for dinner. Rita has to go and sell a Tudor house, and I'm microwaving some low cholesterol ice cubes.

MOLLY. I'm meeting Randy for sushi. I just stopped by to change.

RITA. And how is Randy?

MOLLY. The same.

RITA. I'm sorry to hear that.

MOLLY. Can't be helped. A year ago, while I was going through some kind of inner rebellion, I thought Randy was interesting. It didn't take long to outgrow him. What Tudor house?

RITA. The one on McCavity.

MOLLY. They're selling that as Tudor?

LEO (*triumphantly to RITA*). You see!

RITA. Well what would you call it?

MOLLY. Well ... to me it looks more like Pinocchio's house.

LEO. Bravo!

MOLLY. Hello, Pierre. Say something to Molly. (*Silence.*) Nothing.

RITA. I don't think a Cornell computer professor would want to live in Pinocchio's house. I'll stick to Tudor.

MOLLY. Must you go right away, Rita?

RITA. I should have left five minutes ago.

MOLLY. Oh ...

RITA. Why? Is something the matter?

MOLLY. No.

LEO. Rita will be coming back later.

MOLLY. I'm afraid it's going to be a long night of dealing with Randy. Some other time.

RITA. Of course. (*Kisses LEO.*) Until later then. Eat something. Please?

LEO. Yes, nurse. The wine has given me something of an appetite.

How much cholesterol is there in Pop Tarts?

MOLLY. What's all this about cholesterol?

RITA. Your father saw his doctor today.

MOLLY. That explains a lot.

LEO. No, it doesn't! I don't need any doctor to tell me I'm a walking time bomb!

RITA. Don't explode until I get back. Goodbye, Molly! Give my best to— *(Looks at her watch.)* Oh, I'm going to be late! *(Grabs her briefcase.)* And this couple is so damn punctual! Bye! *(Exits.)*

LEO *(calling out after her)*. Tell them Cardinal Wolsey once took a crap in the privy! *(Awkward pause.)* I didn't know you liked sushi.

MOLLY. I don't. But Randy does. So your cholesterol is still high?

LEO. High as a kite. Depending on how you do the math, I may crash at any moment.

MOLLY. Something tells me you're exaggerating, Dad.

LEO. Rita says I'm turning into a hypochondriac.

MOLLY. No comment. Did you see Grandpa when you were down there?

LEO. I did.

MOLLY. How's he doing?

LEO. No comment. What did you mean you had to "deal with" Randy? Is something going on?

MOLLY. You might say so. Oh, damn! I wish Rita was here. It's easier to talk to her.

LEO. Thank you.

MOLLY. You know what I mean.

LEO. Actually, I don't. What's the trouble, Molly?

MOLLY. No trouble. It's ... *(A bit too casually.)* it's just that I'm pregnant.

(Pause.)

LEO. Some people might call that trouble.

MOLLY. I don't. But there's Randy to deal with and ...

LEO. Is Randy the ... lucky dad?

MOLLY. Of course he is! What do you think I am?

LEO. Sorry. And you have to tell him tonight?

MOLLY. Hell, no. I'm never going to tell him. I just have to get rid of him once and for all. So I'm going to watch him eat sushi.

LEO. I don't know what to say.

Shades of Valor

By
KAREN L. LEWIS

Shades of Valor was first produced by Twin City Stage in Winston-Salem, N.C., on October 28, 2016, with the following cast:

Cast (in order of appearance):

Barb..... Shelley Stolaroff Segal
KittyKathryn Mobley
Rick..... Clint Blumenberg
Daniel..... Garry C. Wadell

Production:

Director Brook Davis
Scenic and Sound Designer John Shea
Costume Designer Emily N. Brink
Lighting Designer Suzanne Vaughan
Props Master Edwin H. Martinat III
Stage Manager Stephanie Guelzow
Assistant Stage Manager.....Heather Sevy

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), 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:

“*Shades of Valor* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Twin City Stage in Winston-Salem, N.C.”

Shades of Valor

CHARACTERS

BARB MARSHALL: Late 40s to early 50s. A Caucasian.

RICK MARSHALL: Barb's son. 24 years old. A second lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

KITTY PRESTON: Chic, beautifully coifed, the wife of a very important man. African American.

DANIEL PRESTON: Kitty's son. 34, but can look older.

CAPT. MASTERSON: Voice only.

TIME: New Orleans in 1981 and Vietnam in 1971.

PLACE: The living room/dining room of a house near New Orleans and various places in the past indicated by a pool of light.

PRODUCTION NOTE: When a / is used within a line, it indicates overlapping dialogue.

Dedicated to the memory of 2nd Lt. Richard E. Harlan

Shades of Valor

AT RISE: *The newly furnished, not-yet-lived-in house of DANIEL PRESTON. Decorated by his mother, it offers no insight into the man who will inhabit it. The furniture is classic to modern and all to KITTY PRESTON's taste. The front door is upstage. A swinging door L leads to the kitchen. On the dining room table is a large metal tub containing cans of soda. The ice in it long since melted, a small pond of water has collected at the tub's base, staining the table. In that water is a front door key. A banner proclaiming, "Welcome Home, Danny!!" is strung above the couch. Downstage two plain wooden chairs have been moved from the dining room table to flank the playing area. RICK MARSHALL sits in the DR chair. He wears a Vietnam-era lieutenant's uniform. He seems impossibly young and boyish. DANIEL sits in the DL chair. Approximately 34 years old, DANIEL wears a prisoner's uniform. Both men look as they did when their mothers last saw them. They do not react to each other or the world around them except as specified in the text. Their mothers are not aware of their sons' physical presence.*

(A moment of silence suddenly broken by a determined knock on the front door. Silence. Another knock; this one more insistent. Silence. Suddenly more knocking, so frenzied it seems an attempt to batter down the door.)

BARB (*offstage*). You open this door. Open it, I said! (*Rattling the doorknob.*) Open up, God damn it, or—

(BARB MARSHALL, amazed to find the door unlocked, lets herself in. She wears heels, tight pants and a blouse and carries a large purse. [Note: if the actress playing Barb IS a smoker, Barb smokes. If the actress does not smoke, the character does NOT smoke.] Rumped and hot, BARB stands in the doorway.)

BARB (*cont'd*). Hello? Who's home? Who's here? You left every damn light blazing!

(Silence. BARB steps into the room.)

BARB *(cont'd)*. Huh. Them that's got; shall waste. *(Regarding the banner.)* Well, isn't that nice. *(Calls.)* Are y'all too hung over to answer?

(BARB crosses to the tub of drinks. Takes them out one by one.)

BARB *(cont'd)*. RC. RC. Orange Crush. RC. Grape. Ginger Ale. RC. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I've crashed a nest of Baptists. Damn it all to hell.

(BARB takes a brown paper bag from her purse and enters the kitchen. Beat. The front door opens and KITTY enters. Although exhausted and worried, her makeup and hair are still perfect.)

KITTY crosses to the table, sees the key and, using her forefinger, moves it out of the water. She crosses to enter the kitchen when the door swings toward her.)

KITTY. Danny?! Danny, thank—

(BARB enters holding a glass of bourbon.)

BARB. He's not here, Mrs. Preston. At least I don't think he's here. I didn't check the whole house. I knocked and the door was open so I let myself in.

KITTY. And you are?

BARB. Aw, don't you remember me?

KITTY. I'm afraid I don't.

BARB. Well, it's not like I'm lookin' my best. I been drivin' like a crazy woman to make the party, but here I am like a headache and the shakes—the morning after. Bet it was a blow-out, what with the return of the prodigal and all.

KITTY. Are you a friend of Danny's?

BARB. Hey, ya want a drink?

KITTY. At eight o'clock in the morning?

BARB. I am not a slave to time. Anyhow, this is a festive occasion, right? *(Drinks.)* What? It's only two fingers. The way I feel, I could've poured the whole damn hand. *(Laughs.)*

KITTY. I was about to make coffee.

BARB. You sure look good, Mrs. Preston. Like you never had a care in the world.

KITTY. How do we know each other? Were you on his defense team?

BARB. Me, a lawyer? Don't I wish. You better warn your Danny-boy not to leave the door unlocked. This isn't Beverly Hills; any whacko could wander in.

KITTY. It was unlocked because Danny doesn't have a key. Danny hasn't arrived yet.

BARB. Whoa, nellie; you must be pissed. Huh? Going to so much trouble; traveling all the way here. Where's his daddy? Back at the hotel? Bet you're bunking some place swank. There's got to be fancy places 'round here for your people, huh? What am I saying? You can stay any place you want thanks to your Dr. King and LBJ. And hooray for Hollywood, right?

KITTY. I think you had better leave, Miss—

BARB. Barb. No offense meant, Mrs. Preston. Honest. I just don't think about it much—what's gone on in the world; y'all getting your civil rights, and Pres. Johnson and his Great Society and all. The last decade's slipped clean away from me. I'm just wrung out; sleep deprived really. Hell, I drove two days to get here. Would have gotten in last night if my old rattlebug—it's a VW—hadn't busted a gut in Tennessee. That fool cracker mechanic didn't even know the engine was in the back. My husband, Gus, warned me about German cars. He said, "You buy a Nazi car, and you'll live to regret it." And I do. That's maybe the one thing Gus ever got right. So why isn't Dan gonna be back in Hollywood with y'all?

KITTY. Is that where you know each other from, California?

BARB. Heck, no. I never got farther west than Kansas.

KITTY (*slightly alerted, covers*). Does Daniel have your phone number?

BARB. Wouldn't do him any good. I'm not home.

KITTY. If you'll tell me where you're staying, the name of your hotel—?

BARB. Till I see Danny I'm sleepin' in the "Bug House."—My car.

KITTY. I have no idea when he'll arrive.

BARB. You never said why Dan's gonna be living half way across the country from his mom and dad.

KITTY. Daniel has family in Louisiana; my family.

BARB. Yeah, your sisters and all. Well, he'll have a heckuva lot a freedom here, that's for sure.

KITTY (*pointedly*). I wanted him to have more privacy.

BARB. “The Big Easy.” No cares, no woes, just one big party. Let the good times roll! Hell, I’d move here myself, if I thought they’d roll my way. But with my luck those good times’d roll right over me and keep on goin’! Hey, when’s your husband coming? I must look like the dog’s dinner; don’t want to scare him.

KITTY. My husband can’t be here.

BARB. If my son was coming back to me after ten years I’d crawl over three thousand miles of hot tar to hug his neck.

KITTY. Gordon’s working.

BARB. Oh, my, he is something, that Gordon Preston. In that picture he made with Yvette—Yvette Mim—what is it?

KITTY. Mimieux.

BARB. Yeah, her. He was gorgeous—swimming in that crystal clear blue water, the white sand beach behind him. Now that is a man to be stranded on a desert island with. You are a lucky woman, Mrs. Preston.

KITTY. I’m glad you—and, it seems, most of the women in America—are fans. Gordon is devoted to his fans.

BARB. Must be strange being married to a guy that great looking; and rich and famous to boot. Every woman you meet—no matter what color they are—wondering what it’s like being you. Heck, I’d be scared he’d throw me over for one of those starlets—or even a fan—some day.

KITTY. Gordon will never leave me for another woman. He doesn’t believe in divorce.

BARB. Lucky you. How many other actors in Hollywood take their marriage vows serious? Can count ’em all on one hand, I bet.

KITTY. Forgive me, but I have a splitting headache.

BARB. Why didn’t you say so? (*Gets an Excedrin bottle from her purse.*) Take two of these— (*Pouring bourbon.*) With this shot of Jack.

KITTY. That wouldn’t be wise.

BARB. Maybe not, but it’ll cure what ails you. This— (*The booze.*) And these— (*The pills.*) And Hostess cupcakes kept me alive the last two days. If you don’t take ’em your headache’s only going to get worse.

KITTY. Just the Excedrin. Thank you. (*Chooses a soda and takes the pills.*) Where did you say you were from—Barb?

BARB. Virginia's my home.

KITTY. Oh. Then you know Gordon? You're one of his Arlington friends?

BARB. Me, a friend of your husband's? Wouldn't that be a kick in the fanny. Naw, I'm from a flyspeck in the Valley; the Shenandoah Valley—Afton.

KITTY. That's lovely country.

BARB. I guess. Yeah, for the sticks. You'd be bored stiff, I can tell ya that.

KITTY. I prefer peace and quiet.

BARB. Me, I like noise. Forget long walks in the country, give me a juke box, a bowling alley, anyplace with a little action. Hey, I watched the Academy Awards on TV last year; saw you and your husband pull up in that limousine of yours, and—

KITTY. It's not ours. We don't own it.

BARB. Your chauffeur and everybody jumping to open your car door and help you out. You looked like a movie star yourself.

KITTY. The studio sends a car and driver. We don't have a chauffeur.

BARB. Only 'cause you don't want one, right? Or your husband doesn't. Nothing stuck up about him. That's one of the reasons I like his movies. He's real down to earth.

KITTY. As I said, I'm not feeling well; so, if you'll / come back later—

BARB. / It's a helluva puzzle, huh. Your husband's a good man. I read the magazines; I keep up. He's a strong guy with old-fashioned values. And you seem nice; polite. A real lady. With parents like you—and every break in the world—how come your boy tossed it all away? You think it was just the drugs?

KITTY. I prefer not to discuss personal matters with strangers.

BARB. Sure. But you and me, we're not strangers.

KITTY. Because you “keep up” by reading movie magazines? Whatever's brought you here—

BARB. Hey! I thought we were having a friendly chat to pass the time.

KITTY. I was out most of the night searching for Danny. My nephews and I checked the station—they don't even know if he got on the train. He purchased a ticket, but ... We went to every restaurant, bar—everywhere they used to go. Before.

BARB. Did ya check with the cops? The hospitals?

KITTY. I'm exhausted and I need to be alone.

BARB. You go on up and take a nap. I'll holler when Dan shows up.

KITTY. I'm asking you—rather nicely under the circumstances—to leave.

BARB. Well, see, but here's the thing: if I sit out in my car and ambush Dan on his way in who knows how long you'll have to wait to see him? *(Beat.)* What was I saying before? Oh, yeah. I have puzzled and puzzled over this riddle. Your boy was damn lucky ... Had a daddy he could look up to and a mama he could be proud of. Too many *(Slight hesitation.)* "people" get a little money and think they can act any which way. Those "Black Power" radicals marching and throwing their fists in the air. Embarrassing our country at the Olympics—and that singer—that nasty Eartha Kitt—she took advantage of the First Lady's generosity—when Lady Bird was so liberal and friendly to the colored race—and made her cry—right there in the White House!

KITTY. Miss Kitt was entitled to her opinion.

BARB. Did she have a son or a husband in Nam? No. That radical tore into the First Lady of our land. It was shameful to your race—don't you go defending her just 'cause she's colored.

KITTY. Eartha Kitt doesn't need me to—Good God, that was over a decade ago.

BARB. I'm only saying there are folks you people can be proud of—like your husband—and others who just don't want to get along with the rest of us. You should thank your lucky stars that you married the right kind, that's all. Hell, you never sat in the back of a bus; you're nestled in furs in the back of limousines driven by white men.

KITTY. It's best for all concerned that you are not here when Daniel—

BARB. "All concerned"—get you. This is it: you and me—and his daddy, of course—are all that's concerned about your son. Nobody but us gives a hoot if he lives or dies.

KITTY. Danny has many friends—and supporters.

BARB. Bullshit. Oh, yeah, some lowlife scum latched on to him when he was the Commie whatta-ya-call-it? "Cause de jour"? Yeah, until the truth came out. Then they ran back under their rocks. But maybe you think Dan's ditched your homecoming celebration to be out partying with the Black Panthers and Eartha Kitt at some motel. Hey, that'd be something, huh.

KITTY. You know nothing about my son.

BARB. Honey, I'm an expert.

KITTY. Danny doesn't need to come back to a curiosity seeker.

BARB. You so sure he's showing up? Now that he's free maybe he's set on making a fresh start away from everything and everyone.

KITTY. You get out of this house right now.

BARB. Shoulda had him escorted here. Had one of his cousins or some kinda hired guard meet him at the prison gate.

KITTY (*crossing to phone*). Leave or be arrested; it's your choice.

BARB. You can't scare me. I haven't been scared of God or man since January 19th, 1971.

(KITTY stops dialing.)

BARB (*cont'd*). The night your boy murdered my son.

KITTY. Mrs. Marshall?

BARB. You didn't know you was throwing a surprise party, did you. Surprise.

KITTY. Barbara Marshall.

BARB. We spent sixteen days not thirty feet from one another in that Kansas courtroom. That first day you wore a navy blue suit with white piping, white hat and gloves. And when you'd cried one hanky wringing wet, you'd pull a fresh one out of your navy blue purse. I can't recall what I wore. But then, I was watching you. And your son. You look every bit as good as you did then. It's like no time's passed at all.

KITTY. It's been horribly difficult for all of us since the trial.

BARB. Really, has it? For y'all, too? Good. How about Danny?

KITTY. Danny was horrified by what happened.

BARB. By "what happened"?

KITTY. It was a horrible mistake.

BARB. Oh, yeah; your kid murdered the wrong white guy. You think that should've been points in his favor?

KITTY. Your son's death was a tragic loss. I am so very, very sorry.

BARB. Your spoiled kid doesn't get the "Hollywood treatment" in the Army, so he decides to blow an officer he doesn't like to kingdom come. Only it's my son, my boy Ricky who's asleep in that barracks. It's Ricky who gets all torn and mangled up

by those grenade fragments. He's the one they ship home in a box. And the other guy? The one your boy meant to kill? He's on the fast track to becoming a general. Did ya know that? Course not—what do you care—it was all a “mistake.” Yeah, I keep tabs on him. He and his wife and three kids live in Texas. I write him every now and then. He doesn't even have the decency to answer. I tell him, “You ought to get down on your knees every morning, noon and night and thank my boy. Because my son died for you. Yeah, that S.O.B. is living Ricky's life because your son was so messed up, he didn't murder the right white guy.

KITTY. What do you want from me, Mrs. Marshall?

BARB. From you? Nothing. Not a ding-dang thing.

KITTY. From Daniel, then.

BARB. Did he suffer in prison? It was inconvenient, but was he miserable, locked up and watched every minute? Was he scared?

KITTY. I'm not sure.

BARB. Why not? You saw him plenty; rented an apartment not twenty miles from the prison.

KITTY. Yes, I did.

BARB. Must be nice having money. Take him a lot of gifts, did you? Special “gourmet” treats? I bet you made being locked up seem like a vacation.

KITTY. Daniel wanted to pay for what he'd done.

BARB. Ten years of not being able to run with his friends, or go to nightclubs, or sit by the swimming pool. Yeah, that balances with sixty or seventy years of my son's life. That judge practically handed your boy a free pass.

KITTY. Mrs. Marshall, you heard the psychiatrists' testimony—

BARB. Yeah, yeah, it was “stress.” Stress from battle. Bullshit. Your son was a screwed up, lazy good-for-nothing that they didn't want in combat. That's why he was mopping latrines at the base and smoking dope while my son was upholding the honor of our country.

(RICK crosses into the “airport gate.” BARB joins him.)

RICK. Where's Dad?

BARB. He doesn't want people to see him like that.

RICK. He should have stayed home.

BARB. Your father wanted to come—unlike someone I could mention.

RICK. You made him come.

BARB. What kind of man doesn't see his boy off to war? And what kind of girl / can't be bothered—

RICK. / Janine wanted to come, but—I knew there'd be trouble / between you—

BARB. / Not from me, there wouldn't be.

RICK. She and I said our goodbyes in private. Well, guess this is it.

BARB. Dad and I love you, Richard. You're everything we ever wanted and hoped for in a son. You've been my life from the day you were born.

RICK. OK, Mom. I better go.

BARB. You remember, whatever happens over there, I could never love you more than I already do—and I will never, ever love you less.

RICK. I have to get on the plane.

BARB. You keep yourself safe; don't do anything they don't order you to do.

RICK. Mom.

BARB. Forget all that crap your father shoveled at you. I could kill him; worshipping Audie Murphy, dragging you to every Saturday matinee and filling your head with the “honor and valor” of battle. Nothing good can come from you getting yourself killed. Nothing, understand? Follow orders, but don't volunteer. Don't try to be a hero. We don't need medals or citations. We need you.

RICK. I'll be careful. Tell Dad not to worry.

BARB. I should have put my foot down and made him shut up about all that “guts and glory” craziness. Then he'd be in here saying goodbye instead of hiding in the car blubbering like a old woman. Or maybe you wouldn't be leaving us at all.

RICK. Mom, I took the ROTC scholarships and the money. It's time to pay my debt. I want to go. Like you say, “If we don't stop Communism in Nam the world's done for”.

BARB. I want you home again just as soon as you can be.

RICK. I'll come back, Mom. I promised Janine I would, and I will. Mom, can you set aside your differences while I'm away and look after her?

BARB. That girl doesn't need anybody or anything. She'll always land on her feet, that one.

RICK. I need you to tell me you'll watch out for her.

BARB. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Ricky. Now you play it safe over there. You look out for number one; that's what all those other fellas'll be doing, believe you me. Promise?

RICK. I promise. I'll come back.

(RICK returns to his chair as BARB rejoins KITTY.)

BARB. Hell, I've been stressed since Ricky said goodbye. You don't see me killing anybody. Not yet, any how.

(DANIEL moves to the "airport gate" as KITTY joins him.)

KITTY. They keep saying the war's nearly over—

DANIEL *(laughs)*. "Keep saying"—but all they do is ship guys out—

KITTY. Why did you enlist?!

DANIEL. And who's "they"? The politicians or the faces on the news? Oh, yeah, they never lie.

KITTY. You didn't have to enlist.

DANIEL. They would have taken me soon anyway; enlisting looks better.

KITTY. Better to whom? For whom?

DANIEL. I dunno—to the Army. For me.—And Dad didn't need any extra hassle.

KITTY. You should be an officer not an—

DANIEL *(smiles)*. You want the war won while I'm at OCS.

KITTY. Well, of course I do! This makes absolutely no sense. You do realize that? A few years ago you were marching—yelling, "Hell no, we won't go"! Now ...

DANIEL. Mom. What choice did I really have? Run off to Canada? Oh, yeah, that'd be great for us, wouldn't it.

KITTY. This is *your* life we're talking about, not your father's.

DANIEL. Gordon Preston's son a draft dodger? You know that wouldn't fly.

KITTY. Your father and I are proud of you no matter what.

DANIEL. Yeah, sure. Hey, smile, Mom. I'm off to save the world for democracy. For real.

KITTY. Why couldn't you at least have applied for Officer's Candidate School?

Get Out of Dodge

By
JEANNE DRENNAN

Get Out of Dodge was first produced at the Venice Theatre in Venice, Fla., on Nov. 3, 2016, with the following cast:

Molly Hamilton..... Heather Forte
Chip Hamilton..... Tim Wisgerhof
Caroline Hamilton..... Rebecca Holahan
Phoebe Hamilton..... Megan Hartnett
Schuyler ReedMichael Campbell

Production:

Executive/Artistic Director Murray Chase
Producing Director..... Allan Kollar
DirectorKathy J. Pingel
Assistant Director..... Rachel Weaver
Stage ManagerJennifer L. Woodford
Set Designer..... Frances Smetts
Sound Designers Dorian Boyd and Jaclyn Ledoux
Lighting DesignerChristian Londos
Costume Designer..... Jonathan Hall
Props Designer..... Lisa Million
Technical Director..... John Andzulis
Production Manager..... Allan Kollar

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), 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:

“*Get Out of Dodge* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest at the Venice Theatre in Venice, Fla.”

Get Out of Dodge

CHARACTERS

MOLLY HAMILTON: 40; pianist and teacher of music.

CHIP HAMILTON: 40; Molly's husband; a landscape architect.

CAROLINE HAMILTON: 65; Chip's mother, really well turned out; a devoted grandmother.

PHOEBE HAMILTON: 16; Molly's and Chip's daughter; athletic and self-assured.

SCHUYLER REED: 62; Molly's father; formerly lean and spare but now softening a bit and losing the edge.

SETTING

A large family room in Molly's and Chip's house. The room should look so comfortable and welcoming that you might imagine the house's living and dining rooms are never used. Squashy sofa and armchairs, filled bookcases, a small dining table and chairs, excellent natural light with well cared for plants basking in it. No TV visible.

Exits to kitchen, front door, second floor, hallway leading to Molly's studio and to an exterior terrace.

The time is the recent past.

Get Out of Dodge

Scene 1

(Mid-July. About 9 o'clock in the evening.

PHOEBE HAMILTON lies on the sofa, fiddling with her music, earbuds in her ears. CAROLINE HAMILTON is putting dirty dishes from the table onto a tray. She drinks intermittently from a glass of white wine as she loads the tray. The wine bottle on the table is about three-quarters empty. A suitcase sits near the exit to the second floor; it still wears its destination labels for JFK.)

CAROLINE. Bellagio! Bel ... lag ... i ... o ... It even sounds romantic.

MOLLY *(from offstage, down the hall)*. It was beautiful, incredibly romantic.

CAROLINE. Lake Como ... I always wanted to go but somehow Eliot and I never got there, not to any of the Italian lakes. His ridiculous schedule, I suppose. Or it was the wrong season, or—something.

(MOLLY HAMILTON enters from the hall to her studio.)

MOLLY. Chip missed a lot, of course, because of his meetings.

CAROLINE. Naturally. Husbands always do. I must have been crazy to tag along with Eliot to all those medical meetings. *(Raising her glass.)* My life at poolside.

MOLLY. It wasn't like that.

CAROLINE. Of course not. You were in Italy. I was at a Hilton pool.

MOLLY. No, I mean—how important it was for Chip. He got to meet these incredibly smart European innovators and hear about what they're doing. He got to show his designs to some of his heroes.

CAROLINE. Chip's too old to have heroes. *(She begins to top up her glass from the bottle, then stops.)* Does anyone want more of this wine before I finish it off? I don't want to be selfish.

MOLLY. Don't save any for me.

CAROLINE *(calling up toward the second floor)*. Chip! Should I save you some wine?

MOLLY. Phoebe, you're supposed to be helping your grandmother.

CAROLINE. Don't get up, darling. There's nothing for you to do.

MOLLY. Phoebe.

PHOEBE (*pulling out her earbuds*). What?

CAROLINE (*calling off*). Chip! More wine?

MOLLY. Your grandmother had a magnificent pizza waiting for us when we got home. You should help clean up.

PHOEBE. I already helped, didn't I, Miu-Miu?

CAROLINE. Of course you did, darling.

PHOEBE. I grated cheese or something.

(PHOEBE abandons the music on the sofa, picks up the tray and exits to the kitchen with it.)

CAROLINE. Thank you, darling. (*Pours half the remaining wine into her glass.*) I doubt if he wants any more.

MOLLY. We can open another bottle if he does.

(MOLLY kneels at the suitcase, roots around in it.)

CAROLINE. Phoebe should rest. You spent the day relaxing in business class all the way from Milan.

(PHOEBE enters, minus the tray.)

MOLLY. We were in coach, thanks. But at least we got into the section where there's room for your legs. (*To PHOEBE.*) You weren't gone long enough to load the dishwasher.

PHOEBE (*returning to the sofa*). You always rearrange the dishes anyway, so I'm cutting out the middleman.

CAROLINE. But you weren't working on the plane, not physically. That El Greco works the swim team very hard, doesn't he, love?

MOLLY. El Greco?

CAROLINE. Oh, I think his name is Dmitri but somebody started calling him El Greco and he actually seemed to like it. So it stuck.

MOLLY. He's Greek?

PHOEBE. He's Serbian.

CAROLINE. Are you sure? I thought he was Russian.

PHOEBE. Serbian. Positive.

CAROLINE. Anyway, El Greco drives the team very hard. Then after lunch, she takes tennis lessons. And today she finished up with a Pilates class. So she's tired.

PHOEBE. I'm not tired. I wasn't the one drinking tequila sunrises at lunch.

MOLLY. Don't tease your grandmother. Really, Caroline? Tequila sunrises?

CAROLINE. We're working our way through the cocktail list, and I have to say the tequila sunrise doesn't rank very high. And I'm sure I had only one.

(CHIP HAMILTON enters from the second floor.)

CHIP. Sorry. I was in the bathroom.

CAROLINE. Airline food.

CHIP. I hardly ate. I knew you'd have something terrific waiting for us. *(To MOLLY.)* This ready to go up?

MOLLY. I'm still finding the souvenirs.

PHOEBE. Oh goody—presents.

MOLLY. One present—for you, anyway. Here, got 'em.

(MOLLY hands presents wrapped in tissue to CAROLINE and PHOEBE. CAROLINE pulls a big square silk scarf from the tissue.)

CAROLINE. Oh, beautiful! But you spent too much. This has to be a Versace.

MOLLY. I didn't spend too much. The woman promised it would fool anybody but an expert.

PHOEBE. You're not supposed to buy counterfeit stuff, Mom.

MOLLY. It's not counterfeit. It doesn't say Versace anywhere on it.

PHOEBE. It's being passed off as a Versace and you knew that because the seller told you.

CHIP. Stop picking on your mother.

CAROLINE *(modeling the scarf)*. And stop trying to spoil my present. It's Versace in spirit.

PHOEBE. But we're always being lectured at school about being our "authentic selves." And then our parents go and buy something they know is a knock-off.

CHIP. I said, stop picking on your mother. She's had a hard enough time today.

MOLLY. I didn't have a hard time. Let's move on, OK?

CAROLINE. May I at least say thank you?

MOLLY. Of course, I'm sorry. I just meant everything was fine. I didn't have a hard time.

CHIP. You did. I was ready to strangle that guy at immigration.

PHOEBE. What? Did he think you were smuggling drugs?

CHIP. Immigration, not customs. You're just showing your passport.

(MOLLY returns to the suitcase, rearranging the contents.)

MOLLY. It wasn't so bad.

CHIP. It was so bad. He keeps her standing there while he taps away at his keyboard until another agent comes out and says Mom has to go with him—for an interview. I couldn't go with her, I had to sit on a bench in the hall.

CAROLINE. You don't mean it. That's outrageous.

CHIP. And you have no rights. No right to have an attorney present, your husband, anyone.

PHOEBE *(overlapping)*. So what did they ask you?

MOLLY. About stuff that's in my passport. Stuff I know. Repeatedly. If they were trying to trip me up, they needed to ask harder questions.

PHOEBE. Like what?

MOLLY. I don't know. Like, where my mother was born. I know the state—Montana, but I'm not sure where she grew up. I only mean that they wouldn't have to go very far to make me seem—uncertain, or guilty.

PHOEBE. Wow, Mom. Do they think you're running a meth lab or something?

MOLLY. They didn't ask me about a meth lab.

PHOEBE. And they didn't say why?—I mean, why you?

MOLLY. They don't have to explain anything. After a while, they said I could go.

CAROLINE. Your name's gotten onto some kind of list. You'd better make sure it gets off it.

MOLLY. I think they pick people at random. *(She closes the suitcase; to PHOEBE.)* So do you like your present? So far as we know they're not counterfeit anything.

CAROLINE. Show me, love.

PHOEBE. Look, all these little blank notebooks with marbled covers. And the paper is beautiful. Of course I like them.

(CHIP grabs the suitcase.)

CHIP. Finished?

MOLLY. It's all yours.

(CHIP exits upstairs with the suitcase.)

PHOEBE. Didn't you get anything for Ethan?

MOLLY. It's in there somewhere. We can take it to him on Sunday.

PHOEBE. Is it visiting day already?

MOLLY. Yes. You don't sound very enthusiastic.

CAROLINE. Of course she's enthusiastic—aren't you, darling?

PHOEBE. It's creepy. All those girls with their creepy little buns?
It's not even ten percent boys.

MOLLY. That's normal for a ballet camp.

PHOEBE. And I may be busy on Sunday. Some kids from the club are talking about going sailing.

MOLLY. We can talk about it.

PHOEBE *(starting an exit to the second floor)*. I know what I'm doing. I went to sailing camp in June, remember?

CAROLINE. Are we on the same schedule for tomorrow? Swim practice at ten?

PHOEBE. I guess.

CAROLINE. I'll pick you up at nine-fifteen.

(CHIP enters from the second floor.)

MOLLY. I can bring her. Why should you do all that driving?

CAROLINE. It's fine, it keeps me busy.

MOLLY. Or sleep in the guestroom and you won't have to come back. You always say you love that room.

CAROLINE. It's beautiful, but I like sleeping in my own bed. With Marigold.

CHIP. Stay. Cats are really self-sufficient. Even Marigold.

MOLLY. It's dark already—and you know what the deer are like.

CAROLINE. So long as they don't give me Lyme disease again I have no argument with the deer.

PHOEBE. It's not the deer, it's the deer tick.

CAROLINE. I'm quite aware of that, darling. *(She takes a sip from her wine glass.)* Nine-fifteen. Be ready.

MOLLY. I'm going up with Phoebe to unpack. You're sure you won't stay?

CAROLINE. Positive.

MOLLY. Then be careful. The pizza was perfect—thank you. And thanks for taking care of everything while we were gone, especially Phoebe.

(MOLLY gives CAROLINE a hug and kiss. She and PHOEBE begin the exit.)

CAROLINE. You know I love having her.

PHOEBE. You're lucky they didn't find that counterfeit scarf in your luggage.

MOLLY. It's not counterfeit. Think of it as—an *homage*, like in music. An *homage* to Versace, a compliment, almost an expression of reverence.

PHOEBE *(overlapping)*. I know what an homage is, Mom.

(They exit to the second floor.)

CHIP *(a beat)*. Why don't you stay?

CAROLINE. I didn't drink too much, if that's what you're worrying about.

CHIP. I didn't say anything about your drinking.

CAROLINE. But that's what you meant.

CHIP *(shrugs)*. We've both noticed that you've been drinking more since Dad left.

(CAROLINE gathers up her things.)

CAROLINE. If I'm drinking more, it's probably just in celebration. I heard today at lunch—over a tequila sunrise—that Lucy hates San Diego.

CHIP. Dad says she's getting used to it. At least that's what he said before we left.

CAROLINE. That's what he'd tell you. Lucy would tell her old friends the truth. And the truth, apparently, is that your father is busy being the new star in the hospital system, and Lucy is at loose ends. Or should that be Lucy-ends? She's completely cut off from her old friends—like me. It's funny how betrayal does that.

CHIP. Let's hope she doesn't turn to drink.

CAROLINE. Touché. (*Beginning an exit, then stopping.*) You really should encourage Molly to find out what's going on with this problem at immigration. You don't want that to happen every time you come back from anywhere. Why don't you talk to your sister about it—or better, get Molly to call her.

CHIP. She does real estate. You can't expect her to be up on immigration law or whatever you'd call this.

CAROLINE. I'd call it—basic human rights. Of course, if this was going to happen to someone in the family, Molly would be the someone.

CHIP. And you think that ... why?

CAROLINE. Be realistic, Chip. Who turns up as a Princeton freshman, alone, on a bus, with one suitcase?

CHIP. Seriously? You're reaching back ... twenty-three, twenty-four years?

(*CAROLINE shrugs.*)

CHIP (*cont'd*). Would you feel better if she'd turned up in an overstuffed SUV with Connecticut plates?

CAROLINE. Almost certainly. (*Resuming the exit.*) Now I'm really leaving. And if you tell me to be careful, I'll scream.

CHIP. Good night, Mother. Thanks for dinner.

(*CAROLINE exits.*)

Scene 2

(*The next morning.*)

The room has been restored to order. From MOLLY's studio a recording is playing loudly, something quasi-heroic like the theme from The Magnificent Seven. From the front of the house, a doorbell rings.

PHOEBE (*from upstairs*). Mom! (*A beat.*) Mom! Somebody's at the door!

(The doorbell rings again. A beat. Another ring. PHOEBE enters from upstairs, already dressed.)

PHOEBE *(cont'd)*. Mom!

(She exits in the direction of the front door. A longish pause. The music continues.)

PHOEBE *(cont'd, offstage)*. She's back here.

(PHOEBE enters, followed by SCHUYLER REED. He carries a duffel the size of a gym bag.)

PHOEBE *(cont'd)*. You can—wait here, I guess.

SCHUYLER. Thank you.

PHOEBE. You said—Idaho?

SCHUYLER. Yes. An old friend from Idaho. Thank you.

PHOEBE. OK.

(PHOEBE exits down the hall. A pause. SCHUYLER takes in the room until the music stops. A pause. MOLLY enters, followed by PHOEBE.)

SCHUYLER. Hello, Molly.

MOLLY *(a beat)*. Hello. *(A beat.)* Phoebe—? You've got your stuff?

(PHOEBE picks up her sunglasses from a table and puts them on.)

PHOEBE. Everything's there. I have a locker. I mean, Miu-Miu has a locker.

(From outside, a car horn sounds.)

PHOEBE *(cont'd)*. That's her.

MOLLY. You'd better go then.

(PHOEBE starts an exit toward the front of the house.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. Wait. Phoebe, this is Schuyler. From back home.

PHOEBE. Hi.

SCHUYLER. Hello, Phoebe.

PHOEBE (*backing off*). So, bye.

MOLLY. Wait—you forgot my hug.

(*PHOEBE hugs MOLLY and exits. A pause.*)

MOLLY. Twenty-three years.

SCHUYLER. I guess. That's a beautiful child you got, that Phoebe.

MOLLY. Never mind my child. Where the hell were you?

SCHUYLER. Mexico.

MOLLY. Mexico.

SCHUYLER. Mostly in and around Guanajuato. That's pretty much in the center of the country.

MOLLY. When you headed out, you were less than a hundred miles from Canada. I figured you'd head for the border. But Mexico?

SCHUYLER. When I pulled out, of course I thought Canada. And then I thought, well, so will the feds. So I made a U-turn, headed south and kept going.

MOLLY. It's got to be a thousand miles.

SCHUYLER. I wasn't counting. You didn't need a passport. It was all, "So long, have a nice visit." I thought, any minute now they're gonna to pull me over—but it was OK.

MOLLY. Uncle Tuck told them you'd taken the blue Chevy.

SCHUYLER. How could I? Somebody stole that Chevy maybe six, seven months earlier.

MOLLY. Sure, but you didn't report it.

SCHUYLER. What for? Never was worth a damn.

MOLLY. It took them three days to find out it was sitting on a lot in South Dakota. That bought you some time.

SCHUYLER. Good for Tuck, then. But I'm surprised the fellow got that far.

MOLLY (*a beat*). I'm waiting to hear why you never called.

SCHUYLER. That's a little harder.

MOLLY. I've got all day. (*A beat.*) You look tired. There's—uh, fresh coffee still hot in the kitchen.

SCHUYLER. Thanks.

(*MOLLY starts an exit, stops.*)

MOLLY. You still take it black?

SCHUYLER. You got it.

(MOLLY exits to the kitchen. SCHUYLER takes in the room again—the books on the shelves, family photos. MOLLY re-enters with two mugs of coffee and hands one to SCHUYLER.)

SCHUYLER (*cont'd*). This is real nice, Molly, a nice place.

MOLLY. It's home. Where did you sleep?

SCHUYLER. Greyhound bus.

MOLLY. From—?

SCHUYLER. Fort Smith. You know, Arkansas.

MOLLY. You've got friends there, huh?

SCHUYLER. I got a ride with somebody who's got a house there. Last bus got me into New York around five. A nice lady at a desk told me how to get to the train station. She mapped the whole thing out.

MOLLY. Miss Ellen called to say you were looking for me.

SCHUYLER. That's right, I called her for your address.

MOLLY. Six weeks ago, because that's when she called me. You must have been having a nice time with this friend in Fort Smith.

SCHUYLER. Miss Ellen's real proud of you, Molly. She said you went off with a scholarship to Princeton University.

MOLLY. That was Miss Baker's doing.

SCHUYLER. Martha Baker? At the high school? I didn't think of trying her.

MOLLY. She's the principal now.

SCHUYLER. Principal? Son of a gun.

MOLLY. She's got my address, but she wouldn't have given it to you.

SCHUYLER. That's how I remember her. All high and mighty. I'm not surprised she pushed you into a snooty college all the way across the country.

MOLLY. She said the distance would give me a better chance of getting in.

SCHUYLER. How's that?

MOLLY. They want what's called regional diversity. So if a kid from Idaho applies with good grades and good scores, they're pretty happy about it.

SCHUYLER. How about that.

MOLLY. And if her father's a fugitive, they get even happier.