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Dramatic Publishing

Larry's Favorite Chocolate Cake

A Serious Comedy in Two Acts

by

KENT R. BROWN

Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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KENT R. BROWN

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(LARRY'S FAVORITE CHOCOLATE CAKE)

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In February, 1995, *LARRY'S FAVORITE CHOCOLATE CAKE* received a developmental reading at Arkansas Rep under the guidance of Artistic Director Cliff Baker. The cast included Ron Aulgur, Steve Wilkerson, Graham Gordy, Frances Kemp, Richard Glover, Jennifer Catney and Vivian Morrison.

A second reading was held in March at the BoarsHead Theatre in Lansing, Michigan under the direction of Ed Menta. The cast featured John Peakes, Carmen Decker, Buck Schirner, Bethany Smith, Peter Ruvolo, Dana Munshaw and Greg Bodine.

In 1996, *LARRY'S FAVORITE CHOCOLATE CAKE* was a Finalist in the Norfolk Southern Festival of New Works, and received its premiere production at the Mill Mountain Theatre, Roanoke, Virginia; Jere Hodgkin, Executive/Artistic Director. Doug Zschiegner directed the production which featured Michael Mansfield, Vincent Wares, Dorothy B. Johnson, Dawn Westbrook, Shaun Mabry, Jody Wade, Bruce Barton and Eddie Collins.

LARRY'S FAVORITE CHOCOLATE CAKE

A Play in Two Acts
For 4-5 Men and 3-4 Women

CHARACTERS

SPARKY Larry's father
DORIS Larry's mother
LARRY mid-40s
MICHELLE Larry's wife
KEVIN Larry and Michelle's teenage son
LORAINÉ Larry's office "companion"
(doubles as TRAVEL AGENT)
THE BOSS Larry's former employer
(doubles as THE LOVER)
TRAVEL AGENT an effective saleswoman
THE LOVER Michelle's wannabe office lover

PROPS ASSISTANT, TV ANNOUNCER, CHEEVES THE BUTLER, and THE DOCTOR: These characters should be shared by "all purpose" actors (male and female) with specific assignments left to the discretion of the director.

TIME

The present, the past, and LARRY's imagination.

SETTING

A wing-back chair, a small table and a telephone are the only permanent pieces in what is otherwise a bare space. Isolated items such as a telephone stand, a bed, a rowboat, an additional chair and so on, will make their appearance later.

SOUND EFFECTS

Use sparingly: boat whistles, car horns, Big Ben perhaps, the ticking of a clock, and so on.

CHARACTER NOTES

- **SPARKY:** Gregarious, high-spirited, tends to lose his focus now and then
- **DORIS:** A no-nonsense, down-to-earth woman who calls 'em as she sees 'em
- **LARRY:** Intelligent but finding himself overwhelmed by the tempo and complexity of his life
- **MICHELLE:** Senses that she, too, is at a crossroads
- **KEVIN:** Sharp-minded but caught in the turbulence of adolescence
- **LORAIN:** A hard-driving middle-management colleague
- **THE BOSS:** Supercilious
- **TRAVEL AGENT:** Seductive, subtle

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *LIGHTS* reveal SPARKY “conducting” a classical Beethoven piece. He is awash in the spirit of the music.

The telephone rings. SPARKY continues “conducting” the music. He audibly underscores the piece with a “da-de-dum-dum-de” now and then. After a moment DORIS enters from the “hallway” carrying a suitcase. She crosses to the “front door” and sets the suitcase down.

DORIS. Sparky! The telephone! Answer the telephone, sweetheart. I’ve got my hands full here. (*Exits to the “kitchen.”*)

SPARKY (*hearing the telephone but still absorbed in the music. Calling offstage*). Doris, the telephone’s ringing. I’ll get it. (*But he remains absorbed in the music.*)

(DORIS appears from the “kitchen” with an apron around her waist and moves toward the “hallway.”)

DORIS. Sparky! Answer the damn phone. I only have two hands! Share the wear, sweetheart, dinner’s in the pot. (*DORIS exits to the “hallway.”*)

SPARKY (*answering the telephone*). Hello? Who is this? (*SPARKY’s attention remains focused on the music.*) Make it quick, will you? Dinner’s in the pot and I’ve got Beethoven

by the throat here! Ta-da! Da-da-dum-dum-dum-dum-de-dum!

(DORIS enters from the "hallway" carrying another suitcase and two carry-on bags with straps. She places the items by the "front door.")

DORIS. Is it the travel agent, Sparky? Are there any problems? Is everything all right?

SPARKY *(into the telephone)*. Is everything all right? What? Speak up. *(To DORIS.)* I don't think everything's all right.

DORIS. What do you mean everything's not all right? Give me that phone! *(DORIS takes the telephone from SPARKY.)* What is this about problems? We aren't paying a fortune for any problems. We're paying for the trip of a lifetime! Everything's all set out. But if you have some personal problems you want to get off your chest you can come over and have a little chicken soup with Sparky and spill your guts. We're very good listeners. Just take the Jackson Grove exit off I-64 North, you know where that is, I'm sure, then a...

(As DORIS begins giving directions and SPARKY continues "conducting" the music, LARRY enters carrying two suitcases and a backpack with a trenching tool, a poncho, an old baseball mitt and a mess kit attached to it. He is wearing a rumpled business suit and carrying a briefcase. The total effect is somewhat surreal.)

DORIS *(continuing)*. ...sharp left at the 7-11 with the Slurpee on the window.

SPARKY. Then right at the Texaco!

DORIS. Then right at the Texaco, left at the Wal-Mart...

LARRY. Mom? Dad?

DORIS. ...left again at the Bingo Palace. Oops, hang on now! Sparky, do you go three lights after the McDonald's or four... (*SPARKY holds up three fingers.*) Three! Got it now. We're back on the trail. Three lights... (*LARRY puts down his baggage and exits.*)...and keep the cemetery on your right, and the auto salvage yard on your left. Now, a half mile past the Green Parrot sign you'll see an old blue Oldsmobile 88 sitting up on blocks.

(LARRY re-enters with several more items including a small tricycle.)

DORIS. And there you'll be. 6743 Paradise Lane. On the corner. We'll be waiting. (*DORIS completes her directions, hangs up the telephone, and begins to cross to the "kitchen."*) Shape up, Sparky. We've got company for dinner. Then we finish packing, make out the mail card and we're off! (*DORIS sees LARRY completely surrounded now by his gear. SPARKY continues "conducting."*)

LARRY. Hi, Mom!

DORIS. Larry?

LARRY. Hi!

DORIS. Sparky? Sparky! (*DORIS's insistent tone "shuts off" the music. SPARKY continues vocalizing for a moment before realizing there is no music.*)

SPARKY. What happened to the—

DORIS. It's Larry.

SPARKY. Larry? No, dear. It's Beethoven.

DORIS. It's Larry. He's here.

SPARKY. Where?

DORIS (*pointing to LARRY*). There!

SPARKY (*seeing LARRY, he, too, is visibly surprised. SPARKY and DORIS exchange looks*). Son? Is that you?

LARRY. Hi, Dad. That old Oldsmobile 88 sure was something, wasn't it? I'll get right to it in the morning. Some good old elbow grease and I'll have it looking good as new again.

DORIS. Well, this is a big surprise. We were expecting the—

LARRY. Yeah, hey, me, too. Big surprise here, let me tell you.

SPARKY. Is it really you, son?

LARRY. Sure is, Dad.

DORIS. It's Larry, Daddy.

LARRY. I've brought a few things with me.

DORIS (*looking behind LARRY to see if someone else is there*). Where is, uh, did you bring...

LARRY. Michelle?

DORIS. Michelle, yes, Michelle. Is she with—

LARRY. Uh, no, she couldn't make it this trip.

SPARKY. Oh, that's too bad.

DORIS. We never see enough of her.

LARRY. Yes, well, she's very busy.

SPARKY. What about... did you bring, uh...

DORIS. Kevin.

SPARKY. Of course. Kevin. Slipped my mind for a second there.

LARRY. Uh, no. Kevin's home, too. With Michelle. Michelle and Kevin are both home.

DORIS. Oh. Both home. I see.

SPARKY. Both home, eh?

DORIS. But you're here. With your suitcases and camping gear.

LARRY. Yeah, guess I am. (*There is a period of extended awkwardness.*)

DORIS. What's the matter, Larry? A mother always knows when her child's in trouble.

SPARKY (*in a "You can tell us anything, son" tone*). A father knows, too, Larry, but not as much as a mother knows...so 'fess up, son.

LARRY. Uh, yeah. Well, you're right, Mom. Look, uh—this is...I bet this looks sort of strange. I don't know how to tell you this.

SPARKY. Go ahead, son. Just open your mouth and let her rip!
We can take it, can't we, Mother?

DORIS (*a bit wary*). That depends.

LARRY. I've come home.

SPARKY. Is that it? Is that all? You've come home?

LARRY. Yes.

SPARKY. Well, that wasn't so hard, was it, son? Larry's come home, Mother.

DORIS. So I heard.

LARRY. I'm back.

SPARKY (*not comprehending the implications of what LARRY has just said*). Mother, Larry's back! Isn't that wonderful?

DORIS. Back? What do you mean... back?

LARRY. Back. Like...come back home...back in.

DORIS. Back in? Like...move back in?

LARRY. Yes. Like move back in.

SPARKY. Back in where, son?

LARRY. Here. This house. With you and Mom. Home again.

SPARKY. Home again? Like come back home again?

DORIS. Now? Here?

SPARKY. Tonight?

LARRY. Here I am! Back.

DORIS (*supportive but cautious*). For how long are you back?

LARRY. I don't know yet. For a while. A visit.

DORIS. A short visit? Then back home to—

SPARKY. Michelle and Kevin! (*SPARKY gives the "thumbs-up" gesture to DORIS.*)

LARRY. Well, maybe not a short visit.

DORIS. Not a short visit.

LARRY. No.

DORIS. Longer than a short visit? (*LARRY nods and smiles.*)

SPARKY. Oh, oh.

LARRY (*looking about the room*). Oh, it feels so good to be back. The old memories. When times were simpler. No cares. No troubles. Just take out the trash and be in by ten. A feeling of safety and love. I've been gone too long. Mom! Dad! (*It's now time for the family "hug."* LARRY opens his arms and moves toward SPARKY and DORIS. SPARKY and DORIS exchange "Do you think he really means to move back in" looks. As LARRY gets closer, SPARKY retreats behind the wing-back chair. LARRY then pursues DORIS who retreats as well. The "chase" increases in tempo, but no one actually hugs anyone. An effort should be made to elongate this segment. The characters could be caught in a series of "freeze frames" as they work to align themselves in this strange familial dance. "Slow motion" could also be used, underscored by chase music. When the "chase" ceases, all three catch their breath.)

SPARKY. Whoa! That was a heck of a ride, eh, Big Guy?

LARRY. Sure was, Dad. That was great. Just like cowboys and Indians. (*Slowly, LARRY extends his hand. SPARKY shakes it. Then LARRY steps in and embraces his father.*) Dad! Oh, boy. (*LARRY then goes to DORIS and embraces her.*) Mom! You look great!

DORIS (*during the hug*). Have you gained weight?

LARRY. A little, I guess, yeah. All the stress. Overtime.

DORIS. You look tired.

LARRY. Yeah, a bit. Deadlines. Traffic. Taxes. The usual.

SPARKY. Got to take care of yourself, son. I can't take care of myself anymore so Mother blocks downfield for me, don't you, Mother?

DORIS. Have to protect my investment. (*DORIS and SPARKY look at the items LARRY has brought with him.*)

SPARKY. What's all this stuff, son? Is this a tricycle?

LARRY. Yeah, that's Kevin's old tricycle.

DORIS. What do you need a tricycle for? Thought you had a car.

LARRY. Thought I could feel what it's like to be a little kid again.

DORIS. Why? You're a big person now.

LARRY. I know that, Mom. But it's not fun being a big person.

DORIS. Whoever said it was?

LARRY. Well I just thought I'd pull back a bit, take a breath.

DORIS. You're having trouble breathing, too?

LARRY. No, Mom. It's just an expression. I mean—

SPARKY (*hefting one of the suitcases*). These suitcases are bulging at the seams, son.

DORIS. Sparky, your back!

LARRY. They're the Great Books, Dad.

SPARKY (*hefting another of the suitcases*). The great and heavy books, you mean. Can't be great if they're not heavy, eh, son?

LARRY. That's right, Dad.

DORIS. And what about this camping gear?

SPARKY. Larry's going to climb Mt. Everest, Mother.

LARRY. Actually, Dad, I thought we might camp out in the back yard like we used to. You know, just the two of us. Cook marshmallows. Look at the sky. Read the Great Books. Talk about sex.

DORIS (*to SPARKY*). Didn't you talk to Larry about sex, Sparky?

SPARKY. I'm sure I said something about it, dear.

LARRY. Look, I just need to relax a bit. Drop my guard. Think things out. Have some milk and cookies, you know? Touch bases with you.

SPARKY. I'm a little too old to play catch, son, but I'll give it a try.

DORIS. I don't think he means baseball, Sparky.

LARRY. I know this must come as a big surprise, just walking in on you like this.

DORIS. You're right there, son.

LARRY. But things seem to snowball all the time...and my job...and Michelle, Kevin. All of a sudden everything's falling off the plate.

SPARKY. Well, scoop it up off the floor, son, and slap it right back on the plate.

LARRY. It's too much. I'm feeling disconnected, fragmented. I'm losing my focus. I need to talk to you again.

SPARKY. That's what the telephone's for, son. Everybody knows that. Reach out, touch someone, then hang up.

LARRY. I know, Dad, but I don't think a phone call is going to do it this time. I'm feeling a little desperate here and... the phone is too—

SPARKY. We had a good talk the last time we called, didn't we, Mother?

LARRY. Actually, Michelle and I weren't doing that well and—

DORIS (*overlapping, trying to get her bearings*). We did? Where was I?

LARRY (*overlapping*). Dad, look, I'm in big trouble at work and I don't think Kevin is—

SPARKY. It was the sixth inning of the World Series, Mother, remember?

DORIS. I was in the kitchen! I'm always in the...

SPARKY (*overlapping*). Bases were loaded!

LARRY (*trying to get their attention*). I don't think my values are holding up. I don't think I'm doing the right—

SPARKY (*moving to the telephone and dialing*). And I said to your mother, "I wonder if Larry is watching the Series."

DORIS. And I said... Good Lord, your dinner! Don't start without me. I'll be right back. (*DORIS exits to the "kitchen."*
The telephone is heard ringing offstage.)

LARRY. Mom, will you please stay and listen! (*LARRY is beginning to feel overextended.*) I've come back for some answers. Can we talk now?

SPARKY (*calling offstage to DORIS*). It's ringing, Mother!

LARRY. Dad, I'm standing right here! Look. Face to face, See? Can we...aw, damn! (*A telephone rolls onto the stage. In frustration LARRY crosses to the ringing telephone and answers it.*) Hello!

SPARKY. Hey, hey, there you are, Big Guy!

LARRY. Dad? Hi, Dad.

(*DORIS appears with a soup ladle in her hand.*)

DORIS. How is he? Is he eating all right?

LARRY. Everything OK, Dad?

SPARKY (*to DORIS*). He's asking if everything's OK.

DORIS. Tell him we're still alive.

SPARKY. Your mother says we're still alive, son. That's good to know, isn't it?

MICHELLE (*from offstage*). Larry, who is it? Larry—

DORIS. Let me talk to him. You always hog the telephone

SPARKY. Your mother wants to—

(*MICHELLE enters with a coat over her arm.*)

MICHELLE. We have to go now. Larry, I have to be back at work in—

LARRY (*overlapping with MICHELLE as DORIS reaches for the phone. In short: "Family Telephone Chaos"*). It's Dad. He wants to know if we're OK.

DORIS. Larry, it's your mother.

LARRY. Hi, Mom. Everything's fine here. Look, can I call you back tomorrow?

SPARKY (*yelling over DORIS's shoulder*). Are you watching the Series, son?

MICHELLE (*overlapping*). We're going to be late, Larry. We can't be late again.

LARRY. Did Dad say something, Mom?

DORIS. He wants to know if—

MICHELLE. Larry, please!

LARRY. We won't be late, Michelle.

SPARKY (*overlapping*). What did he say?

DORIS (*taking full command of the telephone*). You sound a little...are you all right?

LARRY. Well, we're in a hurry right now and—

DORIS. Daddy had his prostate checked. He's OK, but we're watching it.

SPARKY. Your mother doesn't mean we're actually watching it, son.

MICHELLE. Larry, I have obligations, too!

DORIS. And his hearing's going a bit off.

LARRY (*to MICHELLE*). Give me a minute here, won't you? Mom says Dad's—

MICHELLE (*overlapping*). Don't you want to make this work? I thought you wanted to—

SPARKY (*pulling the telephone closer to his ear. DORIS won't let go*). I can't hear you too well, son. Your mother didn't pay the phone bill.