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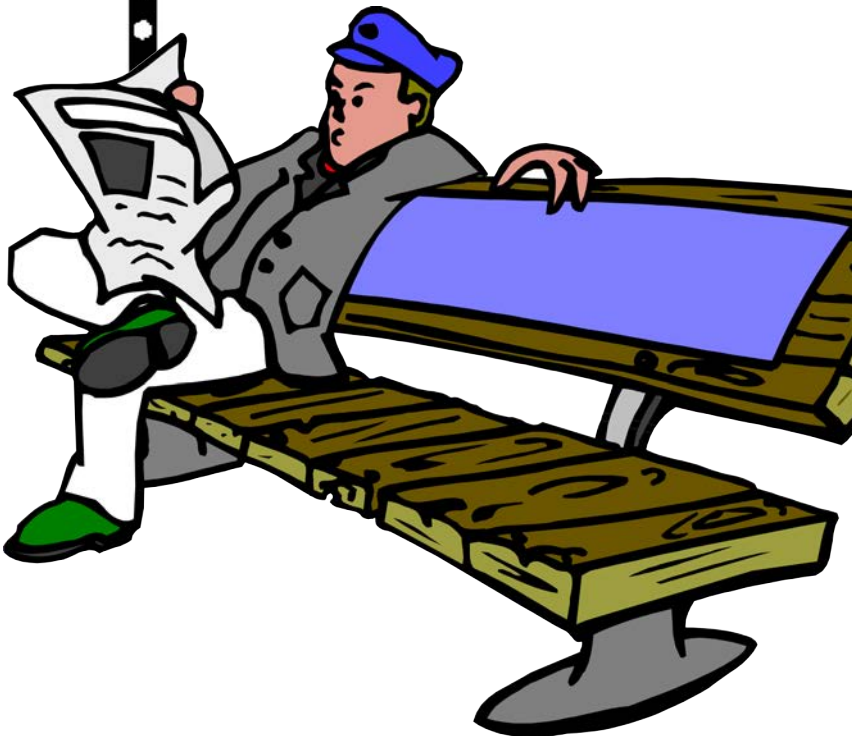
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## **Family Plays**

# THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE



Drama by  
**RALEIGH MARCELL Jr.**





# THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

**Drama.** By *Raleigh Marcell Jr.* Cast: 4m., 1w.

Four people must change buses at an isolated bus stop—literally in the middle of nowhere. The only items in sight are two benches, a Coke machine and an old man who calls himself Keeper of the Machine. The travelers wait for their bus ... and wait ... and wait. The old man makes the startling announcement that they will not be able to leave until he is killed by one of them, who will in turn assume his place as Keeper of the Machine. Humor gives way quickly to incredulity and then to terror as night approaches and no bus has stopped for them. Who is the old man? What is the significance of the perverse Coke machine? Where are they and why can't they leave? This gripping play is full of symbolism and subtle suggestions about life. The author has intentionally led his audience into expecting the expected—from trite, weird solutions to strange, bizarre problems—but what we've become conditioned to expect to happen never happens in this play. Read the play, and then, after you've taken time to reflect on what it says, read the author's explanation included in the script. You—and your audiences—are in for an intriguing experience. *The Middle of Nowhere* is intended for young adult and adult theatres. *Bare stage with props. Approximate running time: 35 to 40 minutes. Code: MM1.*

## Family Plays

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Title

# The Middle of Nowhere

A Play in One Act

by

RALEIGH MARCELL, Jr.

**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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# THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

## *The Characters*

**ARLO**, a young man in his early to mid twenties

**HOYT**, older than Arlo

**LORA**, an indeterminate age—not young, not old

**MILO**, a businessman

**THE OLD MAN**

*TIME*: A little while ago . . . or maybe tomorrow

*PLACE*: Somewhere in the middle of nowhere

Originally produced in 1979 (as **THE COKE MACHINE**)  
by the Open Space Theatre at the University of  
Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette.

## ABOUT THE PLAY

Four persons must change buses at an isolated bus stop . . . literally in the middle of nowhere. The only items in sight are two benches, a Coke machine, and an old man who calls himself “Keeper of the Machine.”

The travelers wait for their bus . . . and wait . . . and wait. The old man makes the startling announcement that they will not be able to leave until he is killed by one of them, who will in turn assume his place as Keeper of the Machine. Humor gives way quickly to incredulity and then to terror as night approaches and no bus has stopped for them.

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Read the play. And then after you've taken time to reflect on what it says, read the author's explanation beginning on page 24. You—and your audiences—are in for an intriguing experience.



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### *Properties*

Long whittling stick, knife—Old Man  
5 or 6 bottles of Coca-Cola (may be mimed)—in Coke machine  
Coins (may be mimed)—Arlo, Hoyt, Milo  
Old soft-leather briefcase—Milo

Suitcases—Arlo, Hoyt  
Large red bandanna—Hoyt  
Large straw purse—Lora  
Love beads—Lora  
Pistol—in Milo's briefcase

### *Costumes and Make-Up*

ARLO gives the impression of being a college student and should have a hair style and clothing which are currently popular. He is energetic, but it is an energy born of nervousness. HOYT is ever the realist. He wears a faded workshirt with the sleeves rolled up. He is older than Arlo. He has a new suitcase.

LORA is one of those ageless women who might be 25 or 40. She wears a light summery dress with a strand of large, white, pearl-like beads. She has a large straw purse in place of a suitcase. MILO is a businessman. His suit is worn-looking. His suitcase is very old and worn. He is a tired man, but not old. When he speaks, it is with great effort and not much above a whisper.

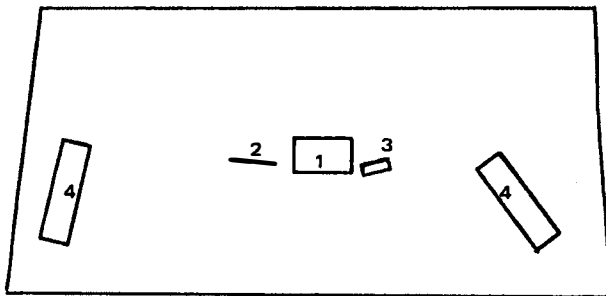
The OLD MAN should have a timeless air, not a Father Time or decrepit old-age look. The author offers this quotation from J. G. Frazier's *The Golden Bough* (3rd ed., Vol. 1, p. 9) to describe the Old Man: "For year in, year out in summer and winter, in fair weather and in foul, he had to keep his lonely watch, and whenever he snatched a troubled slumber it was at the peril of his life . . . His eyes [had a] restless, watchful look . . ."

### *Music, Lights, and Special Effects*

The script calls for a recording of Fred Astaire singing, "I'm Building Up to an Awful Let Down." If not available, any other suitable music will do.

While no special lighting effects are called for in the script, there are two moments when a follow-spot would be effective. The first is the sequence of the Old Man dancing to the music, and the second is the "Epistemological Parable" (pp. 20-21). At the onset of twilight toward the end of the play, dimming the stage lights and bringing up a deep orange glow would be effective.

### *The Set*



1—The Coke machine  
3—Wooden bottle crate

2—Wire bottle rack  
4—Wooden benches

Scale: 1/8" = 1'

## THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

By Raleigh Marcell, Jr.

*[Blackness surrounds the acting area. Left and Right are simple wooden benches. The center of attention, however, is a Coke machine. This need not be an authentic, functioning property but it must look like a Coke machine, meaning it should be adorned with the standard logos of the Coca Cola Company. On the machine six selections are indicated: diet, orange, grape, strawberry, rootbeer, and Coke. To the Right of the machine is a wire bottle rack. To the Left, a wooden bottle crate.]*

*AT OPENING: An OLD MAN is seated on the crate, leaning with his back resting against the Coke machine. He is whittling on a long stick. After a moment, ARLO enters from Right. He places his bag on the ground near the Right bench, going up to the machine into which he deposits money, punching up a selection. From his reaction, it is obvious that what he selected and what the machine delivered were not the same. But he is out of change so he reluctantly retreats to the Right bench grimacing as he drinks his soda. HOYT and LORA enter from Right]*

HOYT. Who ever heard of having to change buses in the . . . in the—  
*[stops]* —Jeez, where are we?

LORA. I don't know. But we do seem to be right in the middle of it.

HOYT. Then it's *got* to be nowhere. I mean, whenever you're right in the middle of it, it's nowhere. *[Drops suitcase]* It's all or nothing. You're either right in the middle of nowhere or you're someplace else. Have you heard of anybody being on the *edge* of nowhere? Or *just outside* of nowhere? And since we're not anywhere else . . . here we are—right in the middle of nowhere! Jeez, it's hot . . . *[Takes out a large red bandanna to wipe his face. He goes to the machine. To Lora:]* Want one?

LORA. You kidding?

HOYT. Now, would I kid about something as important as a bottle of soda pop? *[Deposits and punches up]* Jeez! Wanted orange and got a Coke!

ARLO. Same thing happened to me.

HOYT. Yeah?

ARLO. I wanted a diet drink but got a Coke instead.

HOYT. *[To Old Man]* You got the key to this machine?

OLD MAN. *[After a pause, as he always pauses before speaking]* No. You do.

HOYT. Jeez, he's crazy . . . . *[Preparing to try again. To Lora]* Sure you don't want one?

LORA. You know that if you put a tooth in a Coke and left it overnight it'd dissolve?

HOYT. What'll they think of next . . . .

LORA. It's true.

HOYT. You don't have to keep the drink in your mouth overnight. You can swallow it, you know. *[ARLO has been drinking his Coke and is now coughing and gagging. HOYT goes to him and slaps him on the back. LORA follows]*

LORA. What's the matter?

ARLO. It's the coke . . .

LORA. *[To Hoyt]* What was I telling you . . . ?

HOYT. His teeth aren't dissolving—he's gagging. *[ARLO's coughing subsides]* You all right now?

ARLO. *[Holding his head]* Thank you. I think so. Regular Cokes make me sick. You see, I've got this condition—

HOYT. Then why did you drink it?

ARLO. It's so hot and dusty and I didn't have any more change. It's that stupid machine's fault for giving me this Coke. I'm sorry I caused you this trouble. *[Coughs]* You see, I have this condition— *[Bends over, head between legs]*

HOYT. That's all right. No trouble. If you walk around you'll feel better. *[He helps ARLO to his feet. ARLO is not too joyous at the prospect but is too weak to resist]*

ARLO. I . . . I don't think I will.

HOYT. *[Walking him around]* Nonsense! It'll do wonders.

ARLO. That's what I'm afraid of.

HOYT. Say, did anybody ask the bus driver when the next bus was comin'?

LORA. I didn't.

HOYT. *[To Arlo]* How about you?

ARLO. Nooo . . . .

HOYT. I could kick myself for not askin' but he kinda caught me by surprise.

LORA. I was sort of daydreaming and before I knew it he was telling me that I had to change buses here.

ARLO. Could we stop now?

LORA. I think he's turning green.

ARLO. Ohhhh . . . .

LORA. *[To Hoyt]* Maybe you ought to slow down . . . . *[To Arlo]* How's your stomach now?

ARLO. Not too good. In fact, revolting. It's revolting against the Coke. My stomach does a lot of that.

HOYT. Then walkin's just the thing. Had an aunt who lived to be a hundred. Walked every day.

LORA. Anything I can do?

ARLO. You wouldn't happen to have some cottage cheese, would you?

LORA. Afraid not.

ARLO. *[Being walked at a brisk pace]* I think I'm getting dizzy. Could we stop now?

HOYT. If you stop now you'll feel just as bad as before.

ARLO. But I'm feeling *worse*.

HOYT. Walking purges the system . . . . How long do you think we'll have to wait?

ARLO. Not too long I hope.

HOYT. That's it. Keep it up, now . . . .

ARLO. Couldn't we slow down? Just a bit?

HOYT. Now, I'm gonna take a little break but I want you to keep goin'. Okay . . . ? *[HOYT steps aside and ARLO, however reluctantly, continues to walk in a little circle around the area]* It's for your own good . . . . You gotta show your body who's boss.

ARLO. It already knows. *[ARLO continues, now with his hands on his stomach]*

HOYT. Come on, admit it, you're feelin' better.

LORA. He doesn't look it.

HOYT. A coupla more laps 'n' you can quit . . . .

LORA. *[Goes Upstage Right to look off]* I wish the bus would hurry up and come . . . . *[ARLO stops Center]*

HOYT. There! How's it now?

ARLO. I feel like there's a crazy old man down in my stomach making a silent movie. He's got his cap on backwards and he's down there laughing and turning the crank of the movie camera. Turning. Around

and around and . . . around . . . ! *[ARLO puts his hand over his mouth and exits in a run]*

HOYT. I guess he wasn't used to the exercise. *[Pause]* See anything?

LORA. Not yet.

HOYT. Are those love beads you're wearin'?

LORA. *[Turns from looking off]* Yes.

HOYT. Aren't you kinda old to be . . .

LORA. Aren't you the epitome of tact.

HOYT. Well, aren't you? Kinda old . . .

LORA. One is never too old for love . . . *[Returns to Right bench]*

HOYT. Naw, I mean to be wearin' 'em. Like some kid or somethin'.

LORA. *[Trying to restrain her anger]* In your entire life, Mr.—Mr.—

HOYT. Hoyt. Just call me Hoyt.

LORA. —Hoyt. Have you *ever* been embarrassed?

HOYT. Nope. Can't say that I have.

LORA. Figures.

HOYT. Well . . . ?

LORA. Well what?

HOYT. Why you wearin' love beads? They been outta style for years.

LORA. Well, I bought them when they were in style. But I never started wearing them until a year ago.

HOYT. Late bloomer, eh? *[LORA gets up, going to Left to look off again]* You married?

LORA. *[An exasperated laugh]* You really don't realize that you've got as much tact as that bench, do you?

HOYT. Sorry . . . It's just that where I come from when you wanna know something you just ask. Sorry I asked. *[Pause]* See anything yet?

LORA. No . . . *[Touching the beads]* I just wanted a change, that's all. Nothing deeper than that . . .

HOYT. Well, we all need a change every now 'n' then.

LORA. Hey! The bus is coming!

HOYT. *[Getting up]* What?

LORA. Over there.

HOYT. *[Takes up his suitcase and joins her]* Well, let's go.

LORA. But it . . . it's stopping way down the road.

HOYT. *[After a pause as they look]* Aw jeez . . . It's lettin' somebody off . . . Hey, look! *[Puts down suitcase and begins waving frantically]* It's turnin' off! *[Discouraged, they start slowly back]*

LORA. Why don't we ask the old man when the next bus is coming.