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Dramatic Publishing



**American Association of Community Theatre
AACT NewPlayFest Winning Plays:
Volume 1 (2014)**

Exit Laughing

By Paul Elliott

The Seamstress

By Cece Dwyer

The Vanishing Point

By Nedra Pezold Roberts

Jellofish

By Jim Henry

End Papers

By Barry Weinberg

The Boatwright

By Bo Wilson



aact
NewPlayFest

American Association of Community Theatre AACT NewPlayFest Winning Plays: Volume 1 (2014)

Exit Laughing – Comedy. By Paul Elliott. When the biggest highlight in your life for the past 30 years has been your weekly bridge night out with the “girls,” what do you do when one of your foursome inconveniently dies? If you’re Connie, Leona and Millie, three southern ladies from Birmingham, you “borrow” the ashes from the funeral home for one last card game, and the wildest, most exciting night of your lives involves a police raid, a stripper and a whole new way of looking at all the fun you can have when you’re truly living.

The Seamstress – Drama. By Cece Dwyer. It is 1916, a time when women’s rights are far from equal. Cynthia McFarland, attractive and gracious wife of the extremely wealthy, albeit licentious and abusive, Richard McFarland, finds herself in a desperately compromising position. He wants the requisite wife in an attempt to enter politics. She wants to free herself from a brutal relationship. At Richard’s offhand suggestion, Cynthia hires Andorra Hamilton, a beautiful young seamstress, to be a working guest in their home and outfit her for the upcoming social season and political functions, initiating a series of events that unravel the secret lives of everyone in the McFarland mansion.

The Vanishing Point – Drama. By Nedra Pezold Roberts. How do you find your way home when the land, the culture and way of life, and even the relationships of your birth are vanishing all around you? That’s the problem that haunts Pierre, an environmental engineer recently returned to Point Critique to head an experimental program designed to halt the loss of Louisiana’s coastal wetlands. What he finds, in addition to a dangerously fragile ecosystem, is a brother (now engaged to Pierre’s former girlfriend) determined to break free of the trap he sees as Cajun culture, and a father, Paul, still smarting from the pain of his broken relationship with Pierre. When Paul’s shrimp boat sinks in a fiery wreck at sea, Pierre believes that replacing the vessel is the way to connect with his father and heal old wounds. But Paul wants more than a boat; he wants his son back. Gaining his lost son, however, won’t prevent Paul from losing the other one.

Jellofish – Drama/Comedy. By Jim Henry. Four World War II veterans have been playing a monthly game of poker and dragging 5% from every pot since 1945, and this “side pot” has grown to a sizable fortune. As the men compete, they struggle over what to do with their shared nest egg. As the debates escalate, their conflicting views on love, friendship, politics, death and taxes are exposed. The events of their lives are revealed as each player comes upon random “history chips,” created during the past 50 years by one of the players when a significant event occurred in their lives. While the significance of history chips such as Grand Slam, Raccoon and Jellofish are revealed, the deeper implications of a lifetime of friendship and competition are explored. The table is set. Shuffle up and deal.

End Papers – Drama. By Barry Weinberg. Kathy has to use all her ingenuity and intelligence if she is to avoid losing her home and all her possessions after her husband’s secret life is exposed. At the same time, she is forced to fend off unwelcome romantic overtures from the old boyfriend who reappears in her life. Kathy is convinced she can build a money-making business out of End Papers, the used bookstore where she works, and is encouraged by the store’s 80-year-old owner. But if she is to make her plan a reality, Kathy must use all her wiles to deal with her husband and ex-boyfriend, both of whom insist on dominating her affections and stifling her independence.

The Boatwright – Drama. By Bo Wilson. Ben Calloway can’t seem to get his bearings in his own home anymore. Fifty-seven years old, recently widowed, childless and retired from the Kansas Highway Patrol, he’s adrift—and even though he’s never seen the ocean, he decides he should build a boat and sail across the Atlantic, single-handedly. When he decides to let his troubled neighbor, film-school dropout Jaime Watson, make a movie about his project, the two men—generations apart and lonely in very different ways—force each other to confront the isolation in their own lives.

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**American Association of Community Theatre
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INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Community Theatre (AACT) is proud to present the six winning scripts and playwrights of the first 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.

In this inaugural cycle, ending in 2014, scripts were submitted by more than 200 playwrights. From the two dozen-plus theatres that applied, six were selected from across the country to produce the world premieres of the winning scripts. The benefits of AACT NewPlayFest will grow 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

AACT NewPlayFest is made possible in part by a grant from the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Fund.



Jack K. Ayre celebrated his 90th birthday before passing away in December 2011. At his birthday party 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 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*. Upon Jack’s death, resources he left were used to create the Jack K. Ayre Foundation for the United States Coast Guard, of which he was a member during WWII, and the Jack K. and Agnes K. Ayre Foundation for Blind Children—his mother, Agnes, was a teacher and pioneer in educating the blind. In addition, the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation has been created by the family of Frank Ayre Lee as a legacy for the creative endeavors of Jack, who was an advertising executive and public relations director. The family is pleased to honor Jack K. Ayre and Frank A. Lee, who passed away in August 2012, through a lasting legacy promoting new works for theatre through AACT NewPlayFest.

Photo: Courtesy of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Fund.

Exit Laughing

Comedy by
PAUL ELLIOTT

Exit Laughing was premiered by the Springfield Little Theatre in Springfield, Mo., on Nov. 15, 2013, with the following cast:

Rachel Michelle Sturm
Connie Judy Luxton
Leona Nanette Crighton
Millie Sandy Skoglund-Young
Bobby Vince Miller
ButterButt Buddy

Production:

Director John R. “Chuck” Rogers
Set Design John R. “Chuck” Rogers
Lighting and Sound Jamie Bower
Costume Design Kris Haik
Costumes Maxine Whittaker
Stage Manager Garth Domes
Properties Jan Myers, Dennis Stewart
Wigs Rick Charton
Slide Show Design Karen Richter
Set Construction Jeff Hammock, Celine Snyder,
Marilyn Kleine, Noah Sheets,
Scott Obert, Barb Parker, Mark Mauzey,
Jasmine Gill, Kiersten Andersen

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:

“*Exit Laughing* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by the Springfield Little Theatre in Springfield, Mo.”

Exit Laughing

CHARACTERS

RACHEL ANN: 21, a young woman who seems to have issues with life and men until bridge night opens her eyes.

CONNIE HARLAND: 55-year-old mother of Rachel, who finds on this fateful bridge night that life doesn't end at 55.

LEONA: One of Connie's closest friends and a member of the bridge club for over 30 years. A woman who's a beautician by profession and a rather caustic lush by preference.

MILLIE: Another of Connie's friends and a long-standing member of the bridge club. This is a woman who moves to her own special drummer, even though she's the only one who can hear him.

POLICEMAN / BOBBY: 23, a young man of many talents, and they all come to "bare" on the ladies' bridge night.

BUTTER-BUTT: The cat.

Exit Laughing

ACT I

AT RISE: *The living/dining room of 55-year-old CONNIE HARLAND's vintage home outside of Birmingham, Alabama. It's early evening on a warm summer night. The year doesn't really matter. It's the South. Nobody cares.*

After a beat, RACHEL ANN, a moderately attractive 21-year-old college student, pushes through the front door in a frustration bordering on depression. She carries an armload of books.

CONNIE (*from the kitchen*). That you, Rachel?

(Rachel doesn't answer. She just drops all of her books like a bomb on the floor in one loud crash.)

CONNIE (*cont'd, from the kitchen*). Goodness. Rachel. Are you OK?

(CONNIE, dressed in black, enters through the swinging door from the kitchen, wiping her hands. She sees Rachel standing there with the books at her feet.)

CONNIE (*cont'd*). Oh honey, don't leave them there. Not today. Leona and Millie are coming ... And what are you doing home so early?

RACHEL. I got stood up. (*Heads into the kitchen, swinging the door open.*)

CONNIE. What?

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). Don't ask.

CONNIE (*following her to the door*). Honey, I'm your mama. I'm supposed to ask.

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). I got stood up.

CONNIE. I got that part. (*Seeing the books and bending over to pick them up.*) It's the who, what and where I'm waiting for?

(RACHEL's voice stops her mid bend.)

RACHEL *(from the kitchen)*. And don't pick up the books. Leave them there as a monument to everything stupid. Stupid men! And stupid me.

CONNIE. What have you got to be stupid about?

RACHEL *(from the kitchen)*. For putting myself out there. For thinking I might finally get a boyfriend.

CONNIE. Oh, come on, Rachel, you're a beautiful young girl with lots of person—

RACHEL *(re-entering)*. Lot's of what? Personality? That's like describing a girl as one step above psycho. *(Rushing to a mirror.)* And look at me, I look like Medusa ... And these eyebrows. They're like two yeti mating.

CONNIE. Oh, Rachel, stop being so dramatic.

RACHEL. I'm supposed to be dramatic. I'm a theatre major.

CONNIE. Onstage. Not off. And come here. You're a beautiful young woman—

RACHEL. Yeah, but you have to say that. You're my mother.

CONNIE. Well, it's true even if I am.

RACHEL *(sinking into a chair in despair)*. Stood up. Deserted. Left behind. Mom, I'm going to end my life just like you.

CONNIE. Excuse me?

RACHEL. Never going out. Never dating. All alone.

CONNIE. I do go out ... to the grocery store. And I've got you. I wouldn't call that alone.

RACHEL. But what about a man?

CONNIE. What about a man?

RACHEL. When was the last time you actually had a date? *(When CONNIE doesn't answer right away.)* I'll bet it hasn't been since Dad left us and that's been over ...

CONNIE. I know how long it's been and trust me, if you'd been married to your father, you'd understand why I'm not in that big a rush.

RACHEL. But 15 years?

CONNIE. So I'm a slow healer. There are worse things than being alone.

RACHEL. Name one?

CONNIE. Aside from your father ... ? Constipation. (*On RACHEL's look.*) I don't know. It was just the first thing that came to my mind. Rachel, I'm sorry you got stood up. Whoever he was, he doesn't know what he's missing.

RACHEL. Well, I know what I'm missing: a life. I feel like locking myself in my room and never coming out.

CONNIE. Oh, come on, honey, you're not 16 any more, and it's not the end of the world.

RACHEL. Maybe, it's not for you. But for me, I don't see any long line of guys beating down my door trying to take my virginity.

CONNIE. I thought we decided that was a good thing.

RACHEL. When I was 12, yes. But that was 10 years ago.

CONNIE. You know, I don't think I'm old enough to have this conversation.

RACHEL. I didn't say "give it up," Mother, but I sure as heck would like somebody to try to take it for once. I feel like I'm in a college of raging rutting hormones and nobody even sniffs in my direction.

CONNIE. Well, maybe you bathe more than most.

RACHEL. This is not a laughing matter. I don't see anything funny about being a loser. Or "not" being a loser, depending on how you look at it. I was really excited about tonight. He was cute. He was smart. He was ...

CONNIE. I'm sorry.

RACHEL. I even bought a new dress.

CONNIE. Was it pretty?

RACHEL. Who cares if it was pretty? It's going to hang there in my closet for the rest of my life, rotting like something out of *Great Expectations* ... (*Crossing back into the kitchen.*) And it's all your fault.

CONNIE. Honey, what did I have to do with anything?

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). You're my mother. I have to blame somebody.

CONNIE. Well, don't blame me. I was at the funeral home all day.

(RACHEL comes back from the kitchen, this time with BUTTER-BUTT, a large furry cat, in her arms.)

RACHEL. Oh, crap. I'm sorry. How was it?

CONNIE. Not what you'd call a barrel of laughs.

RACHEL. How are Miss Leona and Miss Millie taking it?

CONNIE. Who can tell? We're all sort of numb. They're stopping by. What are you doing with Miss Mary's cat?

RACHEL. I'm taking Butter-Butt to my room. We've both been left alone in the world to fend for ourselves.

CONNIE. I know the feeling.

RACHEL. I guess it's been a cruddy day all around.

CONNIE. I don't think black is my color.

RACHEL *(heading up the stairs)*. Give it to me then. Today I feel as old as you. You know, it just burns me up. If I ever hear the name Bobby again in this house, I think I'll die.

CONNIE. Bobby?

RACHEL. Mom? Why don't you just rub salt in my wounds while you're at it?

CONNIE. Rachel, I'm sorry. I just didn't know that name.

RACHEL. Well, you won't ever hear it again. That name is banned forever. *(Starts up the stairs.)*

CONNIE *(exiting into the kitchen)*. OK, OK. Anyway, I'm sorry.

(There is a knock at the door.)

CONNIE *(cont'd, from the kitchen)*. Will you get that? It's probably the girls.

(Feeling put upon, Rachel comes back down the stairs and goes to the door.)

RACHEL. With my luck, it's probably a mugger. That's the way my day's been going.

(She opens the door and finds nobody there, just a boxed package on the porch, which she picks up. She has to now juggle both the cat and the box just to get it inside.)

CONNIE (*from the kitchen*). Is it Leona or Millie?

RACHEL (*shouting back to her mother*). No. It wasn't them.

(She puts the box down on the side table and continues back up the stairs with Butter-Butt.)

CONNIE (*from the kitchen*). What?

RACHEL (*exiting upstairs*). Never mind. Nobody was there. The story of my life.

(CONNIE returns from the kitchen with a couple of plates, which she sets down on the buffet. Looking and finding RACHEL gone, her shoulders slump, and for a moment she looks like she might cry.

Just then, the front door slams open, and LEONA enters without knocking. Dressed in black and with the deep voice of a heavy hitter, she surveys the situation for just a beat before exclaiming.)

LEONA. God, I need a drink.

CONNIE. Help yourself.

LEONA. You look like crap.

CONNIE. Good, I feel like crap.

(Both women hug as old friends.)

LEONA. I forgot the cookies.

CONNIE. I don't think we're gonna feel like eating anyway.

LEONA. Right, you can't drink cookies. (*Noticing the books on the floor.*) What's that?

CONNIE. What? Oh, Rachel's monument to stupid men.

LEONA. Maybe she ought to try for someone a little taller.

CONNIE (*picking the books up and moving them to a shelf*). She's just depressed.

LEONA. Join the club. (*Finding a bottle of liquor and clutching it to her chest.*) At least now, I'm saved. Where's a glass? (*Hold-ing up the bottle and looking at it more closely.*) Rum? Is this all you've got? Rum? Nobody drinks rum.

CONNIE. Sorry. I'm sure there's something else in the kitchen. Behind the breadbox.

LEONA (*crossing through the swinging door into the kitchen*). Even I don't drink rum. A lush has to have some dignity. And I know that's what you call me behind my back. A lush. (*Heads into the kitchen.*)

CONNIE. I never. I'd never do that.

LEONA (*from the kitchen*). Well, *she* did. Mary.

CONNIE. Well, Mary said a lot of things she didn't necessarily mean.

(LEONA returns from the kitchen with a bottle of vodka and a glass. She's pouring herself a healthy drink and slugs it.)

CONNIE (*cont'd*). Oh, come on, Leona, don't drink that so fast.

LEONA. Now you're sounding like Mary.

CONNIE. Well, maybe she was right.

LEONA. Yeah, well, now she's dead. Damn her.

CONNIE. It's not like she did it on purpose.

LEONA. Well, she did it anyway.

CONNIE. We knew it was just a matter of time. I just didn't realize what it would feel like when it happened.

LEONA. And could you believe the funeral home. I thought Mary said she didn't have any living relatives.

CONNIE. Maybe she didn't consider trailer trash "living."

LEONA. I never saw any of them visiting her, or heard Mary speak of them.

CONNIE. And suddenly after all these years, they're in control. They're gonna bury Mary—just because she's dead.

LEONA. And she didn't want to be buried.

CONNIE. I know. I know.

LEONA. And we promised. The three of us.

CONNIE. I know.

LEONA. "Spread my ashes over the most beautiful places you can find." We promised.

CONNIE. I just want to scream, or cry, or be sick.

LEONA. Or get drunk.

CONNIE. How could everything get so screwed up?

LEONA. At least you got her cremated.

CONNIE. Thank God I had that in writing. I swear two of those vultures would have dumped her straight from the hospital into the ground if they'd have gotten here any sooner. They were complaining about the cost of the funeral home.

LEONA. Well there's nothing we can do about it now. Legally they're holding all the cards.

CONNIE. I'd like to tell them what they can do with all those cards.

(Both turn as they hear MILLIE fumbling with the front door.)

CONNIE *(cont'd, as though it needs no explanation)*. That's gotta be Millie. *(Calling out as she crosses to the door.)* It's not locked!

(CONNIE opens the door, and Millie literally stumbles in the room sideways.)

CONNIE *(cont'd, grabbing for MILLIE to keep her from falling)*. Millie! For crying out loud, it has a door knob.

MILLIE *(trying to regain composure)*. But my hands were full.

(And they are. She carries a large grocery bag carefully in her arms.)

LEONA *(crossing to help, she whips the bag out of MILLIE's grasp)*. What'd you bring? Hopefully, more liquor.

MILLIE *(taking off her black hat)*. Not exactly.

CONNIE. How not exactly?

LEONA *(sticking her hand inside the bag)*. Let me guess. I feel ...
I feel ...

MILLIE. Mary.

LEONA. No. Don't tell me. I feel ...

MILLIE. Mary.

(Suddenly, LEONA freezes.)

LEONA. Omigod, it is Mary!! *(Jerks her hand back as though discovering a snake in the bag.)*

CONNIE. What?

LEONA & MILLIE. Mary!

LEONA (*looking for a place to put the sack*). Omigod, omigod!
How did I end up with this thing? Oooo, ooooo. Oooo.

CONNIE. Just put her down. Anywhere?

(LEONA sets the sack on the table and backing away, rubs her hands on CONNIE.)

LEONA. Ick. Ick. Ick. Ick. Ick.

MILLIE. Oh, stop acting so silly.

LEONA. I'm not acting silly, Millie. (*Grimacing at how that came out.*) I've always made it perfectly clear at the beauty parlor, I don't do dead people.

MILLIE. But Leona, we're not at your beauty parlor, and it's not just any dead people. (*Pulling a rather drab looking urn from the bag and placing it on the table.*) It's Mary.

LEONA. Excuse me. If she's in that urn, she's a dead people.

CONNIE (*whispering urgently*). Millie, what's she doing here? How?

MILLIE. Well, it *is* bridge night.

CONNIE. What?

CONNIE & LEONA. She's dead.

MILLIE. Well, you don't have to be so ugly about it.

LEONA. What's ugly about calling a frizzy perm a frizzy perm ...
Or in this case, a corpse a ...

MILLIE (*getting upset*). I'm not asking you to fix her hair.

LEONA. She's cremated. She doesn't have any hair.

MILLIE (*getting indignant*). Well, let me tell you this about that. The way you're acting, I wouldn't ask you to fix her hair anyway. And I thought you were her friend. I thought you'd want her here.

CONNIE (*calling for time out*). Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

LEONA (*equally upset and shouting*). I *am* her friend. *Was* her friend. But ... she's dead.

CONNIE. Whoa, whoa, Whoa!!!!

(LEONA and MILLIE turn to CONNIE as she tries to compose herself.)

CONNIE *(cont'd, gesticulating, trying to figure out how to phrase this)*. Uh ... I don't know how ... I mean ... How did you ... Her ... You ... How?

MILLIE *(giggling at CONNIE's waving arms)*. Oh, is this like charades?

LEONA. No, no Millie. *(A beat.)* What Connie is asking in her simple but not-wanting-to-offend-anyone way is ... Where the crap did you get Mary?

MILLIE *(catching on)*. Oh, I just picked her up. It was my day to carpool.

CONNIE. But the funeral home was closed. Locked.

MILLIE. Well, I did sorta have to break a window.

CONNIE. You what?!

MILLIE *(excited)*. It was just like on television. You know, where you take a rock and ... You know, and tap it. Well, maybe a couple of times, but then ... It was easy. Well, it wasn't really that easy. It'd been easier if I had broken the pane right over the lock, but I broke the one ...

CONNIE. I get the picture.

MILLIE. So, I had to reach ... But the door just clicked open ...

CONNIE. What possessed you?

MILLIE. Well, you two were so upset, and I thought since it was bridge night.

LEONA & CONNIE. But Mary's dead.

MILLIE. So?

CONNIE. Millie, you stole Mary's body from the funeral home.

MILLIE. I didn't steal her. I just picked her up. I mean they're going to bury her tomorrow. I thought breaking the window would be easier than having to dig her up next week.

CONNIE. Now, Millie, I know your car doesn't always run with a full tank, but even you know you don't dig up bodies, and you don't steal bodies, and if you do, you don't bring them to *my* house. What if Rachel finds out? How do I explain ... "Oh, guess who Millie dug up for bridge night?"

MILLIE. I didn't dig her up, and you wouldn't have wanted to leave her there in the funeral home all alone on her last night, would you?

CONNIE. No, of course not, but *here*?

MILLIE. Fine. Then we'll play bridge all by ourselves, won't we Mary? (*Picks up the urn and carries it into the living room.*)

CONNIE. Whoa, whoa, whoa. You're still going into *my* living room.

MILLIE. Well, that is where we play bridge, isn't it? Oh, look Mary, Connie's got a new lamp.

CONNIE. Leona, do something.

LEONA. What do you want me to do? (*Holding her hands out like they're contaminated.*) I've still got Mary on my hands.

CONNIE. You don't have any Mary on your hands. She's in the urn.

LEONA. But what if they spilled some of her on the outside?

CONNIE (*almost screaming*). They didn't spill any Mary.

RACHEL (*from upstairs*). Mom, you OK?

CONNIE (*quickly*). I'm OK. (*Shouting up the stairs.*) I just spilled something.

LEONA. See, see?! And I just had my nails done.

CONNIE. I didn't spill anything. I was just ... Never mind. Just go wash your hands.

(*LEONA starts towards the kitchen.*)

CONNIE (*cont'd*). But not in the kitchen sink.

LEONA (*does a U-turn and angrily hisses*). What are you suggesting? The washing machine?

CONNIE. We do have a bathroom.

(*LEONA rushes to a door under the stairs and quickly enters. CONNIE tries to regain her composure.*)

CONNIE (*cont'd*). Millie dear, how can I put this so you'll understand. Even in your world, it's a no-no to break into a funeral home and steal a body.

MILLIE. Oh, Connie, don't be silly. I didn't steal her. I just asked if she wanted to go to bridge night and—

CONNIE (*stopping her*). Don't tell me she answered. I don't want to know. Omigod, what are we going to do when the police start looking for the body?

LEONA (*returning drying her hands on a towel*). Maybe we'll get lucky and they won't notice.

CONNIE. When they dig that hole tomorrow and there's nobody to put in it, they're going to notice.

LEONA. Then you'll just have to get her back before then.

CONNIE. Me? What about you?

LEONA. Me? I'm not touching that thing.

CONNIE. Millie, did anybody see you when you ... uh, picked up Mary?

MILLIE. I don't think so.

CONNIE. Because we just don't want the police dropping by.

LEONA. Unless maybe it's Johnny Ray.

CONNIE. Leona, we're not talking about in bed.

LEONA. With Johnny Ray, that was the only talking we did. God, he used to be so good with those handcuffs.

CONNIE & MILLIE. Leona?

LEONA. Oh, not on me. On him. Spread eagle (*She demonstrates.*) with his arms and legs all ...

CONNIE. Leona. There is a time and a place, and this is not it.

MILLIE. I love eagles.

CONNIE. Of course, you do. Look, Millie, about Mary. I know it's bridge night, but ...

MILLIE. She's my partner. And I always bring her.

LEONA. Well, you keep telling them that as they cart you off to prison.

MILLIE. Oh, I don't want that. (*Realizing.*) Omigod, do you think they're gonna ask me to bend over and spread my legs?

CONNIE & LEONA. What?

MILLIE (*the authority*). That's what they say. I watch TV.

LEONA. What are you babbling about?

MILLIE. Every time they arrest someone, they say, "Bend over and spread your legs." But I never understood why.

CONNIE. What don't you understand?

LEONA. The bending or the spreading?

The Seamstress

Drama by
CECE DWYER

The Seamstress was premiered by the Hickory Community Theatre in Hickory, N.C., on Jan.10, 2014, with the following cast:

Brigid Ryan Mary Moretz Howell
Cynthia McFarland Connie Boos
Patrick Ryan Steve Austin
Andorra HamiltonChristy Rhianna Branch
Richard McFarland John Koval
Steven Blackwell Joshua Propst

Production:

Artistic Director,
Hickory Community Theatre Pamlea Livingstone
Managing Director,
Hickory Community Theatre John Rambo
Technical Director..... John L. Smith
Costume DesignerChristy Rhianna Branch
Lighting Designer Rose Goodrich
Sound Manager Steven Thigpen
Stage Manager Matthew Dotson

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 Seamstress* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by the Hickory Community Theatre in Hickory, N.C.”

The Seamstress

CHARACTERS

ANDORRA HAMILTON: Seamstress, 20s, beautiful and eccentric; can be sweet, playful and flirtatious; likes to use antiquated speech and dresses flamboyantly.

CYNTHIA McFARLAND: Wife, 40s, attractive, pleasant, astute and gracious.

RICHARD McFARLAND: Husband, 50s, real estate mogul, aspiring politician; can be smooth and urbane but is obnoxious and abusive when drinking.

BRIGID RYAN: Housekeeper, 30s, cute, spunky; speaks with brogue.

PATRICK RYAN: Houseman, 30s, adores his wife, Brigid; speaks with brogue.

STEVEN BLACKWELL: Attorney, 30s, well-mannered, ladies man.

TIME & PLACE

A large city somewhere on the East Coast, circa 1916.

The Seamstress

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: *Living room of the McFarland mansion.*

AT RISE: *It is late morning. BRIGID RYAN is setting a silver coffee service with cookies, jam, etc., humming an Irish tune and glancing upstairs a bit. CYNTHIA McFARLAND enters down the staircase holding a small ice bag over one eye. She notices BRIGID and makes an effort to seem cheerful.*

CYNTHIA. Oh, good morning, Brigid! Did Patrick say when he might be home with our new houseguest?

BRIGID. Any minute now if the train's runnin' on time. Are you feelin' all right there, missus?

CYNTHIA. Yes ... of course. I just woke up with one of my ... headaches. Nothing to worry about.

It's been a hectic few weeks getting her room ready. I hope you and Patrick know how much I appreciate everything you've done.

BRIGID. For sure it was nothin', ma'am. I'm only happy everythin' got here before she did. Are you sure I can't be gettin' some more ice for your face there?

CYNTHIA. Oh, don't bother, Brigid. You have so much to tend to as it is.

BRIGID. Can't help but worry about you, ma'am. An old broom knows the dirty corners best. I'm hopin' they're not gettin' worse.

CYNTHIA. Nothing I can't handle, Brigid. But I do appreciate your concern.

BRIGID. Yes, ma'am.

CYNTHIA. Oh, would you mind checking the mail outside? And please let me know as soon as Miss Hamilton arrives. (*Exiting upstairs.*)

BRIGID. Of course, ma'am. As soon as she arrives. (*Exits out the front door.*)

(*PATRICK RYAN enters through an interior door with suitcases. ANDORRA HAMILTON follows, wearing a lavish red hat and carrying a purse and seamstress case.*)

ANDORRA. So Patrick, how *did* you find me so quickly at the station?

PATRICK. I was told to be lookin' for a young lass wearin' a lovely red hat.

ANDORRA. Of course! Actually, it's magenta.

PATRICK. I'm thinkin' it would surely make a Cardinal blush.

ANDORRA. It's a shame Mrs. McFarland wasn't able to meet me at the station.

PATRICK. Truth to tell, she was feelin' a bit ... poorly this mornin'. Havin' one of her, uh, headaches. They can be fierce sometimes.

ANDORRA. I'm sorry to hear that. She did mention them when she contacted me a few weeks ago.

PATRICK (*reaching for her case*). Here, I'll be takin' that upstairs for ya.

ANDORRA. No, thank you. I'll keep my seamstress case if you don't mind. It can't be replaced. My trunks should arrive tomorrow, so you'll have your hands full then.

PATRICK. My pleasure, miss. I'll be takin' these up to your room and let the missus know you're here.

ANDORRA. Thank you, Patrick.

(*PATRICK exits upstairs. ANDORRA walks around, taking in the entire room.*)

BRIGID (*enters quietly*). Excuse me.

ANDORRA. Ah! You must be Mrs. Ryan. I believe Mrs. McFarland is expecting me.

BRIGID. Indeed she is. And myself too, for that matter.

ANDORRA. Of course. Is there something wrong?

BRIGID. I'm a bit surprised is all. I was told you travel alone so ... I was lookin' for someone ... a wee bit older.

ANDORRA (*laughs*). I'm afraid there's nothing I can do about that now is there?

BRIGID. Of course not, miss! I guess my mind's eye was expectin' someone ...

ANDORRA. Someone who looked more experienced? I'm certain Mrs. McFarland would never hire anyone who wasn't first rate. Am I right?

BRIGID. Of course, miss! Mind you, age doesn't boil the pot like a talent from the almighty. (*Indicating the seamstress case.*) Here, let me take that for you.

ANDORRA. No, thank you. I can manage. Now, if you'll tell Mrs. McFarland I'm here ...

BRIGID. Heavens above! So sorry. I'll be tellin' the missus you've arrived.

Oh, I would be Mrs. Ryan, the housekeeper.

ANDORRA. And I would be Andorra Hamilton ... the seamstress.

BRIGID. Of course, miss. (*Exits upstairs.*)

(ANDORRA continues to examine the room and carefully sets her seamstress case by the couch. CYNTHIA enters.)

CYNTHIA. My housekeeper tells me that an extremely confident, if very *young*, woman has come to our home today. I believe her exact words were ... as sure of herself as a cat in the creamery.

ANDORRA. Your housekeeper has a delightful way with words.

CYNTHIA. Yes, she does. I'm Cynthia McFarland. Welcome to my home. So sorry I wasn't able to meet you at the train station.

ANDORRA. I understand completely. Patrick told me it was one of your headaches. I remember you telling me about them.

CYNTHIA. When I telephoned you two weeks ago, I wasn't expecting you for quite a while. I could hardly believe my good luck. I had been told you were booked months in advance.

ANDORRA. Yes. Unfortunately, before I even arrived at my last client's home, her husband was killed in an automobile accident. Changed her life completely. Needless to say, my services were no longer required.

CYNTHIA. Very sad. But I'm so happy you're here!

ANDORRA. What an entirely exquisite greeting room you have.
And your Mrs. Ryan was a most charming greeter.

CYNTHIA. I've found over the years that having the Ryans as allies makes life here much more comfortable.

ANDORRA. Patrick ... Mr. Ryan, couldn't have been more helpful.

CYNTHIA. He appreciates pretty, young women. As long as Brigid, Mrs. Ryan, doesn't notice.

ANDORRA. I have a feeling Mrs. Ryan notices most things.

CYNTHIA. Very perceptive. I hope that won't be a problem for you.

ANDORRA. Not at all! I think we're already friends.

CYNTHIA. Good!

ANDORRA. If I may ask, do you have other help in the house?

CYNTHIA. Just the Ryans live in, if that's what you mean. As I mentioned in our conversation, my daughter's away at school.

ANDORRA. And you miss her terribly.

CYNTHIA. More than I ever thought possible. She's the most important thing in the world to me. Unfortunately, her father knows that. He visits her sometimes when he's on business, and takes great joy in telling me about it.

ANDORRA. It's none of my business of course, but that sounds very cold-hearted. Cruel even.

CYNTHIA. Mrs. Ryan was right to put you in a very special category. You're not only confident but ... prescient. Very unusual qualities for such a young woman.

ANDORRA. Some of my clients swear I'm clairvoyant. Merely imaginative, I think.

CYNTHIA. By the way, the photographs you sent of your work were fascinating. Certainly like nothing I've seen at any social event here at least.

ANDORRA. I believe I have yet to displease any one of my clients. I assume you checked my references?

CYNTHIA. Your credentials are very impressive. My good friend Charlotte Webster recommended you highly, as did all the others.

ANDORRA. Mrs. Webster was my very first private client! A remarkable woman. I definitely wouldn't be here today without her.

CYNTHIA. All of your references were exceptional. Every single woman said they had never been more beautifully dressed, or felt better about themselves in years.

ANDORRA. My methods are quite unique. Some even say ... daring.

CYNTHIA. They all said you were meticulous and your results outstanding. I wouldn't have hired you otherwise. Have you been influenced by any particular ... designers?

ANDORRA. I assure you my ideas are entirely my own. Although, working with Madame Lucille in her Paris salon was truly inspirational. The only woman to have one, you know.

CYNTHIA. I'm happy we were able to work something out so quickly. (*Takes ANDORRA's hands.*) A service like yours isn't found so easily.

ANDORRA. And I'm finding it more and more difficult to keep up with the demands on my time.

CYNTHIA. Understandable! But then, what's more important than looking good and feeling even better! A woman in my position needs to be absolutely prepared for any and all occasions.

ANDORRA. I'm at your service exclusively.

CYNTHIA. I'm also told you work quickly but with an eye to detail.

ANDORRA (*laughs*). And that is where the devil comes in, as they say.

CYNTHIA. Yes ... of course.

BRIGID (*enters*). Excuse me, Mrs. McFarland. Might I be servin' the coffee now?

CYNTHIA. Yes, thanks Brigid. I see your shortbread and strawberry jam here. (*To ANDORRA.*) I thought you might need a bite to eat after your long trip.

ANDORRA. So thoughtful. They look scrumptious. Thank you, Brigid.

BRIGID. You're welcome, miss. (*Exits.*)

ANDORRA. My trunks will be arriving tomorrow. They're brimming over with some of the most remarkable fabrics I've ever seen in all my travels. Not to mention the latest designs from Paris.

CYNTHIA. I've asked Patrick to bring them up to your room as soon as they arrive. And Brigid is very anxious to help you unpack.

ANDORRA. Not surprising. By the way, I've found from past experience, they're wonderful for transporting the finished goods abroad or ... elsewhere if necessary.

CYNTHIA. I won't be needing to transfer anything. But I can see how that would be convenient.

If there was more than one residence of course.

ANDORRA. I think you'll be quite pleased with the selections I've chosen. I hope you have a dress form available with your measurements?

CYNTHIA. Just as you requested. It's in your room. I've followed all of the instructions you sent. I don't want anything to stand in the way of a successful outcome, Miss Hamilton.

ANDORRA. Please ... Andorra.

CYNTHIA. Yes, of course ... Andorra. A very unusual name.

ANDORRA. My mother was a romantic. She thought since my life had begun in such a beautiful place, it was only natural to give me its name!

CYNTHIA. Of course. If you don't mind my asking, how *did* you choose your ... profession?

ANDORRA. Choose? How I wish that were the case! (*Laughs.*) I'm afraid women have very little to say when it comes to choosing a profession, don't you agree?

CYNTHIA. I do. Hopefully things will change, for my daughter's sake anyway.

ANDORRA. How old did you say she was?

CYNTHIA. Katherine just turned 14, but she already has her mind set on the medical profession, and her heart set on becoming a doctor.

ANDORRA. An extremely sensitive age. She's very fortunate to have your support. She'll need it.

CYNTHIA. Mine, yes. Her father's another story. Richard's dead set against it. He's especially difficult where women are concerned.

ANDORRA. Do you think he'll begrudge paying for my services?

CYNTHIA. Heavens no! Why, hiring you was actually his suggestion. Not exactly of course, but he did suggest a new wardrobe for the season ... and his new political ambitions.

ANDORRA. How thoughtful. I'm especially pleased when the husbands of my clients are in agreement with my coming. You have told Mr. McFarland that I'll be here for a while?

CYNTHIA. Of course. And that your room is next to his sitting room.

But you never answered my question. If you didn't choose to be a seamstress, how did it come about?

ANDORRA. You might say fate! My father was in the diplomatic service.

As a very young girl, we were stationed in various European capitals. Later, India and the Orient.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I was inhaling an exhilarating combination of trends.

CYNTHIA. Fascinating. You must have gotten quite an education. Travel can be the best of tutors.

ANDORRA. Of course my mother saw to it that I attended the very best schools. And she introduced me to some of the most prestigious couturiers in the world. The pain of losing my mother was overwhelming.

CYNTHIA. I'm sure. And your father?

ANDORRA. Both of my parents have passed.

CYNTHIA. So you have no one.

ANDORRA. That's right. But, as fate would have it, one of my mother's favorite fashion houses in Paris took me in as a design apprentice. There was money enough to finish my studies and travel a great deal more.

CYNTHIA. And you became a seamstress.

ANDORRA. After losing my parents, you might say that dressmaking was the one decent occupation open to me. I clearly couldn't be a shop girl, or a domestic.

And I certainly never even considered the stage.

CYNTHIA. Marriage wasn't an option?

ANDORRA. It never occurred to me.

Anyway, everything fell into place when I met your friend Mrs. Webster.

CYNTHIA. Oh, yes. You were sailing back to the states from India.

ANDORRA. I was mesmerized by her personal life, and her obsession for fashion. By the time we docked in Boston, I had my first full-fledged client.

CYNTHIA. I see.

ANDORRA. Wanderlust is a part of me now. I find staying in one place too long very ... unappealing.

As a traveling personal seamstress, I'm able to go where I wish, live with my customers and give them my full attention.

CYNTHIA. So your position suits you in a number of ways. Your fees should let you live very nicely.

ANDORRA. I admit my rates may seem high ... some even say exorbitant.

CYNTHIA. Not at all! Having a personal seamstress is priceless.

ANDORRA. And I guarantee complete satisfaction. You'll look quite handsome no matter what the occasion.

BRIGID (*enters with coffee pot*). Excuse me, ma'am.

CYNTHIA. Thank you, Brigid. The coffee smells wonderful.

ANDORRA (*nibbling a cookie*). Just as I suspected, Brigid, your talents are extraordinary.

BRIGID. Why, thank you, miss. Will there be anythin' else, ma'am?

CYNTHIA. Miss Hamilton?

ANDORRA. What more could I want?

CYNTHIA. That will be all, Brigid.

BRIGID. Yes, ma'am. (*Exits.*)

ANDORRA. Is there anything else I should know?

CYNTHIA. You have an extra large bed as you requested—for cutting and preparing your patterns, of course. Your sewing machine arrived just yesterday. The latest model.

ANDORRA. Very accommodating.

CYNTHIA. Your room has the best light available most of the day. And you'll be happy to know that we've added electric lighting to the gas fixtures throughout the house. So, you'll be able to work under any circumstances.

ANDORRA. Wonderful! Anything else?

CYNTHIA. Just that you'll be meeting Mr. McFarland this evening. (*Stands.*)

ANDORRA. Excellent! (*Stands.*) I'm always most anxious to meet the spouse of my employer as soon as possible. I like to know where their tastes run also, as it always makes my job much easier.

CYNTHIA. In that case, would you like to have dinner with us in the evenings? It's always served at 7.

ANDORRA. That would be very nice. I'll join you in a week or so after I'm completely settled in. Will I be seeing your daughter at all while I'm here?

CYNTHIA. I don't know yet. Mr. McFarland has seen to it that her visits home are few, and as brief as possible. But I have very high hopes of changing things in the future.

ANDORRA. Anything else I should know about your husband?

CYNTHIA. Yes, his itinerary can change on a whim. His political ambitions have taken over his regular schedule.

ANDORRA. Please let me know when he *is* home. I prefer to avoid any surprises. I'm sure you understand. (*Retrieves her case.*)

CYNTHIA. Completely. (*Ringing bell.*) I'll have Mrs. Ryan show you your room. I think you'll be very comfortable. Please let her know of anything you might need—anything at all.

BRIGID (*enters*). Yes, ma'am?

CYNTHIA. Brigid, please show Miss Hamilton to her room and see that she has absolutely everything she wants while she's our special guest.

BRIGID. Yes, ma'am.

ANDORRA. Together, I think we'll have an exquisitely satisfying experience.

CYNTHIA. A wonderful choice of words.

(*ANDORRA and BRIGID exit. Blackout.*)

The Vanishing Point

Drama by
NEDRA PEZOLD ROBERTS

The Vanishing Point was premiered by California Stage Theater Company in March 2014 with the following cast:

Jolie.....Emily Kentta
Pierre.....Jeremy Minagro
Paul St. Pé.....Richard Winters
T-Paul.....Nick Lunetta

Crew:

Producer/Director.....Ray Tatar
Stage Manager.....Melanie McClurg
Costumes.....Jenny Plummer
Scenic Design and Construction/Prop Design.....Buzz Weitz
Lighting Design.....Ryan Samples
Sound Design.....Susan Pikowsky
Scenic Painter.....Michael RJ Campbell
Dramaturg.....Lauren Sullivan
Cajun Dialect Consultant.....Neece Camp

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 Vanishing Point* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by California Stage Theater Company”

For Carrie and Eddie
who gave me everything.

vanishing point (*n.*)

- 1:** a point at which a group of receding parallel lines seems to meet when represented in linear perspective
- 2:** a point at which something disappears or ceases to exist

—Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary

The Vanishing Point

CHARACTERS

PAUL ST. PÉ: A proud and stubborn Cajun shrimper in his early 50s. He is irascible with a wry sense of humor. Deeply loyal and committed to family, he has raised two boys: T-Paul, his biological child, and his orphaned nephew, Pierre, from whom he's been estranged for years, ever since Pierre learned he was adopted. As Paul's sense of separation from his sons deepens, he remains convinced that their most important lessons about family and the power of love must be learned on their own. His surname is pronounced *Sant Pay*.

PIERRE: At 30, he is a weary, world-traveled environmental engineer who returns home to plant hope in the form of experimental grasses to shore up the endangered wetlands. Equally important to Pierre is the chance to heal the painful separation he has felt not only from his father but from his Cajun homeland. And then there is Jolie, the girl he left behind, or thought he had left behind.

T-PAUL: 27, a happy-go-lucky but restless dreamer who radiates impatient energy. T-Paul is fed up with the hard work on shrimp boats and oil rigs. Now engaged to Jolie, he wants to run away with her to the stability and excitement of life in the big city. His name is a Cajun version of Petit Paul, or Paul Junior, and is pronounced *Tee Paul*.

JOLIE: Also 27, a practical woman firmly tied to family and community. She is the glue that holds this ensemble together. Steady and honest, she knows her own mind and what she is willing to fight for. While T-Paul criticizes Jolie for being too *attache à sa famille* to leave the area and make a new home, she would say that family *is* home.

SETTING

Pointe Critique, La. The summer of 2005, shortly before the arrival of hurricane Katrina.

Act I

Scene 1: The St. Pé home, late afternoon.

Scene 2: Mid-morning the next day.

Scene 3: Mid-morning, two weeks later.

Act II:

Scene 1: Early the following morning.

Scene 2: Late afternoon, three weeks later.

Note: The music that ends each scene should be that of southwest Louisiana Cajun artists such as BeauSoleil or Nova Scotia's Ronald Bourgeois.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Although the French language married into English back in 1066, the blending has not always been seamless, as with the Acadians who were forced to migrate in Le Grande Dérangement of 1755 and settled in southwest Louisiana between 1763 and 1776. In French, for example, there is no *th* sound; the name Thibadeaux is pronounced Tibadō. However, for the multitude of English words that begin in *th*, Louisiana's Cajuns substituted a *d* for the *th* sound. *This* became *dis*, *they* became *dey*.

When Paul speaks, it is with my grandfather's voice from the vault of my memory. Today, reproducing that Cajun dialect accurately in Paul's dialogue could inadvertently cast him as a stereotype in the Justin Wilson mold. To avoid that misconception, I have kept the English *th* sounds but stayed true, I hope, to the distinctive music and rhythms of the French-English fusion in Cajun speech. And while traveling the world has helped Pierre lose much of his Cajun accent, T-Paul and Jolie still have a slight but lingering trace of music in their speech.

The Vanishing Point

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Early afternoon in Pointe Critique, La., at the St. Pé home. It is a small but sturdy house in need of a woman's touch. The kitchen is spare. Hooks by the door hold work caps, jackets and a pair of waders. A table and four chairs occupy the center of the room; a worn arm chair and ottoman are against one wall by a low storage chest with a hinged lid. A small seine net, a small trawling net and a few fishing rods lean against that same wall. The side yard adjacent to the kitchen also carries the trappings of this Cajun life—a large shrimp net in need of repair, an assortment of light buoys and pole buoys, a crab trap or two and an old galvanized tub planted with herbs. PIERRE enters the yard and pauses, caught in a moment of emotion and memory. He moves and halts outside the kitchen screen door, watching, a stranger now in this familiar world. Inside, JOLIE is dancing, lost in Cajun music as she tidies up. [Perhaps the song "Jolie Louise" by Daniel Lanois would be particularly appropriate here.] Pierre quietly enters, letting his laptop and duffle bag fall to the floor then turns the music off. JOLIE is startled and yelps in surprise.)

JOLIE. *Ayyyeeeee! Mon dieu, Pierre!*

(JOLIE laughs and rushes to embrace PIERRE with an easy quick peck on each cheek.)

JOLIE *(cont'd)*. Where did you come from? When did you get here?

PIERRE *(grinning, drinking in the sight of her)*. Don't let me interrupt. The floor show was just getting—

JOLIE. You like to give me a heart attack. I didn't know you were coming home. Your papa never said—

PIERRE. He doesn't know.

JOLIE (*pulling out of the embrace, suddenly embarrassed*). You came to surprise him?

PIERRE. Not exactly.

JOLIE (*covering her awkwardness*). I made some coffee. Fresh.

PIERRE. No thanks.

JOLIE. Your papa should be home soon.

PIERRE (*taking in the familiar kitchen*). At least this place hasn't changed.

JOLIE. Not this house, no. But the land around here has.

PIERRE. I noticed on the drive down from Lafayette. (*Beat.*) Where is the old man?

JOLIE. Your papa's down by Mr. Fontenot's. Getting a part for his boat.

PIERRE. That old tub's still limping? I thought for sure he'd have given up on it by now. Seems like it's been nothing but trouble for the past 10 years.

JOLIE (*puttering as he studies her*). Mr. Paul don't give up easily on anything.

PIERRE. Like I said, some things never change.

JOLIE. You hungry? I made a pot of red beans for your papa. Want me to fix you a bowl?

PIERRE. No thanks. I ate something on the way down here. (*Gestures at her apron.*) So what's all this about? You working for the old man now?

JOLIE. Helping out a little now and then. You want a beer?

PIERRE. I'm fine. (*Pats the chair next to him.*) Stop fussing and come sit down.

JOLIE. T-Paul said you been working on some environment project in Vietnam. Must be exciting, all those far-away places you go.

PIERRE (*laughs*). Not unless you like swatting bugs and living knee-deep in mud. That's been my excitement for the last 11 months. Surveying the marshes just west of the Mekong Delta, trying to figure out what's killing their grasses.

JOLIE. Sounds like what's happening here, only kinda exotic.

PIERRE. Dying grass looks like dying grass. I just exchange one body of water for another. After a while, they all start to look alike.

JOLIE. I can't imagine there'd be another place like home somewhere across the world. How long you gonna be here this time?

PIERRE (*absently touching a loose strand of her hair*). You interested?

JOLIE (*gets up and moves away*). Just asking. T-Paul's due back this evening. He'll be glad to see you.

PIERRE. Back from where?

JOLIE. The oil rigs off Port Fourchon in the Gulf. Been working there five months now.

PIERRE. You gotta be kidding. And the old man let him go?

JOLIE. Couldn't stop him. T-Paul said he was done with shrimping. He wasn't going out on your papa's boat no more.

PIERRE. Damn. Nobody hates those rigs like the old man. But T can be stubborn when he wants to.

JOLIE. Just like your papa.

PIERRE. You got that right. (*Beat.*) How did the old man take it?

JOLIE. At first there was a lot of shouting and ugly arguments. Then your *Oncle* Emile drowned and your papa went quiet. Now they don't talk about it when T-Paul comes home. He's on the rigs 28 days, then off for 10.

PIERRE. Must be quiet around here.

JOLIE. They just pretend nothing's happened.

PIERRE. Makes it easy not to talk.

JOLIE. You should know.

PIERRE. Careful. Your claws are showing. (*As he playfully grabs her wrist, he sees her ring.*) What's this?

JOLIE. T-Paul and me, we're engaged. We gettin' married as soon as he saves enough money from the rigs.

PIERRE (*absorbing the blow*). That was fast.

JOLIE. You been gone a long time.

PIERRE. Apparently.

JOLIE. He loves me and I—

PIERRE. I didn't ask.

JOLIE. You did. I saw it in your eyes.

PIERRE. It's none of my business—

JOLIE. Not anymore. That's right.

(Returning home, PAUL ST. PÉ enters and sees PIERRE. He takes in the luggage on the floor but says nothing as he crosses to wash his hands at the sink.)

PAUL *(to JOLIE)*. That washing machine work all right for you today?

JOLIE *(gathering her things)*. Perfect. I did three loads. And I made you a pot of red beans for tonight. You gonna need anything else?

PAUL. No. I'm fine, me. There's some good redfish in the cooler by the back door. Take that to your mama. I'll pay you at the end of the week, no?

JOLIE. No rush, Mr. Paul. You can wait 'til after the next load of shrimp comes in.

PAUL *(dries his hands as he studies PIERRE)*. That's good, then. I got the boat fixed to go out tonight. Brown shrimp are runnin' big now.

PIERRE. Need any help?

PAUL *(measuring him)*. A man wit' out no sons at home always need some help. You think you remember how to do that kinda work?

PIERRE. What time you want to go out?

PAUL. Hmmph. Right after we eat dinner.

JOLIE *(cautious)*. Well, I'll be on my way then. I'm gonna wax these floors and clean the windows tomorrow. Just leave me a note for what else you want done.

PAUL. That's plenty for one day, *chère*. You work too hard in this house.

JOLIE. I don't mind. *(Beat.)* See you tomorrow, Mr. Paul. Pierre.

PIERRE *(speculatively)*. Yeah. Tomorrow.

(JOLIE exits. PAUL lifts the lid on the pot of beans and smells the aroma.)

PAUL. *Bien fait*. That girl can cook. You a damn fool to let her get away.

PIERRE. I didn't have what she was looking for.

PAUL. Hmmph. You a damn fool.

PIERRE. That seems to be the popular opinion.

PAUL. Your lil' brudder didn't need no map to find that jewel.

PIERRE. They set a date for the wedding yet?

PAUL. If they did, they never tole me about it. *Mais* T-Paul, he don't tell me much, him. *(Beat.)* What you doin' here now?

PIERRE. Working. A wetlands project. The marsh grasses turning brown down by Leeville. Thought I'd crash with you for a few weeks. If that's all right.

PAUL. It don't make me no never mind. I got plenty empty bedrooms in this house. You might as well use one.

PIERRE. Right. (*Testing the waters.*) How's *Tante Bébé* been doing since *Oncle Emile* died?

PAUL. *Tante Bébé*? *Oncle Emile*? Oh, you part of this family now?

PIERRE. You know I was in Vietnam when his boat went down. I didn't get the news in time for the funeral.

PAUL. Well, we managed to bury my brudder wit' out you. But *Bébé* gonna be pleased you care.

PIERRE. He was my godfather. Of course I—

PAUL (*with heat*). He was your *parrain*! You gave up our words, too, when you moved away? (*Pause. Crosses to examine the pile of fishing poles.*) Emile didn't have to go out toward the Gulf, no. I tole him that *tempête* was coming. And he knew the wetlands was all gone out there. Nothin' to stop a surge no more if it come. He didn't have to go out that far. They was plenty shrimp close by. *Mais* him, he knows better than me. (*Shakes his head.*) Nobody listens to me no more.

PIERRE. Thick-headed, just like you.

PAUL (*shifting the mood, off-hand but probing a bit*). T-Paul didn't have no easy time findin' you name in the telephone. *Mais* how you call yourself now?

PIERRE. Pete. Pete St. Pé.

PAUL (*muttering*). Pete. Sound like the noise a bird make. I give you my papa's name and that's what you do wit it? Pete.

PIERRE. It's what the guys I work with started to call me. It just stuck.

PAUL (*mildly*). They shoulda called you jackass. Let that stick. (*Beat.*) Pete. Sound like a bird.

PIERRE. How long has Jolie been cleaning for you?

PAUL. Since I been livin' here on my own.

PIERRE. Since T-Paul left to work on the rigs?

PAUL. Since T-Paul turn his back on his heritage. Like you done.

PIERRE. Not every Cajun is cut out to work on a shrimp boat.

PAUL (*impatient, the old familiar complaint*). Don't you think I know that? But this family been independent since our people settled these bayous. We worked for ourselves, owned ourselves. Now look at the two of you. You workin' for somebody else. You dependin' on somebody else for a job. Me, I can take care of myself. I pay Jolie to clean up a little around here, but I take care of myself.

PIERRE. OK, OK. Let's not argue about this tonight. Plenty of time to argue tomorrow. I'll be home for a while.

PAUL. Home? You got one of those?

PIERRE. Shit. (*Pause.*)

PAUL. That grass you come here to see, it's part of the land that's disappearin'?

PIERRE. That's what I've come to find out.

PAUL. It ain't just at Leeville they turn brown, no. Get you out by Bayou Lafourche and you can see more.

PIERRE. We're looking into that, too.

PAUL. Well, you better look fast before they's nothin' left but empty water. That land's vanishin' right before our eyes.

PIERRE. Yeah. We figure the loss rate is 25 square miles each year.

PAUL. You can thank the Corps of Engineers for that. All that college knowledge and they still *stupide*. We tole them back in 1960 you can't put no levees to cage up that river. But you think they listened to us up in Baton Rouge? Hell, no. Those politicians grabbed that oil money and let that good soil from the river go straight out to the ocean. They starved the wetlands. (*Digusted.*) *C'est la vie, c'est la vie, c'est la goddamn vie!*

PIERRE (*testing the waters*). The study I'm working on isn't for Baton Rouge. It's for Washington, D.C.

PAUL. For true?

PIERRE. Yeah.

PAUL. Hell, them people don't even know where Louisiana's at. How come now they want to study some disappearin' land? They never cared before.

PIERRE. A third of the country's seafood comes from here. If the ecosystem supporting that disappears, so do a lot of businesses. Then there's the drilling factor for oil and gas. And those refineries along the coast. If the wetlands disappear, all those Gulf rigs will be at risk any time a good storm kicks up. The bottom line is money, what else?

PAUL. Gonna take more than money to save this land.

PIERRE. Not saying it won't. My team's here to assess the problem. The oil companies always had a lock on drilling rights, but with the marsh grasses dying, the picture's changing fast.

PAUL. Can't keep grass on land that's under water.

PIERRE. The problem may be bigger than the loss of good silt.

PAUL. Well, you solve that mystery, and you be a genius for true!

(A car noise from outside signals T-PAUL's arrival. He is an exuberant man, a physical man, full of energy. He enters the kitchen, tossing his backpack aside as he spies PIERRE. He is playful, elated.)

T-PAUL. Ah, no! Look who's here! Am I seeing things? What you doing here, man? How long you staying?

(The brothers embrace.)

PIERRE. A few weeks. Maybe more.

T-PAUL. You on vacation?

PIERRE. I wish. A wetlands project. Thought I'd spend some time with the family, but it turns out you don't live here anymore.

T-PAUL *(laughing, collecting his gear to move it to a bedroom)*. Now you sound like Papa. *(To PAUL.)* You been brainwashing him while I was gone?

PAUL. I don't need to wash nobody's brain. I live alone now. Anybody can see that.

T-PAUL. Well, looks like you got two sons in your house now. Come on, Papa, let's celebrate. How about a beer?

PAUL. Bah! I got a boat to get ready. Shrimp gonna be runnin' hard tonight. The tide gonna push them right in the nets.

(T-PAUL exits to the bedroom.)

PIERRE. You want some help loading the boat?

PAUL. You and you brudder drink you beer. But if you comin' wit me tonight, you better be ready to leave right after we eat.

PIERRE (*smiling at the old game*). I'll be ready.

PAUL. And you gotta be ready to work.

PIERRE. I haven't forgotten.

PAUL (*secretly pleased*). All right, then.

(PAUL exits as T-PAUL enters.)

T-PAUL (*crosses to the refrigerator*). You really going out shrimping?

PIERRE. Sure. Why don't you come along?

T-PAUL (*handing PIERRE a beer*). Not me. I gave that up for good. Besides, I got plans tonight. I been stuck on a rig too many days with nothing but men. I need to see a female face for a change.

PIERRE. Not even for old times? The old man looks like he could use another crewman. He's starting to show his age.

T-PAUL. Don't kid yourself. The older he gets, the tougher he gets.

PIERRE. He's looking tired to me. *Oncle Emile's* death must have hit him hard.

T-PAUL. About knocked him flat.

PIERRE. What the hell happened, anyway?

T-PAUL. Bad luck and worse judgment.

PIERRE. Emile?

T-PAUL. Yeah. He was so proud about sending Cheramie to college. Guess he thought if Papa could pay for you to go there, he could do the same for his kid.

PIERRE. Wait. Cheramie's old enough to be in college?

T-PAUL. Almost finished. Graduates in August. You been gone a long time, man.

PIERRE. So I've been told.

T-PAUL. *Oncle Emile*, he was having some money problems—the boat, his car. Missed a mortgage payment. Then had to make that last installment on Cheramie's tuition for the semester. (*Beat.*) Wouldn't take no money from Papa.

PIERRE. Too much pride.

T-PAUL. Thought he'd make one last run for shrimp close to the mouth of the Gulf. Papa said he was crazy. Told him not to go. They had a big fight. I'm talking *BIG*.

PIERRE. Cajun temper.

(T-PAUL rises to get another beer. PIERRE signals he's still working on the first one.)

T-PAUL. Damn right. So *Oncle* Emile went out. Took Roland and Justin with him.

PIERRE. Little Justin? He can't be more than 10 or 11 at most.

T-PAUL. He's 15. And just like his daddy. Hard damn heads, all of 'em. When the storm hit, they were too far out. And the boat was loaded, sittin' heavy in the water. They tried to outrun the surge, but they were too slow. Boat swamped; they went down.

PIERRE. The kids?

T-PAUL. They all got separated. Next morning a supply boat headed for the rigs pulled Roland out of Barataria Bay. Coast Guard rescued Justin a few hours later. Choppers took them to Lady of the Sea Hospital.

PIERRE. *Oncle* Emile?

T-PAUL. Took another two days to find his body. The boat was gone—just some debris left. Papa was with the search crew. Chopper flew me in from Port Fourchon, and I joined him that Tuesday. He hadn't slept for three days, but he was still shouting orders to everybody.

PIERRE. Doesn't know how to give up.

T-PAUL. Head like a brick.

(Old habit. They click beer bottles, then T-PAUL drains his.)

PIERRE. That why you quit shrimping? You used to love being out on the water.

T-PAUL. Hell, I finally woke up. You know what it's like out there—long hours, back breaking work, no guarantee you'll make the catch. And for what? Hard times and shit returns.

PIERRE. At least you'd be your own boss.

T-PAUL. Big deal.

PIERRE. The rigs can't be better.

T-PAUL (*crosses to get another beer*). Pay sure is. And that's what I'm after.

PIERRE. What about satisfaction?

T-PAUL. Overrated.

PIERRE. T-Paul—

T-PAUL. Money's freedom. My ticket out of this life. I want what you got—independence, a fat bank account, a chance to see the world.

PIERRE (*quietly*). I'm not as free as you think.

T-PAUL. I want something more than killing myself for a boat load of shrimp.

PIERRE. Shrimping's been good to this family. It—

T-PAUL. So how come *you* left?

PIERRE. It wasn't the life.

T-PAUL. What then?

PIERRE. It's not important.

T-PAUL (*testing the waters*). That summer before you left for college, you and Papa stopped talking. I figured you had some kind of fight.

PIERRE. A difference in viewpoint, that's all.

T-PAUL. Musta been some difference. You even stopped calling him papa.

PIERRE. You're imagining things.

T-PAUL. Not *that*. Musta been big.

PIERRE. Just different. (*Beat.*) So, now you're chasing the good life, huh?

T-PAUL. Listen, man, I don't want good. I want *great*.

PIERRE. Which is?

T-PAUL. A house on solid land, for one thing. A brick house. With central air so I don't have to bake at night when I sleep. (*Warming to his vision.*) I want to drive a new car—one that keeps that new car smell, you know? And a driveway that's made of concrete, not oyster shells. I want a steady job, one I can count on. Go in at 8, get off at 5. A job that's gonna be there whether shrimp are run-

ning or not. (*Sitting now, willing PIERRE to see the dream.*) This guy I'm friends with on the rigs. Fellow from Breaux Bridge. He's got connections in Lafayette—a cousin who's got his own shop. Says he can get me a job there working on engines.

PIERRE. Always the dreamer. 8 to 5 would bore you.

T-PAUL. I'll take that chance.

PIERRE. Get real. Pay on the rigs may be good, but the hours are just as grueling as shrimping. And the risks of storms or explosions are insane. How long you think you can stick it out?

T-PAUL. Long as I have to. Get me enough spending money, then hello Lafayette.

PIERRE. A smart man told me once, "It's not how much you make, it's how much you don't spend."

T-PAUL. People who say that kinda shit already got all the money they want.

PIERRE (*gets a second beer*). What do they have you doing on the rigs?

T-PAUL. "Mop rag" crew, plugging small oil leaks and mopping up spills. I'm getting pretty good with a blowtorch.

PIERRE. That appeals to you? Day after day?

T-PAUL. Hell, no. But I'm learning some useful stuff. Like I said, I don't plan on working the rigs forever. I got other plans.

PIERRE (*gauging his brother's reaction*). Those plans include Jolie?

T-PAUL (*on alert*). You know about that?

PIERRE. She was finishing up here when I arrived.

T-PAUL. She told you?

PIERRE. That rock on her hand was hard to miss. You can't be saving much money if you're paying for that.

T-PAUL. She deserves it.

PIERRE. Not saying she doesn't. I just hope you'll like working on the rigs a lot longer.

T-PAUL. I'll do what I have to. We not gonna waste our lives here fighting the same stuff that Papa and the old people did. We gettin' out, gonna live for a change. Like people do in the cities. (*Beat.*) You OK with Jolie and me?

PIERRE (*masking his pain*). Sure, why not?

Jellofish

Drama/Comedy by
JIM HENRY

Jellofish was premiered by Phoenix Stage Company in Naugatuck, Conn. on May 2, 2014, with the following cast and crew:

Billy.....	Ed Bassett
Kooch.....	Tim Phillips
Earl.....	Timothy Cleary
Judy.....	Deborah Forish
Director.....	Ed Bassett
Stage Manager.....	Agnes Dann
Props.....	Lori Poulin
Set.....	Mark Rees
Lighting Design.....	Al Hathway.

Jellofish was developed in part at Chicago Dramatists and Chicago Street Theatre where Jim Henry is a resident playwright.

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:

“*Jellofish* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Phoenix Stage Company in Naugatuck, Conn.”

Jellofish

CHARACTERS

BILLY DIAMATTI: 80 years.

EARL MUMFORD: 78 years.

ALFRED KUCHINSKI “KOOCH”: 80 years.

JUDY CLABBER: mid-30s.

Time: Throughout the year of 1999.

Dedicated to the memory of Robert J Minniti Sr.
and all his fellow comrades who fought in the great wars.

Jellofish

ACT I

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *A square table and four chairs. There are four stacks of poker chips on the table in front of each chair.*

(In the chair L, BILLY DIAMATTI is shuffling a deck of cards. BILLY is wearing a green plastic dealer's visor that looks like it has been through a war.

Seated at the upstage chair, facing the audience, is EARL MUMFORD. He is wearing a Chicago Cubs baseball cap that is worn and tattered. He is wearing an oxygen hose that is hooked to his ears and feeds air to each nostril. A small oxygen tank on wheels is next to his chair. The other two chairs are empty.

BILLY pulls a cigar out of his shirt pocket and pops it between his teeth.)

EARL. No smokes.

BILLY. You know, Earl, I could light this seegar and blow us both to Texarkana. But I wouldn't give our friend Kooch the satisfaction.

EARL. Kooch is late.

BILLY. Kooch is perpetually late.

EARL. Every game.

BILLY. Yeah, but this takes the cake, icing and all, when we're playing cards at his house, and we get here before him.

EARL. Roosevelt knew all along.

BILLY. If Kooch doesn't get here in five minutes, you, me and Dale here are starting without him.

(On the word "Dale," he points to the empty chair that is pulled up to the table with its back to the audience. There is a blue and gold scarf hanging over the back of the chair. BILLY reaches down to a six pack on the floor. He picks up a can of beer, cracks it open and swigs.)

EARL. He knew months and months before.

BILLY. Who?

EARL. FDR. He knew the Japs were coming. Pearl Harbor was planned ...

BILLY. Snap out of it, sailor, come back to 1999, Earl. We got a whole new millennium coming at the end of the year, gotta move on.

EARL. Deal the cards.

BILLY. Now you're talking sense.

(BILLY starts dealing cards to Dale, EARL and himself. The cards in front of Dale's chair are dealt face up.)

BILLY *(cont'd)*. That'll teach Kooch to be late for his own poker game.

(EARL starts to rub his chest.)

BILLY *(cont'd)*. Your heart hurting again, Earl?

EARL. No.

BILLY. If it is, you take your nitro.

(EARL takes a small bottle from his shirt pocket and offers it to BILLY.)

BILLY *(cont'd)*. No thank you, Earl.

(EARL sets the pill bottle on the table next to his poker chips.)

BILLY *(cont'd)*. You won't ever catch me with nitro in my mouth. I was a munitions man in the war and we used that stuff to take out bridges.

EARL *(feeling his teeth)*. Bridges?

BILLY. No, not the kind in your mouth, the kind that spans a river in Germany. But come to think of it, if you don't watch it with that nitro, you'll blow your dentures clear through the picture window. OK, everybody ante a dollar. *(Picks up a white poker chip from his stack. He looks it over.)* Well, would you look at this, Earl?

EARL. What?

BILLY. I hold in my hand, the Brian chip.

EARL. Who?

BILLY. This ain't a good omen when I get the Brian chip right off the git go.

EARL. Who's Brian?

BILLY. My son? Brian?

EARL. Smiley?

BILLY. Yeah Smiley. Yes he was.

EARL. Smiley died.

BILLY *(stares at the chip, looking at both sides)*. I wrote this history chip when he hit that grand slam at sectionals.

EARL. Kaboom.

BILLY. That boy could kill that ball.

EARL. They killed him.

BILLY. Yeah.

EARL. The Vietnam.

(BILLY places the chip back on his stack.)

BILLY. Yeah, the Vietnam.

EARL. Smiley Brian was dead pull when he hit the ball. Right down third base liner.

BILLY. Dead pull.

EARL. Where's little baby Karen?

BILLY. She grew up. Moved to Florida.

EARL. With Mickey Mouse.

BILLY. Actually, you're not to far off. Her husband is a moron.

EARL. More off or more on?

BILLY. Exactly. *(A beat, he deals some cards.)* Well, screw it, we're playing.

(ALFRED KUCHINSKI "KOOCH" enters with a grocery bag. He stops dead in his tracks when he sees BILLY dealing the cards. KOOCH is wearing an old fishing vest with lures pinned all over its many pockets.)

KOOCH. You wouldn't dare.

BILLY. You're late.

KOOCH. It's my house for Chrissake, you shit.

(KOOCH sets the grocery bag on the chair R, opposite BILLY's chair. He unpacks the pretzels, chips and diet soda and sets it on the table.)

BILLY. Don't clutter the table.

KOOCH. I'm unpacking.

BILLY. Dale and Earl and I are in the middle of a hand.

KOOCH. It's a dead hand, Billy. You started without me. I'm hosting this month's game and this is my house and you play by my house rules, in my house. It's dead.

EARL. Dead pull.

KOOCH. See Earl agrees and that's two against one, democracy. Besides, you three haven't even anteed up.

BILLY. Fine, this hand's dead. Now sit down and let's go.

KOOCH *(looks at the hand face up in front of Dale's empty chair)*. Too bad, Dale had a pair of kings.

BILLY. Put 60 bucks in the pension bucket to cover your chips.

(KOOCH places \$60 in a rusted bucket under the table.)

BILLY *(cont'd)*. Do you always have to be late?

KOOCH. I'm not always late.

BILLY. Never once have you showed up on time.

KOOCH. You sound like a woman with your always this and never that.

BILLY. Kooch, we been waiting 20 minutes.

KOOCH. Did you knock before you came in?

BILLY *(throws two poker chips into the middle)*. Everybody ante two bucks. Why should we knock? You weren't here.

KOOCH *(throws in two chips of his own and then two chips from Dale's stack)*. Earl, you're light. *(To BILLY.)* It's still a courtesy to knock before you barge into a man's domicile.

BILLY. Domicile? This place is a pigsty. Earl, pot's light, ante up. *(To KOOCH.)* You didn't drive to the store, did you?

KOOCH. How else am I supposed to get there?

BILLY. The bus, a taxi?

KOOCH. I am not going to be a slave to public transportation, schedules, fare disputes, crazy foreign drivers.

BILLY. Our taxi delivered us perfectly safe, didn't he Earl?

EARL. Yep.

KOOCH. I offered to come get you guys.

BILLY. Better to be safe.

KOOCH. What's that supposed to mean?

BILLY. It means, Kooch, you don't follow the two second rule.

KOOCH. I do too.

BILLY. Last time you picked us up ...

KOOCH. Yeah, I know, you counted one thousand one, blah blah blah.

BILLY. You follow too close.

KOOCH. No, you count too slow.

BILLY. Guys your age shouldn't even have a license.

KOOCH. Guys my age? You're the same age as me.

BILLY. I'm eight months younger and besides, I took a taxi.

KOOCH. They'll have to pry my driver's license out of my cold dead fingers.

BILLY. You don't have a license, you lost it.

KOOCH. Well, if I did have one, they'd have to ...

BILLY. It's a license to kill that's what it is.

KOOCH. Let's play cards.

(BILLY deals a hand, Dale's cards are face up again.)

BILLY. Five card draw, guts to open.

EARL. What's wild?

BILLY. Shut up. *(To KOOCH.)* Get that stuff off the table.

(KOOCH takes the groceries off the table and puts them on the floor. BILLY looks at Dale's cards.)

BILLY *(cont'd)*. Dale has a pair of fours, I say he opens for two bucks.

KOOCH. I agree

EARL. Yep.

(BILLY throws two chips from Dale's pile into the pot.)

BILLY. Two bucks to you Kooch.

KOOCH. I'll call Dale's two bucks.

(They look at EARL, who is staring at his cards.)

BILLY. Well?

EARL. What?

BILLY. Dale's got a pair of fours and he's challenging you with a two dollar bet. Two to you or toodle-loo.

EARL *(chuckles)*. Toodle-loo. *(Throws in two chips.)*

(As the scene progresses, the poker game proceeds with the three men throwing chips in, dealing cards and drawing for new cards.)

BILLY. I'll call Dale's two bucks. And I say he'll keep the pair of fours and draw three cards.

KOOCH. OK by me. I'll take three cards too.

EARL. I'll take two.

BILLY. Dealer takes three cards.

KOOCH. Who's hosting the game next month?

BILLY. It's Earl's turn next month. I think Dale should fold his pair of fours.

KOOCH. Fine, and I'll bet three dollars. Earl? Is Sarah going to let you host the game next month?

EARL. At my house.

KOOCH *(to BILLY)*. You can't smoke those cigars around Sarah, she'll have a conniption.

BILLY. I'm just chewing it. You think I'd light this thing with a live O2 tank sitting here? I used to handle precious gases during the war.

KOOCH. You pass precious gases maybe.

BILLY. Hardy har, I'll call your three bucks, what do you have, Kooch?

KOOCH. Two pair.

(EARL lays his hand down. BILLY throws his cards in.)

BILLY. Take it, I'll deal for Dale, ante two.

(KOOCH takes his winnings, takes two chips out of the pot and tosses them into a rusty bucket under the table. Throughout the scene, anytime anyone wins a pot, they throw a few chips into the bucket.)

KOOCH. Billy, I'll bet you 10 bucks that Sarah doesn't let Earl have the game at his house next time.

BILLY. Earl's been hosting his turn for the past 50 odd years. You're on, Kooch, 10 bucks. Earl, don't you let me down, you hear?

EARL. With who?

KOOCH *(picks up a white poker chip)*. Well, would you look at this.

BILLY. What?

KOOCH. I hold in my hand the Vasectomy chip.

BILLY. 1971.

KOOCH. No it was '69.

BILLY *(grabbing the chip)*. Let me see that. I swear it was 1971 ...

KOOCH. 1969.

BILLY. Gracie and I had just gotten back from the Grand Canyon ...

KOOCH. 1969, the year of the moonwalk ...

BILLY. No, the moonwalk was in November, Dale got his vasectomy in the summer ...

KOOCH. The moonwalk was in July ...

BILLY. Dale hobbled in here complaining about the heat ...

KOOCH. Right, it was July and Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin stepped on the moon and Dale just had his vasectomy.

BILLY. You might be right, we should have written the date on these history chips.

KOOCH. It was '69, sure as a turd. It was after Dale and Margie's seventh kid was born. How old is their youngest?

BILLY. How the hell should I know?

EARL. Thirty-three.

(BILLY places the Vasectomy chip on his stack.)

KOOCH. Whoa, cowboy, that was my chip.

BILLY *(tosses a white chip to KOOCH)*. Here.

KOOCH. Wait a minute, this chip is blank, gimme the Vasectomy chip.

BILLY. What's the difference? They're both worth a buck.

KOOCH. I drew the Vasectomy chip and I want to play it, you'll have to win it fair and square.

BILLY *(holds up the chip)*. Fine, here it is, V-A-S written all over it, there you go, but don't hog it, throw it in the pot on your next bet.

KOOCH. I'll play it at the appropriate moment based on the strength of my hand.

BILLY. I'm winning that Vasectomy chip by the end of the night.

KOOCH. We'll see. Hey, do you know if the Raccoon chip made it to the table tonight?

EARL. My raccoon.

BILLY. I don't look, I just dig in the box and grab whatever chips and stack 'em up.

EARL. That bastard raccoon.

BILLY. How much is in the pension bucket?

KOOCH pulls a savings passbook out of a pocket in his fishing vest and opens it.)

KOOCH. Eighty-eight thousand, three hundred forty-two dollars and 18 cents.

BILLY. Thank God none of us waited to actually retire on that.

KOOCH. How did we ever figure the pension bucket would be up to a million bucks by the time we all retired?

EARL. Billy did.

BILLY. What?

EARL. You.

BILLY. Hell I did.

KOOCH. You sat right there in that chair 50 some years ago and said it too, a million bucks, right there in that chair.

BILLY. You just bought these chairs last year.

KOOCH. In your spot, you sat there in your spot and agreed we'd all retire millionaires, split four ways.

BILLY. It was Dale, he was the accountant, he figured out some compound interest thing.

KOOCH. We should'a pulled 20% from each pot like I said, not five, and we'd have a nest egg on our hands right now.

BILLY. If Dale would have put it in the stock market like I told ...

KOOCH. What are you goofy? The stock market?

EARL. Dale died.

BILLY. Really, are you sure about that, Earl?

KOOCH. Stop it, Billy.

BILLY. Or is his lucky scarf just sitting there waiting for him to get here.

EARL. Notre Dame. He loved ...

BILLY. Yes he did, and he was also too conservative or we'd be sitting in Irish green right now.

KOOCH. Well, I say we start pulling 20% from each pot.

BILLY. What good is that gonna do us now?

KOOCH. Every little bit ...

BILLY. Helps, yes, if you know how to invest it, we could have put some of that money into Microsoft or Wal-Mart.

KOOCH. That's hind sight.

BILLY. Let's just split it and forget it.

KOOCH. What did you just say?

BILLY. Split the pension bucket and be done with it.

EARL. Split it?

BILLY. Split it four ways and trash the whole idea. Each of us gets 25 percent.

KOOCH. What about Dale's 25 percent?

BILLY. Give it to his Margie, she put up with him being at these games all these years. Send her a cashier's check, she'd shit a golden brick.

EARL. Margie's in Phoenix.

KOOCH. That's not what we agreed to.

BILLY. Forget that.

KOOCH. You're saying forget our agreement, buck tradition?

BILLY. I'm saying this whole thing is a waste and it's a stupid waste.

EARL. The pension bucket?

BILLY. Yes.

KOOCH. We all agreed that we'd split the pension when it reached a million.

BILLY. You gonna live to be a thousand years old?

EARL. Methuselah.

KOOCH. A million bucks or whoever is left with it.

BILLY. Oh, the last guy standing contingency.

KOOCH. Exactly.

BILLY. I agreed to the million, not to the last guy to kick that bucket.

KOOCH. Awe, bull crap, that was the contingency. In case the rest of us met with an untimely death, then somebody's got to get the money.

BILLY. Untimely? Dale died when he was 81. Earl here is the youngest and he's 77.

EARL. Seventy-eight.

BILLY. Whatever.

KOOCH. That was the agreement and we're sticking to it.

BILLY. And what about Margie?

KOOCH. What about her?

BILLY. Dale gets none of it, his wife sits home alone all those years and ...

KOOCH. Margie's suffocating in money, have you been to their ranch in Arizona?

EARL. They got cows.

KOOCH. They got herds. They got acreage, and a house on Sanibel Island. You know what she sold their place in Aspen for?

BILLY. Doesn't matter. She should get a fair and commensurate share.

KOOCH. Ah, Judas Priest, she don't need the money.

BILLY. She can give it to her seven kids, or her thousands of grandkids.

KOOCH. Now that's where I put the foot down. We all agreed on day one that none of our kids get any of the pension bucket.

BILLY. Let's take it to a vote.

End Papers

Drama by
BARRY WEINBERG

End Papers recieved its premier production at the Little Theatre of Mechanicsburg (Mechanicsburg, Pa.) in July 2014.

Cast:

Kathy..... Elizabeth Z. Parry
Mr. G..... Charles (Smitty) Smith
Rich..... Mark L. Scott
Ted..... Jack E. Eilber
Grace..... Kelly Scheib

Production:

Director Duane A. Baker
Producer Kathie Spacht
Stage manager Michael Guenther
Costumes..... Jackie Goodwin, Alice Kirkland
Properties Michael Guenther
Set Design Giulio Marchi
Set Construction..... Giulio Marchi, Angie Wise
Lighting and Sound Design Jerry Sanders
Painting Giulio Marchi, Charles (Smitty) Smith
Set Dressing Kathy Spacht, Duane A. Baker
Headshots/Photography Michael Guenther
Opening Night Reception Kathie Spacht

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:

“*End Papers* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by the Little Theatre of Mechanicsburg (Mechanicsburg, Pa.)”

End Papers

CHARACTERS

KATHY: Recently unemployed editor of a literary journal. In her 40s.

TED: Kathy's boyfriend long ago. Now a successful attorney. In his 40s.

MR. G: In his 80s. Owns End Papers Books and Records.

GRACE: Kathy's best friend. In her 40s.

RICH: Kathy's husband. A bank vice president. In his 40s.

SCENES

ACT I: Fall 1984

Scene 1: End Papers bookstore.

Scene 2: That night. Kathy and Rich's living room.

ACT II: End Papers Bookstore

Scene 1: The next day.

Scene 2: The next six months.

Scene 3: Two weeks later.

Scene 4: Two weeks later.

Scene 5: One week later.

Scene 6: One month later.

End Papers

ACT I

SCENE 1

(End Papers, a used bookstore. There is an entrance from the street. On the stage are bookshelves filled with books; an old wooden desk, on which there are a pile of magazines and a pile of typewritten short stories; store items such as a small cash box and a telephone; and an old long library table and a chair. On the table are a box full of books and other books in random piles.

KATHY is sitting on a chair at a table holding several typewritten pages. She is casually but neatly dressed. KATHY reads aloud.)

KATHY. “‘Here I come, world!’ she said.” *(She looks up, stands and walks around, still holding the papers.)* She announced. She exclaimed! She trumpeted! She shouted! Screamed! Spat! ... Sputtered. *(She returns to the desk and begins to write in the margin of the top paper.)* A vigorous action needs a vigorous verb.

(MR. G enters from behind a bookcase.)

MR. G. Still acting like a high-school teacher?

KATHY. I'm *helping* a high-school teacher. I'm *not* a high-school teacher.

MR. G. You were *never* a high-school teacher. You were an editor. You should edit.

KATHY. I'm editing.

MR. G. Stories by high-school kids.

In a bookstore.

On the job.

KATHY. You said I could.

MR. G. It's nice having you in the store since that literary journal you edited squeezed you out. It's been like it was when you were younger, when you were always hanging around here.

But even though you're working here—for pay—I thought that the volunteer editing would lead to something bigger. You'd help out editing high-school stuff, you'd get that feeling again, and bingo! You'd go get a job at some literary journal. Editing and happy as a clam!

KATHY. I *tried*! Every journal in town says I'm either overqualified or untouchable. Do I look like a “problem” to you?

MR. G. It depends on whether you keep yelling “She shouted!” “She screamed!”

KATHY. These high-school assignments make you wonder that *anyone* becomes a good writer. (*Louder.*) Where's the vim, the verve, the vigor!?

MR. G. Probably not in what you're reading.

KATHY. Excitement! Thrills! That's what I want to see!

MR. G. Calm down. What got into you?

KATHY. Hold onto your hat! I've got news!

MR. G. I'm holding. But so far this year, the Soviet Union is boycotting the Olympics, a woman could be Vice President of the United States and the Baltimore Colts snuck off to Indianapolis. Your news'll have to be pretty big.

KATHY. I'm going to start my own literary magazine! I've figured out the format, and who I'll contact for the stories and poems and articles ...

MR. G. Good for you! I can't wait to read it!

KATHY. I need to pick a name, do a mock-up and get the numbers together. That'll take a week or two. Then, the big part—the hard part—shopping for investors.

MR. G. Just think! Kathy's Journal!

KATHY. That's not the name. I've got a few ideas that I'll narrow down tonight. Tomorrow you can help me pick the winner.

MR. G. What's wrong with right now? You got me all excited!

KATHY. Sorry about your excitement, but right now I have to finish these papers and deal with a customer who wants to buy books that go with blue.

MR. G. What author is blue? Kipling is more red and brown. Jane Austin's probably gray and green. I don't think anybody knows what Faulkner is.

KATHY. The *bindings* should go with blue. An interior decorator has clients who don't read, but they want books.

MR. G. For what?

KATHY. For display.

MR. G. They should come in and see how happy the books are on display. They could get excited and buy whole shelves of books.

KATHY. *She* wants to get the books for them—for decoration—without them having to go into a bookstore. She says it would just confuse them.

MR. G (*downcast*). They probably don't want used books. For decoration only new would do.

KATHY. They want it to look like the books have been read.

MR. G (*excitedly*). You could construct a person! Combine some books from one section, like history, and other books from another section, like economics, and keep going, section by section, until you have the right amount of books. The decorator puts them on the shelf, and bingo! It looks like they have those interests. Once they have the books, they'll want to know what's in them. They'll read the books, and bingo again! You've created interesting people!

KATHY. Won't work—no curiosity. What they are is what you see. Like this place. It hasn't changed in years. You've got to think about putting in coffee.

MR. G. There's no room for it. It's too much work.

KATHY (*points L*). We could open up the back and put a coffee bar over there.

(*MR. G looks uncomprehendingly offstage L.*)

KATHY (*cont'd*). Just move the juke box that doesn't work ... get rid of that stack of gift boxes nobody buys ... and throw out the dead plant.

MR. G. And ruin the character of the store? This is a bookstore, and it's gonna stay a bookstore. People come here to buy books.

KATHY. And browse. With coffee, when they browse, they've already *paid* for the coffee, and they might also *buy* some books. Some will stop every day for coffee. You'll make a lot of money.

MR. G. You're a Circean siren.

KATHY. Put wax in your ears. Tie yourself to a bookcase.

MR. G. It's too late. I'm enchanted. But I'm still not putting in coffee.

(The telephone rings. MR. G answers it.)

MR. G *(cont'd)*. End Papers Books and Records.

KATHY. Excitement! I want thrills!

(MR. G hands the telephone receiver to KATHY.)

MR. G. You get your husband.

(Stage lights dim. RICH enters. Spotlights on RICH and KATHY. RICH is dressed as a bank vice president. He faces the audience and reads a document while he holds a telephone receiver, speaking in a disinterested voice.)

KATHY. Hi, Rich.

RICH. What's today's exciting bookshop news?

KATHY. I can revise page layouts, I can deconstruct a post-modern paragraph, but how do you color coordinate a shelf of books?

(RICH and KATHY face each other and speak as if they could see each other, with appropriate gestures and movements. RICH continues to read while he talks.)

RICH *(uninterested)*. Here's an offer you can't refuse. You can come to the bank dinner tonight.

KATHY. Can I take off my clothes?

RICH. No.

KATHY. Can I rub up against some vice presidents?

RICH. No.

KATHY. Can I make out with the bartender?

RICH. OK, so you'll miss another bank dinner. Why am I not surprised?

KATHY. Oh, lighten up. I'll just curl up with Anaïs Nin and do my usual autoerotic things till you get home.

RICH. I called to tell you I got a bonus.

KATHY. Again? You should be close to owning the bank by now.

RICH. That's why we can buy what we have, *dear*.

KATHY. As long as you're not minting it.

RICH (*angrily*). What does that mean!?

KATHY. It's a joke! Can't you even recognize a joke any more?

RICH. I'm working my ass off here. The only joke is that you think working in that bookstore is a real job.

KATHY. Jesus you can be mean when you want to. And since you brought it up, I'm going to start my own literary journal.

RICH. Because ... ?

KATHY. Because I can't get a job on anyone else's journal and because I'm an editor and that's what I'm going to do. I'm preparing a prospectus and I'll be looking for investors.

RICH. So you called a banker because that's where the money is. Well, the bank has a policy of not lending money to bank officers' spouses.

KATHY. I didn't call you, and I didn't ask you for a loan.

RICH. You should have. You're an unsecured risk and you'll have trouble getting financing from anyone else.

KATHY. We have lots of security. The cars, the house ...

RICH. "We" is right. We, not *you*. I'm not signing off on some scheme that will never make enough to pay off investors. As things stand, you're an unsecured risk.

KATHY. Rich, a marriage isn't a business proposition.

RICH. And, no, we can't use our cash. I can't have questions raised about how much money we have.

KATHY. Forget about money. Can't we just talk, like we used to?

Let's do it. I'll say, "Hi, Rich." Now you go ahead. Say what you always said.

RICH. I'm busy.

KATHY. You know what I mean. Go ahead. Say it.

RICH. What's the story, morning glory?

KATHY. What's the word, mocking bird?

RICH. This is stupid.

KATHY. Go ahead. Just one more.

RICH. A penny for your thoughts.

KATHY. Why don't we go to a happy hour and get some munchies? Like old times. Whatever happened to the old times? They were good.

RICH. Sure they were. When a happy hour was all we cared about. Then life happened, didn't it?

KATHY. Is that really all you think we had?

RICH. It's all I could figure out to give you. So now you'll just have to settle for the things my money can buy, tangible things that have real value. Goodbye.

(KATHY slams the phone down. The spotlight on RICH goes off. RICH exits. Lights up on stage. KATHY sits down, pauses, picks up one of the short stories.)

MR. G. Always nice to hear warm words between husband and wife.

KATHY. Just our usual contentious chat. There was a time—you remember—a time when he would have been happy for me to start a journal. We would have worked on it together, drank Mateus, laughed at each other's silly ideas, slept in each other's arms and woke up bleary-eyed to go to work the next morning. Why did he have to change?

MR. G. I should butt out.

KATHY. I have no secrets from you. You saved my life letting me work here.

MR. G. Want some advice?

KATHY. OK.

MR. G. Buy the bookstore.

KATHY. Mr. G, I've told you ...

MR. G. I still want to sell it to you—on very easy terms—so you can make it the great place you think it can be. With, you know, coffee and ... everything. I've had it a long time. It's time for me to let it go, to someone who will take good care of it.

KATHY. Mr. G, End Papers is yours. And as Rich so nicely put it, I'm an unsecured risk.

MR. G. Be an unsecured risk for me. God knows, I was an unsecured risk when my sister loaned me the money to buy this place.

Family and friends help each other out. Buy it. I'll stay on and give you a hand. The two of us will show that big schmuck what a mistake he's making.

KATHY. Thank you. I love you. But not yet.

MR. G. At my age I had to hear, "I love you, but not yet?"

KATHY (*picks up a typed paper and a red pen*). Tonight I work on the name for the journal, tomorrow we'll choose the name, and then upward and onward! But first ... (*She begins to read.*) "It was easy to see a wagon approaching long before it drew near. Serena *knew* it could be only one of three people, all of them *bad news*. She was *encapsulated* with fear." (*She pauses then begins to write, saying aloud what she writes.*) One. If she *knew* it was one of three people, why doesn't she know which one? Two. In 1870, *bad news* was news that was bad. Three. Look up *encapsulate*, then use a different word.

(*TED enters, peering cautiously at KATHY. He is well dressed.*)

TED. Kathy?

(*KATHY is shocked to see TED. She stares at him. MR. G is also surprised.*)

KATHY. That's you, isn't it?

TED. In the flesh. (*To MR. G.*) Mr. G, I was hoping you'd still be here.

MR. G. Where else would I go?

TED. I meant ...

MR. G. I know what you meant: I'm not dead.

TED. OK. Bad choice of words. It's hard to know what to say.

KATHY. That's not the Ted Coburn I knew. (*With an edge.*) But it's been over 20 years ...

TED. Do you have a minute?

KATHY. I'm not sure.

TED. Maybe just showing up was a bad idea.

KATHY. Well, you've certainly made it awkward.

TED. I'm sorry.

KATHY. Good on sentiment. Bad on timing.

Yeah, let's talk about timing. Let's talk about how you walked out on me in college. Let's talk about caring and staying around and staying in touch. How about a phone call every five years or so? Or a Christmas card with a picture of you and the family? With the family dog. You have a family dog, don't you? You wanted a dog, and you always got what you wanted.

TED. All right, maybe I should have phoned first.

KATHY. Nah, barging in unannounced is the way it should be done.

Dump the woman, stay silent for a couple of decades, then bounce right in, smiling and natty and full of good cheer. Forgive and forget! As long as it's the other person doing the forgiving and forgetting.

I left *messages*. I *looked* for you!

MR. G. You didn't see how she was.

KATHY. Maybe time heals all wounds, Ted, but first we're going to have to settle up.

TED. OK, give me a chance here. I can see you're still angry.

KATHY. Astute. Natty and astute. Usually an irresistible combination. But right now ... Right now I think Mr. G needs my help checking the boxes of books that we got in yesterday.

MR. G. Checking books can be dangerous. Anything can go wrong at any time. You need help if you're checking books.

(The telephone rings. The stage lights dim. GRACE enters. She is calling from outside of End Papers. Spotlights up on MR. G and GRACE, holding a telephone receiver. MR. G answers the phone.)

MR. G. End Papers.

GRACE. Hi, Mr. G.

MR. G. Hi, Grace.

GRACE. May I speak with Kathy?

MR. G. Sure. It's like old home week here.

GRACE. You're doing it again. I don't know what you mean.

MR. G *(in a lower voice)*. Ted Coburn is here.

GRACE. You're kidding! Has Kathy broken anything?

MR. G. In a bookstore?

GRACE. Don't let anyone do anything violent. I'm on my way. (*She hangs up.*)

MR. G. Violent?

(*MR. G hangs up. The spotlights on GRACE and MR. G go out. GRACE exits. Stage lights up.*)

TED. Look, I apologize for leaving the way that I did. For not talking to you. OK? C'mon, Kathy, this is serious.

KATHY. If *you* want something, it's serious. What if *I* wanted something? Damn it, Ted, you have no idea ... Now you just pop in here ...

MR. G. If you two will excuse me, I'll go to the bathroom. It'll only take a minute or two if I'm lucky. (*He exits.*)

TED. Look, I can't talk like this, standing in an old bookstore with Mr. G about to come back.

KATHY. He won't come back for a while.

TED. But he said ...

KATHY. He's an optimist. Trust me, it'll be a while. How did you know I'd be here?

TED. We knew you worked at the journal. The journal office told me you were here.

KATHY. We?

TED. My firm. In Chicago.

KATHY. I know where you are. I know you're a successful Chicago lawyer with an international practice. And now you're a detective. A man for all seasons.

TED. Sounds like some sleuthing by you, Nancy Drew.

KATHY. Didn't have to. Your achievements are well known in town. Also, and don't take this the wrong way, the general opinion here is that you're something of a jerk. Kind of ... full of yourself. Pushy.

TED. The polite term is "autocratic."

KATHY. You always had a strong internal focus.

TED. You were notable in the internal-focus department yourself.

KATHY. Touché, pussycat.

TED. Touché yourself. That's better.

KATHY. Yeah, maybe.

TED. And I want to talk with Rich. But first ...

KATHY (*interrupting*). He's first vice president at the Union bank.

TED. I know.

KATHY. It hasn't moved. You'll find it.

(*MR. G enters.*)

MR. G. False alarm. (*To KATHY.*) Help is on the way. Grace is coming.

TED. Grace Goldman?

MR. G. The one and only!

TED. How are Grace and Allen? My god, what good times the four of us had.

KATHY. He's OK, she had breast cancer.

TED. That's awful! Poor Grace! I'm glad I'll get to see her. (*Beat.*)
Kathy, how can we move on?

KATHY. I can think of at least two options.

One, you can leave, move on right now ... give me time to think about this. That's preferable.

Two, if you're going to stay, you can stop acting like we should welcome you back as if nothing happened.

(*GRACE enters through the door R.*)

GRACE (*to TED*). Omigod!

KATHY. He thinks so.

GRACE (*to TED with a quick cadence*). How have you been? Where have you been? Why are you here?

TED. Grace! You're looking good.

GRACE. Under the circumstances. Kathy probably told you. Did you tell him? Things haven't all been rosy. But I'm still here, and Allen's still here. And now you're here. Are you here? I mean, are you here long? Kathy, what's with this?

KATHY. He just waltzed in. Unannounced.

GRACE (*talking quickly*). Isn't that just perfect? I mean, here you are. Together. I always thought it was too bad you ended up with

other people. I mean, Rich is fine, for a banker. And I'm sure your wife, Ted, whoever she is, is wonderful. All of your wives probably are—I heard about the divorce and remarriage. But, gee, you two. (*To TED.*) And then you flew the coop, took a hike. Devil take the hindmost! And now here you are again. I mean, what are you up to?

TED. We've—

GRACE (*interrupting*). Well, I know you're eager to finish up and go.

(*GRACE abruptly puts her arm around TED's shoulder and starts walking him toward the door, still talking quickly.*)

GRACE (*cont'd*). Call next time you're in town. I'll have a party. You can have a reunion with everyone you refused to talk with in 20 years. See ya.

TED. Kathy and I were talking—

GRACE (*interrupting*). I'm sure your wife will want to hear all about it.

TED. Actually, I'm divorced. Again.

GRACE (*stops and faces TED*). You're single!?! On the loose!?! Is that safe? I mean, are you dating? Doing the singles scene? (*Beat.*) And now you're here. Well goodbye.

TED. Won't you even tell me what's happened to the people I used to know?

KATHY. I don't think we ...

GRACE. They're all still here. (*Unable to resist talking. To KATHY and MR. G.*) Did you hear about Susan Jeffries? She was getting her hair done and a couple of chairs away, she hears the mother of Theresa, the girl her son David went out with.

Of course, Theresa's mother doesn't know that Susan is right there. Or else she wouldn't have added that David couldn't perform with Theresa because he was traumatized when he found his mother, that's Susan, in bed with the guy who mows their lawn.

Now, I've seen the lawn guy with his shirt off, and I can tell you that wouldn't have been a bad deal, especially if he cleaned up the clippings. (*Disappointedly.*) But I know Susan, and it's prob-

ably not true. (*Quickly.*) Then bang: Susan is out of her chair like a shot and she slugs Theresa's mother in the chops! Theresa's mother calls the cops, the beauty shop owner calls a gossip columnist, Susan is charged with a misdemeanor, Theresa's mother has a contusion the size of China, and the beauty shop is booked solid for the next two months!

(*TED, MR. G and KATHY laugh.*)

GRACE (*cont'd, to TED*). Well goodbye.

TED. Time out. I know I'm not invited, but I'm here and there's something I have to tell Kathy ... (*Beat, then looking at GRACE and MR. G.*) which I'll do later. At least let me know how you're doing, Kathy. Then I'll go. Promise.

MR. G. Tell him how you edited the journal.

KATHY. He knows.

MR. G. She was *very* successful.

KATHY. And that's the whole story.

MR. G. The best writers; chapters from books in progress; short stories. But *new* owners changed it to a light-features magazine. Offered to keep her on as an "assistant," god knows to whom. She was squeezed out!

GRACE. She tried reasoning with them.

TED. In your old subtle way?

KATHY. I told them they were killing an intellectual forum that was the mainstay of the literary community for the sake of a dumb-ed-down run-of-the-mill company apologia.

TED. You said apologia to them? How did they know to be offended?

KATHY. Must've been the context. And *that's* the whole story.

MR. G. They put out the word she's "emotional," "hard to work with—"

GRACE (*overlapping*). What men say about strong women who won't bow down to them—

MR. G (*overlapping*). It was as good as a blackball against her. But now she's starting her own journal!

GRACE. Since when?

KATHY. It's a plan. I'll tell you later. (*To TED.*) And thanks to Grace and Mr. G, that's the *whole* story.

The Boatwright

Drama by
BO WILSON

The Boatwright received its premier production at the Grand Rapids Civic Theatre (Grand Rapids, Mich.), in September 2014.

Cast:

Ben Calloway Patrick A. Hendren
Jaimie Watson David Cobb

Crew:

Director Bruce Tinker
Assistant Director Kylie Piette
Stage Manager Laurie Hamilton
Set Design David Len
Costume Design Roert A. Fowle
Light Design Catherine Marlett Dreher
Sound Design Sam Johnson
Technical Director Steven Schwall
Property Design Michael Wilson, Sharon Hayes
Properties Volunteers Mary Bockheim,
Roberta Rossi, Carol Todd
Sound Board Operator Krista Pennington
Light Board Operator Kevin Arnett, Terry Parsaca
Deck Crew Andrew Faught, Kyle Aspinall
Jack Heinen, Mitchell DeNolf, Chad Hamilton
Scene Shop Volunteers Dan Smigiel, Jim Chervenka,
Jack Heinen, Robert Jonas Allen,
Kyle Aspinall, Terry Aspinall
Props Angie Kline

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“*The Boatwright* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by the Grand Rapids Civic Theatre (Grand Rapids, Mich.)”

The Boatwright

CHARACTERS

BEN CALLOWAY: A man in his late 50s. A quiet air of fitness and competence. He used to know his place in the world; lately, he's less sure.

JAIME WATSON: A young man of 20 with all of the highs and lows of that age. He's never had the slightest idea of his place in the world.

SETTING

We're in Kansas, a bit north and west of Topeka. Present day.

The entire play takes place in Ben's workshop, which may once have been a garage. A door in one upstage corner ostensibly leads to the rest of Ben's house. A door on the opposite downstage corner opens directly to the outside. A long workbench. Three dusty televisions underneath it. Racks of lumber are overhead and/or along walls. If we could see what was overhead, we'd see only beams and the roof. In one corner there is an ancient battered freezer.

A note on the execution of scenic elements: The play features a small boat at varying stages of its construction. I believe there are ways to achieve this that are realistic; I also believe that there are ways to do this that are less realistic but no less effective. In other words, I trust that there's more than one way to get the job done and that each production will find the way that best suits it.

This play is for
James Jr.,
Jim Jr.
and Zachary James

The Boatwright

ACT I

AT RISE: *Lights up. A special on BEN who is sitting in what we will later see is his workshop/garage.*

(He speaks directly out.)

BEN. I guess I was tired of not *doing* anything, all day every day. Not doing *anything*. Just, uh, missing the job and missing Amy. Eating cereal, bitching to an empty house about how everything on the television is crap, counting the minutes till the mail, kind of, uh, rationing myself? “I’ll wait another half hour and then I’ll walk out and check.” Reading the newspaper cover to cover, I mean the whole damned thing, Beetle Bailey, the letters to the editor, grocery ads. Timing myself on the jumble, and the crossword. The big one, not that little dinky thing. I do ’em in ink. Set a new record for the Jumble yesterday, 47 seconds. But there was no one to tell. I don’t know whether you know this feeling, when you forget that someone is gone and you have a kind of uh, knee jerk, instinct thing, “Wait’ll I tell Amy,” and then ... you remember. It happens again and again. For a long time. It started to feel like drowning. Slow drowning, like maybe in mud, or quicksand. Like there were two of me, and one of ’em was thrashing around and getting tired and sinking

and the other one was just watching it happen. Not even helping.
It was ... morbid.

So I said to Amy—I still talk to her sometimes—I said,
“I can’t keep being like this.”

And she said, “Then do something!”

It was only in my head, I know that, but I sure did hear it.

Sounded a little irritated with me, too.

“Do something!”

So I started building this boat.

(Light fades on him. In the black, we hear the sound of hammering: gentle, steady, precise ... Then, from outside, a youthful male voice, under the influence of something or another.)

JAIME (*voice only*). Show me the way ta go home ...

(Light is slowly rising on JAIME, who holds a large plastic cup.)

JAIME (*cont’d, now visible*). I’m tired ’n wanna go bed ...

I had a little drink ...

I had a couple drinks ...

I had a fifth of Vodka

’bout an hour ago

an it got me in my head ...

(Light builds across the rest of the stage. We can see a large garage or workshop, within which is BEN, who has stopped his hammering, cocking his head, curious to know exactly what sort of irritation he’s in for.)

In the meantime, JAIME has reached into one of his myriad, voluminous pockets and produced a small handycam, which he holds at arm’s length, pointed at himself—perhaps it casts a small, harsh light at his face. He adopts an exaggerated Australian accent, a faux documentarian.)

JAIME (*cont’d*). It’s very late at night

and we’ve taken our position just outside this dwelling

in the hopes of obtaining additional liquid refreshment.

The lights are still on—let’s go see what awaits us inside.

(JAIME begins moving to the side door of the workshop, but BEN's curiosity has led him to the same spot, and he opens the door before JAIME can complete his Safari-stalk approach.)

BEN. Who's that?

(JAIME swings the camera around, and its light shines in BEN's face. BEN winces.)

BEN *(cont'd)*. Hey!

JAIME *(still in narration mode, and loud, too)*. Suddenly we're confronted by a native!

BEN *(extending his arms, warding off the light)*. Get that thing outta my—Jaime?

JAIME. He's attempting to communicate!

BEN. Shut that thing off, and lower your voice. People are sleeping.

JAIME. Not us! *(Beat.)*

OK. Sorry. *(Closing the camera and putting it away.)*

Who's sleeping, what time is it?

BEN. What can I do for you, Jaime?

JAIME. I saw your lights.

BEN. Your folks know you're over here?

JAIME. I dunno. Guess they're sleeping too.

BEN. I see.

JAIME. I didn't mean to bother you, Mr. C, I was ... hey, whatcha doin in there, you making something?

BEN. I'm laying out plans for—hey!

(JAIME has pushed past BEN, walking into the center of the shop.)

JAIME. What's all the paper doing on the—

BEN. FREEZE!

(It's a whipcrack of a voice, and when it says freeze, you freeze.)

BEN *(cont'd)*. Turn slowly and face the workbench.

JAIME. Like this?

BEN. Good. Now, you're gonna take big, careful steps forward until I tell you to stop.

JAIME. Like this?

BEN. Keep going.

JAIME. I feel goofy.

BEN. You look goofy, keep going ... OK, Simon says, "Stop."

JAIME (*giggling*). Simon says ...

BEN. How much have you had to drink tonight?

JAIME. Oh, you know. A lot, I guess. Did I mess anything up?

BEN. No ... no, it seems like it's OK ...

JAIME. What *is* it?

BEN. It's called a lofting diagram.

JAIME. Cool. What's a lofting diagram?

(A quick beat as BEN musters his good manners and a kind of paternal patience.)

BEN. Have you ever seen anyone make a dress, or sew anything, like a seamstress?

You know how they use paper patterns?

Well, that's what a lofting diagram is, a paper pattern. For a boat.

JAIME. You're sewing a boat? Making one?

BEN. Yes.

JAIME. A real one?

BEN. Yes.

JAIME. That is so cool!

BEN. Thank you.

JAIME. I never knew anyone who made a boat.

BEN. Me neither.

JAIME. What does Mrs. ... Oh shit. (*Beat.*)

I was gonna ask what your, um, I forgot about ...

(Beat. BEN busies himself with pretending to double check a measurement.)

JAIME (*cont'd*). I wanted to say, you know,
 I never did, but I meant to, say,
 you know, that I'm
 sorry for your loss. About Mrs. Calloway.

BEN. I appreciate that.

JAIME. She was always real nice to me and stuff.

BEN. She was fond of you.

JAIME. She was?

BEN (*surprised that he's surprised*). Of course.

JAIME. Wow. That's, um ... Thanks. For saying that.

BEN. Jaime—I don't think you need any more of whatever's in that
 cup, whaddaya think?

JAIME. Huh? Oh this! Nah, I know. You're right.

*(JAIME tosses the plastic cup aside. Some liquid probably spills
 out as it flies, unnoticed by JAIME. BEN is working hard on the
 whole patience thing.)*

BEN. What you need is probably a big glass of water and a couple
 of aspirin and a good night's sleep, whaddaya say?

JAIME (*oblivious, walking slowly, studying the diagram on the
 floor*). I don't see how this is gonna be a boat ... What are all
 those numbers?

BEN. Reference points for the hull, they're called offset points,
 they're for—

Jaime, look, it's a little bit complicated.

JAIME. You really gotta do all this stuff to build a boat?

BEN. Well ... some people use kits,
 all this stuff is already done for you ...

but I think it's better if you understand things from the ground up.

JAIME. But not everything! Like, here, check it out ... (*He's fum-
 bling for his camcorder again.*)

BEN. Now look—

JAIME. I'm not gonna turn it on, but look what I'm saying.

Like, if I'm gonna make a video? Here. "On." And then here,
 "Record." Two buttons.

BEN. OK ...

JAIME. But dude—I got no *idea* how it works!

BEN. Yeah, well, with boats it's different.

JAIME. Why?

BEN. There's this fella, he's all alone

with nothing but hundreds of miles of Atlantic Ocean
in every direction

and the only thing between him and that water is his boat.

So he'd best understand that boat.

JAIME. Huh. Like a Marine and his M-16, huh?

BEN. Jaime ...

JAIME. I'm drunk, I know, I suck, I get it.

BEN (*realizing that something doesn't add up*). Is Tech on some
kind of break right now?

JAIME. Heee ... well that depends.

BEN. They don't give you guys Lincoln's birthday do they?

JAIME. It's the south. They still think Lincoln is the anti-Christ
down there ...

BEN. Why aren't you in school?

JAIME. It's like you said, it's a break.

BEN (*knows when to abandon a point—it starts to be clear that for
whatever reason, he has dealt with plenty of drunks in his life*).

Oookay. Well, look, you need to get some rest, so—

JAIME. It's a *special* break. It's like, independent break,

like, you know, independent study

is when you take a course no one else takes,

so independent break is when you take a vacation no one else takes.

BEN. OK.

JAIME. Isn't vacation a funny word? Vayyyy cayyyy shunnnn.

BEN. I never thought about it.

JAIME. Especially the "shun." Very heavy on the shun, in my case.

BEN (*surrender—if the kid won't leave, then he will*). It's time I
turned in ...

JAIME. They kicked me out.

(*Beat.*)

BEN. The school?

JAIME. You believe that?

All the money we've paid them, and they kick me out?

I mean, it's only temporary. Officially.

Technically, they have to let me back in next semester.

But I don't think I'm going.

BEN. Look. I want you to listen to me, OK?

JAIME. OK.

BEN. I'm sorry about whatever's happening. It sounds like you have a lot to think about.

JAIME. Got that right.

BEN. So here's the plan: Step one, get some rest and sleep off the booze, you can't do big-time thinking worn out *or* drunk.

JAIME. Big tiiiiimmmmee ...

(BEN is steering him toward the door.)

BEN. Right, so you get back next door and get into your bed, right?

JAIME. Yeah ... you're right ...

Hey, Mr. Calloway?

BEN. Yeah?

JAIME. Are you disappointed in me?

BEN. I don't know you well enough to be disappointed in you.

JAIME. Heh. My parents don't know me very well either but they're *waaaaayyy* disappointed in me.

BEN. Then you know what you do?

JAIME. What ...

BEN. You wake up tomorrow and you start giving them reasons to get past that.

JAIME. How?

BEN. Decide what you want to do. Make a plan to get it done.

Step one, make a plan.

Step two, stick to the plan.

Step three, remember that booze gets in the way of steps one and two.

JAIME. 'Swat you're doing isn't it. This boat. Big plan ...

BEN. Exactly.

JAIME. I'm sorry I bothered you.

BEN. Don't worry about it.

JAIME. Can I come back sometime and see your boat?

BEN. Sure.

JAIME. Cool ... OK, well, anyway, Good night, Mr. C.

BEN. Good night.

(He watches JAIME go ... And he watches for a good while after that before returning to regard the various bits of his work spread all over the floor. A deep breath.)

BEN (*cont'd*). Stick to the plan.

(Lights fade on BEN resuming his measurements. After a beat or two in darkness, they restore to the "testimonial" light with which we opened the play.

Again, BEN speaks out.)

BEN (*cont'd*). I've never seen the ocean.

I know that seems ... odd. Especially with me building this boat.

I always wanted to. Especially when I was a kid.

That's probably when I first got, uh , caught up,

by this idea, you know,

of sailing the open seas.

I went and saw any movie with ships,

The Black Swan, you know, and *Captain Blood* , oh,

there was a television show, *Adventures in Paradise*,

(Adopting an announcer tone.) "Starring Gardner McKay as Adam Troy," heh,

this terrific show about sailing and the ocean.

I guess most people don't even remember it now.

Television used to be better.

Anyway, point is, I wanted to *do* that.

I never stopped wanting to do it.
 I just ... never did it.
 Amy and me, that was one of our big dreams,
 you know travel, see the ocean,
 not just *one* ocean, *all* of 'em.
 Then life keeps rolling by
 and you keep thinking tomorrow is soon enough
 and then Amy got sick ...
 So. Tomorrow isn't soon enough anymore.
 The first word on the new plan is "today."
 I'm going to build this thing
 and I'm going to learn to sail it
 and then I'm going to put it on a trailer
 and hook it up to my gooseneck
 and I'm gonna drive east until I run out of road
 and then I'm going to see what I've been missing.

(As the lights begin to fade, we hear a growing sound—the sound of wind and waves, of wild, open water.

In the darkness, the sound grows, surrounds us, peaks ... And then slowly recedes, scaling back until it's clearly coming from a single source onstage as the lights come up.

It's the next day.

BEN is in the shop, and there's a good-sized stack of lumber along the upstage wall. He is inspecting it piece by piece. The sound from the blackout, faint but still audible, is coming from a small set of speakers on his workbench.

His inspection process is simple—two sawhorses spanned by a piece of plywood to create a simple table. Onto this table, he places each piece of lumber, first flat and then on-edge, to check it for curves, warps, etc. He will occasionally hunker down to get eye level with a piece.

The lumber is being sorted into one of two stacks, one of which has only two or three pieces in it.)

BEN (*cont'd*). Okayyyy ... You're good.

(BEN places a piece with most of its siblings, gets another from the original stack and inspects it.)

BEN (*cont'd*). You're good ...

(As BEN's inspection continues, we see JAIME emerge and approach the side entrance to the workshop. He raises a hand, hesitates and then raps twice on the door.)

BEN (*cont'd*). Come!

(JAIME enters and holds at the door. BEN looks up.)

BEN (*cont'd*). Jaime.

JAIME. Hey, Mr. C.

BEN. How are you this morning?

JAIME. Uhh, not bad. You know.

Not as bad as I could be, I guess. I took the aspirin and drank the water and everything.

BEN. Good.

JAIME (*indicating the speakers*). Um ... what's that?

BEN. Huh. *(He quickly switches the sound off.)*

Sorry. I forget it's on, sometimes.

JAIME. What was it?

BEN. Just ocean sounds.

JAIME. Like some kind of sound effects CD or something?

BEN. It's a cassette.

JAIME. Kind of, what, gets you in the mood?

BEN. Yup.

(A beat.)

JAIME. Well, um, I came over, because I wanted—I thought I should apologize.

BEN. Yeah?