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**American Association of
Community Theatre AACT
NewPlayFest Winning Plays:
Volume 4 (2020)**

On Pine Knoll Street by
MARK CORNELL

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On Pine Knoll Street

By
MARK CORNELL

On Pine Knoll Street received its world premier production at The Sauk in Jonesville, Mich., on Feb. 6, 2020.

CAST:

THELMA Anne Conners
MARILYN M.J. Dulmage
CURTIS..... Trinity Bird
KRISTIE Andrea Ortell
MITCHELL Keegan Oxley

PRODUCTION:

Director Trinity Bird
Stage Manager Allison Cleveland
Dramaturg Kathy Pingel
Scenic Design..... Bruce W. Crews
Costume Design..... Roene Trevisan
Lighting Design Tracy McCullough
Sound Design Joella Hendrickson
Properties Design..... Travis Blatchley
Set Dressing Cyndi Baldermann
Assistant Stage Manager..... Shannon Chen
Light Board Operator..... Angela Forant
Sound Board Operator Joella Hendrickson
Origami Derrick Oxley

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:

“On Pine Knoll Street was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by The Sauk in Jonesville, Mich.”

On Pine Knoll Street

CHARACTERS

THELMA (w): 87.

MARILYN (w): 52.

CURTIS (m): 40.

KRISTIE (w): 38.

MITCHELL (m): 9.

TIME: Spring of a recent year to fall of the following year. The play covers about a year and a half.

PLACE: A small house in a small Southern college town.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Scene shifts should be made by characters in full view of the audience and thought of as a continuation of the story. For example, when Marilyn puts up the reminder signs, it is not merely to get the signs on the walls. It is at first because she wants to help her mother and later on because she is frustrated. Characters may relate to one another if they share a shift. Although shifts should be efficient, at no time should they feel rushed.

Between Scenes 8 and 9, the snow should remain on the stage.

When needed, use lighting—dawn, midday, dusk, night—to indicate the passage of time.

For Lucile.

On Pine Knoll Street

ACT I

Scene 1

(In the black, we hear a Celtic lullaby, “Dream Angus.” As the lights rise, the music lulls to a murmur. It is a spring morning in a small house in the South. There is a living room, a small kitchen with an eating area and a door to a bathroom. The living room has a large window, a closet and a hallway that leads to the back bedrooms. There is a utility room through the kitchen. The house is earth-toned, except for the kitchen, which is neon magenta. There are three potted plants—a cactus, a palm of some kind and some succulents. In the living room, THELMA, dressed a little garishly, sits in an old Barcalounger with a cane leaning against it. She is wrapped in an afghan. On the side table next to her is an old boom box from which the lullaby plays. Some cat toys are on the floor. On the other side of the room, MARILYN stands at a small kitchen table going through pills in a plastic receptacle, talking to CURTIS, who is distracted by the room’s unusual decor—sculptures, paintings, metal works, papier mâché, candles, etc.—all featuring vaginas.)

MARILYN. As you can plainly see, Curtis, all the pills are distributed evenly for each day of the week, and separated by a.m. and p.m. All you have to do is put the appropriate pills on a saucer for her, and she’ll take them with her morning and evening meals. Easy, right? Just make absolutely sure the pill box goes back on top of the fridge.

(She notices that CURTIS is distracted.)

MARILYN *(cont’d)*. Curtis, are you listening to me?

CURTIS. Yes. Sorry.

THELMA. He’s hypnotized by the vaginas.

CURTIS. I wouldn’t say hypnotized.

MARILYN. You've been in my house before, right?

CURTIS. I don't think so. I would have remembered.

MARILYN. You came to my Super Bowl party this past year.

CURTIS. No, I didn't. I've only ever come as far as the porch, trick or treating with Mitch.

MARILYN. Curtis, I know you've been in here.

THELMA. He hasn't, Marilyn. Obviously. Nobody's ever going to forget a dozen smiling hoo-haws.

(CURTIS laughs.)

MARILYN. Mom. *(Gesturing to the art.)* These are leftovers from my gallery in Miami, Curtis. It's art, OK?

CURTIS. Yeah, it's definitely art.

MARILYN. I know what you're thinking. I'm not gay.

THELMA. She's gay.

MARILYN. Mom! Calling someone gay is not funny!

THELMA. I'm not trying to be funny.

MARILYN. *I'm not gay.*

THELMA. God forbid you should come out to your own mother.

MARILYN. Can we not do this right now, please?

THELMA. I watched my next-door neighbor in Key West come out to her mother, and it was beautiful.

MARILYN. Curtis, you've said "hello" to my mother, haven't you?

CURTIS. Yes, but I'll say it again. Howdy, Thelma. How are you?

THELMA. Fine as frog's hair.

MARILYN. "Howdy?" Who says "howdy?"

THELMA. Sweetie, he probably doesn't know that saying "howdy" makes him sound like a dipshit.

(CURTIS laughs.)

MARILYN. I'm sorry to ask you to step in at the last second, Curtis, but I'm in a bind and my mother's nurse was—

THELMA. She fired Lanying. Who wasn't a nurse. *I was a nurse.*

MARILYN. Lanying was stealing Mom's pills.

CURTIS. Lanying? The hoarder Chinese lady up on the corner?

THELMA. You don't know she was stealing anything, Marilyn.

MARILYN. A bottle of Bumex is missing.

THELMA. Who in the world would steal a diuretic?

MARILYN. She's a hoarder, Mom. A hoarder kleptomaniac.

THELMA. Goodness gracious, if that's true, then why in God's name did you let her in this house?

MARILYN. OK, Mom, that's enough. Can't you sit in silence, please?

THELMA. I'm not a piece of furniture, dear.

MARILYN. Anyway, Curtis, I'll be back super early Monday morning, so you're off the hook after Sunday night.

CURTIS. I'm always around, so this is no big deal.

MARILYN. Mom, you sure you can handle making your own meals?

THELMA. I have made one or two meals in my eighty-seven years, honey. And plenty of those were for you.

MARILYN. Do we need to go over again how to use the microwave?

THELMA. Open. Close. Start. What's the mystery? I'm not a child.

MARILYN (*to CURTIS*). Mom has a stack of Kashi dinners in the freezer. Have one with her. You could even sit and read with her. Or do one of Mom's puzzles, if you want. She'd like that. They're down here.

(She points to a stack of them at the bottom of a bookshelf.)

MARILYN (*cont'd*). A lighthouse, a bunch of kittens, here's one that's a pile of jelly beans. I dare you to try that one.

THELMA. How's your daughter, Curtis?

MARILYN. He has a son, Mom. I told you. (*To CURTIS.*) I told Mom a little bit about you before you came over.

THELMA. What's your son's name?

CURTIS. Mitchell.

THELMA. Mitchell? That's a last name, you dummy. How old is he?

CURTIS. Nine.

MARILYN. I mentioned to her that you stay home with him.

THELMA. So is he at home by himself right now?

CURTIS. My wife is at home with him.

THELMA. She doesn't work, either?

CURTIS. She's a professor at the university.

THELMA. Oh, well, la-dee-da. Why isn't she off at the university?

CURTIS. It's Saturday.

MARILYN. Stop badgering him. And Curtis works, too, Mom.

He's a writer. I told you.

THELMA. What do you write?

CURTIS. Short stories.

THELMA. Good for you. I like Hemingway. And Fitzgerald. And Steinbeck. All the biggies.

MARILYN. All males, too.

THELMA. What's wrong with that? I like men.

MARILYN. You sure you can handle the cats, too, Curtis?

CURTIS. I can handle it.

MARILYN. I keep the water bowl and the food bowl here by the fridge.

(She walks over. He follows.)

MARILYN *(cont'd)*. The food is in the kitty cookie jar. Where is the kitty cookie jar? Mom, stop moving things. Here.

(She finds it on the counter, opens it.)

MARILYN *(cont'd)*. Give them exactly a scoop and a half in the evening and the morning. Make sure the water is filled up and fresh. Don't top it off. Got it?

CURTIS. Yup.

MARILYN. "Yup?" First howdy, now yup?

THELMA. Now who's badgering him?

CURTIS. Yup and howdy were words my dad used. What can I say? I'm turning into my father.

MARILYN. Let me introduce you to the cats, Hoss. They're hiding in the closet.

THELMA. Sounds familiar.

MARILYN. Give it a rest, Mom.

(MARILYN pulls wide a partially open closet door.)

MARILYN *(cont'd)*. Curtis, say hello to Snatch and Twat.

(CURTIS turns to THELMA.)

THELMA. See? Ho-mo-sex-u-al.

MARILYN. Mom!

THELMA. If she tells you the shelter named them, she's lying.

MARILYN. Wakey-wakey, babies! Snatch, Twat, this is Curtis. Say hello to the cats, Curtis.

CURTIS (*flatly*). Hello.

MARILYN. Snatch likes to be called Snatchy and Twat likes to be called Twa-Twa. Try speaking to them again. From the heart.

CURTIS. Mornin', Snatchy! Mornin', Twa-Twa!

MARILYN. They know when you're faking it, Curtis. Come on. Let me show you the all-important litter box in the utility room. They use it like there's no tomorrow.

(CURTIS follows MARILYN into the utility room. MARILYN continues to talk, although we can no longer understand what she is saying. THELMA leans forward to get at a book that is open and face down on the coffee table in front of the couch. But it's too far away for her to reach. She leans back and tries to get at it with her foot, but no luck. She strains hard, but can't reach it. She grabs her cane and stretches out and touches the book with it. After great effort, she pulls the book off the coffee table and onto the floor. Then she drags it along the floor and to herself. She leans down and picks it up. She holds up her arms in victory. MARILYN and CURTIS return.)

MARILYN (*cont'd*). I'll pay you ten a day for the cats and five for Mom.

CURTIS. You don't have to pay me, Marilyn.

MARILYN. I paid Lanying, I can pay you.

(CURTIS' cell rings.)

CURTIS. Excuse me. Sorry, I usually have it on silent, but Kristie wanted me to ... *(Pulling the phone out of his pocket. He answers.)*

Hi, Kristie, everything OK? *(Beat.)* Kristie, this shouldn't be a surprise. This is who he is. *(Beat.)* No, you can. You can do it. *(Beat.)* OK. I'm coming now. *(Beat.)* Yes, right now. *(Beat.)* Yes, I promise. *(He hangs up.)* I need to go.

MARILYN. Just one more thing. Mealtimes are eight in the morning and six in the evening for both Mom and the cats. Lunch for Mom is one, but that's a non-pill meal, so you don't have to be here for that.

CURTIS. I'll be back at six, then. See you soon, Thelma. Have a great trip, Marilyn. Where are you going anyway?

MARILYN. To Wrightsville Beach. With some friends.

THELMA (*air quoting*). "Friends."

MARILYN. It's my book club.

THELMA (*air quoting*). "Book club."

MARILYN. You've met all these women, Mom. They're not lesbians.

THELMA. What book club meets two hours away on the beach?

MARILYN. Ours does. We always go to the beach the weekend before Memorial Day.

THELMA. Stop pretending! You go to the beach and gay it up!

MARILYN. Mom!

THELMA. In Key West, nobody pretended. We let it all hang out. And I mean *all of it*.

CURTIS. Well, Wrightsville sounds fun. Gotta go.

(He exits quickly out the door.)

THELMA. He left in a hurry.

MARILYN. Sometimes things get crazy, I think, at home. I see his kid running back and forth across their yard sometimes.

THELMA. Sounds normal.

MARILYN. Back and forth, though? Like a tennis ball?

THELMA. You could use a little back and forth. With a man.

MARILYN. You know, Mom, I really wish you would stop with the relentless jokes. They're hurtful. Especially in front of other people.

THELMA. You know what's really hurtful, Marilyn? That you would pay a man more money for taking care of your cats than taking care of me.

(THELMA turns the volume knob up on her boom box and the Celtic lullaby gets louder. She reads her book. MARILYN stands there a moment and then exits. Lights fade. The music should continue in the scene change.)

Scene 2

(As lights come up, the Celtic lullaby fades, but is still slightly audible from the boom box. It's just past six that evening. Above

the kitchen table on the wall is a taped 8.5x11" sign that says "hearing aids." Nearby are freshly cut peonies in a glass vase. Sitting at the table, where the pill box rests, THELMA eats. Every time she is about to swallow her food, THELMA takes a pill from a saucer and puts it in her mouth, then swallows. Sitting with her, CURTIS watches, curious.)

THELMA. You don't have to sit right on top of me. I know how to take a pill. I'm not completely *non compos mentis*.

CURTIS. You always swallow your pills with food?

THELMA. We had a housekeeper when I was growing up, a Scottish lady, whom we called Mrs., just Mrs., even though she wasn't married, and she believed that food carried medicine with love and that love always beat illness.

(He smiles. She eats. He watches her.)

THELMA (*cont'd*). You have got to be bored senseless.

CURTIS. Me? No. Nothing bores me. Nothing.

THELMA. Really? Marilyn didn't mention you were dim-witted.

(He chuckles.)

CURTIS. You don't have anything to drink. Let me get you something.

(CURTIS groans as he gets up. Grabbing the pill box on the table, he goes into the kitchen and puts the pill box on top of the fridge.)

THELMA (*as CURTIS goes into the kitchen*). First you bring peonies from your garden, then you grab the mail, now a drink? No one likes a do-gooder.

CURTIS. It's my tragic flaw. What do you want to drink?

THELMA. Ginger beer. Have one with me. Life's short. Let it rip.

(CURTIS laughs, getting a Stone's ginger beer from the fridge.)

CURTIS. Tempting, but I'll pass, thanks.

(Twisting open the bottle, CURTIS gives THELMA her beer.)

THELMA. Your loss.

(THELMA takes a few huge swigs.)

CURTIS. My mother liked Stone's ginger beer, too. Not like you like it, but ...

THELMA. Invite her over. We'll toast our ailments.

CURTIS. She passed away about two months ago.

THELMA. Then for God's sake, don't invite her over.

(Smiling, CURTIS sits.)

THELMA *(cont'd)*. I shouldn't be insensitive, but I have to joke about death, otherwise I start thinking about it seriously, and the next thing you know, I'm back in church or walking in front of a speeding bus.

CURTIS. My mother *loved* death jokes. The more grim, the better.

THELMA. Good for her. How did she die?

CURTIS. An aneurism. In her sleep.

THELMA. There are worse ways.

CURTIS. It was hard not getting to say goodbye.

THELMA. When I was a nurse, I learned the only thing harder than not saying goodbye is saying goodbye.

CURTIS. She was a good mother. She found it easy to be good. My brother and I were lucky. I miss her.

THELMA. I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't missed my mother. My parents were Presbyterian missionaries and always gone. She died when I was sixteen, and then she was gone-gone.

CURTIS. How's the food? What is that?

THELMA. Who knows? I burned it beyond recognition. That microwave is defective.

CURTIS. Smells good, though.

THELMA. Grab a fork.

CURTIS. Thanks, but I have to be careful about what I consume.

THELMA. Consume? Lord, you're not one of those irritating vegan-types, are you?

(CURTIS laughs.)

THELMA *(cont'd)*. Oh, God, you are. Vegans are ripping this country apart.

CURTIS. *Vegans* are?

THELMA. Yes, with their fascist views on food, their political correctness baloney, nurturing everything, looking to the moon for answers. If you refer to God as a she, I am going to punch you right in the mouth.

CURTIS. I'm not a vegan. I've just got acid reflux. (*Sarcastic.*) I'll have something really yummy when I get home, like plain steel cut oats with shredded coconut. Mmmm!

THELMA. Ha! You know, for a home dad, you don't stay home much.

CURTIS. I can count on one hand the number of times I've been away from my son.

THELMA. Oh, shut up.

CURTIS. It's true.

THELMA. He doesn't go to school? Does social services know?

CURTIS. I homeschool him.

THELMA. Grandparents don't take him off your hands once in a while?

CURTIS. My in-laws live in New Zealand. I think. They kind of do their own thing. And my family's in California.

THELMA. You don't go back there? Or they come out here?

CURTIS. No. My wife always felt judged by my parents. Devout Catholics. Latin Massers. Old school.

THELMA. Oh my, that's terrifying.

CURTIS. Yup. My parents' house has holy water in a dish by the front door.

THELMA. Holy crap. So send your father out here. Put him up in a hotel if your wife can't have him under her roof.

CURTIS. After my mom died, my father followed a couple weeks later.

THELMA. Goodness gracious sakes alive.

CURTIS. He'd been sick with prostate cancer for years. He died with sixty-four dollars to his name. And he was the hardest working man I've ever known.

THELMA. *Sixty-four dollars?*

CURTIS. Everything he earned, he gave to others.

THELMA. Spouses going one right after the other is not uncommon. Somehow, though, I've managed to stick around for twenty-three years since my husband knocked off. So you've never gotten a babysitter?

CURTIS. Nope. So who looked after you with your parents always gone?

THELMA. Our housekeeper.

CURTIS. The Scottish lady? She didn't have a name?

THELMA. Margot Angus. But she was just Mrs. to me. She wanted me to call her that even though she wasn't married.

CURTIS. Yes, you said that. She's responsible for the Celtic lullabies?

THELMA. She would sing them while she worked.

CURTIS. So did you grow up in Scotland?

THELMA. India. That's where the church sent us. There's a photo of my school on the wall there.

(He follows her gesture, rising, to a large photo on a wall nearby. He groans as he gets up.)

THELMA *(cont'd)*. That's the second groan I've heard out of you.

CURTIS. Back trouble. When my son didn't walk, I carried him. When he cried, I carried him.

THELMA. Back problems. Stomach problems. I think you're still carrying him.

CURTIS *(peering in at the photo)*. Whoa. "Woodstock School. 1951." Which one are you?

THELMA. The hot momma with the giant grin in the front row.

CURTIS *(finding her)*. I think I can see every single one of your teeth.

THELMA. I was a happy child.

CURTIS. How did you end up in the US?

THELMA. You don't really want to hear my whole story, do you? I'm eighty-seven. It'll be epic.

CURTIS. You could give me the highlights.

THELMA. Well, a lot of it I don't remember, which is fine with me.

In fact, there's a lot more about my life I'd like to forget but can't.

CURTIS. I'm the opposite. There's a lot more I'd like to remember.

THELMA. Like what?

CURTIS. I'd like to remember what it was like when I walked for the first time.

THELMA. You're kind of an odd duck, you know that?

CURTIS. My son has taught me that every milestone in life is precious.

THELMA. For my girls, every milestone had to happen as soon as humanly possible. And when they didn't, they complained. But they were my life. And my husband hated that I chose my grumpy girls over him, so he chose other women over me, and then when he got sick, I chose forgiveness over resentment, and nursed him all through my fifties all the while I was being a real nurse at Cook County Hospital.

CURTIS. I hope he appreciated it.

THELMA. He eventually said "thank you" by dying. His last words were "OK, that's enough."

(CURTIS laughs. She laughs, too.)

THELMA *(cont'd)*. Oh, I shouldn't speak poorly of the man. He wasn't all bad. He loved the one thing about me that I loved the most.

CURTIS. What's that?

THELMA. I could dance.

CURTIS. So what are we doing sitting here? Let's dance!

THELMA. Now?

CURTIS. Why not? Weren't you the one who said "let it rip"?

THELMA. Don't you need to feed the cats?

CURTIS. I already did. Water, too. Scooped the litter box, even. Come on, Thelma, dance with me.

(He puts out a hand for her.)

THELMA. But I just ate. I'll cramp.

CURTIS. What's your next excuse? You're eighty-seven? All the more reason to get up and dance!

THELMA. I haven't danced in twenty years!

CURTIS. What in the world are you waiting for?! On your feet, Thelma!

THELMA. But I don't have my Greek tunic!

CURTIS. I don't know what that means.

THELMA. Isadora Duncan always wore her Greek tunic when she danced.

CURTIS. We'll imagine. Come on. Take my hand.