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SPECIAL DAYS

Nine one-act plays by Seth Kramer

<i>Bedtime Story</i>	5
JEFF	
<i>Prelude to Thirty-Five</i>	11
RAE	
JAY	
<i>Bucket of Moon</i>	27
JESS	
DEE	
<i>Speak Now</i>	39
CASEY	
HAROLD	
<i>Surviving Fad</i>	53
BOB	
GLORIA	
<i>Still Life</i>	65
DAVID	
MICHELLE	
<i>February 14th</i>	79
LOIS	
GANNON	
<i>Name</i>	93
STAN	
SUSANNAH	
ZACK	
LEWIS	
<i>Angels, Laws & Miracles</i>	107
AJ	
WINNY	

BEDTIME STORY

Cast of Characters

JEFF

For Ruby Josephine Pucillo—Born January 9th, 2001

BEDTIME STORY

by Seth Kramer

(JEFF sits next to a crib rocking it. The stage is lit by a lamp. He talks to his child.)

JEFF. I sat there...dressed in the green-blue surgical scrubs, a poofy mushroom hat on my head, smiling like a stoned idiot behind my mask.

(Pause.)

You cried.

(Beat.)

Your first sounds in the world.

(Beat.)

I think back on it— Everything so alien and bright to you—this strange new place. I would have screamed in confusion too—probably did actually. The nurse who cut away your last connection to mommy—bathed you—washed you naked and pink and clean. God, how you bawled and writhed—a willful child even then—until she finally laid you into your mom’s protective arms.

(Beat.)

And then everything went silent, Ruby. Everything was wonder. Your eyes blinked and gazed up at Wendy and probably thought: *(Baby voice)* “So that’s what a mommy looks like.” *(Smiling into crib:)* I kept wiping my eyes, unable to keep them from tearing up, you know? I was crying with joy and awe and fear and about a thousand different emotions all at once.

(Beat.)

The sight of you—cradled against your mommy’s flushed cheek, tiny limbs pumping aimlessly in confused motion—the look of bliss on Wendy’s face. That’s a memory I will take with me through the rest of my life.

(Beat.)

The first time...

(Beat.)

The first time— When that nurse walked you over to me—and I felt you in my hands... My HUGE hands—this wrinkled, fragile, little miracle—that I could hold, from head to butt, in two hands. Looking into those clear wondrous eyes as you discovered everything for the first time...

(Beat.)

Right that second, Ruby— Right then I KNEW. Knew what every man back to our cave days comes to know. There is nothing I will not do for you. No limit to my...

(Beat.)

My Love. *(Soft:)* Step in front of a rushing train or kill an 800-pound grizzly with my bare hands—I can do those things to keep you safe. Plant crops from sun up till sun down so you'll never know hunger. Walk naked so my clothes could keep you warm. There's no limit Ruby.

(Beat.)

And then fear.

(Beat.)

Such fear chasing up behind that I could barely breathe. Like nothing I have ever felt before. Fear that one day I'll find myself wanting. Absent when I should have been there for you. Flawed in your moment of need.

(Pause.)

So many years. So much of my life was something else. I wouldn't call it less meaningful, because I don't think that's right, but I look back now at what was so damn important to me— What I needed— wanted to make me happy—and I just laugh. A good job. Getting the acting gig. Finding a leather jacket that fit right. Going to the “in clubs.”

(Pause.)

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PRELUDE TO THIRTY-FIVE

Cast of Characters

JAY
RAE

Acknowledgements

Prelude to Thirty-Five was first produced in 2003 by Brass Tacks Theatre in New York City, with the following cast:

RAE Hope Albrecht
JAY C. L. Weatherstone

Directed by Dennis Schebetta

For Mom & Dad on their thirty-fifth anniversary

PRELUDE TO THIRTY-FIVE

by Seth Kramer

(A train station overhang during a snowstorm. RAE sits on a bench wearing a hat and sweater. She huddles around her handbag, shivering. A pause. JAY, covered in snow, stomps on carrying two suitcases. JAY wears a hat and trench coat.)

JAY. Hell of a night. Like Alaska out there. Snow drifts must be five-feet high already. And the roads... Jesus, I wouldn't be driving around in this unless I had to. No siree. A bad night to be caught outside.

(Puts down bags. Blows on hands.)

Aren't you cold?

RAE. No.

JAY. Really?

RAE. I'm fine.

JAY. You look cold.

RAE. I said, I'm fine.

JAY. If you say so.

RAE. I just did.

JAY. *(Beat:)* You walked?

RAE. Yes.

JAY. In the middle of all this?

RAE. I walked here.

JAY. And you're really telling me you're not freezing?

RAE. I've got a hat.

JAY. Suit yourself.

(JAY crosses to the posted train schedule. He studies the schedule. Pause.)

JAY. When's it coming?

RAE. What?

JAY. The train? What time is it—

RAE. I don't know.

JAY. OK.

RAE. Soon.

JAY. OK.

RAE. You don't need to worry.

JAY. Who said I'm worried?

RAE. Good.

JAY. 6am.

(Beat.)

It says here—the next train isn't until...

RAE. 6am?

JAY. That's what the schedule says, anyway.

RAE. Wonderful. Just wonderful.

JAY. You going to wait?

RAE. I guess so.

JAY. It's gonna be a long night. A LONG COLD WINTER night—nothing but you and your hat sitting here getting snowed upon. If it were me...

RAE. Jay?

JAY. Yeah?

RAE. Leave me alone.

JAY. Yeah.

(JAY picks up the bags and walks them to RAE.)

JAY. Just thought I'd drop these off. The bigger bag...that's the one with your coat in it.

(Beat.)

Have a nice night.

(JAY puts the bags down at RAE's feet. She refuses to meet his eyes. JAY shakes his head and exits. A beat. RAE looks after JAY then re-adjusts herself, curling her legs up under her sweater. Pause. JAY reenters.)

JAY. Damn.

RAE. Now what?

JAY. You're really serious about this, aren't you?

RAE. Weren't you leaving?

JAY. I should.

RAE. So go.

JAY. You'd like that, wouldn't you? If I just turned around and walked away. That's it. All over. Poor little stubborn girl spends the rest of the night alone in the freezing snow.

RAE. I'm under an awning.

JAY. It's NINE HOURS until the next train.

(Beat, gestures to bag.)

Put on the coat.

RAE. No.

JAY. At least do that much.

RAE. I don't want to.

JAY. Stop acting childish. The coat will keep you warm.

RAE. Childish? Childish!? I'm being childish? I'M THE ONE WHO'S BEING...

JAY. YES.

RAE. How am I the ONE being childish?

(The next bit of dialog comes rapid-fire.)

JAY. Whose bags are those?

RAE. Mine.

JAY. And do you have a coat in one of those two bags that are yours?

RAE. Maybe.

JAY. A brand new winter coat? Something warm and cozy that we went out shopping for and bought special for this trip?

RAE. Yes.

JAY. And you're refusing to wear it in the middle of a snowstorm because... ?

RAE. *(Grudging:)* You brought it.

JAY. THAT'S how YOU'RE being childish.

(Beat. RAE gets up, reaches into a bag and yanks out a puffy, warm coat. She shoves her arms into it, plops back down on the bench and glares at JAY.)

RAE. There.

JAY. Thank you.

RAE. Uh huh.

JAY. Good.

RAE. Fine.

JAY. *(Pause:)* Why am I thanking you?

RAE. I don't know.

JAY. I mean— I mean I brought you the coat, didn't I? Drove myself down here skidding all over the roads, nearly crashed into a stop sign—just to give you—make sure you had a coat to keep you warm tonight.

RAE. Yes.

JAY. *(Beat:)* And I just thanked YOU?

RAE. You're welcome.

JAY. Boy, you are making this really difficult. Because I—I mean...YOU are the one who—who is having some major...THIS. Whatever THIS is. Episode or meltdown or whatever... Because let me tell you something, lady—people—normal, non-medicated people—they do NOT act like you are acting tonight.

RAE. Did you just call me crazy?

JAY. If the straightjacket fits...

RAE. I really think you need to leave now.

JAY. You—I—this is like, what? Only the third time you've been to visit...

RAE. Fourth.

JAY. Third.

RAE. Your dad's birthday, Thanksgiving, your cousin's BRIS, and now. Four. (*Counting on fingers:*) One, two, three, four.

JAY. The point is...

RAE. And who asks someone they're dating to a bris?

JAY. THE POINT IS—how's this going to look?

RAE. I don't know.

JAY. That little scene you acted out.

RAE. It wasn't a scene.

JAY. You don't think marching out in the middle of the night, leaving all your stuff behind, wasn't just a LITTLE overdramatic?

RAE. I was upset.

JAY. Uh huh.

RAE. I mean, REALLY upset.

JAY. I'm getting that.

RAE. (*Pause:*) Crap.

JAY. You see my point?

RAE. They think I'm crazy now, don't they?

JAY. Well...

RAE. No, they do, don't they? I bet they're thinking "Thank God! Thank God, this has happened and our son is FINALLY through dating THAT GIRL."

JAY. That "crazy" girl.

RAE. They said that?

JAY. Well, no.

RAE. No?

JAY. They didn't "say" that.

RAE. But they were thinking it, huh? You could tell.

JAY. Actually...my dad was asleep and mom had her hearing aid out when you—when everything happened, so...

RAE. They don't know anything?

JAY. But if they HAD HEARD...

(RAE begins to hit JAY. JAY grabs RAE by her wrists. She struggles and ends up elbowing him in the nose.)

JAY. Hey...

RAE. You're a jerk!

JAY. Now, just...

RAE. A real bona fide jerk.

JAY. Yeah, OK—

RAE. That was cruel!

JAY. Hitting bad. Hitting—

RAE. Getting me all worked up over nothing like that and then making me feel like I've ruined my one chance at...

JAY. Ow?

RAE. I hope you're proud! How could you? I mean, what do you have to say for yourself?

JAY. Bleeding.

RAE. What?

JAY. Your elbow, my nose—

RAE. No.

JAY. I am TOTALLY bleeding.

RAE. Oh crap.

JAY. I need—

RAE. Sit down.

(JAY sits. RAE digs in her bag, finds a handkerchief and offers it to JAY. JAY holds it on his nose and speaks in a nasal, pinched voice.)

RAE. Here. Oh please, take this. Oh crap, did I—did I...is it... ?

JAY. Broken?

RAE. Oh, God.

JAY. Could be.

RAE. Tip your head back.

JAY. I—

RAE. Come on tip your head back. It will help stop the bleeding.

JAY. I can taste blood going down the back of my throat. It's pretty gross.

(Beat.)

I can't believe you hit me.

RAE. Well you shouldn't have made me think...

JAY. Right in the face.

RAE. Your parents really didn't hear us?

JAY. *(Beat:)* No. They didn't hear us.

RAE. You're sure?

JAY. I just got punched in the face over it. I'M SURE.

RAE. What will you tell them?

JAY. I don't know. The truth, I guess.

RAE. The truth.

JAY. That you left. That you're angry with me and that it's all my fault.

RAE. Your fault.

JAY. Come back with me.

RAE. I...

JAY. Please.

RAE. I don't think it's a good idea.

JAY. Then at least take me to the hospital.

RAE. The hospital?

JAY. I need to get this nose looked at.

RAE. Uh huh.

JAY. I can't drive in my condition. I can barely see my eyes are stinging so bad.

RAE. Are you going to use the ride to the hospital to try and talk me out of leaving?

JAY. (*A bad lie:*) What— I would never— I mean— No?

RAE. Jay.

JAY. Yeah?

RAE. I'm sorry for hitting you.

JAY. It's OK.

RAE. And thank you.

JAY. For?

RAE. For bringing me my bags.

JAY. You're not going to drive me to the hospital, are you?

RAE. I'm sorry.

JAY. *(Stops holding nose:)* Yeah. Me too. *(Offers hanky:)* You want this back?

RAE. That's OK. You keep it.

JAY. I could wash it and maybe mail it to you or even...

RAE. I don't care what you do with it. Keep it. Throw it out. Leave it, whatever. I don't...

(Beat.)

Please, just...just go. Just go home.

(JAY shuffles his feet. He goes to RAE and tries to hug her. The hug is awkward and uncomfortable. JAY walks toward the exit and stops.)

JAY. I've done a lot of things in my life. Some, I don't know, some turned out OK, some maybe not. But I've never dealt with...

(Beat.)

What I'm saying is... It's not that I—or that you— WE... What I'm saying is...

(Beat.)

I don't know what I'm saying.

(Pause.)

You walked out. You walked out the door and I felt...BAD. Felt like there were these little—these hamsters or something—all running around in my head screaming at me what to do, "Go after her. Win her back." All these hamster voices telling me that it can't end like this. Little furious hamsters squeezing my chest making it so I couldn't breathe right and...

RAE. Jay...

JAY. Do you understand? Do you understand what I am trying to tell you?

RAE. You felt...you felt...like a confused rodent?

JAY. I'm not doing this right. I'm not saying this right.

(Beat.)

All this time and we've been—you know...things have been pretty good. And dating and good feelings and getting to know each other and then you...you go and...

(Beat.)

Crazy. I'm sitting here trying to explain crazy to a crazy person.

(Beat.)

This REALLY isn't going right.

RAE. I'll say.

JAY. Why? Why did you say THAT? Why did you ask?

RAE. Because I wanted to know.

JAY. But—but—but—

RAE. And now I do.

JAY. I'm supposed to ask you! That's how it goes. I— ME.

(Pounds chest.)

THE MAN. I get to be the one who— I mean, down on one knee and the taking of the hand and everything. I'm supposed to do that to you, not the other way around.

RAE. And in the meantime?

JAY. In the meantime, what?

RAE. Me. What was I supposed to do, in the meantime?

JAY. Well...I don't...

RAE. Wait?

JAY. Apparently not.

RAE. Life is too short, Jay. Life is happening all around us, zooming right along a second at a time. One day you're going to blink and everything is gonna to be half over and you'll be scratching your head wondering where all the time went.

(Beat.)

I met you. You came along and we've roller skated and danced and I made my mother's special shrimp recipe for you and all that "test drive" crap.

(Beat.)

Now I look into the future and I like...LIKED...the idea of us always being together. I wanted that. So, I asked.

(Beat.)

And you couldn't answer.

JAY. You surprised me.

RAE. Terrified, more like.

JAY. It wasn't that bad.

RAE. You hid in the bathroom.

JAY. Well—

RAE. You stared at me, didn't answer the question, and RAN to hide in the bathroom.

JAY. I said something.

RAE. "Excuse me, I think I need to use the bathroom."

JAY. Not really what you were hoping to hear, huh?

RAE. No.

JAY. And that's why you ran out.

RAE. Action can be an answer too.

JAY. *(Pause:)* Ring.

RAE. What?

JAY. There was no ring.

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BUCKET OF MOON

Cast of Characters

DEE

JESS

Acknowledgements

Bucket of Moon was first produced in 2002 by the Vital Theatre in New York City, with the following cast:

JESS.....Taylor Ruckel

DEE.....Diane Landers

Directed by Michele Travis

For James and Brian. Heroes both.

BUCKET OF MOON

by Seth Kramer

(Lights up.)

(A dim stage with couch down left and cordless phone nearby. JESS, 30—powerful build, haunted, stands at center and stares out at nothing. He wears boxers and a FDNY T-shirt, dressed for bed. DEE—30, an attractive woman, seven months pregnant, enters from offstage. She is also dressed for bed wearing a knee-length nightshirt. She approaches JESS, reaching out. Before her hand touches his shoulder.)

JESS. *(Struggling:)* There were fires. There were fires in the sky.

DEE. Jesse—

JESS. Falling on us. Falling everywhere.

DEE. You're OK.

JESS. Like the end of the world.

DEE. You're OK, Jess.

JESS. I—

DEE. Just a dream.

JESS. *(Coming clear:)* Dream?

DEE. A bad dream, that's all.

JESS. *(Beat:)* Should have been there.

DEE. Don't say that.

JESS. I should have been there.

DEE. You couldn't have known. No one could.

JESS. Mutual. My fucking mutual.

DEE. Just like every other Tuesday.

JESS. Why?

DEE. I don't know.

JESS. A fluke? Luck? What?

(Beat.)

Why me?

DEE. I don't know.

JESS. All those people, Dee. I keep seeing it in my head. All those people—

DEE. Don't do this to yourself.

JESS. My company—every last one of 'em.

(Beat.)

Brian. If it had been his Tuesday— His mutual—his day off instead of mine—

DEE. You might have been killed in his place.

JESS. Maybe—

DEE. Give me your hand.

JESS. Maybe I could have done something.

DEE. Jesse don't—

JESS. I let them down.

DEE. You're alive. That's not a failure.

JESS. I wasn't there when they needed me most.

DEE. *(Beat:)* Come back to bed.

JESS. I won't be able to sleep.

DEE. Try.

JESS. I won't be able to.

DEE. OK, fine. So we won't sleep. There are other things to do in bed.

JESS. I won't be able to do that, either.

DEE. It's OK, Jess. Everything is OK.

JESS. I just—I just...

DEE. The thunder?

JESS. Yeah.

DEE. It's been getting to me too.

JESS. It sounds like— Like something else going on outside.

DEE. Explosions?

JESS. Maybe, I don't know.

(Beat.)

Like explosions, yeah, it sounds like that.

DEE. We'd have seen something.

JESS. On the news?

DEE. They would have said something.

JESS. It's just a storm.

DEE. *(Pause:)* Before you came home I— At first—when the storm first started—I, uh, climbed in the tub. Just sorta balled up and couldn't move for a while.

(Shakes head.)

As if sitting in a bathtub would be any safer.

JESS. This is bad.

DEE. The weather?

JESS. This will make it harder.

DEE. For the searchers?

JESS. Yeah.

DEE. But the fires...a rain like this... Maybe it will help put out some fires.

JESS. I should call in. See if they need me.

(Pause. JESS does not move.)

DEE. Hand.

JESS. What?

DEE. Give me your hand.

JESS. Why?

DEE. Don't be difficult, Jess. Just give me your hand.

(He does.)

Ugly. You have ugly hands.

JESS. Thanks a lot.

(DEE kisses JESS's palm. She places it gently on her stomach.)

DEE. It turned me on. When we first met—at that Halloween party—

JESS. My hands turned you on?

DEE. Yeah.

JESS. My UGLY hands?

DEE. Uh huh.

JESS. You are so full a' shit.

DEE. Your brother introduced us. 'Member?

JESS. Wonder Woman.

DEE. That's right.

JESS. Hell of a costume.

DEE. You shook my hand and I thought: "Now THAT would feel nice on my ass."

(He smiles, she strokes his hand.)

Callused, scarred, lived-in hands. "This guy doesn't work at a desk. He's not fixing computers for a living." Everything you told me about yourself that night— What you do, your job, this house you were building— All of that—I knew it from these. These two ugly hands.

(Beat.)

They were the first thing I noticed.

JESS. I noticed your tits.

DEE. Charming.

JESS. Come on!

DEE. My husband.

JESS. That Wonder Woman costume you had on—

DEE. Hey—

JESS. It pushed up your—

DEE. At least I **WORE** a costume.

JESS. I was dressed up.

DEE. Right.

JESS. Me and Brian—

DEE. Doesn't count.

JESS. What are you talking about?

DEE. Switching dress uniforms with your brother—

JESS. Of course it counts.

DEE. It does **NOT**.

JESS. Well, we thought it was pretty clever.

DEE. That's because you were both shit-faced.

JESS. Brian always... He always joked it was one of the major perks of the job. *(Funny voice:)* "And Bro, the best thing about it? You'll never have to think twice about what you're gonna be for Halloween."

DEE. You feel that?

JESS. Yeah.

DEE. Our little soccer pro.

JESS. Strong.

DEE. Two months more.

JESS. Two months.

DEE. I think he likes it when you do Brian's voice.

JESS. *(Funny voice:)* You like this, huh? You like to hear your daddy talk like goofy old Uncle Brian, huh?

DEE. Guess so.

JESS. Another?

DEE. Let me know if you see a foot kick through.

JESS. *(Baby talk:)* Mommy and daddy wuv you— Want you to grow up big and strong. Yes, yes. Just like your uncle Brian.

(Long pause.)

I miss him.

DEE. Me too.

JESS. Every time the phone rings—every time—I keep expecting it to be him.

DEE. If anyone could find a way...

JESS. Some great story about how he managed to hide in a doorway or stairwell or something. Some pocket of safety.

DEE. You shouldn't give up hope.

JESS. *(Pause:)* We used to— God, I haven't thought about this in years— Brian and I, growing up—we used to play this game on the roof of our old apartment building in Jersey City.

DEE. What game?

JESS. King of the hill.

DEE. Oh, I bet your mother loved that.

JESS. First and only time she ever took a belt to either of us was when she found out.

DEE. Did it work?

JESS. Hell no. Just made us more sneaky.

DEE. It's a wonder you two ever survived puberty.

JESS. The roof was fun.

DEE. Hope you remember that when the shoe's on the other foot, *daddy*.

JESS. By the time we'd turned 13 it was the only place to be after midnight. Brian and I—we'd sit there and pass a joint back and forth and stare out over the water at the Trade Towers, watching the lights blink in and out half the night. Talking about what we wanted to do with our lives, where we wanted to travel, becoming firefighters, stuff like that.

DEE. Sounds nice.

JESS. I grew up seeing those towers every day. Every Day. They were like the moon, you know? Like the moon or the ocean or a mountain. Something so vast and—and...

DEE. Permanent?

JESS. Yeah. Yeah, that's the word. Permanent.

(Beat.)

Now I go down there and it's just—just—

DEE. I know.

JESS. I get in that line and I start doing. Bucket after bucket. One after the next. Like a bunch of men trying to move Everest one stone at a time. And I don't think. **CAN'T THINK** about anything. I'm just there—another pair of hands in a long line.

(Beat.)

And before I know it two hours have gone by and then four and after a while the sun's coming up or going down and all I've done, more times than I can count, is just pass that bucket. And always—**ALWAYS**—it gets passed back to me just as full as it was the last time.

(Beat.)

Nothing we do seems to matter anymore.

DEE. It matters.

JESS. We don't save lives. We don't rescue anyone. Most of the time we don't even find any body parts. Just rubble. Just buckets.

(Pause.)

How do you...go on, Dee? How do you live in the face of something like this?

DEE. You just do.

JESS. But how?

DEE. I don't know. By coming home, I guess. By coming home to me and talking. Placing your hand here, right here, and feeling your son kick. I think that's a start. I think that can be reason enough for right now.

JESS. I'm afraid.

DEE. Me too.

JESS. Afraid tomorrow I'll turn on the TV and...

DEE. There'll be something worse?

JESS. Yeah.

DEE. Then we'll deal with that tomorrow.

JESS. What kind of world is this to bring a child into?

DEE. I don't know.

JESS. I should call in. I should see if they need me.

(Pause. JESS looks at the phone but does not take it.)

JESS. If you ask me...

DEE. What?

JESS. If you ask me—I'll give it up.

DEE. You don't mean that.

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SPEAK NOW

Cast of Characters

CASEY
HAROLD

Acknowledgements

Speak Now was first produced in 2001 by Word Of Mouth Theatre in New York City, with the following cast:

CASEY Kim Winter
HAROLD..... Boston Stergis

Directed by Taylor Ruckel

SPEAK NOW

by Seth Kramer

(A rooftop. CASEY sits, in a simple wedding dress, hugging her knees. She is missing a shoe. HAROLD stands nearby in a tux holding said shoe. Pause. HAROLD inches towards the ledge. CASEY watches.)

CASEY. What are you doing?

HAROLD. I just... I want to check out the view. I figure since I came all the way up here I might as well...look. You know, that's one of those things about this city, it's very...

(Beat.)

Very vertical.

(Beat.)

And, I mean, how often do you TRULY get a chance to stand next to at a great big dizzying drop like this and really enjoy the...the full, what? The FULL...

CASEY. You hate heights.

HAROLD. The full TERROR of it.

(Scurries back.)

Yes. That's definitely what it is. Terror.

(Beat.)

Boy—really gets the heart rate up though, doesn't it? I get it now—bungee jumpers, skydiving, all those hideous falling things—There's nothing like the utter fear of impacting into a squishy, pulpy DEATH to really make you feel alive.

CASEY. Harold.

HAROLD. Yes?

CASEY. You're an idiot.

HAROLD. OK.

CASEY. No, I mean it.

HAROLD. I'm getting that.

CASEY. Say it.

HAROLD. I'm not going to...

CASEY. Say it!

HAROLD. I'm an idiot.

CASEY. Thank you.

HAROLD. But...

CASEY. Now shut up.

HAROLD. *(Pause:)* I'm sorry, OK?

(Beat.)

I really am. If there was any way I could go back in time and fix this, I would. But I can't. So, all I can do is apologize. I screwed up. I made a STUPID mistake. The least you could do is acknowledge the fact that I am man enough to admit that, OK?

(Pause.)

Couldn't you do that for me? At least?

CASEY. OK. I acknowledge.

HAROLD. Thank you.

CASEY. I acknowledge your stupidity.

HAROLD. *(Beat:)* So that's it then, is it? This is what you want to do? You want to just sit here and pout like some sullen child and call me names. Is that it?

CASEY. Uh huh.

HAROLD. Fine. That's just fine! We'll sit here then. I'll sit here and feel like an asshole for caring in the first place and you can just keep on sitting there sulking. Fine. This is just great.

CASEY. Could you at least do your part WITHOUT talking so much?

(HAROLD sits down next to CASEY. Pause. He offers her the shoe.)

HAROLD. Here.

(CASEY stares at the shoe. She takes it and hits HAROLD with it.)

HAROLD. OW! What are you doing?

CASEY. Making myself feel better.

(The two get up and circle one another. HAROLD stays out of range.)

HAROLD. Hey, now that's enough!

CASEY. I disagree.

HAROLD. We shouldn't be fighting.

CASEY. OK, you don't fight, I'll do it for both of us. Come a little closer.

HAROLD. Just put...put DOWN the footwear.

CASEY. But you went to so much trouble getting it for me.

HAROLD. You know, it's not like...not like...I KNEW or anything. OK? It's not like I did it on purpose. Some nefarious plot. Came up here and decided to... I mean, how was I supposed to know?

CASEY. It was in the door!

HAROLD. You could have lost it.

CASEY. How the hell do you LOSE something in between a door and a wall? What did you think, hmmm? I got my foot CAUGHT? I had to pull myself free? Why else would it be there?

HAROLD. I didn't know it would lock...

CASEY. It's an emergency exit, Harold. There's a sign!

(CASEY throws the shoe at HAROLD.)

HAROLD. Are you trying to kill someone?! Didn't you ever hear about that kid who dropped that penny from the top of the Empire State Building?

CASEY. Oh for God's sakes...

HAROLD. If this shoe had gone over the edge it could have gone right through someone's skull into the cement.

CASEY. This isn't Everest, Harold, we're seven flights up.

HAROLD. *(Holding up shoe:)* Still—that is one mean heel. It would hurt.

CASEY. Harold, just...just...go away.

HAROLD. That's going to be a little difficult. I happen to be just as trapped up on this God damn rooftop as you are.

CASEY. Well, then go to the other side or something. I don't care. I don't want to talk to you anymore, got it?

(HAROLD stalks across the roof and leans against a pipe ignoring CASEY. A solid pause. CASEY plays with her dress and watches him.)

CASEY. What are...

(Beat.)

what are you doing here, anyway?

HAROLD. I thought you didn't want to talk anymore?

CASEY. I don't.

HAROLD. Then what do you call this?

CASEY. You know what? Forget it.

HAROLD. Fine.

CASEY. I'm sorry I even asked.

HAROLD. Not as sorry as I am.

CASEY. *(Pause:)* Are you going to tell me what you're doing here or not?

HAROLD. I thought I'd sneak off and burn a joint before the wedding. Why do you think I'm here?

(Beat.)

I was looking for you.

CASEY. Oh.

HAROLD. Actually, everyone's kind of doing that right now. Half the church is trying to figure out if you stole a car or just fled on foot.

CASEY. Oh.

HAROLD. Your mother's ready to call the cops and your father is parked at the reception table getting loaded on vodka, your maid of honor is telling half the guests you've been abducted and...

CASEY. I haven't been gone that long.

HAROLD. Would you like me to tell you what time it is?

CASEY. No. Yes. I don't know.

HAROLD. I'll tell you this much, right now there's some poor organist sweating his way through the longest wedding march jam improv you've ever heard.

CASEY. I don't want to think about it.

HAROLD. So?

CASEY. So what?

HAROLD. You want to tell me what's going on?

CASEY. I just...

(Beat.)

I needed to get away from there for a little while.

HAROLD. I figured out that much. You know, you could have told someone...

CASEY. I didn't plan this. To be gone this long. I needed a little space so I just...just...

HAROLD. Found the first flight of stairs you could and started climbing?

CASEY. Basically.

HAROLD. Some things never change.

CASEY. I guess not.

HAROLD. At least you've grown out of climbing trees or power lines. That sort of thing. You'd look pretty funny sitting on top of a stoplight in that wedding dress.

CASEY. Heights help me gain perspective.

HAROLD. *(Pause:)* You OK?

CASEY. I'm fine. Really. I've just been sitting here. Watching the cars pull up. Watching the guests get out and go in the church. For the last hour, I guess. You know, I haven't recognized a single face in the lot. Who are all these people?

HAROLD. The same strangers that come to every wedding. Fifth cousins. Your mother's personal trainer. Some great grand relative who always smelled like Ben-Gay at the family barbecues. Weddings and funerals, you can't keep them away.

CASEY. I just kept looking back at the door and my shoe, knowing I should go. Get up, slip my foot in and walk through. Go back down the stairs and do this. Do what I'm supposed to do. What I came here to do. Say my vows, marry my man and spend the rest of my life with him.

HAROLD. And now, thanks to me...

CASEY. And now...yeah.

(A pause. HAROLD starts to undress.)

CASEY. Um...Harold...what are you...uh...doing?

HAROLD. What does it look like?

CASEY. Well, at first glance, I'd say taking your clothes off.

HAROLD. Uh huh.

CASEY. OK, let's follow that with—WHY?

HAROLD. I'm going to... I'm going to climb down.

CASEY. You?

HAROLD. Yes.

CASEY. The guy who gets all twitchy on an escalator?

HAROLD. I'm going to climb down to the next window.

CASEY. And THEN, Spiderman?

HAROLD. I don't know. Kick it in or something. I got you into this mess and so I'll get you out. I'm not going to let you miss your wedding.

CASEY. And being naked is going to help this how?

HAROLD. I'm going to make a rope. I'll fasten this cummerbund part to those bars there and then—

CASEY. Uh huh.

HAROLD. ...then hook my belt to that and maybe tie my pants to that.

CASEY. Harold...

HAROLD. I don't know, once it's all knotted together I should have enough length to lower myself down to...

CASEY. Harold...

HAROLD. ...the nearest window and get us out of here. I can do this.

CASEY. Maybe you should go look at that drop again.

HAROLD. Fear is there to be conquered!

CASEY. Or to keep you from killing yourself.

HAROLD. I'd rather die than sit here and have you hate me for ruining your wedding.

CASEY. Great, so it'll be my fault when you fall to your death.

HAROLD. I might live long enough to tell someone where to find you.

CASEY. Try and remember to warn them about the door locking.

HAROLD. Here I go.

CASEY. OK.

HAROLD. If I don't look down I should be alright.

CASEY. I'm not going to try and stop you.

HAROLD. I don't want you to.

CASEY. I mean it.

HAROLD. So do I.

CASEY. Fine

HAROLD. Fine.

CASEY. Nice knowing you.

HAROLD. Here I go.

CASEY. Good luck.

(HAROLD turns around by the ledge. He closes his eyes tight and prepares to step over. CASEY rushes to him and grabs him around the neck. HAROLD opens his eyes.)

HAROLD. What are you doing?

CASEY. I'm coming with you, I guess.

HAROLD. You're going to hang from around my neck?

CASEY. That's right.

HAROLD. Strangulation makes this type of climbing really difficult.

CASEY. Oh, I wouldn't worry, there's no way that cummerbund is strong enough to support both of us. We're definitely going to die.

HAROLD. Casey...

CASEY. After all, it's my fault you came up here in the first place.

HAROLD. I came up here because I was worried about you.

CASEY. And if one of us has to die thanks to sheer stupidity, then I guess the other one has to as well.

HAROLD. OK.

CASEY. Banzai!

HAROLD. You've made your point.

CASEY. I have?

HAROLD. Yes.

CASEY. So, you won't climb over?

HAROLD. I won't climb over.

CASEY. I'm still not letting go.

(CASEY hugs HAROLD. Pause.)

HAROLD. I'm sorry about locking us up here.

CASEY. It's OK.

HAROLD. No it's not.

CASEY. It was a mistake. Anyone could have made it.

HAROLD. No...they couldn't.

CASEY. You're right. They couldn't. I was just trying to make you feel better.

HAROLD. It didn't work.

CASEY. It was a halfhearted attempt anyway.

(Pause.)

What am I gonna do?

HAROLD. I wouldn't worry too much.

CASEY. No?

HAROLD. Hey, if I could figure out where you went, it's only a matter of time before someone else realizes too.

CASEY. You know what, they probably already have.

HAROLD. Sure, that's the spirit. It's not like I'm the only person who knows you this well. Your mom and dad...hell, Robert has to know you at least as well as I do. After all, he is going to be your husband.

CASEY. Husband. Yeah.

HAROLD. And it's not like they can start the wedding without you.

CASEY. True.

HAROLD. Someone is bound to come looking for you any minute now.

CASEY. And find me up on the roof.

HAROLD. I did.

CASEY. Alone with you.

HAROLD. Right.

CASEY. In your boxers.

HAROLD. *(Beat:)* Dressed.

CASEY. Definitely.

HAROLD. I should get dressed.

(HAROLD starts to get dressed. CASEY watches. Pause.)

CASEY. Harold, can I tell you something.

HAROLD. Shoot.

CASEY. Just between us?

HAROLD. Ain't no one else here except for the pigeons.

CASEY. I thought...I thought today of all days I'd be nervous.

HAROLD. You're not?

CASEY. No.

HAROLD. Not even a little?

CASEY. *(Pause:)* All day—all today—the big day. The long walk down the aisle. All the family and friends here. Saying the vows and all that before God. All of it. None of it seemed to matter to me. I don't feel anything.

HAROLD. Well, maybe that's normal. Maybe you don't feel anything until you've actually done it.

CASEY. I just woke up this morning and started doing what I was supposed to do. Just like the rest of it. Everything else over the last 9 months. There hasn't been a single thing that I haven't had some other person advising me on. Planning for me. The caterer, the florist, the printer. All of them—my parents, Robert's mom and dad. Robert himself. I just went along with everything from the dress on down, to make them happy. I kept waiting for it to sink in and FEEL IMPORTANT. FEEL LIKE MY WEDDING...but it never did. A traditional wedding? Fine. A videographer? Alright. You want your sister to be a bride's maid. No problem.

(Beat.)

I went along with everything but I didn't care...

HAROLD. Well maybe...

CASEY. Until I invited you.

HAROLD. Oh.

CASEY. *(Pause:)* Seeing you again— Knowing you were here...in the same room with me, sometimes—that made me feel...feel things I had almost forgotten exist. Alive. Nervous. Aware. And when I suddenly thought you were really going to climb over the edge and smash into the lower window to get us off the roof.

(Beat.)

Do you know what I was feeling then?

HAROLD. Fear?

CASEY. Yeah.

HAROLD. That something might happen to me?

CASEY. That you might actually succeed.

(Beat.)

That you'd unlock this door and our time together would be over. That I would have to go downstairs and become someone else's wife.

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SURVIVING FAD

Cast of Characters

BOB

GLORIA

Production Notes

A note about staging: The original production of *Surviving Fad* took place in an actual swimming pool. If you've got a pool at your disposal be bold. Stage it there!

If not: A divided stage area—one section is bathed in blue light with a blue backdrop representing the Ocean. The other section has a few shrubs and rocks to represent Land. The land section should be bright with daylight.

Acknowledgements

Surviving Fad was first produced in 2002 by Word Of Mouth Theatre in New York City, with the following cast:

BOB.....Boston Stergis

GLORIA.....Jennifer Jiles

Directed by Michele Travis

SURVIVING FAD

by Seth Kramer

(BOB and GLORIA enter. They leap and swim in the Ocean section. Both wear wetsuits, fin hats and flippers on their hands. Movement in the Ocean section is confident and sure—almost dance-like. BOB and GLORIA make sounds like various sea life—whale song, dolphin squeaks, etc. GLORIA rushes to the edge and flops out of the water onto the Land section. BOB approaches concerned.)

BOB. Heeeey.

GLORIA. Wow.

BOB. I—this is—

GLORIA. Look at me.

BOB. I don't think you're supposed to be doing that.

GLORIA. I'm on land.

BOB. I can see.

GLORIA. Did you know we could—

BOB. I've heard stories.

GLORIA. You did?

BOB. Heard it's dangerous.

GLORIA. I think it's kinda neat.

BOB. Gloria, why don't you get back in the water.

GLORIA. What?

BOB. Come on, get back in the water.

GLORIA. No.

BOB. Get in the water!

GLORIA. I don't want to.

BOB. You'll asphyxiate.

GLORIA. Asphyx-a-what?

BOB. You won't be able to breath.

GLORIA. I seem to be doing OK right now.

BOB. Give it time.

GLORIA. I intend to.

BOB. You'll see.

GLORIA. It's pretty nice out here.

BOB. Bugs?

GLORIA. I could get used to this.

BOB. Are there bugs?

GLORIA. What are—

BOB. These things—really ugly, nasty, creepy, little organisms that like, crawl all over you and bite. Are there any bugs?

GLORIA. I don't think so.

BOB. Well I'd watch out for them, if I were you. Especially the flying kind.

GLORIA. It's warm.

BOB. I hear they're poisonous.

GLORIA. Warm and...something. What is that sensation?

BOB. It's called wind.

GLORIA. Wind.

BOB. Very bad for your complexion.

GLORIA. Warm and WINDY. I like it.

BOB. Dries out the skin.

GLORIA. You don't get this much swimming around underwater, do you? Wind.

(GLORIA begins trying to move. It goes poorly—a lot of comedic flailing and flopping that grows in absurdity. This should be contrast against BOB's smooth, sure movements.)

BOB. I'll take "wet" over "windy" any day.

GLORIA. Why don't you climb out and join me?

BOB. Leave the water?

GLORIA. Sure.

BOB. No. It can't be done.

GLORIA. I just did it.

BOB. Well, then, fine—it SHOULDN'T be done.

GLORIA. Why not?

BOB. If we were meant to live on land we'd have tails. We don't. We have flippers.

GLORIA. It'll just be for a little while.

BOB. Flippers are for the water.

GLORIA. Like a mini vacation. We could have an adventure—go see what's over that hill.

BOB. Probably more hills.

GLORIA. Come on! Explore with me.

BOB. Not for all the fish in the sea.

GLORIA. You might like it.

BOB. I don't even like the fact that YOU'RE doing it. What would make you think I'd want to try?

GLORIA. We could mate.

BOB. Mate?

GLORIA. Sure, we could go over that hill, find a nice muddy little spot, I'll lay a couple hundred eggs and then you could, you know...SPURT all over 'em. How 'bout it, my horny little blowfish? You in a fertilizing kind of mood?

BOB. Gross.

GLORIA. (*Seductive:*) You don't want to?

BOB. Nuh uh.

GLORIA. We are talking about SEX here, you get that right? You're always up for sex. It's a biological imperative.

BOB. Not on LAND.

GLORIA. I thought it'd be, you know...kinky.

BOB. What kind of pervy sea life do you take me for?

GLORIA. It was just an idea.

BOB. Deviant.

GLORIA. Prude.

BOB. What's next? You wanna tie me up with some seaweed and crap in my mouth?

GLORIA. You know what? Forget it.

BOB. I intend too.

GLORIA. Forget I even asked.

BOB. Not a problem.

GLORIA. Good.

BOB. (*Beat:*) You'll be eaten, you know.

GLORIA. What?

BOB. I'm telling you, this "exploration thing"—it never ends well. On land you're easy pickings. They have these big fur-covered toothy monsters that walk around on four legs—gobble you right up.

GLORIA. How would you know?

BOB. I've heard stories.

GLORIA. From who?

BOB. This fish I know.

GLORIA. You're so full of—

BOB. It's what happens when we leave the ocean.

GLORIA. You're just trying to scare me back into the water.

BOB. Is it working?

GLORIA. No.

BOB. Look, I don't want to fight. Why don't you splash back in and let's work this out. Together. We'll talk, make a few passes at the coral, and if you're still in the spawning mood we can swim off someplace private and see what happens. Whatever this is, we'll work it out together.

(Beat.)

What-a-ya say?

GLORIA. I'm sick of being wet.

(BOB gasps in disbelief.)

I'm sick of being soaking wet all the time. Look at my flippers, they're all pruned. It's disgusting.

BOB. I— We— But—

GLORIA. I'm staying out here where it's dry.

BOB. But you're a FISH!

GLORIA. *(Sing-songy:)* "Label."

BOB. What type of fish doesn't want to be wet?

GLORIA. The type looking to make a change.

(GLORIA tries to stand though the following speech.)

BOB. Change. CHANGE?! Change is swimming upside down for a few hours. Change is leading the school instead of being in the middle. Change is fresh water instead of salt. This—whatever this is—whatever you think you're doing—this isn't CHANGE it's...it's...

GLORIA. Evolution!

(GLORIA almost stands and falls over.)

BOB. Oh boy, here we go again with the "Evolution" thing again.

GLORIA. Just because you don't...

BOB. You know, if you're pissed off at me about something.

GLORIA. JUST BECAUSE you don't believe in change...

BOB. Let's talk about whatever it is *I* did and...

GLORIA. This isn't about you! OK, hammer head? Get that through your waterlogged skull! This has nothing to do with you!

BOB. Whatever.

GLORIA. It's about me.

BOB. "It's not you it's me." Is that what you're telling me?

GLORIA. I guess so.

BOB. Great.

GLORIA. This is about wanting to— No, **NEEDING** to—to—

BOB. What?

GLORIA. To **REINVENT** myself.

BOB. Can't you just shed some scales or turn a different color or something?

GLORIA. I'm sorry.

BOB. No, of course not. That's not good enough for **YOU**. Gloria can't be like the rest of us fish. Gloria needs to "evolve" into her very own "race."

GLORIA. I've made up my mind.

BOB. Fine.

GLORIA. I like it out here.

BOB. That's very modern of you.

GLORIA. I'm leaving the ocean for good.

BOB. And me?

GLORIA. I just don't feel like we're the same species anymore, Bob.

BOB. You'll see. After a few days of dirt and grime. A few days of struggling to get anywhere. You'll come back. I mean, look at yourself, look how you get around—you can barely move out there!

GLORIA. I can flop.

(GLORIA demonstrates with a truly ugly flop.)

BOB. Go ahead, flop. Flop off. Flop away. And in a few days when you've realized what an awful, horrible, terrible, mistake you made, realize you miss being able to swim and the taste of salt in your mouth, when you realize how much you miss ME—then you can drag yourself back here, where you belong... THEN we'll see who was right, won't we?

GLORIA. I should go.

(GLORIA starts to flop away. BOB rushes to the edge of the ocean.)

BOB. *(Approaching hysterical:)* And maybe, just maybe I won't be around anymore. Did you ever stop to consider that? Maybe I'll have swum off with some other gestating Lung Fish and inseminated a couple hundred of HER eggs like two normal non-freakish fish who LIKE to DO IT underwater. Who'll be sorry then, huh? Who will be wallowing alone with no offspring by herself, then, huh!? You'll see. You'll be back.

(Beat.)

You'll realize this whole evolution thing—it's all just a fad.

GLORIA. *(Turns to him, sees something:)* Bob.

BOB. Please, Gloria, don't LEAVE ME!

GLORIA. Bob.

BOB. I'm sorry, I didn't mean all those things I said. I want...

GLORIA. Bob, get out of the water!

BOB. What?

GLORIA. You need to get out of the water.

BOB. Oh no, if YOU love ME, YOU'RE going to have to get back IN the water.

GLORIA. I saw something.

BOB. You did?

GLORIA. Yes, I saw something. I saw a fin.

BOB. A fin.

GLORIA. A big dorsal fin.

BOB. Crap, where?

GLORIA. I can't see it anymore, it's gone back under.

(BOB looks around concerned.)

BOB. I don't see anything

GLORIA. Trust me.

BOB. Maybe it was a dolphin or something.

GLORIA. I know my fins, Bobby, and that was no dolphin.

BOB. Was it close?

GLORIA. Yes.

BOB. How close?

GLORIA. Just past the shallows.

BOB. Maybe it will swim by.

GLORIA. Maybe it'll lurk out there and wait for you.

BOB. I could dive for it.

GLORIA. You'll never make it.

BOB. You don't know that.

GLORIA. Bobby.

BOB. Damn it. Damn it. Damn it! This is all your fault! If you hadn't decided to jump out of the water on me, I wouldn't be here. I'd be back with the rest of our school swimming in relaxing circles instead of cowering in the shallows trying to figure a way out of this.

GLORIA. Caught between a fin and a dry place.

BOB. What am I going to do?

GLORIA. Take my flipper, Bob.

BOB. I—

GLORIA. Clamp onto my flipper and let me help you up out of the water.

BOB. Just climb out? Just like that?

GLORIA. I did.

BOB. Give up everything I've ever known just to be trendy like you? The sea, the coral, the plankton, the salt? Just give all that up and become a land dweller?

GLORIA. It beats getting eaten.

BOB. Not for me sister. I was laid in these waters, raised in 'em, and I'd rather know I died swimming instead of cowering on land like some wannabe quadruped. I'm a Lung Fish, lady, A LUNG FISH!! and I'm gonna do what my kind does best. I'm gonna swim.

(A determined BOB dives and charges off stage. Pause. A terrified BOB shoots back on and splashes toward GLORIA.)

BOB. EAYYYHHAHAH! *(Swimming for dear life:)* Gimme your flipper, gimme your flipper, gimme your God damn flipper!

GLORIA. Here!

(GLORIA reaches out with a flipper. BOB clamps it into his mouth and the two manage to awkwardly pull him onto land.)

GLORIA. Are you OK?

BOB. Teeth.

GLORIA. Did it...

BOB. Lots and lots and lots of sharp gnashing teeth.

GLORIA. Don't worry, you're safe so long as you stay out here.

BOB. I guess I could hang out for a little while.

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STILL LIFE

Cast of Characters

DAVID

MICHELLE

Acknowledgements

Still Life was first produced in 2001 by the Gallery Players in New York City, with the following cast:

DAVID.....Gilbert Vela

MICHELLE.....Heather Dumont

Directed by Laurie Brown

STILL LIFE

by Seth Kramer

(Lights up. MICHELLE sits in a chair facing out. Both her hands are wrapped in bandages. She sits motionless. Pause. Banging from offstage. The sounds of something being dragged then dropped.)

DAVID. *(Offstage:)* Aw, damn it. Crap.

(More clatter.)

Oops.

(DAVID enters. He carries an easel, a blank canvas, brushes, paints, a boom box, a stool and other assorted artist things, all precariously held.)

DAVID. Good morning, Michelle. Or should I say good afternoon actually, seeing as how it's almost...

(Juggling to look at watch.)

Damn. Little help here? Little help?

(More juggling.)

Seeing as how it's almost...oh, screw it.

(Drops things.)

How about I just leave everything dumped right there? How's that sound? Hmm? Nice little pile. Michelle? Do you know what time it is? It's after three. How are you feeling?

(Touching her, she pulls away.)

Not particularly talkative today, I see. Of course, I guess I'm getting pretty used to that.

(As her:) "But thank you for stopping by to visit today, David. It was very thoughtful of you."

(As him:) "Oh don't mention it, Michelle."

(As her:) "Alright, I won't. How about I just sit here and ignore you."

(Beat.)

OK, do that. Ignore me. Great.

(Pause.)

And I see, once again, you have the shades all the way down to give that extra special gloomy feel to the room. All you need to do is stick a few dead plants around the room and have The Cure crooning morosely in the background. That ought to really punch up the mood of this place.

(DAVID opens the shades.)

MICHELLE. Don't.

DAVID. Oh ho! Did I hear right? Did some monosyllabic grunt actually escape from your lips?

MICHELLE. Don't do it.

DAVID. Do what?

MICHELLE. The light...

DAVID. Well at least you're speaking today.

MICHELLE. It's too harsh.

DAVID. Several words in a row, no less. Will wonders never cease?

MICHELLE. Close the shades.

DAVID. I'm letting some light in.

MICHELLE. *(Flinching:)* I don't want any.

DAVID. Then you can get up and close them yourself.

MICHELLE. It hurts my eyes.

DAVID. *(Wicked Witch voice:)* Oh, I'm melting. I'm melting.

(Beat.)

This is called sunlight, OK? It's actually a key element in the earth's life cycle, plants and shrubs go goofy for this stuff. It won't hurt you.

(Opens window.)

Fresh air too. Remember what that feels like?

(Inhales. Beat.)

Michelle?

(Pause.)

Back to this, are we? OK. So, what do we feel like doing today? Hm? It's lovely outside, we could go for a walk, maybe. Play some cards? Gallery hopping? Perhaps a drive somewhere? Come on, you name it. I'll do anything you want except sit here. Anything at all.

MICHELLE. I want...

DAVID. Yes?

MICHELLE. I want to be left alone.

DAVID. You want to be left alone.

MICHELLE. Yes.

DAVID. Alright.

MICHELLE. Good.

DAVID. Ask me to leave.

MICHELLE. *(Beat:)* I'm going to lie down.

DAVID. Fine. Fine, you do that. Go lie down. Have a good nap. I'll be in here entertaining myself. So glad I came by for a visit.

(DAVID starts to set up the easel. MICHELLE stops and watches him.)

MICHELLE. What are you doing?

DAVID. What does it look like? You tell me.

MICHELLE. Making a pest of yourself.

DAVID. Sullen and insulting. Boy, you're a real sunny treat today.

(DAVID hits play on the boom box. Miles Davis plays softly. Pause.)

MICHELLE. I...this is...

DAVID. You recognize?

MICHELLE. *(Wistful smile:)* Miles. Miles Davis.

DAVID. I found a copy in a used CD store. You used to work to this all the time, right?

MICHELLE. Yes.

DAVID. I'd hear it coming from your apartment till all hours of the morning. 3am. 4am. *(Looking at CD:)* This song, I forget the name but—

MICHELLE. In a Silent Way.

DAVID. That's right.

MICHELLE. You shouldn't have brought all this stuff.

DAVID. Too late.

MICHELLE. I don't want it in here.

DAVID. I thought you were going to lie down?

MICHELLE. I am.

DAVID. So go.

MICHELLE. *(Cradling hands:)* This isn't funny. I don't think you're funny.

(DAVID sets the canvas on the stand. Pause, MICHELLE stares at it. He watches her.)

DAVID. What?

MICHELLE. Nothing.

DAVID. Liar.

(Beat.)

Come here.

MICHELLE. No.

DAVID. There is nothing to be afraid of.

MICHELLE. I'm not afraid.

DAVID. Then come here.

(Sets stool.)

Sit down.

MICHELLE. Don't be asinine.

DAVID. If you'd rather have a chair I'll—

MICHELLE. David—

DAVID. Sit.

(MICHELLE takes a few steps forward and stops. DAVID crosses to her and guides her to the stool.)

DAVID. Tell me what you see.

MICHELLE. I see...

DAVID. What?

MICHELLE. *(Beat:)* I don't see anything.

DAVID. Nothing?

MICHELLE. It's just a blank canvas. There's nothing there.

DAVID. I don't believe you.

MICHELLE. It doesn't matter what you believe.

DAVID. You already know.

(Beat.)

Don't you.

MICHELLE. Know what?

DAVID. What's there. What's waiting to be painted.

MICHELLE. I'm not having this conversation.

DAVID. "The canvas provides its own art."

MICHELLE. Take it away.

DAVID. You used to say that all the time, remember? "The painter just reveals what's already there."

MICHELLE. So? So what? That was a long time ago. I was a different person back then.

DAVID. *(Holds out brush:)* Show me.

MICHELLE. I can't. You KNOW I can't.

DAVID. That's not true.

MICHELLE. *(Covers hands:)* My hands...they're...they don't—

DAVID. I know.

MICHELLE. The doctor said—

DAVID. I was there when he told you.

MICHELLE. Then why are doing this?

DAVID. It's been a year.

MICHELLE. This is cruel. This is—

DAVID. Injuries heal.

MICHELLE. Not enough.

DAVID. How long do you need before you even try?

MICHELLE. Maybe I don't want to try anymore. You ever consider that? Maybe I'm sick to death of trying.

DAVID. Look at you. You can't even take your eyes off the canvas.

MICHELLE. So what?

DAVID. *(Beat:)* I know you see something.

MICHELLE. That's not the point, is it? That's not the fucking point. What does it matter IF I see something or not? A vase, some fruit, a naked man? So FUCKING WHAT!? I CAN'T paint it. I CAN'T do anything about it! NOTHING! All I CAN do is watch the blank, see all the things that I can't make anymore...that I can't...because...

(MICHELLE attacks the canvas and knocks it over. She kicks the boom box, stopping the music.)

DAVID. Michelle...

MICHELLE. Go away, David. Just go away.

DAVID. I'm trying to help you.

MICHELLE. I don't want your help!

DAVID. Yes.

(Beat.)

You do.

MICHELLE. Oh, please—

DAVID. You can't let something from a year ago—

MICHELLE. *(Vicious:)* That's what they all say. The fucking head shrinks who won't leave me alone. That's their line of crap. "Time to let the healing begin. Let's talk about what you're feeling. What you're afraid of." I don't need to hear this shit from you!

DAVID. Fine, what DO you need to hear?

MICHELLE. *(Pleading:)* Can YOU heal me, David?

DAVID. No.

MICHELLE. Can you give me my hands back like they were? Can you?

DAVID. No.

MICHELLE. The doctors. The psychoanalysts. The physical therapists. All the same shit. All the same results. Poke at my hands with needles. Give me balls to squeeze, "fine motor" tasks to practice. Talk and talk and talk...about degrees of progress, long-term improvements, adaptive skills for the real world and all that shit. Do you know what it adds up to? At the end of the day?

(Beat.)

I still can't use my hands. I'm still just another useless cripple.

DAVID. Yes.

MICHELLE. Fuck you. What do you know?

DAVID. I know fear. I know what it takes to start over.

MICHELLE. You do a thing long enough, your whole life...I don't really think it matters what that thing is... Bowling, playing poker, art...I don't think it matters. Eventually it becomes you—that part of you that gives you a reason to wake up and breath every day. I mean, that's what it's all about, right?

(Beat.)

Your purpose, right?

(Pause.)

The FIRE took that from me. It took everything. Every single thing I ever made—painted—all of it just fucking torched to high hell. You have no idea what that means. What that felt like.

DAVID. I lived through that fire too.

MICHELLE. And I shouldn't have. That's the difference. I was meant to burn there, with everything else. You should have let me.

DAVID. I couldn't.

(MICHELLE sits. Long pause. DAVID gets up and puts on his coat.)

MICHELLE. What are you doing?

DAVID. I'm leaving.

MICHELLE. Fine.

DAVID. Unless you ask me to stay.

MICHELLE. Do what you want.

DAVID. I want to stay.

MICHELLE. I'm not asking you to.

DAVID. I'll come back tomorrow then.

MICHELLE. Take all this shit out of here with you.

DAVID. No.

MICHELLE. Take it!

DAVID. I won't.

MICHELLE. Why?

DAVID. If you want it gone so bad, then you gather it up and take it out yourself. You do it. Throw it in the street if you want. Set it on fire. I don't care. But I won't do it for you.

MICHELLE. You brought it here.

DAVID. Yeah, rotten old me.

MICHELLE. You can't make me paint.

DAVID. I know that.

(DAVID starts to go.)

MICHELLE. David, wait.

(Beat.)

I don't...I don't understand.

DAVID. Understand what?

MICHELLE. Why you keep doing things like this. Why you keep coming here.

DAVID. It's a simple answer.

MICHELLE. If you feel guilty—

DAVID. It's not guilt.

MICHELLE. If you feel responsible...

(DAVID crosses to MICHELLE. He touches her face. He kneels next to her and takes her hands in his. She struggles to pull them away but he won't let her. DAVID begins to unwrap one hand. MICHELLE resists but slowly gives in.)

DAVID. Did you know, before I ever even talked to you I was memorizing your artwork. Did you know that?

(Beat.)

I've never had the courage to tell you this before.

(Beat.)

I used go out on my fire escape to smoke. I'd do it after coming home from work, when it was late, even during the winter. I just liked to have a place to go and sit. To be by myself. I'd always...always hear your music playing at two something in the morning. Always some jazz or fusion thing coming from your window. After a few months—well, I got curious. So, I...one night...one night, instead of just sitting there, I climbed down the two floors between us and peeked in. Into your studio. You were working on a painting of yourself. I still remember it clearly. A black and white contour image. You had this light set to cast shadows over yourself and were working from a mirror. I sat there all night with you. Watching. Afraid to stay because you might notice me. Unable to leave because I didn't want to miss anything.

(Pause.)

After that...after that I couldn't stay away.

(Beat.)

I'd look forward to what new thing I might see every few days. Something as it was created there on your stand. I was giddy—God, I can't believe I am saying this—giddy when I saw a new blank canvas. The anticipation of what you might make next. After a while...I knew it was way too stalker / creepy to watch you like that, so...so I came down to introduce myself.

MICHELLE. You asked me if you could swap a few jazz CDs.

DAVID. Yeah.

MICHELLE. I remember.

DAVID. I'd gone out and bought them the day before, just to have an excuse to talk to you.

MICHELLE. I was afraid you were the old woman from next door coming to complain about the noise again.

DAVID. I was afraid you'd slam the door in my face but you invited me in.

MICHELLE. How could I not? You were my biggest fan.

DAVID. You knew?

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FEBRUARY 14TH

Cast of Characters

LOIS
GANNON

Acknowledgements

February 14th was first produced in 2001 by Word Of Mouth Theatre in New York City, with the following cast:

LOIS.....Kelly Sue DeConnick
GANNONJason Moscartolo

Directed by Lisa Kerekes

FEBRUARY 14TH

by Seth Kramer

(Lights up. GANNON, a large man in his 30s, sits beside a children's playground holding a drink. LOIS, a small woman, black hair, also in her 30s, sits nearby. They both look around, distracted. A boom box rests on the ground. Pause.)

LOIS. I—

GANNON. Hmm?

LOIS. Nothing.

GANNON. You sure?

LOIS. Yes.

GANNON. I thought—

LOIS. What?

GANNON. Well, you started to say something.

LOIS. I know.

GANNON. What was it?

LOIS. I just— I was wondering what time it was?

GANNON. A little before seven.

LOIS. That early?

GANNON. Yeah.

LOIS. Huh. I'd hoped— I mean— I thought...

GANNON. That it might be later?

LOIS. Yeah.

(Beat.)

But it's seven?

GANNON. A little before.

LOIS. OK.

GANNON. It's still early.

LOIS. The night is young.

GANNON. *(Pause:)* You know, Lois, I've been thinking...

LOIS. What's that?

GANNON. We could... I mean, if you were feeling like you...

(Beat.)

We don't have to stick to the original plan or anything...if you're not having fun...

LOIS. I didn't say that.

GANNON. I just— I don't want you feel that you have to...I mean, I'm GLAD you're here with me.

LOIS. Me too.

GANNON. But I wouldn't be hurt or upset if you told me that you didn't think...

LOIS. I was just curious what time it was.

GANNON. You're sure?

LOIS. That's all.

GANNON. It's a little before seven.

LOIS. You said that, already.

GANNON. Right.

(Beat.)

The papers?

LOIS. No— Yes.

(Beat.)

Is it that obvious?

GANNON. Like a giant flatulent pink elephant.

LOIS. I just want it all to be over with already, you know?

GANNON. We could go check the mail.

LOIS. God NO!

GANNON. I'll go with you.

LOIS. If they've come, then they've come.

GANNON. Once you actually have them in your hand...

LOIS. They'll be in the mailbox when they get there. Me checking isn't going to make them appear any quicker.

GANNON. True.

LOIS. Besides, we went to all the trouble to sneak in here—I'm not going to let that stupid prick ruin even one more second of the rest of my life. I did what I did to move on, so let's MOVE ON. This is supposed to be OUR evening out together. We made a deal, right?

GANNON. Right.

LOIS. So let's not talk about the farting pink elephant anymore, agreed?

GANNON. Agreed.

LOIS. Good.

GANNON. I—uh—I almost forgot...here.

(Takes flowers out of a bag.)

I brought you these.

LOIS. Flowers.

GANNON. Yeah, roses and those leafy things they give you with roses.

LOIS. I can see.

GANNON. I didn't know what type you liked or...you know, 'cause each different rose—each color is supposed to mean something different, right? And I wasn't sure what—well...I don't want you to get the wrong idea and think that I'm saying—or NOT SAYING— You know, something—so...

LOIS. So you bought every color?

GANNON. Basically. The rainbow assortment.

LOIS. Say it with flowers, huh?

GANNON. Yeah.

(Beat.)

I guess I'm saying "I'm confused."

(Beat.)

Anyway, those are for you.

LOIS. That's very...very...

(Pause.)

See, I hate this.

GANNON. Oh?

LOIS. I really do.

GANNON. The flowers?

LOIS. No— Well, yes.

GANNON. Should I have gotten a card instead?

LOIS. No.

GANNON. Chocolates?

LOIS. It's not just the flowers— Gannon—it's this.

GANNON. I don't...

LOIS. THIS. Today. I hate this day.

GANNON. Oh.

LOIS. I mean, the whole thing. The whole manufactured, Hallmark, greeting card-marketed bullshit. I can't believe I ever bought into it. Or that, just because today is today, you felt you had to run out and buy me a bunch of colorful, thorny, long-stemmed plants that are just going to die soon anyway...

GANNON. I didn't feel I HAD to.

LOIS. No?

GANNON. I wanted to. That's why I did it.

LOIS. Still—

GANNON. Sorry.

LOIS. Don't apologize, Gannon, I just...

GANNON. OK, then I'm not sorry.

LOIS. It's all a bunch of nonsense. Don't you see?

GANNON. Sure.

LOIS. Candies and gifts and all that...

GANNON. It's all a bunch of nonsense.

LOIS. Do you understand?

GANNON. You're saying why bother with some sort of romantic gesture or gift, when in the long run, romance and / or love—like the flowers—can't possibly last. It eventually dies.

LOIS. Yeah.

GANNON. And that makes this whole day and everything it stands for one big horrible, awful, sad waste of time, right?

LOIS. Basically.

GANNON. Well, so long as you're keeping a sunny, positive attitude.

LOIS. *(Pause, regrouping:)* The flowers were very sweet of you, Gannon. I'll put them in water when I go home. Give them a nice slow wilting death.

GANNON. You're welcome.

LOIS. *(Beat:)* A little before seven, huh?

GANNON. Yeah.

LOIS. This day just won't end quickly will it?

GANNON. *(Pause:)* Dance.

LOIS. What?

(Gannon punches play on the boom box. The music should be something a bit soaring like "I Will Survive" or "Wind Beneath My Wings.")

GANNON. Dance.

(Beat.)

With me.

LOIS. I'd rather... I don't think...

GANNON. Come on. Let's just do it. This is our big date.

LOIS. I've still got half my drink left.

GANNON. Finish it.

LOIS. I'm not good at...at just DOING things like that.

GANNON. What, dancing?

LOIS. Things like that, yes.

GANNON. Scared?

LOIS. It's not that I'm...

GANNON. Inhibited?

LOIS. I think it's more...

GANNON. Clumsy?

LOIS. Yes. A bit.

GANNON. So am I.

LOIS. I trip over my own feet.

GANNON. Not if I step on them first.

LOIS. If you stepped on my foot you'd break it.

GANNON. Probably.

LOIS. This sounds like about the worst idea you've had all night.

GANNON. Actually, I think the flowers won that one.

LOIS. Why do you want to do this?

GANNON. Because it's something neither of us would ever do, alright? Not together. Not on a typical night out. It's something we are both afraid of.

LOIS. Because we're both bad at it.

GANNON. Sometimes that's a good reason to do a thing.

(Beat.)

Take my hand.

LOIS. I will never speak another word to you for as long as I live if you hospitalize me just to prove some asinine point about "the rhythm of the night."

(LOIS takes GANNON's hand. They stand in front of one another.)

GANNON. Slow dancing seems safest.

LOIS. At arms length.

(Pause. They circle awkwardly.)

Did you have to call it "a date?"

GANNON. Isn't it?

LOIS. You and I have been hanging out since we met at school here.

GANNON. I know.

LOIS. It's never been a date before.

GANNON. We've never spent today together before.

LOIS. You're really stuck on this day thing, aren't you?

GANNON. I wouldn't call it "stuck" ...

LOIS. But it's so...

GANNON. I know, manufactured-Hallmark-greeting card-marketed bullshit. I got it the first time.

LOIS. So, what's—

GANNON. This day was...special to Ellen and I. We never missed one. Not the whole time we were together. It was a..."thing" with us. Special.

LOIS. Oh.

GANNON. *(Beat:)* I think you're trying to lead.

LOIS. I can't help it.

GANNON. I'm the man.

LOIS. So?

GANNON. Men lead.

LOIS. Oh, evolve.

GANNON. Perhaps we could just agree upon a step then?

LOIS. Stop looking down.

GANNON. If you're not going to let me lead then you'd better let me watch your feet or I will injure you.

LOIS. Hang on.

GANNON. What are you... ?

(LOIS takes off her shoes and climbs onto GANNON's feet.)

LOIS. There, better?

GANNON. I feel like we're back at my Bar Mitzvah.

LOIS. You're the one who wanted to lead. So— Lead.

(Beat. GANNON spins them through a quick succession of turns. He thrusts out their arms and they mock a tango strut. LOIS breaks into a laugh and hugs GANNON. A beat, GANNON sniffs LOIS's neck.)

LOIS. What—what are you doing?

GANNON. I'm...nothing.

LOIS. Are you—

GANNON. I didn't do anything.

LOIS. Did you just...SNIFF me?

GANNON. What— I—it wasn't— Because I'd never—

LOIS. DID YOU?

GANNON. No

(Beat.)

I prefer to think of it as “inhale.”

LOIS. *(Liking the sound of that:)* Oh, well...inhale works.

GANNON. Then can I...

LOIS. Sure, go ahead.

(He smells her a second time.)

Well?

GANNON. You odor good.

LOIS. You are one strange man.

GANNON. Says the woman dancing on my feet.

LOIS. Twirl.

(The two spin a few more times. They end in a hug.)

LOIS. I'm glad we agreed to do this.

GANNON. What, the date or the dancing or the breaking and entering?

LOIS. All of it.

GANNON. Me too.

(Beat.)

I didn't want you to be alone tonight.

LOIS. I didn't want you to be alone either.

(Pause.)

LOIS. Gannon?

GANNON. Yeah?

LOIS. If I hadn't called you...

GANNON. Uh huh.

LOIS. And asked you to spend this evening with me...

GANNON. Yeah?

LOIS. What would you be doing right now?

GANNON. *(Pause:)* The same thing I've done for the last five years, I guess.

LOIS. Visiting Ellen?

GANNON. I'd bring her flowers.

LOIS. Roses?

GANNON. She didn't like roses. Lilacs—that was her—

LOIS. Oh.

GANNON. Lilacs and some little gift. A Pez dispenser or snow globe or something. Something silly that I know would make her smile. I'd leave the gift there with the flowers after talking to her for a while.

LOIS. About what?

GANNON. Stuff that I've done since last time I came by. How work is. Things like that, really.

LOIS. I'm sorry if my asking you to keep me company is ruining some tradition or...

GANNON. Used to be...used to be, I could imagine what she might say if she could somehow hear me and we could still talk. Little comments she'd make. Jokes. Stuff like that. It was easy in the beginning but now—now all I really hear is the silence.

(Pause.)

She's gone. Ellen's gone. And I think...I think tonight I'd rather be here dancing with you than there pretending with her.

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NAME

Cast of Characters

LEWIS
STAN
SUSANNAH
ZACK

Acknowledgements

Name was first produced in 2001 by the Gallery Players in New York City, with the following cast:

STAN.....John Pinckard
SUSANNAHHeather Dumont
ZACKMichael Izquierdo
LEWIS Gilbert Vela

Directed by Laurie Brown

NAME

by Seth Kramer

(Lights up. A bed at center, minimal setting. A group of four friends sit around talking. They are all in their late 20s. ZACK sits on the bed with SUSANNAH, an attractive woman, seven months pregnant. ZACK is touching SUSANNAH's belly, perhaps even resting his head against it, listening. STAN sits to her right, wearing a suit and a loosened tie. There is a briefcase at his side. Behind the bed stands LEWIS, an effeminate man, who fusses over ZACK every now and again. Most have party hats on and STAN has one of those annoying horns that he blows a few times early on. There is a half-eaten cake off left. At first we should believe that it is SUSANNAH who needs the bed due to her pregnancy; later it should become apparent that it is ZACK who is ill and actually bedridden. ZACK's skin is pale and splotchy.)

LEWIS. *(To STAN, struggling to remember:)* Damn—

SUSANNAH. All I'm saying is—all I'm saying is—

LEWIS. What was that?

SUSANNAH. I mean, look at their lives, yeah? By 27 they had all lived these brilliant, full lives—the things they had accomplished by this point. If—if—if any of them—Kurt Cobain, um...Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, even Jimi Hendrix—if any of them had even had a few more years...

STAN. Where's the beef.

LEWIS. Yes.

STAN. Am I right?

SUSANNAH. Think of what they could have accomplished.

LEWIS. Sure, I remember that.

SUSANNAH. Who can say?

STAN. WHERE'S THE BEEF!

LEWIS. I loved those commercials.

STAN. The one where she is chasing the airplane.

SUSANNAH. In one day they probably lived more than any of us will in our entire lives.

LEWIS. I wonder what ever happened to that old lady, anyway?

SUSANNAH. Legends. Lives worth remembering. Not like ours.

ZACK. Sus, don't say that.

STAN. She did a feature film.

LEWIS. You're shittin' me.

SUSANNAH. At least it seems that way sometimes.

STAN. No, we saw it, didn't we, baby?

SUSANNAH. Saw it?

STAN. The movie? Haven't you been listening?

SUSANNAH. (*Agreeing blindly:*) Oh sure, that's right, the movie.

STAN. We rented it from Blockbuster.

SUSANNAH. If you say so.

LEWIS. Any good?

SUSANNAH. I don't—

STAN. It was no Citizen Kane.

ZACK. (*Feeling the baby kick:*) There!

SUSANNAH. I know.

ZACK. That's amazing. What is it? kicking?

SUSANNAH. Yeah, that's kicking, alright. Uff, or punching.

ZACK. Wow.

STAN. School House Rock?

SUSANNAH. Believe me, the novelty wears off after the 100th-plus time.

LEWIS. *(Singing:)* “I am a Bill, yes, I am only a Bill and I am sitting here on Capitol Hill.”

ZACK. How long?

SUSANNAH. Another two months?

STAN. About that. Fifty-seven more days. That’s what the doctor said. Give or take.

ZACK. *(Aside:)* He already has it planned down to the minute?

SUSANNAH. *(Aside:)* Even labor. Doesn’t want to miss any work.

LEWIS. *(Singing:)* “Conjunction, junction... ”

STAN / LEWIS. *(Singing:)* “...what’s your function? Gonna get you there if you’re very careful.”

STAN. Yes! YES! Now that was TV.

ZACK. *(More kicking:)* Oh, again.

SUSANNAH. Now I know what a soccer ball feels like.

ZACK. Do you know whether it’s... ?

STAN. A boy.

SUSANNAH. Stanley couldn’t wait to find out the natural way. He had the doctor tell us early, so he could...

STAN / SUSANNAH. “Buy the right toys.”

SUSANNAH. You should see all the crap he’s bought already.

STAN. A boy can never have too many toys.

SUSANNAH. Even when he’s still in the fetus stage.

LEWIS. Atari.

STAN. Space Invaders.

ZACK. I can’t believe you are going to be a mother.

SUSANNAH. You and me both, Zack.

STAN. Mr. & Mrs. Pac-Man.

LEWIS. Pong.

STAN. Pooooong. A true technological marvel.

ZACK. I think it's wonderful, Sus. I really do.

SUSANNAH. Wonderful, sure.

ZACK. *(To LEWIS:)* Come put your hand here.

LEWIS. Uhh...

ZACK. You have to feel this.

LEWIS. I'd kind of rather—

ZACK. Quick, he's doing it again.

LEWIS. I'm going to pass.

STAN. Pass?

ZACK. Why?

LEWIS. Well, I keep picturing that scene from that movie...you know, where that hideous little creature comes bursting out of that space-guy's stomach and he spews blood and spaghetti everywhere... Um...you know the movie I'm talking about?

(Pause.)

OK...awkward moment, here.

(Pause.)

No offense. I'm sure your baby won't...RAHGHH!

(Acts out alien bursting from stomach. Beat.)

Little help, here? Anyone?

SUSANNAH. *Alien*, sure.

LEWIS. Thank you.

SUSANNAH. I've had that one more than a few times, myself.

STAN. You have?

SUSANNAH. Um hmm.

STAN. You never told me this.

SUSANNAH. Of course I have.

STAN. When?

SUSANNAH. Plenty of times. You just pat me on the stomach, roll over and go back to snoring. Mr. concerned husband, here.

(Beat.)

Are you doing aerobics in there? Enough already.

STAN. Huh—

SUSANNAH. *(Begins rocking and humming “Amazing Grace”:) This tends to do the trick.*

STAN. I don’t recall—huh.

(SUSANNAH will return to rocking and humming between lines.)

ZACK. Here’s one for you...

LEWIS. What?

ZACK. The first time you were filling out some stupid questionnaire and had to mark the “26 to 50” age box.

LEWIS. God, this is depressing me. We are getting SOOO old.

(Beat.)

Where’d I put my walker?

STAN. You know what the worst thing about having Alzheimer’s is?

LEWIS. You can never remember where you left your teeth?

STAN. No.

LEWIS. You keep forgetting to change your adult diaper?

STAN. No.

LEWIS. Is this a Viagra joke?

STAN. No.

LEWIS. OK, I give up, what?

STAN. *(Beat:)* You know what the worst thing about having Alzheimer's is?

ZACK. You two are horrible.

LEWIS. Can I tell you, I almost blew the Quicky Mart guy last week because he carded me for cigarettes.

STAN. Uhhh...see this button? This is the too much information button. I'm pushing it now, Lewis, OK?

LEWIS. 'Phobe.

ZACK. Hey—Underoos.

LEWIS. Underoos.

STAN. *(Beat:)* You guys want to know a secret?

SUSANNAH. Stanley, don't you dare.

STAN. Sus still has a few pairs around.

LEWIS. She does NOT!

STAN. I saw them when we packed up the basement last year.

ZACK. Do you?

SUSANNAH. Yes, sure. So what? *(To STAN:)* Jerk.

ZACK. What kind?

SUSANNAH. What do you think?

ALL. Wonder Woman.

(Laughter from everyone.)

STAN. Disturbing, isn't it?

SUSANNAH. This from the man who still has all of his Star Wars figures posed in a glass display case. POSED.

STAN. Hey, those things are collector's items.

SUSANNAH. *(Sing-songy:)* Toys.

STAN. I've had them for years.

ZACK. Stan and I met playing with those figures in grade school.

LEWIS. Growing up I always had a Han & Luke group-sex fantasy where I was Jabba the Hut and they would lick...me... (*Beat, to STAN:*) You're pushing the button again, aren't you?

STAN. Too much—WAY too much information, Lewis.

SUSANNAH. All I know is, every time we have a houseguest they want to know how much older our OTHER child is.

STAN. You're exaggerating. She's exaggerating.

SUSANNAH. I tell them 29.

STAN. This is her new favorite fight to pick.

SUSANNAH. I just don't see why we can't keep your little dollies somewhere else.

STAN. Look—

SUSANNAH. Preferably in a box—out of sight.

STAN. Not everything in the house has to be your way.

SUSANNAH. Why not? You're never home anymore.

STAN. Great, here we go.

SUSANNAH. I'm just saying—

STAN. The doctor told me to expect some erratic behavior from her. All those raging hormones.

SUSANNAH. And that's HIS favorite new dodge. Everything I say is trivialized because I'm being hormonal.

STAN. I'm home plenty.

SUSANNAH. Plenty? Should we get Lewis here to bring us a dictionary so you can look up the word plenty?

LEWIS. Keep me out of this.

STAN. I'm home more than enough, all right?

ZACK. Jesus, listen to you two.

STAN / SUSANNAH. What?

ZACK. You're so...MARRIED.

(Everyone laughs a little.)

STAN. Yeah. Yeah, I guess.

SUSANNAH. "Mr. and Mrs. Bickerson." Who would have thought, right? Ten years ago.

ZACK. High school.

STAN. That seems like such a long time ago.

LEWIS. A lifetime ago.

ZACK. Who would have thought we'd end up here?

SUSANNAH. Not me, that's for sure.

STAN. No, of course not.

SUSANNAH. Ten years ago I probably would have shot myself if I had even thought I'd end up like this.

STAN. Thanks, hon.

SUSANNAH. I didn't mean it like that.

ZACK. High school.

SUSANNAH. I just always thought—

ZACK. I was soooo in the closet back then.

STAN. Susannah always thought she should be some kind of famous rockin' country star touring around the globe by now. Isn't that right?

SUSANNAH. Stan you're—

STAN. My world famous country rock star wife!

ZACK. I used to hide Playboys someplace I knew my dad would find 'em.

STAN. Touring around singing Janis Joplin songs about...about...

ZACK. Just so he'd think I was one of the guys.

STAN. ...I don't know—being a lonely truck-drivin' cowgirl.

ZACK. Now he won't even talk to me.

STAN. Getting stoned after each show and probably screwing some groupie or something like that.

SUSANNAH. I didn't say that.

STAN. You don't have to.

SUSANNAH. There's more to life than just this.

LEWIS. I even pretended have a girlfriend.

STAN. I guess if it hadn't have been for rotten old me tricking her into getting married and moving out to the awful suburbs where I keep her locked up in our hideously SAFE three-bedroom home.

ZACK. (*Touches LEWIS's face:*) All that time.

STAN. and afflicting her with...

ZACK. (*Looks in LEWIS's eyes:*) What a waste.

STAN. With...

SUSANNAH. Just because—

STAN. My elitist BMW cars and—

SUSANNAH. (*To group:*) Just because I have aspirations beyond this—

STAN. You see?

LEWIS. Um guys—

SUSANNAH. ...beyond being his little baby-making machine—his perfect “Stepford housewife” —

LEWIS. Guys, please—

STAN. She refers to the baby as a “Cabbage Patch plaything” for adults.

LEWIS. Now's really not the—

SUSANNAH. I was a good singer. I loved doing it and you can't ever take that away from me! *(Beat, to stomach:)* Stop fucking kicking!

(Long, awkward pause. A watch alarm goes off. LEWIS gets out a number of pills and a glass of water. He brings them to ZACK who takes them one at a time. Pause.)

ZACK. Uh... I think...I think...

(Beat.)

...we're all lucky. All of us. To be where we are right now. Living today. I think...because you can spend your entire life looking at the other guy and seeing his life as better than yours. Just because they're living a certain way and you're not. Somebody has more money, more freedom, a better pair of sneakers. Envy half your waking hours away.

(Beat.)

It's about being happy, isn't it? Isn't that right?

(Beat.)

I mean, when it's all said and done? At the end...it's easy to look back at all the choices you've made and see only the things you DIDN'T do. Dwell on the mistakes. But what's the point in saying "I should have"—"I wish"—"I wasted"—whatever. What's the point of that?

(Beat.)

Why regret the only life you get?

(Pause.)

It's good to see everyone again. It's too easy to lose touch. I'm...I'm...

(Beat.)

Thank you for coming.

LEWIS. *(He kisses ZACK lightly:)* Hey, it's your birthday, baby. Of course we'd be here.

SUSANNAH. Yes. Yes, we should be— I'm sorry...this is a celebration, right? Right?

STAN. *(Takes her hand:)* Um, absolutely, yeah.

SUSANNAH. We didn't mean to—

STAN. Work. I've just been working a lot and—

SUSANNAH. All these hormones. I can't tell you. You should see some of the things I'm eating!

ZACK. It's fine, really.

LEWIS. Come on, “smiles everyone, this is Fantasy Island!”

STAN. “De plane, boss, de plane!”

SUSANNAH. Why don't we...

STAN. The gift?

SUSANNAH. Yes.

(SUSANNAH begins to hum and rock again. She will continue doing this, when not speaking, until the end of the scene. The song she hums is “Happy Birthday.”)

STAN. It's in my—hang on...

(Grabbing case.)

I have it in my briefcase.

ZACK. You shouldn't have...

STAN. Please, please it's just something small...

SUSANNAH. We wanted to.

(STAN hands ZACK a small package.)

ZACK. This isn't necessary. Just seeing you...

LEWIS. Hey!

(Slaps ZACK in arm.)

Be a gracious old fart. Open it and say thank you.

**PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.
THE PLAY CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE.**

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ANGELS, LAWS AND MIRACLES

Cast of Characters

AJ
WINNY

Acknowledgements

Angels, Laws and Miracles was first produced in 2003 by the Vital Theatre in New York City, with the following cast:

AJ.....Tom G. Constantin
WINNY.....Mary Ann Anderson

Directed by Bob Jude Ferrante

For Dad

ANGELS, LAWS AND MIRACLES

by Seth Kramer

(Lights up. At center AJ—frail, bald, late 50s—lies in a hospital bed. He wears sweatpants and a T-shirt cut up the back to make it easier to take on and off. AJ has the use of his left arm and little else. WINNY—a stout woman, 50s— enters humming. She carries a washbasin with soap, sponge and towels. She also has a change of clothes. WINNY hums under the following)

AJ. You—you—you—you live. Take it for granted. When—when you need to do a thing—go to the bathroom or shave your face or pick up a fork— That you'll be able to. Simple things. Smoke a cigarette or clean off your chin. That's—I mean—the ACTION of being alive. You never consider—realize...

(Pause.)

A pri—pri—pri—prisoner of your own body.

(Beat.)

When it breaks—someone can fix it. Fracture a leg or catch some sort of virus? Go see a doctor and get a treatment or take a pill—spend time in rehab. Penicillin, chemo, antibiotics, interferon or whatever. You get better. You—one day—you stand up and go on with your—your—your—your—your—your—your—YOUR—

WINNY. AJ.

AJ. YOUR—YOUR—

WINNY. Start again.

AJ. Shit!

WINNY. Try not to get upset.

AJ. Shit.

WINNY. Start again. *(Prompting:)* Go on with your... ?

AJ. Your—your—your—your—your—your—

WINNY. Life?

AJ. Hmm.

WINNY. It's time.

AJ. No.

WINNY. Don't be difficult.

(WINNY helps AJ out of his shirt.)

AJ. You can't shave.

WINNY. OK.

AJ. I mean it.

WINNY. I won't shave you.

AJ. My son—when he comes—I told him—

WINNY. I understand.

AJ. We'll do that. My boy and me. We'll— We'll— We'll— We'll—

(Beat, frustrated.)

Getting worse.

WINNY. What will you two do?

AJ. Enjoy...

WINNY. A shave together?

AJ. I promised him.

WINNY. I'm just going to clean you up a little. So you look good for company. OK?

AJ. OK.

WINNY. I need to put you on your side now. On three. Ready?

AJ. Ready.

WINNY. One, two, three.

(WINNY rolls AJ onto his side.)

WINNY. Good. Now hold tight with that strong arm of yours.

AJ. An itch. I have an itch. Itch. Itch.

WINNY. Tell me where.

AJ. Back of my leg. Back of...

WINNY. This knee?

AJ. Higher.

WINNY. Here?

(WINNY scratches AJ just beneath his butt.)

AJ. Oh Jesus. right there. Yes.

WINNY. Better?

AJ. Yes. Thank you. That's been driving me nuts all—all—all—all damn morning.

WINNY. Glad I could help.

AJ. What a way to spend your life, huh? Scratching someone else's ass for them.

WINNY. I do what I can.

AJ. No way to live.

WINNY. It's a job.

AJ. So's delivering babies.

WINNY. Not for me.

AJ. Why?

WINNY. Don't like kids.

AJ. But cleaning up my—my—my—my shit— That job appeals to you?

WINNY. I show up every day, don't I?

AJ. Yes.

WINNY. Then it must be OK work.

AJ. I'm sorry, I refuse to believe you choose to do this for the paycheck.

WINNY. That is still my answer.

AJ. Come on, the truth.

(Beat.)

Why do this?

(WINNY ignores him and begins to hum again. She washes AJ, efficient but gentle. AJ listens.)

AJ. What are you...what is that?

WINNY. It's an old gospel song. My daughter used to sing a solo bit in the choir.

(Speaks the words.)

“May the Lord bless and keep you in His care.
As you leave this place, take his love to share.
Go, now in peace for all to see,
God's love has come to set you free.”

AJ. Pretty.

WINNY. Eh, the song goes on forever. Lots of hallelujahs and praise Jesus and... *(Sings:)* “Oh lord—lord, lord, lord!”

(Smiles.)

Still, when that girl would open her mouth...I swear angels wept.

AJ. Angels.

WINNY. Speaking of, where is that young man of yours? Normally he is the first one here.

AJ. I had to— I sent him somewhere.

WINNY. Pick up breakfast?

AJ. No. There are some...some details he needs to arrange.

WINNY. I see.

AJ. So my wife won't have to.

WINNY. Smart.

AJ. Necessary.

WINNY. That too.

AJ. This sort of thing— She's not—not—not—nnnn—not ready for it. Those places are predatory. Charge you an arm and a leg if you wait. Better to take care of details now, PRE-NEED, while everyone has a clearer head.

(Beat.)

Shouldn't have to. My wife. Son. These arrangements. They shouldn't have to.

WINNY. You can't protect people forever.

AJ. I let them down.

WINNY. No.

AJ. As soon as the doctor told me what—what—what—what—what—

WINNY. You couldn't know.

AJ. He told me my odds. I should have taken care of matters then. Instead I...

WINNY. Chose to fight.

AJ. A losing battle.

WINNY. A football team doesn't go home at half time just because they're behind in the score. They compete until the last second.

AJ. Vanity.

WINNY. Optimism.

AJ. That it could turn out any different for me.

WINNY. Where there's life there's hope.

AJ. Just words.

WINNY. But good words.

(Beat.)

I'm going to roll you onto your back again, OK?

AJ. OK.

(WINNY rolls AJ on his back and continues washing him.)

WINNY. So this is what you've been doing all morning, huh? Making yourself crazy with self-recriminations?

AJ. No.

WINNY. Saved it all for me, then?

AJ. Been waiting.

WINNY. For?

AJ. M-m-m-m-m-miracle.

WINNY. *(Beat:)* Do you believe in miracles, AJ?

AJ. Never know.

WINNY. Most people go their entire lives and never see a single one.

AJ. Most people aren't really looking.

WINNY. Are you?

AJ. Hey, at this point, I'm ready to be surprised.

WINNY. Then make the call.

AJ. No.

WINNY. I have the number in the other room. It will only take a few minutes—

AJ. No— No—nonononononono NO.

WINNY. You just said...

AJ. Fairytales.

WINNY. AJ.

AJ. Won't sit here and let some witch doctor—

WINNY. I've met your Rabbi. He's a very nice man.

AJ. I won't play along.

WINNY. All you have to do is listen.

AJ. Heaven. An afterlife. These things...they—they—they—they—

WINNY. What?

AJ. Fairytales we tell survivors to make living easier.

WINNY. And what's so wrong with that?

AJ. I'm not going to—

WINNY. It will help.

AJ. Never believed before. Not one word. Never— Never— NEVER. Not going to spend my last days pretending. Proof—or no deal.

WINNY. Quid Pro Quo?

AJ. Damn right. *(To Heaven:)* I get my miracle and he gets a true believer. That's the deal. If not, F—fu—fu—fu—fuck God. I go out like I came in: Alone and pissed off.

WINNY. And your wife?

AJ. My—

WINNY. What about her? When all this is over?

AJ. I don't know.

WINNY. You get the easy part here.

AJ. Easy?

WINNY. Done is done. You won't be the one who has to wake up alone every morning.

AJ. *(Pause:)* Not fair.

WINNY. No, it's not.

AJ. Don't want to die.

WINNY. I know.

AJ. I'm afraid.

WINNY. *(Long pause:)* Einstein.

AJ. Einstein?

WINNY. The First Law of Thermodynamics. You know of this?

AJ. No.

WINNY. Energy can never be destroyed. Einstein said this. It can only change form. A tree can be cut down from where it has taken root. It can be chopped into wood and burned, becoming heat and smoke which rises up into the air and becomes part of the world. The tree may no longer stand but it is not truly gone.

(Beat.)

A law that governs the universe. Nothing is ever lost, AJ. It just changes form.

(Pause.)

OK, I'm going to roll you to the other side now. On three, ready?

WINNY / AJ. One, two, three.

(WINNY rolls AJ again. She continues to wash him and change his clothes.)

WINNY. Good. Hold on for me. Almost done.

AJ. I...

WINNY. What?

AJ. You still haven't answered my question.

WINNY. I haven't?

AJ. No.

WINNY. "Why do this?"

AJ. A dying man makes a request, the least you could do is...

WINNY. My daughter.

AJ. Your daughter.

WINNY. It was in her brain. Like you.

AJ. How old?

WINNY. She never saw her twenty-first birthday. Wanted to become a doctor. Not a nurse like me. It always seemed to embarrass her that I never aspired to do more than this. Give care. She loved medicine. Was studying very hard. Wanted to CURE people. Had a semester of premed left when she started having seizures.

AJ. What—what—what—what—what—

WINNY. I left my job and flew out to be with her.

AJ. Good.

WINNY. I had cared for a number of critical patients before. I said all the things you say, was positive and supportive...yet in my heart I knew I was not going to help her “recover.” Still, how she fought...such hope. Even after the tumor stole her sight, her ability to speak or stand...my child refused to give up. But what else is there? For life you fight. Tooth and nail, every day, for as long as you can.

AJ. How long?

WINNY. She lived nine months. Surgery. Radiation. Blood treatments. Temidar. Even put those chemotherapy things—the wafers—directly into her brain.

AJ. Gliadel.

WINNY. We tried everything science could offer. Nothing worked. Bought us more time together maybe. I don’t know.

AJ. Nine months.

WINNY. “Make her comfortable.”

(Beat.)

These words...when a doctor says these words... It means only one thing.

AJ. She was lucky to have you.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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