

FROM THE WELL
A Ten Minute Play

By Candace Perry

CAST:

LAUREL: mid 60's

JACK: Laurel's husband, a bit older

KATIE: Laurel's ten year old granddaughter (voice only)

PLACE:

Outside a dune shack in the Peaked Hills

TIME:

The present, early June

SET:

Several plastic gallon jugs of water are on the deck of the shack. Near them is a folded blanket, and resting against the deck are a couple of metal folding beach chairs.

FROM THE WELL

AT RISE:

*We hear the ocean roaring in the distance.
LAUREL and JACK enter, each carrying
two plastic gallon jugs full of water.*

LAUREL

Wasn't that just exhilarating? See what's so wonderful about being in the dunes?

JACK

(Out of breath) Hiking the Sahara. Climbing the equivalent of five flights of stairs carrying twenty pounds of water. Just great.

LAUREL

Don't be silly. The Sahara doesn't have the Atlantic Ocean at your feet.

JACK

(Still having trouble breathing) Or sharks. Sweetheart, think we could sit down for a minute before we have to go back to the well?

LAUREL

You are so spoiled. Did you know that in developing countries women have to walk an average of four miles a day to get to water? Katie loved pumping her own water from the well. Racing up the dunes. *(Beat.)* Well, that's all over now. Only ten, and she's outgrown me and all this.

JACK

Come on, Sweetheart, you don't know that. She's just in a phase.

LAUREL

She used to think I was the coolest grandma. Now I'm just some aging hippie who still uses a flip phone and thinks a week in a dune shack is a big treat.

JACK

Katie loves you. You'll have other summers. *(JACK drinks from one of his jugs.)* Ah.

LAUREL

Jack! What on earth are you doing?

JACK

Hydrating.

LAUREL

Don't drink out of the jug! We have glasses in the shack.

JACK

Oh. Sorry. Now we're being civilized? I thought the whole point of dune shack living was some retreat to primitivity.

LAUREL

The whole "point" is to live with nature: the dunes, the ocean, the sky.

JACK

The skunks, the mice, the mosquitoes.

LAUREL

You're impossible. *(She takes the blanket from the deck and spreads it)* Help me with this.

JACK

We're sleeping outside now? What if it rains?

LAUREL

We don't sleep outside. You said you needed to sit before we go back to the well.

JACK

How many more jugs do we have to fill?

LAUREL

As many as we use. And you'll be shocked how many if you waste water like you do at home.

JACK

I don't waste water.

LAUREL

You let it run the whole two minutes you brush your teeth. That's about three gallons worth. And your usual ten minute shower takes more than twenty gallons. And when you shave you –

JACK

Okay, okay. Point made.

LAUREL

Isn't this heaven? This was Katie's favorite time. The beginning of a week in the dunes. Not

LAUREL (cont'd.)

knowing what adventures awaited us. What treasures might wash ashore. Would we find a bird's nest, a snake hole, hear a coyote howl?

JACK

Lucky me. All these years, you've been telling me about how fabulous dune shack living is, and now I get to experience it with you.

LAUREL

You're a terrible liar. You've never once wanted to come out here.

JACK

"It is the 'unexpected thing' that brings life to the soul." Harry Kemp wrote that.

LAUREL

You've been reading Harry Kemp?

JACK

Poet of the dunes. You know, when in Rome. (*Beat*) Sorry, Hon, but my knees can't take this. I'm gonna have to use one of those chairs. (*He goes to get one of the chairs*)

LAUREL

You know if we're really quiet we might hear the piping plovers all the way—

JACK

(*Making a loud noise setting up the beach chair*) Don't know why I couldn't have just brought my Ergo Lounger.

LAUREL

Dune shack living is meant to be simpler. Without so much stuff.

JACK

"Stuff." Like running water.

LAUREL

Thanks to that running water, American families use over 500 gallons of water a day. A day! And how much do you think the average African family uses?

JACK

Less? A lot less.

LAUREL

Five gallons a day, if they're lucky. Pumping your water from the well makes you realize how precious what we take for granted really is.

JACK

Yeah, yeah. Using an outhouse really puts me in touch with my inner self.

LAUREL

You didn't have to come.

JACK

Let's not do this. You look forward to it all year. But I didn't want you to be out here by yourself. Ah, feel that sun on your face.

LAUREL

Sunscreen?

JACK

It's getting cloudy. Who needs sunscreen?

LAUREL

I'll get it. Did you bring yours?

JACK

I'll use yours.

LAUREL

You don't like my sunscreen, you say the zinc oxide makes me look like a mime.

JACK

I'm flexible.

LAUREL

Ha! You forgot to pack sunscreen. How many times did I tell you --

JACK

-- I lost count at forty-seven. And I didn't forget. It's in my bag. *(He starts to get up)*

LAUREL

Sit. I'll find it. *(She exits into the shack)*

JACK

(Calling to Laurel) Seriously. I can use yours. You're right; the zinc oxide probably covers –

LAUREL

(She storms out of the shack, carrying a smartphone.) Aargh! Jack! What's this?

JACK

My phone.

LAUREL

The whole point of being out in the dunes is to get unplugged!

JACK

Come on, Laurel. Be reasonable. I just brought it in case of an emergency.

LAUREL

Afraid we'd run out of fat free half and half and need to get the dune taxi to deliver?

JACK

Sweetheart, I'm really sorry. I know I'm a poor substitute.

LAUREL

Stop that. I won't have you feeling sorry for me. She's simply outgrown me.

JACK

You'll always be her Nana.

LAUREL

But she'd rather go shopping in New York with her new grandmother. "Grandmere" Marie. How pretentious can you get? "Grandmere."

JACK

Your ex can really pick 'em. One trip to Paris and Grant's new wife thinks she's some kind of French nobility.

LAUREL

And this has to be the only week in the whole year that they could take Katie to New York? This week! *(In a syrupy sweet imitation of Marie with a phony French accent)* "Now, Laurel, we don't want you to be upset." That fake tone probably works wonders with Grant, but it made me want a cigarette.

JACK

You don't smoke.

LAUREL

I thought fire in my lungs might feel good. Smoke might fill that suddenly empty place. Or bourbon.

JACK

I'll walk into town and get you some.

LAUREL

Cigarettes or bourbon?

JACK

Both. Either. Whatever you want.

LAUREL

You'd do that for me? Walk over burning sand?

JACK

I'd probably cheat and call the dune taxi. But I hate seeing you like this. I know these times in the dunes with Katie have always been so special to you.

LAUREL

Every summer since she was five. How we loved our walks on the beach, the outside shower from the black plastic bag, collecting rocks, playing dominoes by lamplight, making up silly stories, wearing only a sarong all day, trying to count the stars...*(She begins crying)*

JACK

Sweetheart, it's okay.

LAUREL

I'm sorry I'm being such a pain. I had to know the time would come when she'd rather do something other than be in the dunes with her old grandmother. She didn't even tell me herself.

JACK

Look, she's your granddaughter, so I don't want to say anything I'll regret.

LAUREL

She's yours, too. No such thing as a "step-grandparent."

JACK

Right. I know the party line. As long as you babysit so the parents can get away for a weekend, you're a grandparent. And I adore Katie. But she's changing, heading into being a teenager.

LAUREL

But she's only ten. We were always so close. She should have told me herself that she didn't want to come to the dunes this summer.

JACK

She should have. But she wanted to do it the easy way. And Marie –

LAUREL

Marie couldn't wait to make that phone call. That syrupy sweet voice of hers. Grant probably sitting in the background, smirking.

JACK

My guess is, Grant didn't have much to do with this.

LAUREL

Except it proves him right that the almighty dollar rules everything! Together he and Marie can turn Katie into one of those shopaholic, fashionistas!

Jack's cell phone rings.

Great! So much for nature's quiet repose. I'll go inside and read.

Laurel exits into the shack.

JACK

(Calling to her) Sorry, Hon. *(On the phone)* Hello, there. What's up, Pumpkin?...I know you're not a pumpkin. How's New York?...The dunes are just great...Really great...What?...Come out here now?...Let me see what Nana thinks...*(Calling)* Laurel, Hon, can you come out here?

LAUREL

(Laurel enters) What now?

JACK

It's for you.

LAUREL

I told you, I'm unplugged in the dunes.

JACK

It's Katie.

LAUREL

Is she okay?

JACK

You ask her. Here, I'll put her on speakerphone.

LAUREL

Katie, sweetheart, are you okay?

KATIE (voice only)

I'm fine, Nana. It's just, well, it's just I miss the dunes. I miss you.

LAUREL

And I miss you, but you must be having a wonderful time in New York with Pops and Grandmere Marie.

KATIE (voice only)

Grandma Marie didn't want to do anything except shop. We went to like, five, Gap stores, and Saks and some other places.

LAUREL

That sounds like fun.

KATIE (voice only)

Nana, we're back in Boston. (*Rapidly*) And Grandma Marie and Pops said they'd drive me to Provincetown and I can take the dune taxi out to the shack and finish out the week with you, if that's okay with you, and if it's okay with Grandpa, but if it's not okay, then I don't have to come out, but I'd really like to –

LAUREL

Whoa, whoa! Slow down. Let me talk it over with Grandpa.

JACK

Grandpa says get yourself out here! You think I'm the only one who's taking a shower with a cup of water in a black bag?

KATIE (voice only)

Grandpa, you're funny. Guess what, Grandma Marie thought I made up "If it's yellow, let it mellow." And she lets the water in the sink run for like an hour until it gets hot enough. I told her she shouldn't do that.

JACK

Good girl. Let me talk to your other grandfather and we'll make the arrangements.

KATIE (voice only)

He's outside taking a nap in the hammock. I'll go get him and call you right back. Bye!

LAUREL

Bye, Sweetheart. See you soon.

JACK

I'll see if Grant can get her here in time to take the sunset dune tour out, and I'll ride back with them. You and Katie can still have your time in the dunes.

LAUREL

I'd like it more if you stayed, too.

JACK

You sure? This is your special time together.

LAUREL

Things change. And, after all, "It is the 'unexpected thing' that brings life to the soul."

END OF PLAY