

b **O**ys **g**rown **TALL** !!

By

Timothy X. Troy

Boys Grown Tall

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A full-length one-act drama



WHY I LIKE IT: *Acting Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes... David Sinclair, a Harvard professor who specializes in aging and epigenetics, theorizes that the first person to live to the age of 150 years old has already been born... a wonderful fact for the worthy bastard... This longevity is something Sinclair says could not have been believable even ten years ago. Hell, universities now offer undergraduate degrees and higher now specifically for "Aging" and "Geriatrics". Living in a 21st century, fast-pace, don't-stop-till-you-get-enough-or-wait-around-and-you'll-found-out-you've-missed-it, now now NOW RIGHT F*****G NOW society. We are OBSESSIVE with our youthful vivacious..ness; maintaining it, prolonging it, repressing it, running from it, silencing it, embracing it, usurping it, etc. etc. etc. fill the gap as you please. It's an intergenerational cause that has stumped academics, enthralled playwrights, and empowered Disney witches with causation for generations.*

*One quality of aging that grinds the dentures of the elderly and stops the heart of the youth is that has beguiled generation: whose responsible to take care of the elderly? The beauty in *Boys Grown Tall* by Timothy X. Troy relies on this intergenerational fascination. More specifically, our generational disinterest with those of a certain age. It delivers a delightful look full of familial banter upon a rather dreaded day that only a youngest child could bring out. Charmed with witty dialogue from a mother/son(s) dynamic that unravels the confabulation of a fragile memory slipping away, we tow the line of who's right and who's wrong, what's a life worth living, and most importantly; who should be the one who gets to decide?*

Five stars

Boys Grown Tall, by Timothy X. Troy

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1(F), 2(M) Single Interior. 80 minutes.

Synopsis:

A youngest son gradually believes only he sees the truth of what his older siblings are not ready to accept - their beloved and powerful mother needs help only professionals can now provide.

The Barstow Family:

HARRIET - 81 years old

Her sons:

EDWARD – 51 years old, Insurance industry executive

DONOVAN – 35 years old, professor of psychology

Setting:

1983. A Saturday morning in late February. Saratoga Springs, New York. Interior of a Mid-Century Modern home – the lower level family room. We see the ½ - story staircase. The visible level also includes doors to a bathroom and a guest bedroom. Dry bar, fireplace, slide rocker for HARRIET.

Confabulation (verb: **confabulate**) is a memory disturbance defined as the production of fabricated, distorted or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world, without the conscious intention to deceive.

(HARRIET sits alone in a glide-style rocker. She enthusiastically hums the theme from Chariots of Fire. She's wearing a winter coat, unbuttoned. Did she just arrive, or is she getting ready to leave? She crochets a small project.)

HARRIET

(To the tune of Chariots of Fire) He runs on the bea-each. He runs on the beach. Ta-da-da-da tah. He comes in first place. *(Continues humming a few bars. With increased gusto.)* He runs with his bare feet. They're all dressed in white. Ta-da-da-da tah. He's lithe and he's handsome ... he runs on the beach. *(She giggles.)*

(Perhaps she's testing the gage of a new pattern. Though her muscle memory is sure, she struggles to find a rhythm. No sign of upset, she continues.)

HARRIET

(Toward the stairs.) It's too warm again. *(Continues humming.)* I still think it's early, but whatever you say. I do like it when the bacon is fresh. And the eggs. Old eggs! The trick is to order an omelet. The one with pepper and onion. What's that called, again?

DONOVAN

(From just off-stage.) We're not going to brunch.

HARRIET

Green pepper and onion? Eggs! No cheese.

DONOVAN

(Continues off-stage.) Denver.

HARRIET

Why "Denver" ?

DONOVAN

No idea.

HARRIET

They say it's a mile high there.

DONOVAN

Thin air.

HARRIET

I bet you can see the stars there. All those stars. I spent my whole adult life missing the stars.

DONOVAN

The stars are better here.

HARRIET

Yes. Especially when we take that little drive on a clear night.

DONOVAN

(Continues off.) Schroon Lake.

HARRIET

SCHROO--OON.

DONOVAN

Schroon Lake, right. Be right there.

HARRIET

Can we run on the beach at Schroon Lake? *(Chariots of Fire theme continues.)*

DONOVAN

Sure, Ma. That'd be fun.

HARRIET

Your father took me to Schroon Lake in 1932. We took a train. We got away from the city. Took the train. I made egg sandwiches. He brought apples. That's where we started making babies! Now you know what I'm thinking about when we drive to Schroon Lake.

DONOVAN

More than I need to know, mother. Thank you.

HARRIET

You're gathering the troops, aren't you? *(Continues humming.)* I'm ready. I know what you've planned.

DONOVAN

Marcie made your tea. I'll be right down.

HARRIET

A daughter knows what a mother wants. (*She continues humming, crocheting.*) Troublesome pattern. Are you alternate rows, or alternate stitches? (Puts the yarn to her ear to listen.) Stop changing.

(*DONOVAN enters with a tea tray. Sets it on the dry bar.*)

DONOVAN

All set. Here, Mom, let's get your coat. Oops. You're a little tangled. I'll take that. (*He puts the crochet on a side table.*) Now I'm tangled.

HARRIET

Don't pull out the stitches. I'm just getting it.

DONOVAN

What's this? (*She turns so he can take her coat. He unwinds yarn from a small collectable teaspoon.*) There's your trouble.

HARRIET

That's a nice dance we just did. You should take me dancing, too.

DONOVAN

(*Chuckles.*) I'm not sure where we'd go to dance. Marcie might know.

HARRIET

She knows a lot of things. Starts her day with a smile. How did you know? Are you charmed?

DONOVAN

Know what?

HARRIET

That she'd be so lovely. There are so many things we can't know, yet we go headlong. I could see it, but I'm the grown-up. How did a young man like you see it?

DONOVAN

My mother raised me right.

HARRIET

Smart mom. Young fellas don't know a thing. That's why I didn't marry one. How about those countries where they don't know each other at all?

DONOVAN

Arranged marriages.

HARRIET

Arranged. It's all arranged for them. The parents make the arrangements. Like puzzle pieces. The bride and groom show up. They sing and dance and the parents tie their hands together and send them off for the rest of their lives.

DONOVAN

The parents don't tie –

HARRIET

Of course not.

DONOVAN

They get tied down, down in a manner of speaking.

HARRIET

“Hitched,” is the word you're looking for. Trundle.

DONOVAN

Trestle ?

HARRIET

Stop that. I don't want your word games today.

DONOVAN

They say the arrangements works better than our system.

HARRIET

Throw them in the deep end and they cling to each other and learn to wade. (She motions swimming.)

DONOVAN

They're like salmon.

HARRIET

We have sons and daughters. And grandsons and granddaughters.

DONOVAN

Richard. Emily.

HARRIET

And your husband dies and you start over.

DONOVAN

With your sons and daughters and grandsons, etc.

HARRIET

And you swim upstream.

DONOVAN

To spawn, mom.

HARRIET

That's what you get when you marry an older man. He was bound to leave me. I think I knew that. He had a line on a nice apartment.

DONOVAN

So you married Dad for his real estate?

HARRIET

He left me with babies to raise.

DONOVAN

A hoard of tiny terrors.

HARRIET

How to manage that youngest boy! All the boys. We found a good plan for the baby.

DONOVAN

An excellent plan. You were a great mom. Inspiring

HARRIET

(Gets his attention.) That's why I'm here, right?

DONOVAN

Right.

HARRIET

I'm a single gal again. Footloose. I know where not to go. Avoid the Bunnyman.

DONOVAN

We're making adjustments.

HARRIET

Those men aren't here.

DONOVAN

(As he takes her coat.) Which men? *(No answer.)* The men. Yes.

HARRIET

They come down from the 6th floor. The flirtations are not welcome. We're not teenagers.

DONOVAN

They don't belong on the 4th floor.

HARRIET

It's not their place. Just because we're nearby, doesn't mean we're available. Like sailors on shore leave.

DONOVAN

You're such a looker. One can hardly blame them.

HARRIET

Watch your tone, young man. That funny one, Alfonso, claimed he knew your father. Collar open. Still wears cufflinks. Seeks me out, and starts to croon.

DONOVAN

He croons?

HARRIET

Directly in my direction. In front of everyone.

DONOVAN

He lets it loose?

HARRIET

"When the moon hits your eye." That kind of song. Launches right into it, like a brass-ringed troubadour. Cravat. He's a character in an Andy Rooney movie.

DONOVAN

Damon Runyon.

HARRIET

He carries a folded newspaper. Calls it his racing form.

DONOVAN

Harry the Horse.

HARRIET

Takes two-dollar bets from his buddies. I'll bet he knows The Bunnyman.

DONOVAN

They can play cards or read the racing forms on the 6th floor.

HARRIET

They can sing "Oh Susannah, oh don't you cry for me", or some manner of Stephen Foster song until the very last cow comes home. On the 6th --

DONOVAN

-- on the 6th floor. (*Sets her coat on a side chair.*) And here's this.

(*He hands her the spoon.*)

HARRIET

Anything they please, up there, where they belong. Watch girlie movies. Car races. Amongst themselves. Quietly, would be nice. I knitted as a girl.

DONOVAN

Where's your hook? (*Looks in her crochet bag.*) Ah. I'll put it with your bag. "Tea, is served." (*He bows like an English butler.*) Those men aren't here. Not to worry.

HARRIET

You know I can help myself. She doesn't seem to like me in the kitchen.

DONOVAN

It wasn't that, Mom. She knew we were out of your tea, there was no sense looking. We ran out and got some, and here we are. No milk, one sugar in the morning. Right?

HARRIET

Yes, thank you. I don't know why we keep going over this – Sugar in the afternoon. Milk in the morning. No wait – sugar in the morning.

DONOVAN

I'm 35 and I've never seen you drink tea before last week. So, you know, we're adjusting.

HARRIET

Bosh! A woman of my era was raised to drink tea. Coffee is for men.

DONOVAN

I think that's the way it used to be.

HARRIET

Used to be. Right. A letter came from the tenant's association. That old elevator again. Mr. Hammes knows about old buildings. He can decide. Why was it always couples, do you think? With The Bunnyman? (*No answer.*) Two against one, right? They were compromised, I know, but it doesn't take long to ... to untangle. I mean, to defend yourself, one doesn't bother with niceties ... like underpants and brassieres.

DONOVAN

I have no idea what you just said.

HARRIET

The guy. The man. It's well known.

DONOVAN

Ed is having --

HARRIET

Edward.

DONOVAN

-- is having coffee with Marcie.

HARRIET

She's so nice. She raids my recipe file. Your grandma was not much of a cook, bless her pointy little head. But Aunt Betty! A person looked forward to those visits. She could peel an orange and it would taste better coming from her hands.

DONOVAN

How does that work, I wonder?

HARRIET

Uncle Dick, Richard as rightly she insisted, rode the train raided by Butch Cassidy. Such a thing was not pretty piano music and jumping into the pool. It was frightening and people got hurt. And they say he's buried in Glasgow.

DONOVAN

I think that story ends in Bolivia.

HARRIET

Glasgow is the Great Train Robbery. Call the library if you don't believe me. Uncle Richard rode that train. Aunt Betty showed a picture he'd taken. That's the proof. Photos don't lie. Unless it's some sort of Soviet history book – removing pictures of Trotsky and those currently out of favor. Aunt Betty didn't fabricate. *Lacuna*, they call it. A skipping ahead. An *elision*.

DONOVAN

There's a word you don't hear every day.

HARRIET

Would be a lovely first name for a gal: Allow me to introduce you to my dear Aunt Lacuna.

DONOVAN

Marcie and I once joked that "Jaundice" would be lovely name ... for little girl.

HARRIET

Jaundice Marie, she's the smart one.

DONOVAN

James is on his way. All your adoring boys gather together.

HARRIET

He's always a welcome sight. He did right by you. He's right about things. He knows how to live.

DONOVAN

Ed took the train –

HARRIET

Edward.

DONOVAN

- 'dward arrived on the train in Albany. From Boston.

HARRIET

I think he's been in Boston for some time now. He's not in the same house. It's that second woman. One each. That's what we're allotted.

DONOVAN

Not always how it works out, mom.

HARRIET

She calls him 'Ted.' In my presence, she calls him 'Ted.' What a thing to say to a mother. I was there when we named him. I know his name.

DONOVAN

I don't understand it, either.

HARRIET

Ted! Sounds like a skin inflammation. Edward is a perfectly fine name, why do people insist on making names shorter. Ed-ward. Two syllables. Hardly a burden. And what's the point of suddenly adding a 'tah' sound to the front? 'Ted' is the name of a child's plush toy, not an insurance big-wig. 'Ted' is supposed to be short for Theodore. Not Edward. Jeesh. Doesn't know a thing. What's this second ... woman called? Ah – don't tell me. She's not here, is she?

DONOVAN

Edward is alone.

HARRIET

He's alone again?

DONOVAN

No, he's not alone, alone. He's alone today. He's a party of one. Not a fun party.

HARRIET

I don't *need* to know at this point. The second woman is not my favorite person. I don't think *her people* - her ancestors - were honest people. I don't like the way that sounds, even as I say it. Nevertheless, her people are not ours. Bootleggers, is my guess.

DONOVAN

Like the Kennedys?

HARRIET

Well ... not smart like a Kenndy. More like the gun runners. I know how these things worked. That was my time. I'm sure there are things you know about, but the gun running bootleggers, that was my time. Shall I put my coat on?

DONOVAN

Not yet, mom.

HARRIET

Then let me get back to my ... (*Points to her crochet; can't think of the word.*) ... my Chariot of Fire!

DONOVAN

(*Gently singing*) Swing low, sweet Harriet, coming for to carry me home.

(*Takes the tea and hands over the yarn.*)

HARRIET

You are more clever than the others. Because you got the best of him. Clever, like alcoholism, skips generations. Every woman deserves a clever grandson. (Begins to hum Chariots of Fire theme again.)

DONOVAN

I never thought of Richard as clever. Monosyllabic, truth be known. It's a stage.

HARRIET

I don't mean *that* Richard ... silly boy ... learn to take a compliment graciously. Grace. It's part of growing up. As you grow, you'll begin to learn what holds your attention. What matters in the morning is more important than what matters at night. With whom to share it and how to raise a family. Spend within your means. Keep your promises.

DONOVAN

To thine own self ... About The Meadows, mom. During our visit last week, Mrs. Wendt reminded us –

HARRIET

Wendt. The woman who slaps herself.

DONOVAN

-- that when a spot becomes available, we'll need to decide quickly.

HARRIET

And she rushes. She's a flurry. Doesn't allow a person to finish a sentence.

DONOVAN

I gather they like to run at capacity.

HARRIET

Like my first flat in Brooklyn. Second floor walk-up. I found Gretchen in the Math rooms, and we snatched it up like flapjacks.

DONOVAN

The Meadows is all one story. No men from the sixth floor. We had lunch there.

HARRIET

Fruit medley! All manner of soft food. Old people have dentures and bridges. Cream pies – banana, coconut – all manner of cream pies.

DONOVAN

Marcie likes the pie.

HARRIET

At twenty-seven I arrived in New York City. Imagine if Marcie had been with me then. If we met at twenty-seven, we'd have enjoyed walking through life together.

DONOVAN

She would have liked that, too.

HARRIET

I arrived in New York with the promise of a teaching position. The post was held for me. It's a big city, and there are plenty of teachers. My credentials were good. A promise was a promise. *And* they would put me through my master's degree. I settled in, and there were ample students to be had. It was a lovely time.

DONOVAN

Just in time for The Crash?

HARRIET

We had nothing to lose. No one I knew had stocks. Just gamblers and speculators. Over time you could feel things fall apart ... gradually unravel. Pull a thread here. Tug hard on a loose end. Stores start to close. Young people waiting at street corners. Men waiting in lines. Women carrying baskets of laundry. You could see it. Students worried about their parents.

DONOVAN

You don't talk about that time.

HARRIET

I always felt a little guilty. We were spared rough parts.

DONOVAN

You were smart, right?

HARRIET

Sharing rent made it not expensive. One didn't buy a car. But I wasn't like the natives. I was driving since I was 14! The shows and the symphony. Plenty of music, and made our own music. A young gal could live like that. Time for quiet *and* adventure. I missed the familiarity of "The Great Plains". We were raised to think it was special. It was our duty to bring it to harvest.

DONOVAN

The Heartland. Breadbasket to the world.

HARRIET

A person could see it all by eighteen if you had a notion to look. Mom and dad were gone so soon after I left. Your uncle Robert liked the family home. No chance of you ever meeting them! We made with what we had, Robert and I. We joined forces. Then sold to the highest bidder. It's a modest legacy to be sure, but steady and free of encumbrances, as they say. It's yours. When you get older.

DONOVAN

The Meadows, mom. They called yesterday.

HARRIET

That's Mrs. Wendt! The slapper.

DONOVAN

Exactly right!

HARRIET

I'll do as I please. Thanks for the tea. What is it that Edward wants?

DONOVAN

Mrs. Wendt.

HARRIET

Edward arrives alone from Boston to discuss Mrs. Wendt? She's a fine woman, to be sure, but why would Edward need to chat with her? She struck me as perfectly capable. A little twitchy. If Edward intends to sell insurance to her ... well, I'm not sure it's my place to be involved. Does she need a character reference?

DONOVAN

Edward doesn't sell insurance. He works for the insurance industry. Actuary. Statistics. You know this.

HARRIET

Don't tell me what I know. Have you any notion of how many insurance policies I've outlived? I can't count them ... and wouldn't care to if I could. That's the point, to outlive them. Unless you don't. We took care of the family thanks to that investment.

DONOVAN

He's an actuary.

HARRIET

Funny name.

DONOVAN

They define standards.

HARRIET

Furthermore, now that he's "Ted," he should show himself. (*Calls out.*) EDWARD!

DONOVAN

He's with Marcie. They're talking about the award ceremony. Jim will be here soon.

HARRIET

James. James knows The Bunnyman. Ask him. Haven't we talked about this already? Fine. I suppose James is here to talk about Mrs. Wendt, too. She's well past school age. I'm sure you noticed. Perhaps, she needs James to advise her what school to send her grandniece. While she updates her insurance and uses Marcie as a clandestine intermediary to acquire my recipes!

DONOVAN

It's the cornbread, mom.

HARRIET

Ha! It's always about the cornbread. I've made far more complicated dishes, but all I ever hear about is the cornbread. Okay, I'll tell you. Cinnamon. A dash of cinnamon. In every other way, it's standard stuff. Don't use that salted butter. Add a bit of cinnamon, and you're sure to please. Did you know it was that simple? Did she? I'm happy to share that bit of knowledge with Mrs. Wendt. We could do so with a brief phone call. No need to get Edward and James involved.

DONOVAN

I should write this down.

HARRIET

No need. All you have to remember is (*whispers*): *cinn-a-mon*. (*Returns to her crochet.*) Once you learn to both *see*, and more importantly, *feel* the width and height of a stitch, you'll never lose track of your stitch count again. You'll make a mistake every now and again, but you'll see it or feel it very soon. You fix it, lickity-split. No damage done. Very little wasted effort. Why did I choose this complicated pattern? Why now? What's the point?

DONOVAN

I don't recall many craft projects. Vaguely. A few, I guess. Long time ago.

HARRIET

I let it go for a time. I skipped it.

DONOVAN

Why the spoon, mom? I don't remember the spoon.

HARRIET

It helps with the tension. I don't want to talk about my spoon. Stop with the spoon. You hold it. Listen carefully. This is something our Marcie knows nothing about. Modern gals don't seem to go for such things.

DONOVAN

She's a modern gal. I guess her mom never sat her down with a needle and thread, or yarn, or hooks.

HARRIET

This pattern, which I unveil before you, is a journey. It is seven stitches wide, and five rows high. You repeat seven stitches along each row. Each of the five rows is a different stitch pattern. You reveal the pattern every fifth row. It's like playing ragtime. The left hand is doing one thing; the right hand another. Why doesn't it just sound like chaos? Because they catch-up with each other in a regular pattern.

If my left hand is doing seven and my right hand is doing five, then how many measures does it take for them to catch-up with each other? Quick! It's not two.

It's certainly not three. Seven. Yes, it's seven with the right hand. Five in the left hand. The downbeat of every eighth measure, that's when they line up. That's why a sixteen-bar melody is so satisfying. It's a rhyming couplet. Like ragtime music, the height of a fabric with this pattern will necessarily be multiples of five high. Now, how wide?

DONOVAN

Seven. Fourteen. Twenty-one. Twenty-eight.

HARRIET

Right. Sevens. Shall I tell you the 'real' reason you all so love the cornbread?

DONOVAN

I'm riveted.

HARRIET

Rarity. I only made it once a year. You associated it with other rarities. Turkey. Cranberry. A four-day weekend. Then James' lovely cottage with woods and the hunters nearby.

DONOVAN

They named the award in Ed/Ted's honor.

HARRIET

Edward won an award named after himself! I thought they only named awards for dead people. Like Nobel, or ... or, Pulitzer! Did they mean to give it to him? Do they know what he's like?

DONOVAN

Well ... sure mom. He's the president of the organization.

HARRIET

Now you're talking nonsense. No one is president of the "insurance industry." I wasn't born in a lake.

DONOVAN

Then you'd be a duck. And what would I be?

HARRIET

Tadpole.

DONOVAN

Marcie gathered some photos.

HARRIET

She enjoys that sort of thing. Photos. Recipes. Doilies. She gathers. She nests. She's a nester.

(DONOVAN retrieves a small box with loose photos from the bar. Casually looks through them. Ad lib comments on two or three as he adjusts the order.)

DONOVAN

Would you like to see some?

HARRIET

Not now. My hands are full with tea and yarn. I don't want to change my glasses.

(HARRIET continues to wrestle with her yarn. A new refrain from Chariots of Fire.)

HARRIET

He walks on the bee – each. He runs in the sand. He runs from The Bunnyman. He's a not a great fan!

(DONOVAN lays out a few photos on the bar, carefully choosing an order.)

HARRIET

I feel a test coming on.

DONOVAN

There is no test.

HARRIET

Like you do with your students.

DONOVAN

I give tests and quizzes and papers; check observational notes. Teaching is the easy part, finding ways to determine if they've learned something; that's the hard part.

HARRIET

I don't mean classroom tests. You run a kind of laboratory that tests people.

HARRIET

We do research. They volunteer.

HARRIET

Volunteering for an ice cream cone, that I could understand.

DONOVAN

It's more like I test the test. I'm not testing the students, the subjects. Control is the better word. I control ... I'm part of a team that controls the tests. They're harmless memory tests. Traces of memory.

HARRIET

Harmless memory. That's a good one, ha!

DONOVAN

It's all pretty fuzzy, truth be known. We look for ways to calibrate the tests. We look for meaning, significance.

HARRIET

No one likes tests. What a thing to do! You systematically irritate people. That's your job. Are you telling me, you don't even know if the tests have any meaning? There must be some result, some sort of outcome.

DONOVAN

We know there is meaning. We test to determine how much meaning. We try to measure consistency. Like: You give the same test to people at different times of day, or two days apart. Make it stressful or relaxing. Do they come up with the same answers?

HARRIET

Give them ice cream and they'll do better on the tests. If they feel good, they'll do better.

DONOVAN

You're probably right. (*Selects a photo.*) This one is fun. James out-did himself for us. The cottage. The lake. Enough space for us all.

(DONOVAN sets the photo on her lap. Returns to the other photos. HARRIET sets aside the yarn. Changes her glasses. Looks at the photo carefully. She stands. Covers it against her chest. Moves toward the stairs. Listens for anyone approaching.)

HARRIET

You should darn know that you can't fool me with this. Carefully selected out, she is. You are like the politburo – air-washing, whatever they call it -- the wrong person out of the picture ... after they put him on a long train to Siberia.

DONOVAN

Mom, slow down.

HARRIET

I know. I saw you. I saw her. There. Here, at this place. I'll pass any test you can dream up. I hope it's some kind of flinging thing. It's not my place to say. It's not

polite to use James this way. At his cottage. We are guests. Before he arrives, I want to settle this.

DONOVAN

Settle what?

HARRIET

I know what you've got going. Meeting her in the woods while everyone is packing their car. What if she would have seen you?

DONOVAN

Who is "she"?

HARRIET

I don't know. You're keeping her a secret. Summoning her to the family gathering is not a smart move. This is the type of situation that draws The Bunnyman. It's not a good move. It's very impolite. Holding her hand. Kissing her under a tree. There, but off to the side. A person doesn't kiss another person that way unless they're doing other things, too. Out of reach. Out of sight of others.

DONOVAN

I didn't meet - I'm not having an affair - a relationship.

HARRIET

Of course not! No one ever says they're having an affair outside ... whatever you call them ... over the side. Still, they happen obviously. Checkered coat. Brunette. Glasses. Handbag like this. (*She crooks her arm as if she's holding a clutch purse.*)

DONOVAN

Oh! Jennifer. As far as I know, Ed met her after they separated. They might have met earlier, but he didn't leave his marriage for Jennifer. That's when he became Ted.

HARRIET

Not Edward! Younger. (*Points to the photo.*) Here. You. With her. I'll thank you to keep this sort of business away from the family. What you do on your own time ... that's between a man and ... himself. Can you assure me that I'll never see such a thing again? Especially not after lunch in plain sight. I don't want to see it.

DONOVAN

Yes, mom. You'll never see it. I promise.

HARRIET

If something is going on and I don't need to know, then I don't want to know. I raised my two sons -

DONOVAN

- three.

HARRIET

Who knows where the other one is. I raised my ... sons ... to be gentlemen. See to it. Whatever you think you're getting out of it. Your students are not your dating service. They have their own lives. They pass through our lives like the seasons.

DONOVAN

Wow. Okay. Here. Let's have that picture, mom.

HARRIET

Your father made that mistake. I won't say it led to a ... an unravelling. Things got ... colder within the family ... sphere. A grown man changing his name. Confuses people. Robert and I should have waited until I finished my degree. Everything worked out, but it was an unnecessary risk. (*Hands back the photo to DONOVAN.*)

DONOVAN

You were a graduate student. It was a different time. You had an established teaching career.

HARRIET

Have we settled this before James arrives?

DONOVAN

We're settled. The air is clear.

HARRIET

The woman in the woods is out of the picture.

DONOVAN

Out of the picture. Never was in the picture. Not pictured.

HARRIET

You can stick to that story.

DONOVAN

I will.

HARRIET

You're still young. You can recover.

DONOVAN

Thanks, mom.

(Presents her with the spoon.)

HARRIET

Spoon. This is why you need me here.

DONOVAN

I disremember your spoon.

HARRIET

Niagara Falls. From our honeymoon. See (shows him the handle of the spoon) We were there. Then it disappeared, or I paid it no attention. And then – zap – here's the spoon and I'm in business again. (She refers to her crochet.) I'm behind on my craft projects ... for gifts.

DONOVAN

You have a gift list?

HARRIET

Edward's new woman is not on that list, and is unlikely to join that list any time soon. She's a grown woman. She can get someone else to make her things.

DONOVAN

We still have the storage. If there's something you want, photos, or spoons we'll get them. Take you there.

HARRIET

There is only one spoon. One honeymoon. One spoon. (*singing*) "May your days be happy and light. And my all your Christmases be bright." If a husband and wife each had a steady job. And if you were just a little bit lucky with a good apartment, life in New York during the Depression wasn't so bad. It was a challenge, but New York was a good place to wait out a bad time. There was plenty of music and schools and parks and the subway and trains. I was not a young mother. I had my own pot of money, and together we saw what was coming and knew we'd each be better if we joined – enjoined – our lives.

DONOVAN

We're in Saratoga Springs.

HARRIET

Not Albany?

DONOVAN

We get off the train in Albany.

HARRIET

I knew that. And we walked.

DONOVAN

It's a short drive.

HARRIET

This is where Marcie lives. I like her very much. Thank God for her. And you test students, all co-eds, if I'm not mistaken. You should be careful. This can get a young man into trouble. Even when he's not looking for it. They can imagine things. A wink, or a nod. A kind word. A special attention meant only as an encouragement.

DONOVAN

I never wink.

HARRIET

But you nod. I've seen it. I've seen you nod. You're a nodder. She is a shrugger. Mrs. Wendt slaps her thighs. (*She imitates.*) "Okay then, we're all set!"

DONOVAN

That's exactly what she does! She is a slapper.

HARRIET

Edward is a grunter. And that, that, that ... young man I see here, he's constantly shifting the hair out of his eyes. We all know there is fast cure for that. (*She demonstrates scissors with her fingers.*) Snip. Snip.

DONOVAN

Richard.

HARRIET

They'll think they're in love and will want to make your babies. It's sweet in its way. You can't blame them. Biology makes them do it. Older men are a better bet in life. But you must keep a distance. I've seen it. I know of which I speak.

DONOVAN

You were well into your twenties.

HARRIET

What would you know about that? And what would you know about this.

(*Picks out a photo set apart from the line of photos she organized earlier.*)

DONOVAN

(*Before he takes the photo.*) All we want is to do what's best for you. To make sure you're comfortable. Happy.

HARRIET

Since when are we all supposed to be happy. Surviving was the goal. If you were lucky enough to have a few comforts – like not worrying about tomorrow -- then you had no right to expect more.

DONOVAN

Affection? Engagement? Plans for the future?

HARRIET

Of course, I understand your concern. You're a good boy. I am the peach of your eye. I have everything I need here.

(She reaches out her hand with a photo she had specially selected earlier. He takes it and considers her carefully.)

HARRIET

That's why we found a good home for you when you were a boy.

DONOVAN

(He chuckles, confused.) Uhm ... I'm grateful. *(Referring to the photo.)* Right. I'll set this one aside. I didn't recognize it. Maybe some of Marcie's family got mixed in the box.

HARRIET

I think we can both agree that Marcie does not 'mix' things.

DONOVAN

I'm stumped.

HARRIET

I can give a test, too. *(They look at the photo together.)* Aunt Edna? *(Doesn't ring a bell for DONOVAN.)* Uncle "Finch" they called him. I don't know why. I believe he actually signed his name "Finch Anderson." Nice enough people. Nothing remarkable. Behind them you see what?

DONOVAN

Farmland. Is this Kansas?

HARRIET

Yes, this is Kansas. And on Finch Anderson's land where wheat still grows you'll also find gas wells. Wells that generate the quarterly income that sent you to school, and supported that good home in which you were raised.

DONOVAN

I thought it was life insurance.

HARRIET

Gas wells put you through private school. That family property will go to you someday. Through the family. *Great Expectations*. The legacy of your Quaker ancestors. The life I left behind when I boarded the train for New York. I missed the Dust Bowl and the Okies and revival tents. God in heaven, I would have been miserable there.

DONOVAN

Legacy?

HARRIET

You didn't know about the "quarterly income" part, did you? (He stares at the photo.) You'll still need your job, but you'll find an extra few thousand or so each quarter sweetens the pot. It fluctuates a little, so don't count an exact figure. Best to treat it as an unexpected windfall that follows the changing seasons.

DONOVAN

Why don't I know this?

HARRIET

The Quakers teach us to be *quiet*. Let's try that together from this moment. Not unless and until you are *moved* by the *voice of God*, shall you utter another word.

(She returns to crochet and humming her favorite tune. He considers more unfamiliar photos. After a pause.)

DONOVAN

I'm sure James is about here.

HARRIET

Did God tell you his arrival was imminent? If not ... sshhh.

DONOVAN

(He tries to be quiet again.) How come I didn't know this?

HARRIET

That question cannot have come from God, because God already knows the answer.

DONOVAN

Where did "Finch" come from?

HARRIET

I'm sure God only refers to him by his baptismal name. That's the point of a baptism - to introduce a new child to God. Enough. If you can't play our "remain-quiet-until-moved-by-God" game, then go out and play with your friends.

DONOVAN

You are a pip!

HARRIET

No. You are a Pip. Remember *Great Expectations*.

(An off-stage phone rings.)

HARRIET

A message from God.

DONOVAN

Marcie will get it.

HARRIET

She'll have a little chat with His Greatness. I hope it's good news.

(DONOVAN shuffles through photos as HARRIET continues her yarn work until ...)

EDWARD

(From off- stage.) James will be here in 30 minutes.

(Neither DONOVAN nor HARRIET respond as EDWARD enters. He carries an admissions folder for the The Meadows – glossy cover with an image of the facility. "New York's finest in Senior Living." He considers each of them for a moment.)

EDWARD

Pretty quiet. *(To DONOVAN hushed.)* Did you ... you know ... explain things? *(DONOVAN shrugs a non-answer.)* Marcie's keeping an eye out for James.

(No answer from DONOVAN or HARRIET. Another moment. EDWARD looks through more photos.)

EDWARD

She seems perfectly calm.

DONOVAN

Of course, she is.

HARRIET

We're waiting for the voice of God.

DONOVAN

To stir within.

EDWARD

(Beat.) I'll take over. Decide what's going on. Marcie says there's no problem here.

DONOVAN

Of course, she does.

(EDWARD hands the admissions folder to DONOVAN.)

EDWARD

We don't need this yet. Not the time.

DONOVAN

Photo fun. Take a gander. *(Hands him a school class photo.)*

EDWARD

James 6th grade class. Look at his ears. Sail away. *(He finds another picture.)* I have no memory of you playing baseball.

DONOVAN

You wouldn't. Listen carefully, she speaks of you as my dad and I'm her grandson. I feel it coming on.

EDWARD

Then who does she think Marcie is?

DONOVAN

Marcie's just Marcie.

EDWARD

But she doesn't think I'm dad, right? That would be a kind of ancient weirdness.

DONOVAN

I don't think it works that way. She knows I'm much younger than you, but can't seem to keep it all straight. She's clear that James is my brother, *and* clear that James is her son. Still, somehow, I become her grandson. It's sweet in a way.

EDWARD

She seems perfectly calm.

DONOVAN

Little mercies.

HARRIET

I'm here, Edward. I'm right here.

EDWARD

You're why we're here, too.

HARRIET

Seven times twelve, Edward. Quick.

EDWARD

Eight-four. So what's going on, Mom. Marcie says you're a sweet woman.

DONOVAN

Of course, she does.

HARRIET

Florence Henry was on to you, Edward. She knew. First, she said, "Your Edward, he's drifting, Harriet. He's has one foot out the door the moment he arrives. Used to play bridge with us. Have a chat. Talk about his music. Compliment my pie." So, I said, "He's in another stage of life. Doesn't own his time the way he used to." And she says, "It's his wandering eye."

EDWARD

Will this never be settled between us?

HARRIET

How did Florence, a dear friend, but a neighbor nonetheless, notice your wandering eye before your own mother?

DONOVAN

Mrs. Henry was no expert, mom.

HARRIET

Expert enough to write guidelines for the City Health Department. Expert enough to plan and build the Mothers' and Childrens' Clinic. Reproductive Health Care. She invented the phrase.

EDWARD

A woman ahead of her time. A friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. Her cheesecake as light as merengue.

HARRIET

Her Thomas made the arrangements for us to live together when your father died. Combine our insurance settlements to make a trust. Pay our rent and

utilities for the rest of our lives. Someone I know, brought a neat little sheet of paper with figures and columns and said, “No. Not equitable.”

EDWARD

It was the age difference between you, not the initial investment. I explained that. Even she understood that.

HARRIET

Sometimes the equation includes trust, companionship. Social capital, I think is the term. No one was trying to take advantage of anyone.

DONOVAN

Mrs. Henry was naïve, mom. We didn’t say she was a crook.

HARRIET

(*To EDWARD*) She diapered you. Remember who you’re speaking of.

DONOVAN

I think moms across the world keep a secret catalog of the friends and neighbors who diapered their children, just for moments like this.

EDWARD

Sharp as flint. Why are we even considering this?

HARRIET

They gave you an award last night. Named it in your honor. But you’re still alive. How does that work?

EDWARD

Quite an evening. Dizzying. I knew I was getting a service award. I agreed to it. It’s good for the organization.

DONOVAN

Interesting way to put it.

EDWARD

The ongoing aspect. A committee reviewing nominations. Calling for nominations from across the country. Excellence in Actuarial Service ... throughout the field.

HARRIET

And it’s forever named after you.

EDWARD

I had nothing to do with that. It was a new thing, and the committee didn’t have a name for it. Kept referring to it as the Edward Barstow Award –

DONOVAN

Glad they got the name right. "Ted."

EDWARD

Because that's what everyone one was calling it anyway.

DONOVAN

The shoe fit.

EDWARD

Right.

DONOVAN

We're all very proud. Had we known it was this important ...

EDWARD

It was news to me.

HARRIET

Like a surprise party. I never much cared for surprises. Your father's department surprised him once. It was fun. He liked it. End of the school day. Contained. Sensible.

(DONOVAN hands EDWARD a photo. He considers it. Pours himself some tea. Referring to the picture.)

EDWARD

Marcie had this? You must have had this, right? It's your own place, The Meadows. Plenty of space for photos and pictures and your own favorite chair.

HARRIET

Complex insurance policies, I'll betcha.

DONOVAN

Mrs. Wendt needs a policy review.

(EDWARD turns to DONOVAN for a cue.)

DONOVAN

Just keep going.

EDWARD

(Holding the photo.) Why is dad posing with a concertina?

HARRIET

His favorite toy. A great curiosity to him. Never played it in public. You heard him play it at home.

EDWARD

Are you sure?

DONOVAN

News to me.

HARRIET

You wouldn't remember.

EDWARD

He was so stern looking. (*To HARRIET*) Did he actually enjoy making music?

HARRIET

Do you mean *joy*?

EDWARD

Yes. Sure.

HARRIET

Not with that instrument. Never mastered it to his satisfaction. He liked the sound very much. And the feel. "It taught me how to breathe," he said. But the repertory you play on the concertina was not in his heart.

EDWARD

He missed the folk music revival.

HARRIET

Maybe he needed some jigs and reels and polkas in his heart. Would have done him good. Imagine him dancing a jig!

EDWARD

He respected jazz, though he claimed not to understand it.

HARRIET

Of course, he understood it. He respected talent, that wasn't the issue. "Best listened to live," he would say. We had plenty of opportunities but didn't take advantage. Didn't discourage you. You had the ability. No denying that.

EDWARD

That phase was more about being cool than a deep appreciation for the form. Best people watching at clubs back in the day.

DONOVAN

(With a gesture.) Schwoo – I missed that chapter.

HARRIET

I spoke with this one about the woman in the woods, so there's no need to revisit that topic.

EDWARD

I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about.

DONOVAN

I'll fill you in later.

HARRIET

He understands why James' cottage is off limits. What should we expect with your example?

EDWARD

(To DONOVAN) Marcie said you were making progress with her.

DONOVAN

This is what we're talking about. Takes a little time to settle. Or at the first sign of fatigue.

HARRIET

We all know about your woman in the woods. The one who insists on referring to you as Ted.

EDWARD

(To DONOVAN) Jennifer is a woman in the woods?

DONOVAN

Of a sort. Yes.

(EDWARD brings the concertina photo to HARRIET. She considers it very briefly.)

HARRIET

I don't remember this photo. I think it's a fake.

DONOVAN

(Retrieves the photo and returns it to the box.) It's not important enough to be fake.

HARRIET

Why is he alone then? If he played that instrument, then he would surely have played with a band of some kind. A dance hall band in church basements during the wedding season. Edward can fill you in. His clarinet. Concertina. A gathering for our neighbors and friends.

DONOVAN

Living room concerts.

HARRIET

(to DONOVAN) When you were this one's baby. They came to us. Sat in our living room. Invited your father to form a band. "To travel", they said. "A mix of music," they called it an "omnibus." Wanted one group who could play the popular music of our "immigrant heritage." They wanted a Jew, a Negro, a female singer, a Polish, an Italian, an Armenian. Your father would lead the whole kaboodle. Pick the music, form the ensemble.

EDWARD

A "Negro", mom?

HARRIET

Yes, a negro. Including a negro at that time was very forward looking. Very democratic.

DONOVAN

Dad gets a European tour!

HARRIET

To lead a group with his vast knowledge of music old and new. A script written by Arch Oboler, in support of the new United Nations. They would make a series of programs for each country. Part of the Marshall Plan, they said.

DONOVAN

It's fantastic.

HARRIET

Take this. (*She passes her crochet project to DONOVAN*). Count the stitches in the top row. I lost track.

DONOVAN

I have no idea -

HARRIET

Just count. One, two, three, etc. You can do it.

(DONOVAN sits on the floor at her knee and begins to count.)

HARRIET

A new Europe could only reform with a new model. The ashes strewn across the landscape, must be plowed-under and fresh crops sewn. Preserve the old traditions as we rebuild. Those of us in the middle age between the troops and their parents, we held an ambiguous position. We became a little lost after the war. None of us had the same bond, the stories of travel and battle. The loss of young husbands. We had to carry on. It was our job to pay forward. Our duty was to plan for their return even as the war began. We had to be their teachers, their aldermen, have stable businesses ready for their return. To prepare for the influx of college students. That was my job. It doesn't sound like much now – but someone had to figure out how a college could run with two-shifts, like a factory. You can't simply extend the day; you schedule two days for each day. It's not a night class anymore when you have just as many students at night as during the day. That was my job. Edward, you may continue the narrative from here.

EDWARD

Everything started over. New programs. New opportunities. I came up in the middle of all that. Populations shift. The developers built the suburbs. New wealth. Wider wealth. I'm sure that's why I did what I do.

HARRIET

I know all about you, Edward. And I know why James came for this one here.

(EDWARD returns to the photos for a moment. Silence.)

EDWARD

We'll have plenty of time to organize the photos mom. We'll gather them all and have an organizing party. When we get ready for The Meadows.

HARRIET

Which is why you made time to talk to Mrs. Wendt?

EDWARD

Marcie says she's very nice.

HARRIET

And she needs insurance. I'm not sure why I'm the one to help you. You don't need a character witness. You're a grown man who can handle his own business.

DONOVAN

She thinks our meeting with Mrs. Wendt involves an insurance policy.

EDWARD

I know what they want, the riders, the clauses. Mom, you have the best long-term care policy in the business. I saw to that. Iron clad. It covers all the basic services at The Meadows with enhancements. I don't want you to think about that ... until.

DONOVAN

What she's trying to say –

HARRIET

I'm not trying to say anything. I'm saying. I'm quiet. Marcie enjoys our chats. The long-haired boy is pleasant enough, when he wears his headphones. My needs are simple. (to EDWARD) You were right. I didn't fight you. The apartment was getting too big. The stove was acting up. Manhattan lost its charm. They were building dorms and laboratories all around us. Upstate is quiet. It's nice. It's always been nice. I know Albany. I know the Finger Lakes. Schroon lake. I was never one of those *New Y-AW-rk-UHs* who think the world ended in Westchester County. I'm a country girl. A Midwesterner. My sons didn't settle in New York. The attachment faded. But this one (*referring to DONOVAN*), he carries on the line. The steady one. He's the whiteheaded boy.

DONOVAN

"Whiteheaded"?

HARRIET

The Irish neighbors always had the right expressions. Even when we didn't know what they meant.

EDWARD

I'm here, because of the opening at The Meadows. What we need to discuss. Marcie said Mrs. Wendt was very clear: when a spot was free we have to decide right away. If we pass it up, then we move further down the list.

DONOVAN

Let's not get into lists, Ted.

EDWARD

I'm here now and I think you should decide. It's your decision. You say it, we'll do it. You're comfortable here, right mom?

HARRIET

I don't want to be anywhere near the The Bunnyman. That's why I like it here.

EDWARD

We know you like to be near Marcie.

HARRIET

He hides under bridges. He comes out when couples are doing other things. I don't miss the apartment, and I like to be further away from him. This suits me fine.

EDWARD

Marcie loves having you nearby.

DONOVAN

I don't think we're here to discuss Marcie.

HARRIET

Don't take her from me. There are too many bridges in New Jersey ... and Virginia has bridges, too. Sometimes you need to pull along-side the road on the parkway. That's when The Bunnyman is suddenly there. There's nothing to be done. He lies in wait.

EDWARD

Why does she remember that?

HARRIET

Bridges. An overpass.

DONOVAN

You're always in a car with one of us. Or the train.

HARRIET

The Daily News, for weeks they featured him.

EDWARD

Most of that is made up at the typewriter.

HARRIET

They found part of a bunny ear – a costume bunny ear. I never said it was an actual overgrown rabbit. I'm not a ...fantasia ... a fantasist!

EDWARD

You're right, mom. I remember. There was a the bunny suit guy. An assault.

DONOVAN

A series of assaults, apparently. Rabitt rage.

HARRIET

I think Jamie should come here for turkey. I know the Bunnyman is in New Jersey. He can stay in New Jersey. I don't want to go. James knows.

DONOVAN

We'll ask James when he gets here. Anytime now.

HARRIET

I'm not driving there. It's lost its charm. The woman in the woods. The Bunnyman. (*Takes EDWARD aside. DONOVAN returns to the photos.*) I'm perfectly happy to see my son, but I don't know what you're trying to accomplish.

EDWARD

The Meadows, mom. We need to decide.

HARRIET

Your young man is very successful. Makes mistakes like other men. You can't blame him from following your example. The apple. The tree.

DONOVAN

He's never followed my example.

HARRIET

This is not a day for decisions. You go see Mrs. Wendt. You do your business with her. I don't know why she is suddenly so important that you'd travel from Boston to meet with Mrs. Wendt on Saturday. Furthermore, you're apparently bringing James into it. I don't think you've thought through all this. Your judgment is clouded. A grown man changing his name. It won't make you younger.

DONOVAN

At least he didn't buy a sports car.

EDWARD

I didn't change my name. She just likes to call me Ted. It's not my professional name. I can prove it.

HARRIET

I'm not asking for evidence. I'm asking you to calm down and think about this whirlwind you've created. Despite your insistence, perhaps, this is not a good time to make a big decision. You're not yourself, Edward. The insurance salesman award got to your head.

DONOVAN

Ed doesn't sell insurance. He ensures the insurers are sure.

HARRIET

Let us review. I'm the woman who built an education. Who left, on her own, to the big city. I thrived there. An occupation. Friends. Started a family with a good man. God took him too soon. I saw to it that each of my children had the required benefits to take over their own lives. Which each has done. I know how the world works. I know to each woman comes a time for quiet. I gave back the apartment.

I gave back strolls under the city lights. I gave up Florence. I gave back your (*to EDWARD*) weekly phone calls. Your lunches when you were in town for business. I let go when you didn't keep your house in order. Now I have quiet. I can watch the seasons. I have reclaimed my crochet hook. Marcie knows when it is time for tea. You don't know about tea, or a trip to the dinner theatre. Or strawberry pancakes! You don't know what James understands. It's time you learn from James. He's his own man now. Not your underling. (*to DONOVAN*) Dear sweet boy. We understand each other. You just need a little course correction. Someone to remind you to behave. You don't mean any harm. I'll keep an eye on you .

DONOVAN

(*To EDWARD*) That was wonderful.

EDWARD

She knows how to work a room.

HARRIET

I think you two should figure out whatever it is that brought you here today. Please, bring my tea and my book.

(*As EDWARD gets her items, DONOVAN gestures for him to join him at the photos.*)

EDWARD

She doesn't need The Meadows. James and I talked about this last night. Marcie said whatever we decide.

DONOVAN

Don't speak for Marcie. She's being patient, but this is not her problem to solve.

EDWARD

She's an equal in the family.

DONOVAN

She's *like* a daughter. She's not the daughter.

EDWARD

I'm not trying to speak for her.

DONOVAN

Neither of us, nor James, can leave it to Marcie. It's not fair.

EDWARD

We're not talking about forever. It's not good for me to take her to Boston. My situation is ... different, has changed. I'm saying, don't rush to change. That includes staying here until a new spot opens.

DONOVAN

Time. Change. Now. Later. It's all the same to her, Ed.

EDWARD

She's knows the difference between before and after. The level of detail.

DONOVAN

Before and after, sure, but not today and tomorrow. She's confident about 40 years ago. She knows we don't have those details. But, Alphonso? The Bunnyman?

EDWARD

There was a Bunny Man.

DONOVAN

That had anything to do with us?

EDWARD

Not as far off as it sounds.

DONOVAN

Or James? Alphonso is a man from the 6th Floor. The 6th floor of what? Of where? She hasn't lived anywhere with a sixth floor since her first apartment in New York.

EDWARD

She's calm.

DONOVAN

Tea drinking. Knitting. We can see those things. It's what we don't know, Ted. It's what we're not doing for her. We don't even know that she needs. Social stimulation. Peers who share memories. The up every night with her is not sustainable for Marcie, for crissake. Sometimes a person needs professionals. Forgets to eat. Is that OK for a day? For two? We don't know.

EDWARD

She's harmless.

DONOVAN

It's gradual, steady.

EDWARD

She's content. She's been through enough change. Let her adjust.

DONOVAN

Ed, Ted - she thinks I'm your son.

EDWARD

That's happened before. I always thought is kind of funny.

DONOVAN

With total strangers, sure.

EDWARD

(He sifts through the pictures in the box.) What is this about selling insurance to Mrs. Wendt? What did you tell her?

DONOVAN

That we planned to see Mrs. Wendt at The Meadows.

HARRIET

What are you two up to now? You don't think it's all such a good idea? The big meeting with Mrs. Wendt.

EDWARD

When's the last time you talked to James, mom?

HARRIET

Yesterday. Last week. It was yesterday. Before.

EDWARD

You'd like to see James, wouldn't you?

HARRIET

What a question. Of course, I like to see James.

EDWARD

James is good at these things. Knows what's good for people. How to hear what someone isn't saying. How people feel. Right?

HARRIET

What are you getting at?

EDWARD

Just that James and I think Donovan is being a good son. Don't you think?

HARRIET

I'm the peach of his eye.

EDWARD

This is comfortable and it isn't crowded.

HARRIET

Is this about that "establishing residency" requirement? New York is New York.

DONOVAN

That's been settled. You're a New *Yah-keh*, through and through.

EDWARD

Being part of family. James said "the connections." Part of the on-going "story", he calls is.

HARRIET

James is good with a story. He knows about Bunnyman. He's from New Jersey.

DONOVAN

The family story. The stories you tell.

HARRIET

Marcie's the one who knows all these things.

EDWARD

(Selects a photo with mom and three sons.) Here's a fun one. It's the four of us.

HARRIET

I feel a test coming on. You don't give tests. He gives tests. Did you know he tests the tests? Evaluates them. Finds meaning.

EDWARD

Sure, I know about his tests. Where was this taken, mom? I don't recognize it.

(She considers the photo. Gets up. Paces a bit as she considers. EDWARD and DONOVAN remain at the bar. Suddenly she shows the photo to them. Beat.)

HARRIET

This is the story you will tell: You are just boys grown tall. Is what you are. I'm busy.

EDWARD

(To DONOVAN) See! It's fine. You're the one who needs patience. *(Kisses HARRIET on the cheek.)* I'm glad we took the time to assess the situation. *(to DONOVAN)* It's always good to see Marcie. I'll take a train back today. Maybe we didn't need to drag James all the way here.

DONOVAN

He's here any minute.

EDWARD

It'll be a nice visit. I'll call Mrs. Wendt. We'll take it up again at the next availability.

DONOVAN

Don't call Mrs. Wendt.

EDWARD

You're right. It's Saturday. It can wait until after the weekend.

(EDWARD exits. A pause.)

HARRIET

James always looked after you, didn't he?

DONOVAN

He did.

HARRIET

He saw to it you had a man in your life. A role model. The conversations a boy doesn't have with his mother. To show him the way forward. How to behave. What girls are like. Steady as she goes.

DONOVAN

Let's get your coat. And your purse. *(Helps her on with her coat. He tucks The Meadows admissions folder under his arm.)*

HARRIET

Out to lunch, are we?

DONOVAN

Yes. Remember the cream pies? Let's watch Edward sell insurance to Mrs. Wendt.

HARRIET

Yes. Let's do that. See a professional in action. He's good when he talks about numbers.

DONOVAN

Makes me believe I understand them.

HARRIET

How about James?

DONOVAN

He'll meet us at lunch. Any time now. Very soon. He'll tell a good story.

HARRIET

My project. My book. (*DONOVAN retrieves her crochet bag and her book.*)

DONOVAN

Right. Good idea.

HARRIET

There's no Bunnyman at cream pie, right?

DONOVAN

Not to worry. (*Kisses her forehead. Leads her up the stairs.*)

(End of play.)

Playwright's Statement

"Boys Grown Tall", by Timothy X. Troy

Dublin, 9 January 2023

Over the course of 2-3 years, a colleague of mine (not theatre related) often turned to me and said, "I have a story that would make a great one-act play." He'd give me the broad outline. I was intrigued. I'd nod. We'd move on to other topics. I was writing other plays, anyway. The third or fourth time a variation of this conversation happened I wondered, "As a non-theatre person, why does he keep talking about this story as a 'one-act' play?" I realized he had an intuitive sense that the one-act format condenses events into a very brief timeline – a whole life bears down into one critical life-altering moment. When I was between writing projects, I asked him to formally sit with me and recorded a couple interviews where I got the whole story. "Boys Grown Tall" grew out of those meetings where he opened the window of his family history to my care.

Over time, other themes embedded in his story took over my imagination. One theme was the fragility of memory. Another was how the contingencies of life – when and where each of us was born and how differently we experience broad historical events and family histories depends on our age and given circumstances. Finally, how might I generalize my own experience of caring for elderly parents into another person’s story? While working through the play, the particulars of my colleague’s story changed. My colleague’s family recognizes the broad outlines, but the specifics are altered, rearranged, details and the tone of core relationships wholly invented. Some aspects took on my own experience. Others took on the experience of other family and friends. What remains from the original story is the moment when a confused elderly mom clings to her authority, her sense of surety, and tells her grown sons, “You’re just boys grown tall.”

AUTHOR BIO: Timothy X. Troy (playwright & stage director) is the Hurvis Professor of Theatre and Drama at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. Regular teaching areas include acting, directing, script analysis, and playwrighting. Troy is a proud member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. As a director for plays, operas, musicals, and audio theatre Professor Troy devotes his role as a teacher to help students and audiences experience the stories that shape our lives. Troy’s playwrighting activities focus on how large social forces influence family relationships and our shared vision of the future. Professor Troy’s love for, and commitment to, travel began as a 16-year-old Rotary Exchange Student and continued to his sponsorship of a study-abroad program at the Gaiety School of Acting in Dublin. While serving as visiting professor at Samuel Beckett School of Drama, Trinity College-Dublin, and as a visiting professor at Lawrence’s London Centre, Troy is committed to helping his students learn about themselves and their culture by exploring the similarities and differences in other cultures and contexts. When he’s not making theatre Professor Troy enjoys crochet projects and playing Traditional Celtic music on his high D and (new!) low D tin whistles.

Currently, Troy is a Fulbright Scholar teaching playwriting and audio theatre in the School of English, Drama & Film at University College Dublin. His research project will result in his next play – an exploration of the anti-colonial struggle in Ireland (1919-1921) through experience of Daniel John Stapleton (1886-1968) who was a Kilkenny-based pharmacist by day and rebel munitions maker by night.