

Two Excerpts From

PANAMA

A Play

By Mike Folie

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ACT I

MAN sits in a chair on one side of a desk, waiting anxiously. WIFE, early-forties, can be seen sitting in the front passenger seat of a car, reading a magazine. DOCTOR enters, carrying a sign on a stand that says "The Diagnosis." HE places the sign prominently so that the audience can see it before sitting down on the opposite side of the desk. MAN leans in towards DOCTOR, focusing on HIM intently, waiting for the verdict, as the DOCTOR consults paperwork. *[Note: Parentheses within dialogue indicate where that line is overlapped by the next line of dialogue.]* Finally.

DOCTOR

Well, once again . . .

MAN

Yes? Yes?

DOCTOR

You're in great shape!

MAN

Yes!

DOCTOR

Tip-top.

MAN

Oh, I exercise every day.

DOCTOR

Excellent.

MAN

Eat right.

DOCTOR

It shows.

MAN

I take really, really good care of myself!

DOCTOR

I wish more of my patients would.

MAN

Really good!

(Pause, savoring it)

So I'm fit as a fiddle, eh?

DOCTOR

You'll live another thirty-five years, at least.

(The MAN's attitude changes suddenly from joy to suspicion and anger.)

MAN

What's that supposed to mean?

(The DOCTOR is taken aback by the sudden change in tone, but gamely tries to keep the conversation jovial.)

DOCTOR

It means, uh, you're so healthy, you'll probably live to be at least eighty years old.

MAN

And then what?

DOCTOR

Excuse me?

MAN

What happens after I'm eighty?

DOCTOR

All I'm saying is, you're . . . you're a very healthy (middle-aged man.)

MAN

Yeah, but what happens after I'm eighty?

DOCTOR

You could live to be ninety. Perhaps even a hundred!

MAN

And then what?

DOCTOR

Well, we, uh, we all have to go . . . sometime.

MAN

(Hit hard)

You mean . . . die?

DOCTOR

Some day, yes, but . . .

MAN

Even me?!

DOCTOR

Of course, "even you." Anyone can die, at any time, but . .

MAN

(Outraged, perhaps standing)

"At any time?! At any . . . !?" You mean . . . you mean I might not even get the eighty paltry years you just (promised me?!)

DOCTOR

But . . . you probably won't die, I mean, not for a (very long . . .)

MAN

(Very angry)

And when, exactly, were you planning on telling me all this?! Huh!? Doctor!?

DOCTOR

(At a loss, then)

Look, uh, are your parents still living?

MAN

My what?

DOCTOR

Your parents. Mom and Dad? Are they still alive?

MAN

How the hell should I know?! Wait. Yes! They're living! I think. In a desert. Someplace . . . hot.

DOCTOR

Well, you must know someone who's passed on. An uncle, or a grandparent?

MAN

Well, them! Sure! Of course. Them!

DOCTOR

And you are no different.

MAN

But I am different! I'm very different. I'm . . . I'm me.

DOCTOR

So?

MAN

Me?! Me!? I can't die! If I die that . . . that's the end!

DOCTOR

For you maybe, yes, but life does go on.

MAN

(Shocked to HIS core)

You mean -- without me!?

DOCTOR

Of course.

MAN

(Hyperventilating)

This just gets worse and worse!

DOCTOR

Please calm down.

MAN

You want me to be calm? You want calm? When I've just learned I'm going to die! Die!?

DOCTOR

We all die, sir!

MAN

(Enraged)

No! You die. You quack! Maybe you die! You! You die! But not me!

(HE attacks doctor, strangling him)

DOCTOR

Wait . . . !

MAN

Not me! No! You die! You! You die! I don't die! You! You die!

(The doctor dies. Harsh and discordant organ music. MAN drops the body and staggers off, like Frankenstein off to ravage the village. Organ music changes suddenly to spiritual as a man dressed and looking like JESUS CHRIST enters. MAN blunders right into HIM. Music out.)

MAN (CONT.)

Jesus Christ!

JESUS

(Bored and mechanical)

No, I'm a dentist. Open your mouth.

(MAN opens wide and JESUS peers in with the help of a small flashlight.)

MAN

(Mouth wide open)

Ut ooh ook ust ike esus! (*"But you look just like Jesus!"*)

JESUS

(Peering into MAN's mouth)

Yeah, yeah, I know. I look just like Jesus Christ. Lotta good it does me. I thought it might help business some if I dressed like Jesus, too. You know? "Jesus Saves -- Teeth!"

MAN

(Clinging to JESUS, desperately)

Can you help me, Jesus?!

JESUS

Only if you floss.

MAN

Can you help me live forever!?

JESUS

Well, uh . . . well no, (actually.)

MAN

I have to . . . I have to get out of town!

JESUS

You and me both, buddy. This "Jesus the Dentist" gig ain't cutting it.

(MAN reacts away from JESUS and runs toward the car.)

MAN

Let me go! Let me go!!

JESUS

(Calling after HIM)

Hey! If you come across any good Jesus jobs out there you give me a holler! Okay?
And don't forget to floss!

(MAN gets into the driver's seat next to WIFE and starts driving. SFX of car starting up. JESUS enters the DOCTOR's area and casually nudges the DOCTOR, who stands up. JESUS turns the sign around. On this side it reads "The Wife!" A YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN enter the stage and begin to hitchhike. THEY, too, carry a sign, the way hitchhikers often do, but we cannot see what is on it yet. JESUS and the DOCTOR exit, putting the "Wife" sign on the desk and rolling that off-stage with THEM, but leaving the chairs. JESUS whispers something to the DOCTOR and THEY both laugh loudly as THEY exit. Music out.)

MAN

(Driving, almost crying)

What a cruel, pathetic joke life is!

WIFE

(Still reading)

I know I'm planning to die some day.

MAN

Of course you're going to die! I'm counting on that. But me?!

WIFE

(Putting down magazine)

Now, now. We have a long drive ahead of us. I'm so delighted you've finally agreed to visit your parents.

MAN

(Distracted, checking the rearview mirror.)
I thought we should . . . get out of town for a while.

WIFE

Let's play a driving game!

MAN

We should have had children. Why didn't you give me any children, damnit!?

WIFE

Ooooh. I think you have to engage in sexual congress from time to time in order to have children, dear.

MAN

You do?

(There's just a hint of clenched-teeth tension beneath HER jovial tone)

WIFE

Oh, my yes indeed-y. The female egg must be quickened by the male sperm. I'm pretty darn sure about that.

MAN

Damn! The one decent, worthwhile thing a woman can do -- have children -- and it turns out they need a man's help to do even that! And when were you planning to spring this on me?! Huh?

WIFE

You're just having a mid-life crisis. I read all about it in my women's magazine. Here it is. "Fearful at Forty-Five -- Why Your Husband is Such a Royal Pain in the . . ."

MAN

Of course I'm having a mid-life crisis! It's because I just found out I have a "mid-life" that I'm in crisis, you idiot!

(We can see the hitchhiker sign now. It reads "Two Young People Hitchhiking")

WIFE

Oh, look, there's two young people hitchhiking. That's dangerous, you know.

(HE floors the accelerator, SFX: car speeding up.)

MAN

(Manic glee, giggling)
I'm going to hit them with my car.

WIFE

You will not!

(SFX: Car speeds up even more. The HITCHHIKERS stand directly in front of the car, smiling, with big, stupid grins on THEIR faces as the sound of the accelerating car gets louder and louder.)

MAN

Why should they live?! Why should they live if I have to die?!

WIFE

You stop this car this instant!

(SHE wrestles the wheel away from HIM and slams on the break. SFX: brakes squealing. The two hitchhikers run up to the car.)

YOUNG MAN

Thanks for stopping. We have to get to California right away!

YOUNG WOMAN

So we can learn how to be computer animators and control reality!

YOUNG MAN

Will you take us?

YOUNG WOMAN

We'll design a really gar reality for you!

MAN

(Screaming into THEIR faces)
You're going to die!

(Pause)

YOUNG MAN

(Snorts)
Yeah, right!

(YOUNG MAN chuckles, as if the idea were ludicrous; YOUNG WOMAN joins in. Do these YOUNG PEOPLE know something HE doesn't?)

MAN

Get in the car! Get in! We can take you as far as Arizona.

YOUNG WOMAN

(Sing-song, as THEY get in the back seat)

Oh! A my name is Alice and my husband's name is Al and we live in Arizona and we sell Apples!

WIFE

Oh, oh, yes! B my name is Beth and I live in Baltimore and my husband's name is Bob and we sell . . . bobcats.

(MAN begins to drive.)

MAN

Your name isn't Beth.

WIFE

(Another hint of tension under the smile)

We don't sell bobcats either, do we, Darling?

EXCERPT NO. 2

GRANDPA AND GRANNIE, WHO MAY OR MAY NOT BE MAN'S PARENTS, REHEARSE FOR THEIR LOCAL AMATEUR THEATRE PRODUCTION OF ENDGAME, BY SAMUAL BECKETT.

(GRANDPA and GRANNIE stand up in the trash bins, popping out of them. Both should be played by young actors made up to look old with bad wigs and obvious make-up, and GRANNIE should be played by a man in drag speaking in a high, crackle-y-old voice.)

GRANDPA

This is stupid. I want to play golf.

GRANNIE

You can play golf anytime. How often do you get to be in a play by Mr. Samuel Beckett?

(THEY each pull out copies of ENDGAME from inside the trash bins.)

GRANDPA

This isn't the kind of play a retirement community theatre should be doing. We should be doing a Neil Simon play or . . . or a musical. Like CATS!

GRANNIE

Oh, sure! Can you just picture any one of those arthritic old geezers trying to crawl around like a pussy cat?

GRANDPA

We could do THE OLD COUPLE.

GRANNIE

That's THE ODD COUPLE, stupid. ENDGAME is perfect for the Geriatric Players. Only one of the characters has to move around at all.

GRANDPA

But this play is absurd!

GRANNIE

Yes! It's Theatre of the Absurd.

GRANDPA

When I go to the theatre, I don't want to see absurd, meaningless rubbish. I want something that makes sense, damn it!

GRANNIE

The Director says the theatre should reflect life, and life is absurd and painful and meaningless. So that's why we have to do plays that are absurd and painful and meaningless.

GRANDPA

Why can't I just play golf? Golf is absurd and painful and meaningless.

GRANNIE

Besides, Mr. Beckett was a war hero, just like you.

GRANDPA

Really? The guy that wrote this stuff was in the war?

GRANNIE

Yes, indeed-y.

GRANDPA

The Big One? Not one of those stupid little phony wars they have nowadays?

GRANNIE

He was in the French Underground.

GRANDPA

A French resistance fighter, huh? Oh-la-la.

GRANNIE

No, he was Irish.

GRANDPA

But you just said . . .

GRANNIE

He suffered, okay! That's all you have to know. He suffered!

GRANDPA

I hope he's still suffering, making me go through this, standing around in a garbage can spouting obtuse bullshit when all I want is to play golf.

GRANNIE

Let's just practice and get it over with. You knock.

(Pause)

GRANNIE (CONT.)

Knock!

(HE knocks)

GRANNIE (CONT.)

"What is it, my pet?"

(Pause)

GRANDPA

You have more to say (here.)

GRANNIE

I know that! I'm pausing, damnit! It says "pause" so I'm pausing!

GRANDPA

You don't have to pause every time some stupid playwright writes "pause."

(Pause)

GRANDPA (CONT.)

Or do you?

GRANNIE

Well when Mr. Beckett says "pause," you damn well better pause or you'll be arrested by the police!

GRANDPA

Oh, come on! Who told you that?

GRANNIE

The Director. He said that under the old East German government, Bertolt Brecht would put on a black shirt and a little beret and he'd come around and he'd shoot you for it.

GRANDPA

I'm starting to wish somebody would just shoot me.

GRANNIE

So you just wait for my bleedin' pause. We'll try again. Knock.

(HE knocks)

GRANNIE (CONT.)

"What is it, my pet?"

(Pause. SHE gives HIM a dangerous look. Finally)

GRANNIE (CONT.)

"Time for love?"

GRANDPA

Not bloody likely while we're stuck in these things.

GRANNIE

Will you say your line!?

GRANDPA

"Were you asleep?"

GRANNIE

"Oh, no!"

(Pause. GRANDPA is reluctant to say the next line.)

There's no pause written there.

GRANDPA

"Kiss me."

GRANNIE

"We can't."

GRANDPA

Thank God for that, anyway.

GRANNIE

That does it!

GRANDPA

Okay, okay! Uh, "Try."

(THEY strain towards each other. THEIR garbage bins fall over and THEY fall out of them as they roll. As THEY extricate themselves and stand up, there is a knock.)

GRANNIE

What is it, my pet?

GRANDPA

That's not some stupid Theatre of the Absurd knock. That's a real knock.

GRANNIE

Oh, it must be the Director. He said he was going to come over and help us rehearse.

GRANDPA

Oh, please, no!

GRANNIE

Come in!

(JESUS enters quickly, strikes a dramatic pose.)

JESUS

Ta-daaaaaa!

(HE looks around, confused.)

JESUS (CONT.)

Uh . . . Oops! Sorry.

(Whispers to GRANDPA and GRANNIE as HE exits.)

JESUS (CONT.)

Keep going! Go on! You're doing a great job!

(JESUS exits. There's another knock.)

GRANNIE

Come in!

(MAN, WIFE, YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN enter.)

MAN

Dad! Mom! Hi! Howyadoing?! Give me all your money!

WIFE

Shh! You can ask them for money later. We have to visit first.

MAN

Why?

WIFE

Because it's polite! Because they're your parents and you haven't seen them for years and years.

GRANDPA

Who are you, some gang of thieves? Well I've got a surprise for you.

(GRANDPA exits)

YOUNG MAN

Got anything to eat, Grannie?

GRANNIE

We've got cheese! Want some cheese!?

YOUNG WOMAN

Remember that Monty Python bit about the cheese shop that doesn't have any cheese?

GRANNIE

Well we've got cheese!

YOUNG WOMAN

Got'eny Brie?

GRANNIE

Velveeta?

WIFE

Oh, God, yes! Good! Very good! Thank God! Finally! Now. Let's all sit down and have very small things to eat and drink coffee and tea from tiny little, precious cups and talk and talk and talk about . . . about what different things cost now and how much cheaper everything used to be!