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The Grown-Up

Jordan Harrison

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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THE GROWN-UP was first produced by the Actors Theatre of Louisville (Les Waters, Artistic Director) in Kentucky as part of the 2014 Humana Festival. The performance was directed by Ken Rus Schmoll, with sets by David Zimmerman, costumes by Janice Pytel, lights by Paul Toben, and sound and original music by Lindsay Jones. The Production Stage Manager was Katie Shade. The cast was as follows:

ACTOR A. Matthew Stadelmann
ACTOR B. Brooke Bloom
ACTOR C. Paul Niebanck
ACTOR D. Tiffany Villarin
ACTOR E. Chris Murray
ACTOR F. David Ryan Smith

CHARACTERS

ACTOR A – Kai (*rhymes with eye*)

ACTOR B – Anna Bell / Lane Heatherette

ACTOR C – Grandfather / First Mate / Barry / Minister

ACTOR D – Grandma / Rosie / Wedding Guest / Paula

ACTOR E – Mr. See / Wedding Planner / Award Ceremony Emcee

ACTOR F – Josef the Fisherman / Steven / Cater Waiter / Miss McGinn

AUTHOR'S NOTES

There is a strange kind of blindness to this play, not unlike a radio play. Hopefully this can be liberating; we can go anywhere – a tall ship in a storm, a crowded ballroom – because we don't have to see these places realized. We can be any age. I suspect that there is very little on stage.

All of the actors do narrating duty. Narrated lines are *set in italics* for the sake of readability, but they are very much within the action and momentum of the scene. They are not a step outside; they are not direct-address.

Because the costume changes are minimal and the characters plentiful, the actors are always actors in a sense – which is maybe why it seemed right to identify them as Actor A, Actor B, etc.

I.

- A. It doesn't *look* very valuable,
B. *you say*.
A. Looks like glass.
C. Crystal,
B. *your grandfather says, running his fingers over the doorknob*.
C. You can tell by the way the light is trapped. How it's split into rainbows, here?
A. Oh yeah,
B. *you lie. You don't want him to know you can't see. There's something wrong with people who can't see magic*.
C. It's older than this house. It's older than me. It's even older than your grandma.
D. Older than Grandma? Impossible!,
B. *Grandma says. And back to her knitting*.
C. I reckon it's older than this whole country.
A. How do you know?
B. *You squint but it still looks like glass*.
C. The man who built this house—When I was your age he was my age, if you follow. Real geezer, with one bad eye the color of an iceberg.
B. *Grandfather's eyes pass over the old ship's wheel mounted on the wall*.
C. He was just an ordinary fisherman, but long before, he'd been a cabin boy on a tallship. That's how he came across it.
A. The ship was carrying doorknobs?
C. Treasure, from the Silk Road. Spices, incense. *Jewels*,
B. *he adds, strategically. Spices are abstract to a ten-year-old, but jewels—*

- C. (*To A.*) They figured to make a fortune, but half of them died on the way here, from scarlet scurvy.
- D. Fever.
- C. What?
- D. Scarlet fever.
- C. You weren't there.
- A. Does scarlet scurvy make you scarlet?
- C. Not anymore, thank god. They put an end to it long before you were born.
- B. *And you're glad to hear it, though the idea of a disease disappearing altogether is somehow troubling—like your favorite TV show ending, or a whole species ending, or you ending.*
- C. Anyhow—
- B. *Grandfather lights his pipe—*
- C. The old sailor said the doorknob was part of his ship, once. You know all those ships had a lady on the prow, a chesty lady.
- D. A mermaid—
- C. A chesty mermaid.
- D. George, don't say "chesty."
- C. What should I say? Popular?
- B. *Grandma drops a stitch.*
- D. Look what you made me do.
- C. Now this ship wasn't just any ship...
- A. It was a pirate ship.
- C. How do you know?
- A. Why else would it have a story about it.
- B. *Grandfather doesn't like how certain you are.*
- C. Maybe it wasn't a pirate ship after all.
- A. No, it was!
- C. Maybe it was a tugboat.
- A. (*Pleading.*) It *was* a pirate ship, it was!

- C. (*Relenting.*) So it was. But before they could reach Portsmouth—when they were out in the deepest part of the ocean, the ship was eaten whole by a great wave.
- D. I thought you said scarlet fever.
- C. First fever, then the wave.
- D. Very unlucky pirates,
- B. *Grandma says.*
- C. The unluckiest.
- B. *Even at age ten, you sense there's something fun for them in these little battles.*
- C. Can't you just imagine all those silks and doubloons sinking to the ocean floor? What a goddamn waste. And the hell of it was—
- D. George—
- C. The heck of it was, the only part of that whole great ship that survived, the only thing that washed ashore was the big round crystal in the eye of the chesty mermaid on the prow. And do you know where that eye ended up?
- B. *You look over at the doorknob.*
- A. No way!
- B. *And he's got you now. There's a little itch down the back of your neck like the fingernail of a ghost.*
- A. What's so special about a doorknob?
- B. *you say, covering.*
- C. (*With mystic intrigue.*) It's a doorknob to anywhere.
- A. A doorknob to anywhere? What's that supposed to mean?
- C. It means if ever you're feeling a little bored with your smart-ass ten-year-old self; if ever you're getting tired of playing gin rummy with your sister; if ever you're feeling like summer is going altogether too slow, then you just go over and grip that doorknob very hard with both hands—
- D. George, he'll think you're serious.

- C. Just pull 'til it pops clean off. Then you stick that knob on any door you want, and the second the door opens you'll be someplace else.
- A. Where?
- C. That's the catch.
- A. There's *always* a catch,
- B. *you say, flopping back onto the couch in a way that makes Grandfather narrow his eyes, wondering if you aren't a future homosexual.*
- C. The catch, since you asked, is that you can't choose where the doorknob will take you. The doorknob doesn't care about time and space, life or death. Death doesn't trouble it. You could end up a thousand miles away, or a hundred years ago. You could end up somewhere that will make you beg for your little sister and gin rummy.
- D. Stop scaring the boy.
- A. I'm not scared.
- B. *Yes you are.*
- C. You're very young. You could stand to be a little scared.
- B. *Some of the light and love seems to leave his eyes, but you're not sure what's replaced it.*
- A. If it's a magic doorknob, then how come I've seen Grandma open that closet a million times and there's nothing in it but placemats and napkins and stuff?
- C. That's on account of it's the Safety Door.
- A. The Safety Door?
- C. Like neutral for a car. It's the one door where you can put the doorknob when you want it to be just a doorknob. The one door where its powers don't work.
- D. How convenient,
- B. *Grandmother says. She looks up from her knitting, hearing footsteps.*
- (**ACTOR D** looks at **ACTOR B** for the first time.
ACTOR B is now ANNA BELL.)

- D. Well look who's here, Kai. If it isn't your poor little sister, looking for a friend.
- B. Gin rummy?
- A. Not now.
- E. *Anna Bell always wins at gin rummy. Always.*
- B. Why not now?
- A. I'm talking to Grandpa.
- B. What about?
- A. You're not old enough.
- B. *(A second opinion.)* Grandpa?
- C. I'm afraid he's right.
- E. *(To A.) You and Grandfather share a look. You are never so close as when you're leaving Anna Bell out.*
- B. Whatever it is, I bet it's stupid.
- D. Yes, dear. It is stupid.
- B. Why does Kai keep looking at that door?
- D. Never mind that.
- Sit down and I'll teach you the garter stitch.

II.

(The FISHERMAN stands under a lamppost. It is raining lightly. ACTOR A stands outside of the light as he narrates:)

- A. *An old Fisherman squints into the darkness.*
- F. Hello?
- A. *There's someone out there, just beyond his vision. He could see who if it weren't for his one bad eye the color of an iceberg.*
- (The FISHERMAN tunes a little pocket radio that plays a sea shanty:)*

RADIO.

ARE YOU MISSIN' THE SEA?
SOMETIMES LIKE YOUR MOTHER

ARE YOU MISSIN' THE SEA?
 SOMETIMES NOT AT ALL
 ARE YOU MISSIN' THE SEA?
 LIKE A LIMB THAT YOU LOST
 ARE YOU MISSIN' THE WAY
 IT MAKES YOU FEEL SMALL.

(He turns the knob on the radio and finds a different station.)

OH YOU BATTEN THE STAYSAIL AND GAZE AT THE STARS
 AND WONDER, ARE WE MEANT TO SEE THAT FAR...

(This one seems to stir up bad memories. He turns the knob. Another song:)

STORM A-COMING TONIGHT,
 LET EVERY MAN KNOW.
 SWING LEFT, SWING RIGHT
 HITCH YOUR HAMMOCK UP TIGHT
 SWING HIGH, SWING LOW
 SWEET DREAMS OF A GIRL IN A RED TROUSSEAU.

(The FISHERMAN tries to see who's out there in the darkness. Squinting in the direction of ACTOR A:)

F. Anybody out there?

A. No answer.

F. Come say hello if you want.

(Beat.)

(Muttering, giving up.) Be a nice change.

III.

B. Gin!

E. cries Anna Bell. She's won the last six games.

A. I don't believe you.

E. She shows you her cards.

B. *(Showing him the win.)* One, two, three.

E. She smiles. Her teeth are black with licorice.

B. Play again?

A. Let me win this time?

B. No.

A. Then no.

B. (*Whining.*) There's two whole hours to dinner.

A. We could play something else.

B. Like what.

A. How about *Grossest Thing You Can Think Of*. Or *Where Did My Eyelids Go*.

B. You always win those games.

A. Or *Find My Booger*. I'll give you a hint—it's under your pillow.

B. Mom, Kai won't play normal!

A. (*To B.*) Shut up!

E. *It might be the most penetrating thing she's ever said: Kai won't play normal.*

B. Mom! Kai told me to shut up!

A. Shut up!

E. *You peek into the doorknob room, which is also your grandparents' sitting room. Empty now.*

D. *Grandma is cooking supper.*

C. *Grandfather is puttering around the garage.*

B. I'm bored.

E. *You get an idea.*

A. How 'bout we play hide-and-seek? You can hide first.

B. That's how you always get rid of me when you want to get rid of me.

A. I promise, Anna Bell,

E. *you lie.*

A. Anna Bell, my favorite only sister, I promise I'll come find you.

B. Okay, count to a hundred.

A. Fifty.

B. That's too short!

- A. One,
- E. *you say, and she's off and running. Off to the toy chest in the attic, her favorite hiding place. Never mind you've found her there before.*
- B. *(Heartbreakingly, all she really wants is to be found.)*
- E. *And there's nothing worse than giving her what she wants.*
- A. Two, three, four...
- E. *You make your voice a little louder to cover the fact that you're slipping into the next room. Reverse Doppler.*
- A. Five! Six!
- C. *Your hand on the crystal doorknob now, the doorknob to anywhere.*
- E. *Does it give off a faint glow, or is it just your imagination?*
- D. *You pull it off the safety door with a satisfying pop.*
- A. Seven! Eight!
- C. *Pick a door, any door...*
- D. *Front door?*
- C. *Nah*
- A. No
- E. *Maybe.*
- D. *The front door has little glass windows. You can see the sunny day beyond, the climbing tree, Anna Bell's purple plastic ponies mouldering on the lawn.*
- C. *Yes, this door. Not a crooked little gnomish door, but an everyday door: The perfect test for a magic doorknob.*
- A. Nine! Ten!
- E. *You put the knob on the door—*
- D. *It slides over the real one with magic ease—*
- C. *The knob turns in your hand, and the door opens*
- B. *Kai? You were up to ten and you stopped.*
- Kai?
- C. *And you step on through.*

(Continuous into...)

IV.

E. (*Cordial.*) Kai!

F. *You enter the bright office.*

E. Welcome.

F. *Big desk with a man behind it. Sun in your eyes not his.*

E. Sorry to make you wait.

A. Oh no, it wasn't—It was actually good to have a little breather after the traffic, which was—

E. Yeah, welcome to L.A. How long were you waiting?

A. It was my fault, I got here early, so.

E. Yeah you shouldn't do that in this town.

A. I shouldn't?

E. Looks low on the totem pole.

A. Trying too hard.

E. Something like that. Another thing you shouldn't do is pace outside the TV executive's window for twenty minutes practicing your pitch to thin air.

A. You saw that?

F. *Shit.*

E. I was trying not to.

C. *Shit.*

E. Relax, Kai. Can I call you Kai, Kai?

A. Sure.

E. Just relax. Bonnie warned me I was getting an 18-carat New York City neurotic.

A. 24-carat.

E. Hah, whatever. Bonnie sure can pick 'em.

A. Bonnie's great.

E. She's got a real eye for writers. Or is it an ear.

A. Both maybe.

E. She said you were like the new Woody Allen but more, you know...

A. Waspy?

E. No. Woody Allen but with more...

- A. (*Off his gesture.*) *Cojones.*
- E. What? What's that?
- A. Balls in Spanish.
- E. That's it—Woody Allen with balls.
- F. *Silence.*
- A. Yeah, Bonnie's great.
- E. So you wanna go ahead and tell me this thing of yours?
Bonnie says you're cookin' up something special.
- A. Actually, do you guys have any coffee?
- E. (*Preposterous.*) "Do we have coffee." (*Into intercom, but not miming this:*) Rosie, our writer friend wants to know if we have any coffee. (*Back to A.:*) We have a freezer full of Acid Reflux Roast from Intelligentsia. Know that place?
- A. No.
- E. You should never admit to not-knowing in this town.
- A. Oh, sorry.
- E. And never apologize. Kidding!
- A. Ha
- D. Milk and sugar?
- A. Oh, no thanks
- E. Thanks, Rosie
- A. Thanks.
- E. So now you're all parked, you're all coked up on that –
- A. Getting there –
- E. And you've done a little dance outside my window. Any more stalling you wanna do?
- A. Well I just—ha, that's good—I would really just love to hear what you guys do here first. I have a few different ideas so I don't wanna just throw spaghetti against the wall, you know? I wanna hear what you guys are into.
- E. First of all, there's no "into," okay? That's what you literary types have to remember. This isn't personal. We're not "into," we're "about."
- A. What are you about?

- E. Cops, doctors, and lawyers. That's the brand, that's what works for us. You can slice up the series in syndication, shuffle it every which way and Judy Housewife doesn't care if she's watching season three, nine or seventeen, so long as there's a guy in a trench coat looking at some bones. His haircut might change but that's about it. We call it "counter-context programming." Say it for me.
- A. I'd rather not.
- E. ("Really?") You're not gonna say it for me.
- A. Counter-context programming.
- E. See? That wasn't so bad.
- A. Great. So, should I just? —
- E. No time like the present.
- A. Ha. (*Three descending notes:*) *Duh-dah-dum.*
- E. Yeah, I know that, that's *Psycho*.
- A. Actually I think *Psycho* is *Ree-ree-ree-ree*. I was doing more like classic Lon Chaney horror I guess, with a soupçon of *Jaws*.
- E. This guy's a real movie buff.
- A. Well, yeah.
- E. (*Lightly condescending.*) No, it's great.
- A. So I've been rolling this idea around in my head a lot
- E. Good, good...
- A. And I mean it's kind of a guilty pleasure but highbrow. Kind of a *Pirates of the Caribbean* meets *Quantum Leap*, but not at all '80s. Very current, good hair... Bonnie told me period is out, so.
- E. Period's the worst. Isn't it, Rosie.
- D. Hate.
- A. Is she gonna keep listening in?
- E. That a problem?
- A. I guess not.
- E. So: *Quantum Leap* plus pirates
- A. Well the hero is this guy who's like the opposite of a pirate. Like the guy from *Sideways*, whatshisname

- E. Oh I love him
- A. But with more sex appeal
- E. (*Obviously.*) Yeah.
- A. But still, you know, normal
- E. Rick something
- A. (“No.”) Something like that
- E. What’s the guy’s name Rosie
- D. Paul Giamatti
- E. *Giamatti*. Tip of my tongue.
- A. And he plays this guy who gets time-jumped back
- E. *There’s* Quantum Leap
- A. He has to right a wrong from his family’s past or something
- E. (*Liking this more.*) Okay, okay. Revenge is stupid right now.
- A. Revenge is “stupid”?
- E. Oh sorry, that means “hot.” I see how that could be confusing.
- A. So our guy, he ends up back on a 19th century pirate ship –
- E. Why a pirate ship?
- A. (*He realizes he doesn’t know.*) I guess I just like pirates.
- E. Stop. (*The best idea ever:*) What if they were *modern* pirates, like Somali pirates.
- A. I don’t think so
- E. But you said not period
- A. Just trust me on this. So our hero finds himself in this life that’s not his own—He has to man the crow’s nest, he has to survive a shipwreck, maybe he gets himself a parrot
- E. This is TV we’re talking about?
- A. Yeah, why
- E. Feels Feature to me. Does it feel Feature to you Rose?
- D. Feels feature.

E. See?

A. Feels feature why?

E. Time stuff is easier to pull off on the big screen. Big canvas, bright colors. Like *Jacuzzi Time Flux*, you see that?

A. (*Politically.*) I saw the ads.

E. That thing set records. (*Significantly.*) On the big screen.

A. I was kind of seeing one-hour drama. Well, dramedy.

E. That's a word we like. That's a good word here.

A. As I was saying the pirate is kind of a sad-sack, like an office worker, a janitor

E. (*Helpfully.*) A writer

A. Yeah—*Hey*

E. Kidding, go on.

A. Say, what's that on your desk?

E. What, the paperweight?

A. Is it glass?

E. Crystal, I think. My last assistant gave it to me.

A. I saw something like that once. I don't know where.

E. Nice girl, totally burned out on me. That's how it goes with these girls. They come in all ready to grab the world by the—what was that word?

A. *Cojones*

E. Ready to kick the world in the *cojones*, but then they just (*He makes a gesture for disappearing in a puff of smoke.*) You still listening in, Rose?

D. Sure am, Mr. See.

E. Don't burn out on me, 'kay Rosie girl?

D. Not the plan, Mr. See.

E. Isn't she great?

A. Mr. See, how old do I look to you?

E. Early-late twenties I'd say, but your skin's good for a writer. Bonnie said you could pass for late-early twenties, and she wasn't wrong.

A. (*Almost to himself.*) I was talking to my grandfather—it was yesterday. It was today. I was ten.

E. You okay, Kai? You look confused.

A. What did he tell me. “If you’re ever bored...”

E. Could be the coffee—Not everyone can handle the Reflux Roast. Right Rosie?

(**ROSIE** is strangely paralyzed—like an actor who’s forgotten her lines.)

Rosie, you make the coffee too strong again?

(*Still no answer.*)

A. (*With new resolve.*) I know what this is.

E. Again with the paperweight.

A. It’s not a paperweight.

E. Are you *trying* to throw this meeting? Or do they like bullshit back in New York?

A. I went through a door. How did I forget?

E. Don’t touch that!

A. That must be part of it—the forgetting

E. This isn’t coffee. Lemme guess: you’re the new kid in town, you snort a few uppers, don’t know how to handle it—

A. (*Piecing it together, in his own world.*) I’m a boy, I’m ten. I’m playing gin rummy with my sister.

E. Rosie, get security. Rosie?

A. I’ll go back. Maybe if I turn it the opposite way—

E. Put the doorknob DOWN.

A. I thought you said it was a paperweight.

F. *Silence.*

E. Kai, / listen—

A. (*Overlapping.*) Stay away from me.

C. *You move toward the door.*

E. Whatever’s on the other side of that door, it’s not your sister playing gin rummy. It’s not your grandfather and his pipe. It’s farther down the path—infinately worse.

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