Acting Edition

Sneaky

by William S. Yellow Robe, Jr.

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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Rather than altering the original work and speculating on Mr. Yellow Robe's authorial intent, we decided to present this play as we found it. We believe this decision best honors Mr. Yellow Robe's creative process and authorial intent while acknowledging that he did not have the opportunity to make final edits.

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CHARACTERS

ELDON ROSE – In his early 30s, the middle brother of the family

FRANK ROSE – In his mid-30s, the eldest son

KERMIT ROSE – In his early 30s, the baby of the family

JACK KENCE – A white male in his early 40s, the second generation owner of a funeral home

SETTING

A yard outside the Rose house. Jack Kence's funeral home.
The clearing of meadow.

NOTE ON CASTING

Native characters should always be played by Native actors. The production must know whether the Native actor is an enrolled member of their tribe or of descent, and if they live their life in community as a Native person, before casting. In no instance should someone who claims to be a Native actor but who has no tribal affiliation be cast in one of these roles.

Scene One

(Place: In the yard outside the house.)

(Time: Evening.)

(The wind is softly blowing. **FRANK** *and* **ELDON** *are by a fire that is slowly burning out. There are a few small boxes around the* **BROTHERS**.*)*

FRANK. What do you think?

ELDON. I don't know.

(Pause.)

Yeah. I guess so.

FRANK. We did round everything up?

ELDON. Yeah…yeah. I did.

(Pause.)

What about the old blue steamer trunk?

FRANK. I found it in the root cellar.

ELDON. Too bad. Hey, what about those boxes of sewing patterns? Them too?

FRANK. Yeah. I got them, too.

ELDON. The pictures?

FRANK. Not all of them.

ELDON. Good.

FRANK. I kept some of them. Here, take a look.

*(***FRANK** *removes a small cigar box from a bigger box and hands it to* **ELDON**. **ELDON** *eagerly goes through it.)*

She doesn't want anyone to have these. Burn them when you're done.

ELDON. The Smithsonians would want these…and this one, and that one – damn! You think we did right?

FRANK. Yeah, just like when the old man passed away. Did the same thing, but at a different spot.

*(***FRANK** *takes a bible from a box, and* **ELDON** *spots it.)*

I guess we could…

ELDON. Don't throw the Bible on the fire, Frank! Jesus.

*(***ELDON** *takes the bible.)*

Hey – you remember? Colleen Hammer came driving up and tried to get the old man's rifle – the octagon .22?

FRANK. Yeah. The way she came driving up with all those wooden apple boxes in the back of her old white Ford. Her small, squinty eyes looking around the place. And that greasy apron she wears, black spots on her dress.

*(***FRANK** *laughs.)*

We used to tease you about her. We told you she was your bride, picked out for you.

ELDON. Quit teasing me like that. No way. Not that bad. Oh yeah, oh yeah. She said her "cuzin" let her have the rifle. And all the time it was burning with the rest of Dad's stuff. I thought she was going to scream when you told her if she wanted it, to go and get it. The fire had melted the barrel into a U shape.

(Pause.)

Where is Colleen now, I wonder? I thought she would show up by now.

FRANK. Probably mad about something.

ELDON. Mad? What for? Because of the…

FRANK. You didn't marry her.

ELDON. Damn you, Frank. You're always…

FRANK. I'm just kidding you, Eldon. It's too early yet. The news hasn't gotten around. When the word does, she'll be stopping by. She'll come in that old Ford. Probably with a bunch of cardboard boxes in her trunk and plenty of her grandchildren to help her with her haul.

*(***KERMIT** *enters. He is singing and carries a small paper sack. He sets the sack near the porch, takes a bottle from the sack and drinks, then he sets the bottle down and goes to the fire.)*

It'll be just a matter of time. She'll come waddling into the yard like a fat duck to water. I don't like…hey!

(Pause.)

Kermit? Why don't you go into the house and stretch out?

KERMIT. Ma?

ELDON. Oh Christ…yeah! Kermit, you look tired.

(Turns his back.)

KERMIT. Momma? Oh…momma…

(Stands at the fire.)

FRANK. Come on, Kermit. You need the rest.

(Grabs **KERMIT***'s arm.)*

FRANK. Let's go.

(He starts to lead **KERMIT**, *but* **KERMIT** *breaks free and staggers.)*

KERMIT. No…no! I can do it by myself.

ELDON. Hey, ringy! He's only trying to help you.

KERMIT. I can do it… I can do it! Fuck!

(He mumbles, staggers to the porch, and sits, then takes out the bottle and drinks. **FRANK** *watches as* **ELDON** *lifts some of the pictures from the box and sticks them inside his shirt.)*

ELDON. How is he? Is he going to get real ringy on us? *(Softly.)* Frank? Frank?

FRANK. Speak up! He'll be all right.

ELDON. Are you sure?

KERMIT. Yeah! Don't lose any sleep, El. I'm not going to die. I can hear you, even though I don't want to… goddamn it! Paw-uk-nah-uk!

ELDON. Was he cussing at me again? Huh? I hate it when he cusses at me in Assiniboine.

FRANK. Don't worry, it's only drunk talk. Hey – but you'll have one hell of a hangover tomorrow.

(No reply from the **BROTHERS**.*)*

Christ. I remember drinking with him four years ago. He met me on a Friday night at the Long Horn. Denise took the kids and her mother to bingo.

*(***KERMIT** *gets up and walks over to the* **BROTHERS**, *trying to hide the bottle on his way over.)*

KERMIT. You bet, partner! What yah guys doing?

FRANK. I wasn't planning anything. Then I started drinking shots of whiskey and had a beer chaser. Glad people told me, otherwise I would've forgotten. Anyways, he came over and sat with me. And then it was park-the-car time. What was it you were drinking?

KERMIT. Top secret – mustn't tell. It was muscatel.

(He laughs and offers **FRANK** *a drink on the side.)*

FRANK. No thanks. When the Long Horn closed we got two cases of beer and a jug of wine and went to a house party – it was a house, anyway. We finished the beer and wine and I passed out.

KERMIT. Wussed out.

FRANK. Saturday afternoon we woke up, hot and sweaty, in the truck. Bought another case of beer and went to – Clem's bar, I think? Yeah. And we drank until Clem's closed. We drove around and finished off the case. I quit drinking Sunday, and I think this guy went drinking until next Sunday.

KERMIT. Hey, hey, hey, Frank. You wussed out on me.

ELDON. See! This is what I mean.

KERMIT. Oh shit. You mad? Fuck! Good time, huh Frank?

(Pats **FRANK** *on the back and looks at* **ELDON**. *He goes back to the porch.)*

My brother.

ELDON. Now that Mom is dead he'll…

FRANK. No, no…it's up to him. One way or another, he'll decide for himself like I did.

ELDON. Are we going to have a feast after the funeral?

FRANK. Yeah. Claire said she would do it. The kids will help. Aunty Babs, Joan, and Ava said they would help, too.

ELDON. When are we going to have the funeral?

FRANK. Wednesday.

ELDON. Why Wednesday? Hell that's a four-day wait. Hell that's two days after we're supposed to have the feast!

FRANK. I know.

ELDON. Kence just wants it on Wednesday 'cause he can make more money. Keeping her in storage like a piece of furniture.

FRANK. He's the only mortician in a hundred miles. Hell – I don't like him, but he's the only one nearby.

(Pause.)

Hey!

ELDON. What?

FRANK. Why don't we bury Mom ourselves?

ELDON. You mean, let Kence prepare the body and we dig the hole?

FRANK. I've been thinking. We don't need to put all those chemicals and preservatives in her body. Why preserve her dead body like she was a damn beet?

ELDON. I don't know, Frank…

FRANK. Well, I sure the hell do.

ELDON. Yeah, but Father Crane will be pissed if he doesn't get to pray over her.

FRANK. To hell with Crane. He was there when she died. He had a chance to sprinkle his water on her and pray over her.

ELDON. If you think about it that way…

FRANK. Remember when I used to work for Kence Senior? He told me the secret for funerals, El. You want to know what they are? One – you need a dead body.

Two – a hole in the ground. Three – transportation to get the body to the hole in the ground. Four – start a bank account.

ELDON. No…uh – uh…no…no…

FRANK. Don't worry, I'll take care of you.

(Pause.)

We have a right to do this. Even Kermit.

ELDON. Not that drunk.

FRANK. We're all family.

ELDON. But what about Dad's relatives?

FRANK. We did right by Dad – they'll think we did the same with Mom. We have to stick together and ride this one out. The others – they'll figure it out.

ELDON. Frank… Frank…

(Pause.)

You're just… You're really serious about this?

FRANK. Damn right I am.

ELDON. I thought you were just joking.

FRANK. No. And I'm not doing it because I'm trying to get out of Kence's fee. We'll give him his money when we're finished. I want us to bury her. Not a stranger and with his strange ways.

ELDON. How will we do it?

FRANK. She's always talked about being buried in the traditional way, remember?

ELDON. Yeah? Where are we going to start shoveling?

FRANK. Nooo… Eldon, no – not their way, our traditional way. Not buried in the ground. Bury her with the wind, in a tree.

ELDON. What about her decaying smell, in the wind?

FRANK. If you're worried about the smell, we can burn the body after the funeral. Just like in the old days, no one will find it. We can find an old tree and place wood around it and set them on fire.

ELDON. Then, why don't we just have her cremated? I'll pay for part of the cost.

FRANK. You're not listening. It isn't the money that's important. Way back when, it was the responsibility of the family to bury their own.

ELDON. That was a long time ago. Two or three hundred years ago. It wasn't right, remember?

FRANK. For who, Eldon? Us? Eldon – this way, her grave won't be disturbed. They uncover a bunch of unmarked graves and take the bodies out and in a few more years, who knows? Some scientist will come along and discover Mom's body and take it off to some college or university. Her skull sitting on a little wood box under glass. Her bones sawed up, spine and all, like beef ribs. Then they'll put them under a microscope. Is that right? I sure the hell don't think so. And I'm not going to allow it to happen.

(Pause.)

Goddamn it, El.

ELDON. Well, do you really know how to bury her in the traditional way? I don't recall having heard of anybody doing it recently. I don't know of anyone who has done it or remembers seeing it. And if nobody knows how to do it, I don't want to mess with it.

FRANK. You don't, huh? I remember Grandma telling us how they used to do it. And I remember a little of what Grandpa told me.

ELDON. Yeah? But do you know enough about it so we can do it right?

FRANK. Grandma told me how to do it. And I know she told it to you and Kermit when she used to babysit us. If we try to do it right, and do – do it right, we'll tell our kids about it. And they'll tell their kids. We can keep it going just like Grandpa and Grandma did with us.

ELDON. But what about the law? Her will? And if we're not caught by the cops, we still have Kence to settle with. And I don't want to mess with that guy.

FRANK. I've seen the will.

ELDON. How did you see it?

FRANK. In her last couple of weeks, she called me to her house and asked me to be with her. That's when she made her will out. Kence was there, too.

ELDON. Why didn't Mom call me?

FRANK. I don't know. Mom probably didn't want to bother you.

ELDON. I would have come if somebody would have told me. They call me for everything else. Christ! What the hell was Kence doing there? I'm her own son.

FRANK. Anyway – in her will she was going to request to be buried near the place she grew up at. She wanted to be buried in the traditional way. And Kence told her it wasn't possible. He knew where she wanted to be buried at, but he didn't know how to perform the ceremony. And he suggested she go with the American traditional funeral, everybody else does.

(Pause.)

ELDON. Well, why didn't you say something then, Frank? Huh?

FRANK. Not in front of Kence. He would've really put the blocks to us before we even had a chance.

ELDON. It just doesn't seem right. We could get caught.

FRANK. Who's going to know, huh?

ELDON. Someone will see us and tell. Maybe one of Mom's friends…

FRANK. They won't tell. I'll explain it to them. I'll put the will in the tribal newspaper if you want me to. Will and all. El, Mom didn't like the white man's funeral. She said all it had to do with is money, and nothing else. You can't even cry without the priest's permission.

*(**KERMIT** slowly staggers to them.)*

If you decide no, we can't do it. You're the second to the oldest.

ELDON. If you can't do without me… I'm a member of the family now, huh? Okay, I'll go along with you, but we have to keep this to ourselves. I don't want this going through the moccasin telegraph.

FRANK. It'll go through the moccasin telegraph. By the time it gets around the rez, it'll be too late for Kence and the cops to do anything.

ELDON. It sounds slick and all. I…

KERMIT. What's up?

*(Tries to place his hand on **FRANK**'s shoulder.)*

FRANK. Kermit. We've decided to bury Mom ourselves. What do you think?

KERMIT. E-chaw-wok-nok! Hell, yes! Let's do-er!

*(He nearly walks into the fire, but is saved by **FRANK**.)*

ELDON. Chh… Christ! He's not even in walking condition. Frank, if we get caught it'll be because of him. He's lost his mud. He hasn't cared about Mom. He's lived off of her. Now he wants to help us steal her from the morgue, because you've come up with this idea.

KERMIT. What? Steal Momma?

FRANK. Hold on now, Eldon. He has the right to be a part of this too. You wouldn't like to bury Mom by yourself?

KERMIT. Yeah, you tight-ass human.

ELDON. Shut up!

FRANK. I want us to do the burying, because that's the way we've always done things. By ourselves – family. We didn't get to bury Dad, but now we've got a chance to bury Mom as a family.

KERMIT. What's this shit about stealing Momma?

FRANK. We're going to take Mom from the mortician and bury her ourselves. Are you in?

KERMIT. Shit – yeah!

(He falls and **FRANK** *tries to catch him.)*

ELDON. Oh, goddamn it!

FRANK. Don't be afraid of Jack Kence. I'll handle him.

ELDON. Like you did at Mom's will? I'm not afraid of him. Who said I was?

KERMIT. Fuck you. You're afraid of him because he has money. I'm not. I'm like Frank.

ELDON. Shut up, you drunk.

(He goes to **KERMIT** *and pushes him.)*

FRANK. Easy, Eldon. I know Kence has money and a lot of connections, but he also has our mother.

KERMIT. Yeah. Who we talking about again?

FRANK. We're going to get her back. When Mom died, no one asked me what I wanted. Kence just came in and took her without permission.

ELDON. Yes, but he has a right, Frank. He's a mortician. The county coroner. It's his job.

FRANK. It's our job, Eldon. And the thing is, we don't get paid for doing it.

KERMIT. That's right. We can't let the son of a bitch do our job for us.

ELDON. What if he calls the cops on us? Huh? Or even the FBI? We could be up shit creek without a paddle. And if we go to jail? Hell, the pen? What happens to my family?

KERMIT. They'll be better off.

ELDON. Shut up, Kermit! You don't have a wife and kids to worry about. I do. And you have kids, too, Frank. What happens to them? How are we going to support them from prison?

FRANK. We won't get caught, El. Your problem is you're always thinking like one of them. So what if Kence has connections with the cops? That's the risk we have to take.

ELDON. Okay.

KERMIT. You're damned right. I'm behind you one hundred percent.

(He goes into a fast grass dance, does a few steps, and nearly falls over into the fire but is saved by **FRANK**.*)*

FRANK. We're not cooking fry bread. If you bum yourself up, you aren't going to be worth a shit to us.

ELDON. You're not as it is now.

KERMIT. Sure I am. I can keep watch for you two guys. No problem.

FRANK. Okay. Let's get started.

ELDON. What about the fire.

*(***ELDON** *picks up some of the boxes and turns his back to the* **BROTHERS**.*)*

FRANK. We'll shovel dirt on it.

*(***ELDON** *walks off.)*

ELDON. One big chief and a damn drunken Indian.

FRANK. What?

KERMIT. Damn right.

*(***KERMIT** *attacks the fire, and* **FRANK** *helps him toss dirt onto it. Blackout.)*

Scene Two

(Place: Jack Kence's funeral home.)

(Time: Late at night, same day.)

*(***FRANK** *and* **ELDON** *hide behind and run to several objects before they reach the funeral home. They enter the funeral home, and* **FRANK** *leads* **ELDON** *to the surgical room.* **KERMIT** *slowly follows his brothers. Two slabs are in the middle of the room with a surgical tray at the side of each slab, and a large sink on one side of the wall. The other wall is lined with glass and wood cabinets, each cabinet containing surgical equipment. Bodies lie on each slab. The* **BROTHERS** *are carrying flashlights.)*

ELDON. God, it smells funny in here. What is that smell, Frank?

FRANK. Death and all its causes.

*(***ELDON***'s light shines on the bodies.)*

ELDON. Hey! There are two of them. How do we know which one of them is Mom?

FRANK. You do the one on the right and I'll do the left.

*(***KERMIT** *enters the room. He is humming the theme song from a popular spy series.* The two* **BROTHERS** *go to the bodies.* **KERMIT** *goes to* **ELDON**. **FRANK** *is the first in pulling back the sheet.)*

I found her. I found Mom.

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*(**ELDON** pulls back the sheet and looks at **FRANK**. **FRANK** shakes his head "no," then **ELDON** looks at the body.)*

ELDON. Ohhh…my god…

KERMIT. What's up, El? Can't handle it, eh?

*(**ELDON** shows **KERMIT** the body, and they become sick.)*

Ohhhh…

FRANK. Hold on. Hang on to it.

*(**ELDON** gets sick. **FRANK** grabs **ELDON** and **KERMIT**, and takes them to the sink. **FRANK** goes back to the slab and examines the body. He finds a foot tag.)*

Jesus. It's Uncle Joe Yellow Foote, and half his face is gone.

*(**KERMIT** and **ELDON** take turns vomiting into the sink. **FRANK** reads the foot tag.)*

Accident victim: Hit and run. Identification: Joseph Alvin Yellow Foote, Senior. Occupation: Vagrant.

ELDON. God – it made me sick. Let's get the body and go.

FRANK. You're right, Eldon. Kermit? Can you make it back to the pickup by yourself?

KERMIT. Who, who – who hit me?

(He is on his hands and knees rocking back and forth. Slobber dangles from his mouth and touches the floor. He slumps to the floor.)

Son of a bitch! Who hit me, goddamn it! Come on! I'll take you all on…

FRANK. Better help him out to the truck, El. He won't make it by himself.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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