Acting Edition

Touch

by Lori Goodman

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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TOUCH premiered at The Tank in New York City in 2025. The performances were directed by Janice L. Goldberg, with sets by Jonas Harrison, sound design by Iman Rose Louise-Jeune, and lighting design by Michael Abrams. The production stage manager was Noelle S. LeBlanc and the stage manager was William English. The producing fellow was Kyra Davis. The cast was as follows:

BETTY . . . . . Carole Forman
JIM . . . . . Alex Brightwell
BOB . . . . . Willie C. Carpenter
ANNA . . . . . Allyson Kaye Daniel
MAUREEN . . . . . June Ballinger
SALLY/WIFE . . . . . Stacey Scotte
HUSBAND/STAN/MORRIS . . . . . Joe Gately

TOUCH was developed and first presented as a workshop production at New Circle Theatre Company in New York City in 2023. The production was directed by Janice L. Goldberg, with sound design by Eric Nightingale and lighting design by Katherine R. Mitchell. The stage manager was Noelle S. LeBlanc and the assistant stage manager was William English. The cast was as follows:

BETTY . . . . . Carole Forman
JIM . . . . . John Lampe
BOB . . . . . Willie C. Carpenter
ANNA . . . . . Kaili Y. Turner
MAUREEN . . . . . Polly Adams
SALLY/WIFE . . . . . Kit Flannagan
HUSBAND/STAN/MORRIS . . . . . Gene Santarelli

CHARACTERS

BETTY – In her 70s, widowed; a transplanted New Yorker. She and her husband retired and moved to be near their son. She is spirited but very much a woman of her era; wife, mother, not much else; she is a little lost without her husband and depends too much on her son, Jim.

JIM – Betty's son. In his 30s–40s and lives nearby. He is helpful, and patient. No drama kind of guy. He would love his mom to find her way to becoming more independent.

BOB – In his 70s, widowed. He moved to Florida from Chicago with his ailing wife in the hope that the warm air would cure her. It didn't. He could use a dose of dependence on others.

ANNA – Bob's daughter. In her 30–40s, recently divorced. Smart, headstrong like her dad. Anna has a difficult relationship with her father. She was close to her mom.

MAUREEN – In her 60s–70s. A widow who takes great care to put herself together. Her boisterous personality masks her deep reflective nature.

SALLY – In her 60s–early 70s; very much the savvy older single. She is unsentimental, assertive.

WIFE – In her 60s–70s. She and Husband represent aspects of the Florida retired life.

HUSBAND – In his 70s or so. He is married to Wife. Curmudgeonly and cheap.

STAN – Mid-70s–early 80s. Fancies himself a stud of the animal kingdom. Betty's first date.

MORRIS – Another failed date for Betty.

The roles of **SALLY** and **WIFE** can be played by the same actor, and the roles of **STAN**, **HUSBAND**, and **MORRIS** can be played by the same actor. Diverse casting encouraged.

SETTING

Delray Beach, Florida

Set requirements: simple suggestions of furniture, etc. Locations can be depicted by lighting, sound, and minimal props. Scenes should flow one into the other to keep things moving.

TIME

Winter and spring 2009.

Touch *is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Claire Goodman, who, after the death of my father, faced the world alone with resilience and courage.*

Scene One

(The stage is split. On one side, Betty's condo. On the other side of the stage is Jim's apartment.)

(At rise: **BETTY**, *in her bathrobe, looks offstage at a large box in the hallway. She is on the phone with* **JIM**.*)*

BETTY. That thing is the size of my living room. I can't even get it in here.

JIM. It's a flatscreen. It hangs on the wall.

BETTY. I don't have a wall big enough to hold it.

JIM. Yes, you do. You can hang it across from the couch.

BETTY. But that's my chachka wall.

JIM. You can hang the TV between them. There's room.

BETTY. It'll break up the themes.

JIM. You're kidding, right?

BETTY. I don't want to move everything.

JIM. You just need to shift things a little. I'll come by tomorrow to hang it.

BETTY. Tomorrow? I have a doctor's appointment.

JIM. Then how about today?

BETTY. I was going to wash my hair today.

JIM. Is that going to take you all day?

BETTY. I have to dry it too.

JIM. Okay, so when's a good time?

BETTY. Let me see, Thursday I have to take things to the dry cleaner, Friday is Canasta.

JIM. Are you telling me you can only do one thing in a day? Can I come by after you go to the dry cleaner or before you play cards? Or why don't I just let myself in and set it up?

BETTY. I want to be here.

JIM. Then I'll come over now. You can wash your hair later.

BETTY. I'm already in my robe. Why did you get me a television? I have a television.

JIM. Mom, your TV is like from the Stone Age.

BETTY. Your father bought me that television for our anniversary.

JIM. Like a million years ago.

BETTY. And it works fine. It's a Magnavox.

JIM. Mom, it's 2009. The technology's changing. You won't be able to get a good signal on that analog television. Everything's going digital.

BETTY. I have no idea what you are saying. It makes me nervous.

JIM. It's a television Mom; something to keep you company.

BETTY. Televisions don't keep you company. Television is just noise with moving images.

JIM. Like your Canasta group.

BETTY. That's not funny…maybe a little. But at least they're flesh and blood. People keep you company, not machines. You live an hour away and your sister, who knows where she is now.

JIM. South America.

BETTY. In a jungle, probably dead.

JIM. Didn't you just get a postcard from her?

BETTY. A postcard is not company either. I'm a people person. I need to be around people.

JIM. I know it's hard Mom. I'm just trying to help.

BETTY. I don't want help. I want your father.

JIM. We all want him Mom, it's just not going to happen.

BETTY. I still have his slippers and that old sweater he would never throw away... I hated that thing.

JIM. I know.

BETTY. ...and this television he bought all those years ago. Did I ever tell you the story of this television?

JIM. Many times.

BETTY. It was snowing, I was all alone.

JIM. But let's hear it again.

BETTY. You and your sister were little and I was angry. I was convinced he had forgotten our anniversary again. He was out with his buddies and I was stuck home with you two.

JIM. What could be worse?

BETTY. Not that I blamed you. Back then we didn't know about birth control.

JIM. This story never gets old.

BETTY. Anyway, I was just about to call Mrs. Davis to stay with you so I could look for Dad, when all of a sudden, I hear this big thump outside the door. I couldn't imagine what it was so I run over and there's your father with this big box and I say.

BETTY & JIM. *(Mouthing with her.)* "What in God's name is that?"

BETTY. "It's the newest model," he says. "I had to wait in line, that's why I'm so late." Your father waited in a line. Your father! You know he was not a patient man. But he did it so I could have the best. We watched TV in each other's arms all night. Well, until we went to bed and then you know.

JIM. Please stop.

BETTY. Parents are human beings with needs and desires too you know.

JIM. Can we get back to the TV please?

BETTY. I'm just trying to make a point.

JIM. Noted. Now can you just let me come over to hook up it up and program it?

BETTY. Program? It's a television. You turn it on and off, don't you?

JIM. Yes, but I need to sync the universal remote to the TV and cable box.

BETTY. Jimmy, I'm just not ready. Your father was the one who did everything like this.

JIM. I understand, which is why I'm offering to set it up for you. Wouldn't you rather watch *Matlock* on a screen where you can actually see his face?

BETTY. Maybe.

JIM. *(Cringing at the thought.)* I'll even come by and watch with you.

BETTY. It doesn't seem right, getting rid of the Magnavox.

JIM. You can add it to the chachka wall.

BETTY. I don't know.

JIM. Mom, it's been a year, you have to try and move on.

BETTY. Don't you lecture me! I'll move on when I'm ready and not a minute sooner.

JIM. Fine. Sorry.

BETTY. You don't know what it's like to be alone.

JIM. Yes, I do. I live alone remember.

BETTY. By choice. You don't know what it's like to have it thrust on you without notice. One day you're making dinner for two, talking about the grandchildren we'll never have –

JIM. – Amazing how you work that into every conversation –

BETTY. – And then, out of nowhere, you're standing in the bedroom looking at empty slippers and holding an ugly sweater trying to pretend he's still in it. That's the alone I'm talking about. The never-ending kind.

JIM. I don't know what you want me to say Mom. I can't imagine what that's like. I'm just doing the best I can for you. If you want, I'll have the store pick up the TV.

BETTY. – Let me take my shower and think about it.

JIM. Fine.

BETTY. Would you really watch *Matlock* with me?

JIM. *(Cringing even more.)* I would.

BETTY. I think you'll like it. That Andy Griffith is terrific.

JIM. So you say.

BETTY. Let me take my shower.

(They hang up.)

Scene Two

(The stage is split: Bob's home. There is a table with a phone on it and an area with a photo of his wife. We hear a radio being tuned past different stations [past music, talk radio, etc.] until lights come up on: **BOB** *with a dust rag in one hand, turning the dial on his radio. Eventually, Mozart's "Adagio for Piano K.540" plays.** **BOB** *looks at the radio, chuckles, then sets it on the shelf. The music continues.)*

(He picks up the photo of his wife and dusts it with care.)

(The phone rings: lights come up on **ANNA** *in her home. She has a tension ball that she squeezes throughout the scene.* **BOB** *slowly puts down the photo and makes his way to the phone. It rings and rings.)*

BOB. *(In a cheery voice.)* Hello.

ANNA. When are you going to get an answering machine?

BOB. If I had a machine, you would've left a message, and we wouldn't be speaking right now.

ANNA. What if I'd hung up? Then you wouldn't know who called.

BOB. The only people who call, are you and adult care facilities.

ANNA. Well, maybe one day I will hang up. Then you would've walked all that way for nothing.

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BOB. You won't hang up. If I don't answer, you'll think something's wrong. Besides, walking is supposed to be exercise.

ANNA. Very funny.

BOB. I've got a lot of time on my hands to think these things through.

ANNA. What are you listening to? It's not your usual station.

BOB. What do you think?

*(**BOB** holds the phone up to the radio.)*

ANNA. Is that Mozart?

BOB. Yep. Recognize the piece?

ANNA. Um...uch, the one Mom tried to teach me on the piano?

BOB. Tried and tried.

ANNA. What a torture... I don't know who suffered more, her or me.

BOB. I was the one who had to listen to it.

ANNA. Ha ha. Clearly my talents lie in other areas, not music.

BOB. You can say that again.

ANNA. Hey, my tin ear was inherited from someone, and it wasn't Mom.

BOB. My ears are more attuned to jazz that's all.

ANNA. Uh huh. So, why are you listening to the classical station?

BOB. It's Sunday. On Sundays, I spin the dial and see what comes up.

ANNA. Adventurous.

BOB. They say you should try new things to keep the brain sharp.

ANNA. Good for you.

BOB. Yeah. Anyway, I heard this and..it brought me back.

ANNA. In a good way?

BOB. I suppose.

ANNA. *(Hoping for a moment of connection.)* How're you doing, Dad?

BOB. Me? Sensational, but I expect an improvement.

ANNA. *(Disappointed.)* Right…okay… so, what else is going on?

BOB. Not much.

ANNA. How's the weather?

BOB. Same as always, hot. I don't know what your mother saw in this place. It's hot and then it's hotter.

ANNA. It's got to beat shoveling two feet of snow.

BOB. I never minded.

ANNA. Well, it's dreary as hell up here; rain all day. Why don't you go for a swim?

BOB. I might, later. It's not like the pool's going anywhere… or the heat.

ANNA. Dad, you need to get out of the house.

BOB. I'm almost out of Endust, maybe I'll go to the store.

ANNA. Wow. Exciting.

BOB. It's a thrill a minute down here. How are the kids?

ANNA. Good. Britney has her dance recital coming up. She's all excited.

BOB. And Milo?

ANNA. He's good.

BOB. What's he doing?

ANNA. The usual, going to school, drawing, singing –

BOB. – Still no sports?

ANNA. Still no sports.

BOB. I figured by now he'd have found something; baseball, basketball, something.

ANNA. He's not a jock. He's an artist.

BOB. Do the other kids make fun of him?

ANNA. Are we really going down this road again?

BOB. I just don't get it. When I was young you were into sports or you were, you know, funny.

ANN. Dad, no one cares anymore. Girls play competitive sports and –

BOB. That don't make sense either –

ANNA. And boys draw and sing. He's actually very good. I would think you of all people would appreciate his musical talents. Did Miles Davis play sports, did Louis Armstrong?

BOB. Louis played golf.

ANNA. That's not a sport.

BOB. Well, it's something.

ANNA. And Milo plays our game really well. He can guess a song in two notes and tell you when and where it was recorded. He's amazing, like you.

BOB. That's all well and good, but a boy, should, you know, be a boy. Get dirty, play rough.

ANNA. I'm not having this conversation again. And I don't want you having it with him either.

BOB. Fine. Are you bringing the kids down for the spring break?

ANNA. Simon's taking them skiing. I thought I might come down and visit you on my own.

BOB. Oh. I was hoping to see the kids.

ANNA. It's Simon's turn. I had them for Christmas. He hasn't gone away with them in a while.

BOB. Okay. I guess it can just be you and me.

ANNA. Your enthusiasm is overwhelming.

BOB. I'm just thinking about what we could do, just you and me.

ANNA. It doesn't matter to me. We could go to the beach.

BOB. I don't like the beach. I only went for your mother.

ANNA. Fine, we won't go to the beach. There's got to be something we can do together.

BOB. I suppose.

ANNA. Dad, I don't have to come if you don't want me to.

BOB. Don't be ridiculous. You're my daughter. Why wouldn't I want you to come see me?

ANNA. *(To herself.)* So many reasons.

BOB. What?

ANNA. It's still a few months away. I'll call you when I have my ticket.

BOB. Don't come too early in the morning. It's hard for me to get the motor going these days.

ANNA. Okay.

BOB. And don't come too late at night. I have trouble driving at night.

ANNA. Fine.

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