

Acting Edition

Tents

by Sean David DeMers

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-71276-0

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TENTS was first produced by Prime Number Productions, and premiered at The Tank in New York City on November 13, 2025. The production was directed by Taylor Edelle Stuart, with set design by Molly Carroll, graphic design by Sula DeMers, and lighting design by Heather Crocker. The production stage manager was Ximena Morellon. The cast was as follows:

DIANA Rubina Vidal
ELMER Russ Cusick

CHARACTERS

DIANA – Female, late twenties.

ELMER – Male, fifties.

SETTING

A secluded camp in the woods.

TIME

The not-too-distant future, after civilization's collapse.

NOTE ON SYMBOLS

(/) – The next character's line starts and overlaps after this symbol.

(–) – signifies a change of thought.

(...) – signifies something unspoken.

(" ") Anything in double quotation marks spoken is from the King James Bible (I'm reasonably sure), and in one case, *Romeo and Juliet*.

(' ') Anything in single quotation marks is a repetition of something said by the other character, like air quote emphasis, but please do not actually do air quotes with your hands while performing.

(A forest plateau on top of a hill. Trees [white birch?]. It's mid-to-late fall, so there should be leaves, branches, and twigs scattered. There is a destroyed portion of a church wall, maybe some stained glass and part of a pew.)

(A large tent is erected near the wall. The tent is big enough to sleep two comfortably.)

*(At rise, **ELMER** exits the tent and stares offstage left, searching. It is getting late.)*

(He returns to the tent and gets in.)

*(From right, **DIANA** enters tentatively and with a slight limp. She has a worn shoulder bag and a gauzy wrap around her leg above the knee. She is also wearing a sling with wrist brace and perhaps has some cuts and bruises on her face. She is out of breath from the uphill climb, but makes her way toward the tent.)*

*(As **ELMER** reemerges with a pair of binoculars, she hides. He is focused left and becomes more so as he uses the binoculars to search.)*

*(**DIANA** is wearing a locket, which she looks at for a moment before hiding it under her clothing and stepping into the clearing.)*

*(**ELMER** uses the binoculars to search the perimeter and eventually he finds **DIANA**.)*

ELMER. Jesus!

(He jumps; DIANA is unmoved. A pause as he evaluates her.)

ELMER. You could – you know – cough, or something.

(DIANA gives a slow, small cough.)

(To himself.) Nothing is sacred; no one is safe.

(No response.)

So. Where did you come from?

(No response.)

Are you hurt?

(No response.)

Obviously you're hurt. Stupid question. Did someone hurt you? Are you running from something? Can I help?

(No response.)

Do you – do you speak? Can you hear me? This is ridiculous –

(He removes a large knife from his belt.)

I really need to start hearing you speak.

(No response.)

Things being what they are. I'll have to insist.

(She looks around as if deciding to stay. She decides.)

DIANA. I find it hard to trust strange men. 'Things being what they are.'

(She reaches into the bag.)

(ELMER takes a cautious step back.)

(DIANA pulls out an apple.)

Particularly if they have knives.

(She takes a bite of the apple.)

(He laughs and puts the knife away.)

ELMER. I'm sorry. You're right. But you know, you can't be too careful. And you snuck up on me which could be seen as suspicious. I've grown a bit paranoid, but paranoia saves lives – you must know that the way you crept up here – you seem more cautious than most anyway. You by yourself?

DIANA. Not sure if you could tell from our previous conversation, but I'm not too keen on answering questions – especially personal questions – feels like being grilled.

ELMER. Right. Sure. Not sure why you're here, but feel free to rest before you get on your way.

DIANA. That's very generous.

ELMER. Not really, I forgot to emphasize the 'get on your way' part.

DIANA. Okay.

(She eats and surveys the camp.)

ELMER. So, by way of avoiding personal questions, you haven't – by chance – come across a woman while you were traveling?

DIANA. Come across a lot of women in my travels.

ELMER. I'm thinking recently.

DIANA. Recently?

ELMER. Like yesterday...today –

DIANA. See a lot of stuff while I'm moving, but not so good at registering it anymore. I'm very – focused these days – you could say. You see, I'm looking for a spot – before it gets cold. It's getting cold.

ELMER. Yes, it's starting to.

DIANA. I'm going north.

ELMER. Well, you're bound to get colder.

DIANA. I'm cold-blooded.

ELMER. No, I mean – I thought you said you were trying to find somewhere warm.

DIANA. I didn't say that at all. I *said* I was looking for a spot before it gets cold.

ELMER. Isn't that the same thing?

DIANA. No.

ELMER. Okay, well, maybe before you get on your way you can tell me where you're coming from? By way of communion.

DIANA. Communion?

ELMER. In exchange for a cup of tea.

DIANA. Oh! Interesting. A fair deal. It's rare to have a fair deal in this world – hmm. Okay. A cup of tea sounds like a deal.

(ELMER fetches a jar of sun tea. She points to where he found her.)

I came from that way.

ELMER. Obviously. You must be travelling from a town, or a group of people?

DIANA. Nope. Just me. No group – not anymore.

ELMER. Wherever it is, they must have some apples.

DIANA. Yeah.

ELMER. I originally came from the southeast, the only reason I made it this far was from trading – used to own an antique store.

DIANA. Didn't trade for this.

ELMER. Then where –? Sorry, I've never thought about how a simple conversation with a stranger can feel like an interrogation. I promise I'm not trying to grill you, but I know you couldn't have stumbled on an orchard.

DIANA. It's apple season. Maybe you walked right by the trees out of season.

ELMER. Possibly. I was hoping you had seen someone recently –

DIANA. A woman.

ELMER. Yeah.

DIANA. Who?

ELMER. I see it's okay for you to grill me.

DIANA. There's a big difference. I'm at a disadvantage and you seem eager to divulge.

ELMER. Now *you* might be making an assumption.

DIANA. Do you mind?

ELMER. Not really.

DIANA. That's the difference – I mind.

ELMER. I have nothing to hide.

DIANA. Which implies I do.

ELMER. No, no, but – actually maybe you do. And honestly, I don't care. Your business is your business and I don't need to know it.

(Beat.)

DIANA. Kind of glad I stayed. I almost didn't – at the beginning there – I almost turned right back around because I usually don't trust men, especially men all by their lonesome. Not that I trust you, but you're a damn sight more interesting than anyone else I've come across. And you offered me tea and haven't tried to fuck me yet so – that's a good sign.

ELMER. I'm married.

DIANA. More married people try to fuck me than unmarried.

ELMER. Oh.

DIANA. So, how'd you lose your wife?

ELMER. I didn't lose her. Erin – that's her name – she left some time ago. To get water. She should've been back by now. She's about 5'6" – long hair, really long, like down to her elbow – no hairdressers around, you know? Maybe a ponytail. She has glasses, the transition kind so they're usually dark like sunglasses now, dark all the time. I should've gone with her, I know, but we take turns to watch over camp and we're always so careful when we leave. Watching out for – you know – them.

DIANA. Good tea. I haven't seen anyone lately.

(She returns the teacup.)

ELMER. Okay.

DIANA. No one alive anyway.

ELMER. Good, well not good but, okay. I'm Elmer.

DIANA. Elmer. Cool. Can I pitch a tent here?

ELMER. Oh –

DIANA. A small one.

ELMER. I don't know, probably best you get on your way –

DIANA. You said that, but you see, I've been hunting for a spot, and this is a good spot. High ground and flat –

I need some flat earth and protected earth, and this seems to be a spot, maybe it's *the* spot. I'm not sure yet, but if you had that instinct too – you seem trustworthy – you are trustworthy right? Don't answer that. You strike me as someone who has good instincts. Is this a good spot?

ELMER. It's been good for us, only been here for a couple of nights and planned on moving on soon, but it's been good for us.

DIANA. A couple of nights? Really? And no trouble?

ELMER. Not a peep.

DIANA. That can't be true.

ELMER. Well...no...that's not true. The first night there was a procession...a ways off. I heard them and saw their torches with my binoculars. They didn't come too close and luckily we don't use a campfire after dark – you know, for safety.

DIANA. Safety first.

ELMER. Yeah. And with the hill it's hard to tell this is a spot to begin with.

DIANA. Sure.

ELMER. So, other than that one procession – not a peep.

DIANA. Until just now.

ELMER. Just now.

DIANA. So it's cool if I crash here?

ELMER. It's just that my wife –

DIANA. Oh, right. Your wife is out getting water with long hair and sunglasses.

ELMER. Transitions.

DIANA. What are those?

ELMER. Transitions are just regular glasses that turn into sunglasses when you go outside.

DIANA. So, transitions change?

ELMER. Yeah.

DIANA. I guess that was a stupid question. Of course transitions change! You'll have to forgive me, it's been a while since I've actually talked with anyone. Not since my dad really.

ELMER. Your dad was -?

DIANA. Shit, that's my fault. Please don't ask about him.

ELMER. Sure, of course. We've all lost someone - lost / everyone -

DIANA. Seriously, don't talk about it.

ELMER. No worries. If I didn't have / my wife -

DIANA. Yeah yeah yeah, tell me about it, tell me all about it. Not a lot of people around these days - not sane ones anywho. We've all suffered, blah blah blah. Let's pretend we've gotten past the part where we talk about all the horrible things we've seen, okay? I'm giving you permission to skip it and I'm hoping you take the hint and shut the fuck up about the past, because the past is all fairy tales now.

ELMER. Yeah. Okay. Fairy tales, got it.

DIANA. Thanks. Tell you what, I'll set up my tent and then help you find your wife or help wait, and if she comes back and you both decide you don't want me around, I'll skedaddle. Deal?

ELMER. Let's call it a fair deal.

DIANA. Great.

ELMER. Do you want some help? With your stuff?

DIANA. You don't think I can handle it myself?

ELMER. I don't mean you're incapable, but maybe you've had some misfortune –

DIANA. Offering to help a damaged, helpless little girl? No thanks. I've had that kind of help before and on that score I don't trust you and will probably never trust you, so if you have any perverted thoughts in your mind, feel free to remove them now.

ELMER. It's just the sling on your arm –

DIANA. This? It's fine, I'm only letting it set, I broke it a month ago. I was gonna take it off to pitch the tent. Oh my god, I don't know if this is worth the trouble. Listen, I'll just find another spot.

(She starts to go.)

ELMER. Wait. No. Please stay.

DIANA. Now, that sounds a bit different than 'get on your way.'

ELMER. I'm serious. Stay. I...this is gonna sound stupid, but I think I need you to stay. Erin's not back and, while I might act all cautious and tough, the fact is I don't know what to do. I need your help, okay? To search for her. I can't leave all of this stuff to look – it's all I have left besides her. You can stay and I won't talk about your past, I won't make any personal advances, and I won't touch your stuff unless you ask me to. Plus, if you help me, you can definitely stay no matter what my wife says, okay?

DIANA. You'd disregard your wife's wishes?

ELMER. Not in a jerk way – I'd convince her.

DIANA. Sure you would. Fine. For the spot. I'll be right back.

(She goes.)

(He takes a breath.)

*(He scans the opposite direction **DIANA** came from, and after seeing nothing, tosses the binoculars in his tent.)*

(He pulls out some kind of rudimentary chair, like a bucket or kids' stool, and takes a seat.)

(He removes a pouch and pipe from his tent and begins to fill it and smoke during the following.)

*(**DIANA** returns pulling a large children's wagon. It is piled very high and is bound together by bungees and rope. She has already removed the sling.)*

DIANA. Nice pipe.

ELMER. Thanks. It helps calm me.

DIANA. You don't think it'll attract attention?

ELMER. It hasn't so far.

DIANA. You trade tobacco?

ELMER. Sometimes, but it's mostly for me.

DIANA. Cool.

ELMER. I didn't catch your name.

DIANA. You never asked.

ELMER. True. My mistake. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." What can I call you?

DIANA. Diana, you can call me Di. But, "What's in a name?" Right?

ELMER. Diana, like the princess.

DIANA. Sure.

ELMER. Were you named after her?

DIANA. Why do I have to be named after someone?

ELMER. It's a traditional thing – I was named after my Pampy –

DIANA. Hey! My grandfather was Pampy too!

ELMER. Imagine that! So, were you named after anyone?

DIANA. I don't think so. Probably just found the name in a book.

ELMER. Could be.

DIANA. And now there's no one to ask.

ELMER. Right.

DIANA. I definitely wouldn't want to be named after a princess.

ELMER. Why not?

DIANA. It's part of the old, corrupt hierarchical system, right? That didn't work out too well.

ELMER. It worked fine.

DIANA. Oh, really?

ELMER. We'll get back to it. You sure you don't want any help?

DIANA. No. I'm good.

ELMER. Would you like to hear about Princess Diana?

DIANA. In case you haven't gathered, I'm not too keen on the past. There's lots of people out there I've met and mostly they won't shut the hell up about their lives from before, and when you dig deeper – it turns out they didn't really know what was going on. They talk about emotional things, or money, or some petty thing without thinking about the big picture or engaging with the world. And now – whether they like it or not – they're just waiting for death. When you look back, you can't see what's coming.

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