Acting Edition

Love...or Best Offer

by Phil Olson

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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LOVE...OR BEST OFFER was first produced at The Group Repertory Theatre, North Hollywood, California, in February 2023. The director was Doug Engalla, the assistant director was JC Gafford, the producer was Aly York, the stage manager was John Ledley, the lighting design was by Douglas Gabrielle, the sound design was by JC Gafford, the publicist was Nora Feldman, the artistic director was Doug Haverty, the marketing was by Kristin Stancato, and the graphic design was by Art & Soul Design. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

CHERYL. . . . . Stephanie Colet
LORI . . . . . .Kathleen Delaney
STAN . . . . . Doug Haverty
DAVE . . . . . .Marc Antonio Pritchett

As the First Place Winner in the Robert J. Pickering/J.R. Colbeck Award for Playwriting Excellence, *LOVE...OR BEST OFFER* opened in March 2023 at the Tibbits Opera House, Coldwater, Michigan, produced by the Branch County Community Theatre. The director was Laurie Ludlow and the chairperson was Jennifer E. Colbeck. The cast, in order or appearance, was as follows:

CHERYL. . . . . .Amy Abrey
LORI . . . . . Nedra Kingsbury
STAN . . . . . .Shaun Briscoe
DAVE . . . . . Jesse Manson

LOVE...OR BEST OFFER opened in May 2023 at the Barstow Community College Performing Arts Center Black Box Theater in Barstow, California. The production company was StageCrafters Productions from Victorville, California (Producers Michael Barrett and Stephanie Brynjolfson). The directors were Stephanie Brynjolfson and Michael Barrett with lighting design by Sean Nelson. Lights and sound were operated by Paul Peterson. The publicity head was Sheila Fares. The stage manager was Kristine Nelson. The house manager was Amy Ross. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

CHERYL. . . . . .Stephanie Brynjolfson
LORI . . . . . Crickett Enos
STAN . . . . . Steve Millikin
DAVE . . . . . Michael Barrett

CHARACTERS

CHERYL – Over fifty. Professional, businesswoman.

LORI – Over fifty. Cheryl's best friend.

STAN – Over fifty. Nerdish, computer multi-millionaire.

DAVE – Over fifty. Stan's friend and Chief Operating Officer of Stan's company.

SETTING

Cheryl's home, stage right. Stan's home, stage left.

TIME

Present Day. The play takes place over a seven-month period of time.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Scene Breakdown

There are forty-seven, mostly short, scenes in the play that are designed to be performed continuously, without any scene or act breaks, i.e., as the lights go down on one side of the stage, they come up on the other side of the stage. With good pacing, it runs under eighty-five minutes.

If a theatre would like to add an intermission, it's up to them. One possible place for an intermission is on page 48 after Stan says to Dave, "I have no idea what I'm doing."

Production Notes

The set can be a simple black box-type set or a more elaborate, finished set.

It's up to the theatre how to show Lori and Dave when they are on the phone with Cheryl and Stan. For the sake of the script, we will say, "enters on platform," when Lori and Dave are on the phone. Otherwise, they will enter directly into Cheryl and Stan's homes.

Some theatres may elect to have all actors remain on stage at all times, instead of entrances and exits, and use lighting to show which actors are "on."

Options to show Dave and Lori include them entering on two platforms, stage left and stage right, or on a single platform upstage center.

Another way to show them is by appearing behind a scrim where lighting reveals the characters.

Another option, have TV screens on the wall showing the actors, live, while face-timing on their cell phones, or project them on a screen.

Options for using cells phones include using Bluetooth earpieces, FaceTime, or the speaker on the phone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like many of my plays, my goal with *Love...or Best Offer* was to write a comedy with some very personal, heartfelt emotional moments.

Love...or Best Offer was inspired by the real love of my life, Nancy, whom I met online. Nancy has qualities similar to the character, Cheryl, in the play; she's a licensed fiduciary, she has a special needs daughter, and a son, as in the play. Thank you to Nancy for giving me the "okay" to write about her, including some emotional challenges that she has faced, and for all the laughs that we've had. Thankfully, the real life story has a happy ending, as does the play.

Love...or Best Offer had twenty-five readings throughout the country that helped in the development of the play. A big thanks to the theatres that put on the readings, including: The Group Repertory Theatre, North Hollywood, CA, The Mighty Richland Players, Orangeville, IL, Lake of the Woods Players, Locust Grove VA, High Desert Center for the Arts, Victorville, CA, Pequot Lakes Theater, Pequot Lakes, MN, Persimmon Tree Players, Fluvanna County, VA, Broadway Vista Theatre, Vista, CA, Canyon Theatre Guild, Newhall, CA, Grand Island Little Theatre, Grand Island, NE, Showcase Players, Colby, WI, Stage Coach Theatre, Boise, ID, Friends of the Arts, Renville, MN, Stage 212, LaSalle, IL, Brunswick Little Theatre, Southport, NC, History Boy Theatre, Jefferson, IA, Mama Moon Theatre, Volga City, IA, Redlands Footlighters, Redlands, CA, Catskill Community Theatre, Oneonta, NY, and the Fort Worth Community Arts Center, Fort Worth, TX.

And finally, a giant thank you to my friends at Concord Theatricals/ Samuel French for publishing *Love...or Best Offer*.

– Phil Olson

(Stage right is **CHERYL***'s home office, stage left is* **STAN***'s home office. A small table, downstage right, on Cheryl's side, has a laptop computer on it. A small table, down stage left, on Stan's side, has a laptop and two small* Lord of the Rings *figurines.** *There are two door openings, one upstage left, another upstage right. There are two other openings, center stage left and center stage right that open to a platform for* **LORI** *and* **DAVE**.*)*

(Lights up stage right. **CHERYL** *enters while talking to someone behind her. We don't see him.)*

CHERYL. *(Rapid fire.)* Thanks so much for a wonderful time, I'd invite you in but my place is a total mess, and I have a real busy day tomorrow, lots of work tonight, and I feel like I'm coming down with something, must be going around. Anyway, thanks so much, take care, buh bye.

(She closes the door, hits speed dial on her cell phone.)

I am gonna kill her.

LORI. *(Enters on platform on her cell phone.)* Hey, Cheryl. How did it go?

CHERYL. No more blind dates.

LORI. It couldn't have been *that* bad.

CHERYL. He brought his kids.

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LORI. Why didn't he get a babysitter?

CHERYL. His kids are adults.

LORI. That's sweet. He's spending quality time with 'em.

CHERYL. He asked me to split the check.

LORI. I've had worse.

CHERYL. We went to Hooters.

LORI. Nope. You win.

CHERYL. And you thought he would be a good match?

LORI. Think of it as a practice run. You've been out of the market since the Ice Age. You need it.

CHERYL. No, I don't.

LORI. Listen to me, Cheryl, as your therapist –

CHERYL. You're not my therapist.

LORI. As your best friend, you need to start dating. I'm worried about you.

CHERYL. I'm fine. And it's been twenty-nine years since my last date. It's not that I'm rusty, I'm corroded.

LORI. You need practice. I have another guy for you. He does my taxes.

CHERYL. I'm not doing this again.

LORI. Okay, no more blind dates. We'll go to online dating.

CHERYL. Oh, no. That's for young people.

LORI. Well, you're young at heart.

CHERYL. The other day I pulled a hamstring putting on my shoe.

LORI. That's nothing. Last night I sprained my back, *sneezing*.

CHERYL. See?

LORI. I know. One minute you're young and fun, and the next minute you're turning down your car stereo so you can *see* better.

CHERYL. Young people have what I don't have, hope.

LORI. It's not just a young thing. Online dating is a party that everyone is at.

CHERYL. Is it a fun party?

LORI. No, it's a nightmare.

CHERYL. *(Sarcastic.)* Oh, well, you convinced me.

LORI. Everyone does it. It's like online shopping.

CHERYL. I'd rather stick with Amazon. They never reject me.

LORI. You have to do it. Now, promise me you'll at least try.

CHERYL. Lori, I don't need a man in my life.

LORI. Cheryl, I beg to differ.

(Lights down, stage right. **CHERYL** *and* **LORI** *exit.)*

(Lights up, stage left. **STAN** *enters on his cell phone.)*

STAN. Hey, Trish, it's Stan... No, nothing's wrong, I just called to say hi... I know I just saw you ten minutes ago. I just miss you already...you're right, boundaries, got it, but, before you go, I just want to say... Okay I know we just met *tonight*, but I was wondering if you'd like to go on a *cruise* with me...too soon?... Yeah, you're right. How about dinner tomorrow?... You're moving? Where?... Undisclosed... Oh, you're in the C.I.A.? I thought you were an accountant... Okay, how about breakfast?... You're leaving in an hour?... Well, can I visit you? – Hello? Hello?... Hmm, must be a bad connection.

(Lights down, stage left. **STAN** *exits. Lights up, stage right.* **CHERYL** *enters, on her cell phone as* **LORI** *enters on the platform on her phone.)*

LORI. You need to get out there. You've been despondent for two years.

CHERYL. I'm happy with my despondence.

LORI. What would Steve want?

CHERYL. Oh, don't do that.

LORI. You've successfully completed the mourning period. Steve would want you to be happy.

CHERYL. I'm not ready for happiness.

LORI. You have a lot of anxiety and it's not healthy. You're not in a good place right now.

CHERYL. "Not all those who wander are lost."

LORI. What is that, Socrates?

CHERYL. No, Gandalf.

LORI. Whatever. You need to find a guy to help carry your angst. Think of him like an emotional pack mule.

CHERYL. It's late. I gotta go.

LORI. Love you, Cheryl.

CHERYL. Yeah, yeah.

(Lights down stage right. **CHERYL** *and* **LORI** *exit.)*

(An hour later. Lights up stage left. **STAN** *enters, followed by* **DAVE**.*)*

STAN. So, what's up, Dave? A little late for you, isn't it?

DAVE. I was just wondering how the date went.

STAN. I thought it went well.

DAVE. Uh huh.

STAN. Turns out Trish is in the C.I.A. She's moving, so not really sure what the future is.

DAVE. Yeah, about that. I just got off the phone with her.

STAN. Trish? How is she? Hey, thanks for setting me up, by the way.

DAVE. Did you tell her you have a *Lord of the Rings* figurine collection?

STAN. *(Holding up figurines.*[*]*)* I do. And it's awesome.

DAVE. And that you put on little plays with 'em?

STAN. Because they're on a quest. Duh.

DAVE. Yeah. You might wanna hold off on sharing that kind of information.

STAN. Until when?

DAVE. I'd wait until, ahh...never... Never tell 'em. Not even if you get married.

STAN. *(Laughs.)* You're funny.

DAVE. Look, I'm sorry, but Trish doesn't want you to call her.

STAN. Why? What did I do?

DAVE. Oh, there just isn't enough time.

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STAN. Well, do you have anyone else you can set me up with?

DAVE. Well, Trish was the third one, and, ahh, no, there's no one else.

STAN. Okay. That's it, then. I'm gonna join a monastery.

DAVE. Monasteries don't have wifi.

STAN. I will *not* join a monastery.

DAVE. You need to try online dating.

STAN. Oh, no, I'm not doing that.

DAVE. Everyone does it. I met my girlfriend online. I'm surprised we're still together. She returns everything she gets online.

STAN. I tried it. It doesn't work.

DAVE. What did you try?

STAN. Bumble.

DAVE. Is that the one where the woman has to make the first move?

STAN. Yeah. No one ever swiped right on me. The algorithm is flawed.

DAVE. Yeah, that's probably it. How about Tinder?

STAN. Tinder is a confidence killer. You have to be smoking hot and have six-pack abs, and go parasailing while you're cliff diving.

DAVE. How about eHarmony?

STAN. I tried 'em all, Blender, Hinge, *Ancestry.com*... Not a single smiley face. They don't work.

(Looking at his computer.)

Wait, I haven't tried, WomenBehindBars.com.

DAVE. Try it. She'll steal your heart, then your wallet. Listen, women don't like desperate guys.

STAN. I *am* desperate. To find love. Or best offer.

DAVE. You tried that. Your ex-wife wasn't on the same page.

STAN. Jill just didn't give me a chance.

DAVE. Jill is eighteen years younger. She married you for your money.

STAN. She was mature for her age.

DAVE. "Mature?" Her favorite drink is "juice box."

STAN. No, it isn't. It's Sunny D. Look, I'm not giving up on love, and I'm not gonna beat myself up about the divorce. Half the people in the country get divorced.

DAVE. Do half end up with the husband losing thirty million dollars to a witch that ran off with the pool boy?

STAN. I don't get it. I thought she loved me.

DAVE. She did. Thirty million dollars worth. Good thing you have a prenup.

STAN. I don't understand women.

DAVE. Quick tutorial. They grew up watching *Cinderella*. Too many of 'em want a big-dollar Prince Charming to sweep 'em off their feet. They want guys that are confident, but not cocky. Handsome, tall guys that have cool cars and big houses. And if you can make her laugh, bingo. So, here's the deal, you need to find one that doesn't want all your stuff.

STAN. And where do I find that?

DAVE. Have you tried, "Friends, Love, or Whatever?" It's new.

STAN. I don't think so.

DAVE. You start off on a Zoom date. No pressure. It's where I met my girlfriend.

STAN. I'm done with online dating.

DAVE. What do you have to lose?

STAN. Thirty million dollars.

DAVE. You can't give up. Now, look, as your friend, and Chief Operating Officer, you're kind of falling apart and your company is starting to suffer because of it. Now, get out there and find love. Or best offer.

STAN. I'll think about it.

DAVE. And promise me you won't be desperate.

STAN. Too late.

DAVE. I'll put together your profile.

(He exits.)

STAN. *(Follows* **DAVE** *out.)* Bye, Dave.

(Lights down, stage left.)

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