

TO ABSENT FRIENDS

A One-Act Drama

By Rand Higbee

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STORY OF PLAY

Eric Nilsson, a high school senior, is in the hospital after a serious car accident. Uncomfortable, depressed, and lonely during the middle of the night, he is surprised by a visit from three close friends. There's Bruce, the class genius; Shawn, the class clown; and Jenny, whose presence is enough to brighten any room. They try to cheer him because that's what friends are for. but through their gaiety and vitality, Eric is forced to face the question of what really happened to the four of them in the car accident.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ERIC NILSSON: A high school senior, he's in the hospital following an auto accident.

PATTY COOPER: A young nurse, in her early 20s, at the hospital.

BRUCE KORG: Eric's best friend, also a senior; is considered the class genius.

SHAWN CLARKE: Another of Eric's good friends; is the senior class clown.

JENNY KERNER: Also a senior and friend. She and Shawn are an item.

SETTING AND TIME

The entire play takes place within Eric's hospital room. Eric is lying in bed with a large cast on one leg, an IV in one arm, and perhaps a few other marks of his accident covering his body. There is an overhead light above his bed, or an institutional type lamp on the nightstand by his bed. There is also a pitcher of water, a glass, and some magazines on the nightstand. The time is the present, a Wednesday morning, about 3:30 a.m.

PROPS

Several pills in a small container, six-pack of beer, several inflated balloons with strings, and pen for Bruce's pocket.

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: ERIC, lying in the hospital bed, is trying to sleep but can't. Presently, he flips on the light by his bed and grabs a magazine from his nightstand. After a moment PATTY enters.)

PATTY: What's the matter, Eric? Can't sleep?

ERIC: No.

PATTY: Ah, well, in that case your friendly doctors have instructed me to give you this little present. *(SHE crosses to HIM.)*

ERIC: Sleeping pills?

PATTY: You guessed it.

ERIC: I don't want them.

PATTY: They'll help you sleep.

ERIC: No, they won't. You want to help me get to sleep? I'll tell you what to do then. Take this stupid IV out of my arm.

PATTY: That I can't do. I can give you a couple pills though. *(SHE sets the pills on the nightstand.)*

ERIC: You ever try to sleep with an IV sticking in your arm?

PATTY: No.

ERIC: I mean, it's in my arm! There's a needle sticking in my arm!

PATTY: Do you have enough water?

ERIC: Yeah.

PATTY: Take the pills and try to get some sleep.

ERIC: Yeah.

(PATTY turns to leave.)

ERIC: Is it Wednesday? I mean, do I have my days straight here? It's after midnight now so it's Wednesday, right?

PATTY: *(Turning at the door.)* Yes. It's 3:30 a.m. Wednesday to be exact.

ERIC: When do I get the IV out then? Today?

PATTY: I know what you're thinking, Eric. No. Forget about it.

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ERIC: Hey, listen Patty -

PATTY: I'm your nurse and I said forget about it.

ERIC: A nurse can't boss a patient around. Only a doctor can do that.

PATTY: Well, I'm also your friend, and your friend says to go to sleep. Okay? *(SHE exits.)*

ERIC: *(After SHE'S gone.)* I'll take the IV out myself if nobody else will.

(ERIC picks up his magazine and tries to read but can't seem to concentrate. He tosses the magazine aside and just stares into space. Presently, BRUCE enters.)

BRUCE: *(Imitating Oliver Hardy.)* Mmph! Here's another fine mess you've gotten us into!

ERIC: Visiting hours are over.

BRUCE: *(Still as Ollie)* I know that. *(Twiddling HIS tie.)* Why, I was just telling that pretty young nurse out there that I needed to see my best friend. And she let me.

ERIC: I'm not in the mood for it, Bruce. Why don't you leave, all right?

BRUCE: *(Dropping the imitation.)* Can't leave yet. I'm here on a little mission ... to cheer you up, buddy.

ERIC: You, of all people, cannot cheer me up.

BRUCE: I can't?

ERIC: No.

BRUCE: Well, in that case I'd better call in some reinforcements. And here they are, straight from a two-week stint at the Cowpie Bar in Pukwana, Shawn and Jenny!

(SHAWN and JENNY enter. Shawn is carrying a six-pack of beer and Jenny is carrying a bunch of balloons.)

JENNY: Did someone mention a party?

SHAWN: Warm up the tube and cool down the beer, it's time to party 'cause Shawn Clarke is here!

ERIC: Oh, no.

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SHAWN: (*Puts six-pack on bed.*) How about a beer, Nilsson?

ERIC: No thanks.

SHAWN: Oh come on! Hey, we got beer, we got balloons, the night is young. I mean, it is some night to be alive!

ERIC: (*Shouts.*) Would you get the hell out of here?

BRUCE: (*After a pause.*) I think we've caught him in rather a foul humor.

JENNY: Well then, it's up to us to cheer him up, right?

SHAWN: Right on, right on. Hey, Jenny! The other day I was playing basketball with some Africans.

JENNY: Oh yeah? Zulus?

SHAWN: No, we won! Hey, Bruce! My wife just left on a long ocean voyage to the West Indies.

BRUCE: Oh yeah? Jamaica?

SHAWN: No, it was her own idea! Hey, Nurse Jenny!

JENNY: Yes, Doctor Clarke?

SHAWN: We just got some new patients in, so make a note of this. Some of these guys have strange names, so be sure you get this straight.

JENNY: Yes, Doctor Clarke.

SHAWN: I say Who's in room A, What's in room B, and I Don't Know's in room C.

JENNY: Who's in room A?

SHAWN: Yes.

JENNY: The patient in room A

SHAW: Who.

JENNY: The man in room A.

SHAWN: Who.

JENNY: What's the name of the man in room A?

SHAWN: No, he's in room B.

JENNY: Who's in room B?

SHAWN: No, Who's in room A.

JENNY: Well, what are you asking me for? (*SHE points to ERIC.*) He's cracking a smile, I can tell. He's about to laugh.

ERIC: I am not.

SHAWN: It worked! We cheered the guy up.

BRUCE: Elementary. I knew we could.

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ERIC: All right, all right. You made me laugh. Fine. Now could you just leave me alone and let me try to get some sleep?

SHAWN: Sleep?

BRUCE: You can sleep anytime, Eric.

JENNY: But we're your friends, and we're here to see you now.

ERIC: Past visiting hours, you might add.

BRUCE: Visiting hours don't mean much to us.

SHAWN: Not at all.

JENNY: They're just rules.

ERIC: Rules are made to be broken.

SHAWN: They sure are, and Bruce should know all about that, right? After all, he broke a few rules Saturday night, didn't he? Like the speed limit. Like failing to stop for a stop sign.

BRUCE: There was no stop sign.

SHAWN: "There was no stop sign." Will you listen to this guy? He still insists there was no stop sign. I could see the stop sign, Bruce, and I was bombed out of my mind.

BRUCE: Yeah, you could see the stop sign. And you could see pink elephants crossing the road, too.

SHAWN: *(Laughs.)* Well now, they were real. You saw them, didn't you, Jenny?

JENNY: I thought they were orange.

SHAWN: Oh, no. Definitely pink.

BRUCE: Listen, say what you want, Clarke, but I was the only one fit to be driving. I was the only one who was sober.

ERIC: I was sober.

SHAWN: You were? Ha! I drank you under the table, Nilsson. You were further gone than any of us.

ERIC: I was not.

SHAWN: Under the table, Nilsson.

ERIC: I should have been driving.

JENNY: I don't think any of us were fit to drive.

BRUCE: Listen, it wasn't the alcohol. It was the icy roads.

JENNY: We shouldn't have tried it ourselves. We should have caught a ride with someone else.

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SHAWN: Yeah. Maybe we should have flagged down a ride with one of them pink elephants. Hey, let's can this talk, huh? I mean, all the hindsight in the world ain't going to change what happened. I mean, the main thing now is to get this guy well again, right?

JENNY: That's right.

BRUCE: Good point.

SHAWN: (*Patting ERIC'S cast.*) I mean, look at this leg! He banged this sucker up, huh?

JENNY: Hey! You know what we ought to all do? We ought to sign the cast!

SHAWN: You're right!

BRUCE: Perfect idea.

SHAWN: Anyone got a pen?

BRUCE: (*Digging one out of HIS pocket.*) I do.

ERIC: No, guys.

JENNY: No, what?

ERIC: Don't sign the cast.

SHAWN: Why not?

ERIC: I don't want you to.

JENNY: But, we're your friends, Eric.

BRUCE: Friends always sign casts, don't they?

JENNY: Sure they do. Look, he's already got some on here. Look at this one: Patty Cooper.

BRUCE: Patty Cooper?

SHAWN: Patty Cooper?

BRUCE: Nurse Patty Cooper?

SHAWN: You little operator you!

BRUCE: Come, Eric. Are you going to let some pretty-faced nurse sign your cast but not your best friends?

ERIC: Look! I appreciate what you guys are trying to do. Believe me, I do. But I'm just not in the mood for it. Not now. And I'm going to say this just one more time, all right? Would you please leave?

SHAWN: I don't think he wants us around, guys.

JENNY: I wonder why not.

SHAWN: What do you make of it, Bruce?

BRUCE: He appears to be going through a period of self-doubt. In fact, you might call it questioning of self-worth.

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