

Unmuted

Unmuted
A One-Act Play
by Clark DesSoye

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Characters

Sue *senior*

Don *senior, Sue's husband*

Setting: *A modest living room with a well-worn couch facing a TV (seen from the back by audience). The actors and director can improvise blocking, character actions or even dialogue (to update ads) to add to the fun tone of the first part of the play.*

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Scene 1

At Rise: *Before lights up we hear melodramatic music (“Isn’t It Romantic”) rising and then a line of dialogue from an old movie that is suddenly interrupted by a TV commercial (bad singing like an opera chorus):*

MOVIE DIALOGUE (MAN)

“Here’s a kiss from David. *(long pause)* It’s all in the family.”

COMMERCIAL

“I have a structured settlement, but I need cash now”

[Music abruptly stops as lights come up on Sue and Don sitting together on the couch. Don is forcefully pressing the mute button on the TV remote.]

SUE & DON (TOGETHER LOUDLY)

Awwww!

SUE

Not quick enough with the mute, dear ...

DON

Yeah, sorry. *[pause]* When Jeopardy or your news shows are on, they always warn us when they’re going to a commercial. But these movie channels just seem to throw ‘em in, where ever ...

SUE

It *was* pretty abrupt.

DON

One second, we’re on a 40s California estate and the next, we’re watching a bad opera company *[pause]* Weren’t you just saying the other day how they don’t do catchy ad jingles anymore?

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SUE

Probably because you're usually faster with the mute – I've been spared having to listen to / these

DON

You're welcome. / Do you even know what this one's about?

SUE

I think it's a racket to buy out some sucker's annuity for half what it's worth.

DON

Nice. So much for consumer protections.

So, what does *that* have to do with Vikings and – I'm guessing – Medieval villagers?

SUE

Who knows. *[pause]*

Oh *[looking at the TV]* here we go. “No trust account to break into? Our ‘trusted financial advisor’ Tom Selleck wants you to sell your house / to him”

DON

He looks / so sincere, dear. *He* wouldn't try to mislead us; would he?

SUE

Not “Magnum PI.” All my friends in high school had huge crushes / on him

DON

Really? /

SUE

Not me. I always thought he was too pretty – cute – too *[pause]*

I don't know *[pause]* fake.

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DON

Still has that 70s porn-star 'stache – always plays the same character ...

SUE

Yeah, there's *that*, too. *[pause]*

Wait, now this one 's my favorite. Just look at that pathetic looking carrot.

DON

That's a *real* thing?

SUE

Apparently. It says so right there: "One in ten men suffer / from Peyronie's"

DON

And / how's *that* a problem?

SUE

If *you* don't know

DON

Guess I'm *not* one of the select few

SUE

No, you aren't. Though it might be kind'a *[pause; teasing]*

/ interesting to

DON

You're *not* / serious

SUE

Just teasing. You've got a fine carrot. *[patting Don on the thigh]*

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DON

Thanks. *[pause]* Ah... our movie's back.

[Don unmutes the TV. Romantic music comes up. Lights out. End of scene.]

Scene 2

At Rise: Melodramatic music continues and then, before lights up, a line of dialogue from the movie is suddenly interrupted by a TV commercial:

MOVIE DIALOGUE (WOMAN; WHISPERED)

“Keep talking, David. *[pause]* Keep talking.”

AD NARRATOR

“Partial response. That's when...”

[Lights up. Don fumbles with the remote to mute the TV, turning to Sue apologetically.]

SUE

Oy! /

DON

Sorry. / Should 've seen it / coming

SUE

It's ok, / sweetie. They're really sneaking 'em in tonight. *[pause]*
Popcorn?

[Sue gets up and moves toward the door, continuing to talk from off stage.]

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DON

Sounds good. *[pause; squinting at TV]*

My God, look at all the fine print. Can anyone even read it?

SUE

You'd never touch any of this stuff if you could. I was reading the Zocor medical warnings the / other day ...

DON

Zocor? /

SUE

My cholesterol meds

DON

Where do they come up with the names?

SUE

I think they dump out a bag of Scabble tiles and start arranging the letters randomly ...

DON

... Until they come up with something that's NOT a word ...

SUE

... Right! And, presto, that's our new drug ...

DON (SQUINTING AT THE TV)

"May cause suicidal ..."

[Sue returns and sits close to Don.]

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SUE

Yeah. And *this* one's for an antidepressant, I think ...

DON

That's why she's carrying around a smiley face sign?

SUE

I guess. [*pause*] And once she takes these magic pills (that you need to ask your doctor to prescribe for you), she can go shopping and take her kid to the park just like all the other happy mothers

DON

We really are living in "Prozac Nation," aren't we?

SUE

Or some variation of it [*pause*] You know, these ads are awful, but it's nice to see inter-racial couples and gay couples and old people getting out and about — despite the constant threat of a stroke ... or broken bones ...

DON

...Yeah. Watch out for that four-inch curb granny...

SUE

"Just one injection a year..."

DON

Bet that costs a bundle...

SUE

No look. "It *may* be covered by Medicare..."

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DON

... And who decides *that?* ...

SUE

Nobody knows. Some mysterious cabal of regulators, healthcare industry hacks, big pharma sales reps and lawyers and – maybe a couple of doctors ...

DON

... Don't forget the bent carrot lobby ...

SUE

... I mean those *poor* guys ...

DON

... And the sad soccer moms ...

SUE

... and the cheerleaders with bad skin ...

[A microwave oven beeps offstage and Don jumps up and exits, while talking.]

DON

... A fib ...

SUE

... Sleep apnea ...

DON

...Diabetes ...

SUE

... High cholesterol ...

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[Don returns with a heaping bowl of popcorn that he places between them as he sits.]

DON

... Restless legs ...

SUE

... Bulging eyes ... unsightly veins ...

DON

... We *are* falling apart at the seams ...

SUE

... Or so it would seem.

DON

I'd hate to be a doctor these days. People coming in constantly asking about shit they think they need for their flakey skin and bent peckers and... and ... sadness ...

SUE

You know. If you think about it, we put on this movie we love so much because we wanted to cheer ourselves up - distract us from what's happening - with David. If they just let us watch it, we wouldn't need a pill to cheer up!

[Don turns away suddenly, staring blankly for a moment then turns back to Sue, asking quizzically.]

DON

Why Cleveland?

[Sue is surprised by the sudden change of topic.]

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SUE

Who knows. You *know* your brother. He was probably going to a new Keith Emerson exhibit at that Rock-n-Roll place – or maybe Springsteen donated another guitar.

DON

Did you know that he's seen "the boss" thirty-some times and wrote up a set list for each show?

SUE

I'm *not* surprised.

DON

And no two shows are alike.

SUE

He's fabulous – so much energy. But *thirty* times?

DON

I wish Jennifer would just. I mean, I don't want to – to deal / with it

SUE

She's just / a kid, Don. She's barely seen David since he and Connie split. She wants us to hear it directly from the doctors and give her / permission

DON

To pull / the plug?

[The movie comes back on and Don moves to unmute it, but Sue reaches over and takes the remote away from him, placing it next to her on the couch, taking his hand.]

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SUE

It's hard. / A father she barely knows anymore who – for some strange reason – listed her as his emergency contact.

I'm sure she didn't want to leave New York in the middle of a semester to / go to Cleveland.

DON

We'll be there / tomorrow – I – today – I just wanted to veg out – remember the fun times with him. How we always tease him – how he *is* David in this *[gesturing to the movie on the TV]*.

The guy everybody loves, wants to be around, wants to / be with

SUE

Not / everybody. *I* chose the serious, quiet, sweet / brother

DON

He's / always so alive. Never / sits still

SUE

The life / of the party. Remember how he put together those Fourth of July “basketball” games with ours and all the kids in the neighborhood?

DON

How serious he was – keeping score / calling fouls

SUE

All with / a whistle in one hand and a bottle of beer in the other one

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DON

I can't bear to see him – helpless. Machines beeping. Whispered conversations in the hallways. *[looking off in the distance, again]* They're probably lining up recipients for his – his *viable* organs / and things

SUE

We've all / signed the forms, Don, it's the *right* / thing to

DON

I know but / I *can't*

SUE

We *need* / to – she just lost her mother and *now* / this

DON

It's / *so* hard

SUE

I know /

[Don turns to Sue, mouthing “Thank you.” She nods, placing her hands gently on his cheeks visibly wet with tears. Sue glances at the TV then passes the remote to Don. He moves to unmute then groans, leaving the sound off.]

DON

Oh – My / God!

SUE

Not the / Vikings again!

*[Lights out.
End of play.]*