

QUICK TRIP

A short play

by

Eric Coble

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QUICK TRIP

CHARACTERS:

ISABELLE: A Woman Waiting, Elderly.

LOUISE: A Woman Going, Her Daughter

TIME:
Now.

PLACE:
A Nursing Home.

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(An old woman, ISABELLE, sits in a chair, blinking slowly, a small Afghan in her lap. There's a radio/tape player on the table beside her, currently turned off. She looks at her hands.)

(Pause)

(A middle-aged woman strides in with a purse and plastic bag full of magazines. This is LOUISE. She proceeds to straighten up, re-straighten up and straighten up)

LOUISE

Hey, mom. Sorry I'm late, I only got a second and I gotta jet, how you doin'? Whoo! You got enough heat, don't you? Thanksgiving's not for another few months, mom, no need to start broiling that turkey yet. My god, do you want to live in a rainforest? Rainforests are notoriously bad on wallpaper. You want to go to the rainforest at the zoo sometime? They got monkeys and birds and stuff. Hot as hell. And moist. Like a sauna with monkeys.

(Isabelle looks out in the distance)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

I could take you. We could clean out the van if you wanted to bring a wheelchair, and I'll push you. Or Barrie'll push you. Or we can take the Camry. We should go in the winter, it's great in the winter, get all warmed up with the kookaburras or whatever they are. I went on a field trip with Zach's class back in pre-school. Great fun, them all sipping their juice boxes by the anacondas. I think we lost a few, but, hey, that's what the liability waivers or for, right? Kidding. I'm kidding.

(Looking at Isabelle)

How you doing, mom?

(Kneels in front of her, not touching her)

You doing okay?

(Isabelle blinks at her)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Zach and Barrie were gonna come, but Zach's got violin lessons. He's getting really good.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

You should hear him -- I should have him play for you sometime. He should do a concert for everyone on the floor. In the lobby or the multi-purpose room or cafeteria or wherever. Wouldn't that be sweet? Be a good chance for him to get over his phobias about visiting here too -- I mean, I don't know how everyone feels about "Mary Had A Little Lamb", and "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star", but I bet we could organize a sing-along.

(Beat. Isabelle stares at her)

Like I said, I gotta zip. Gotta get home and make some dinner. I just wanted to drop the monthly dose of magazines by for you. New "Ladies' Home Journal", "Good Housekeeping", "Woman's Day", "Family Circle", and for a little spice: "People". Looks like Brad and Jennifer may be in trouble. I know you were worried about them. And Britney Spears is working on a comeback album. Isn't that a relief? And there's an inspirational story about a guy and a kitten. See? The cat looks kind of like Shelby. Remember Shelby? He was a darn good cat. I mean, now we just remember the incontinence thing, but he was a sweet sweet kitty. I'd read you the story, but like I said, there's a Stouffer box with my name on it. I'll read it next time, or you can read it, or Mrs. Albertson can read it to you. I'll leave it here in your lap, okay? Everything you need from the world right here at your fingertips, okay?

(She carefully folds the magazine back and places in Isabelle's lap, not touching her. Isabelle looks at her)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

I gotta run. It looks like they're treating you okay. You look like a million bucks. "Green and wrinkled". Remember that? You'd be going out with daddy and you'd put on one of those wigs even though your hair was perfectly fine underneath, and you came out all done up with new hair, new eyes, new lips, black velour dress, and say, "How do I look?" "Like a million bucks". And you'd raise that one eyebrow and do that whole, "Are you saying I'm green and wrinkled?" thing.

(Beat)

I always pictured a million bucks in silver dollars for some reason. Shiny and translucent pale. Like Grandma Wilma's skin. ...So I guess you do look like a million buck now.

(Beat)

Not having any more bad thoughts are you, mom?

(She almost touches Isabelle's cheek... hesitates... withdraws her hand)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

It sounds like the pills are going okay. They giving you the right colors at the right hours? I saw Ms. Gutierrez at the front desk.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

You remember her -- the pretty woman with the Spanish accent. She's here after lunch. She said you were doing real well with the new dosage. Really good, she was really pleased. She said again how good it was that you weren't still at home. That we have "people in the know" taking care of you now. I said I bet you probably agreed.

(Isabelle looks at her hands in her lap)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Though it's gotten a lot calmer around the house since you moved here. Not because you moved here! But Zach's doing great at school and Barrie's settling into his job. You wouldn't recognize the place. A college buddy of Barrie's is coming into town next week and we're gonna put him in your old room. We aired it out and put up new curtains and everything -- you should have your curtains open here -- see the sunset. Don't you want to see the sunset, mom?

(Isabelle looks up)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

You used to love sunsets -- favorite time of the day, remember? Day's work done, you're off other people's clock and on your own and not yet sleepy -- Freedom. Family time or reading time or sitting on the porch time as the sky goes into cool flames. Remember? You should open-- Or is there a glare? You face west, I bet you get too much sun right in your eyes with these open. That's probably why they closed it. Probably a good call. It's just another sunset. You've seen your fill, right? You want to watch some T.V? It looked like they had the group T.V. turned to Judge Judy or some court program -- you want to see that? Why don't I take you out there on my way out?

(Isabelle stares)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Get you out of this rainforest. Maybe perk you up to talking a little bit. Huh? Get you yelling at the T.V. like old times? I could always tell when Ronald Reagan had used the words "Evil Empire" 'cause I'd hear you screaming at the T.V. in the kitchen. You want to go scream at Judge Judy? Or Montel or Jerry or Oprah or anyone?

(Kneeling beside her)

You feel the urge to speak about anything, mom? Anything at all?

(Beat.)

(Isabelle starts to open her mouth just as Louise stands and turns away, pulling out her cell phone and speed-dialing)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

(Into phone)

Hey, Orlagh? No, I'm not home yet, I gotta finish up here with my mom, then get some dinner and I'll come back in and help out with the McChesny account. Did you find those invoices?

(Isabelle is trying to point to the little tape player/radio on the table beside her)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

(Into phone)

If Sammy doesn't have 'em, I have no idea. But if we're closing the account Tuesday, Rick's gonna want our ducks in a row. We gotta-

(Noticing Isabelle)

Mom. What do you want? You want a drink? I'll call someone.

(Louise goes to the doorway as Isabelle gets her hand on the radio)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

(Into phone)

Sammy's gotta have 'em. We'll get on him first thing A.M.- Mom, do you want the radio? I'll turn on the radio. Here.

(Louise clicks it on. It's out of tune)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

What station do you want? Classic oldies? Sports Talk? Howard Stern?

(Into phone)

Sorry, Orlagh, my mom wants her music, she waits 'til I'm on the phone to give me the first reaction all day, hold on.

(To Isabelle)

Mom. Is this good? Do you like this?

(Isabelle keeps pressing at the radio)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

I'll do it. Mom. I'll do it. You're just gonna knock it over. Mom.

(Into phone)

Orlagh, hold on, I'll call you right back.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

(Hangs up, to Isabelle)

Mom. Look. Just let me do it.

(Isabelle pushes the tape buttons)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

You want the tape? Why didn't you say you wanted the tape?

(She ejects it and looks at it)

It's a homemade one. Which is it? Is there a special song?

(Isabelle keeps pressing the button)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Okay, okay, I'll play the tape, then I gotta go. For real.

(She puts the tape in and presses play.
The grainy opening chords of
Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood")

(Beat. Louise looks at the tape
player. Isabelle looks at her hands)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Is this the song? Who made this for you? How long have you
had this? Did Daddy make you this? Mom, this was your song,
right?

(Isabelle tries to get up)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Are you okay? Can I help? Here, you need to go the
bathroom, I can help-

(She touches her for the first time,
helping her up)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

I'm trying to get you magazines and T.V. and sunlight and
decent air and all you want is to go to the bathroom -- let's
get you up and then I really gotta-

(Isabelle leans on her)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Are you okay? Mom?

(Isabelle quietly takes one of Louise's
hands in hers. Then the other. And
begins to turn. Slow dancing.)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Mom?

(Beat. Isabelle closes her eyes)

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Is this how you danced with Daddy?
(Beat.)
Is this...

(They keep gently dancing to the music. Isabelle leans her head on Louise's shoulders, eyes closed, holding her closer, lost. Louise takes this in... breathes... closes her eyes. Holds her mother gently. And they keep dancing.)

END OF PLAY.