

CAPTAIN, MAY I

A 10-minute play

by

Philip Heckman

Characters

CAPTAIN (70s), mostly comatose; can be portrayed by an empty wheelchair with its back to the audience or by the playwright himself.

ANN (40s), his daughter.

TRISH (30s), his daughter.

Time

May 10.

Place

A room in a nursing home. Besides the Captain's wheelchair, there are two regular chairs and a wastebasket.

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CAPTAIN, MAY I

If there is an actor playing the CAPTAIN, he mostly slumps motionlessly in his wheelchair. After a moment TRISH enters, carrying an oversized purse.

TRISH

Hi, Daddy.

(Kisses him on the cheek, shivers.)

Oh, your skin is so cold.

(Picks up a folded shawl from a chair and wraps his shoulders.)

Only the tenth of May. It's eighty-five degrees outside and in here it feels like sixty.

(Dons a cardigan from her purse.)

Have you seen Ann, Daddy? No, of course not, this is my day. You won't believe the treat I brought you.

(Pulls a plastic bag from her purse.)

You're going to love this. Look--pastrami on rye and split pea soup, the way you like it, with bacon and Parmesan cheese. Doesn't it smell good? Let's dig in, OK?

(Seated, begins to offer him food.)

How about a nice bite of sandwich? Open up.

(Beat, no response.)

Here, let me break it up for you.

(Beat, no response.)

OK, maybe we'll start with soup.

(Only a drop gets down his throat.)

You know where I got this, don't you? Marco's. That's right, the restaurant where I work. The one with the booths. Next to where you used to take us for sundaes, remember? I still get sundaes there sometimes before my shift. I always remember what you used to say. Come on, girls, hearty up, you always said. Hearty up, hearty up. I have no idea where you got that --Army, I suppose.

(Beat.)

OK, how about chips?

(She rummages in the bag.)

Damn, I left them at the restaurant. I'm sorry, Daddy, I know how you like potato chips, the plain old thin kind. Forgive me?

(Beat.)

Will you?

(Beat.)

I'll bring some next time.

TRISH resumes futilely trying to feed CAPTAIN. After a moment ANN enters.

ANN

Hey, Trish.

At the sound of her voice, TRISH hides the food behind her purse.

TRISH

Ann, hi. What're you doing here? I always visit on the even-numbered days. You're odd. You should've been here yesterday.

ANN

Yeah, well, I didn't make it.

TRISH

Don't tell me you forgot. Great.

ANN

Yeah, the mind's starting to go. Maybe you should get me on the waiting list for the first available room.

TRISH

Don't kid about that.

ANN

Yeah? Then what should I kid about?

(She shivers.)

Damn this air conditioning.

ANN pulls the CAPTAIN's shawl from his shoulders and drapes it over hers as she sits. TRISH slips out of her cardigan and wraps CAPTAIN with it.

ANN

Aren't you cold?

TRISH

No.

ANN (CONT'D)

Jesus, you always were a freak.

(She peers at CAPTAIN's chin.)

What the hell?

(She turns on TRISH.)

What's that?

TRISH

...Bile?

ANN wipes a spot, smells her finger.

TRISH (CONT'D)

That's it--bile. You know...like they have to drink on that TV stunt show.

ANN

(Licks her finger.)

Bile, my ass.

ANN grabs for TRISH's purse.

ANN

Pea soup! Pastrami! What'd I tell you about feeding him this crap?

TRISH

It's not crap. It's from Marco's.

ANN

And you know what rich food does to his bowels?

TRISH

He only ate a little.

ANN

I'm sure. You want to deal with the repercussions?

TRISH

There won't be any repercussions.

ANN

Like hell. All that fat. I'm not cleaning it up.

ANN drops the food in the wastebasket.

TRISH

You should be more respectful.

ANN

Oh, that's right. You think he can hear us.

(In CAPTAIN's ear.)

Day six hundred eighty seven, Captain. Almost two years since you resigned your command. Packed your duffle. Faded away. How's it feel not giving orders any more?

(Beat.)

You got that right.

(Beat.)

Look, I'm going to get the Captain here what's good for him. Something his stomach can handle.

ANN exits.

TRISH

(Fidgeting.)

Daddy, I'm sorry about Ann. I didn't think she was coming. She isn't supposed to be here today.