

**MISSOURI LOVES COMPANY**

A short play by

Philip Heckman

Characters

ANGELA, a 12-year-old girl, aka Missouri

TERI, her mother

RANDALL, 50s, a former athlete and candidate for a hip replacement

CHERYL, 40s, a new single mother

PATRICIA, 40s, a no-nonsense nurse

Time

Present.

Setting

A hospital lounge.

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*Three benches in a hospital lounge, widely separated in a U-shaped arrangement. RANDALL slouches on one of the side benches, a baseball cap pulled over his eyes and his arms crossed. A cane leans beside him against the bench seat.*

*CHERYL sits with perfect posture on the side bench opposite, a book resting on the handbag in her lap as she reads.*

*TERI enters, digging through her purse. After a moment, ANGELA follows with a backpack slung over her shoulder and wearing a hoodie. Angela plops down on the bench center stage, alert and full of pentup energy.*

TERI

This where you want?

*Angela surveys the scene with satisfaction, nodding.*

TERI (CON'T)

You're sure.

ANGELA

Lots better than the bus stop. Perfect.

TERI

*(Gesturing off stage.)*

Well, you know I'll be right over there where I can see you.

ANGELA

Mo-om, I know what I'm doing.

TERI

Don't forget you have homework, too. Are you ready for your test? Can you explain the Missouri Compromise?

ANGELA

Sure. It's when the mom wants to shop the Mall of America and the dad want to see the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders and they settle on Six Flags St. Louis.

TERI

You are such a kidder, Angela. Thank God for that.

*Teri exits. Angela makes a great show of extracting books and papers from her backpack and arranging them beside her, watching to see if she's having an effect on Randall and Cheryl, which she isn't. She pulls out a bottle of water, and tries to twist it open, grunting loudly, but failing to break the seal on the cap. After a few tries, she carries the bottle to Randall.*

ANGELA

Excuse me, mister.

*(Beat, as she gets no response.)*

Mister.

*Randall slowly lifts his head to peer at her from under his cap.*

RANDALL

What?

ANGELA

Can you open this for me, mister?

*Randall studies her, then reaches for the bottle, which he twists open. Angela drinks.*

ANGELA (CON'T)

Want some water?

*Randall recoils slightly as he shakes his head.*

ANGELA (CON'T)

I got another one.

RANDALL

No. Thanks.

ANGELA

You're s'posed to drink eight a day. I don't know how though. Couple of these and I have to pee for hours.

RANDALL

That's good. Restroom's way down the hall.

*Randall pulls his cap down, crosses his arms and shuts down again.*

*Angela turns her attention to Cheryl, circling behind her. Cheryl doesn't notice Angela reading over her shoulder.*

ANGELA

What's libido mean?

CHERYL

*(Covering her book.)*

I beg your pardon.

ANGELA

Oh, that's OK you can't explain it. I have to read lots of stuff I don't understand.

CHERYL

What I meant was, I don't believe what I'm reading is any of your business.

ANGELA

I was just trying to educate myself. My mother says questions are better than answers.

CHERYL

Yes, well, I'm sure your mother wouldn't want you talking to total strangers.

*Angela sits beside Cheryl.*

ANGELA

What's your name?

CHERYL

I don't think--

ANGELA

My name's Missouri. Missouri Compost.

*Angela holds out her hand with a look of such earnest innocence that Cheryl is compelled to take it.*

ANGELA (CON'T)

Pleased to meet you...

CHERYL

*(Against her will.)*

Cheryl...Boynton.

ANGELA

Pleased to meet you, Ms. Boynton. May I call you Cheryl?

CHERYL

Sure...OK...fine.

ANGELA

There. Now we're not total strangers anymore.

CHERYL

*(Looking unsuccessfully.)*

Is...your mother around?

ANGELA

I don't have a mother. She was mauled by hyenas in the Serengeti.

CHERYL

I...I'm sorry to hear that.

ANGELA

I call it The Night the Laughter Died.

CHERYL

That's not...

ANGELA

I'm an orphan. My father croaked on a scientific expedition. He was lost in the Great Monarch Butterfly Stampede of Aught Four.

CHERYL

Now I think you're pulling my leg, Missouri. In fact, I'm even beginning to doubt that's your name.

ANGELA

Well, that would come as a complete surprise to my poor mother, may she rest in peace. Pieces, actually.

*Cheryl laughs in spite of herself.*

ANGELA (CON'T)

You see, Missouri was also my mother's name, conceived by my grandfather on the battleship Missouri during double-you, double-you two. Uh, that is, he conceived my mother's name on the battleship, not my mother herself--that would've been against the rules, both naval and biological.

CHERYL

Well, Missouri, I'll say you sure have a powerful imagination. Your mother, the safari hunter. Your dad, the entomologist...

ANGELA

It's all true. Honest. Look, I'll prove it.

*(Digging through her backpack.)*

I inherited my father's interest in bugs and spiders.