

THE VIEW FROM DUNHAM'S BLUFF

A one-act play

by

Philip Heckman

Characters

ESTELLE, a middle-aged motel proprietor, desperately attached to her dying hometown

SULLY, a middle-aged bar owner, passively resigned to same

ARNOLD, an elderly local, retired and cynical

BOBBY, his long-time friend

DENISE, a young one-person tour operator, bubbly and single-minded

RODGER, an elderly tourist

HATTIE, his wife

EVIE, a nineteen-year-old woman traveling alone

Time

Now.

Place

A country tavern catering to the tourist trade, which from the slightly rundown look of things has fallen off of late. The set includes a bar with three or four stools and three or four small tables with chairs. An upright piano stands in one corner.

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A country tavern catering to the tourist trade, which from the slightly rundown look of things has fallen off of late. The set includes a bar with three or four stools and three or four small tables with chairs. An upright piano stands in one corner. ARNOLD and BOBBY, play cribbage at one end of the bar, near a window. BOBBY wears a beat-up hat throughout. SULLY mans the bar from the other end, doing typical chores in a desultory manner in between bouts with a crossword puzzle.

ARNOLD

(Counting his hand, moving his peg.)

Fifteen-two, fifteen-four, and the run is five, and...there you go, Bobby Henderson -- I am home!

BOBBY

(Throws his cards.)

Damn!

ARNOLD

(While he gathers the deck and shuffles.)

Oh, don't take it so hard, Bobby. The cards are like women -- when they desert you, you can't beg nor plead, you can't bluff nor bluster. You have to pretend you have no interest in their kisses and that's how you woo them back.

BOBBY

Shut up, Arnold. What do you know about women?

ARNOLD

I know women like the back of my hand.

BOBBY

You know women like the palm of your hand.

ARNOLD

You hear that, Sully? My friend Bobby's resorting to cheap insults to mask his complete lack of skill at cribbage.

SULLY

(Without looking up from his paper.)

Bobby's on to something, Arnold. Your frantically poking your peg into one hole after another, sounds like overcompensation for sexual inadequacy.

BOBBY snorts.

ARNOLD

And you're handing out free psychology now?

SULLY

Not free at all. If I can't keep your glasses full, you have to leave.

ARNOLD

All right, bring me and my unlucky friend Bobby another round.

SULLY gets up to draw two beers. While ARNOLD deals, BOBBY peers out the window.

BOBBY

Look. Here she comes.

ARNOLD

She tries to hide it, but she's taking it hard.

BOBBY

And who isn't? It's tough to give up on your home town.

ARNOLD

She and Bill put a lot into their place the past two years. Too much, you ask me.

SULLY looks out the window as he delivers the beers.

SULLY

Heard she had an offer, though. Fellow from Jersey. Came out to look her place over last week, and then bid on it.

ARNOLD

She should take it. No sense fighting the inevitable. Get out while there's still something you can take with you.

BOBBY

(To ARNOLD.)

You going to piss or play?

ESTELLE enters, awkwardly.

ESTELLE

Damn it, Sully, almost broke my neck on that top step again.

SULLY

(Not going to bite.)

Afternoon, Estelle.

ESTELLE

Well, when you going to fix it? You know it's customary to have steps of equal height.

ARNOLD

That's Sully's designated-driver test.

ESTELLE

Hey, Arnold. Bobby.

*They acknowledge her without pausing
their card play.*

SULLY

(Reading.)

"Dinosaur desert." Four letters, ends with an i.

ESTELLE

Gobi. Gee-o-bee-eye. And don't change the subject. Why you try to put me in the emergency room every time I stop in?

SULLY

You're relentless, Stella. How about a beer?

ESTELLE

Prefer a touch of Glenmorangie, ("glen-MOR-an-gee") you don't mind.

SULLY

Glenmorangie, Glenmorangie, uh...

(Lowering his voice.)

...well, Estelle, there's that little matter of your...you know.

ESTELLE

I know, my unpaid tab. And you're a sweetheart, Sully, to be so patient. I'll settle up with you as soon as circumstances improve, you know I will. Bill and I are no deadbeats. We believe in meeting our obligations. Just might take a little time, is all.

SULLY

I understand. It's just, well, Bill was in last night and got to reminiscing.

ESTELLE

Say no more. I'm the one had to pour him into bed. Give me a tap.

SULLY

(Drawing a glass.)

Any takers for your place?

ESTELLE

Guy from New Jersey made an offer, but I wouldn't let Bill take it.

SULLY

Why not?

ESTELLE

The guy's credit report was bogus. Bill wanted to take the chance, I said no.

SULLY

You might not get many more offers.

ESTELLE

That doesn't mean I should take the first loser comes along.

SULLY

Angela and I might. We're thinking we'd sell the bar for whatever we can get, try our chances somewhere else.

(Realizes he's depressing her further.)

But, hey, you never know. Maybe things are going to turn around. Didn't I see a couple of cars in your lot yesterday?

ESTELLE

Lost tourists. That'd make a great epitaph, wouldn't it? Lost and looking for someplace else.

SULLY

Don't forget there was that tour bus come through here three days ago.

ARNOLD

Didn't stop though, did it?

ESTELLE

It would've if we put some effort into advertising around here.

SULLY

Denise said she might bring a group by today.

ESTELLE

And she told me when they stop in, we should entertain them with some facts. People just need to hear a little bit about our local attractions.

BOBBY

What attractions?

ARNOLD

My ESP -- Extraordinary Sexual Prowess.

BOBBY

Too late for that, you broken-down old goat, we need coming attractions.

ARNOLD
Sully's psychological analysis then.

BOBBY
As penetrating as your sexual prowess.

ESTELLE
Dunham's Bluff.

ARNOLD
Dunham's Bluff is 10 years out of fashion.

ESTELLE
Still got a view second to none. The surf, the rocks, the beach. From the top of the bluff, the horizon looks like the edge of the universe. You can see forever.

BOBBY
You should write the advertising, Estelle.

ESTELLE
Maybe I will. All we need is to get the town together, pool our resources, and invest in a little marketing campaign.

SULLY
(From his puzzle.)
Help me out, Estelle -- "Filene's basement locale."

ESTELLE
Letters?

SULLY
Six, third is s.

ESTELLE
Boston.

SULLY
(Writing.)
Thank you very much... OK, what's the theme for your ad campaign?

ESTELLE
(Beat.)
How about: "Lose yourself in the view from Dunham's Bluff."

ARNOLD
Yeah: Get lost in Dunham.

ESTELLE
No, no, think of it: Dunham, city with a view of forever.