

**MISSOURI LOVES COMPANY**

by

Philip Heckman

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701 Panther Tr.  
Monona, WI 53716  
608-221-4087  
philip\_heckman@yahoo.com

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## MISSOURI LOVES COMPANY

### 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

PATRICA, 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.

*Angela opens her hand in front of Cheryl, who screams and jumps to her feet, brushing her clothes frantically, spinning around and checking over her shoulder.*

CHERYL

Where is it?! I hate spiders! Get it off! Get it off!

*Randall, roused by the noise, gets to his feet and hobbles quickly to Cheryl, swiping at her back with his baseball cap, then clubbing the unseen spider with his cane.*

*In the melee, Angela edges away.*

ANGELA

I'll get security.

*Angela exits at a run.*

RANDALL

I got it. It's dead.

CHERYL

Are you sure?

RANDALL

*(Examining the end of his cane, flicking the tiny, unseen corpse.)*

Positive.

*Cheryl sits, trying to compose herself.*

RANDALL (CON'T)

You all right?

CHERYL

Yes...Yes, I think so.

RANDALL

Damn fool kid.

*PATRICIA enters.*

PATRICIA

What's going on?

RANDALL

Some kid, the girl who belongs to that backpack. She's terrorizing the place.

PATRICIA

Girl, huh? Twelve years old maybe? Brown hair, bangs, wearing a gray hoodie? [OR WORDS TO THAT EFFECT DESCRIBING THE ACTOR PLAYING ANGELA]

RANDALL

Yeah, that's her. She's a menace. What're you going to do about her?

PATRICIA

She's the one I'm thinking of, she's harmless. Obnoxious, that's for sure, but won't hurt you none.

RANDALL

What in hell kind of place you running here?

PATRICIA

I'm sorry, sir. If you just have a seat, I'll take care of the girl.

*Patricia exits.*

CHERYL

Thank you.

RANDALL

Gave you quite a scare.

CHERYL

*(Shivers.)*

I hate spiders.

RANDALL

Well, I'm glad you're OK.

*Randall, unsure, leans in the direction of his bench, preparing to leave. Cheryl slides over slightly.*

CHERYL

Please...just sit here for a minute. 'Til my heart rate returns to normal.

RANDALL

Sure. Hearts idle when I'm around.

*Randall sits clumsily.*



CHERYL

I hope you didn't hurt yourself running over here.

RANDALL

No, I need the exercise.

CHERYL

I'm so embarrassed.

RANDALL

Hey, there's no need. We all got our phobias.

CHERYL

Oh? What's yours?

RANDALL

Twelve-year-old girls.

*Cheryl laughs in agreement.*

RANDALL (CON'T)

Truth be told this place gives me the creeps, too.

CHERYL

I've seen enough of it myself these past few months to last a lifetime.

*(Beat, noticing his questioning look.)*

The official diagnosis is postpartum depression.

RANDALL

I'm sorry.

CHERYL

They promise me they'll get the drugs right eventually.

RANDALL

Yeah, I heard that before.

*(Now it's his turn, he laboriously straightens his leg.)*

Arthritis of the hip, aggravated by thirty years of knucklehead weekend competition.

CHERYL

We're a couple of wrecks.

RANDALL

That's the trouble with hospitals--bring out the worst in you.

*(Beat, looks around.)*

Your husband here with you?

CHERYL

Don't have one--which is a good thing. If my son's father was still in my life, no anti-depressant in the world would be strong enough.

RANDALL

I see.

CHERYL

His absence is the only thing keeps me going. Besides my son, that is.

RANDALL

*(Beat.)*

Tell you what. I bet we have a cup of coffee apiece we can find something else to talk about besides our troubles.

CHERYL

*(Considering.)*

All right. Let's try that.

*They get up, she helping him. He smiling in rueful gratitude.*

*Patricia enters.*

PATRICIA

I want you to know I haven't abandoned the search. I'll find your troublemaker.

RANDALL

And when you do, I hope you sic one of your Nazi physical therapists on her.

*Randall and Cheryl exit in the same direction Teri did earlier. Patricia, looking after them, spots Teri offstage. Taking a stance, Patricia beckons. After a moment, Teri enters.*

TERI

I know, I know, Patricia. I promised.

PATRICIA

A promise you had no intention of keeping, I can see.

TERI

At the time, I did. Really. It's just...I can't say no to her.

PATRICIA

That doesn't help. She needs you to be the parent. Especially now.

TERI

But she's so vulnerable.

PATRICIA

She's way tougher than you think. Just ask those folks just left here.

*Angela enters.*

ANGELA

Guess who I just saw in the cafeteria--Baseball Cap Guy and Spiderwoman.

*Angela rummages through her backpack, pulls out another bottle of water.*

PATRICIA

They complained about you, you know.

ANGELA

*(Twists the bottle cap off with ease.)*

Don't look like they're complaining now.

TERI

Patricia and I've been talking, Angela, and she's right. You can't keep doing this.

ANGELA

Wanna bet? I feel great.

PATRICIA

That's not what your mother meant.

TERI

We need to talk, Angie.

ANGELA

*(A sharp reversal.)*

No!

TERI

Angela--

ANGELA

Call me Missouri!

TERI

What?

ANGELA

Missouri--my new name.

TERI

Don't be silly--

ANGELA

--Missouri, Missouri--say it. Show me! Show me you love me.

PATRICIA

Honey--

ANGELA

I'll be Honey tomorrow. Today I'm Missouri!

*Teri, despairing, sits. Patricia goes to another bench and sits.*

PATRICIA

Come here, Angela.

*Angela folds her arms.*

PATRICIA (CON'T)

Come here...Missouri.

*Angela marches triumphantly to take a seat next to Patricia.*

PATRICIA (CON'T)

Tell me what this is all about.

ANGELA

*(Beat, teasingly.)*

Like my new wig?

*(Tosses her hair, but carefully.)*

PATRICIA

It's very nice.

ANGELA

Bought with my own money.

*Patricia looks to Teri, who nods wearily.*

PATRICIA

Sassy.

ANGELA

Way better than that crappy free wig they give you and expect you to thank them for.

TERI

Angela, that's...

*Angela's look stops her.*

TERI (CON'T)

...that's not nice, Missouri.

ANGELA

It might not be nice, but nice is something I don't have to be anymore.

TERI

Now just a minute--

PATRICIA

--What your mother means is, maybe you need to be more careful about other people's feelings.

ANGELA

I'm just having fun. Meeting people. Talking to them.

TERI

I think I made a mistake bringing you to public places to confront complete strangers.

ANGELA

You can't stop me.

TERI

Angela, maybe we can compromise--

ANGELA

--Yeah, let's. Let's compromise: We'll do what I want until I'm dead, and what you want after!

*Teri is speechless. Patricia lets the silence sit for a few moments, then...*

PATRICIA

That's not how it works.

ANGELA

How do you know what works if you're going to stop me from trying.

TERI

But these poor people...innocent strangers--

ANGELA

Not after I get through with them.

TERI

Why?

## ANGELA

Because I want people all over the world to notice I'm gone. Is that so bad? I want hundreds, millions of them to have some itty-bitty memory of me. Like some day in the far-distant future, Mr. Baseball Cap Guy is eating his Raisin Bran and he says to Mrs. Baseball Cap: 'Remember that girl threw that spider on you, what was her name?' And Spiderwoman says, 'Missouri. She called herself Missouri, remember? What a crazy kid.'

*(Beat, tearfully.)*

That's what I want, momma. To not be forgotten.

*Teri rises and reaches out to Angela. They meet between the benches and embrace.*

## ANGELA (CON'T)

Can't I have one little part of this thing my way?

## TERI

Yes, you can.

*(Beat.)*

Come on, baby, we'll figure it out.

*Teri and Angela exit together.*

*Patricia watches them leave. Then she notices Angela's backpack on the bench, and turns to call out, but they're gone. She picks up the backpack to follow them, but suddenly drops it in alarm, frantically brushing unseen spiders from her arms and stomping on them.*

*Black.*

**THE END**