

## **A JEWEL AND A FOOL**

**Written By M.A. Smith.**

**Directed by Everett Gregory.**

### **Scenario**

In a cramped apartment lit by the day outside, two best friends through the decades have their final conversation.

Luther is sick. Yet he is still sharp-tongued as ever; trapped between his reality and how he wants to tell his story, lingering in a body with a liver that's going kaput. Marty arrives, polished and composed, better than ever. Yet, beneath the surface, he may be just as compromised (albeit much healthier!). With his arrival, he carries old photographs, old loyalties, old guilt, and hopes that the truth aligns with what he's trying to be. Just as the conversation wanders from drunken nostalgia to reckonings of who they both have become in the present day, the audience roams from moments of full hilarity to times of heartfelt truth.

This two-hander is a terrific opportunity for actors to do what makes theater such an amazing medium for art. Both of these roles hold such a depth to them, and with the action taking place over a single place in time, the actors and the audience get a beautiful chance to explore what it means to live a well-lived life.

### **Characters**

**Luther:** 50s - 70s. (240 Lines) - A retired, caustic, journalist with a brilliant mind trapped in a failing body. He's disheveled, defiant, sarcastic. His control of his own narrative, ultimately, may have been his own undoing. As the emotional engine of the play, he wrestles and reckons with the life he has made through his time on Earth. Presently, Luther needs full-time care from his wife who is not seen on stage. He sits in a chair next to his walker for the duration of the play, and commands the planets to orbit him while doing so.

**Marty:** 50s - 70s. (240 Lines) - Luther's oldest, possibly only, friend. On the surface, Marty is opposite in nearly every way. He's become fit, polished, and successful, going instead into the world of finance. He says he's off the drink, and all the better for it. Beneath his calm surface is a man shaped by regret, loyalty, and the loneliness that life occurs. He is the play's steadier center, seemingly holding the control over his life that Luther thinks he lacks. Bringing along old photos to an ailing friend, Marty holds a deep love for their friendship, and all the trouble that they got up to in their youth.

## SIDE ONE

LUTHER

She called the cops on me.

MARTY

She what?

LUTHER

The cops! The cops! She called the cops. I was sitting in the bathtub reading, enriching my mind, as I'm wont to do, when all of a sudden I hear a commotion at the door. The cops have busted in and Charlie is telling them "he's in there, hurry!" Next thing I know three burly guys are yanking me out of the bathtub, throwing a towel over my teeny weeny, and strapping me down to some type of gurney. They roll me out to the paddy wagon and race me to the prison where they attach me to all sorts of information gathering probes and wrap my ass in towels to soak up the blood from my now bleeding rectum.

MARTY

Bleeding rectum?

LUTHER

They've got electromagnetic mats all over the floor in my cell so if I set my foot down the mats will electrocute me and blast terrifying alarms to my guards who will come running to make sure I don't escape. As if I would actually attempt to leave such a pleasant cell.

MARTY

Bleeding rectum?!

## SIDE TWO

LUTHER

Well, what else are we going to do? Sit around like a couple of old farts talking about the good old glory days?

MARTY

“In the blink of a young girl’s eye.” (short pause) We had some good days.

LUTHER

Ancient history. Nothing new to talk about. Let’s get in your car and go someplace.

MARTY

Road trip?

LUTHER

Road trip. Like we used to. Wine, women and song.

MARTY

It was beer and you can’t sing.

LUTHER

I have perfect pitch. I could’ve been an opera singer with the right training.

MARTY

You can’t carry a tune to save your life.

LUTHER

Well, come on! Let’s forget about death for a moment. Let’s go down to the Colt 45.

MARTY

The Colt 45 is in Costa Rica.

LUTHER

So?

MARTY

Costa Rica.

LUTHER

We were just there. A fine gentlemen's club where you made a complete fool of yourself.

MARTY

Apparently. But many, many years ago.

LUTHER

Many years ago, when we were friends. (pause) How will you live without me?

MARTY

Very well, thank you.

LUTHER

(sincerely) Don't you love me anymore?

MARTY

No more. No less.

LUTHER

You're very mean, you know that? Always have been.

MARTY

What would you have me say? There's a hole in my spleen where your spirit once lived?

LUTHER

Very prosaic. You'll think of me often once I'm gone.

MARTY

Worried about your legacy?

LUTHER

My legacy is well established. I'm a prize-winning journalist. And you're... What are you anyway? Have you thought about that? Have you thought about your obit? God knows I've thought about mine.

MARTY

You've been writing it for years.

LUTHER

So, what will it say, hmm? Your obit? "Rich, playboy fund manager who..." Who what?

MARTY

You're making me uncomfortable. Do you have a safe zone here in your little abode?

LUTHER

Practical. And clever. That's it. "He was a clever practical man." Full of common sense, emphasis on common.

MARTY

Something you never were.

LUTHER

No?

MARTY

No. Impulsive.

LUTHER

Adventurous.

MARTY

Reckless.

Curious.

LUTHER

Arrogant.

MARTY

“A man who pursued the truth unafraid where it might lead him.”

LUTHER

(snorts) You were always afraid.

MARTY

True. But I was always courageous.

LUTHER

### **SIDE THREE**

MARTY

That's enough. I'm going to leave now... (starts to go)

LUTHER

The life of a caregiver is filled with despair. I don't blame her. I blame you.

MARTY

(a long pause) You're right. I should buy you a drink. I should buy you a fifth of vodka.

LUTHER

Now you're talking.

MARTY

(slowly) There's really nothing left for you, is there? You're right. Charlie was the one. I think I've always loved her. Even before you stole her from me with your confident swagger and truck load of bullshit that made us all smile. Your dazzling philosophical observations and Einstein theorems. Your pursuit of truth. Winning a Pulitzer.

LUTHER

Yep. I was quite a guy.

## SIDE FOUR

MARTY

But we were still the best of friends, weren't we? The best of brothers. I could still love you and Charlie at the same time, couldn't I? When I came to visit you in the Big House the last time, one of the many times you were going to die, I came to visit Charlie as well.

LUTHER

I know. I know all about it.

MARTY

I told her she was still young and beautiful with a whole lifetime ahead of her.

LUTHER

And that taking care of me was sapping the life out of her. The way things are going, you said, Charlie will go before I do. You told her there were "facilities" that could take better care of me, professionals who could help me full time. You even said you'd pay for it.

MARTY

Assisted living. She could see you anytime, all the time she wanted, knowing that you'd be taken care of and she could...

LUTHER

Spend more time with you.

MARTY

Have a life of her own.

LUTHER

With you.

MARTY

She doesn't want me!

LUTHER

How do you know?

MARTY

I asked her! She said you were the one, the only one. She would take care of you as long as you both were breathing. She's never loved anyone else and no one could ever take care of you the way that she does.

LUTHER

(pause) If you really loved us you would do it. If you really were my friend.

MARTY

I can't. I promised her.

LUTHER

Then why did you bother coming?

MARTY

To say goodbye.

(Silence)

LUTHER

You held my hand?

MARTY

I did.

LUTHER

So, then there's nothing left to say?

MARTY

(MARTY shakes his head "no." A pause, then, offering the pictures on the table to LUTHER) Pictures?

LUTHER

Put 'em in one of your boxes.