



## **A One Act Play by Robert Anderson**

### **Directed by Janel Culver**

**Synopsis:** Laura Cunningham, once a star, lives amid costumes, props, and memories of her career. Too frail to act, she remains fiercely independent and resists her nephew's attempts to move her to the country where she can be cared for. In fact, she has an interview that very afternoon with a director. This haunting, beautiful play will amuse and move any audience.

**Cast:** 1 woman, 2 men (line count in parentheses)

- ❖ **Laura Cunningham-** (137) an actress well into her eighties, once “one of the Great Ladies of The American Theatre.” She is still a beautiful woman, and still has the warm smile that enchanted millions, the lovely lyrical voice... and the feistiness. She begins the play with a 3½ page monologue, seemingly directed to some combination of her dog and her inner self. She then converses with her nephew, who seems to have inherited some of her stubbornness. They briefly quarrel on the subject of moving her closer to him, before their conversation is interrupted by the entrance of Michael Jones, the director who has arranged to meet with Laura about an exciting opportunity.

❖ **Ben Cunningham-** (72) Laura's nephew. He is a well-meaning, pleasant man and wants to move his aunt to a house in the country where he and his wife can care for her better. He loves his aunt, but caring for her has worn him down.

❖ **Michael Jones-** (81) a director. He is a man of some poise and importance, though informal in his manner. He worked as a stage manager with Laura many years ago, and is now reconnecting with her to present her with an exciting opportunity.

### **Rehearsal Schedule:**

Tuesday or Thursday evenings 6-8pm at Magic Circle Theatre

June 2- July 23 (Tech week is July 27-29)

### **Performances:**

July 31st 7:30pm, August 1st 7:30pm, and August 2nd 2:00pm

LAURA. Why didn't you call?

BEN. I did call. You have the phone off the hook. You know people might be trying to reach you.

LAURA. Nobody's trying to reach me. That's why I keep the phone off the hook so I won't know nobody's trying to reach me.

BEN. (*Puts phone on hook.*) Aunt Laura, I took that bolt off two days ago.

LAURA. I put it back on.

BEN. (*Kisses her on the cheek.*) What if you were ill in here?

LAURA. I won't be ill. I don't get ill. I'll be dead. Then who cares? (*Moving towards the kitchen.*) Console, you're a big help. I could have been murdered. (*At the kitchen door, SHE turns.*) Where's Console?

BEN. You know. I took her to the vet's.

LAURA. I did *not* know. You've had her put away!

BEN. I took her to see if the vet could do anything for her. Perhaps another operation ... There must be a note here to that effect ... (*HE looks over notes scattered on the floor. Picks up one and reads.*) "Ben took Console to vet's."

LAURA. (*Registering the boxes.*) What are these?

BEN. Boxes. Just leaving them by. I'll bring more.

LAURA. For what?

BEN. (*Patiently but masking annoyance.*) For you to start sorting out things. Packing what you want to take with you.

LAURA. Take with me where?

BEN. Aunt Laura, we've talked this over and over.

LAURA. What? What "this"?

LAURA. Why not? I sleep there some nights when I don't want to bother clearing the bed. (*Change of tone.*) Look, you're a very nice boy, and you've been very considerate, but I'm doing what I want to do. I'll sign a piece of paper saying that. Where's a piece of paper? (*Looks around, picks up a piece of paper from the floor, does nothing with it.*) Old people die when they're moved. Do you know that? So either I die here, or I die there. I don't care about dying. But I want to die here ... All my things. (*SHE gestures lovingly to all the chaos.*) It's a mess to you, and it was a mess to your father who was a neat and tidy man who felt that life was just great as long as it ran on schedule ... I'm sorry. But this is my life. Console is my life ... my best friend for ten years ... I will not ... (*Looks around at "her life."*) I can't put all this in boxes. I would never find things again. I can put my hand on anything I want ... Ophelia's flowers ... (*SHE pokes in some container but comes up with no flowers.*) The hat I wore in ... (*Again a gesture. Touches a dress.*) Valentina ... Mainbocher ... I may need these clothes for costumes. A director is coming to see me about being in his new movie.

(*BEN looks up, shakes his head, goes on with boxes.*)

LAURA. Besides it all belongs to the Museum For The Performing Arts. I promised it to them years ago. Except the love letters. Those go to the Library. Don't worry, they won't embarrass you. I've left orders they're not to be opened until you're dead ... They're silly. All love letters

are silly, but I want people to know ...

*(BEN smiles sympathetically.)*

LAURA. The furniture, my minister bought that five years ago when I needed money to buy a dress for the Film Festival ... I get to use it till I die. Just tell the Museum and my minister I'm dead. TWO phone calls. *(SHE sits.)* I can't live in the country. I have to be here in the Theatre District. I've always kept a place in The District, even when I had houses in the country where you used to like to bring your friends to swim in the pool. Even when I was making movies on the coast.

*(MICHAEL. is about 60, attractive in an "interesting" way. HE wears flannel slacks and a leather windbreak jacket, shirt and tie. Obviously a man of some poise and importance, though informal in his manner.)*

MICHAEL. Her agent thought it would be easier if I came to her.

BEN. *(Not too happy with this turn of events.)* Well, she'll be with us in a minute.

MICHAEL. *(Looks around at the clutter of theatrical mementoes. Shakes his head and smiles.)* I hope this is all going to some museum.

BEN. So she tells me. Except for the furniture. She's sold that to her minister. I had a cleaning woman come in once a week, but it became hopeless. She was finally just paying her at the door and sending her home before she took off her hat. (*Indicating papers on floor.*) These are notes reminding her to do various things. (*Picks one up.*) "Eat breakfast" ... You were thinking of her for a movie?

MICHAEL. (*Still absorbed with the History of the American Theatre on the walls.*) No, a play.

BEN. (*Relaxes ... a smile.*) Oh.

MICHAEL. I wanted to see her, talk to her. (*Points to a poster dimly visible on wall.*) I was the assistant stage manager on that production. Forty years ago.

BEN. I didn't see much of her work till I was on my own. My father didn't approve of the theatre.

MICHAEL. (*Smiles.*) I'm not sure I do. She was very kind to me.

BEN. (*When nothing follows.*) You know she hasn't been on the stage in a number of years.

MICHAEL. She seemed excited about the possibility, according to her agent.

BEN. I think she thought it was a movie ... The last time she appeared in a play, prompters were stationed behind the scenery to the right, the left and up center. Finally, in the last act, tense and exhausted and in tears, she screamed at one of them who was feeding her lines, "I know the God-damned lines!!" That broke the audience's heart, but it was also the end.

MICHAEL. I heard about that.

BEN. Her last appearance on a stage was at the Tony Awards some years ago ... an honorary Tony for a lifetime in the theatre.

MICHAEL. (*Smiles, obviously delighted with this old lady.*) It's a great honor.

LAURA. (*Flustered.*) Thank you.

MICHAEL. I've been looking at all this. Wonderful.

LAURA. I apologize for the disorder. I had to dismiss my cleaning woman because she stole from me.

MICHAEL. (*Pointing to a poster.*) I saw you in that.

LAURA. Was I good?

MICHAEL. Yes.

LAURA. I don't remember. I can't remember anything. But I have such memories.

MICHAEL. I stood to see it. In Boston, I was in college.

LAURA. Thank you very much. I hope you enjoyed it.

MICHAEL. I did.

LAURA. I remember old stories of college boys drawing Maud Adams through the streets of Boston in a carriage. Did you draw me through the streets?

MICHAEL. I'm sorry, but no.

LAURA. Ah, well ...

MICHAEL. (*Relishing this lady.*) You're looking great.

LAURA. Thank you, kind sir. So are you.

MICHAEL. Do you remember me?

LAURA. Now that's not nice.

MICHAEL. *Comfort Me With Apples.*

LAURA. I beg your pardon.

MICHAEL. The title of the play. From the Bible.  
"Comfort me with apples for I am sick with love."

(*LAURA shakes her head, confused.*)

MICHAEL. I was your assistant stage manager and played a small part. (*HE points to a window card barely visible.*)

LAURA. I'm sorry.

MICHAEL. You were very kind to me.

LAURA. I'm glad of that.

MICHAEL. You told me I was not a very good actor.

LAURA. That was kind?

MICHAEL. Yes ... It was one of my jobs to see that you got home safely after the show, if someone didn't call for you.

LAURA. Thank you.

MICHAEL. I had a tremendous crush on you. You were having an off and on affair with the director.

LAURA. Oh yes! Well, that happened. Sometimes it

was the only way to deal with the directors ... Back then I was ... How old did I say I was? (*Smiles.*)

MICHAEL. Forty-five. I was twenty.

LAURA. (*Smiles wistfully.*) I wish I could remember it.

MICHAEL. I remember it ... After the play opened and the director left ...

LAURA. They always do ...

MICHAEL. We'd sit in your dressing room while you took off your make-up ... You'd fixed it up very warm and cozy ...

LAURA. Well, after all, it was my home.

MICHAEL. We'd have a drink. We'd talk ... The stage door man would get furious having to wait for us.

LAURA. (*Looks at him a long time.*) Did we have an affair?

MICHAEL. No.

LAURA. I remember someone who used to sit in my dressing room ... Ah, well ... Won't you sit down?