

Dreams from Hogback Bridge
A gentle comedy
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Running time: 65-75 minutes approximate

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SYNOPSIS: Nestled in a covered bridge in Madison County is a Dream Journal. It's well used and some of those dreams can take you on a magical mystery tour. The play is inspired by those postings.

SCENES:

ACT 1

1. Past: Dancie and Charlie
2. 6:30 a.m. – Nobody Can Hear You scream
3. 9:00 a.m. - Unlocked
4. 11 a.m. – American Gothic
5. 12:30 p.m. Avery and Dancie and Charlie

ACT II

6. 2 p.m. – Avery and Dancie and Charlie
7. 3:30 p.m. – Not Fishing
8. 6:30 p.m. - Rain
9. 8 P.M. - Paris
10. Charlie and Dancy

CAST: 8-17* (can use 4f, 4m for small cast; up to 8f, 7m, 2 either gender for large cast**) In a pinch, you could do this with 6 – but there will need to be some quick changes.

10 Scenes

1. Dancie and Charlie (Scenes 1, 5, 6, and 10)

Dancie (17-22) female; a spirit – probably – a helper
Charlie (ageless 20's – 60) dreams of Dancie

2. Nobody Can Hear You Scream

Marion (25-50) female; dreams of writing potboilers
Harold (25-50) male; amateur and good photographer – dreams of the “perfect shot”
Ana (17-22) female; dreams of revenge
Mysterious Voice (One line – use from cast)

3. Unlocked

Kristi (20-40) female; in love but dreams of getting out of love
Matlock Sherlock (20-40) male or female; locksmith helping people get rid of their love locks;
no dreams
Stanley (20-40 - should match Kristi in age); male; dreams of staying alive

4. American Gothic

Oswald (30-50) male; dour farmer; passionate dreamer; will *never* show that side
Ethel (30-50) female; dour farmer's wife; passionate dreamer; will *never* show that side

5. **Avery, Dancie and Charlie**

Avery (18-30) male or female; dreams of giving his beloved Josie the perfect good-bye

- Optional Intermission –

6. **Avery, Dancie and Charlie continued**

7. **Not Fishing**

Melisande (18-20) female; a wisher – dreams of unicorns

Tom (20-22) male; a wanna-be helper – dreams of a pot of gold

8. **Rain***

Rain (18-28) female; young; bursting with rain; dreams of a different existence

River (18-30's) male; woebegone, lost man who dreams of falling in love

*The genders noted are how I envisioned them as I wrote them – but for this you are welcome to change the genders to suit your cast.

9. **Paris**

Marie (mid-twenties) female; moving on - dreams of a new life in Paris

Paul (mid-twenties) male; moving back – dreams of Marie

10. **Dancie and Charlie**

*Notes:

For the “couples” or potential couples, the actors should somewhat match in ages. If Harold is 25 then Marion should be 25. Or they're both 30 or 40 or 50. And so on.

Dancie died young so Charlie could be 25 or older. Just use common sense with the pairings.

While you may not change wording or do cuts without my approval, **you may change** the genders of the characters and accompanying pronouns if it works with the plays and suits your cast.

Doubling for 8 (4 male, 4 female) or what you will:

Charlie

Harold/Oswald/River

Stanley/Tom

Matlock/Avery/Paul

Dancie

Marion/Ethel/Marie

Ana/Melisande/

Kristi/Rain

A one act version can be devised. Use the four Charlie-Dancie scenes and two scenes from each act.

You may delete a scene or two if it doesn't work with your casting, but unless you are doing a true one-act (under 35 minutes), **royalties for the full length** still apply. You may also rearrange scenes - except of course for the Charlie-Dancie scenes. The Charlie-Dancie scenes in both versions *must* stay. They are the heart of the play.

Design:

SET: You can do this in front of a curtain, or outside, or use levels for area staging or projections, a backdrop or whatever suits your fancy to suggest a bridge. Of course, you can always build a bridge.... Charlie mentions the bridge right away, so the audience knows it's there.

COSTUMES: Summer contemporary costumes. Play with Rain – an umbrella with drops falling off? A hat with rain streamers?

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OPTIONAL: While audience is gathering or after announcements, we may hear:
 (“sung to the tune of “Meet Me In St. Louis, Louis, Meet Me at the Fair””)

Meet me in Madison County,
Meet me at Hogback Bridge.
There’s no place that’s more romantic
Than dreaming at a Hog’s Back Ridge.

We shall dance to corny love songs
In a field of dreams and real corn.

If you will meet me in Madison County,
Meet me at Hogback Bridge.

SCENE 1

DANCIE AND CHARLIE

(Lights up on Hogback Bridge. Soft breezes, bees buzzing, birds chirping, The air is scented with the combination of flowers, grass and farmland. There is a bench near the bridge. CHARLIE enters or is already there.)

CHARLIE

That’s Hogback Bridge. It’s not the most romantic name for a bridge that has welcomed dreamers since 1884. It’s named because of that ridge where the wildflowers grow. The townspeople thought it resembled a hog’s back. Can you see it? Try squinting. Or standing on your head. Maybe then it will be clear. Or not. But the name doesn’t matter. It’s a place where people come to connect – with lovers, with family, with nature, with the past and even the future. It makes sense to come to a bridge when you are looking to connect. It’s the function of a bridge. Of course, once the bridge was solely to connect the ridges over a creek so the farmers could get their grain to town. And the people thought ahead. They knew a bridge would be ravaged by rain and snow in Iowa – so they decided to cover them so that the flooring would remain intact. They designed a lattice truss system to keep the steel pylons intact which you probably don’t care about. But it worked. The flooring remained intact. Of course, the covered roofing needed replacement. Once there were nineteen of these bridges. Now there are seven – and to me – this is the most special one because of the Dream Journal.

I care for the Dream Journal – which is the most important part of this bridge. People have been writing their dreams into this journal for decades. And the things is – they really do write their dreams and they’re magical. This journal contains the goodness in the world – in case we need a reminder.

CHARLIE (cont'd)

We keep it here – just inside the bridge. It's clipped on this string so people can easily find it. You're going to see some of the entries. I'm really supposed to check on the nuts and bolts of the bridge but in truth – I stay here for the Dreamers. And to be honest - because of Dancie.

(DANCIE enters and sits on a bench. CHARLIE will hang up the Dream Journal if he hasn't already and then join her.)

I remember Dancie and what was and what could have been. I remember the past too well.

(It's a summer in the past – 10? 20? Years ago – depends on the age of your cast.
DANCIE and CHARLIE are seated. They are early 20's? 18?)

DANCIE

How long have we been coming here, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Since we were both Sweet Sixteen. I'm not sweet anymore but you sure are.

DANCIE

We had our first kiss here on this bench.

CHARLIE

I remember.

DANCIE

How many picnics? How many dances in the moonlight?

CHARLIE

Jeez, Dancie. Lots. Why so many questions?

DANCIE

It's not enough. I want more.

CHARLIE

I can kiss you more. Lots more.

DANCIE

You're avoiding the subject.

CHARLIE

My heart's paper thin. It beats too fast. Especially when I'm with you.

DANCIE

Don't blame me for not wanting to commit.

CHARLIE

It wouldn't be fair. You'd be left alone with no one to care for you.

DANCIE

How is that different from living alone now with no one to care for me?

CHARLIE

You have me!

DANCIE

Do I, Charlie? Because I'm feeling mighty lonely. I fill up my time helping others and I am happy to do it – but I wonder – do I spend all my time helping others in their lives because I have no life? (Beat.) I want a life.

CHARLIE

I want to give you everything you want, Dancie. But I can't give you time. I don't have it.

DANCIE

You can give me "us." I dream of us. Us in our home. Us with our babies. I want us.

CHARLIE

I could be gone in one hour/

DANCIE

/or ten years! I'll risk it. And if we only have an hour – I will make sure that hour gives me all the memories I need to take me into my old age. Marry me, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Let me think about it.

DANCIE

Don't think too long. I want a real life. And if I cannot have it here, I will look elsewhere.

CHARLIE

But you love me. You know you do.

DANCIE

I do. That's what makes it so hard. Storm's coming. I need to get ahead of it. I promised Deborah I would watch the new babe so she could take a walk and have an hour of peace to herself. Think about what I said.

(DANCIE exits. CHARLIE just sits. Lights dim. We hear thunder.)

CHARLIE

She didn't get ahead of the storm. And I've had more time than I thought I would.

(Lights change to just before dawn.)

CHARLIE (cont'd)

But that was the past. You didn't come for that. You came for today. Late August. It's just before dawn and looks to be the perfect summer day. We could do with some rain. We say that every August in Iowa. We'd much rather Mother Nature supply the crops with water than pay for it ourselves.

(HAROLD and MARION enter – it could be shadowy because the sun is not up yet. They take their places and we hear a car door slam.)

CHARLIE

People are up and about awfully early today. Of course, this is Iowa. Up before the sun. I wonder what they're doing here.

SCENE 2

NOBODY CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM – 6:30 a.m.

(MARION is by the bridge. Her husband HAROLD is just inside the bridge.)

MARION

HAROLD! Stop snooping in the Dreamer's Journal and come out here. It's dark. And spooky. HAROLD!

(ANA enters.)

Oh! Hello! I was just ...

ANA

Calling for Harold. I heard.

MARION

Are you one of those Madison-County-Bridge hunters?

ANA

Sorry? Are there people who hunt bridges? Is there a bounty?

MARION

Don't be coy with me. Just saying, this wasn't in the movie.

ANA

What movie?

MARION

Come on. Don't kid a kidder. You want to be Francesca, don't you? "Cause we all want to be Francesca.

ANA

Francesca?

MARION

Meryl Streep.

ANA

Oh – she's an actress, right? From old Hollywood.

MARION

She's going to star in my horror novel. She doesn't know it yet because I haven't written it yet but I'm writing it for her.

ANA

That's nice. I'm just here to photograph this bridge at sunrise. Then I'm going to win a thousand dollars and that'll show him. He'll never question my worth again. And when he begs me to come back – I won't!

MARION

You're entering that contest sponsored by Sunrise magazine?

ANA

Yes.

MARION

Are you any good?

ANA

Of course. Sure. Yes.

MARION

You shouldn't tell strangers your plans. Best to be mysterious. You never know who you will meet. Like suppose I told you that I plan on winning that contest and I don't suffer losses easily.

(ANA moves away scoping out the place. MARION follows.)

ANA

Quiet. With no one around.

MARION

Harold and I aren't no one. But I like it. It's the kind of place where no one can hear you scream.

(Beat.)

ANA

I'll just wait in the car...

MARION

If you're going to take a prize-winning photograph, best to check out all the angles. Down that path is promising.

ANA

It's ... still dark. There might be spider webs.

MARION

Oh honey – who knows who's out here? A spider could be the least of your worries.

ANA

I think I'll stay here. Near the road. Near my car. With my phone. That has an emergency button.

MARION

You're in the middle of nowhere. Check your bars.

(ANA does. Probably no bars.)

No worries. If anything happens, Harold and I are here.

ANA

If you're trying to scare me. It's working.

MARION

Just be on high alert. (Whispering.) They never did find the body.

(HAROLD enters from the bridge.)

HAROLD

Marion, are you trying to scare her with your horror story?

MARION

It's a fact. The body was never found. Is that a great first line or what?

HAROLD

I'm Harold.

ANA

I figured you must be.

HAROLD

This is my wife, Marion. She's the local librarian who will soon be fired if she doesn't quit reading the toddlers horror stories during story hour.

ANA

We met.

HAROLD

So, here to take a sunrise photo?

ANA

How'd you know?

HAROLD

That's why people come here at sunrise. Nobody actually watches the real sun rise. Do you have your shot all figured out?

ANA

I figure Mother Nature will do all the work and I'll just snap it.

(ANA looks around and faces west. She fiddles with her camera which she doesn't understand. HAROLD enters.)

HAROLD

The sun rises in the east. That way.

(ANA twirls around.)

ANA

I knew that.

HAROLD

So, you're going to win my contest.

ANA

Why not?

HAROLD

Because it doesn't look like you've done this before.

ANA

How hard can it be? This is a pretty place. The sun rises. Click. Done. Send it in. Win. And show my ex that I can do ... some things.

HAROLD

You realize that all over Madison County there are photographers who understand their cameras ready to take a sunrise photo. And they're all going to send it to the same contest.

ANA

You mean people have been here before?

MARION

This place was teeming with tourists in 1995 after the movie came out.

(ANA shrugs her shoulders – she never heard of it.)

The Bridges of Madison County?

ANA

Never heard of it. Sorry.

MARION

If you're trying to annoy me, it's working. Best to not annoy strangers. If you get my meaning.

HAROLD

It's coming! The golden hour. Nobody move! Well. Actually, both of you, move! You're blocking the view. And it only lasts a few seconds.

(The sun starts to come up. HAROLD is checking the settings on the camera. ANA just starts clicking away.)

HAROLD (cont'd)

What are you doing? Did you even check your ISO?/

ANA

/I just/

HAROLD

/What's your shutter speed?/

ANA

/I don't/

HAROLD

/Is this your first photograph?

ANA

No! I've taken lots of selfies.

(The lights brighten.)

HAROLD

It's here. Get out of the way. (Beat.) Please. You too, Marion. I have enough photos of you.

(MARION poses.)

MARION.....

(MARION gets out of the way. Harold nudges ANA out of the way. HAROLD focuses over the bridge and clicks. He lies down and focuses over and under around and clicks. He kneels and clicks.)

All right you two – smile.

ANA

What? No!

HAROLD

SMILE!

(They smile. Like they're on automatic.)

HAROLD (cont'd)

Nice. And ... done. That was a workout.

ANA

I didn't get one photo. And now the sun's up. Does that mean I have to come back tomorrow and do this all over again? Because I got up at 4 a.m. to come here and 4 a.m. is not my usual rising time. I can't believe anyone gets up at 4 a.m. Although I heard that farmers do. But I'm not a farmer and now I know for sure I'll never be a farmer but I thought I'd be a photographer because they don't have to tend their crops, right?

HAROLD

How long have you been at this photography thing?

ANA

(Checking her watch and counting on her fingers.)

Fifteen hours. Actually, nine hours if you don't count the six hours of sleep I got last night. Do the sleeping hours count?

HAROLD

Why not?

ANA

Then fifteen. I bought the camera yesterday at 3 p.m. and decided to take off and capture sunrises. Because they're impressive.

HAROLD

And you want to impress.

ANA

Definitely. It's life and death. A "to be or not to be" situation/

HAROLD

/Got it. It's important to you. To capture the sunrise you have to be one with the camera. Let me show you. Come on, I won't steal it. Hold mine. It's worth a lot more than yours.

(They draw close.)

First... you need to set the ISO to low. Sometimes mid-range. You will know once you are friends with your camera.

ANA

ISO? Like "in search of?" Is the camera in search of something?

HAROLD

It's the sensitivity of your camera's sensor. You're going to do this to control exposure. You're going to need a high aperture and of course, you want to control the shutter speed.

(THEY are very close. MARION sneaks in-between.)

MARION

Say ... did you come here to take a sunrise photo or snag a photographer? 'cause he's taken. Miss "I am too young to have seen Bridges of Madison County." Ha! You want your very own Robert Kincaid. Go find your own! He's not for sale.

HAROLD

Hold on, Marion. You never know – if the price is right...

MARION

Just remember what I said. Out here, "Nobody can hear you scream."

HAROLD

Don't start that chant again.

MARION

Nobody found the body.

HAROLD

THERE'S NO BODY! (Beat.) Back to your original plan, if you want to bid for me, how high would you go?

ANA

You're safe. I like my men a bit more buff...

HAROLD

Ouch!

ANA

And men who believe in ladies first and let them take the first picture. I came here to get a sunrise photo and I didn't even get that. Because you pushed me out of the way, insulted my camera and did not let me do my thing. I had a plan!

HAROLD

Plans are good.

ANA

Everything was worked out in my head. I was going to show my boyfriend... excuse me ... my ex-boyfriend that there was more to me than being ... well ... you know. An object. Yes! He objectified me! I was his ornament and when I called him on it, he said, "Well, what else can you do? Do you write? Draw? Sing? Run triathlons?" And I told him, "What do you know? I am photographer!" And then I planned on winning the sunrise photo contest in the local paper and ... well ...

HAROLD

You'd show him!

ANA

Except/

HAROLD

You've never taken a proper photograph in your life.

ANA

I grew up with an i-phone. I took tons of photos of me and my friends...

HAROLD

Making duck faces...

ANA

Sometimes. I'm really good selfies. See?

(She snaps a few selfies to go with each of her descriptions.)

ANA (cont'd)

Comedy, tragedy, horror, adventure, cooking, runway model, goofy, cold, hot, thirsty/

HAROLD

Not bad. I like this. Can you give me a few pointers?

ANA

Let all your inhibitions go. Be one with the camera... one with the word...

(ANA throws out words and HAROLD and maybe MARION pose.)

Marathon! Moon walk! Dancing Queen! Penguin! Limerence!

MARION and HAROLD

Limerence?

ANA

That's about being totally infatuated with another person. Something I know nothing about. Anyway, with all my camera experience, I thought, how hard can a sunrise be?

HAROLD

And you found out that light's tricky. Light moves. You have to sense that and tell the camera – that's what all the settings are for. Although if you look here –

(He takes her camera.)

See that little picture of the sunrise? It's a clue. And if you click on it, your camera will make all the correct settings. Wait. What's that? Oh – that's good. When did you take that?

ANA

It must have clicked when you pushed me.

HAROLD

Look at that angle. And how the slight tilt moves the light. It's an amazing photo.

ANA

Really?

HAROLD

I think it could win.

MARION

But Harold should get some credit. After all, he did push you.

ANA

I'll ... think about it.

MARION

Nope no thinking. Just do it. Harold, get some paper from the Dreamer's Journal. Let's draw up a contract right now.

(ANA starts to move away.)

You're not going anywhere. Remember... nobody can hear you scream out here. I think there's a storm coming. It could be a dark and stormy morning. The kind where the rain comes in torrents and violent gusts of wind throw cars into ditches. Later, when the storm has passed, the townspeople will notice your forlorn car in the ditch and go to check on the driver. But you're not there. Nobody ever found the body.

ANA

You wouldn't.

MARION

Do you want to find out? I'd really like the prize money. (Approaching ANA.) I want to self-publish a collection of horror stories. You could be in it ... who knows?

HAROLD

Don't mind her. She lives in a world of darkness. It's actually what I love about her. She searches for the dark and I look for the light. I'm starving. Let's grab some breakfast. Care to join us? We live about a mile up the road.

ANA

Is it secluded?

MARION

Very. I could murder someone in my home and –

MARION and ANA

Nobody would hear you scream.

MARION

How'd you know?

ANA

I'll pass.

HAROLD

Too bad. I have a really good photography collection of sunrises. Come on, Marion. I'm hungry. And kid – send in your photo. I'd be happy with second place.

MARION

There's more money in first place.

HAROLD

We don't need the money.

MARION

I thought I'd self-publish. "The Missing Bodies of Madison County." Iowa would eat it up. And you could take photos of the missing bodies?

HAROLD

How can I take photos of missing bodies if they're missing?

MARION

We'll figure it out. In a mystery there's always something to figure out.

(MARION and HAROLD exit. ANA is alone. We hear a noise – maybe the wind. A bush rustles. ANA looks around. She is very spooked. She takes out her car keys and points and unlocks her car.)

ANA

And I am out of here.

(She runs off to her car. We spy someone – in a bush?)

MYSTERIOUS PERSON

Anyone there?

(Thunder. Then nothing. Lights brighten. CHARLIE enters.)

CHARLIE

Who knows if Marion will ever write her novel. Sometimes dreams just stay as dreams. The thunder was promising. But the rain never came. Too bad. All the farmers are dreaming of rain. Look at this: Locks. Many locks. People come here to lock in their undying love for their partner. To cement it, they put a lock on the bridge. Sometimes it works ... and sometimes ... it doesn't.

(Lights change to 9:30 a.m.)

SCENE 3

UNLOCKED – 9:30 a.m.

(It is now late morning. It's hot and birds and bees are making their rounds. We hear the sound of sawing. Or trying-to-saw. It's not going well. Lights up on KRISTI. She is by one of the railings that contains a few "love locks." Hers is near the bottom and she is trying to saw it off.)

KRISTI

He loves me.... He loves me not. He loves me not He loves me NOT NOT NOT! Oh! It's hot HOT HOT! I hate him. (Beat.) Not. I love him. NOT! Come on lock, unlock! Ohhh! Where is a locksmith when you need one?

(AND just like that, MATLOCK SHERLOCK, locksmith extraordinaire appears.)

MATLOCK

At your service, Ma'am. Sorry I'm late. Matlock Sherlock, at your service.

KRISTI

What in tarnation/

MATLOCK

/You wished for a locksmith. You have a locksmith.

KRISTI

That's not how things work.

MATLOCK

This is Iowa. If you wish for it, it will come. I'm just a tad late. There was gridlock. Two tractors.

KRISTI

Ohh! A roadblock!

MATLOCK

Exactly. (Beat.) You're never going to be able to get that lock off. Your saw is way too large to get in between all the locks. And has anyone ever sharpened it?

KRISTI

That's why I called for a locksmith... only I didn't call...

MATLOCK

Wished.

KRISTI

I wonder what else I could wish for.

MATLOCK

Wishing only works with baseball fields and locksmiths. As I said, this is Iowa.

(Fiddles briefly with lock.)

Pretty flimsy lock. I wouldn't trust my love with it. Really, if you blow on it, it will fall apart. Watch.

(He blows on it. Nothing.)

Just need to catch my breath.

(He blows on it again. Nothing. Soon he is huffing and puffing like the Big Bad Wolf trying to get the lock to open.)

I see the problem. It's still held together by love.

KRISTI

You must be out of breath. Have some water. It's hot. The air. Not the water.

(She hands him a water bottle and he drinks.)

KRISTI (cont'd)

It's only my love that holds the lock together. His love is gone. Or so he says. Can you unlock this so my love is unlocked?

MATLOCK

Sure thing. As I said this is pretty flimsy. The nail file should do the trick.

(Maybe doing contortions by the railing, MATLOCK works on filing the lock so it breaks. Only it doesn't.)

You have to help me here.

KRISTI

Water?

(HE gulp some down.)

MATLOCK

Stop loving him.

KRISTI

I'm trying. That's why I want the lock destroyed.

MATLOCK

I'll try the pliers. These are really good at twisting small pieces of metal.

(More contortions as he tries to break the lock.)

This lock is being stubborn. Are you sure he doesn't love you?

KRISTI

Pretty sure. He left with all his belongings and said he never wanted to see me again under pain of death. I did mention that I could arrange that. (Beat.) Maybe I shouldn't have said that.

MATLOCK

No. That's good. That's the kind of thing I like to hear. Those are fighting words that unlock love locks. I'll just crack it with a hammer.

(He takes out a small hammer or something resembling one – can be silly –
And starts banging on the lock.)

You know what's wrong? You need to do it. You need to prove to the lock that there is no love left by smashing it to bits.

(KRISTI tries but the lock holds.)

MATLOCK (cont'd)

Are you sure he doesn't love you? Because this lock is saying something different.

(MATLOCK takes some more water and holds on to the water bottle.)

KRISTI

Pretty sure. He forgave me after I poisoned him. (Beat.) But he refused to forgive me the second time.

MATLOCK

(Handing her the water bottle.)

Poisoned?

KRISTI

Accidentally! I am not a murderer.

MATLOCK

I don't feel so good.

KRISTI

Maybe we should get you in the shade.

MATLOCK
Don't touch me!

KRISTI
Have some more water.

MATLOCK
What's in it?

KRISTI
Water.

MATLOCK
How much did I drink?

KRISTI
Just a few sips. Wait. Oh – you think – no, no, really it's just water. I don't poison people. Not on purpose anyway.

MATLOCK
Just those few times you poisoned your husband?

KRISTI
Twice! Only twice! Jeez... some people just want to think the worst of everyone.

MATLOCK
I have to go.

(MATLOCK is a bit rocky on his feet.)

KRISTI
You're overheated. Maybe dehydrated. Just rest a minute. (Beat.) You have all these scenarios running through your head, don't you? Like I poisoned you? Relax. All you had was water and you could use a little more.

(Beat as KRISTI notices some graffiti above her in the wood.)

KRISTI
Oh no!

MATLOCK
What? I'm dying, aren't I?

KRISTI
The graffiti. Right above you. See? I carved this this one years ago.
"Kristi and Stanly were here." – I did that on our first date.

KRISTI (cont'd)

Look at this one: “She said yes!” – Stanley did that one after he proposed.

“:Just married.” We both did that together. And then we put our lock on the railing, closed it shut and professed our undying love. And then – the love died. Or rather he thought he was dying and that killed the love.

MATLOCK

Stanley ... is he still alive?

KRISTI

Of course, he is. The poison wasn't deadly enough to kill him. He just got nauseated and thought he was dying. Apparently, some wild mushrooms will do that to you. Stanley just loves mushrooms and I found some exotic ones in the woods out of town and thought I would surprise him. I surprised him all right.

MATLOCK

Did you get sick?

KRISTI

No. I hate mushrooms. (Beat.) I did get sick from the berry pie. Do you know some red berries are poisonous? Climbing bittersweet can make you very sick. Do avoid it. It did look very pretty in the pie though. Of course, I had just a sliver because I watch my weight and Stanley had three helpings so I just felt a little off and he well... had to go to the E.R. And that's when he ended it. He said he'd rather live a long life than be married to me. He unlocked our wedlock and so here I am trying to unlock our love lock and quite frankly, you haven't been very helpful.

MATLOCK

I'm like Stanley... I want to live.

(We hear a car door slam.)

MATLOCK

Someone's here. I'm going to be rescued.

STANLEY (O.S.)

Kristi?

KRISTI

Stanley? OVER HERE!

STANLEY

I knew I'd find you here. (Beat.) Who's this?

MATLOCK

I'm a locksmith. Or was. Before my demise.

KRISTI

You're fine! Our love lock won't unlock.

STANLEY

I know ... it's because ...

KRISTI

You still love me?

STANLEY

Yes. Till death do us part. But about that "death" thing – not for another fifty years, okay?

KRISTI

Okay! I guess my lock wasn't so flimsy after all.

MATLOCK

Since I'm not needed, I'm going to Urgent Care.

KRISTI

Drink some water.

(Offering him the water bottle.)

MATLOCK

Good advice. I shall. As soon as I find a gas station with water. In a bottle. That's been sealed.

(MATLOCK exits.)

STANLEY

Odd fellow. (Beat.) I love you, Kristi.

KRISTI

Enough to write it down in the Dream Journal?

STANLEY

Yes. But Kristi, from this day forward, for better or worse, I will do all the cooking.

KRISTI

No problem. Have some water.

(STANLEY has a nice drink of water as the lights change. As STANLEY goes to write in the Dream Journal, CHARLIE enters. STANLEY will quickly write and exit with KRISTI.)

CHARLIE

All's well that ends well. And let this be a reminder that while you are here, "don't eat the plants." (Beat.) There's a famous Iowa painting – "American Gothic." Maybe you know of it. The farmer, his wife and a pitchfork looking very dour – Oswald and Ethel that is. The pitchfork looks just fine. But looks aren't everything. Sometimes a serious mask hides a burning passion. There's this farmer and his wife that come here once a year. They write in this journal and confess that even though they've been married forever, they still burn for each other.

(ETHEL and OSWALD appear with their pitchfork. OSWALD heads for the Dreamer's Journal.)

CHARLIE

I better get out of their way.

(LIGHTS change for Scene 4.)

SCENE 4

AMERICAN GOTHIC – 11 a.m.

(OSWALD and ETHEL stealthily come center. Let their costume suggest the painting AMERICAN GOTHIC. They do not need to be reproductions. ETHEL carries a pitchfork. Once they are convinced they are alone, they stand center stage with the pitchfork between them. ETHEL writes in the Dream Journal.)

ETHEL

(Writing.) We are back for our yearly affirmation of “till death do us part.” Oswald even said, “I love you” twice this year so it’s been the best year ever.

(NOTE: No matter how passionate their words are, they remain dour and committed to not show any passion at all. They are making their yearly declarations of love to each other. But they are not prone to any public display of affection. The kiss at the end (quick, a peck, behind the pitchfork) is huge for them. OSWALD and ETHEL nod at each other. It’s time to begin.)

ETHEL

Oswald?

OSWALD

Yes, Ethel?

ETHEL

Do you wanna dance?

OSWALD

Under the moonlight? I don’t dance. Don’t ask me.

ETHEL

But I’m the Dancing Queen.

OSWALD

Maybe the Funky Chicken.

(And with the pitchfork between them, there is a brief Funky Chicken Dance.)

ETHEL

Oh that’s was wonderful. Now, I want to hold your ...hand.

OSWALD

No Hands.

	ETHEL
C'mon. Put your hand in mine.	
	OSWALD
I can make your hands clap...	
	ETHEL
I was born to hand jive.	
	OSWALD
All right, all right. Just ... put your head on my shoulder.	
(SHE does so.)	
That's enough.	
	ETHEL
Oswald? Will you still love me when I'm 64?	
	OSWALD
We've only just begun.	
	ETHEL
All we need is ...	
	OSWALD
Love. Can't buy me love.	
	ETHEL
Endless love.	
	OSWALD
Crazy stupid love.	
	ETHEL
Crazy in love.	
	OSWALD
Modern love.	
	ETHEL
Baby love.	
	OSWALD
What?	

I will always love you.
ETHEL

What's love got to do with it?
OSWALD

Can you feel the love tonight?
ETHEL

Can you feel my heart beat?
OSWALD

My heart will go on.
ETHEL

A heart of glass.
OSWALD

Don't go breaking my heart.
ETHEL

Oh Ethel!
OSWALD

Oh Oswald!
ETHEL

Your kiss is on my lips.
OSWALD

Any minute now.
ETHEL

(And discreetly behind the pitchfork, there is a kiss. They face forward and sigh. They smile. And then the dour expression returns to their faces.)

Take me home, country roads.
OSWALD

Take the long way home.
ETHEL

(And they sneak out as quietly as they entered as the lights change.)

CHARLIE

I love a good old-fashioned love song.

(We hear a car pull up and park. Soon, we will see AVERY with an urn.)

Here's someone I don't know. With an urn. That can only mean one thing. We have our sad songs here just like everywhere else. Sometimes the sad stories include ghosts. There have been sightings of a young girl who appears when people at their wits end. Sometimes they are alarmed and sometimes they feel comforted. I've never seen her so I wouldn't know.

(LIGHTS change to Scene 5.)

SCENE 5

AVERY AND DANCIE AND CHARLIE – 12:30 p.m.

(Lights up on Hogshead Bridge. It is just after noon. We hear a car pull up and park. AVERY appears with a medium-sized urn. AVERY looks around and cross to the bridge. AVERY carefully unfolds a piece of paper. DANCIE appears on the other side of the bridge. She's more spiritual – gauzy white or light blue. She looks at AVERY who is startled by her presence.)

AVERY

Hi! Nothing to see here. I'm just ... admiring the bridge. Just having a private moment. Super private. Personal. Exclusive. You don't mind, do you? Giving me have some privacy? I won't be long.

(DANCIE watches.)

Are you watching me because I *really* want to be alone and you *really* want to be annoying? It's that private thing. You understand, right?

(DANCIE is gone. AVERY looks around but no one is there.)

AVERY (cont'd)

You're still watching me! I can feel you watching me. I know you're watching me. What is this world coming to when you can't have a moment of privacy in the middle of Iowa?

(CHARLIE enters.)

AVERY (cont'd)

I wouldn't come any closer. There's a weird lady running around here.

CHARLIE

Have you seen her?

AVERY

She won't leave me alone.

CHARLIUE

Is that so terrible?

AVERY

I want to be alone!

CHARLIE

Curly hair, about this high? (*Can change description to match actress.*)

That's right.

AVERY

I wish I could see her.

CHARLIE

I wish she would go away.

AVERY

You're lucky.

CHARLIE

I don't feel lucky. I'd like to go somewhere else. But I made a promise. Oh, what the heck? I'll try again after lunch. She should be gone by then.

AVERY

(AVERY exits.)

Dancie. Why won't you come out for me?

CHARLIE

(Lights fade to black.)

INTERMISSION

SCENE 6

CHARLIE AND AVERY AND DANCIE – 2 p.m.

(AVERY again enters with the urn and then CHARLIE enters.)

AVERY

You're here a lot.

CHARLIE

I'm an unofficial caretaker of the bridges. I try to keep them mended. It's getting hard. You don't find those wide wooden planks anymore. They are beauties. We need to keep them restored. The past – whether it's good or bad needs to be noticed.

AVERY

I hate to be a pain but I kind of need to be alone. I'm going to try and do this before that woman appears.

CHARLIE

She just wants to help.

AVERY

She's spooky.

CHARLIE

She is that! Let her help you. That's what she does - appears when someone needs help.

AVERY

I don't want to hear platitudes. I've heard them all. They don't help.

CHARLIE

She doesn't say much anymore. I am told she is supportive. But I wouldn't know.

AVERY

I don't want a hug or someone to hold my hand.

CHARLIE

There's no chance of that happening. If you see her, go on with your business. Trust me. You'll feel better.

AVERY

Thanks.

(AVERY takes out his phone. He's looking for a song.)

CHARLIE

The urn is small. A dog? Cat?

AVERY

Pig. She is ... was my best friend. Josie and I used to camp out here when we went out west to work in the state parks. She loved it here. I've had her since I was little. They don't live long enough.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry for your loss.

AVERY

She was a championship swimmer. And digger. I never could teach her to jump rope though. She tried. I have to hand it to her – she was game for anything. (Beat.) She gave the best snout kisses.

(Teary-eyed but fighting it.)

I'm sorry. This is hard.

(AVERY turns on an annoying children's song (public domain, please). It could be "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" or anything that has lasted through the ages. CHARLIE may wince.)

It was Josie's favorite song.

CHARLIE

I'll leave you to it.

(CHARLIE exits. AVERY takes out a piece of paper.)

AVERY

I will I will miss you...

(AVERY cannot go on. He looks up expecting to make sure they are alone.)

"I will miss reading you Charlotte's Web every night. Even though we both knew it by heart. I will miss ... everything. As Charlotte told Wilbur, 'You have been my friend. That is a tremendous thing.'"

Oh Josie, I'd give anything to see you wiggle-waggle your tail again. And that bobble-wobble you did you did with your nose. And that corkscrew, curly tail was the talk of the county. You always had at least eight curls fitted into that tail. Josie.... Oh Josie... what will I do without you? How will I go on?

(AVERY opens the urn and carefully spreads the ashes. *Note: you do not need real*

ashes. DANCIE enters with a covered basket. AVERY freezes. DANCIE lays it near AVERY – not coming too close and exits. AVERY picks it up and looks inside. We hear a piglet squeal. AVERY holds back tears and picks up the urn.)

AVERY

No! No more pigs! I won't replace Josie! Good-bye best friend. Until we meet again in some great muddy puddle in the sky.

(We hear another piglet squeal. AVERY moves away. Another squeal.)

AVERY

Stop that!

(Squeal.)

Not another word!

(Squeal. AVERY picks up the basket.)

Okay! But just for tonight.

(Squeal.)

You're kind of scrawny. Maybe two nights.

(Squeal.)

Don't nag. I bet it's feeding time, isn't it? With a piglet, it's always feeding time.

(AVERY exits with the urn and the basket. DANCIE appears in the background and watches as the lights dim. CHARLIE enters.)

CHARLIE

I hope they are happy together.

(MELISANDE enters. She has a basket and a fishing pole. SHE settles herself by the creek.)

I don't know her. But she's been coming here every afternoon. Her family rented a place in town for the summer. Which is a bit odd as we're not a resort town. And it's a little late to be fishing. The fish are asleep. Maybe I should tell her.

(CHARLIE waves. MELISANDE looks away.)

Or maybe I'll let her find out by herself.

(CHARLIE exits. Lights change to Scene 7.)

SCENE 7

NOT FISHING* - 3:30 p.m.

*Crappies – a mild-tasting fish pronounced “Kra-peeZ”

(MELISANDE is just outside the bridge – it looks like she’s fishing. Tom runs by. He sees MELISANDE and runs backwards to speak to her. He continues to run in place.)

TOM

You won’t catch anything this late in the day.

MELISANDE

It’s fine for my needs.

TOM

I’m telling you nothing’s down there. No bluegills, no bass, no crappies.

MELISANDE

Thanks for the unasked-for advice. Appreciated.

TOM

Just hate to see you wasting your time.

MELISANDE

Sitting by a covered bridge in late summer is never a waste of time.

TOM

You don’t want to waste your bait.

MELISANDE

I waste nothing. Isn’t that true, O’Leary?

(FISHING rod shakes. TOM stops running in place.)

TOM

You named your worm?

MELISANDE

No worms.

TOM

Leeches?

MELISANDE

No leeches.

TOM

How do you expect to catch a fish?

MELISANDE

Not fishing.

TOM

You're doing a good imitation of it – sitting here with a fishing rod and a bucket.

MELISANDE

You're not seeing the whole picture.

(Fishing rod shakes.)

Whoa, O'Leary, whoa! Success?

(She briefly lifts the rod and looks.)

That's all right. Keep trying.

(She leans over to listen.)

Really? Good. Yes. I can be patient.

TOM

Some people fish to relax. They don't really expect or even want to catch anything. They just want to get away.

MELISANDE

Not fishing.

TOM

There's this saying – maybe you know it – if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck – it's probably a duck.

MELISANDE

I'm not a duck.

TOM

That's not what I meant –

MELISANDE

- You can go now. Do whatever it was you were doing.

TOM

I was just out for my run.

MELISANDE

Then run. Quickly. Before I unleash O'Leary on you.

TOM

Your worm?

MELISANDE

Think bigger. Think "snake." "Poison." "Death." That sort of thing.

TOM

Got it. I'm out of here.

(TOM starts to run off. And then runs backwards back.)

Please tell me what you're doing. I know I'm the obnoxious curious cat. I can't change my nature.

MELISANDE

Curiosity killed the cat.

TOM

But satisfaction brought it back.

MELISANDE

There is no way I am going to share my deepest, most private, innermost secret with a stranger.

TOM

"Hi!, I'm Tom. Can we be friends?"

MELISANDE

No. Friends share things. Friends have things in common. Friends know things - like each other's last name.

TOM

Tom Murphy. I think we have a lot in common. I'm Irish and ... your devil worm-snake is Irish.

MELISANDE

It's not *exactly* a snake.

TOM

Fine. It's a a I give up. What is it?

MELISANDE

Let's just say there's more here than heaven and earth that are dreamt of in your little world.

TOM

Expand my world.

MELISANDE

It's a "malarkey detector" and it will probably go off any minute now.

TOM

No malarkey here. Maybe a bit of the blarney.

MELISANDE

If you're aiming to charm me, it won't work.

TOM

Lepre...*can!*

MELISANDE

Lepre...*can't!* (Beat.) You should leave. I could start screaming at any moment and what would people think? That a creepy guy wouldn't leave a poor, innocent, young woman alone.

TOM

Everyone in town knows me. In fact, everyone in Iowa knows everyone. I'm harmless. You may be the interloper. The people of Iowa may find it strange that a woman without a fishing license is sitting by a covered bridge pretending not to fish.

MELISANDE

I'm not fishing! I'm ... wishing.

TOM

What are you wishing for?

MELISANDE

That you would leave.

TOM

I walked into that one. I promise I'll leave. Just tell me one fact about yourself. Seriously... Miss Ms... Mrs....

MELISANDE

Melisande.

TOM

Melisande! That's a pretty name. Did you pick it out yourself?

MELISANDE

I have parents.

TOM

It's just sometimes people decide their given name doesn't suit them and you know they sort of decide –

MELISANDE

My parents named me. There's your fact. Bye.

(TOM hesitates then runs off. MELISANDE again leans into the water.)

O'Leary? How's it going? It's cracking? Already? Splendid! Yes, I'll be patient.

(From the other side of the bridge, TOM peers over. MELISANDE is all calm when suddenly the fishing pole starts shaking. MELISANDE has a hard time controlling it. At times it looks as if she may fall over into the water. It gets so bad that TOM can't stand it anymore and goes to help. MELISANDE is appalled.)

STOP! Don't help me!

TOM

I can't let you get dragged under the water!

MELISANDE

The water's six inches deep! I'll live! Don't touch the pole! You'll ruin the magic!

TOM

I can't let you drown! I'm from Iowa! We don't watch people drown!

(MELISANDE drops the pole.)

I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I just had a vision – what am I saying? I never have visions – but there you were face down in the water and I just couldn't let that happen.

(MELISANDE checks her pole.)

MELISANDE

Nooo! He's gone. O'Leary ran away – the little sneak. Never trust a leprechaun. I've been told that my entire life but do I listen? No. He said he was different. He said he could make my wish come true. He said -

TOM

Leprechaun?

MELISANDE

And he wasn't my first leprechaun. I should have known better.

TOM

You're saying you had a leprechaun attached to the fishing pole.

MELISANDE

Yes. And he was helping me make my wish come true. But only O'Leary could get it.

TOM

You believe in leprechauns?

MELISANDE

It's not a question of belief. It's a fact of life.

TOM

So you were hoping for a pot of gold or something?

MELISANDE

Oh no. Something much better.

TOM

I'd wish for a pot of gold. That would make my life easier. Wait! I can't believe I'm buying into this leprechaun stuff. First: leprechauns are not real and second: people can't catch them.

MELISANDE

I have a gift.

TOM

So even if I allow that you are the "leprechaun whisperer," why wouldn't you want the pot of gold? You'd never have to work for a living.

MELISANDE

But would it make me happier? I wished for something to make me happy.

TOM

I'm afraid to ask.

MELISANDE

A unicorn. A baby unicorn that I could raise to bring goodness into the world. She would create rainbow arches that would melt into the air bringing health and well-being to all. I thought about wishing for a dragon but I don't know about fire. It's tricky.

TOM

I work for a company called "The Rainbow Connection" – it helps at-risk youth. A pot of gold would come in handy.

MELISANDE

- That's considered ill-gotten gains in my world.

TOM

And what world is that?

MELISANDE

It's a world that's "touched." Anyway, not getting touched today. Time to get my pole and leave.

TOM

Don't.

MELISANDE

What?

TOM

Leave.

MELISANDE

Why not?

TOM

Knock. Knock.

MELISANDE

Really?

TOM

Knock knock.

MELISANDE

I don't want to know who's there.

TOM

But Clover wants to talk to you.

TOM (cont'd)

(Silence.)

C'mon. Clover.

MELISANDE

Who the heck is Clover?

TOM

Clover here and I'll tell you.

(Beat.)

MELISANDE

(All right. He's starting to win her over.)
I'm Dublin over with laughter.

TOM

I have more.

MELISANDE

That's all right/

TOM

/What do you get when two leprechauns have a conversation? (Beat.) A lot of small talk!

MELISANDE

Are you done?

TOM

What do you call an Irish spider? Paddy long legs! When is an Irish potato not an Irish potato?
When it's a French fry. What do you call/

MELISANDE

Uncle! I give! I give! Please no more.

TOM

I have a hundred of them. My grandpa made me memorize 100 Irish jokes and we would tell
them over and over on St. Patrick's Day. But he never told me a leprechaun was real.

MELISANDE

Aren't you lucky you met me then? So I could set you straight. (Beat.) I have to go.

TOM

Watch out! There's an egg under your foot. Wouldn't want to step on it.

MELISANDE

It's cracked. Poor thing.

(SHE examines it.)

No ... she's ... she's

TOM

Is that what I think it is? I didn't know they came in eggs.

MELISANDE

Unicorns come to us in a myriad of ways. I'd better get it home and nurse it. It's so tiny. O' Leary came through with my wish after all. (Beat.) And thanks Tom Murphy. It's been ...

TOM

Yes....

MELISANDE

Better than I expected...

TOM

Yes... Better than I hoped... who am I kidding? I didn't hope... I just ... I think ...I'd like...

MELISANDE

To know me?

TOM

Yes.

MELISANDE

Autumn is coming and I go with the wind.

TOM

I may ... care about you.

MELISANDE

I can't stay.

TOM

I can follow.

MELISANDE

None of this may be real.

TOM

I'm a dreamer.

(They add some grass to the fishing bucket with grasses and carefully lay the egg into it. They point in different directions, decide on a direction and together with the pail between them, exit as the lights change.)

CHARLIE

Do you really think that was a unicorn that hatched? Improbable? But possible. Last year two children claimed they befriended a fairy. It caused a lot of heated debates in town. And when the dust finally settled, nobody could be sure if it was true or not. Does it have to be real to be true?

Sometimes we hear and see things that not only come to us in dreams at night - but appear during the day. Sometimes we can control them – I believe it's called lucid dreaming. Maybe that's what we are all doing now. And just maybe – you don't want to hear about any of this and just see what's going to happen next. Rain is in the forecast. Yes. I predict that that's what will happen next.

(CHARLIE exits as lights change to Scene 8.)

SCENE 8

RAIN – 6:30 p.m.

(Clouds have moved in. A man (RIVER) approaches CHARLIE and points to the Dream Journal.)

RIVER

Is that it? Tell me that's it. I've come a long way.

CHARLEY

Looking for "it?"

RIVER

Yes. And I have a powerful wish.

CHARLEY

Sorry, this here's not a wishing well. It's a bridge. Would you like to know it's history?

RIVER

No, thank-you. I want my wish granted. I was told if I wrote it down in some journal on this bridge, it would come true.

CHARLEY

It's a dream journal actually. Not a wish journal.

RIVER

So, if I write it down as my dream, it will come true?

CHARLEY

Not exactly.

RIVER

If I dream it, it will come true?

CHARLEY

You need to work your dreams.

RIVER

So if I work in my dreams, it will come true?

CHARLEY

You do know there is a difference between a wish and a dream, don't you?

RIVER

Well I ... no.

CHARLEY

A wish is just a hope. It's sweet. But it doesn't accomplish much. A dream is your goalpost. But you need to figure out how to get there.

RIVER

I just want to write it down and wait for it to happen.

CHARLEY

It could be a long wait.

RIVER

I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of hoping. I want to fall in love. I want to know what the love songs are about. I want it to be real love – you know – not just a five-minute infatuation. I want a will-do-anything-and-everything-for-you, kiss me now and forever, only you, just an old-fashioned love just like Romeo and Juliet.

CHARLEY

That didn't end well.

RIVER

Antony and Cleopatra then.

CHARLEY

You don't want to go there.

RIVER

Lancelot and Guinevere!

CHARLEY

Nope.

RIVER

Lady and the Tramp!

CHARLEY

That's better. I'll let it go that they were dogs.

RIVER

Can this bridge help me?

CHARLEY

It's just a bridge with a cover...

RIVER

That connects two places. That's what bridges do, right? They connect. I need to connect.

CHARLEY

Then you really have to go where the people are. There's not a lot of pedestrian traffic here.

RIVER

I did the gym, the trying to "meet cute" while buying yogurt, the single dances at church; I borrowed a dog so I could meet people at the dog walk, I volunteered at a cat shelter, I even tried the bars. Awkward because I don't drink. I'm under this cloud. And I can't stop it from following me.

CHARLEY

Have you tried a therapist?

RIVER

Are they single?

CHARLEY

To help you with your cloud problem.

RIVER

It's not psychological.

CHARLEY

How do you know?

RIVER

Look up.

(And CHARLEY does. And there is indeed a cloud high above RIVER.)

Do you see it?

CHARLEY

Funny. There's a low-hanging cloud right above you.

RIVER

It's been there for years. You'd think it would have burst by now and I would be free.

CHARLEY

I would love it to burst. We are dry as a desert right now. The crops could fail. Not good for anyone. We've had one storm that brought no rain. I think every farmer in Iowa is dreaming of rain.

RIVER

You should put that in your "Dream Journal."

CHARLEY

As I said, you have to work on your dreams.

RIVER

Maybe call a rainmaker. And maybe – that rainmaker can burst my cloud and both our problems will be solved. May I?

(CHARLEY hands RIVER the Dream Journal.)

I'm going to enter my dream. It can't hurt. I'm River by the way. No irony there.

CHARLEY

Charley. Nice to meet you. Our river bed is drying up. Maybe your cloud will, too. I'll leave you to your dreams.

(They wave good-bye. CHARLEY exits. RIVER sits with the Dream Journal.)

RIVER

Dear Dream Journal, I have a might powerful wish... no – not wish ... dream...

(As RIVER writes, a wind starts to blow. The skies will slowly darken. Then a soft rumble of thunder.)

Now I know why they covered the bridges.

(As RIVER runs to go into the covered bridge, RAIN is running out of the bridge. Of course, THEY collide. It's part "meet cute" and part "meet messy." RIVER is instantly delighted.)

RAIN

I am soo sorry. I can't always control my movements. Sometimes I am delicate like a drizzle. Other times I just gush, and right now I think I am gushing. Am I gushing? Yes, I'm gushing.

(THEY look at each other. Lightning bolt.)

Whoa! What a rush of nitrogen! Hello. I'm Rain.

RIVER

River.

(SHE takes a look at RIVER – up and down.)

RAIN

Would you look at that?

RIVER

What?

RAIN

You have the cutest cloud above you. So sweet. More than a whisp but in control. Doesn't gush. I wish I was that cloud.

RIVER

I wish you were that cloud, also. I'd take you everywhere.

RAIN

I go where the winds blow. I have no self-control.

RIVER

I'd follow you anywhere.

RAIN

Where the winds roar and the typhoons blow?

RIVER

Anywhere.

RAIN

To the mountain tops where I grumble and burst into icicles?

RIVER

Anywhere.

RAIN

Into the eye of a hurricane?

RIVER

To the four corners of the earth if need be. South! North! North by Northwest! East! Where you'll be my sun.

RAIN

That's so amazingly sweet. Nobody's ever said such deep thoughts like that to me before. I know I'm gushing. Am I gushing? Yes, I'm gushing. (Beat.) I'll never be anyone's sun. It's a fact. My life is lonely. I come to town. I make the crops grow. I clean up the soot in the streets. I make puddles for children to dance in. Everyone hides when I'm around. And when the sun comes out, so do the people. And they look for rainbows and cheer. But nobody cheers for me.

RIVER

“Oh Rain who Reigns our earth and sky,
Take the reins, dear Rain, don't be shy.
I love you, Rain. It's not insane

RIVER (cont'd)
To wish to be your swain,
Love, Me.”

RAIN
Did you just propose?

RIVER
I think I did.

RAIN
But you can't.

RIVER
But I did.

RAIN
But I come and I go.

RIVER
And I'll wait. How I'll wait.

RAIN
I burst and I drizzle. I come in torrents and warm sizzles. You'll never know when I will come or how long I will stay.

RIVER
And I'll wait and I'll wait and I'll wait.

RAIN
WAIT! I came here because the corn called me. They're very dry.

RIVER
I'm told a lot of farmers have been calling you, also.

RAIN
Oh there's just too much noise when humans try to dream me up. I can't concentrate. But when the corn and the soybeans call, I do try to pay attention. I have to do this. Do you understand?

RIVER
I'll wait.

RAIN
When I'm done, I'll be gone. Pfff! Into thin air. I ... dissipate. Or evaporate. I forget.

I'll wait. RIVER

It's been RAIN

The best five minutes of my life. RIVER

I think I love you. RAIN

I know I love you. RIVER

(RAIN finally rains. It's a downpour. RIVER will watch. RAIN dances around RIVER. RIVER welcomes RAIN and the rain. Maybe RIVER also dances. The lights will dim as we listen to the rain and watch the dance. Lights change to Scene 9.)

SCENE 9

PARIS – 8 p.m.

(It is later in the day. Not quite dusk. But dusk is coming. PAUL is on one side of the bridge. MARIE appears on the other side. They look at each other – there’s something familiar.)

PAUL

Is it ...

MARIE

... really you?

PAUL and MARIE

Wait there!

(They go across the grassy area and meet halfway.)

PAUL

This is a nice surprise? What are you doing here?

MARIE

I live here. Remember? Or rather “lived.” What about you? Visiting the folks?

PAUL

I live here. Or rather near.

MARIE

Since when?

PAUL

Since this morning at 10:45 a.m. Bought a home in West Des Moines.

(He may dangle some house keys.)

It’s been awhile.

MARIE

Seven years, 95 days, sixteen hours and counting.

PAUL

Wow. I must have really hurt you.

MARIE

It’s a joke. I stopped counting in October after you left.

PAUL

Oh. You look really good. I mean ... really .. you know.

(Beat. Okay, this is a little awkward.)

MARIE

Is there where I say, “so do you?”

PAUL

I wouldn’t mind.

MARIE

So do you.

PAUL

Aw shucks. You’re just saying that.

(A moment.)

PAUL and MARIE

I’m sorry –

MARIE

You go.

PAUL

Ladies first.

MARIE

I need to collect my thoughts. After you.

PAUL

I’m sorry about not showing up.

MARIE

And I’m really sorry about not ... wait! You didn’t show up?

PAUL

You don’t remember?

MARIE

There was nothing to remember. Because I didn’t show up.

PAUL

Really? You didn’t show up to say good-bye to me – your boyfriend of three years who was going off into the great unknown?

MARIE

College! You were going to college. And no I didn't. (Beat.) Why didn't you? Not... show up?

PAUL

Do you want the charming explanation or the truth?

MARIE

After over seven years, the truth is good.

PAUL

I didn't want to say good-bye –

MARIE

- Lose the charm. Tell the truth.

PAUL

I didn't want to be tied down to someone far away from me.

MARIE

Yeah. That five-hour car ride is a bear. Need some truth serum?

PAUL

I thought maybe I'd meet some really hot girls and you know – I didn't want to be tied down.

MARIE

Did you? Meet hot girls?

PAUL

Yep.

MARIE

Was it fun?

PAUL

Not as much fun as I thought it would be.

MARIE

Remember we're telling the truth here.

PAUL

Truth. (Beat.) Why didn't you?

MARIE

I thought I'd do the noble thing and let you go – didn't want to tie you down to your high school girlfriend.

PAUL

Thought we were doing the truth here.

MARIE

And I didn't want my last year of high school to be dateless. I wanted the dances ... the prom. The fun.

PAUL

And did you have fun?

MARIE

You know what? I did.

PAUL

Oh. So we basically gaslit each other.

MARIE

I did keep our prom photo on my desk through October.

PAUL

So for seven or eight weeks?

MARIE

One week for each year we were together.

PAUL

Mine's still in my wallet.

MARIE

Get out of here.

PAUL

It's a bit worn.

(He pulls out his wallet and shows her.)

MARIE

So while you were dating hot girls, you were also carrying this around?

PAUL

Yeah. What did *you* do with our photo?

MARIE

I ... have it.

PAUL

You threw it away.

MARIE

It's safe. In a storage facility. In West Des Moines.

PAUL

You put our younger selves in storage.

MARIE

It's climate-controlled.

(Beat.)

PAUL

I was going to look you up. I drove past the farm. But I thought it would be rude to just stop in. Nobody does that anymore. And then I thought, "Call Marie. See if she even wants to talk to you." And then – I don't know the car drove itself here and here you are and here am I and...

MARIE

Serendipity.

PAUL

It's like we were meant to see each other again.

MARIE

One last time. (Beat.) I'm moving to Paris.

PAUL

Are you sure?

MARIE

Got the plane ticket, the passport, the visa. Yeah ... pretty sure.

PAUL

Your folks will miss you.

MARIE

My folks moved to Costa Rica! They got sick of farming, sick of the winters and decided that Costa Rica was Shangri-La.

PAUL

Iowa farmers don't just move to Costa Rica.

MARIE

Times have changed. They sold the farm for a pretty penny and living in Costa Rica is cheap. My father says he only wants to get up at sunrise to fish. No more planting and harvesting.

PAUL

Iowa farmgirls don't just move to Paris.

MARIE

If they have the opportunity to study with the great pastry chef, Pierre Mathieu, they do.

PAUL

You don't bake.

MARIE

You don't know me anymore.

PAUL

I wish I did.

(A moment.)

MARIE

It's funny how we both came to this bridge at the same time with our lives at turning points. It's as if the universe conspired to give us the good-bye we never had.

PAUL

I've always wanted to visit Paris.

MARIE

I've never liked loose ends. I want to be free to go wherever the wind blows after my studies.

PAUL

Which will be ...

MARIE

In two years. After my months with Monsieur Matthieu, I will be at the Cordon Bleu.

PAUL

I will be done with my medical residency in two years. I could practice anywhere.

MARIE

And you should – practice anywhere. Anywhere your heart desires. I have a plane to catch.

PAUL

Marie?

MARIE

You were always very special to me, Paul. I'm glad I have this opportunity to tell you that. Au revoir.

PAUL

Safe travels.

(CHARLIE enters.)

CHARLIE

Last time at the bridge?

MARIE

Probably. I'll miss you, Charlie. How's the heart?

CHARLIE

Still ticking. Doc says I'm a walking miracle.

MARIE

Stay healthy, Charlie. The world needs you.

CHARLIE

Good luck in Paris.

MARIE

Merci. A bientot.

(MARIE exits. CHARLIE looks at PAUL.)

CHARLIE

She always was a charmer.

PAUL

Yes.

CHARLIE

The one that got away?

PAUL

I was stupid.

CHARLIE

I know something about that. How long are you here for?

PAUL

Two years.

CHARLIE

Welcome home, Paul.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 10

DANCIE AND CHARLIE - MIDNIGHT

(It is Midnight at the Bridge. The rain has passed and the stars are out. CHARLIE enters. He's tired from the day. He sits on the bench and looks around. Maybe he wipes his face. Maybe he takes out a small telescope to see the stars. He relaxes after a few moments. He has just a small start – a small spasm. Anything he is holding in his hands drops to the ground. His eyes blink and close. DANCIE enters and sits next to him. SHE takes his hand and holds it for a moment. CHARLIE opens his eyes and smiles.)

CHARLIE

I've been waiting for you.

DANCIE

I know. It wasn't time yet.

CHARLIE

I've missed you.

DANCIE

I know.

(They smile.)

I've missed you, too.

(DANCIE stands and offers her hand and he stands up next to her. And slowly and deliberately, they go into the bridge. The lights fade to black.)

END OF PLAY

