

Used Hearts

A multi-media play

by Tony Broadwick

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(A modern tragi-comedy based on true events. The names and places are changed to protect the identity of the characters.)

Actors in order of appearance

TED CORENTI Jr. *A five-year old boy*

TED SUMTER *A man in his late 40s*

VIRGINIA CORENTI *A woman in her early 40s*

And voices of two young children.

The stage is bare except for two chairs. One is placed stage-left and another, stage-right.

The wall in the background is white. This will be used as a film screen.

A woman, in her mid-40s, with a touch of gray in her hair, is sitting in the chair on the left side of the stage. This is VIRGINIA CORENTI. She is dressed in a comfortably fitting summer dress. She has a stack of papers in her lap. She holds an iPhone in her left hand. A small laptop sits on the floor near her feet. A stack of papers is placed by the foot of the chair on the right side. A laptop, a tall glass and a bottle of Vodka are placed near the stack of papers.

TED CORENTI Jr. enters. He is dressed in shorts, a dress-shirt, a tie, and a jacket. He is carrying a small backpack.)

TED: Mommy, how do I look?

VIRGINIA: Oh, Ted, my handsome little man! You're going to break some hearts on your first day at school.

TED: How does one break hearts? And why?

VIRGINIA: Come here, give me a hug.

TED: No, you'll mess up my hair.

VIRGINIA: That's how you break hearts; by saying no. *(She gets up, walks to him. She*

takes his hand and they walk off stage.

(Music)

A middle-aged man with graying hair enters and stands next to the chair on the right side of the stage. This is TED SUMTER. He is dress in dark casual slacks and a tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows. He pours himself a drink, takes a sip, and takes a step towards the audience. He talks directly to the audience.

(A spot light shines on TED. The rest of the stage is dark.)

TED: Something special is about to happen today. Something I wish happened a long time ago. But with some things, it's never too lat. In a way, it's good that it will happen now. Had it happened earlier, you'd have missed it. Now, I don't have much time left, but all of you will get to witness it. Why did it not happen sooner? Why don't I have much time left? I guess we don't control our destiny. I used to believe that I did. Not anymore. One tries to plan, organize and orchestrate one's life but life runs its own course. There isn't any logic or design to life. Things happen. If there's a rule, it's randomness. No rhyme or reason, it's all a game of chance. Expectation of any kind is likely to result in disappointment. The best one can hope for is that our partners are - at least - good cooks. Even that seems like asking for too much. If people could cook well there wouldn't be that many restaurants in this world. What's even sadder is that half the cooks in these restaurants aren't worth their salt. Most of the time, like all other life experiences, the food is terrible. The only consolation is that restaurants keep shutting down. And we hope that the next one that opens would be better. That's what makes this world go round. That's what keeps us all going. Hope. Hope that the next restaurant will serve better food; hope that the next partner would be a better cook or a better lover - depending on what you're looking for in life. There really are only two important things in life. Food and passion. And when we stop desiring these, we are done. We might as well be dead. That's what I'm waiting for. But before I lay me down, I have a glint of hope - perhaps the last one. But hope, regardless. You shall see. You're in for a treat. And I, for the biggest treat of my life. My final climax.

(A cell phone vibrates. TED reaches into his pocket fishes for the phone. He finds it, opens it, and presses a button to answer the call. He looks at the display on the phone's screen. He does not recognize the number. VIRGINIA enters the stage and stands next to her chair on the left. She is speaking into a cellphone.)

TED: Hello, this is Ted Sumter.

GIN: Hi, Ted. This is Virginia.

TED: Virginia Corenti?

GIN: Yes, Gin. How are you, Ted?

TED: Gin! Good heavens, how long has it been? *(He sits down.)*

GIN: Too long. You didn't answer my question.

TED: What was the question?

GIN: How are you?

TED: I'm sorry, I didn't hear. Hearing your voice after such a long time, I'm sorry...

GIN: I've been hearing all sorts of rumors about you...

TED: Why have I not heard from you? How have you been? Where have you been?
Where are you?

GIN: Ted! I'll tell you everything you want to know and then some. But first, tell me, Ted
dear, is it really true?

TED: Is what true? I don't know what you've heard? When did you hear it? How long
ago?

GIN: Is it true?

TED: Is what true? What have you heard?

GIN: The news about the big "C". *(She sits down.)*

TED: Oh that. What did you hear? *(pause)* It's not as bad as you may have heard?

GIN: I heard that ... wait a minute! What I heard is not important. Don't you want to talk
about it, Ted?

TED: What there ever anything that you and I couldn't talk about?

GIN: Yes, our good affairs. We always talked about our bad relationships, but never about
the good ones.

TED: Good relationships! I don't even need one hand to count mine. How many good ones have you had?

GIN: Are you asking me what my number is?

TED: No! I'd only loose.

GIN: One should never ask that of a lady.

TED: One never asks that of a lady.

GIN: Now, what are you implying?

TED: Are you married these days?

GIN: No. I'm in between marriages.

TED: As always.

GIN: Always. That's how your letters end, and your cards, and you messages, and emails.

TED: At least I'm consistent.

GIN: That you are. And dependable.

TED: My wife didn't think so.

GIN: She didn't know you as I know you.

TED: If you put it that way. No one else does.

GIN: Should I feel flattered?

TED: It was meant as a compliment.

GIN: Compliments. Yes. That's how it began. Your very first note to me. I have it right her. We were in first grade. *(reading from a piece of paper)* Miss. Virginia Corenti, are you an angel?

(Image of a handwritten note is projected on the wall. It reads: Miss. Virginia Corenti, are you an angel?)

TED: I was seven years old. With my limited experience with women – which came from reading fairy tales, you looked like an angel.

GIN: I invited you to my birthday party. My sixth and you didn't come.

TED: I sent you a note. Didn't you get it? I had the chickenpox or something.

(Following dialogue is projected on the wall as handwritten note. A young boy and a young girl read them out loud.)

GIN: I danced with Johnny. Four dances in a row. Are you jealous?

TED: Do you like him?

GIN: He came to my party. You didn't.

TED: Is he your boyfriend now?

GIN: No, silly. Wish you had come. Johnny ate your piece of cake. I gave it to him.

TED: He is your boyfriend.

GIN: Do you care?

TED: No. Let me ask you about your friend, Mary.

GIN: You like her?

TED: No, I was wondering...

GIN: Don't waste your time on her. She thinks you're fat.

TED: Do you think I'm fat?

GIN: Yes, but I don't mind.

(A photograph of two old-fashioned black telephones is projected on the wall. Voices of the young boy and the young girl are heard.)

GIN: I hear you're moving away.

TED: Yes, Daddy's been transferred to Japan.

GIN: You mean he's being transferred to Japan.

TED: Yes. So all of us have to be transferred to Japan.

GIN: You mean, transported to ...

TED: Make up your mind, will you?

GIN: Where's Japan? Is it out of the State?

TED: I think so. We'll have to get on a plane.

GIN: I looked it up. Japan is a long way away. I'll never see you again. It's already tomorrow there.

(VIRGINIA and TED are facing the audience and as if talking into a telephone.)

GIN: Yes, I wish it were yesterday and we were in school together.

(Music)

(The two continue to read letters.)

TED: This Foreign Service business sucks. Just when I thought I had learned enough Japanese, we get transferred to Portugal. Yet another language!

GIN: I'm graduating from high school.

TED: Who's taking you to the prom?

GIN: Do they have prom dances in Portugal?

TED: No, but they party here all the time. You didn't answer my question.

GIN: I went with Johnny Lindsey. But it wasn't like a date or anything. Whom will you take to the prom?

TED: I graduated two years ago. I'm in college. I'll transfer to Yale in the fall.

GIN: Yes, I forgot. Why Yale?

TED: My father went there. So did my grandfather. It's expected... and ...

GIN: Ted, are you hiding something from me?

TED: Mary's going there too. You remember Mary?

GIN: Oh, is that still going on?

TED: She still thinks I'm fat.

GIN: Why is she thinking about you?

TED: I don't control her thoughts. Somehow, she's become good friends with my sister.

GIN: That reminds me, there was another time when I invited you and you didn't come. It was my sister's coming out party.

TED: Wait a minute. We've gone over all that before. My mother died a day before your elder sister's coming-out thing.... How are things between you and Johnny Lindsey?

GIN: You've changed the subject.

TED: He was your heartthrob at the time.

GIN: Heartthrob! More like a pain in the ass. But this is what you wrote: Dear Virginia, I regret to say that I will be unable to attend your sister's party. My father has decided for me to take a trip to Yale and enroll in the summer camp." Do you know you're the one who started calling me Gin instead of Virginia?

TED: It took me a long time before I discovered what Gin was.

GIN: All my friends used to threaten me to shorten my name to virgin.

TED: That took me even longer to figure out.

GIN: That's because you were hanging around Mary and not me. But thanks, really.

(Music)

(From here on, TED and GIN, the adults, will speak and read the letters.)

TED: Dearest Gin, I've been accepted at Yale.

GIN: I was accepted at Oberlin, the music conservatory. But my family can't afford it. I really don't know what to do with my life. You remember Johnny? He's going to Penn State.

TED: Yes, Johnny, the pain in the ass.

GIN: Are you jealous? I hope you are. Where are you? And how's Mary?

TED: I've put Yale on the back burner for a year and have come to China to teach. Of course, with Yale's approval. *(pause)* No, not to find myself, but to teach English to little children. Mary claims she knows exactly what she wants. She's stayed back with her Harley Davidson. That's her new love interest. A small school, just two teachers. Myself and a young Chinese teacher, and about thirty children. Simple life. Wish you were here with me. You'd have liked it here.

GIN: Never mind all that, how young a Chinese teacher?

TED: She's twenty-one.

GIN: I meant to ask in my previous letter How is your Chinese lady friend? Your concubine?

TED: Are you still waiting for that Mr. Right you once wrote about? Or are you waiting for Johnny to make up his mind? And my Chinese lady friend, or concubine, as you called her; she and I got married three months ago. We're expecting a baby....

(sudden silence)

(Music)

TED: Are you getting my letters? I have not heard from you in months. Are you well? I hope everything's fine. Do write, please.

GIN: Dear Ted, sorry for my long silence. Much has happened. I'm a changed woman. I feel all grown up and bitter. Is that what growing up is? Disappointments and broken hearts.

TED: What has happened, Gin?

GIN: I had an affair with a married man. A man who was old enough to be my father, even older. You and your damn concubine! Whatever happened to her?

TED: Her family never accepted me. Our child died and trouble was brewing in China. We moved to Singapore. There, the locals were very unaccepting of the Chinese from the mainland. My wife became progressively depressed. Finally, she returned to China; we divorced.

GIN: I'm sorry for the loss of your child. It's against all laws of nature to bury one's children; it's the children that are supposed to bury their elders. Please accept my deepest condolences.

TED: You have grown up. Your letters sound sad. Do you want to talk about Johnny? Or is it your older man that has made you so bitter?

GIN: I have made myself bitter. I threw away Johnny. He married the first girl he found. I know he's miserable in his marriage. And for Allen, my old man, as you call him, would have given his life for me. In a way, in the end, he did.

(Music)

(TED and GIN are using their laptops and are chatting. They speak the words as they type.)

TED: What happened to Allen?

GIN: He wasn't in the best of health. He used to take a lot of medication. When we broke up, he just stopped taking his medicine. It was as if he pulled the plug on himself.

TED: Strange thing for me to ask, but why did you break up with him? You wanted him to leave his wife. He did. What went wrong? What happened?

GIN: We couldn't have had a life together. We'd have had two sets of friends. He couldn't have introduced me to his friends and I couldn't have explained him to mine. It would have been a life of secrets and hiding.

TED: Strange thing for me to say, but not if you loved each other. Why would the others matter?

GIN: My family would have never accepted him. In fact, I got really scared because of one of my uncles from my mother's side. He's always been on the wrong side of

the law. At one time, he was wanted here and on the other side of the border. He once set a guy's house on fire because he suspected that the guy was dating one of my cousins. He would have killed Allen if he had found out that we'd had sex.

TED: And I thought this was the new millennium. Are you sure or are you just trying to justify yourself?

GIN: My uncle's had people "disappear". There've been all sorts of rumors about him and his hand in all kinds of criminal stuff even when he was in prison.

TED: What happened to him?

GIN: He's become the mayor of a boarder town notoriously known as the gateway for guns and drugs back and forth. Who said that crime does not pay? Just watch my uncle's family laugh their way to the bank – everyday.

(Music)