

LOVELY, DARK AND DEEP

A Play in One Act

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>Dee:</u>	A college-age woman.
<u>Man:</u>	Dee's father.
<u>Woman:</u>	Dee's mother; the man's wife.
<u>Mitch:</u>	A man in his 30s.
<u>Heather:</u>	A woman in her 20s; Mitch's wife.
<u>Kenny:</u>	Heather's teenage brother.
<u>Girl:</u>	A mysterious figure; age 9 or 10 in appearance.
<u>Old Woman:</u>	A truculent old farm wife.
<u>Cab Driver:</u>	Man who drives Kenny to his sister's home.

Scene

Various locations around Seattle ... and beyond. Black box throughout.

Time

The future.

Scene 1

SETTING: A back porch on a warm summer night.

AT RISE: A MAN in his 50s swings gently on a porch swing and takes occasional sips of beer from a bottle. He appears to be at peace.

DEE
(stepping through a screen door
onto the porch)

Hey, dad.

MAN
Hey, kiddo. What are you doing up?

DEE
Couldn't sleep.

MAN
(patting the empty space
beside him on the swing)
Well, come on. Have a seat

DEE
(joining him on the swing)
It sure is a beautiful night.

MAN
You can say that again. You know, it's great having you home for the summer. Really great.

DEE
Yeah, I'm enjoying it, too. Can I ask you something?

MAN
Don't see why not.

DEE
Do you remember the most recent mass killing that happened in the U.S.?

MAN
What? Where's this coming from, hon?

DEE

Do you?

MAN

Well, let me think. It was that nut down in Salt Lake City, wasn't it? Killed a bunch of shoppers at the mall then holed himself up—

DEE

No, that wasn't the most recent.

MAN

It wasn't? Well, then, it must have been the amusement park bombing over in—

DEE

No, that's not it, either. That was even earlier than Salt Lake.

MAN

Was it really? Sorry, kiddo. I'm drawing a blank. What's this all about?

DEE

It was the teenage boy who killed his family and the neighbors on either side of them ...

MAN

Oh, God. That one. Horrible. Ran out of ammo and started using his hands. I'd almost forgotten.

DEE

That's my point. These things are happening so often that we can't even keep them straight anymore.

MAN

It's not the healthiest subject matter to dwell on, though. That's part of it. We try to move on as best we can, I suppose. For those of us who aren't directly affected, that's got to be a little easier. God only knows how the survivors and family members manage to cope.

DEE

And He ain't talkin'.

MAN

(a little proud)

You remember all my little jokes.

DEE

Most of them, I guess. You know, Dad, it's not exactly the storybook world you brought me up believing in.

MAN

I know it's not. I wish I could make the world a better place. Every parent does. But we can't. Not overnight. But you know what?

DEE

What?

MAN

It's still a beautiful world, with a lot of beautiful people in it. And it could always be worse.

DEE

That's just it. It seems to be getting worse, almost by the day.

MAN

Dee, one of the reasons we lie so much to our kids when they're young is that it gives them the raw material to rekindle their imaginations later in life. It lays the groundwork for being sensitive, caring people. It provides the fuel you need to appreciate art, maybe even produce it yourself. And without art, we're truly lost. As long as we have books and music and paintings, there's hope for the lot of us.

DEE

I suppose. But some people don't seem to be paying attention, or they don't have the right teachers. I don't understand the need to hurt innocent people, Dad. I never will.

MAN

(putting his arm around her)

That's probably why you like all those creepy books you're always reading. You want to make sense out of the bad stuff. It's just not always easy. But you try. That puts you way ahead of most people. You're one of the good ones.

DEE

Yeah, but it's not a competition, is it? I just want the world to improve itself. Why can't that be the trend, instead of this insane descent into chaos?

MAN

I don't believe I ever told you the story about my friend Mitch, did I?

DEE

I don't think so.

MAN

Mitch and his wife, Heather. And her brother, Kenny.

DEE

It's not ringing any bells.

MAN

It might not be the brightener of moods that this situation calls for, but you need a story, and it's the best one I've got. I've saved it up long enough.

DEE

Okay, I'm intrigued. Lay it on me, Pops.

MAN

All right, then. It happened right here in Seattle, as a matter of fact. A good many years ago now. The damnedest thing that ever happened to a man ...

(He takes a longer swig of beer than he has been.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: We are witnesses to both sides of a phone conversation between MITCH and KENNY.

AT RISE: MITCH stands center stage right holding a cell phone to his ear, waiting for someone to answer. Center stage left is dark until a spot comes up on a cell phone on a table. The phone begins to ring. Enter KENNY, running in from upstage left to answer the phone.

KENNY

Hello?

MITCH

Kenny?

KENNY

Mitch? Yeah, it's me. What do you want?

MITCH

Just wanted to check in on my favorite brother-in-law. You know, see if you've given any thought to what we talked about.

KENNY

Yeah, I've given it some thought. It seems like a funny way to show your love, but if you want to scare the shit out of my sister, who am I to stand in your way?

MITCH

It's more than that. I told you, I want to help her get past her gullibility and belief in superstitions. I'll let her in on the joke eventually. I just want to show her that the world's not such a scary place, especially when you've got someone by your side. I suppose that sounds corny to you.

KENNY

A little, but I believe you. Your heart's in the right place. Mine? Not so much. I just want to scare the shit out of her. I think I can do what you were asking, by the way.

MITCH

So you'll do it! You can make the sound file, then? I knew I could count on you. All that whacked-out electro-ambient jazz you're always fiddling around with ... Hell, I knew you were the man for the job. How long will it take to hook up the speakers?

KENNY

A couple of hours, but the speakers aren't the problem. I need to be able to remote into your home network so I can play the sound whenever I want. That's going to take some doing. If you can get sis out of the house for a couple of straight Saturdays, we should be in business.

MITCH

Jesus, I'm surprised your generation hasn't brought the world to its knees. Is there anything you brats don't know how to do with a computer?

KENNY

Not much.

MITCH

I owe you for this one, Kenny.

KENNY

Facebook a picture of the look on her face and we'll call it even.

(MITCH snickers to himself
As he hangs up. The spot
on him goes black. KENNY
pockets his phone as well.)

KENNY

(smiling and shaking his
Head slowly back and forth)
This is going to be excellent.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

SETTING: MITCH and HEATHER's upstairs
bedroom.

AT RISE: MITCH and HEATHER are in bed.
She's stage right of him; he's
stage left of her. Nightstands sit
on either side of the bed. A
closet door hangs partially open
on one wall, center stage left.
Blue moonlight drifts in through a
window in the opposite wall,
downstage right. The couple
appears to be asleep, though
facing each other.

HEATHER

(sitting up suddenly,
breathing heavily, scared)

Jesus.

MITCH

(muttering in his sleep)

No, no! I won't let you do it, you fucking butchers!

HEATHER

(shaking MITCH awake,
alarmed)

Mitch. Mitch, wake up! You're having a bad dream.

MITCH

(also sitting up now,
rubbing his face)

Oh, God. Hon, it was awful.

HEATHER

Mine, too.

MITCH

You had a nightmare?

HEATHER

Woke me up right before I woke you up.

MITCH

(beginning to enjoy the

coincidence)

Huh, what are the odds of both of us having nightmares at the same time? All right, you go first.

HEATHER

What do you mean?

MITCH

Doesn't it feel good to know it was just a dream? You're awake now. Tell me about it.

HEATHER

Oh, I don't-

MITCH

(putting on a facetious,
scolding air)

Heather ...

HEATHER

(smiling a little, giving in)

All right, okay. I was a teenager again, and I decided to give my grandmother a call. Grams, I always called her. That part's true, actually. Anyway, she was at a nursing home, in the dream, so I had to call the front desk and get put through to her room. When she finally answered, she sounded a little funny, kind of hoarse. And she kept saying how happy she was to hear from me, like it was a rare thing. It wasn't-in real life or in the dream. I called her most weekends, and she wasn't suffering from dementia or anything. Anyway, we had a nice talk. She wanted to know if I had a boyfriend. I told her that Mom and Dad sent their love, and that was it. But you know how dreams are. Suddenly I was in the room with her as she hung up the phone after our conversation. Only it wasn't Grams.

MITCH

Ooh, goosebumps. Who was it?

HEATHER

I have no idea. She was about my grandmother's age, but she had short, dark hair. Not the auburn curls that Grams had until the day she died. She turned to me, this strange woman, after hanging up the phone, and said what an odd thing it was, but her granddaughter had just called, and before hanging up she'd said that her mom and dad sent their love. But her daughter-in-law had died in a car accident

years ago, and her son never remarried. I told her that it hadn't been her granddaughter on the phone, that it was me. They must have transferred my call to the wrong room. She stared at me for a long time, and then started nodding slowly. Tears came up in her eyes, made them red, I remember. She walked away then, out of the room, but I could hear her mumbling to herself, something like, "That explains it. It will be a cold day in hell when any of my kin bother me with the time of day."

MITCH

Oh, my God. That's horrible.

HEATHER

Wait, I'm not done. I wish I was, but I'm not. Fast forward to the next morning. I'm sitting at my kitchen table, enjoying a cup of coffee with my morning paper. And there it is, right on the front page: Old Woman Throws Self from Second-Story Window of Care Home. Underneath the headline was a black-and-white photo of the old woman I'd talked to. The caption read, "The emergency-call cord wrapped around Mrs. Mumphrey's neck prevented her fall in an apparent suicide by hanging." I remember every last word.

(A long silence dwells between
husband and wife.)

HEATHER

So, what about yours?

MITCH

My ... Oh, my dream. I've been trying to tell myself it was kind of funny, but it doesn't seem so funny now. It was 1890. Wintertime, cold as hell. I was called into this little room of a large stone house. This was Austria, but everyone spoke English. Heavily accented, but English. I was led to a little sofa near a fireplace by two young women. Nurses, maybe. On the sofa sat the cutest little baby boy, all dolled up in a ruffled outfit and bowl haircut. I was told the child was Adolph Hitler and I had to smother him if I wanted the world to avoid the horrors of the Third Reich.

HEATHER

(rubbing MITCH's arm)

Jesus, hon. You didn't ...

MITCH

I acted like I was going to. I picked him up with both hands and held him at arms' length, studying him. He didn't smile at all, and I realized then that if he was a young man, I might have been able to do it, but not a baby. I didn't care what I might prevent. I wasn't a baby killer. I'm not a baby killer.

HEATHER

It's okay, hon. Of course you're not. You're a good man, a decent human being. That's why you had the dream.

MITCH

I held him close to my chest then and ran past the nurses, out of the room and into the cold night. That's the last thing I remember, me running off into the cold, dark night with the infant Hitler in my arms.

(Before either of them can find words to follow up with, we hear a loud WHUMP! sound from offstage. It's a difficult sound to identify, not quite like two wrecking balls banging together in a cloud, and yet that's what it calls to mind. It's a distant, booming, forceful noise. There is no movement from the couple. Seconds pass.)

HEATHER

It's back. Oh, Christ, it's back!

MITCH

Shit. Okay, it always comes in threes, right? Let's wait and see what happens. It'll pass like it always does.

HEATHER

I can't live like this. Never knowing if it's the last time, or when it will come again. Jesus, Mitch, I'm scared.

MITCH

I know. It's ... strange. It doesn't sound like anything I've heard before.

HEATHER

That's not true anymore.

MITCH

What do you mean?

HEATHER

It's happened at least half a dozen times now, and it always sounds the same.

MITCH

Well, sure, but you know what I mean.

HEATHER

Neither one of us has come out and said what it really sounds like.

MITCH

Oh, and what's that?

HEATHER

It doesn't sound like it's coming from another world to you? The thought has never crossed your mind?

MITCH

Um, Heather, I don't—

HEATHER

I'm serious. It seems to come from the basement, but we've been down there for hours at a time trying to pinpoint a possible cause. There's nothing.

MITCH

Just because we haven't found the cause yet doesn't mean there isn't one. A reasonable one, I mean.

HEATHER

You don't want to know, do you?

MITCH

What? How can you say that? Of course I do.

(WHUMP!)

HEATHER

Then go down there now, while it's happening. It's the one thing we've never done. It's already sounded twice. If you hurry you can get down there before the third one comes.

MITCH

Do you have to make it sound like-

HEATHER

You're stalling. It's been what, three weeks since the last time? Before that it was more like two months. If we can't get to the bottom of this, I'm leaving. I don't want to be in this house anymore. Not as long as ...

MITCH

(swinging his legs over the edge of the bed, putting his back to her; wearing pajama pants but no shirt)

All right, all right. I'll go.

(HEATHER leans over to kiss him between the shoulder blades.)

HEATHER

And do me a favor while you're up: close that goddamn closet door.

(MITCH accedes with a series of nods.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 4

SETTING: The ground level of the house.

AT RISE: MITCH appears upstage left with a flashlight in hand and zig-zags his way through the dark house, ending up downstage right. He stares in that direction at a door leading to the basement.

MITCH

(looking to the ceiling but knowing that HEATHER cannot hear him)

All in the vein of realism, my dear. It's for your own good.

(Whistling and giving the flashlight a nonchalant flip in the air, he swings the door wide and disappears through it and off the stage.

Sound of brisk footsteps going downstairs. A moment passes. Another moment passes. Then ... WHUMP!: the third of The noises.)

Eeeeeeeaaaaaarrrrrrrgggggghhhhhh!!!!!!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 5

SETTING: The bedroom.

AT RISE: HEATHER is sitting upright in bed but appears to be too scared to get up and turn on the light. She takes up a book from her nightstand and reaches with it toward the switch. The book is within inches of the switch when gravity fails her and she falls to the floor. Rising quickly, she flips on the switch and throws open the door.

HEATHER

Mitch! Mitch, what the hell happened?
(Silence. She steps into the hall.)

Mitch! God damn it! Answer me!
(Again, silence. She darts back into the room, as if finding it slightly safer than the darker hallway. She grows more and more agitated, spinning in circles, trying to figure out what to do. Her eyes fix on her phone, which is resting on a dresser across the room. She starts to run for it but makes herself walk. She picks it up, turns it on and taps the screen several times, then sets it back down with some force. She picks it up again and this time finishes dialing a number. She waits anxiously for someone to answer.)

Hello, Kenny? Is that you? For Christ's sake, are you there?

(KENNY appears on his bed, stage left, also holding a phone to his ear. KENNY's half of the stage once again represents a separate

location.)

KENNY

Of course it's me. Jesus. Heather?

HEATHER

Kenny, something's happened. Something bad. I thought about calling the police, but they wouldn't understand.

KENNY

Wouldn't understand? What's going on?

HEATHER

Is Mom or Dad there? I don't have time to explain everything to you. I need their help.

KENNY

They're gone for the weekend. Remember? The Oregon Coast?

HEATHER

Oh, fuck. Is that this weekend? Of all the ... Kenny, listen to me. I need you to get over here. Can you do that for me?

KENNY

It's the middle of the night. How am I supposed to get from Kirkland to Capitol Hill? I don't have my own car, you know.

HEATHER

(trying to calm herself)

Of course not. I'm sorry. I forget how young you are sometimes. You're so mature, you know?

KENNY

You need to tell me what this is about. You've got me scared half to death.

HEATHER

I want you to call a cab. Can you do that for me? I'll pay the fare when you get here.

KENNY

Yeah, okay. I guess I can do that. But can you give me a hint what I'm in for?

HEATHER

I don't know exactly, but I think Mitch is in trouble. He went to the basement to check on a noise, and the next thing I knew he was screaming like a banshee.

KENNY

A noise? What kind of noise?

HEATHER

A loud noise. We've been hearing it from time to time. It seems to come from the basement. This time he went to check on it. The next thing I knew ...

KENNY

Okay, shit. I'll get over there as soon as I can. Stay wherever you are and keep the door closed. Can you prop a chair under the doorknob or something?

HEATHER

Yeah, I'm in the bedroom. Just ... come.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 6

SETTING: A pastoral hillside overlooking a valley and farm.

AT RISE: MITCH sits center stage on a large stone under a tree. The sun shines down on him. He still wears only pajama pants and slippers. He is slumped and dejected.

MITCH

(calling out hollowly, almost as if talking to himself)

Hello? Can anyone hear me? Where the hell am I?

(A young GIRL, nine or ten, holding a briefcase and small bundle of clothes flat in both hands (pants, shirt, jacket, hat, shoes) steps silently into the light from behind MITCH, upstage right. She stops just beyond his shoulder. MITCH's gaze turns heavenward.)

God, I haven't given you much cause to look after me in the world I've apparently left behind, but maybe in this one you'll take pity on a poor sinner, huh? Please, show me a way out of here, before I let the terror in. Because it's knocking, and if I invite it across my threshold, I may start screaming and never stop, much less find a way out of this place.

(sarcastically and with the long-A pronunciation)

Amen.

GIRL

Excuse me, sir?

(MITCH jumps to his feet and whirls around to face the young child, who wears a cheerful yellow dress.)

MITCH

Jesus Christ! What the ... Um, hello. Who ...

GIRL

There isn't much time. Please, take these.

(MITCH hesitates before taking
the items from the GIRL.)

The longer you are here, the more you will lose of your true self. You are right to want out. I am part of a great and good force at work in this place, but there are other forces, also great ... but not so good.

MITCH

My God.

(He sets the briefcase down
but holds on to the clothes.)

How do I get back?

GIRL

Not the same way you came.

(pointing over the audience)

Do you see that valley?

MITCH

Yes.

GIRL

On the far side of it lies a farm. It is your only hope for many miles in any direction.

MITCH

What do I—

GIRL

There is no time, and there is much I cannot reveal. Change into the suit of clothes, and take the briefcase with you to the farm. You'll find something inside it that might be useful.

MITCH

But—

GIRL

I must go. Hold on to your truth for as long as you can. This is the extent of my ability to help, for now.

(The GIRL turns and disappears
in the direction from which
she came. MITCH sets the
clothes on the rock he'd

been sitting on and puts on the shirt. Then he removes his pajama pants and puts on the suit pants, then the jacket, and finally the hat. Remembering the suitcase, he turns to retrieve it and sits on the rock with the suitcase on his lap. He pulls off his slippers and bundles them up with his pajama pants before putting on the shoes. When he opens the briefcase, it is clear that he intends only to stuff the items inside, but once the case is open, he pauses, leaving the pajama pants and slippers beside him on the rock. He stares into the briefcase for a moment.