

A one act drama, written in 2007. It was adapted into a short film in 2010 and shown nationally at film festivals.

**"MANSION ON THE HILL"**

EXT. PARK BENCH, NIGHT, ANY MAJOR CITY

A rainy night... A nondescript, middle-aged HOMELESS WOMAN pulls a suitcase on wheels, as she approaches the bench. The bench is dry, due to an overhang that covers the bench. Next to the bench is a shopping cart, full of the usual nicknacks, plastic garbage bags and clothing found in the cart of someone living on the street.

The woman places her suitcase on the opposite side of the bench from the shopping cart. She pulls a sweater out of the suitcase, folds it up and places it on the end of the bench. She then lies on the bench, resting her head on the rolled up sweater, and quickly falls asleep.

The stage lights slowly go down, signifying the passage of time... Finally - the lights slowly come back up.

A scruffy, middle-aged HOMELESS MAN with a rain cap and heavy coat approaches. He walks with a PRONOUNCED LIMP. He sees the woman and stops dead in his tracks. He leans over her.

MAN

Miss? Miss?

No response... Finally he touches her arm and gently shakes it.

MAN

Miss?

The Woman wakes up. Seeing a man standing over her, she quickly rises to a sitting position on the bench.

MAN

This is my bench.

WOMAN

(focusing)

Your bench?

MAN

Yeah, my bench. That's my cart.

WOMAN

Well, that's my suitcase, mister.

MAN  
Come on, lady. You know the rules.

WOMAN  
Rules? What rules?

MAN  
Look, it's my bench. I was here first.

WOMAN  
Your *shopping cart* was here first.

MAN  
I've been sleeping on this bench for over a week.

WOMAN  
So?

MAN  
So, that makes it my bench.

WOMAN  
Show me the lease.

MAN  
(slightly raising his voice)  
Don't make me...

WOMAN  
What? You gonna throw me off?...  
Tough guy.

MAN  
Look, lady, there's plenty of other benches.

WOMAN  
Yeah - and they're all wet. This is the only one that's covered.

MAN  
Tell you what. Why don't I sleep on MY bench? And you can sleep on the dry ground *next to*... MY bench.

WOMAN  
What a gentleman.

MAN  
And you're a lady?

WOMAN  
 (starting to shiver)  
 Please? The ground's wet... And  
 I've got a cold.

The Man finally sits down on the bench.

MAN  
 (softening)  
 Why don't you just go to a shelter?

WOMAN  
 Where do you think I got this cold?  
 Anyway, I hate those places. Babies  
 crying. Nut jobs.  
 (beat)  
 You're not a nut job, are you?

MAN  
 Wish I were. Make all of this a lot  
 easier... You?

WOMAN  
 Nah. It's too much effort.

MAN  
 I tried the shelters. Too many  
 rules. Too many questions... Just  
 to get a shower.

WOMAN  
 And the water's not even hot.  
 (beat; re: the bench)  
 Please, mister. Can I have it? Just  
 till the rain stops?

MAN  
 (barely nodding)  
 Just till the rain stops... It's  
 still my bench.

WOMAN  
 It's still your bench.

The Man goes to his shopping cart and pulls out a plastic tarp. He places it on the ground in front of the bench. The Woman can see his limp.

MAN  
 I'm gonna sleep here. It's drier  
 than the other benches.  
 (sarcastic)  
 That is - if it's okay with you?

WOMAN  
It's okay.

The Man lies down, facing away from the Woman.

WOMAN  
How is it?

MAN  
Ain't no mansion on the hill...  
I'll tell ya' that.

WOMAN  
What happened to your leg?

MAN  
Stubbed my toe.

A pause...

WOMAN  
(softly)  
Thank you.

MAN  
Just don't try anything. I'm not  
that kinda guy.

WOMAN  
(smiling, as she closes  
her eyes)  
I'll keep that in mind.

The stage slowly goes dark. Time passes as the rain intensifies...

The sound of the Woman SOBBING in her sleep can be heard. The sobbing becomes more pronounced.

The lights come back up. The man awakens, as the woman sleeps.

MAN  
(looking up)  
Hey, lady.

The Woman still sobs in her sleep.

MAN  
(shaking her arm.)  
Lady. LADY! You're cutting into my  
beauty sleep.

The woman awakens with a SCREAM!

MAN  
That does it! Gimme my bench back.

Recovering from the nightmare, the Woman rises to a sitting position. She places her face in her palms.

WOMAN  
(confused)  
What?

MAN  
(rises, and sits on the  
bench)  
The bench. I want my bench back.

WOMAN  
(removing her hands,  
resigned)  
You can have it, mister. I'm better  
off just walking.  
(then, staring away into  
thin air)  
Go away...

MAN  
I'm not going anywhere, lady. It's  
my bench.

WOMAN  
(still looking away)  
Not you, mister.

MAN  
So you are -

WOMAN  
(still looking away)  
A nut job?  
(turning back to him)  
I guess I am.

The woman begins to fold up her sweater.

WOMAN  
(opening the suitcase)  
Sorry, mister. I'll leave you  
alone.

Stopping suddenly...

WOMAN  
 (staring again at nothing)  
 Go away!

MAN  
 Who?

WOMAN  
 (back at the Man)  
 I hate the rain.

MAN  
 (softening)  
 You, too?

The woman nods.

MAN  
 Wanna talk about it?

No response.

MAN  
 I've heard it helps.  
 (lightening up)  
 Especially - nut jobs.

WOMAN  
 How did I get here?

MAN  
 How do any of us get here? We've  
 all got something, miss... Even the  
 rich. Only - they pay to keep their  
 secrets.

The woman, once again, turns away.

WOMAN  
 (to the air)  
 Please?

MAN  
 What do you see out there?

WOMAN  
 It's his face. All--  
 (beat)  
 He only comes when it rains.

MAN  
 With me? It's the eyes.

WOMAN  
(smiling)  
Eyes? The bluest eyes you ever saw.

MAN  
It's a kid - isn't it?

WOMAN  
(finally turning back to  
him, searching his eyes)  
How did you know?

MAN  
Just a guess... Tell me.

WOMAN  
You couldn't understand.

MAN  
We've all got something, miss.

WOMAN  
(again, searching his  
face)  
I wasn't always like this... Nice  
home. Good husband. And a beautiful  
little boy. Jamie. He had a smile  
that would just - break your heart.  
(turning her gaze again to  
thin air, softly)  
Please go away.

MAN  
It's okay, miss... I'll keep him  
away.

WOMAN  
(turning back to the Man)  
We got Jamie a bike for Christmas.  
Couldn't keep him off it... I was  
late for work that morning. It was  
raining. So hard.  
(pause)  
We told Jamie never to play in the  
garage. I pulled out... I just -- I  
prayed with all my heart.  
(beat)  
I don't pray anymore.

MAN  
I'm sorry.

WOMAN  
 "Sorry"? I don't understand that  
 word.

MAN  
 You miss him, don't you?

WOMAN  
 Miss him?  
 (beat)  
 Tomorrow's his birthday. Sixteen...  
 Driver's permit. First date.  
 (breaking down into tears)  
 Oh, Jamie...

Helpless, the Man can only put his hand on her arm.

WOMAN  
 It should have been me.

MAN  
 It was an accident.

WOMAN  
 Accident? That's another word...  
 (beat)  
 I'm sorry, mister. How could you  
 even...? How could anyone?

MAN  
 The world is full of secrets, miss.

WOMAN  
 (dismissive)  
 Yeah...

MAN  
 I've got an army buddy. Sam  
 Mitchell.

WOMAN  
 Sam?

MAN  
 Yeah...Sam the Ham. From Boise. We  
 went through 'basic' together. A  
 real cut up...until...that day...

WOMAN  
 What day?



MAN  
 (pause)  
 ...in the rice paddy.

WOMAN  
 Vietnam?

MAN  
 Never seen fighting like that. VC  
 everywhere. Mortars. Snipers.  
 Choppers... The mud. Smoke.  
 (pause)  
 And pounding rain.

SFX - THE ROTORS OF ARMY HELICOPTERS

MAN  
 (lost in the moment)  
 Can't make out a thing. Someone's  
 running at us. Carrying something.  
 (pause)  
 Sam's shouting, "Stop! Stop! Stop!"  
 But he won't stop...

The rotors fade out...

MAN  
 (slowly turning to the  
 woman)  
 Sam shot him.

WOMAN  
 It was a child - wasn't it?

The man nods.

MAN  
 A boy. Nine or ten... A confused  
 boy. Carrying - an oxen whip.  
 (pause)  
 He just looked at us. Rain dripping  
 down his face. Then... The light  
 left his eyes.

WOMAN  
 I know.

MAN  
 Sam just cracked. Couldn't move.  
 Got down on his knees, and... I had  
 to drag him away - but - he never  
 really left.

WOMAN  
 Maybe the boy didn't understand  
 English.

MAN  
 Sam yelled "Stop" in Vietnamese.

WOMAN  
 What about you?

MAN  
 Me? I took some shrapnel in Da  
 Nang. Sent home.

WOMAN  
 You ever see Sam again?

MAN  
 Yeah. I ran into him about five  
 years ago. At the VA hospital in  
 Eugene.

WOMAN  
 And?

MAN  
 Still the same... Just older.

WOMAN  
 A lot of bad things happen in war.

MAN  
 (dismissive)  
 Yeah...  
 (long beat)  
 Like I said, miss... Everybody's  
 got secrets.

WOMAN  
 And you?

MAN  
 Me? I don't have a big secret. Just  
 a lot of little ones -  
 (looking around)  
 That add up to -

A pause...

MAN  
 Try to get back to sleep, miss.

WOMAN

Sleep?

MAN

Yeah. *Good* dreams this time.

The Woman nods, and pulls out her sweater for a pillow. The Man gets off the bench. The Woman lies back down and closes her eyes.

The Man goes to his cart, pulls out an old jacket and places it around the Woman.

MAN

(softly, to the air)

Go away...

He lies back down on the ground.

MAN

I'll be right here, miss... Next to the bench.

Again, the stage goes dark - signifying the passage of time. The rain intensifies. Finally, through the darkness...

MAN

(shouting)

Dah - Dee. Dah - Dee. Dah - Dee.

The lights come back up. The Woman, who's been woken up by this, reaches down to the sleeping Man.

WOMAN

Mister. Hey, mister.

MAN

(still asleep, shouting)

Dah Dee!

WOMAN

Mister!

The Man awakes. He orients himself - eventually turning toward the Woman.

WOMAN

You okay?

MAN

What?

WOMAN  
You were shouting. In your sleep.

MAN  
Sorry.

WOMAN  
One of those "small" secrets?

The Man nods.

WOMAN  
Wanna talk about it?

MAN  
No...

WOMAN  
You sure?

MAN  
Just go back to sleep, miss.

WOMAN  
I will... If you tell me one thing.

MAN  
What?

WOMAN  
What's "Dah - Dee?"

MAN  
Dah - Dee? How do you know that?

WOMAN  
You were screaming it in your  
sleep.

MAN  
It's nothing... Just "Vietnamese."

WOMAN  
For what?

MAN  
(long pause)  
"Stop."  
(starting to cry)  
"Stop... Stop."

The Man turns away from her. His crying gradually subsides,  
as his eyes close.

Slowly... The Woman reaches down, and gingerly places her hand on his arm.

WOMAN  
Sweet dreams... Sam.

Then, with his free arm, the Man reaches over and covers her hand with his.

The woman's eyes close.

The stage goes dark... After some time, the sound of a bird singing can be heard. The lights come back up with the dawn.

The Woman rises from the bench and quietly gathers up her stuff. The Man awakens and begins to do the same.

WOMAN  
How you feeling?

MAN  
Okay.

WOMAN  
Sleep okay?

MAN  
Yeah... You?

WOMAN  
Yeah... You know what? I had a dream.

MAN  
A dream?... A good one?

WOMAN  
Yeah... Dreamt I was back in high school again.

MAN  
High school?

WOMAN  
(smiling)  
Just a girl. Sitting in the bleachers at a basketball game... And there was this boy. On the bench. He turned around and... he smiled at me.

MAN  
Good.

WOMAN

Yeah...

(beat; gathering up more  
stuff)

Well, at least the rain's stopped.

MAN

`Bout time.

(beat)

So, what are you gonna do today?

WOMAN

I'm thinking - I might pick up a  
card. Yeah, a birthday card... And  
you?

MAN

I don't know... Maybe look up an  
old army buddy. See how he's doing.

WOMAN

Sounds good.

They've now gathered up all their stuff.

WOMAN

Thanks for letting me use your  
bench - Sam.

MAN

Anytime --

WOMAN

(softly to him)

Sarah. It's Sarah.

MAN

Sarah.

(beat)

Maybe - I'll see you around.

WOMAN

Maybe... I've got your address.

The woman sniffs the air.

WOMAN

It always smells so nice after it  
rains.

MAN

(sniffing the air)

It does, doesn't it?

Sarah reaches down to the bench to pick up Sam's jacket - the one he used to cover her last night. She attempts to hand it to him. But instead - Sam gently nudges it back to her. Sarah accepts it.

A tender pause...

MAN  
Well...

WOMAN  
Well...

MAN  
I -

WOMAN  
Me too, Sam... Me too.

James Taylor's tender ballad, "You Can Close Your Eyes" fades in.

Sam and Sarah slowly head off in different directions. One last glance back at each other, as the song fades out...

CURTAIN