

A Wasted Gift

Bob Rinfret





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ArtAge Publications
Bonnie L. Vorenberg, President
PO Box 19955
Portland OR 97280
503-246-3000 or 800-858-4998
bonniev@seniorthatre.com
www.seniorthatre.com

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A WASTED GIFT

By Bob Rinfret

CAST

JAMES: In his seventies. The head of the household.

ANNE: Age forty to fifty. His daughter.

MARTIN: Also in his seventies. A family friend.

GRACE: In her sixties. James' wife.

Place:

A small apartment.

Time:

The present.

Setting: Interior of the apartment. There is an entrance UR. In the center of the room is a small table with two chairs. A small couch with a table next to it is SL. There is a small kitchen UL. An easy chair sits UR. A door leading off-stage is at right. The walls are bare except for a few pictures. A window between the door and the kitchen looks out onto a row of apartments.

At Rise: Lights come up on JAMES CARROLTON. He sits at the table eating a bowl of soup. He is frail and wears a shawl. As he is eating his daughter, ANNE, enters. She is plain but stylish. She has a bag of groceries that she puts on the table and begins to unpack.

ANNE: Hello, Dad. I'm sorry I took so long. The store was very crowded, and they didn't have the oyster crackers you like. I had to try another place, but they didn't have them either. I hope these will do. *(handing him a box of crackers)*

JAMES: No, these won't do! *(he throws them on the floor)* Can't you do anything right? Those ain't what I like. I like oyster crackers, you know that.

ANNE: *(she picks them up)* I know. I tried to find them, but I couldn't, so I thought you wouldn't mind something different for a change.

JAMES: You know I only like *my* oyster crackers.

ANNE: I'm sorry Dad, I tried my best. I just didn't want to leave you alone for too long. I'll go out again tomorrow morning, and I won't come back until I've found them, O.K?

JAMES: Tomorrow, what about tonight? You know I can't eat my soup without my crackers. What am I supposed to do, starve?

ANNE: Don't be ridiculous, you won't starve.

JAMES: I can't eat this soup without my crackers and now, because of you, I won't eat at all.

ANNE: I'll try again tomorrow, I promise. You know, if you had simply told me we were low, I could have—

JAMES: So now it's my fault? *I should have told you? Maybe I should do the shopping. Make the beds. Do the dishes. Sure I can do that.*

(He starts to get up, but is too frail to do so and falls back into his chair. He is breathing hard. She rushes over to him.)

ANNE: Dad, calm down. Remember what the doctor said about your heart. I'll get your medicine.

JAMES: I don't want my medicine! I want my crackers. Don't you understand! My crackers, dammit!

ANNE: They didn't have your crackers! Don't *you* understand?! They didn't have them. If they did, I would have gotten them for you. Do you think I want to listen to you rant and rave like this. I don't! So, please eat your soup and I'll get you your damn crackers tomorrow.

JAMES: You can't talk to me like that. After all I've done for you. I'll show you. You're not too old for a beating. I remember the way I used to do it too. Just let me get my belt. *(He tries to get up but staggers. ANNE tries to help him)* I don't need your help. If I had sons then they would take care of me. Not some stupid girl.

ANNE: Please, just finish your soup before it gets cold.

JAMES: I don't want the damn soup anymore. Useless that's what you are.

ANNE: Dad enough, all right?

JAMES: Useless and lazy.

ANNE: Dad, please.

JAMES: I tried to make a good home for you, but what did I get in return? Nothing. Nothing but a lazy, good for nothing, daughter.

ANNE: Stop it, Dad! O.K.?

JAMES: Someone to carry on my name. Someone to give me grandchildren. To make me proud. Sons can do that. But, no, I get some lazy, backtalking—

ANNE: *Enough! All right?! Enough!* I have had all the abuse and belittlement I can stand. Sons? Do you really think a son would put up with you? Do you really think a son would feed you and bathe you and fix your bed and clean up after you?

JAMES: Sons respect their father. Sons make a man proud. Sons can be counted on. But not you. Your mother was the same way.

ANNE: Stop it! Do you hear me? Stop it. I've had enough of you. I've given up everything to take care of you. I don't have a life. I don't have a boyfriend or *any* friends for that matter. And as for Mom, she put up with you for years after the accident. And for what? To be yelled at and humiliated every minute?

JAMES: You don't know anything.

ANNE: Never going out. Never having friends. Never having anything for herself. Everything for you. Always you. You and *your* idiot friends. A bunch of drunken, lazy, ungrateful pigs who thought a woman's job was to clean up after you. I don't know why she put up with it as long as she did.

JAMES: I gave her everything she needed. A house, clothes, food. That was my job. Her job was to do what I wanted. What else did she need? Friends? She didn't need them. Just a bunch of gabby woman, filling her head with wild ideas, like careers, and clubs and tea parties. She never would have had it so good if I hadn't married her.

ANNE: She deserved better than you. She was kind, caring, patient. Everything you're not. Everything for you. And what did you ever give back? Love!? Respect!? Dignity!? No. You sat there on your throne and dictated your commands. Get me my supper! Get me my coat! Get into bed! I want sex.

JAMES: How dare you.

ANNE: How dare I? How dare *you*! Do you think I didn't know? She told me how she begged you to stop? Begged you to leave her alone? Then crying herself to sleep afterwards while you lay there, snoring, all satisfied with yourself.

JAMES: That's none of your business. What right did she have telling you those sorts of things?

ANNE: Who else could she talk to? She didn't have anyone, you saw to that. After the accident you didn't give her what *she* needed.

JAMES: She had all the newest gadgets she could ever want. If it was the best on the market, then she got it. Everyone said so. If my friends came over they would always comment, "Jim, where'd you get that TV, it's great." Or, "Is that a new refrigerator? It looks expensive." She *had* everything she needed.

ANNE: You couldn't *see* what she needed.

JAMES: I saw fine.

ANNE: She didn't want things! She wanted a life. She wanted to feel appreciated.

JAMES: I earned the money, didn't I? I worked fifty hours a week, every week for forty-five years, didn't I? Didn't I deserve to have my house the way I wanted it? Don't tell me I didn't give her anything, I gave her plenty. And all I wanted in return was a son. Someone to carry on my name, but she couldn't even do that. And look what she gave me...you. A lazy, ungrateful, girl. Now, if I'd had a son—

ANNE: Yes, Father, I know. A son would do this, a son would do that. I could play catch with a son. I could go fishing with a son. But a girl? What can I do with a girl? A girl is worthless. A girl can't carry on the family name. I tried, for years, to be what you wanted. Was it so hard for you to give just a little?

JAMES: Hey, nobody gave me anything. I had to scratch and scrape for every little bit I got. Why should you be any different? I sent you to school didn't I? I got you into that fancy college of yours.

ANNE: You? I worked my ass off to get into that school. You fought me at every turn. You wouldn't fill out the applications. You wouldn't meet with the administrators. You couldn't be bothered. So I filled out everything and attended all the meetings and did everything. All you had to do was sign the papers and even that was a chore.

JAMES: Well, I did, didn't I?

ANNE: Yes you finally did. After months of begging and pleading. And when I needed money for tuition and books, you laughed. So I worked. I worked long hours at three jobs to get the money. What did I ever get from you? Nothing. Nothing but ridicule and scorn.

JAMES: College. Just a bunch of crap! What does a girl need an education for anyway? All it was some loser professor filling your head with a bunch of liberal commie crap. I didn't get no education, and I did all right. I worked for forty-five years at that bus company. I was respected. I was looked up to. I'd be there now if it wasn't for some stupid woman cutting me off and causing that accident.

ANNE: You caused that accident. Not her. The Board of Inquiry said so.

JAMES: The hell I did. I had the right of way. I drove down that same street every day for forty-five years. She should have known that. Buses are big, they take up room. She should have moved over quicker. But no, the Board sided with her. I was at fault. I was negligent. Me! Me, with an unblemished record. Me, three times Driver of the Year. They were just protecting their asses. And I paid the price.

ANNE: You could have taken the demotion and stayed on the job.

JAMES: What, and give them the satisfaction? Never. I took my workman's comp and retired.

ANNE: Yes, retired at one third pay when all you had to do was admit you were wrong, and you could have retired in two years at full pay. But not you.

JAMES: What do you know? You're just ungrateful, just like her.

ANNE: Ungrateful? How dare you! How dare you dishonor my mother like that. I watched her work herself to death for you. She put off everything in her life for you. And she did it willingly and with love. To this day, I don't know where she got it from. God knows you didn't deserve it.

JAMES: What do you mean I didn't deserve it?

ANNE: You heard me. You didn't deserve it because you never returned it.

JAMES: She knew how I felt. I didn't need to be all...lovey-dovey! It just wasn't my style.

ANNE: Yes, I know, According to you, she had everything she needed. Everything right up until the day she died.

JAMES: Stop it. I don't to hear any more.

ANNE: Dad, what happened to you? You weren't always like this. You were stubborn yes but not belligerent, not cruel. There used to be happiness in this house, before the accident, before Mom died.

JAMES: Enough. I don't want to hear anymore. Get away. Go on. Go. Leave me alone. I don't need you. I don't need anyone. Stupid girl.

(There's a knock at the door. ANNE answers it. Enter MARTIN HARRIS. Tall, distinguished looking. About the same age as JAMES.)

MARTIN: Hi, everyone. *(goes to ANNE...)* How are you sweetheart?

ANNE: Fine, Uncle Martin. Thank you for asking.

MARTIN: I hope I'm not intruding? I heard you talking out in the hall and it sounded like a pretty lively discussion.

ANNE: You could say that. No, you're not intruding at all. In fact, I was about to go out. Dad needs something, and I'm not coming back until I find it. Did you hear that, Dad? I won't come back until I've found it. Nice to see you again, Uncle Martin. *(she grabs her coat and exits)*

MARTIN: Hello, Jim. Just thought I'd stop by and see how you're doing. Hope I didn't come at a bad time?

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!