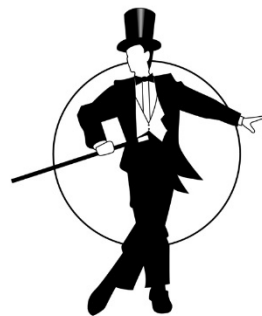


Favorite Cousins

Allan Bates



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ArtAge Publications

Bonnie L. Vorenberg, President

PO Box 19955

Portland OR 97280

503-246-3000 or 800-858-4998

bonniev@seniortheatre.com

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FAVORITE COUSINS

By Allan Bates

CAST

CAROLYN: An elderly woman, preferably in her 80s, very alert and spunky. Carolyn is Kent's "mother" because she married Kent's father after Kent's biological mother died young. After the marriage, the family went on to have many years of loving relationships. Carolyn lives with Kent and his family.

JOHN: Carolyn's 'cousin,' two years younger than Carolyn. Also in very good mental health and equally spunky.

KENT: Carolyn's 'son.' Middle aged. Somewhat overly protective of Carolyn.

GLORIA: John's daughter. Middle aged. Concerned for John's well-being. Does not live with him.

Place

Varies. A bare stage. A rocking chair whenever appropriate. When entering, each character might be carrying a chair to use. Costumes will change in various scenes, from sensibly casual to mildly flamboyantly tourist.

Time

Now. The present.

Production notes: Bits of popular songs, relevant to the key character in each scene, might be added as scenes change, slightly increasing the running time.

Each scene has a title. An actor/stage manager, dressed as an attendant on a cruise, posts placards of the titles.

FAVORITE COUSINS

(Attendant places scene title)

WHAT'S UP?

At Rise: CAROLYN is in a rocking chair, barely onstage, fidgeting, perhaps trying to read a book, but not really able. JOHN enters downstage, phone in hand, and telephones his daughter GLORIA. Telephone rings and rings. Although CAROLYN is onstage, she is not part of this scene.

JOHN: Damn. OK, daughter. If your machine isn't on, you must be home.

(GLORIA enters with wet hands, gingerly holding a phone)

GLORIA: Hi, Dad. I had my hands in dishwater. Everything OK?

JOHN: Sure. Everything's fine. How are the kids?

GLORIA: Fine. You sure?

JOHN: Sure what?

GLORIA: That everything's OK?

JOHN: Of course. Why do you ask?

GLORIA: You usually call me on Tuesday. And I usually call you on Fridays.

JOHN: Yeah. So?

GLORIA: Today's Thursday.

JOHN: Is there any reason I can't call you on Thursdays?

GLORIA: Of course not. You can always call any day you want. You sure you're fine?

JOHN: Yep. I'm fine. Feeling good.

GLORIA: That's good. And we're fine too. What's up?

JOHN: Nothing. (*Beat*) Have you had any contact recently with your cousins?

GLORIA: Which cousins?

JOHN: I was thinking mostly of Kent.

GLORIA: Kent's my second cousin. Or something like that.

JOHN: Any contact with Kent?

GLORIA: Uh...we got a Christmas card from him.

JOHN: When?

GLORIA: At Christmas. In December.

JOHN: That's when Christmas cards come. Just this last Christmas?

GLORIA: Sure. Last Christmas.

JOHN: Just from him?

GLORIA: From his wife and kids too. And Carolyn.

JOHN: Did they say how Carolyn is doing?

GLORIA: Lively as always. Always in somebody's hair. Fussing because she hadn't done anything interesting all year. That's about what they said.

JOHN: That's hard to believe. Carolyn was always up to something.

GLORIA: When's the last time you saw her?

JOHN: I don't know. Maybe at your wedding. To Tom.

GLORIA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Fourteen years ago.

JOHN: That long?

GLORIA: That long. Always the smartass, aren't you? I'm sure Carolyn's changed by now.

JOHN: Do you happen to have her number?

GLORIA: Her phone number?

JOHN: Well...yeah. Or her social security number...so I can...Of course, her phone number.

GLORIA: You want to call Carolyn?

JOHN: Just thought I'd...

GLORIA: OK. Why not? She's living with Kent and Jenny now.

JOHN: That's what I thought.

GLORIA: I have their number.

JOHN: Can I have it?

GLORIA: Of course. Why not? What's up?

JOHN: I want to talk to her about something.

GLORIA: What?

JOHN: Tell you later.

GLORIA: Oh? *(Beat)* OK, I'll get her number.

(Moment while JOHN squirms while waiting)

GLORIA: It's 818-something.

JOHN: That'd be a California number, wouldn't it?

GLORIA: Yeah. That's where they live. Woops! I hear a pot boiling over. I'll send you the number in a bit.

JOHN: You won't put it off, will you?

GLORIA: No. No. Gotta go.

JOHN: Kids OK? You and Tom OK?

GLORIA: Sure. You OK?

JOHN: Fine. Talk to you on Friday. Tomorrow.

GLORIA: Sure.

JOHN: Bye.

GLORIA: Bye. Love you.

(They exit. Attendant places placard.)

HOW'S LIFE?

(Attendant places scene title, phone rings)

KENT: Hello?

JOHN: Hello. Kent?

KENT: Yes.

JOHN: This is John. John Barnes. Your mother's cousin.

KENT: Oh. Hi John. How are you doing? Everything all right with you? And the family?

JOHN: Fine. Just fine. And you. All of you just fine?

KENT: Sure. Just fine.

JOHN: Your mother's fine? I haven't talked with her in years.

KENT: Just fine. Always bustling around. You know Carolyn.

JOHN: Always up to something.

KENT: Always up to something. You like to talk to her?

JOHN: Sure. Why not? If she's handy.

KENT: She's upstairs. I'll call her. (*Calling*) Mom! Mom! Phone.

(*Moment while JOHN squirms some more. CAROLYN enters onstage.*)

CAROLYN: Hello?

JOHN: Hi. Carolyn. This is John. John Barnes. Your cousin John.

CAROLYN: Johnny! How are you? Same old same old?

JOHN: Same old same older.

CAROLYN: Aren't we all? What's up? We haven't talked in years.

JOHN: Two or three Christmases ago.

CAROLYN: At least.

JOHN: How's life?

CAROLYN: Can't complain. It's better than the alternative.

JOHN: I 'spect it is. Would you be free sometime this summer?

CAROLYN: Huh? What? I'm always free.

JOHN: Would you be free this summer to take a cruise with me?

CAROLYN: A what?

JOHN: A cruise.

CAROLYN: I've never taken a cruise. You mean on a boat?

JOHN: That's how cruises are done. On a boat.

CAROLYN: I'm game. Who's going?

JOHN: Just you and me.

CAROLYN: Sure. John, be real. We haven't seen each other for centuries.

JOHN: Only a couple of centuries.

CAROLYN: I guess that's because we've run out of people in the family to have weddings. At least till the grandkids.

JOHN: Remember when I tried to get you to come to the U for the homecoming weekend?

CAROLYN: Well, yeah, you idiot, that would have been a date. And you were a wimpy little kid and I was a sophisticated lady at least two years older than you.

JOHN: I wasn't a wimpy kid. I was a good boy, maybe a little naïve for my years, maybe a bit wet behind the ears, but a nice young college sophomore. You missed your chance. And five or six years later you were married to my big brother.

CAROLYN: So we became family. Cousins. Sort of. And cousins don't date.

JOHN: You sure? Now that we're a couple of hundred years old we still can't date?

CAROLYN: You're insane!

JOHN: Maybe.

CAROLYN: A date. With little cousin Johnny. (*Beat*) But at our age I guess we can damn well do what we please.

JOHN: Yeah. Would you like to go on a cruise with me?

CAROLYN: Where?

JOHN: I was thinking about a week-long cruise up in Maine. See a bit of the sea. You know...Maine...Cruise the islands. Eat gobs of lobster.

CAROLYN: You won the lottery. Now you have a big yacht.

JOHN: No. But there's a cruise line that does it regularly. In Maine.

CAROLYN: On a boat.

JOHN: A big boat. A ship.

CAROLYN: A week cruising.

JOHN: Yeah.

CAROLYN: With you.

JOHN: Yeah.

CAROLYN: I'd have to fly all across the country to get there.

JOHN: To Boston. I'd meet you there and we'd go up to Maine together.

CAROLYN: OK. When? Tomorrow?

JOHN: How about early in August. Weather should be best then.

CAROLYN: I'll have to check my calendar. OK. I just checked it. I'm free in August. Any time. All August!

JOHN: Hot damn! You're a doll, Carolyn! Cousins or not, here we go!

CAROLYN: Here we go! Cousins or not. *(they exit)*

PACKING

(Attendant places scene title)

(CAROLYN enters with a suitcase and a stack of clothes. She is wearing a pair of fluffy slippers. She puts the clothes in the suitcase, then takes out two pairs of pajamas, holds them both up, throws one aside, and packs the other. She puts the slippers in the suitcase, closes it, and walks barefoot offstage.)

THAT'S RIDICULOUS!

(Attendant places scene title)

KENT: That's ridiculous! You can't go.

CAROLYN: What do you mean I can't go? I'm going!

KENT: Mother. We had you move in with us for a reason. To keep our eye on you. To take care of you. To make sure you were doing well. Safe.

CAROLYN: I'm doing well. And you all need a break from me.

KENT: I won't answer that.

CAROLYN: I need a break from you.

KENT: Mother!

CAROLYN: You know it's true. We all need a break from each other.

KENT: John is...

CAROLYN: I haven't seen John in years. I don't need a break from him.

KENT: I was going to say, John is old too. He's an old man.

CAROLYN: He's practically a kid. Two years younger than me. I'll take care of him.

KENT: Be real.

CAROLYN: OK. I'll be real. We're two old folks, two old folks who still have a lot of piss and vinegar in us and we're going off on a spree. Whooooooeeeeee!

(KENT gives up and just shakes his head. They exit.)

DAD, YOU'RE IMPOSSIBLE!

(Attendant places scene title)

GLORIA: Dad, Tom and I have been thinking about a vacation. We could rent a camper and drive to Yellowstone. Tom, me, the kids, and you.

JOHN: Sounds great. When are we going?

GLORIA: We were thinking early August. Before the kids have to go back to school.

JOHN: Not August. I'll be busy then.

GLORIA: I was afraid you'd say that.

JOHN: Why wait till August? The kids'll be out of school in May. Imagine all the lovely spring flowers, the fresh waterfalls from the melting snow. May. Must be a lovely time in Yellowstone.

GLORIA: That's not exactly what we had in mind.

JOHN: *(chuckling)* Don't I know that.

GLORIA: Dad, you're impossible.

JOHN: Rent a big camper with room for Carolyn too.

GLORIA: Sure. With a double bed for you two.

JOHN: Now you have the idea.

GLORIA: Oh my god! I keep worrying about whether the kids will be jumping in bed with the wrong people, and now my father would love to set them a bad example.

JOHN: Carolyn isn't the wrong people. She's family.

GLORIA: That's what I mean. She's your cousin!

JOHN: About third cousin once removed...or something. She's my cousin because she married Mike after Ted died.

GLORIA: So she's been your cousin for years and years and years! She became Kent's second mother!

JOHN: I should have jumped in bed with her about a hundred years ago.

GLORIA: Oh Lord. Well, at least I know you don't really mean that. *(they exit)*

THE CRUISE TICKETS

(Attendant places scene title)

KENT: Here are your tickets, Mother.

CAROLYN: Tickets? What tickets?

KENT: For your cruise with John. Have you forgotten about it already? You left the cruise line brochure out on my desk.

CAROLYN: Of course I did.

KENT: But now you aren't going?

CAROLYN: Of course I'm going.

KENT: At least that's what I thought. So I bought you and John your tickets.

CAROLYN: My dear boy, that's very nice of you. But I left the brochure out for you to look at. Not to buy the tickets. See the photos? There are a lot of old people on the boats. Happy old people having a lovely time.

KENT: And you think you and John will be happy old people on the boat.

CAROLYN: You betcha!

KENT: I hope so. I even think you will. So that's why I bought you your tickets. Consider them your present for next Christmas.

CAROLYN: Kent, you are a gem of a son. But—

(JOHN holds up a hand imperiously to shush CAROLYN)

CAROLYN: John—

KENT: (*very assertively*) Your rooms are among the least expensive, but they're facing each other on the same floor near the dining area.

CAROLYN: Kent! John al—

KENT: I don't think you should be running off like this, but since you insist, I'm trying to help you have a good time.

CAROLYN: Kent, John has—

KENT: Not another word, Mother! (*brief standoff*)

CAROLYN: You're still going to drive me to the airport, aren't you?

KENT: Yes. I am. (*Beat*) If you don't come to your senses by then.

THE BOUNDING MAIN

(CAROLYN enters with her suitcase and a department store package. She sets down the suitcase, unwraps the package and takes out a brand new sexy nightie. She holds the nightie up in front of herself, slinks around with it a bit, reaches in the suitcase, takes out the pajamas, throws them aside and packs the nightie. She exits singing, "Sailing sailing, over the bounding main.")

OH GOOD LORD!

(Attendant places scene title)

(KENT enters with a cell phone)

KENT: Gloria?

(GLORIA enters with her cell phone)

GLORIA: Yes. Kent?

KENT: Yeah. Have you heard from your dad in the last couple of days?

GLORIA: Sure. Just this morning. He said they're having a wonderful time. And almost ready to board the ship.

KENT: I'm worried. I happened to look at my MasterCard charges. Just before supper. And the charge for the rooms on the cruise I bought them was refunded. I hope they're all right.

GLORIA: Refunded! Their tickets? Did you call them?

KENT: Mom refused to take a cell phone with her. Said we could contact your dad if we really needed to.

GLORIA: I'll call Dad right away!

KENT: It's nearly midnight in Maine.

GLORIA: Oh. Oh. Yeah. I'll call first thing in the morning. And let you know.

GLORIA and KENT: Oh good lord! *(they exit)*

YOU WERE ALWAYS MY FAVORITE COUSIN

(Attendant places scene title)

(CAROLYN and JOHN enter, place chairs right next to each other, and sit back as if in bed together. They sway very gently together.)

JOHN: How'd you sleep, Carolyn?

CAROLYN: I slept like a baby. The gentle rocking of the waves.

JOHN: Me too.

CAROLYN: Except when you snored really loud.

JOHN: Me? I never snore.

CAROLYN: I kind of liked listening to you. I haven't been in bed with a man in years.

JOHN: Good thing. That sort of thing should be kept in the family.

CAROLYN: Feel the gentle rocking of the waves.

JOHN: Lovely.

CAROLYN: Lovely.

JOHN: We should have done this centuries ago.

CAROLYN: (*purring*) Yeah.

JOHN: You and me, Carolyn. We still got that old get up and go.

CAROLYN: Still got it.

(*Beat*)

JOHN: You were always my favorite cousin.

GLORIA: (*snuggling in closer to JOHN*) Yeah. My favorite cousin.

THE END