

A GRAPHIC
MYSTERY

Meeting Mervyn



Bambi Everson

MEETING MERVYN
One act, approx. 10 minutes.

CHARACTERS:

ABIGAIL, Middle-aged mom.

MERVYN, An old man. A gruff but lovable curmudgeon.

TIME: The Present

PLACE: Corner of 96th Street and Columbus Ave., New York City

SYNOPSIS: A middle-aged mom meets a gruff but lovable curmudgeon, and a special friendship develops.

SCENE 1

ABIGAIL is waiting at a busy intersection. She spots MERVYN, a very old man, and nods at him. He looks anxiously in both directions, attempts to cross the street but hesitates. ABIGAIL notices this.

ABIGAIL

Do you need help?

MERVYN

Do I look like I need help? I've been standing here 12 minutes. Like I'm a street light inspector.

ABIGAIL

This is a treacherous cross street. I almost got hit here once myself. Here, take my arm.

MERVYN

Taxi drivers don't care anymore. It's like they get extra points if they hit you. You got nice skin. I bet you moisturize.

ABIGAIL

Not really.

MERVYN

Oh, that's important. You should start moisturizing at 20 and keep it up. Then you'll always look young.

ABIGAIL

I think that window has closed for me, but thanks for the advice.

MERVYN

Do you know how old I am? I'm 93!

ABIGAIL

Well, you look terrific.

MERVYN

I was born in 1922!

ABIGAIL

Wow! Well, here you are safe and sound. Where are you headed?

MERVYN

Lincoln Center.

ABIGAIL

You're a ways away. Do you want me to walk you to the subway?

MERVYN

No, I'll sit plenty when I get to the library. It's a nice day. I got nothin' but time. I think I'll walk.

ABIGAIL

That's over a mile. Are you sure you'll be OK?

MERVYN

In 1942 I walked down the Grand Canyon. I got there before the men on mules. Never even got a blister.

ABIGAIL

Impressive... OK, take care.

MERVYN

Wait - you're just going to leave me here on the side of the road?

ABIGAIL

I live uptown. I'm heading home now.

MERVYN

What's so special about home? You got a dog to feed?

ABIGAIL

No...

MERVYN

A babysitter?

ABIGAIL

Actually...

MERVYN

A husband that needs his dinner on the table at exactly 6:05?

ABIGAIL

(Laughing)

God, no!

MERVYN

So you really got no reason to leave an old man stranded on the sidewalk. You young people - always rush, rush, rush! Always on to the next thing. Shutting out the world with your crazy devices... What are you looking around for?

ABIGAIL

Looking for the hidden cameras. This has got to be one of those "What Would You Do" shows.

MERVYN

I don't have a TV. Nothing worth watching since Bonanza went off the air.

ABIGAIL

I'll walk you to the bus stop on 94th Street, if that helps. I can swipe you with my Metro card. That's my final offer.

MERVYN

I don't trust the busses. Too slow. Too many crazy people on the streets these days.

ABIGAIL

You are right about that, sir.

MERVYN

What? With all this standing and talking, you might as well be walking. It's a beautiful day.

ABIGAIL

Fine.

ABIGAIL sighs, resigned. They start walking.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Is there anyone I can call for you? A family member? Someone who could meet you?

MERVYN

My wife died in 1975. Esther Matilda. I called her Em. Lung cancer. Never smoked a cigarette in her life. 37 years old. We were only married 15 years. Never had children. I was selfish. I didn't want to share her with anyone.

ABIGAIL

I'm sorry.

MERVYN

What sorry? It was 15 beautiful years. We traveled everywhere... Spain, India, Italy. I kissed her under the Bridge of Sighs in Venice.

ABIGAIL

Just like in that movie with Laurence Olivier.

MERVYN

I don't watch movies. I haven't seen a movie I liked since *The Sound of Music*. And even that one I had some problems with.

ABIGAIL

Well, the legend is that if you kiss in a gondola under the Bridge of Sighs at Sunset, you'll have eternal love.

MERVYN

Never heard that. The year we went, there was a garbage strike and the sewers were backed up. The whole city smelled like piss and rotting vegetables.

ABIGAIL

That sounds awful.

MERVYN

No, it was great! No tourists. We had the whole river to ourselves. So the gondolier gagged a little when he sang. So what? Still one of the most romantic days of my life. Do you mind if we sit a moment on this bench? I got a bad ticker. You are wearing me out with all this talking.

ABIGAIL

Um...

MERVYN

Life is short. Stop and smell the roses. Or in this case, honeysuckle and hot dogs. Sit, sit. You are making me nervous. Honeysuckle is good for your blood pressure. Back in my day, everyone had flower boxes in their windows, on their stoops. Now between dogs and thieves, they wouldn't last an hour. What's your name?

ABIGAIL

Abigail. My friends call me Abby.

MERVYN

Mervyn. My friends call me Mervyn. At least they did when they were alive. I am the last one. The last dinosaur. Pleased to make your acquaintance.

(shakes hand)

ABIGAIL

Likewise.

She sits.

MERVYN

So where were you going in such a hurry?

ABIGAIL

Nowhere, really. I just hate to leave my daughter alone.

MERVYN

How old is she?

ABIGAIL

22, but she has Asperger's Syndrome.

MERVYN

Never heard of it. Is it contagious?

ABIGAIL

No. And she's fine. I just live in fear that she will accidentally set the house on fire making toast, or forget the pot of water she was boiling and the house will smell like burnt rubber.

MERVYN

Has she done that lately?

ABIGAIL

Well, we've had some close calls, but...

MERVYN

Then let her be. You have to have a little faith in people. I burnt a few pots myself after my wife died. She always did the cooking... She cooked just like my mother.

ABIGAIL

Oh, that must have been nice.

MERVYN

My mother was a *terrible* cook. She boiled everything. It all tasted the same. Chicken, vegetables, bread, you couldn't tell the difference. But I didn't marry Em for her cooking. She was pure of heart. She looked a little like you. Around the eyes.

ABIGAIL

Thank you. You're right. I need to relax. It's not easy for me. Worrier by nature. It's just that my kid is so naive. I always want to leap to her defense and fix things. I guess I have done her a disservice trying to protect her, but I'm her Mom, you know? It's good to stop and breathe for a moment. I usually don't.

MERVYN

You gotta give her a chance to find her own way. You're not gonna be around forever, you know.

ABIGAIL

Hopefully a little while longer. I have an intense fear of death. Especially my own.

MERVYN

May I take your hand?

ABIGAIL

(smiling)

No funny stuff!

MERVYN

Bridget Bardot, Sophia Loren and a crane couldn't get a rise out of me if you get my drift. Five fingers, five minutes. That's all I'm asking.

ABIGAIL

I think I can do that, Mervyn.

They sit in silence for a moment.

MERVYN

I held my Em's hand as she took her last breath. I sang to her.

(Sings)

"Somewhere beyond the sea, somewhere waiting for me, my lover stands on golden sands and watches the ships that go sailing..." She loved Bobby Darin. I didn't do it justice.

ABIGAIL

That's lovely. I wish I could have done that for my dad. He passed away in '96.

MERVYN

Did he like Bobby Darin, too?

ABIGAIL

Hated him. And Barbra Streisand. And Judy Garland. Basically most music I listened to. He liked Deanna Durbin.

(MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Oh, and there was this Harry Belafonte song I sang in second grade, "Turn Around." Dad didn't usually come to school things, but this time he did. He wasn't good at compliments, but he did say he wanted to hear it again in 30 years. He didn't make it that long.

MERVYN

Sing it now.

ABIGAIL

Oh, I couldn't. I don't sing in public.

MERVYN

What public? I don't see any public. Close your eyes.

She does.

ABIGAIL

This is a little uncomfortable.

MERVYN

Unscrew the lid and let the past breathe. Imagine he's with you. Then, now, whenever. Sing to your daddy.

ABIGAIL

(starts to sing with her eyes closed quietly and tenderly)

"Where are you going my little one? Little One?
Where are you going my baby my own?
Turn around and you're two
Turn around and you're four
Turn around and you're a young girl going out of the door."

MERVYN

He hears you.

(closes his eyes)

ABIGAIL

"Turn around and you're a young wife with babes of your own..." Thank you, Mervyn. For a moment I could really feel him there. There was this movie called *The Bluebird* with Shirley Temple that I loved as a kid. When she gets lost in the forest, she thinks of her grandparents, and they came to life. Right then and there, on their front porch, and they had such a lovely visit. It was like that. Thanks for the gift, Mervyn. People are never really gone as long as they are remembered. Hey, how'd you like to come over for dinner tonight? I bet my daughter would enjoy meeting you.... and...

(MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
(turns to look at him)

Mervyn? Mervyn?

(Shakes him gently)

Oh God! Oh My God!

(pulls out her cell phone and dials 911)

Yes. I need an ambulance at 94th street and Central Park West. Park side. Mervyn... I don't know his last name. 93.

(Checking his pulse)

Yes I think so. I'm... I'm his friend. Yes I'll wait.

Sits with MERVYN holding his hands. Slowly starts singing.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
"Somewhere beyond the sea, She's there watching for me. If I could fly like birds on high... then straight to her arms I'd go sailing..."

LIGHTS FADE

EPILOGUE

At a funeral home.

ABIGAIL

Oh. I guess its up to me to say a few words. First a thank you to the police officers and the EMS who responded so quickly. It's so nice that some of you could be here today. I just learned his full name was Mervyn Rademaker. I knew him for a total of 15 minutes, and I will never forget him. We, the living, are the memory keepers. Everything we do is a memory of loved ones lost. Let's raise a toast to Mervyn, who is now sailing, somewhere, beyond the sea.

FADE TO BLACK

END OF PLAY