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As We Know It

A short one-act play by Jeff Garrity

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Wilderness backpacking camp, warm weather. Stump/rock to sit on.

CHARACTERS: Man and Woman, aged 63. Dressed for a backpacking trip.

Man seated most of play. Woman more animated, moving around stage. At times, especially in the beginning, both characters are distracted by their own concerns and not paying much attention to the other.

There could be a yellow/orange glow coming from stage right.

LIGHTS

W: [looking off stage right] Do you think it moved?

M: [seated facing the audience, doesn't respond, looks stage right with casual interest, then faces forward]

W: What do you think? I'm not sure. Did it move?

M: [doesn't look] How long have we been coming here?

W: [insistent] *Does it look like it moved?* It's hard to tell.

M: [looks intently stage right, where Woman wants him to look and where she is looking, then faces forward again] Forty years? Something like that?

W: Do you think it moved?

M: [glances stage right] Four decades. Before Joanie was born.

W: I don't think it's moved. I think something horrible has happened. I can't make any sense of this.

M: Last night was the only time in the forty years we've been coming here that we didn't have sex the first night. We had a forty-year run. Until last night.

W: [staring stage right, concerned about what she sees not what M is saying] There's gotta be some explanation.

M: Yeah, we're sixty-three. Maybe we're too old for tent sex. But for all those years, despite the long hike in, we always pulled it off. Even when we started bringing the kids, that didn't stop us. We got that double sleeping pad, then a double air mattress. That was too noisy so we got that silky thing to stretch over it. All to make it a little easier. It seemed important to us. I think we've just given up.

W: [just starting to pay attention, but still concerned about stage right] You fell asleep.

M: [concerned] Before you?

W: [responding, but more concerned about stage right] Yes. I was game. You fell asleep.

M: What the hell is wrong with me?

W: You're sixty-three. [changing topic] I think it's rising. I think it's moved. [gravely] We are totally and completely fucked.

M: So are you.

W: I said we.

M: No, I mean you're sixty-three too.

W: Will you shut up about us not screwing each other's eyes out like we used to? We're not twenty anymore. [looking or pointing stage right] There's something far bigger going on here.

M: [nostalgic] Still, you have to agree, it was a pretty good run. Forty years. Phil and Mel can't say that.

W: Phil had testicular cancer fifteen years ago. Be fair.

M: [reveling in the word] Tes-tic-u-lar. [brightens] Hey, maybe we just change the rules. We'll say the streak is simply having sex while we're here, and whether it's the first night or not doesn't matter. We'll keep the streak alive as long as we do it before we leave.

W: [turns away from stage right] Are you out of your fucking mind? Look! [points stage right] There may not be a next year.

M: [looks stage right, maybe walks to W, shows some concern] There's got to be some explanation.

W: What if it's the end of the world? The end of all we've known. The end of all humanity. Everybody. Dead.

M: [considers, maybe walks back to chair and sits] That's pretty gloomy.

W: Then tell me what's going on.

M: We're missing something. Something simple. There has to be some easy answer.

W: [pleading for reason] We've been coming here for forty years. We know which way is east and which way is west. We've hiked these woods, we've fished the rivers. This is *our* neck of the woods. [points stage right] The sun is rising in the west. The sun has never risen in the west. The sun always rises in the east and it always will.

[both look stage right].

M: We haven't exhausted all the possibilities.

W: It's eight in the morning and the sun is in the west. Give me one reasonable explanation.

M: [considers] We slept all day and it's actually evening, not morning. We're simply watching the sunset.

W: My phone says [looks at it] eight fourteen a.m. [grabs camera and turns it on] My camera says eight fifteen a.m. Check your phone.

M: [pulls out phone and looks at it and puts it back] Sleeping all day would be a lot more plausible if we *had* screwed each other's eyes out last night. And even more if we'd done it again this morning. A little pre-dawn rendezvous like we used to. Then we would've worn each other out enough to sleep all day and wake up at sunset. Problem solved. But I failed us. I fell asleep.

W: Are you suggesting that if we had sex last night the sun would be rising in the east, not the west? Like our hill-of-beans lives can somehow change the cosmos?

M: [shrugs] Like that old cliché about the earth moving when you have an orgasm. Maybe so many people had sex last night that the earth started spinning faster. [looks down between his legs] Sorry fella. I guess we missed the party.

W: [staring stage right] I need to stop staring at it and maybe it will rise like it's supposed to.

M: [still looking down between his legs but looks up after previous line from W] Does that work?
[looks at W, sees she's upset, walks to her] The only thing that makes sense is that we slept all day and it's really evening. There's no other ...

W: [touch of anger and fear] We didn't sleep through the day! I've never slept through the day.

M: We used to stay in bed all day.

W: Maybe twice. Before we were married. And one of those times I got out of bed to go to class.

M: But you came back.

W: Meaning what?

M: [shrugs] You came back. You were the only one who kept coming back.

W: [focusing on stage right again] It seems higher. But there's all those trees in the way.

M: Damn trees cluttering up the forest.

W: Can you tell? At least try, please.

M: Maybe there was some big surge in magnetic fields or electromagnetic something-or-others and that threw our clocks off. Maybe a dozen massive volcanoes erupted at the same time. Or an asteroid slammed into the earth and knocked us a half turn forward.

W: Maybe Russia or Iran or Mueller pissed off Trump and he started shooting off missiles and there are nuclear bombs going off all over the world and that somehow altered the earth's rotation. Maybe there's only a handful of people left alive.

M: [pensive] That's a lot of pressure. What if I'm the only man left alive and repopulating the earth depends on me and I keep falling asleep? Human extinction. And it will be all my fault. Maybe I'll start drinking coffee again. And jogging. My brother told me yoga helps with sex. I could swallow my pride and do yoga for the sake of humanity. [looks at W] I'll have to have sex with hordes of other women. I hope you're okay with that.

W: Our kids. Our grandkid. All my students. All your colleagues. All our friends. Neighbors. Everybody we know. [mood brightens slightly] Maybe somehow the earth's poles got reversed? North became south. So then east became west.

M: Think so?

W: No.

M: I like the nuclear war idea better.

W: Arghh. How did a spiteful child become president? But not everyone would be dead, right? Even if there was a nuclear war. DC, New York, LA, maybe some places that make weapons. Where's that? Seattle? Detroit? Maybe San Diego because of that big base. What's that big naval base out East? Places like that would be flattened and everybody dead. But not the entire planet.

M: Sure, but then there's nuclear winter.

W: [distressed] All we'll know from now on is misery until we die from some horrible cancer. When's the last time you checked your compass?

M: [half-heartedly checks a couple pockets but doesn't find his compass]. Maybe we're reinforcing each other's mistaken belief that west is that way. Our own little echo chamber. Maybe we're just plain wrong.

W: Let's walk down to the river. Check the flow. We know the river flows west here, towards the big lake. Let's walk down to the river and make sure.

M: We know which way it flows. [points stage right] It flows west. I have a better idea. Let's sneak into the tent and keep our streak alive before nuclear winter sets in. Get our minds off Armageddon.

W: How can you just give up? How can you be okay with letting this happen without a fight? How can you be so defeated already? We don't even know what's happened and you've already decided we've lost.

M: [pause] Sounds like a no.

W: [somewhat hopeful] Was the sun still up when we went to bed last night?

M: I think it was.

W: Maybe the earth stopped spinning. Like the moon. We're still circling the sun but we're not spinning anymore.

(Both look stage right)

M: How can the earth stop spinning?

W: Why does it spin in the first place?

M: [pause] Something to do with physics.

W: Why doesn't the moon spin?

M: Because it's made of cheese. [tone changes] There's no way for us to figure this out so why beat yourself up about it? If something happened ... what's done is done. If it was something horrible maybe there's some new reality and we'll just have to adapt.

W: [with a little fear] I just want to know that the world isn't ending.

M: Maybe we're better off not knowing.

W: Just tell ourselves lies so we feel better?

M: At least until the cancer sets in. Or doesn't.

W: [resolute] We need to hike out and get to town and find out what's going on. We need to find other people.

M: It'll be middle of the night before we get back to the car.

W: Only if the sun is setting.

M: That *is* west.

W: [pleading for reason] But it's *morning*.

[pause]

M: We're back where we started.

W: Did you check your compass?

M: [ignoring W, looking stage right] I think it *is* rising. Is that good or bad?

W: [irritated she has to keep asking] Did you check your compass?

M: [checks another pocket and finds compass, pulls it out and looks at it]. Huh. [puts compass back]

W: What? What? What do you mean huh?

M: [pulls out compass again and looks at it]. It says that way is east [points stage right]. Not west.

W: But we know it's west! [walks to M and takes compass from him, looks at compass and looks stage right a couple times] Damn it! How can this be! We know that's not east. We need to get to town.

M: Why? Let's just wait it out.

W: [exasperated] Wait *what* out?

M: It.

W: Until when?

M: [unsure] Until everything's back the way it was.

W: [looks stage right] Maybe things were never the way they were. That worries me more than anything.

[M and W put their arms around each other and stare stage right]

LIGHTS

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