

Boys Grown Tall

By Timothy X. Troy

A full-length one-act drama



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1(F), 2(M) Single Interior. 80 minutes.

Synopsis:

A youngest son gradually believes only he sees the truth of what his older siblings are not ready to accept - their beloved and powerful mother needs help only professionals can now provide.

The Barstow Family:

HARRIET - 81 years old

Her sons:

EDWARD – 51 years old, Insurance industry executive

DONOVAN – 35 years old, professor of psychology

Setting:

1983. Late February. Saturday. Saratoga Springs, New York. Interior of a Mid-Century Modern home – the lower level family room. We see the ½ -story staircase. The visible level also includes doors to a bathroom and a guest bedroom. Dry bar, fireplace, slide rocker for HARRIET.

Confabulation (verb: **confabulate**) is a memory disturbance defined as the production of fabricated, distorted or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world, without the conscious intention to deceive.

(HARRIET sits alone in a glide-style rocker. She enthusiastically hums the theme from *Chariots of Fire*. She's wearing a winter coat, unbuttoned. Did she just arrive, or is she getting ready to leave? She crochets a small project.)

HARRIET

(to the tune of *Chariots of Fire*) He runs on the beach. He runs on the beach. Ta-da-da-da tah. He comes in first place. (Continues humming a few bars. With increased gusto) He runs with his bare feet. They're all dressed in white. Ta-da-da-da tah. He's lithe and he's handsome ... he runs on the beach. (She giggles.)

(Perhaps she's testing the gauge of a new pattern. Though her muscle memory is sure, she struggles to find a rhythm. No sign of upset, she continues.)

HARRIET

(Toward the stairs) It's too warm again. (Continues humming). I still think it's early, but whatever you say. I do like it when the bacon is fresh. And the eggs. Old eggs! The trick is to order an omelet. The one with pepper and onion. What's that called, again?

DONOVAN

(From just off stage) We're not going to brunch.

HARRIET

Green pepper and onion? Eggs! No cheese.

DONOVAN

(Continues off) Denver.

HARRIET

Why "Denver" ?

DONOVAN

No idea.

HARRIET

They say it's a mile high there.

DONOVAN

Thin air.

HARRIET

I bet you can see the stars there. All those stars. I spent my whole adult life missing the stars.

DONOVAN

The stars are better here.

HARRIET

Yes. Especially when we take that little drive on a clear night.

DONOVAN

(Continues off) Schroon Lake.

HARRIET

SCHROO--OOON.

DONOVAN

Schroon Lake, right. Be right there.

HARRIET

Can we run on the beach at Schroon Lake? (Chariots of Fire theme continues)

DONOVAN

Sure, Ma. That'd be fun.

HARRIET

Your father took me to Schroon Lake in 1932. We took a train. We got away from the city. Took the train. I made egg sandwiches. He brought apples. That's where we started making babies! Now you know what I'm thinking about when we drive to Schroon Lake.

DONOVAN

More than I need to know, mother. Thank you.

HARRIET

You're gathering the troops, aren't you? (Continues humming.) I'm ready. I know what you've planned.

DONOVAN

Marcie made your tea. I'll be right down.

HARRIET

A daughter knows what a mother wants. (Continues humming, crocheting.) Troublesome pattern. Are you alternate rows, or alternate stitches? (Puts the yarn to her ear to listen.) Stop changing.

(DONOVAN enters with a tea tray. Sets it on the dry bar.)

DONOVAN

All set. Here, Mom, let's get your coat. Oops. You're a little tangled. I'll take that. (He puts the crochet on a side table.) Now I'm tangled.

HARRIET

Don't pull out the stitches. I'm just getting it.

DONOVAN

What's this? (She turns so he can take her coat. He unwinds yarn from a small collectable teaspoon.) There's your trouble.

HARRIET

That's a nice dance we just did. You should take me dancing, too.

DONOVAN

(Chuckles.) I'm not sure where we'd go to dance. Marcie might know.

HARRIET

She knows a lot of things. Starts her day with a smile. How did you know? Are you charmed?

DONOVAN

Know what?

HARRIET

That she'd be so lovely. There are so many things we can't know, yet we go headlong. I could see it, but I'm the grown-up. How did a young man like you see it?

DONOVAN

My mother raised me right.

HARRIET

Smart mom. Young fellas don't know a thing. That's why I didn't marry one. How about those countries where they don't know each other at all?

DONOVAN

Arranged marriages.

HARRIET

Arranged. It's all arranged for them. The parents make the arrangements. Like puzzle pieces. The bride and groom show up. They sing and dance and the parents tie their hands together and send them off for the rest of their lives.

DONOVAN

The parents don't tie –

HARRIET

Of course not.

DONOVAN

They get tied down, down in a manner of speaking.

HARRIET

“Hitched,” is the word you’re looking for. Trundle.

DONOVAN

Trestle ?

HARRIET

Stop that. I don’t want your word games today.

DONOVAN

They say the arrangements works better than our system.

HARRIET

Throw them in the deep end and they cling to each other and learn to wade. (She motions swimming.)

DONOVAN

They’re like salmon.

HARRIET

We have sons and daughters. And grandsons and granddaughters.

DONOVAN

Richard. Emily.

HARRIET

And your husband dies and you start over.

DONOVAN

With your sons and daughters and grandsons, etc.

HARRIET

And you swim upstream.

DONOVAN

To spawn, mom.

HARRIET

That’s what you get when you marry an older man. He was bound to leave me. I think I knew that. He had a line on a nice apartment.

DONOVAN

So you married Dad for his real estate?

HARRIET

He left me with babies to raise.

DONOVAN

A hoard of tiny terrors.

HARRIET

How to manage that youngest boy! All the boys. We found a good plan for the baby.

DONOVAN

An excellent plan. You were a great mom. Inspiring

HARRIET

(Gets his attention.) That's why I'm here, right?

DONOVAN

Right.

HARRIET

I'm a single gal again. Footloose. I know where not to go. Avoid the Bunnyman.

DONOVAN

We're making adjustments.

HARRIET

Those men aren't here.

DONOVAN

(As he takes her coat.) Which men? (No answer.) The men. Yes.

HARRIET

They come down from the 6th floor. The flirtations are not welcome. We're not teenagers.

DONOVAN

They don't belong on the 4th floor.

HARRIET

It's not their place. Just because we're nearby, doesn't mean we're available. Like sailors on shore leave.

DONOVAN

You're such a looker. One can hardly blame them.

HARRIET

Watch your tone, young man. That funny one, Alfonso, claimed he knew your father. Collar open. Still wears cufflinks. Seeks me out, and starts to croon.

DONOVAN

He croons?

HARRIET

Directly in my direction. In front of everyone.

DONOVAN

He lets it loose?

HARRIET

"When the moon hits your eye." That kind of song. Launches right into it, like a brass-ringed troubadour. Cravat. He's a character in an Andy Rooney movie.

DONOVAN

Damon Runyon.

HARRIET

He carries a folded newspaper. Calls it his racing form.

DONOVAN

Harry the Horse.

HARRIET

Takes two-dollar bets from his buddies. I'll bet he knows The Bunnyman.

DONOVAN

They can play cards or read the racing forms on the 6th floor.

HARRIET

They can sing "Oh Susannah, oh don't you cry for me", or some manner of Stephen Foster song until the very last cow comes home. On the 6th --

DONOVAN

-- on the 6th floor. (Sets her coat on a side chair) And here's this.

(He hands her the spoon.)

HARRIET

Anything they please, up there, where they belong. Watch girlie movies. Car races. Amongst themselves. Quietly, would be nice. I knitted as a girl.

DONOVAN

Where's your hook? (Looks in her crochet bag.) Ah. I'll put it with your bag. "Tea, is served." (He bows like an English butler.) Those men aren't here. Not to worry.

HARRIET

You know I can help myself. She doesn't seem to like me in the kitchen.

DONOVAN

It wasn't that, Mom. She knew we were out of your tea, there was no sense looking. We ran out and got some, and here we are. No milk, one sugar in the morning. Right?

HARRIET

Yes, thank you. I don't know why we keep going over this – Sugar in the afternoon. Milk in the morning. No wait – sugar in the morning.

DONOVAN

I'm 35 and I've never seen you drink tea before last week. So, you know, we're adjusting.

HARRIET

Bosh! A woman of my era was raised to drink tea. Coffee is for men.

DONOVAN

I think that's the way it used to be.

HARRIET

Used to be. Right. A letter came from the tenant's association. That old elevator again. Mr. Hammes knows about old buildings. He can decide. Why was it always couples, do you think? With The Bunnyman? (No answer.) Two against one, right? They were compromised, I know, but it doesn't take long to ... to untangle. I mean, to defend yourself, one doesn't bother with niceties ... like underpants and brassieres.

DONOVAN

I have no idea what you just said.

HARRIET

The guy. The man. It's well known.

DONOVAN

Ed is having --

HARRIET

Edward.

DONOVAN

-- is having coffee with Marcie.

HARRIET

She's so nice. She raids my recipe file. Your grandma was not much of a cook, bless her pointy little head. But Aunt Betty! A person looked forward to those visits. She could peel an orange and it would taste better coming from her hands.

DONOVAN

How does that work, I wonder?

HARRIET

Uncle Dick, Richard as rightly she insisted, rode the train raided by Butch Cassidy. Such a thing was not pretty piano music and jumping into the pool. It was frightening and people got hurt. And they say he's buried in Glasgow.

DONOVAN

I think that story ends in Bolivia.

HARRIET

Glasgow is the Great Train Robbery. Call the library if you don't believe me. Uncle Richard rode that train. Aunt Betty showed a picture he'd taken. That's the proof. Photos don't lie. Unless it's some sort of Soviet history book – removing pictures of Trotsky and those currently out of favor. Aunt Betty didn't fabricate. *Lacuna*, they call it. A skipping ahead. An *elision*.

DONOVAN

There's a word you don't hear every day.

HARRIET

Would be a lovely first name for a gal: Allow me to introduce you to my dear Aunt Lacuna.

DONOVAN

Marcie and I once joked that "Jaundice" would be lovely name ... for little girl.

HARRIET

Jaundice Marie, she's the smart one.

DONOVAN

James is on his way. All your adoring boys gather together.

HARRIET

He's always a welcome sight. He did right by you. He's right about things. He knows how to live.

DONOVAN

Ed took the train –

HARRIET

Edward.

DONOVAN

- 'dward arrived on the train in Albany. From Boston.

HARRIET

I think he's been in Boston for some time now. He's not in the same house. It's that second woman. One each. That's what we're allotted.

DONOVAN

Not always how it works out, mom.

HARRIET

She calls him 'Ted.' In my presence, she calls him 'Ted.' What a thing to say to a mother. I was there when we named him. I know his name.

DONOVAN

I don't understand it, either.

HARRIET

Ted! Sounds like a skin inflammation. Edward is a perfectly fine name, why do people insist on making names shorter. Ed-ward. Two syllables. Hardly a burden. And what's the point of suddenly adding a 'tah' sound to the front? 'Ted' is the name of a child's plush toy, not an insurance big-wig. 'Ted' is supposed to be short for Theodore. Not Edward. Jeesh. Doesn't know a thing. What's this second ... woman called? Ah – don't tell me. She's not here, is she?

DONOVAN

Edward is alone.

HARRIET

He's alone again?

DONOVAN

No, he's not alone, alone. He's alone today. He's a party of one. Not a fun party.

HARRIET

I don't *need* to know at this point. The second woman is not my favorite person. I don't think *her people* - her ancestors - were honest people. I don't like the way that sounds, even as I say it. Nevertheless, her people are not ours. Bootleggers, is my guess.

DONOVAN

Like the Kennedys?

HARRIET

Well ... not smart like a Kenndy. More like the gun runners. I know how these things worked. That was my time. I'm sure there are things you know about, but the gun running bootleggers, that was my time. Shall I put my coat on?

DONOVAN

Not yet, mom.

HARRIET

Then let me get back to my ... (points to her crochet. Can't think of the word.) ... my Chariot of Fire!

DONOVAN

(gently singing) Swing low, sweet Harriet, coming for to carry me home.

(Takes the tea and hands over the yarn.)

HARRIET

You are more clever than the others. Because you got the best of him. Clever, like alcoholism, skips generations. Every woman deserves a clever grandson. (Begins to hum Chariots of Fire theme again.)

DONOVAN

I never thought of Richard as clever. Monosyllabic, truth be known. It's a stage.

HARRIET

I don't mean *that* Richard ... silly boy ... learn to take a compliment graciously. Grace. It's part of growing up. As you grow, you'll begin to learn what holds your attention. What matters in the morning is more important than what matters at night. With whom to share it and how to raise a family. Spend within your means. Keep your promises.