

Packers
by
Christopher G. Smith

Winner Best Original Play
Jewel Box Theatre Oklahoma, OK

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2021 Second Rounder Austin Film Festival Playwriting Competition.

2020 Finalist Matchstick Theatre Company. London, England.

First Runner-up SETC New Play Contest. University of Alabama.

Finalist Annual Mildred & Albert Panowski Playwriting Award.
Northern Michigan University.

Semifinalist Dayton FutureFest.

Stage readings Midwest Theatre Network.

To my Father, E.E. Smith.

"The great provider"

CAST

(In order of appearance)

ART MURPHY	The earthy father of the clan. Sixty years old.
TIM MURPHY	Youngest son. Home from college.
JOE MURPHY	Second son. Mid 30's. Joe worked on the line at the plant. He is a loyal union member.
MARY MURPHY	Wife and Mother of a family of boys.
TERESA MURPHY	Joe's wife. She feels at home with the Murphys.
DAVID MURPHY	Joe and Teresa's eleven year old son.
MICHAEL MURPHY	Oldest son. Early 40's. Works for management at the plant.
KATHY MURPHY	Michael's wife.

SETTING

Act 1: The Murphy home. Thanksgiving Day, Mid 1980's.

Act 2: The Murphy home. Moments later.

ACT I

TIME: Thanksgiving Day, Mid 1980's.

SETTING: A middle class home in Minnesota. The home of the Murphy family. It is an American foursquare which has been decorated over a series of years and is a bit dated. The furnishings are modest but of good quality. They were purchased as they could be paid for. It is eclectic but comfortable. To the far stage right is the main door with a stairway leading up and out of view. The main area of the down stage is the living room. A couch and "his and hers" chairs are the main furniture. A large console color TV faces upstage with its back to the audience. Upstage to the left is a dining room. A wall/doorway separates it from the living room. Off to the right of the dining room is the kitchen entrance. Through the kitchen unseen by the audience is the back door.

LIGHTS UP: As the play begins we see Art Murphy the 60 year old patriarch of the clan. He is seated in his chair enjoying a beer and watching the football game. He is dressed in dark blue or black work pants, a work shirt and white socks. His black work shoes rest beside the chair.

ART

Hands! Hands! Can't anybody catch a football?

The back door slams loudly offstage.

ART shouts, not moving from his chair.

ART

Hey! Watch that door!

TIM

(Offstage)

I've got it.

TIM enters laughing. His hands are dirty. Tim is 21, handsome, and the college quarterback.

ART

You think it's funny, Tim, but I'm tired of fixing that door.

TIM
 (Kidding)
 So, buy a new one.

ART
 It's not so easy...

TIM
 I know, I know...
 (Looking at the TV)
 How are they doing?

ART
 No protection, limp passes. They must have had a good time
 at the bars last night. Better send in your application.
 What are you doing in here?
 (Getting up)
 Need help with the car?

TIM
 No. You rest. It's cold out there. I came in to warm up.

ART
 Your brother's still out there isn't he?

TIM
 Yes. But you know Joe, ever since he's been working in
 refrigeration down at the plant, the cold doesn't seem to
 bother him.

ART
 All the same, he's working on your car. You better hustle
 back out. Get that car finished up. I'd be out there if it
 weren't for these damn hands...

TIM
 I know. I'm heading out. I just wanted to catch the score.
 The coach said he'd have somebody look at my car when I get
 back to campus anyway.

ART
 Tell "the coach" to have somebody sell it. Get yourself a
 good car.

TIM
 It is a good car. Nothing starts when it's this cold.

ART
 My truck starts.

TIM
 That truck is ten years old.

ART

That's right, a ten year old American made truck. It could be a long cold winter for you laying on the ground staring up at Japan. How old is that flash machine?

TIM

(Smiling)

Hey, the women love it.

ART

Sure, makes you feel like a big shot, I know...

Back door slams

ART

Hey! Take it easy.

ART stands and crosses upstage towards the door.

Joe enters from the Kitchen.

JOE

Dad, do you have any impact sockets?

ART

You boys are going to ruin that door.

JOE

Sorry.

TIM

Touchdown!

ART

(Turning)

What?

JOE

Touchdown!

ART

I missed it?

TIM

They'll show it again.

ART

I don't want to see it again! I've been sitting here all game to see it live. That's what this is, live TV, right?

JOE

Is that the first time we've been on the board?

ART
This game has been less than exciting.

JOE
I've got twenty bucks on this game!

TIM
So, what's the score?

ART
If we make this kick, we'll only be down by 14 points.
(Pause)
But there's always room for improvement in the second half.

TIM
He'll miss it.

ART
What are you talking about? Stenerude is the only decent
player on the team. Green Bay said he was done.
(Pauses, watching the game)
Whose side are you on anyway?

TIM
Sorry, I bet on Detroit.

ART
Where's your loyalty?

TIM
They're a better team.

ART
That's pretty fickle.

TIM
It's a fact. Look at their defensive line...

JOE
Quiet. He's kicking.

TIM
Like he could hear me.

ART
Shh....
(Watching intensely)
Damn...

TIM
I love it! Easy fifty bucks.

ART
Better spend it on that car.

TIM
It's a good car!

Art watches the game and then looking
away with disgust

ART
What did you want, Joe?

JOE
An impact socket. Do you have one?

ART
I suppose you need metric.

TIM
Very funny.

ART
I have a set down in the basement with my tools.

JOE
I looked there.

ART
In the drawers? I keep all my sockets in the drawers.

JOE
Yeah. It's not there.

ART
Well, I don't know where it is then. You boys keep borrowing
tools and never put them back. I swear, one of these days
I'm going to come to your house and search your tools.

JOE
I don't have your tools. Try Michael.

ART
Michael isn't handy and you know it. Don't pull that. This
is just like my extension ladder...

JOE
I know, I know, Uncle Pete borrowed it and...

ART
And when it came back, the rope's gone, it's in two halves,
and the frame's all sprung.
(JOE giggles)
You laugh, but I'm not loaning out anymore tools.

JOE
(Smiling)
Fine.

(Needling with a mock
seriousness)

So, do you have an impact socket?

ART

If it's not in the basement...

JOE

It's not.

ART

Then your guess is as good as mine.

(Pause)

Maybe the quarterback has it.

TIM

Can't help you.

ART

Go ask Bob Johnson next door then. He'll have one.

JOE

Forget it. I'll go without. He's crossing the line on Monday.

ART

You don't know that.

JOE

I know. He's folding. Bastard.

ART

It's not so black and white, Joe. He's had bills to pay.

JOE

You think I don't have bills? We've all got bills.

ART

I know. This has been a long strike. Working seems like a memory. Nobody's coming out of this one a saint.

JOE

Don't defend him. The son of a bitch is busting our union.

ART

Don't talk that way in your mother's house.

(Pause)

He's my neighbor. He helped build this union.

JOE

So why is he crossing?

ART

It's a hell of a thing to have to consider.

JOE

Are you?

ART

Look, if you don't want to use his tools, that's fine. But don't go running down people you don't know anything about. He was a decent man to you growing up.

JOE

Is that right?

ART

I remember a certain kid who was damn glad to get a second hand bike for nothing.

JOE

His kid outgrew it. Big deal.

ART

It was a big deal to a ten year old boy at the start of the summer. Remember that?

JOE

Yeah. I had a lot of fun with that bike.

ART

He didn't have to do that. How did he know you wanted it? Do you ever think about that? That's the kind of stuff you measure people on, not desperate acts at the end of a strike.

JOE

Are you saying it's over?

ART

I'm saying he was a decent man before the strike, and he'll be the same when it's over. We all got to live together when this is over. You remember that.

(Pause)

Now leave me be. Get the car finished. Your mother will have dinner ready soon.

JOE

We'll go over to my place. I've got some tools.

ART

They're probably mine!

JOE

(Laughing)

Do you need anything?

ART

Ask your mother. Yeah, buy some more beer.

JOE
Are you out of beer already?

ART
Almost. Your baby brother had some friends over last night. Since you boys came of age I haven't been able to keep a beer in the house.

TIM
Can't buy beer today. It's Thanksgiving.

ART
Go over to Mitchell's Tavern. They'll be open. They're always open. Joe knows about it.

Art reaching in his pocket

ART
Here's some money.

JOE
No, I'll get it.

ART
Forget it. I don't mind you drinking my beer. I'd rather you did here than downtown.

Art hands him the money

JOE
Dad, I can pay for it.

ART
Take it. Tough times.

JOE
Dad, come on.

ART
No, keep your money. It might be worth something someday.

JOE
Hey, this is too much.

ART
Keep it, just go.

JOE
I'll bring you back the change.

ART
(Small irritation)
Whatever. And take the runt with you!

TIM

Runt!

ART

Will you get out of here so I can watch the game?

JOE

If Teresa stops, tell her I'll be right back.

ART

Don't worry. She'll wait for you.

JOE

I might stop by the line to see how it's going.

ART

No. Good God. Your mother's in there cooking up a storm. Don't make her wait. Just get that damn car back together! Don't stop by the line, this thing could blow soon.

JOE

I know. I want to be there.

ART

You don't want to be there. It's not all glory. Like in my Dad's time trying to build a union. People can get hurt bad in a strike. Things get violent and they get out of control.

JOE

It's our strike, Dad. I want to be there.

ART

You've been there. We both have. Never missed our time on the picket line or pitching in. If you want to help, get your brother's car running so he can go back to school. Family's more important now. The strike will be there tomorrow and the next day. Well, get going.

TIM

Keep track of the score.

JOE and TIM exit through the kitchen.
The back door slams

ART

Watch that door!

JOE

(Offstage voice)

Sorry!

The door slams again

ART looks back and shakes his head. He turns and watches the game a moment.

ART

Damn.

MARY
(From the kitchen)

Art.

ART

Damn it!

MARY
(From the kitchen)
Art, what's the matter?

ART

Son of a bitch.

MARY
(Entering)
Art, what is it?

ART
They threw another interception. Best pass he's thrown all day.

MARY
I wish you wouldn't curse so.

ART
Why? The boys are all grown. It's too late to do them any harm.

MARY
Art! It sounds terrible.

ART
Sorry. It just doesn't seem like you're a part of the game if you don't swear a little.

MARY
Well, swear a little less, please.

ART
Yes, ma'am.