

DANCE BREAK

by Kirk Woodward

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NAME: Kirk Woodward

WHERE YOU ARE FROM: Little Falls, New Jersey

BIO: Kirk Woodward studied acting with Elizabeth Dillon at the HB Studio in Manhattan. He is a director, playwright, and actor, and a member of the New Jersey Mental Health Players. He is musical director and performer for the Foggy Minded Boys and the Foggettes, who provide free entertainment for not for profit organizations.

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What's keeping you positive? Opportunities for artistic and spiritual growth.

Yes, you can publish this!

CHARACTERS (all adults)

EMILY (F), independent and determined

NICK (M), smooth and suave

GABEY (F), trumpet player for the band

TIME: The present.

PLACE: The wide front porch of a house. Inside, a party is going on, with a live band.

A wide front porch, a center door to the house. A party inside, and a live band – dance, not rock – is finishing a set. NICK comes onto the porch through the door, dressed for a classy, formal party.

NICK

(inhales the fresh air, looks around, calls behind him) Emily! Come on out! (No response.) Emily! I'm out on the porch! (Still nothing) Hey, Emily!

EMILY

(from inside) I'm coming! Give me a minute! (He paces with irritation.)

EMILY

(Enters) Sorry! You know I have a lot of responsibilities for this party. I'll be in and out. It's a big night for my aunt.

NICK

It certainly is. Having all that money drop right in her lap. Like she won the lottery.

EMILY

Things like that happen. Some people get the breaks, some people don't. She did. I'm not jealous... Well, maybe a little. It *is* a lot of money.

NICK

See! I knew it!

EMILY

You think you know everything. You're so smart. You have an angle about everything.

NICK

I've got an angle about you, that's for sure. I love it when you're irritated.

EMILY

You're making fun of me.

NICK

How am I supposed to act when you ignore me? You hardly danced with me at all.

EMILY

I just didn't feel like dancing.

NICK

In the dance break you were shaking and rocking and moving like the devil.

EMILY

The music was exciting!

NICK

Exciting? It's a dance band! It was dull when your parents were dating!

EMILY

No such thing! I was having a good time.

(GABEY comes out, holding her trumpet. She blows in it, clearing it.)

NICK

(to EMILY, irritated by GABEY's presence) Come on, let's go out on the lawn. I want to talk with you. I've got an idea.

EMILY

I'm staying here. The grass is wet. (Sees the trumpet player) You're the trumpet player in the band! I didn't realize you were a woman. You sounded great. That dance break – you were hot.

GABEY

That's nothing. You should hear me when I really get going.

NICK

Hey! Over here! This is important.

EMILY

(Crossing to him. GABEY looks away.) Everything's important to you.

NICK

Now listen. You wish you had some of your Aunt Emily's money, right?

EMILY

Why do you ask?

NICK

What if you could get your hands on some of it?

EMILY

You mean steal the money? From her? Don't you dare!

NICK

Did I say anything about stealing?

EMILY

Well, whatever it is. I wouldn't do anything wrong to her.

NICK

How much wrong could you do her? She's incredibly rich now. Tell me this - is she going to share it with you? The answer is no. She isn't going to share it with you. Not a penny. She's never shared anything with anybody.

EMILY

That's not true and you know it. She's taken care of me for years.

NICK

Minimally, and only when she has to. You're telling me she's generous? You work five and a half days a week in an office, your boss is obnoxious, and does your aunt care even a little?

EMILY

She's not responsible for my happiness. Speaking of which, I have to keep an eye on the party.

NICK

Well, come back quick. I've got a proposition for you. (She reacts.) A *business* proposition.

EMILY

You're out of your mind. All right, I'll be back in a minute. (Exits.)

GABEY

Nice girl. (NICK is surprised to hear her voice.) She seems nice.

NICK

What business is it of yours?

GABEY

I just like observing people... and things.

NICK

Keep your observations to yourself. Hey... don't I know you from someplace? What's your name?

GABEY

Gabey. Yours?

NICK

Nick. I'm sure I've seen you someplace.

GABEY

I play in a band, you know. Maybe you've heard the band before.

NICK

That band? Not likely.

GABEY

You'd be surprised. We get around. Don't think this is the only kind of music we can play.

NICK

Yeah, well, follow your dreams. I'm sure there's a big market for swing era trumpet players... somewhere.

EMILY

(enters) The party's going okay. (To GABEY) Is the band going to start again soon?

GABEY

You never know with that leader.

EMILY

My aunt's a stickler for that sort of stuff. She'll be waving the contract in your faces.

GABEY

Not in *my* face! (Goes back into the house)

NICK (to EMILY)

You through?

EMILY

What's so important that I can't have a little conversation?

NICK

I've been thinking, that's all.

EMILY

No wonder you look stressed.

NICK

Shut up. No, I've been thinking about *you*...and your aunt.

EMILY

Aunt Emily? Why?

NICK

Look at it this way. You and she have the same name, right? Middle name too?

EMILY

Neither of us have middle names. Nobody in our family does. It's part of our family history. My great grandfather hated his middle name. It was "Prosperity" or something. So he went to court and dropped it, and none of us have had a middle name since.

NICK

Fascinating. A simple yes or no would have been plenty. (She makes a face at him.) Here's the point. What if all that money she got... was really intended to go to you? I said what if.

EMILY

Then I'd have it.

NICK

But you don't.

EMILY

No, because... well, I just don't, I guess. Why would all that money have been meant for me?

NICK

Why would it have been meant for her? That doesn't make any sense. She's a mean, spiteful person. Do you think she got the money because she was so wonderful?

EMILY

You're saying... you're saying they meant me instead of her? But the lawyers would have noticed!

NICK

Lawyers work for people. Did anybody challenge what she got?

EMILY

There must have been something in all those documents that showed the money was meant for her.

NICK

There's not. Not precisely.

EMILY

We don't know that, so – wait a minute. How do you know there's not?

NICK

Because I looked.

EMILY

You *what*?

NICK

I looked. I happened to be in the library, and I happened to see the right papers. They were lying on the desk, or something. I couldn't *not* look at them, could I? So I looked. It's ambiguous.

EMILY

I can't believe you went through my aunt's private papers.

NICK

She shouldn't have left them out! I had a funny feeling about it. I was right! I think maybe the money *is* supposed to go to you. I think your aunt has been stealing from you!

EMILY

(responding from a call in the house) I'll be right there! (To NICK) Stay here. Don't move. Not a muscle until I get back. (She exits into the house.)

GABEY

(back in view) You must be a lawyer yourself.

NICK

Huh? (Realizes) You were listening? Yeah, well, listen to this. Shut up and stay away from me or I'll make you sorry. Really sorry.

GABEY

You mean, like apologetic?

NICK

You know what I mean. "Sorry!"

GABEY

You can't imagine how many people have said that to me.

NICK

Here's one that means it. Now get out of here!

GABEY

(Seeing EMILY returning) Look, she's back. (GABEY passes EMILY as she goes back into the house.)

EMILY

(enters, to NICK) There's all sorts of problems. We're running out of ice, also the small plates.

NICK

Listen to you. Are you on the staff? Are you your aunt's servant? Wouldn't you rather be the one in charge? Have people respond to you for a change, instead of jumping like a puppet whenever she calls?

EMILY

You're making it sound like I'm Cinderella or something. I'm not! Look at me! I'm not wearing rags, I'm wearing a really nice dress.

NICK

How often do you get to wear it? When your aunt says to! All I'm saying is, there's an alternative.

EMILY

I don't want to hear it. ... (Her curiosity is too much) All right, what's this idea of yours? Tell me.

NICK

It's simple. You get a lawyer to sue and claim that the money was supposed to go to you. ... You don't get it? What's the hard part?

EMILY

I'd never win.

NICK

"Win!" Where have you been? The idea isn't to win. The idea is to settle! With all the money she's got, she'll easily be able to give you a measly ten percent or so. Enough for you to live like a queen for the rest of your life!

EMILY

It would never work.

NICK

Sure it would. It's done all the time. Sweeten the pot. Offer a non-disclosure agreement. If you have to. They'll be sure to take the bait. Her lawyers. Easy as pie.

EMILY

(deeply unsure) Well... (Fighting for time to think) I have to make sure things are okay inside.

NICK

Go ahead, Cinderella! (She glares at him and goes inside, bumping into GABEY, who's coming back onto the porch.)

GABEY

Did you see my mouthpiece out here? My mouthpiece. You know, fits in the trumpet. I must have left it on the bench. Don't see it.

NICK

I've got a funny feeling about you.

GABEY

I've told a joke or two in my time.

NICK

My feeling is the opposite of "ha ha." Have you been listening in on me? Do you work for somebody?

GABEY

I work for the "Rascals of Rhythm." Like it says on the drum.

NICK

Do yourself a favor. Clear out.

GABEY

I can't. I'm on a gig.

NICK

Sure you are. So there's the gig, right in there where the band is. Now go over to the band and don't come back. Got it? Beat it, or I'll "dance break" your legs. (GABEY goes into the house. NICK thinks hard. EMILY returns) So, did you polish all the silverware?

EMILY

Stop it! I'm not a house elf. I'm a grown woman and I choose what I want to do. And I've been thinking about what you said. There's no way I can do it. It would break up the family! It would just ruin everything!

NICK

What family? You're thinking about your aunt? You think it'll make her meaner? She can't be any meaner. You think it'll upset her? She's always upset.

EMILY

And the rest of the family!

NICK

You mean your cousin in Iowa. And Lucy's family in Chicago. Give it up, Emily. Nobody would care. They'd probably cheer! They don't like your aunt either.

EMILY

I just can't do it. It would break her heart.

NICK

If she had a heart to break. Which she doesn't.

EMILY

(Seriously upset now) I... I have to go inside and... and check. (She goes into the house. GABEY enters from a side of the porch.)

GABEY

Nice work.

NICK

(whirls around) You! I thought I told you for the last time to disappear. I'm going to make you sorry you were ever born.

GABEY

That would be a threat - if I had been born.

NICK
Huh?

GABEY
Don't you recognize me, Nick? Come on, we've known each other... practically forever!

NICK
(Realizing) Gabey... Gabriel! *You!* I didn't expect you to look like a woman.

GABEY
(With a French intonation) *Gabrielle*, Nick. Fooled you again. You'll never get ahead of me, Nick. Never.

NICK
What are you doing here? Why here? Why now?

GABEY
You flop at predicting what I'm going to do, Nick. But you, on the other hand - you're completely predictable. Money... greed... three temptations... honestly, I'd think you'd have come up with some new tricks by now.

NICK
I've got some up my sleeve that you've never dreamed of.

GABEY
Then we'll meet them when they come. Meanwhile, I'm going to ruin this latest stunt of yours. There's no way you'll get Emily to do what you want.

NICK
You don't think so? You're wrong, Gabey baby. I'm going to beat you right now. I've got two words, and they'll stop you right in your tracks. Here they are: *free will*. She gets to decide on her own, and she's going to decide for me.

GABEY
Whatever she decides, you know we won't give up. We'll match you at every turn. The story won't be over, no matter what she chooses. I won't let you win – even if I have to blow *this* – (holds up her trumpet) to stop you.

EMILY
(appears in the doorway) You don't have to. I've already made up my mind. (They're both surprised.)

NICK
You have?

EMILY

Do you think I'm completely naïve, Nick? I don't know if I knew you were *the* devil, but I certainly knew you were *a* devil. A devil, Nick! Tempting me! I guessed your secret, even before I heard the two of you talking at the door. And you know what, Nick, you succeeded!

GABEY

Woah! Wait a minute, Emily.

EMILY

No, you wait a minute. Nick has a great plan. It's easy, it won't cost me a thing. It won't even hurt my aunt... much. It's foolproof.

NICK

(to GABEY) Take that, you fat-headed conceited angel!

EMILY

Except for one thing.

NICK

What? I'll fix it. What did I leave out?

EMILY

I couldn't live with myself. It would be wrong, Nick, and wherever it came from, I have some kind of sense of right and wrong. Anyway there's no way I'd do it, no matter how tempting it was.

GABEY

(to NICK, greatly relieved) What were those names you called me, again?

EMILY

So I'm afraid you'll have to take your act someplace else, Nick. Don't think it hasn't been fun. I learned a lot. You taught me a lot. I'll be more careful next time.

NICK

This is ridiculous! It's the wrong decision. Everything's against it!

EMILY

"Free will," Nick. Remember?

NICK

Aaaaaagh! Damn both of you! (Rushes off)

GABEY

Not a chance. ... Watch out! Don't slip! That grass is wet!

(NICK obviously slips, although we don't see it.)

GABEY

Ooooh... (Calls to NICK) Warned you! (NICK is gone) I'm very impressed, Emily.

EMILY

Don't be. It was a near thing. It's still tempting.

GABEY

It always will be. But you'll be all right. And I'm never going to let him win – not even if I have to blow *this*, you know, in a big way. (Indicates the trumpet)

EMILY

You wouldn't have, would you – just for this?

GABEY

You never know. It's all unpredictable. But if I did – it would make for one amazing dance break!

EMILY

It certainly would.

GABEY

Say, the band's coming back. I've got to get inside.

EMILY

You're going to finish the evening? The gig?

GABEY

Sure I am. You know, with the job I have... (Showing the trumpet) I don't get many chances to really blow this thing! (Goes inside.)

EMILY

(to herself) Back to the party...

BLACKOUT