

Underneath

By Dana Hall

Contact:

Dana Hall

708.691.9577

60 Silo Ridge Road

Orland Park Il 60467

Magnoliawrites120@gmail.com

SYNOPSIS

Steve is concerned about the amount of stuff his elderly parents have packed into their home. He has come to help, but along the way finds out that they have a lot more in those boxes than he imagined.

PRODUCTION

Minimal set. Creative freedom is given to artistic team in depicting how to showcase the story.

PLAYWRIGHT NOTE

The use of a slash symbol (/) in the dialogue indicates where the next line of dialogue should begin. The intent is to create overlapping dialogue. If there are lines following this in () this is what the actor would've said had there been no interruption. They may try to say the line as they are cut off.

CHARACTERS

STEVE: Age 30+, steadfast in knowing what he wants for his parents.

MOM (Rosie): Stage age 65+, she is very ill, moves slowly, loves deeply.

DAD (Edward): Stage age 65+, reserved, protective of his family.

At Rise: A living room current day. There are moving boxes and storage bins in view. There is a table with a box on top of it. DAD sits in his chair reading a newspaper and drinking a beer.

STEVE enters.

STEVE
Hey Dad- is Mom around?

DAD
Yeah, she's in the kitchen.

STEVE
Did you go through the boxes like I asked Dad?

DAD ignores STEVE and goes on reading.

STEVE
Dad. Put down the paper.

DAD
(annoyed)
Whaaaaat!?

STEVE
The boxes on the table, did you go through them?

DAD
I did.

DAD goes back to the newspaper. STEVE grabs it.

DAD
Hey-

STEVE
Doesn't look like it. Did you throw *anything* away?

DAD

It's *my* house or have you forgotten?

STEVE

So- that's a no. This place is filled with boxes- it's becoming unsafe. I brought these down here and put them right on the table so the two of you would have to start getting rid of things.

DAD

They're important documents, Steve. You just don't throw them out.

STEVE

Fine. I'll get you a shredder then.

DAD

I have one. I don't need it for this- there are all *keepers!*

STEVE

Keepers? What the hell are you talking about-

STEVE picks up a random piece of paper from the box and reads it.

STEVE

The Lansing Gazette March of 2019. (*sarcastic*) Oh look, breaking news the church had a bake sale. Unless you have a scientist with crazy hair and a DeLorean, this is useless to us. Come on Dad- these are just old papers.

As DAD talks STEVE is digging in a box. He is pulling out ridiculous items.

DAD

You kids these days just don't appreciate anything. Throw it away- Toss. Toss. Toss. (*points O.S to window*) What's that on the tree out there? Oh look it's money-blossoming all around us- hurry let's throw away all these things just to buy more.

STEVE

What's this?

STEVE pulls out a shoebox wrapped tightly with rubber bands.

Hey! Put that back.

DAD

DAD rushes over to STEVE and takes the box out of his hands.

Give me that!

DAD

While DAD is caressing the box, he lets STEVE know what it is.

It's Rhonda.

DAD

Rhonda!

STEVE

Shhh!

DAD

STEVE
The guinea pig I had when I was eight?! I thought you buried her!

DAD half-threatening whispers to STEVE.

Don't tell your mother.

DAD

STEVE
(without hesitation)
Mom! Mom! Can you come in here-

DAD mumbles something about how STEVE doesn't need to involve MOM in everything. MOM comes into the room slowly and uses a cane for support. DAD shoves the box back to the bottom of a large box.

MOM

(as she enters)

What!?! Is someone on fire?! Who's screaming their head off in here?

STEVE

Mom/

MOM

Stevie! You look starved. I've got some soup on the stove/

STEVE

I'm fine Mom. I thought I told you and Dad to go through these things.

MOM

You did, dear.

STEVE

So?

MOM

So...we didn't listen.

STEVE stands holding his head, clearly
frustrated.

MOM

Those lines on his face come from your family not mine. Those are stress wrinkles.

DAD sees an opportunity to get the newspaper
back. STEVE pushes it further out his reach.
DAD sits in his chair annoyed.

STEVE

Maybe because the two of you are stressing me out.

MOM

Oh honey, relax.

STEVE

Relax? How can I relax when you can't do one simple thing without me? I'm trying to help and what do I get in return- Rhonda/

MOM as though she is breaking the news for the first time explains to STEVE.

MOM

Rhonda? Honey, Rhonda is dead.

STEVE

(blows up)

I know! Tell him that!

MOM

Your father knows he buried her by the tree in the back.

DAD gives STEVE “the look.” MOM sits next to STEVE and humors him by taking a paper out of a box.

MOM

Ok. Ok. I’ll go through a box if it makes that vein in your head go away dear.

Let’s see now...hmmm... Oh dear, what do we have here?

Oh look- your 6th grade science fair award... and here is your report card from St.

Catherine’s from fourth grade.

Says here you were a bit chatty- but that Mrs. Kowalksi had it our for you.

MOM comforts him though he doesn’t need it.

MOM

Oh, looky here! It’s your jersey from 7th grade basketball! Put it on for old times sake/

STEVE

(like a child)

No.

MOM

(pleading)

Please.

STEVE

(whinny)

Noooo! I don’t wanna. You can’t make me.

MOM

Oh make your poor old mother happy, will ya?

STEVE reluctantly puts on the jersey over his clothing. He looks ridiculous. DAD has gone back and is relaxing with his newspaper.

DAD

(poking fun)

Fits like a bug snug in a rug.

STEVE

Thanks Dad.

MOM

You're so handsome Stevie. You look just like your brother Tommy in that- he loved sports.

STEVE

Man, I must've been a chunky kid.

MOM

(messing with his hair)

Nonsense. You were perfect just like you are today. I wouldn't change a hair on your head.

STEVE

Great thanks, Mom. I'll add that to my dating profile.

MOM

You're a catch- put that on the inter-web! The ladies should be sweeping right on those little dimples.

STEVE

I don't have dimples Mom.

MOM

Well, not on your face/

STEVE

Oh wow! Ok. Well, this walk down memory lane has been fun. What else do we have...

STEVE puts the jersey back and takes out an X-ray .

STEVE

Are these Tommy's X-rays?

MOM

MmmHmm.

MOM grabs them without further acknowledgement and stuffs them deep into the box.

STEVE

Mom/

MOM

(continues to divert attention)

So how's the weather out there- looked like rain and then nothing all day/

MOM continues to talk over STEVE.

STEVE

Mom- why not get rid of some of this stuff/

MOM

You know you can't trust those people on TV- they're all actors ya know- not scientists.

STEVE

Don't you two want to have a nice clean place to live?

DAD

Nothing wrong with our house son. *(To mom)* Paper says clear skies all week dear.

MOM

See- you can't trust the TV!

STEVE, as MOM is preoccupied with other items in the box, moves closer to DAD.

STEVE

(whispers)

Don't you want her to have a comfortable place?

DAD

It's plenty comfortable.

DAD makes himself more comfortable. He kicks up his feet. STEVE feeling defeated changes the subject.

STEVE

How was dialysis Mom?

MOM

(casual)

Didn't go. Oh look that playbill from that play you were in sophomore year of high school what was it called/

STEVE

It's missing the cover.

MOM

(trying to remember)

Oh...what was it called?

STEVE

Into The Woods.

MOM

Yes, that's it! You were that beautiful golden harp. My little actor.

STEVE

Mom- the golden harp isn't a character; it's a prop. The director basically wrote it into the play so my feelings wouldn't be hurt. I'm pretty sure you had something to do with that...

MOM

Nonsense. There are no small parts dear.

DAD

Or short plays-- 2 hours and 40 minutes that one was/

STEVE

Quick- What year was I born Dad?

*Dates can change to reflect actor ages.

DAD

(guessing)

Uhhh... 76' no 77'- don't tell me I'll get it. 78'?

MOM

No, that was Tommy. Uhh 79'? Am I getting close?

STEVE

80'- 1980 guys. You can't remember my birthday but you can remember how long a play from 20 something years ago was?

DAD

How could I forget! Those seats had my sciatica flaring up!

MOM

Lucy Schmidt's mom with her big hair sat right in front of me- enough Aquanet to suffocate a bear I tell ya!

STEVE

Sorry for the inconvenience guys- so glad we saved this Playbill, chock-full of family memories.

STEVE takes the playbill and starts a 'throw away' pile.

MOM

What are you doing?

STEVE

Dad said there were 'important documents' in there so I'm putting this here in the 'throw away' pile -so as we sort through these boxes we know what to save and what to get rid of/

MOM reaches over and takes the playbill back and puts it in another box.

MOM

They're all keepers and that's that.

(beat)

Did you want that soup now? It's warming on the stove. You should eat. Let me fix you a bowl.

STEVE

I just don't get why you're so resistant to change/

DAD

I'll take a bowl honey- thanks.

MOM

(as she's leaving)

Sure thing. How about you Stevie? Change your mind?

STEVE

No- thanks Mom.

MOM

Suit yourself. You're practically wasting away! I'll pack some up for you to take home.

DAD waits for MOM to get out of earshot into the kitchen.

DAD

(whispers loudly)

Stop making waves.

STEVE

Waves? She deserves to have a clean place to live-

DAD

This place is plenty fine.

STEVE

And another thing- Why didn't you take her to dialysis?

DAD

I did.

STEVE

She said she didn't go.

DAD

She went.

STEVE

Dad, this is serious. You know this is literally life or death right?

DAD

You think I don't know that. *(Confesses)* We sat in the car.

STEVE

(confused)

What?

DAD

She didn't want to go in.

STEVE

Well, force her!

DAD

Steve- she's been grown for a long time now- I'm not about to force her to do anything she doesn't want to do/

STEVE

She's depressed, she needs a push. You have to push her, she's stubborn- did you push her?

MOM

(calls from OS)

Soups almost coming Eddie. I'm going to grab those crackers you like/

DAD

(calls back)

Great dear. *(to Steve)* I did what I could.

STEVE

Well- it's not enough. I'm going next time- I'll make her do it.

STEVE takes out his phone.

STEVE

When is her next appointment? I'll just request off from work.

A long pause as DAD pokes at items in a box.

STEVE

Dad. Dad-Did you hear me? It's still 3x a week right? I'm off on Tuesday- so would it be on Tuesday or Wednesday this week? You know what - I'll just request both off.

DAD

Don't.

STEVE

Why? Someone has to get her there/

DAD

No.

STEVE

No- what? It's Mom- she's strong-willed/

DAD

It's not that- Doc says her heart is too compromised/

STEVE

What? Compromised? When did he say that?

DAD

A few days ago. Keep your voice down- I promised I wouldn't say anything. Her heart is shutting down son- there's no point in having her go through these treatments they just wipe her out-

STEVE

So they fix her heart/

DAD

It's inoperable- long-term side effects of the pacemaker... it's just too weak.
(*Breaking the news*) After all these years the heart is just tired son.

STEVE

So you're just going to give up! Just like that- one stupid doctor and that's it?!

DAD

It's not one son- it's a team. No one is giving up- we're just accepting/

STEVE

Bullshit! We're going to fix up the house like she always wanted/

DAD

Son- cleaning doesn't change reality. I know you feel helpless, I do too, but we knew the heart had damage and that we were on borrowed time- forcing change on her now won't help matters.

STEVE

I just want to give her the life she deserves. She's sacrificed everything for us kids. *(He looks around)* no one even comes around anymore. Maybe if we fix the place up a bit she'll feel a bit better. Maybe her attitude about dialysis would change and she'd have more time. Help me move some of these things/

DAD

Hey- stop. Steve. She's ok- she understand.

STEVE

Ok?! *(He pulls out things from a box)* She still has Tommy's x-rays. When was his accident? 1999? She doesn't need all these stupid things constantly bringing her down. No wonder she wants to give up.

DAD

You're right- her heart has been through a lot- long before her heart attack. But these things aren't stupid to her/

STEVE

I know. It's just I lost a part of her when Tommy died and I'm not ready to let the rest of her go Dad.

DAD

I know son. I know- me either.

DAD and STEVE share a tearful embrace.
Just then MOM enters speaking.

MOM

Hey Eddie! Come on- your soup will be cold/

MOM sees father and son in an emotional embrace. She then remembers the box where Rhonda was in is still out. She assumes this is the culprit.

MOM

Oh, I never knew how sensitive you two were. It's Rhonda isn't it? I knew she meant a lot to you. Didn't she?

STEVE

(covering up he reaches to embrace her too)

Yes Mom, *she* was really special. My best friend -really .

STEVE and DAD share a knowing look.

MOM

Well, I have something to tell you. Your father isn't supposed to know this but come here- I snuck out when Daddy was about to bury her and I brought her in- I couldn't bear the thought of her covered in dirt. She was a part of this family.

MOM walks over to the box and digs underneath all the paper etc. and pulls out the shoebox.

MOM

Here. But don't open it.

STEVE

Oh mom that's...that's the most disgusting thing I have ever heard.

They all shared a laugh.

MOM

I know. It really is- I realize that now that we're talking about it. But in the moment it just felt right. She was important to you so I wanted her with us. Stevie, these aren't just things in a box collecting dust to me-- they're a life. A life I love...

MOM walks over to DAD. Touches his hand.
DAD kisses her forehead.

DAD

You're a better person than I -hun. That's what I love about you.

STEVE

Dad- if Rhonda is in here- what'd you bury by the tree in the back?

DAD

Some empty bear cans.

MOM

You knew all these years?!

MOM playfully hits DAD on the arm.

DAD

Well, you switched the box with a completely different sized box- of course I noticed.
So-- I filled it with some crushed beer cans and well, 'may Miller-Lite rest their soul.'

MOM

Why didn't you say something!?

DAD

It made you happy. I watched you scurry into the house like you found a treasure.
I'd do anything for you Rosie, if this (*gestures to box*) makes you happy then I'm happy too.

MOM

Thank you-for that- for respecting my decisions...

STEVE

Mom, maybe it's time for *Rhonda* to have some peace.

MOM

Maybe son. (*she looks around*) I suppose I could part with a *few* things.

STEVE

We can sort through things together-

They all settle in to review the contents of the boxes.

MOM

I just don't want to forget anything. I guess more than anything- I don't want to be forgotten.

STEVE

Then we'll treat you like Rhonda - but we're going to need a much bigger box.

MOM

(smiling)

Oh you're terrible - just terrible. He gets that morbid sense of humor from your side of the family- you know.

DAD

I've been thinking maybe the boy isn't all wrong Rosie, maybe this stuff is holding us back. I don't want anything to come between us spending time together.

MOM

Me either.

DAD

It would be nice to have the family over again for dinners.

MOM

Guess we could make some room for the grandkids to play.

STEVE is starting to go back through the box.

STEVE

Ok. That's a start.

MOM

But not everything goes.

STEVE

Fair enough.

Let's see what we have here- wait. Before we start- can someone warn me if there are any other beloved family pets in any of these boxes?

MOM comes back to one of the boxes and starts pulling out memories.

MOM

Sure honey, I'll try.

(beat)

Oh, look! A Father's Day card you made for Daddy. Geez, you had to be maybe 6 or so. Hand drawn. Not that store-bought crap. *(passes it to Dad)* Isn't it precious Eddie?

DAD

(disappointed)

Oh yeah, it's something. A drawing of a tie.

MOM

How thoughtful!

DAD

(critical)

Polka dots? When have I ever worn polka dots?

MOM

(warning)

Eddie.

DAD

You had an allowance. We gave you cash money and this is what you do?

MOM

(warning)

Eddie be nice.

DAD

Fine. Fine. But I wonder how *he* would've felt if Santa drew his Christmas presents.

MOM

Edward!

STEVE

(laughing)

He's right- it's terrible. I wasn't much of an artist.

Why is it so long?

DAD

You also misspelled DAD - not your best work son. I'll start the "throw-away" pile.

STEVE

I'll get the shredder.

They all laugh. Mom grabs the hand-drawn tie and puts it back into the box. They all stare at her. She slowly reaches back in and takes it out.

MOM

Now that I look at it- it's not great dear. Maybe it's ok to let go of a few things... Ok fine. Let's get rid of it.
Besides, I have all I need right here.

STEVE kisses her on the forehead.
We see them sitting on the couch sorting through papers and laughing together.

-End Of Play-