

STRANGERS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Wade Bradford

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Heuer Publishing LLC, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

ISBN: 978-1-61588-293-9

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PUBLISHED BY

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC

**P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011**

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SYNOPSIS: The lives of two complete strangers intertwine gloriously on stage before they finally meet each other in the end.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 males, 3 females, 2-23 either, extras)

ALL LINE COUNTS APPROXIMATE

JEFF (m) (99 lines)

JENNIFER (f) (83 lines)

ACTORS 6+ 2 Males, 2 Females, 2+ either.

CHARACTERS INCLUDE:

Narrator, Mothers #1 and #2,

Doctors #1 and #2, Camp boys

and girls, Grandpas #1 and #2,

Katie and Rob, Michael,

Woman, Another Woman,

Toasters #1 and #2, Waiter,

Host, Dentist, Elderly Person,

Employee, Dean of Students,

Toddlers #1 and #2, Vicky, and

Young Person #1 and #2.

(APPROXIMATE ACCUMULATIVE

LINE COUNT: 117 LINES)

DURATION: 30 minutes

PRODUCTION NOTES

The premise of the play, as the title suggests, is that two people will interact year after year but never realize that they have bumped into each other on previous occasions. The actors and or director may decide to have the characters almost sense familiarity, but there should never be a fully conscious recognition.

The supporting characters could be played by as little as six additional cast members, or this could be a much larger cast.

The two main characters, Jeff and Jennifer, should wear distinct colors. If the director wants to go with stereotypical BLUE for male and PINK for female, that's fine, but any two colors will do. Any other cast members should wear indistinct clothing, perhaps gray or black.

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NARRATOR: Age zero.

Expectant MOTHERS #1 and #2 are led onto the stage from opposite ends. A doctor leads each woman. They are in advanced stages of labor. They breathe rapidly. They push once. They grasp each other's hands without even looking at each other.

DOCTOR #1: It's a girl.

The DOCTOR pretends to hand a baby to MOTHER #1. JENNIFER'S head appears in the crook of the mother's arm, giving the cartoony impression that Jennifer is a newborn baby.

JENN: Waaaaah!

DOCTOR #2: It's a boy.

DOCTOR #2 brings a similar pretend baby to MOTHER #2. JEFF'S head pops out and cries like a newborn.

JEFF: Waaaaah!

DOCTORS: Congratulations! Have you decided on a name?

MOTHER #2: I think I'll call him...Jeff.

MOTHER #1: Jennifer. Definitely Jennifer.

MOTHERS: *(Simultaneously to their babies.)* Hello, Jennifer / Jeff.

It's nice to meet you.

NARRATOR: One.

The mothers and doctors have left the stage. The "babies" (JEFF and JENN) stand up, and toddle around the stage. They are still getting used to the idea of walking. As they near each other, their mothers begin to call from off stage.

MOTHER #1: Jennifer! Do you want to go on the slide? Come to Mama!

MOTHER #2: Jeff! Come over here and show daddy how you can walk like a big boy.

He tries to walk in the direction of the voice, but then stalls. He takes a few steps backwards and bumps into JENN. She falls onto the ground. She fusses and puts on a sad face. JEFF chuckles in an innocent toddler sort of way. And then JEFF toddles off stage.

MOTHER #1: What happened, baby?

JENN gets up and toddles off stage, arms reaching out for her mother.

JENN: *(Sobbing.)* Ma-ma-ma-ma! *(She exits.)*

NARRATOR: Two.

JENN and JEFF, toddling around but more balanced this time, cross each other's paths. Jenn has a pacifier in her mouth.

JEFF: *(Holding up three fingers.)* I'm two.

JENN: I'm— *(The pacifier falls out of her mouth.)* My binky! *(She chases after her pacifier, kicking it off stage.)*

NARRATOR: Three.

A bit steadier, the two toddler versions of JEFF and JENN walk out on stage, each holding the hand of an old grandpa. JENN bounces a ball as she walks.

GRANDPA #1: All right, Jeff, don't pull off your old grandpa's arm!

JEFF: Monkeys! Monkeys!

GRANDPA #1: I know, I know. We're almost there.

JENN: Tigers! Tigers!

GRANDPA #2: I'm not sure your grandfather knows where he's going. Let me look at this map here.

While he looks at a map, JENN approaches JEFF.

JEFF: Ball!

JENN: Mine!

JEFF: Ball! Ball!

GRANDPA #1: Yes, that's her ball. Maybe if you ask nice...

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JEFF: Ball?

JENN throws the ball directly into his face. JEFF is stunned and then starts to cry, almost silently. JENN chuckles.

GRANDPA #1: Well, you should've ducked.

GRANDPA #2: Come on, Jenny, the tigers are this way.

NARRATOR: Four.

JENN is wandering around looking up at things in a store.

JENN: Mommy, can I get this? Can I get this Mommy? Or can I get this? Mommy, I want you to buy me all of these things. I want to buy the whole store.

JEFF enters.

JEFF: Hi.

JENN: Hi.

JEFF: What's your um um um um - um - who are you?

JENN: Sometimes I'm a bunny rabbit.

JEFF: Do you want a piece of candy?

JENN: Thank you. *(Eats candy.)*

JEFF: I stolened it.

JENN spits it out, slaps the chewed candy back into JEFF'S hand.

JENN: I don't want to go to jail! *(Runs off stage.)*

JEFF: Don't tell the police! *(Runs off stage.)*

NARRATOR: Six.

JENN: *(Standing on the edge of an invisible pool, wearing goggles.)*

Are you watching me, Mommy? I'm gonna jump. I'm gonna do a cannon ball! Are you watching? *(Dips toe in water.)* I'm gonna do it. Here I go.

She pantomimes jumping. (Perhaps in slow motion - feel free to add sound effects.) Then she pantomimes swimming. One way to do this is to use a chair or stool with wheels; JENN lies on it, kicking and paddling, while one or two cast members roll her along. JEFF sits at the pool edge, with a mask and flippers.

JENN: I did it Mom! Did you see me? Are you even watching me? If you aren't watching me then I'll just go to the deep end. Here I go. Off to the deep end. Oh! Too deep! *(She struggles to swim.)* Mom! MOM!!!

JEFF: Is your Mom the lady in the pink hat?

JENN chokes in response.

JEFF: I think she went to the bathroom.

JENN: Help me! Help me please!

JEFF: As long as it stops your whining.

JEFF offers her a pole (or one of those pool cleaning nets). JENN grabs on and pulls herself to him, clutching onto his leg.

JEFF: Okay. Okay! You can let go of my leg!

JENN: *(Not letting go of his leg, perhaps kissing it with gratitude.)* I don't know who you are, but I'm never going to forget you.

NARRATOR: Nine.

Several "kid" characters run out onto the stage while JENN and JEFF quickly remove their swim attire. The kids divide themselves by gender.

KIDS: Summer camp!

BOYS: Basketball!

GIRLS: Soccer!

BOYS: Baseball!

GIRLS: Gardening!

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During the following exchange, JEFF and JENN speak directly to their peers, never making direct eye contact with the opposite sex, purposely trying to ignore and annoy the other.

JEFF: *(To his male peers.)* Gardening? Girls are so boring.

JENN: *(To her female peers.)* I don't know who that guy is, but he's a dork.

JEFF: And did I mention that girls are gross?

JENN: We're not gross!

JEFF: Oh, I guess it's just girls who like gardening are gross.

JENN: *(Taking a potted flower.)* Why don't you shut up!

JEFF: Why don't you make me?

JENN: I will!

She pulls out a plant from its pot (perhaps a clump of flowers) and hurls it at Jeff. He ducks.

JEFF: Ha! You missed!

The group of girls walks away, indignant. The boys exit at the same time.

JENN: That was the meanest boy ever.

NARRATOR: Eleven.

JENN and JEFF wear masks. JENN and a FEMALE FRIEND sit down. JENN is crying and a friend tries to console her. On the other side of the stage, JEFF and a MALE FRIEND enter, both wearing Halloween masks. The boys pantomime knocking and hold their bags toward the audience, as if they are standing in front of the neighbors.

JEFF/MALE FRIEND: Trick or treat! *(Hold out bags.)* Thank you. Happy Halloween. *(They walk to the "next house.")* Trick or treat! Thank you. Happy Halloween.

FEMALE FRIEND: *(Lifting mask, consoling JENN.)* It's okay. We can get more.

JEFF: What's wrong with her?

JENN turns away, burying her head in her arms.

FEMALE FRIEND: Some bullies stole our trick-or-treat bags.

JEFF: *(Takes off mask.)* That sucks.

MALE FRIEND: Let's get going. They're giving out whole Hershey bars at the Kramer House!

JEFF: Okay. *(Starts to leave. Pauses.)* Um. You guys can have this. *(Hands her his bag of candy.)*

FEMALE FRIEND: That's like two years' worth of candy! Are you sure?

JEFF: Sure. Tell your friend to cheer up. It's Halloween.

Jeff puts his mask back on. Jenn, still wearing her mask, looks up at him.

JENN: Thank you.

JEFF: Bye! *(Exits.)*

JENN: *(Taking off her mask.)* That was the nicest boy ever.

NARRATOR: Thirteen.

JENN sits reading a magazine. JEFF sits opposite, hiding behind his magazine because he is afraid of the upcoming operation. A KID sits in the waiting room, filled with a combination of boredom and anxiousness. A DENTIST escorts another KID PATIENT out of the office.

DENTIST: Here's a new tooth brush, and for the love of gums, floss!

The KID PATIENT, feeling sore in the mouth, exits.

DENTIST: Let's see, who's next? Oi' Roger Root canal! Welcome back. Let's strap you in and get down to business.

The anxious/bored kid follows the DENTIST. They exit, leaving JEFF and JENN alone. JEFF seems to be having a panic attack. JENN peeks out from behind her magazine, but JEFF is shielding himself quite well.

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JENN: Hey, kid. Are you nervous?

JEFF: (Obviously nervous.) No!

JENN: You don't need to be scared.

JEFF: I'm not scared.

JENN: (Returning to her magazine.) This is a good place. I've been here lots of times.

JEFF: You have? Why?

JENN: I've eaten way too much Halloween candy for the last two years. The drill doesn't hurt, especially if they give you the knock-out gas.

JEFF: That's what I'm afraid of. What if I fall asleep and I don't wake up?

JENN: That's not going to happen. You just sit in the chair and breathe in some gas. Unless they give you an injection; but either way, I wouldn't worry about not waking up because the statistical chances of dying from the anesthetic are very slim, only a few people die each year, so there's a very good chance that you won't wind up dead.

JEFF can't take it anymore. He runs out of the office. JENN is still talking behind her magazine.

JENN: You might wind up in a coma. That happens sometimes, I guess.

DENTIST: Next up is...where did he go?

JENN looks up from her magazine, curious.

NARRATOR: Sixteen.

JENN takes a written driver's test. An EMPLOYEE of the Department of Motor Vehicles leads JEFF to his own testing station.

EMPLOYEE: Pass the written test with a score of 80% or better and you get your learner's permit.

JEFF and JENN work on their tests, eyes on their papers. We can tell that some of the questions have baffled JEFF.

JEFF: *(Muttering.)* Oh. Whoa. Didn't study for that one. Or that one. Or... *(Looking around, notices that JENN is taking the test. Whispering.)* Hey...what did you get for number five?

JENN: *(Whispering back, sing-songy.)* That's cheee-ting.

JEFF: I'm desperate. I just need number five...through twelve.

JENN: You're kinda pathetic.

JEFF: You're kinda right.

JENN: *(Finished with test. Walks by JEFF to whisper.)* ABBACAB.
(She exits.)

JEFF: Abba-cab? What... Oh... *(Does test while muttering the answers.)* A-B-B-A-C-A-B. Freeways here I come. *(Kisses the test and goes to turn it in.)*

NARRATOR: Nineteen.

On opposite sides of the crowd, JENN and JEFF are dancing at a crowded garage band concert. Most of the other cast members are thrashing along to the loud music. Eventually, JENN and JEFF make their way closer to the center, near each other. As the noisy song finishes, an ELDERLY person enters the scene.

ELDERLY: You punks need to turn down that music! It's too damn loud!

JEFF: Go back to your crossword puzzle, old man!

EVERYONE: *(Except the ELDERLY.)* Yeah!

JENN: You're just jealous because you're so old and we've got the rest of our lives ahead of us!

EVERYONE: *(Except the ELDERLY.)* Yeah!

JENN and JEFF high-five each other, and before they can bond a second more, more loud music begins to play and they all jump up and down.

NARRATOR: Let me through, let me through! Twenty-two.

The party goes now turn, backs to the audience. They are now a class of college graduates during a commencement speech.

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JENN: (*Putting on cap and gown.*) I can't believe we're finally here.

JENN and her friend take a picture of each other. As the DEAN gives his speech, JEFF enters as a janitor, sweeping up trash with his broom and dustpan.

DEAN: Students of this fine university, you have worked hard, met and exceeded the demands of your instructors, and proven yourself worthy of the title college graduates.

JEFF: (*Muttering, bitter.*) Worthy of the title of college blah-blah-blah.

DEAN: The journey of higher education is not the path for everyone.

JEFF: Not the path for blah-blah-blah...

JENN: (*Not looking behind her.*) Shh!

DEAN: But it is a path that improves anyone who dares to travel upon it.

JEFF: Who dares to blah-blah on it.

JENN: Shh!

The graduates move forward to collect diplomas.

JEFF: (*Realizing he's been a jerk.*) Sorry.

JENN does not hear because she is going up to accept her diploma.

JEFF: I guess I'm just... jealous.

NARRATOR: Twenty-four.

The stage is dark. JENN searches around with a flashlight.

JENN: Sparky! Where are you, boy? Sparky! Come on home. Mommy misses you. (*She exits.*)

JEFF enters with a dog...which can simply be invisible, or played by a cast member, or played by a real dog if appropriate.

JEFF: Hi, boy! Are you lost? Are you, boy? Oh, you're such a good dog! Yes, you are! How could anyone ever abandon you? I'll tell you what...if nobody comes looking for you, I'll be your new Daddy.

NARRATOR: Twenty-six.

JENN is sitting on the rolling chair, which is now a car. A nondescript cast member pushes her as she pretends to steer.

NARRATOR: Red light.

JENN stops and talks on her hands-free phone.

JENN: Hey, Katie, guess what. I got the job. Yep. New town, new career, new life. All I need now is a new boyfriend. No, I do not need a dog. I still have dreams about Sparky.

JEFF, driving a car as well, rides with SPARKY THE DOG by his side. The dog is apparently slobbering all over JEFF'S face.

JEFF: Okay, Buster, okay! I love you too! But I am trying to drive!

Optional sound effect: Car crash. Jeff's car smacks into the rear-end of Jenn's car. They react to the crash in slow motion.

JENN: Oh my god, Katie, some jerk just rear-ended me. I think I'm okay.

JEFF: Buster, are you okay?

JENN/JEFF: I can't believe this is happening.

JENN: What's going to happen to my insurance rates?

JEFF: My insurance rates are gonna skyrocket. Oh wait, I don't have insurance!

JENN: Hold on, Katie.

JEFF: Hold on, Buster!

Optional sound effect: Screeching tires. JEFF pulls the car in reverse and then slams on the gas. He and the DOG make a hasty exit.

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JEFF: Please don't tell the police!

JENN: What the—I can't believe he just hit and run! That son of a—who would give that maniac a driver's license?!

NARRATOR: Twenty-eight.

JENN and JEFF are on opposite ends of a restaurant. Jenn sits in front of her FRIEND. JEFF sits in front of his MOTHER.

MOTHER #2: Oh, my little Jeffy-Weffy... (*Grooming him from across the table.*) You got a little bit of schmutz right there...

JEFF: Thanks, Mom.

MOTHER #2: You look so handsome.

KATIE: Oh, Jenn. You look so...tired.

JENN: Thanks, Katie.

JEFF: What can I say. It's been a good year. Finally got a decent job. Beautiful girlfriend. And I'm saving up for—

MOTHER #2: An engagement ring?

JEFF: Whoa, not so fast. I'm saving up for a trip.

KATIE: So how's work?

JENN: It's been a rough year. They are talking about laying people off.

KATIE: Well, it might be a blessing in disguise. You've always wanted to take time off to travel.

MOTHER #2: Where are you going?

JEFF: Paris.

JENN: I'd love to go to Paris.

Everyone exits.

NARRATOR: (*Putting on a beret. Possible French accent.*) Twenty-nine. Ah, Paris. At the base of the Eiffel Tower, the most romantic destination in the world, and made more so with a gentle sprinkling of rain.

Optional rain, thunder sound effect. Cast members are upstage, holding umbrellas, back to audience, looking up at the tower. JENN enters, carrying an umbrella. She gazes up at the tower.

NARRATOR: They say no one can resist the magic of love-at-first-sight here in this enchanted tourist trap.

JEFF enters, no umbrella. He uses a jacket to attempt to stay dry. JENN and JEFF do not see each other yet. They are looking upwards, taking in the view.

NARRATOR: I have a theory that visitors from around the globe spend so much time gazing upwards at our magnificent tower that when they finally look back upon the earth, they are dizzy, and giddy, and so when they gaze at the first person they see, poof, they fall in love.

JEFF is downstage of JENN. She only sees his back.

JENN: *(Noticing JEFF does not have an umbrella.)* Excuse me, sir, would you like to share my—

JEFF: *(Turning, looking upstage.)* I found you!

JENN is stunned for a moment, thinking that he is speaking to her. But he is speaking to the WOMAN upstage who carries a red umbrella. She is delighted to see him. He runs to her.

WOMAN: Jeff? How did you—

JEFF runs to embrace the woman. Embarrassed, JENN quickly turns away from the couple. Optional: If the actors/directors feel it's appropriate, JEFF and the woman kiss. JEFF gets down on one knee and offers her a ring.

JEFF: Will you—

WOMAN: Yes. Yes! YES!

They walk away, sharing an umbrella. JENN sneaks a peek, but the happy couple has already left. Other couples are exiting as well, leaving JENN alone.

NARRATOR: Ah, L'amour. Thirty-two!

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Lights down. JEFF is wandering the dark stage with a flash light. He also holds the dog's collar. The WOMAN, now JEFF'S wife, soon follows.

JEFF: Buster! Where are you, boy!

WOMAN: You're going to wake the neighbors.

JEFF: I don't care. I can't believe you left the gate unlocked.

WOMAN: I said I was sorry!

JEFF: He doesn't even have his collar!

WOMAN: That isn't my fault.

JEFF: Sometimes I think you don't even love him.

WOMAN: Oh give me a break.

JEFF: Buster!

They storm away, exiting the stage. A HANDSOME MAN enters, coaxing the DOG along.

MICHAEL: Come here, fella. We'll find your home. Don't worry.

JENN is jogging, serious about exercise.

MICHAEL: Excuse me, miss. Do you know who this dog belongs to?

JENN: This is my first time on this block so I don't know—Oh my god, Sparky?! Sparky is that you! *(She embraces the dog.)* I can't believe it! It's you! How did you find him?

MICHAEL: He was just wandering around.

JENN: I don't know what to say.

MICHAEL: My name's Michael.

JENN: I'm Jennifer.

They are obviously falling head over heels in love.

NARRATOR: Thirty four.

It's the wedding reception of the happy couple. JEFF enters, very bitter about something. He approaches a HOST. Optional: JENN wears a white veil. JEFF wears sunglasses and a mustache.

TOASTER #1: Let's raise a glass to Michael and Jennifer! Here's to the happy couple!

Everyone toasts / drinks as JEFF talks.

JEFF: *(Handing over a ticket.)* Do you validate parking? I'm from the bar next door.

HOST: Just a moment sir, I'll see what I can do.

JEFF shakes his head at the wedding party, then moves away, back to the others but still listening.

TOASTER #1: I know that as each day passes the love between you will only grow.

JEFF: Ha!

Everyone looks in his direction, annoyed.

JEFF: Enjoy it while it lasts, people!

JENN: Do you know that person?

KATIE: Don't mind him, sweetie, it's time to throw the bouquet. No peeking now.

Optional: KATIE covers JENN'S face with the veil and leads her to the throwing spot.

KATIE: Time to throw the bouquet everybody!

The women gather to throw the bouquet.

JEFF: *(Still looking away.)* Time to claim the next victim!

JENN: *(Back to him, talking over shoulder.)* Why don't you just leave?

JEFF: I'm getting validated, just like you!

JENN: *(Enraged, turning and throwing her bouquet at his head.)*
Ooh!!!

JEFF: *(Ducks.)* Ha! Missed again!

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He has stunned both himself and the bride. He wonders for a moment, "Why did I say 'again'?" Then, he runs away.

MICHAEL: Did you know that guy?

JENN: Never seen him before in my life.

NARRATOR: Thirty-six.

JENN and JEFF cross the stage from opposite sides, each with a baby stroller. They look at their phones as they stroll past each other.

NARRATOR: Thirty-eight.

JENN and JEFF walk their children, TODDLER #1 and TODDLER #2, to opposite ends of a park.

TODDLER #1: *(JENN'S kid.)* We going to the park!

TODDLER #2: *(JEFF'S kid.)* Here we are!

JEFF and JENN sit down, far apart from each other, paying more attention to their phones than to the kids.

JEFF: Have fun.

JENN: Play nice.

TODDLERS #1 and #2 go to the center of the stage. They sit down in front of each other.

TODDLER #2: Hi.

TODDLER #1: Hi.

TODDLER #2: I'm a monkey.

TODDLER #1: *(Slowly preparing to bite the "monkey's" arm.)* I'm a tiger.

JENN: *(Suddenly aware, emphatic.)* Play nice.

TODDLER #1 bites TODDLER #2, who emits an almost silent cry of pain and fear. JENN rushes over to grab her child.

JENN: *(Hushed, embarrassed.)* No, no, no! Unclench, unclench!
(Pulls her child away.) I told you never to do that again.

TODDLER #2 runs over to JEFF.

TODDLER #2: Daddy! Daddy! Owie, owie! Look, look, look!

JENN: Now we have to say sorry.

JEFF: Who in the hell did this to you? You show me. Where is the little brat?

JENN: Come on, let's go.

TODDLER #1: What about saying sorry?

JENN: We'll be sorry later.

She rushes away while JEFF looks around for the culprit. They exit.

NARRATOR: Forty.

VICKY, a veterinarian assistant stands, waiting. JEFF, wearing a delivery man cap, lifts up a box.

JEFF: Oh. I am not as young as I used to be.

VICKY: *(Talking on the phone.)* Yes, we spay and neuter, whatever you need. Okay, so I got you down for Tuesday, 10am. Bring in the whole litter, or as I like to say the whole kitten caboodle! All right, bye-bye. *(Hangs up.)* Hi Jeff.

JEFF: Hi Vicky. Your signature, please.

VICKY: All righty - oh, we're going to need Dr. Tim to sign off on this. Can you wait just a few? *(Quiets voice.)* Dr. Tim is... *(Suddenly upset.)* Well he's busy.

JEFF: You okay?

VICKY: He's putting down one of the animals. And you know it's never easy.

JEFF: That's gotta be tough.

VICKY: It's a sweet old dog named Sparky. Coming here for a long time now.

JEFF: I know what it's like to lose a friend.

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JENN enters, head down, moves to a seat, crying into a handkerchief, face unseen.

VICKY: *(Whispering in JEFF'S ear.)* That's Sparky's mom.
(Increasing volume.) I'll go see if I can get this taken care of.

JEFF watches JENN'S quiet grief for some time. He wants to say something to her, or at least make his presence known. He sits next to her. He is about to reach out to her. MICHAEL enters and JEFF quickly turns away.

MICHAEL: Sparky?

JENN: *(Hugs him.)* He's gone.

NARRATOR: Forty-five.

JEFF, now wearing gauze over his eyes, is escorted into an elevator by his FRIEND. [Note: It would help this scene if two or more cast members could operate a pair of makeshift elevator doors.

ROB: I don't know why you bother with laser surgery. In a few years' time, you're still gonna need reading glasses.

JEFF: That's a long ways away.

The doors start to close. Upstage of the doors, JENN heads for the elevator.

JENN: Hold the door please.

ROB: Sure.

JEFF: *(Blindly.)* Come on in. Three's company.

Once inside, they all watch the elevator numbers...except JEFF, since he's currently blind.

JENN: Thanks. Second floor please.

JEFF: Hey, Rob. Is she pretty?

JENN: *(A combination of flattered and annoyed.)* Yes she is, but she's married.

BY WADE BRADFORD

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