

Green Pastures

A one act play by Constance Carrozelli

Cast:

Truman Barry

Pamela Barry

Jack Haas

Nurse Louise

Setting: A room in a nursing home, clean but somewhat shabby looking, and devoid of any personal touches. There is a hospital bed, a small TV, a large bureau, and a tray/table with a box of Godiva Chocolates and pitcher of water on it, and a vase of red roses that have seen better days. There is a wheelchair next to the bed, and another chair against the wall.

The time is early spring.

At rise of curtain: Truman Barry is seated in the wheelchair, dressed and coiffed with obvious care. At 87, he is like a lion at the end of his days, growling, and determined to hang on to his old power and glory. In his younger years he was a highly successful man of business, a brilliant intellect, and a committed philanthropist, though his showy altruism was motivated in great part by feelings of insecurity. In return for his deep pockets he derived the compromised satisfaction of a purchased love and respect. He is a man of glaring contradictions: childish, ego-maniacal, prone to a violent temper and staggering self-indulgence; he is contrariwise sentimental, generous-hearted, and, when it came to his career, a model of Spartan discipline. Placed out in front of him on the bed are four neat piles of papers, two pens lined up in the middle of them. Sitting across from him is his friend, Jack Haas. Jack is 85. He wears an elaborate scarf and a jaunty hat, but all the fancy accouterments only add to the impression of a character from *The Wind in the Willows*: the chief weasel in particular.

Jack. I need money, Truman. I haven't been able to pay my bills.

Truman. Well, (He starts to look through the papers spread out in front of him.) I can't find my checkbook.

Jack. You don't have it. I told you, True has it. Your kids have taken over your finances. (Pamela Barry enters. She is expensively but tastefully dressed, and, though she is 82, her posture exudes youth, her bearing aristocratic superiority.)

Truman. Hello Pamela!

Jack. Hello Pam (He rises, but she gives him a condescending nod.)

Truman. You look more beautiful every day. Where have you been? I haven't seen you for a while.

Pamela. I was here yesterday. I've been here every day. (Looking at the one chair in the room.)

Jack. Here Pam, you sit here.

Pamela. Thank you. Maybe we can get another chair.

Jack. No, I'm leaving. (Rises and moves towards the door). Goo'bye, Pam. Bye Truman. I'll see you tomorrow. (He slinks out the door.)

Truman. Goo'bye, Jack. (He calls out after him.) We'll solve that problem. (An uncomfortable chuckle can be heard offstage.) You don't like him, do you?

Pamela. You said yourself he's a sycophant. I've never met such a sponge.

Truman. Well I'll have to unload him. Though I think he may be the only friend I have left. Aaaggh! (He roars and winces in pain.)

Pamela. (Rushes to him.) What can I do?

Truman. (He looks out the door) Oh that large woman sped right by when she heard me. She doesn't like me.

Pamela. Well she won't like you if she hears you refer to her as 'large'! Shall I go get her?

Truman. Yes, tell her I need something for the pain in my legs.

Pamela. (Goes to the doors and calls down the hall.) Excuse me. My husband needs something for pain. Thank you. She's bringing something.

Truman. Before hell freezes over, I hope. (A pause.) Well, I'm not long for this world.

Pamela. Do you need more socks? (She stares at the blue, institutional pair he wears.)

Truman. Do I need more socks? I don't think I'll need them where I'm going.

Pamela. (With a laugh) Well do you need some more while you're here?

Truman. What am I doing here?

Pamela. You had congestive heart failure. It started with gastritis, and that was caused by excessive alcohol consumption.

Truman. That's right. (He nods, remembering the same explanation he's heard every day.) That's what I'd like right now, a very dry martini. Where is that bountiful serving maid?

Pamela. Nix Tru! (She looks towards the hall and back to her husband with a wide-eyed expression of caution.)

Truman. Did you say 'negro?' (Pamela gasps, then shushes him.) Well there are a lot of them around here.

Pamela. You certainly don't sound like a liberal Democrat!

Truman. I am the scion of a great Democrat, a senator. My father was a good friend to the governor.

Pamela. He was a true Roosevelt Democrat.

Truman. Yes, but he was a bad man. When I changed the grades on my report card, he beat me so unmercifully I couldn't undress for gym class for a month.

Pamela. Oh! That is terrible!

Truman. He wasn't much of a Democrat either. He named one of our black terriers, 'Niggie'. (He has a sly gleam in his eye, as though he finds this disgraceful admission a bit humorous.)

Pamela. Shhhhh! (Giggles.) I don't believe it. Well they were different days. My grandmother almost disowned my father when he married an Irish girl. No one cares today if their children marry a Catholic. They went to our funerals, and found out we have the same hymns they do. Just so long as they don't marry a Jew or (she whispers) a black.

Truman. I had so many Jewish friends throughout my years in business, and they were stellar folks, every one of them. (He starts to chant in a singsong rhyme.) Izzy, Iky, Jakey, Sam, we're the sons of Abraham. (He looks into space.) I can't remember the rest. (The nurse enters and hands Truman water and a paper cup with pills in it.) Merci beaucoup, Madame.

Nurse. De rien.

Truman. Parlez-vous Francais? (He sees some potential charm.)

Nurse. Oui.

Truman. Ah ha! Forgive me. Quel est votre nom?

Nurse. Louise

Truman. Chaque petite brise semble chuchoter Louise. (She looks at him with a blank expression, and Truman laughs.) Rinky dinky parly voo? (She gives her shoulders a shrug as she exits.) Au revoir, Madame Guillotine.

Pamela. (Calls after her.) Thank you. Truman! That's not like you! You used to be the soul of noblesse oblige.

Truman. It's not easy being gallant with such miserable people! I hurt my legs the other day, playing football. It was a very rocky terrain, and we were jumping down onto these large rocks. (He eats a chocolate and presents the box to Pamela, but she shakes her head as if he offers the immemorial apple.)

Pamela. Was that when you were at Choate?

Truman. No, this was just the other day. (A plaintive cry for help is heard offstage, weak, drawn out, a sort of strangled croaking, yet insistent 'he-elp...hellp...he-elp') I cannot stay in this bedlam one day longer. Do I have a ride home? (He eats three more chocolates in quick succession, spilling a drop on his pants.)

Pamela. You are going home, as soon as your heart's stronger. (The plea for help continues to intersperse the following dialogue.)

Truman. Is this place costing me a lot of money? It's sort of run down isn't it, sort of blue collar, wouldn't you say?

Pamela. I'm trying to get you into Shady Acres. Dick Whiting and Shell Gaines are on the board, and they're working on it. They're just waiting for a bed to open up. Medicare's paying for everything.

Truman. A bed? To die in? What is our fiscal situation, Pam? (He notices the spot on his pants and starts to dab at it with a washcloth.)

Pamela. Well, the market's a mess, but I'm not selling my stocks because they'll all go up again. The Blue Chips all tanked, but they'll turn around.

Truman. I hope so. (He starts to sing.) We are poor little lambs who have lost our way. Baa! Baa! Baa! We are little black sheep who have gone astray..

Pamela. (She joins in with the melody but goes off-key) Baa! Baa! Baa!

Truman. You got the melody wrong, so I can't sing the harmony. Try it again. (He sings the harmony, she the melody, but they are both flat.) To the tables down at Mory's, to the place where Louis dwells, to the dear old Temple Bar we love so well, sing the Whiffenpoofs assembled with their glasses raised on high, and the magic of their singing casts a spell. (Truman breaks off irritably.) I can't do the harmony when the melody's off! (They listen to the continued moaning cry for help.)

Pamela. Oh dear! I'm going to look for that nurse. What was her name?

Truman. Ahhhh..... Lucretia? (Pamela exits, and returns after a few minutes. While she is gone Truman dips the washcloth in the pitcher and resumes wiping the spot on his pants with obsessive concentration.)

Pamela. She said she's coming. They must be understaffed on Sundays. (Looks out the window.) Oh look, there's the first robin out on the lawn! And you can see a little green starting in the woods.

Truman. Yes, you look out at what should be a dismal day, but there's something lustrous in the light, some sign of life stirring again.

Pamela. Isn't it marvelous how every year out of all those dead limbs and twigs, myriad little buds appear?

Truman. "I love the brooks which down their channels fret, even more than when I tripped lightly as they; the innocent brightness of a new-born day is lovely yet." (His eyes water, and he says in a strangled voice-) I didn't write that.

Pamela. You could have. You didn't have as much time on your hands as Wordsworth.

Truman. No I had to make some money. And I did pretty well if you remember Pamela. You had a pretty nice life with your golf and your bridge.

Pamela. You were a great success.

Truman. Well, I couldn't have done it without you. (She is not the sentimental sort, but we can see by her expression that this is the first time she's ever heard him say this. Finally the moaning cry for help ceases.) I need some cash so I can tip the people around here. And where is my checkbook? I think True has it, and I don't want him going through my personal affairs, goddamit. (He starts to roll himself backward in his chair.)

Pamela. He had to take over, because you weren't paying the bills. We almost lost our insurance. And you nearly gave everything we have to charities. You gave ten thousand dollars to Obama, when our children are struggling! (He stares at her defiantly.) Do you think that's right? (He is nervously wheeling himself back and forth.)

Truman. No. But I haven't been there. You've been taking care of things for the past ten years. (She stares at him with a look of disbelief.) We've been going through a bad time, Pam, in case you didn't know it. (He wheels backward little by little.)

Pamela. That was thirty-five years ago, Truman.

Truman. What was?

Pamela. When you left. With that gold-digger. (He wheels back and crashes into the bureau.)

Truman. Aaagggghh! (Pamela comes to his aid.) Get that goddamn nurse! I need to lie down! (Pamela exits, and returns with the nurse, who maneuvers him from the chair to the bed while Truman alternately swears, shouts in pain, and barks orders to 'be careful.' Finally she pulls the sheets around his chest.) No, I don't want to be tucked in! Thank you. For torturing me.

Pamela. Thank you so much. He's in terrible pain. Like a bear in a briar patch. (She winks at Louise, whose lips form the shadow of a smile, but her eyes continue to glower. She exits.)

Truman. I'm glad to see this is a vast source of amusement for you, Pam. No one gives a damn about me. Why hasn't True been here, or Lottie?

Pamela. Lottie comes almost every day! And True just got his hip replaced.

Truman. That so? Boy, we Barry men are an untidy lot. What about Frank? He doesn't give a rat's ass about the old man. (He stares her down fiercely, as if daring her not to shatter his illusion.)

Pamela. Frank died.

Truman (He starts to cry.) And that is the great tragedy of my life...

Pamela. There's no need to feel guilty.

Truman. Guilty! Why should I feel guilty? (His tears instantaneously dry into anger.) I didn't beat him within an inch of his life!

Pamela. (Almost in an aside.) Abuse comes in many forms. (He is speechless for a moment, while she dabs at her eye.) Do you have any Kleenex?

Truman. Go on into my office, and you'll find some on my desk. (Pamela looks at him sadly. She stands up, and starts to put on her coat.) You're not leaving already?

Pamela. You look like you need a nap. (She leans over him and they kiss primly on the lips.) I'll be here tomorrow.

Truman. Are you bringing me home tomorrow? Or is Frank coming to pick me up?

Pamela. (She stares at him for a moment, suddenly looking very old and tired herself.) Frank will come for you.

Truman. That's fine. Goodbye. (Pamela exits. He turns on the television, but after a minute goes by he looks as if he has just remembered something, and begins to struggle out of

bed.) Pamela! Pamela! Goddammit! (He falls to the floor, writhing and roaring with pain, while he reaches for the emergency alarm button, which starts to sound, then his hands clutch at his chest, and he convulses, silently for another few minutes. His body relaxes, then, slumps into an attitude of utter stillness. As the curtain falls, the alarm continues to wail down the empty corridor, methodically as a heart beat.

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