

“Trip of a Lifetime”

From the full length play:

Checking In

By Tracy Wells

WIDOW/WIDOWER, *a recent widow who is ready to embark on the trip she and her husband had always planned to take together.*

NATASHA, *housekeeper at the Regency Arms Hotel; female*

AT RISE: WIDOW is carefully unpacking her suitcase that is resting on the bed. An urn is on the table and WIDOW is talking to it.

WIDOW

(Taking out a shirt and refolding it.)

And I was sitting next to the nicest young lady on the plane ride. Turns out she’s a new mother away on her first business trip since the baby was born. She was a nervous wreck, I tell you, and I don’t blame her! It must’ve been so hard for her to leave her precious little baby behind.

(Pauses, as if listening, while putting clothing into drawers)

Of course she isn’t leaving the baby completely alone! The baby’s father is in charge. And men these days are much more equipped to take care of a baby than in our day.

(Pauses, as if listening.)

Now, sweetheart, I didn’t mean anything by it. I only meant that when we were young and just starting out in the world it was assumed that men would go out into the workforce and women would stay home with the children. You’ve always been a wonderful father, you know that.

(Pauses, as if listening.)

Yes, even the time you forgot one of the kids at the grocery store.

(Chuckles.)

Little Scottie was fine! The worst thing that happened to him was the tummy ache he got from all the freezer pops the store manager gave him while he waited for you to pick him up.

(Pauses, as if listening.)

I think Janie’s forgiven you by now for that mess you made of her Barbie doll’s hair.

(Pauses, as if listening, trying to stifle a smile.)

No it was *not* funny.

(Unsuccessful, bursting into laughter.)

Okay, maybe it was a little funny to see a Barbie doll with a mullet.

(Laughs.)

You always were good at making a mess.

(Pauses as if listening, then bursts out into laughter.)

Alright, you probably *should* feel bad for that one! It wasn’t your finest parenting moment.

(Knock on the door is heard, but not heard by WIDOW.)

Yes, sweetheart, we all make mistakes, but that one was a doozy!

(NATASHA enters, pulling her cleaning cart behind her.)

NATASHA

Hello? Housekeeping.

WIDOW

(Without seeing or hearing NATASHA.)

You thought it was so funny to scare Susan by dressing up like Bigfoot after she came home from that scary movie with her boyfriend.

(Pauses, as if listening, then smiles.)

NATASHA

I can come back if it's not a good time.

WIDOW

(Not hearing her.)

That's true—you couldn't possibly have known that her boyfriend had a hair-trigger bladder or that he had just drank an entire large cola at the movies.

NATASHA

(Crosses to the door, takes the door hanger sign off and looks at it, quizzically, then back to WIDOW, then puts it back on the door and returns to her cart. She waves, to get WIDOW'S attention.)

Ma'am?

WIDOW

(Not hearing her, further amused.)

And you couldn't have known that he had a deep seeded fear of mythical beasts of the forest ever since that ill-fated hunting trip with his uncle.

NATASHA

Is there someone else here?

WIDOW

(Fully laughing now, unaware of NATASHA.)

Susan really liked that boy! I don't think she's ever forgiven you for that one.

(Pauses as if listening.)

Well two out three ain't bad.

NATASHA

I think I'm just going to go.

(Turns and starts to push her cart out the exit just as WIDOW turns, sees her and is startled.)

WIDOW

Oh my! I didn't see you there.

(Bringing a hand up to her chest.)

You startled me.

NATASHA

Trust me, I know how that feels.

(Crosses to her and puts her hand on WIDOW'S shoulder.)

Are you alright? Should I call your husband?

WIDOW

You could try, but it might be awhile before you reach him.

NATASHA

(Embarrassed.)

Oh, is he in the bathroom?

(Aside to WIDOW.)

Did you guys have the seafood buffet at the restaurant next door? Monte's Fresh Catch? Let me tell you, Monte's is a lot of things, but fresh it is not. Guests are always coming back feeling ill. We call it, "Monte's Revenge."

WIDOW

No, dear, he isn't in the bathroom.

NATASHA

Oh, is he outside on the terrace, then? I can run and fetch him if he's on the terrace.

WIDOW

No he isn't on the terrace either.

NATASHA

(Confused.)

But you were talking to someone when I came in, and I could've sworn it was your husband. It sounded like you were talking about your children.

WIDOW

(Smiling.)

Oh, we were.

NATASHA

(Looking around.)

Then where is he?

WIDOW

(Points to the table.)

Over there.

NATASHA

(Looking toward the table, not seeing.)

Over where?

WIDOW

(Crosses to the table and picks up the urn.)

He's right here.

(Looks at urn, lovingly.)

NATASHA

(Realizing.)

Oh, I see. I'm so sorry. How insensitive of me. Let me just give you some fresh towels and get out of your hair.

(Crosses to her cart and picks up towels.)

WIDOW

Nonsense! You're perfectly fine, dear. I can understand the confusion. It's not everyday you encounter an old woman talking to a pile of ashes stuffed into a gold-plated kitchen cannister.

NATASHA

You're fine. It's me who was an intrusion.

WIDOW

Oh, pish posh. You're not an intrusion at all, I promise. I always talk to my sweetheart. It helps me feel connected to him.

NATASHA

Even still, I'm sure you'd like your privacy.

WIDOW

I have all the privacy I could ever want back home in my empty house.

(Sits on the bed, still holding the urn, and pats the spot next to her.)

NATASHA

But this must be a difficult time for you. You don't need a stranger barging in on you.

WIDOW

Sometimes a stranger barging in on you could be the most important moment of your life.

(Pats the urn.)

That's how I met my sweetheart.

NATASHA

That sounds like a good story.

(Crosses to bed and sits, towels in her lap.)

WIDOW

Oh, it is!

(Smiles.)

WIDOW (Cont.)

It was the summer after I graduated from high school. I was at the local pool with a group of girlfriends. We spent the afternoon enjoying the sun and splashing in the pool. I suppose we were hoping to catch the eye of cute boy or two.

NATASHA

I bet you caught plenty of boys' eyes.

WIDOW

Not that day. The pool was filled with kids whose mothers were lounging by the pool and paying them no mind. It was all we could do to not get splashed to death.

NATASHA

Yeah, that's why I avoid the hotel pool. Those kids are monsters!

WIDOW

We had all but given up on meeting anyone and had just gone into the changing rooms to get out of our wet suits and into our street clothes when I realized I had left my bag outside the door.

NATASHA

Oops!

WIDOW

Oops is right. I was pretty sure one of my girlfriends was just outside, so I wrapped myself in my beach towel and made my way to the door. I opened it just a crack and called out for my girlfriend to hand me my bag. A moment later I felt the soft fabric handle of my bag in my hand and I knew I was saved!

NATASHA

Thank goodness your friend was there.

WIDOW

That's the thing—it wasn't my friend at the door at all! It was a young man, new to town, who I had never met a day in my life.

NATASHA

Oh no!

WIDOW

Oh yes! You can imagine my surprise. I wanted nothing more than to get that bag and close that changing room door as fast as I could. The only problem was, there was a small clasp on the bag that, unbeknownst to us both had become lodged in the handle of the door.

NATASHA

(With increased alarm, adjusting her position on the bed.)

Oh no!

WIDOW

Oh yes! I tugged and tugged as hard as I could, but nothing would dislodge the clasp! He was equally anxious to hand over the bag, so with every pull on my side, he was pulling right back.

NATASHA

That's not good.

WIDOW

No it wasn't. I thought I was finally gaining ground and knew that all I needed was one big pull to free the clasp, so I firmly took hold of the strap with one hand—

NATASHA

(Leaning in closer, enthralled.)

Yes?

WIDOW

And, not thinking, reached with my other hand to grab the strap.

NATASHA

(Bringing her hand up to her mouth in horror.)

Oh no!

WIDOW

Oh yes! Needless to say, I got the strap free and the mysterious young man—who later became my sweetheart—got quite an eyeful.

(Chuckles.)

NATASHA

Well it sounds like what started out as a stranger barging in on you turned into quite a love story.

WIDOW

It sure did. My true love and I were were married fifty-three wonderful years. We shared three children, seven grandchildren, and a lot of laughter over those years.

NATASHA

That's wonderful.

WIDOW

The only thing we didn't do enough of was travel together.

NATASHA

No? Why not?

WIDOW

(Waving her hand, dismissively.)

Oh, you know—when you're young and just starting out, you are anxious to begin your life. You find a great job...get married...settle in quickly...set up house in your new apartment...work on getting a promotion...start saving for a home of your own...start having kids...have even *more* kids...finally buy a home...get settled into your home...decide you need to *remodel* your home...take care of the kids...worry when your kids become teenagers...send those teenagers, now young adults, off to college...watch those young adults get married...settle into life as an empty nester...plan to take some trips but save for retirement instead. Then you retire, and now finally you are going to take that trip you always planned to—

(Looks down sadly.)

—only now one of you isn't well. Something isn't right. You go from doctor to doctor but no one knows what's wrong. You go to an internist...a cardiologist...an endocrinologist...you get CAT scans...and PET scans...and biopsies...and finally you have an answer.

NATASHA

(Sadly.)

No.

WIDOW

(Nodding, sadly.)

Yes. The oncologist tells you that there's time. Only the oncologist can't possibly understand that it's not enough—that there will never be enough. But you hope. So you start the chemo...and the radiation...and the surgeries...and the physical therapy...and the occupational therapy. And when those don't work you try the vitamins...and the herbal treatments...and the acupuncture...and the holistic approaches. You take your life savings and you fly to a foreign land hoping they have the answers you are looking for. Only...

(She trails off.)

NATASHA

Only they don't.

WIDOW

No, they don't.

(Pauses, sighing, then straightens her shoulders.)

So you gather your strength...and you sit by his side...and you hold his hand. You keep him updated about the kids and grandkids...and you tell him funny stories from your life together...and you tell him everything that's inside your heart that you've never said.

(Looks down, a tear falling down her cheek.)

And in those last moments...when he musters everything he has inside him...he tells you that after he's gone...when the casseroles are all eaten...when the family and friends have returned to their own lives...when the house is quiet and lonely—

(She looks up at NATASHA.)

—he tells you to take that trip...the one you always meant to take together...the one you've been waiting for and saving all your life for...the trip of a lifetime. He tells you to go...and take it for the both of us.

NATASHA

So you go.

WIDOW

(Resolutely.)

Yes. You go.

(Smiles.)

And now I'm here.

(Looks down the urn.)

But I couldn't bear to leave my sweetheart behind, so I brought him with me.

NATASHA

(Wiping a tear from her eye.)

That's beautiful.

WIDOW

(Wiping away NATASHA'S tear.)

Oh dear, please don't cry. I was lucky enough to have fifty-three good years with my husband, making countless wonderful memories together. So we weren't able to make those memories in far off places together? That's alright. I'll make those memories on my own now and when I talk to him each night, I'll tell him all about it.

NATASHA

I hope that one day I'll have a sweetheart like yours. And when I do, I want to see the world with him.

WIDOW

Oh, I'm sure you will. You haven't met anyone special yet?

NATASHA

I don't know. There's this one guy...but, well—

(Shakes her head.)

—I just don't know.

WIDOW

Truth is, you probably *do* know.

(Smiles and stands, looking down at NATASHA.)

But are you ready to reach out with both hands, grab onto what you want and pull, no matter the consequences?

NATASHA

(Realizing, smiling suddenly.)

You know what? I think I am!

(Stands suddenly and drops the towels she is holding, reaching out her arms. As she does so, she knocks the urn out of WIDOW'S hand, spilling its contents.)

NATASHA (Cont.)

Oh no!

(Looks down at the spilled ashes.)

WIDOW

(Looking down at the ashes.)

Oh, dear.

(They both look down at the ashes. After a moment.)

Or maybe I should say, "Oh sweetheart."

(Starts to chuckle. NATASHA looks at her incredulously.)

NATASHA

I'm *so* sorry! I can't believe I just did that!

WIDOW

Not to worry. My husband was always good at making a mess. Isn't that right, sweetheart?

(Bends down and scoops ashes back into the urn.)

He always said that life was messy, so he'd probably find this moment funny if he were here.

(Points down to ashes.)

Which he is.

(Points to various small piles of ashes.)

And here, and here, and here.

(She starts laughing. NATASHA hesitantly joins in laughing.)

NATASHA

So you're not angry?

(Bends and helps scoop ashes into the urn.)

WIDOW

No dear. My husband may have thought life was a mess, but I always thought it was a journey. Sometimes that journey is sweet, sometimes its frightening, and sometimes it's sad. But if you look hard enough, if you travel that journey well, you'll always be able to find the laughter.

(Stands and puts the lid back on the urn.)

Well that's most of him, anyway.

(Crosses to the table and sets the urn down.)

I'm sure he won't mind if a little of him is left behind in this beautiful hotel.

(Thinks.)

In fact, maybe I'll leave a little bit of my true love here and there, in all the places we said we'd go. I think he'd like that.

NATASHA

(Smiling.)

I think so too.

WIDOW

(Rubbing her hands together.)

Well I'd better get cleaned up. I have some adventuring to do.

(Starts to cross to the bathroom.)

You'd better get going too. You never know when that love you're looking for is going to come barging in.

(Smiles and exits into the bathroom. NATASHA smiles, looking after WIDOW. End of Scene.)

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