

“Coming or Going”

From the full length play:

One Stoplight Town

By Tracy Wells

RUNAWAY, teen feeling misunderstood by her small town, contemplates leaving it all behind for the big city.

PRODIGAL SON/DAUGHTER, an adult son or daughter of the town, returning home after being in the big city for many years.

AT RISE: It’s dusk. Perhaps it gets gradually darker throughout the scene as dusk turns into night. The stoplight is stuck on red. RUNAWAY enters stage right, carrying a suitcase or duffel bag. She looks around, worried, then starts to walk toward center stage, under or next to the stoplight. At center stage she puts down her suitcase, looks back over her shoulder toward stage right, then pulls out her phone.

RUNAWAY

When is that bus going to get here?

(Looks back over her shoulder, then back at her phone, nervously.)

Come on! Hurry up already.

(PRODIGAL SON enters from stage left, carrying a suitcase.

RUNAWAY sees him.)

Hey, Mister, did you just get off the seven thirty bus out of town?

PRODIGAL SON

No, I’m sorry. I didn’t.

RUNAWAY

But you have a suitcase.

PRODIGAL SON

(Looking down at his suitcase.)

I do.

RUNAWAY

So you must’ve come from out of town.

PRODIGAL SON

I did. I took a taxi.

RUNAWAY

Oh, right. I can’t afford a taxi. Guess I’ll just have to wait for the bus.

(RUNAWAY sits down on her suitcase, dejected, and puts her chin in her hands.)

PRODIGAL SON

I'm sure the bus will be here any minute.

RUNAWAY

(Laughs, ruefully.)

Shows how much you know. The bus rarely comes through here—only once every couple of days. This town's too small to be included on the normal bus route.

PRODIGAL SON

But you have a stoplight.

RUNAWAY

(Pointing up at the light without looking at it.)

A broken stoplight. It's stuck on red.

PRODIGAL SON

Still, if you have a stoplight that must mean you get a decent amount of traffic from the interstate.

RUNAWAY

(Laughs again, ruefully.)

You definitely aren't from around here.

PRODIGAL SON

Actually I am.

RUNAWAY

That's not true. If you were from around here, I'd know you. This town is so small, everyone knows everyone.

PRODIGAL SON

It's been a long time since I've been home.

RUNAWAY

(Perking up, interested.)

So you left? You actually got out of this place?

PRODIGAL SON

I did.

RUNAWAY

(Standing and crossing to PRODIGAL SON.)

Tell me how you did it!

PRODIGAL SON

One day I just packed a bag and...left. Simple as that.

RUNAWAY

And you never looked back?

PRODIGAL SON

Not at first. I loved living in the city—working all day, coming home to my very own apartment at night. Trying new foods, seeing new movies, meeting new people.

RUNAWAY

That sounds amazing! No one around here has even heard of culture. Right at this moment the cinema is playing a double feature of Groundhog Day and What about Bob.

PRODIGAL SON

(Chuckling.)

Great flicks! Bill Murray is the best.

RUNAWAY

(Looking at him pointedly.)

Slapstick comedy and gross out humor.

(Wistfully.)

Whatever happened to classics like Breakfast at Tiffany's or Mean Girls?

PRODIGAL SON

(Smirking.)

Mean Girls? A classic?

RUNAWAY

You know what I mean.

PRODIGAL SON

You're right—there is definitely a lot of culture in the city. But there is also a lot of noise, and dirt and—

(Looks down, sadly.)

Loneliness.

RUNAWAY

(Scoffing.)

How can that be possible? There are *way* more people living in the city than here.

PRODIGAL SON

True. But in the city, everyone's always coming or going. You could walk the streets all day and not run into a single person you knew. No one takes a moment to slow down, or even stand still.

(Stands up and looks around.)

I guess that's why I came back here. Maybe I just need to stand still for a little while.

RUNAWAY

(Standing up.)

But I don't want to stand still—not here, anyway.

(Opening her arms wide and looking around town.)

I'm just so sick of everything in this town! The shops, that stoplight, the people...

PRODIGAL SON

The people? I always thought one of the best things about living in a small town was how nice everyone was.

RUNAWAY

That's it exactly! Everyone is nice...all the time! Too nice if you ask me.

PRODIGAL SON

Is there such a thing as *too* nice?

RUNAWAY

Yes! Some days I feel like everyone in this town except for me are aliens disguised as human beings. Sure, they look like us, talk like us, even move like us. But deep down, inside their human skin lurk aliens, just waiting to take over the world.

PRODIGAL SON

Like the Body Snatchers.

RUNAWAY

The *what*?

PRODIGAL SON

The Body Snatchers? You know, from that old black and white sci-fi movie?

RUNAWAY

Wow, you *are* old! Black and white movies?

PRODIGAL SON

And here I thought you were so cultured.

(RUNAWAY rolls her eyes at PRODIGAL SON as CASEY enters and crosses to stoplight. During the next few lines, she attempts to cross the street a few times, but is unable to.)

PRODIGAL SON

Invasion of the Body Snatchers is a movie about a town overrun by aliens, known as "Pod People", who would use pods to change their forms from alien to human. They would use their new human forms to assimilate into everyday life, unnoticed, looking exactly like everyone else.

RUNAWAY

Yes, that's it! That's exactly how I feel sometimes. Like everyone around me is a Pod Person and I'm the only one who can see them for who they really are.

(CASEY gives up and exits stage right. RUNAWAY and PRODIGAL SON watch her as she exits.)

Ok, that girl is *definitely* a pod person.

PRODIGAL SON

(Laughs then looks down, and smiling a little, remembering.)

I remember feeling the same way as you do about this town.

RUNAWAY

So you get it! You understand why I have to leave?

PRODIGAL SON

The thing about Pod People is, they are devoid of human emotions, such as love—it's the one thing they couldn't replicate. And if I remember correctly, the people of this town have plenty of love to spare.

RUNAWAY

(Backing away from PRODIGAL SON.)

You're starting to sound just like a Pod Person. Maybe you're one of them, come back to town to assimilate into everyday life.

PRODIGAL SON

(Raising an eyebrow.)

Maybe I am.

RUNAWAY

If our town *were* overrun with aliens, at least it would be something new. No matter where I look everything is the same.

(Points toward grocery store.)

There's Bob's grocery with the same old boring chicken, and potatoes. Is it a requirement that everything he sells is an ingredient for a casserole? How about some ethnic foods from foreign lands? Some exotic produce? Heck, I'd even take some medium spicy salsa for a change!

PRODIGAL SON

(Jokingly holds up his hands.)

Whoa! Whoa! Slow down there, stranger. Let's not get *too* wild.

RUNAWAY

(Points toward drugstore.)

Or there's the pharmacy, where the most exciting thing to happen was a few years ago when Loretta suddenly started stocking lemon candies from England.

PRODIGAL SON

(With a smirk.)

Well you did say you wanted foods from foreign lands.

RUNAWAY

Or the cinema, who refuses to show a movie from this century.

PRODIGAL SON

You got me there. Bill Murray is a genius, but there are great movies not starring his comedic talents that you guys are missing out on.

RUNAWAY

(Gives him a withering stare then points toward Polly's restaurant.)

Then there's Polly's restaurant—

PRODIGAL SON

(Interrupts.)

I have to stop you right there. Polly's is just fine the way it is.

RUNAWAY

How would you know? You haven't been there in years.

PRODIGAL SON

Polly's is an institution—the club sandwiches, the French fries, the chocolate malts...

(Thoughtfully.)

I've been dreaming of those malts for as long as I can remember.

RUNAWAY

(Smiling a little.)

Yeah, those malts are pretty good.

PRODIGAL SON

And there's something nice about knowing exactly what store is always going to have your favorite lemon candies in stock.

RUNAWAY

I guess so. Loretta always makes sure she has plenty since the whole town is crazy for them.

PRODIGAL SON

And sometimes boring ingredients like potatoes and chicken, might be the thing that leads to inspiration. Some of the best dishes I ever had in the city were made with chicken and potatoes.

RUNAWAY

I *have* looked up some new recipes online. I guess I could try a few of them out.

PRODIGAL SON

And if you haven't seen Groundhog Day...well...

(Turns away.)

I just don't know if there's anything more I can say to you.

RUNAWAY

(Laughing.)

Alright, alright. I'll go see Groundhog Day.

PRODIGAL SON

And What About Bob?

RUNAWAY

One step at a time, buddy.

PRODIGAL SON

So you're staying, then?

RUNAWAY

I....

(Faltering. Sits on suitcase.)

I just don't know.

PRODIGAL SON

(Crossing to her, puts his suitcase down next to hers and sits on it.)

I bet there are a lot of people who would miss you if you left.

RUNAWAY

Pod people.

PRODIGAL SON

Maybe.

(After a pause.)

Maybe not. All I'm saying is, there are reasons to stay and there are reasons not to. Life is not as simple as that stoplight.

(Points up at stoplight. RUNAWAY looks up.)

You won't have a light telling you when to stop and when to go.

RUNAWAY

(Pointing up at the light.)

I don't have that now. If I let this stupid stoplight decide, I'll be stuck here forever.

PRODIGAL SON

All we can do is think about what our reasons are and make sure we're making our decisions for the right ones. I know it seems like there is so much life out there that you want to live and you can still do that. But is it worth giving up everything you have right here...right now? That's the decision you have to make.

PRODIGAL SON (Cont.)

(Waits a beat.)

So, what did you decide?

RUNAWAY

I guess I'm going to stay—for now.

PRODIGAL SON

What changed your mind?

RUNAWAY

If I'm going to leave this town, I want it to be because I have something I'm running *toward*—not something I'm running away *from*.

PRODIGAL SON

I wish someone had given me that advice before I left town.

RUNAWAY

Do you think you would've stayed?

PRODIGAL SON

Who knows? I guess the important thing is I'm here now. And right now, in this moment, this is where I want to be.

RUNAWAY

(Stands.)

Well I guess I'd better get home before my mom and dad start to worry.

(They both simultaneously pick up their suitcases. She starts to exit stage right, then turns back.)

Good luck assimilating with the pod people.

PRODIGAL SON

(Smiling.)

You too.

(End of scene.)

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