

FURIOUS

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Eric Appleton

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SYNOPSIS: In the last days of his life, Leo asks his daughter, Clare, to kill his cat and have its remains buried with him. Through the years, they have battled each other to a standstill, and with this one final dispute, they begin to understand that a family's fury can be just as binding as love.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN)

CLARELeo's daughter, mid-thirties. She knowingly uses duty and activity to prevent her anger from kicking a hole in the universe.

LEOElderly male. A sharp, forceful man who has withered away. On the verge of death, he still strives for control, despite knowing that he lost it long ago.

Place:

Leo's bedroom.

Time:

The present.

Production Notes:

Furious should be minimally staged. Leo may either rest in a chair (as stated in the text) or in a bed, whichever is best suited to resources available. Since the scenes are very short with virtually no time between, no costume changes should be attempted. This play works best if both Leo and Clare begin with a sense of weariness; if the play begins with obvious anger it undermines the idea that this missing anger was once something precious between them.

Prop List:

- ☐ Leo's easy chair (a bed may also be used)
- ☐ Small bedside table or TV tray
- ☐ Smaller chair
- ☐ Blanket
- ☐ Pillow
- ☐ Small bell
- ☐ Tray
- ☐ Bowl of oatmeal
- ☐ Spoon
- ☐ Glass of orange juice
- ☐ Removable bandage wrapped around Leo's forearm

Production History:

***Furious** premiered at Inspirato's Third Annual Toronto Ten-Minute Play Festival May 1 - 10, 2008.*

for Shifra

Leo sits up in an easy chair, late at night. There's a pillow behind his head and a blanket covering his lap. A second chair, nearby, is empty.

He reaches for the bell on the table beside him and rings it.

He waits, then rings it again.

After a moment, Clare enters, in her bathrobe.

CLARE: What?

LEO: I want Tupper buried with me.

CLARE: No.

She turns to exit.

LEO: She's going to pine. It's the humane thing to do.

CLARE: What are you now, Pharaoh?

LEO: The vet will put her down. It's not like I'm asking you to take her out back and shoot her.

CLARE: You don't have an out back, and yes, it *is* exactly like that.

LEO: Where's Esther? I want Esther.

CLARE: Esther's at home. Asleep.

LEO: Esther would let me take Tupper.

CLARE: No she wouldn't.

LEO: Esther was always my favorite daughter.

CLARE: Which still doesn't make her insane. Do you want any water or anything?

LEO: No.

CLARE: You want to go back to your bedroom?

LEO: No.

CLARE: Good night, Dad.

Clare exits. Black.

Morning. Clare enters with a tray of breakfast.

LEO: I'm still mad at you.

CLARE: Dad, it's an unreasonable request.

LEO: I'm in a state to make *reasonable* requests?

CLARE: The nurse will be here in half an hour. You can be angry at her.

LEO: I want to be angry at you.

CLARE: I cannot and I will not kill your cat.

LEO: See, you're angry at *me*.

CLARE: That's because I'm tired, I have to get to work, and I don't understand how you became a man who would ask his least favorite daughter to kill his pet for him.

LEO: Where did you get the idea you're my least favorite daughter?

CLARE: You have two daughters. My name is Clare. The other is Esther. Esther's your favorite.

LEO: Why would I do something like that?

CLARE: To be spiteful in the middle of the night? Or because she's your favorite. I have to get going now.

LEO: Is she my favorite?

CLARE: At the moment. And only because she hasn't had the chance to tell you 'no.'

LEO: I've had Tupper for eighteen years.

CLARE: She was Mom's cat. You never liked her.

LEO: She sleeps on my lap most of the day.

CLARE: I've never seen her do that.

LEO: Well, you're at work. And she doesn't much like you.

CLARE: She smells my cats on me. That's why.

LEO: Who's taking care of your cats?

CLARE: I stop home on my way back and forth. They're fine.

LEO: I bet they miss you.

CLARE: Probably.

Beat.

LEO: I'm going to die soon, Clare.

CLARE: I'll see you tonight. Eat your breakfast.

She pecks him on the forehead and rushes out before she can cry. He dips his spoon in his bowl of oatmeal, takes a nibble off the end, but can't eat any more. Black.

That evening. Clare paces. There is a large bandage around one of Leo's forearms.

CLARE: What were you thinking?

LEO: I was being humane about it.

CLARE: No. No! Smothering is not humane! How can you even think that?

LEO: How else am I supposed to do it? You won't take her to the vet.

CLARE: I'm not letting her back in this room.

LEO: She's my cat.

CLARE: She was mom's cat.

LEO: Your mother is dead, so she's all I have.

CLARE: How bad is your arm.

LEO: I'm all *she* has. That's what I meant to say.

CLARE: The nurse said she scratched you pretty bad.

LEO: My arm's okay.

CLARE: Let me see.

LEO: No.

CLARE: Let me see.

Leo holds out his arm. Clare perches on the edge of the other chair and undoes the bandage. She winces at what she sees.

CLARE: I'm glad she fought back. I hope it hurts.

LEO: It's funny. I thought it would hurt more, too.

Black. Clare sits in the chair close to Leo. Late at night.

CLARE: *(To the audience.)* And late at night, something woke me. I watched Tupper slink into the room and with a single graceful bound vault up onto the bed. She circled, found the correct hollow against my father's body and settled in. In the close room old man and old cat mingled in the air; which was which? Their scents had already joined them before the grave. Through the trees lining his street, the night sky was tinged orange with light pollution, and the streetlamp in front of his building cast a warm glow into the room; in his chair, both sleeping man and sleeping cat were outlined with the gentlest of fire.

Black.

Morning. Clare is neatening Leo's bed around him.

CLARE: - - so the nurse will be here in half an hour, and then you've got Esther tonight. Please don't ask her to kill Tupper.

LEO: I'm going to ask the nurse.

CLARE: No you're not.

LEO: She understands these things.

CLARE: She'd be horrified. You had her in tears yesterday.

LEO: She's tougher than that.

CLARE: Just because she didn't cry in front of you -

LEO: She yelled at me more than you did.

CLARE: Good. You deserved it. Every word. And even after that you still think she'd be willing to take Tupper to the vet and have her put down?

LEO: She understands despair.

CLARE: I see.

LEO: She lost her mother last year.

Clare neatens.

LEO: And she knows I'll try it again.

CLARE: Which is why Tupper is locked in the kitchen and I left a note that under no circumstances should that cat be allowed anywhere near you.

LEO: You have more feelings for Tupper than for me.

CLARE: Why are you making me choose between you and your cat?

LEO: I love Tupper. She's all I have.

CLARE: So Esther and I, we're chopped liver?

LEO: I can't take you with me.

CLARE: But you can cut short the life of a poor, dumb animal?

LEO: She's a very smart cat.

Beat.

CLARE: She slept with you last night.

LEO: I felt her.

CLARE: Even after attacking her with a pillow, she comes back to sleep with you.

LEO: I know.

CLARE: How do you do it?

LEO: She just came in.

CLARE: People keep coming back to you. You were a beast with Mom, and she never left your side. You were a – let's call it inconsistent – father, but Esther and I always came running. You try to kill your cat, and it comes back and falls asleep next to you. It's horrible, but you know what I miss the most? Your fury. It was such a beautiful anger, like you were only ever really alive if you were raging against something.

LEO: I never laid a hand on your mother. Or you. Or Esther. I never laid a hand on any of you.

CLARE: Like deer in headlights. Is that really a car? Is it really coming toward me? And then it swerves aside at the last moment, and it's the rush you remember, not the fear. I never dreamt I'd have to pity you. Never.

LEO: This – raging against the dying of the light. It wears you out.
Did I ever make you suffer?

CLARE: Yes.

LEO: Can you forgive me?

CLARE: I have to, don't I.

LEO: Please?

CLARE: Yes.

LEO: Clare. My favorite daughter.

CLARE: But you know what I won't forgive you for?

LEO: What?

CLARE: Who do I turn *my* anger on when you're gone?

LEO: Clare. My other favorite daughter. Oh, Clare.

She kisses his forehead and leaves. Black.

CLARE: *(To the audience.)* Two days later, he fell unconscious. We moved him to the hospital where he faded as astringency and sterility steadily replaced the scent of age and urine and Old Spice. He died after two days. I was at work. Esther called, and I rushed to the hospital but he was already gone. We filled out paperwork, did the things we were supposed to do, and after a long, long day, I went home and found that my fish was dead.

Pause.

Agnes ago, my friend Jim had a patio party to celebrate his new backyard pond. We thought it'd be fun to stock the pond with goldfish and give them away as party favors. We got about fifty, and at the end of the night, we sent people home with a fish. There were three left behind, and they stayed in the pond, getting larger and larger through the summer until one night, the raccoons came. Jim said in the morning the pond looked like a war zone, and what those coons had done to the two fish they caught was unspeakable. Since winter was coming on we decided I'd take the

remaining fish and give it a good home. I bought a five gallon tank, set it up, and the winter passed. Years passed.

There came a time it was no longer a goldfish, but a carp. A large, buttery golden fish that barely had enough space to turn around. It hovered, it rose to the surface to take food from my fingers, it faced forward and stared at the TV from over my shoulder. New acquaintances did double takes, seeing so much fish in such a small space. I resisted getting a larger tank, since my apartment wasn't very big, and getting anything larger implied a hobby coming on. I wasn't ready for a hobby centered around a single thirty-five-cent goldfish. I never named it either, since it didn't have to be called to dinner and there was never an occasion for "good fish" or "bad fish." We remained in a comfortable state of nameless cohabitation.

That fish got old.

The day my father died, I came home from the hospital and found my fish floating at the top of the tank, dead. Mysterious ways, my ass. Couldn't the damned fish at least have waited until after the burial? Did I have to be reminded that life is a constant flow of ultimately unfair random events? I didn't need that memo from God right then and right there. "Your father's story, all seventy-six years of it, now ends with, 'And my fish died.'"

It was too big to flush. I had no yard. You don't just throw a pet like that in the garbage can. What do you do with an animal you've spent eight years with? I did the only thing my mind made room for that day. I wrapped it in tinfoil and froze it.

The day of the funeral, I had a frozen fish in my purse. Much of that morning was a blur, and I seem to remember dashing back up to the apartment one last time and seeing my hand wrap itself

around the foil package. I dropped it into the grave as the coffin was being lowered. Esther asked me what it was. Just something, I said. You didn't take Tupper – no. No. The cat's fine. A memento, that's all. Tupper lived another two years and died quietly, happily, in a warm patch of sunlight at my sister's house. Sometimes, when I dropped by and Esther left the room, I'd lean close and press my nose against that sleeping, angry, old cat, and mother, father, my sister, would all flood in. All there. Tupper'd sense me, open one eye, growl.

I think I threw the fish into my father's grave to change the end of the story. It was no longer: "And my fish died." But now, "Oh, he'd be *furious*."

For the first time in the play, she smiles. Black.

THE END