

# **\*SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED**

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(Sample)

Written by

Toby Tieger

**Description:**

When Madeline Munzel wakes up trapped with her estranged ex-husband, she assumes she's in Hell. But when she discovers that they're actually stuck in a mourning machine that saves copies of dead loved ones, she must work with her former spouse and the boy who put her there to figure out how to escape. A play about how far we will go to hold onto the things and people that we love... and what it means to let go.

ttieger88@gmail.com  
(845) 532-1601

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Madeline (Maddie) Munzel – 70s-90s, irascible and refined

James (Jim) Stark – 20s, clean-cut

Frank – 70s-90s, Madeline's ex-husband

Judy – 20s, James' coworker

## SETTING

ACT I – Madeline Munzel's Living Room

ACT II – A Stay'n'Pray House of Faith

"In three words, I can sum up everything I've learned about life. It goes on."

-Robert Frost

SCENE SEVEN

Some months later, about 100 more tally marks.  
Another few things are gone. Madeline and  
Frank are on the couch, James is on the floor.

James has lost a little of his preppy All-  
American sheen, and they all look more  
comfortable together.

JAMES

But why'd you go?

FRANK

Didn't really have a choice, did I? And if I hadn't, I wouldn't have met Madeline.

MADELINE

If only.

FRANK

Stop, you loved it.

(to James)

She loved it.

MADELINE

I loved it.

FRANK

She was always at the center of everything. Every guy wanted to dance with her.

MADELINE

He's exaggerating.

FRANK

Maybe. A little.

MADELINE

But your friend...

FRANK

Bob.

MADELINE

Bob! Oh, Bob. He was short, so he just kept on talking and talking, real fast. Never anything to say, but kept right on talking.

FRANK

That's right. He asked you first – I forgot.

MADELINE

He did. He was cute, besides being, what, five-foot-five?

FRANK

Something like that.

JAMES

So it was love at first dance? Sounds like a movie or something.

A moment while Madeline and Frank remember  
their first dance. And then the 22 years after.

MADELINE

Well, it was romantic. We had at least two good years, before Frank started to–

FRANK

Jesus, Madeline–

MADELINE

No. Yes, it was romantic. I was swept off my feet. And the next week you drew me that picture of a German Shepherd because I said I wanted one.

FRANK

It was a Labrador.

MADELINE

It was a German Shepherd, you just drew the ears wrong.

JAMES

I've never had that. Somebody else – there.

MADELINE

It's not like it was a very good picture.

FRANK

You thought it was wonderful.

MADELINE

...I did. Thank you.

**SCENE EIGHT**

Many months later, 250 tally marks or more.  
More items are gone.

Madeline and James are playing Scrabble while  
they talk, Frank is on the couch asleep.

MADELINE

I'm just saying, I don't think it's healthy. All these gadgets—

JAMES

You collected gadgets all your life.

MADELINE

Keepsakes. There's a difference between keepsakes and gadgets.

JAMES

What difference?

Madeline puts a word down on the board.

JAMES

“Ingot.” That's not a word.

MADELINE

You're challenging?

JAMES

Of course I'm challenging, it's not a word.

MADELINE

Look it up.

He does, using a tattered old dictionary.

JAMES

This is so dumb! Why do we need a word for a block of metal?

MADELINE

We don't, but I assume blacksmiths needed a lot of words for blocks of metal.

JAMES

Plus, you got, like, only twelve points.

MADLINE

Scrabble isn't about getting points.

JAMES

It totally is, that's the whole game! Says it in the rules, the most points wins.

MADLINE

Well, if it says it in the rules...

(returning to the previous topic)

A keepsake helps you remember something. Or someone. And then it helps you keep going forward. A gadget just sucks up your time, without giving anything back. You don't create anything, or talk with anyone. You just... coast.

JAMES

I still don't see a difference.

MADLINE

Alright.

JAMES

And there's something nice about how certain it is. Simple. One core tenet. Everything else we've got on the shelves – Judaism, Christianity, Taoism – has, like, too many questions. The certainty at Stay'n'Pray, that's the backbone, the frame.

MADLINE

Yes, that certainty is exactly the problem. The very idea -“Everything can be explained.”

JAMES

That's not the tenet.

MADLINE

No? Alright, what is it?

JAMES

“You've got questions. We've got answers.”

MADLINE

Same thing.

JAMES

It doesn't mean we have all the answers.

MADLINE

It's implied. It's foolish and it's arrogant.

JAMES

Stay'n'Pray has done a lot of good!

MADLINE

Stay'n'Pray has made a lot of money for themselves. And they've trapped us in a machine.

JAMES

What we do helps people. Okay, not us, you and me, but most.

MADLINE

What they do infantilizes people. Why actually talk to other people, when you can just create simulated ones to say what you want to hear?

FRANK

Would the two of you shut up?

Frank stands up, brushing himself off.

FRANK

Ruining a perfectly good nap.

MADLINE

You nap too much anyway.

FRANK

Oh, go f– I need a drink.

Frank walks out, into the kitchen.

MADLINE

(calling off to the kitchen)

I will not have you drinking again in this house!

FRANK

(from the kitchen)

I'm not! Though God knows I'd– I'm getting cranberry juice!

James puts down a word.

MADLINE

“Quick.”

JAMES

With the Q on a triple-letter. Which makes –  
(does the math)  
– 37 points for me. I win.

MADELINE

Congratulations. Now, about Stay'n'Pray–

JAMES

Aren't we done with that?

MADELINE

No. I'm worried about you.

JAMES

Well, don't be.

MADELINE

You're part of a cult that's trying to play God.

JAMES

Can we please talk about something else?

MADELINE

It's insane.

JAMES

It's not a cult! And nobody at Stay'n'Pray's trying to play God.

MADELINE

Are you sure?

JAMES

Yeah. Most employees don't even believe in God.

MADELINE

They've trapped countless people in these machines.

JAMES

Only us, far as I know.

MADELINE

What about the other people they've done this to?

JAMES

Other... the Wrinklies?



MADELINE

Sorry?

JAMES

Wrinklies – it's what we call dead people in the Vitacista. Officially 'units'.

MADELINE

That's offensive.

JAMES

(suddenly not sure)

It's not.

MADELINE

You don't see 'Wrinklies' as offensive?

JAMES

Never really thought about it much. They're not all old. Anyway. Those people aren't actually alive.

MADELINE

No?

JAMES

No. They're just data strings.

MADELINE

You're just a data string. Aren't you alive?

JAMES

That's different.

MADELINE

And out there, according to your grand Deity of Science, you're just strings of DNA, right?

JAMES

Yeah, but–

MADELINE

And maybe those other strings of data – who I will not call 'Wrinklies', because that's simply terrible, stop using that word – maybe those people can only demonstrate joy and love, but they can feel more.

JAMES

But they can't. They're not programmed to.

MADELINE

Maybe they're glitching. Or evolving. Seems like the same thing. Maybe they have feelings just like me, or Frank, or you. But they have no way to show them.

JAMES

Not possible.

MADELINE

Of course it's possible, you just don't like it.

JAMES

No. They're not. No.

MADELINE

Alright. Maybe those people don't have any real emotions. That's worse.

JAMES

No. What? How?

MADELINE

Then you really have commemorated someone's memory by gluing their face to a giant doll with a pull-string. You're a good man, Jim Stark. How don't you see that as wrong?

JAMES

But we're helping people!

MADELINE

Yes, you keep saying that. But what's the cost?

JAMES

This has been a proven effective treatment—

MADELINE

You don't know that. You can't know that.

JAMES

There are studies. There are a lot of studies.

MADELINE

There are always studies. Stay'n'Pray has a very rigid idea of the world, and anything outside of it they either find a way to sell for a profit or they call a glitch, or an error, or an extenuating circumstance. Like us.

JAMES

Well, that's because you are! And I mean, how's a unit different than one of your 'keepsakes', really? It's something that helps you remember somebody.

MADELINE

(sharp)

I am not a 'thing'. Or a 'Wrinkly' or a 'unit'.

JAMES

No, that's not what I meant.

MADELINE

Then what did you mean?

JAMES

That you're different.

MADELINE

There are too many glitches here, James. Everything about this place can't be a glitch. So maybe, just maybe, your formula's wrong.

JAMES

...maybe.

MADELINE

There. That was it – the tiniest crack. Your mind just opened up a little bit. Good for you.

(starting to clean up the Scrabble board)

Now where's Frank? It's taking him forever to get that juice.

(calling off to the kitchen)

Frank! You okay in there?

No response.

JAMES

Maybe he–

MADELINE

You stay here.

Madeline gets up and walks offstage into the kitchen. After a moment, she comes back.

MADELINE

He's gone.