

From White Buffalo
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Winner of the Princess Grace Award in Playwriting.

CAROL, 40, worn out and exhausted.
MIKE, 40ish, her ex-husband.

(A miracle birth of a white buffalo calf has occurred at CAROL's run-down farm in southern Wisconsin, changing her life entirely. In this scene, her ex-husband, MIKE, returns to the house late at night after having vanished for years.)

(Around midnight. Lights up dimly on the interior of the house. MIKE, soaked to the bone and carrying a duffel bag, arrives at the front door. He tries the doorbell, but again, it doesn't work. He knocks heavily on the door. No answer. He knocks again, insistently. Finally, he fishes in his pocket and pulls out a key. He opens the door just as CAROL is coming down the stairs, tying her robe.)

CAROL *(calling out)*

Yeah, hold on—
(She stops, startled, when she sees the door open.)

MIKE

Hi Carol.
(She doesn't say anything. MIKE takes her in.)
Sorry—I was getting soaked out here—I figured you woulda changed the locks.

CAROL

What the hell do you want?

MIKE

Well... it's a funny story... can I come in?

CAROL

No.

MIKE

It's pouring out here.

CAROL

So?

MIKE

All right. Um... So I was in my kitchen today... and uh... I had the TV on... and I wasn't looking at it, and I heard your voice. So I turned around, and there you were, on CNN, and there was our farm, and there was...

CAROL

You saw me on TV?

MIKE

Yeah...

(short pause)

So I kinda took that as a sign.

CAROL

Well talk your sign, turn around, and get the hell out.

MIKE

Carol, come on—

CAROL

Are you kidding me? What the hell are you doing here?

MIKE

Well I came down to—

CAROL

You saw me on TV?

MIKE

Yeah it's all over. You had this big miracle or something.

CAROL

I don't even know where you live!

MIKE

Minneapolis. I'm just, you know, three hundred miles up the road—

CAROL

Minneapolis? You're in fucking Minneapolis?! You haven't had the decency to call or write in eight years and you're in Minneapolis?!

MIKE

I know, I know, I'm sorry—

CAROL

You're sorry?! What the—wait a minute—there's no money in this Mike.

I know, I know—

MIKE

In fact, it's costing me money.

CAROL

Okay.

MIKE

So don't come down here thinking you're gonna get rich.

CAROL

That's not why I'm here. Can I just step in?

MIKE

No—you can turn your car around and drive back to Minnesota—

CAROL

Well I got a little problem—

MIKE

What?

CAROL

My car doesn't handle very well in the rain, so I...

MIKE

Ah, Jesus Christ—

CAROL

So I'm in the ditch down the road.

MIKE

I'll call you a tow truck.

CAROL

I was hoping I could use the tractor.

MIKE

That's it, I'm calling the police.

CAROL

Hey, come on, I'm telling you the truth, you can go and check if you want—I'll pull the thing out myself—

MIKE

CAROL
The tractor's not working.

MIKE
What's wrong with it?

CAROL
How the hell should I know? The engine doesn't catch.

MIKE
How long has it been like that?

CAROL
Six months.

MIKE
And you haven't had it looked at?

CAROL
Do I look like I've got a pile of money lying around here?

MIKE
Well I can—

CAROL
Mike. Get out.

MIKE
I was pretty good at fixing that thing—

CAROL
I don't care.
(She goes to shut the door on him)

MIKE
Oh come on—wait wait—please, I came down here to see you—

CAROL
Well you saw me—

MIKE
I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry. You know it's fine if you hate me, I can understand that, but you can't not care. Please.
(She looks at him.)

CAROL

Well get in out of the rain at least.

MIKE

Thanks.

(MIKE steps in. More thunder and lightning. The lights flicker.)

CAROL

Ah crap. It's bad enough we're taking on water in the basement—

MIKE

You got a leak in the basement?

CAROL

Yeah the whole goddamn house is falling apart! Are you happy?

MIKE

Why would I be happy about that?

CAROL

Take off your boots, you're getting mud everywhere.

(MIKE goes to sit down)

MIKE

Sorry.

CAROL

Don't get the couch wet.

MIKE

Sorry.

(MIKE sits on the floor and starts taking off his boots.)

So... how's Abby?

CAROL

Oh—you remember we have a daughter! She's out.

MIKE

Out where?

CAROL

I don't know. Out. Out of my field of vision. That's about what I get.

MIKE

Oh. She doing all right?

CAROL

You know...

MIKE

No I don't know, that's why I'm asking.

CAROL

She's uh... she's great.

MIKE

Good.

(Pause. MIKE spots ABBY's picture on the mantelpiece. He goes over to it.)

She looks like my mother.

(Pause.)

CAROL

What are you doing here?

MIKE

I just came to see. I just wanted to see this thing. I promise I'll be gone tomorrow.

CAROL

Your promises don't carry a lot of water around here.

(Pause)

You can sleep on the couch.

MIKE

Thanks.

CAROL

But I want you out of here tomorrow. Okay?

MIKE

All right.

CAROL

And maybe if it's not too much trouble you can explain to your daughter why you haven't bothered to speak to her in eight years. But I doubt she's going to be as nice to you as I am.

MIKE

...yeah.

(MIKE spots one of the pictures on the mantelpiece.)

You still got this?

CAROL

Yep.

(Pause. MIKE studies it.)
...it's the only good one I got of Trevor.

MIKE
I lost mine. He's—four—in this?

CAROL
Yeah.
(Pause. MIKE puts it back on the counter.)

MIKE *(a little choked up)*
So what's Abby doing next year?

CAROL
I don't know.

MIKE
She's not going to college?

CAROL
Well she got... she got in to Oberlin, but she screwed up her financial aid, so...

MIKE
What happened?

CAROL
Basically she decided she didn't want to go to high school anymore, so her grades went into the toilet for the last quarter—she had a big scholarship and then lost it, so... so no college. Right now I think she's planning on getting knocked up and living a life of squalor just to piss me off. Or I guess she's gonna experiment with a whole lotta drugs until it does permanent mental damage. Wow—maybe there is something you could talk to her about.

(MIKE sits down on the couch.)
MIKE
I'm clean.

CAROL
Let's get one thing straight: If you bring anything into my house—I mean, anything—I will drag you to the police station myself.

MIKE
I'm clean.

CAROL
I don't care what you say—all I care about is what you do. You don't have to lie to me.

I'm done with it.
(She eyes him.)

MIKE

How long has it been?

CAROL

Two and a half years.

MIKE

Uh huh.

CAROL

So maybe I could talk to her about that.

MIKE

I don't think she's wanting to hear advice from you.
(short pause.)
You're getting my couch wet.

CAROL

Sorry.
(He stands up.)

MIKE

I'll get you a towel.
(More thunder. CAROL goes to a hall closet and pulls out a towel.)
Here.
(She throws it at him.)

CAROL

Thanks.
(MIKE dries himself off.)
So how are you doing?
(CAROL stares at him.)
How are you doing—

CAROL

I heard you. I was trying to come up with the proper bitter response.

MIKE

Oh.

CAROL

I'm fine. I'm great.

MIKE

Good.

CAROL

So you're... you're clean? You have a job?

MIKE

Yeah.

CAROL

Doing what?

MIKE

I'm a mechanic.

CAROL

Right. Any illegitimate children out there?

MIKE

No.

CAROL

Any legitimate children?

MIKE

No I haven't gotten married or... anything like that. You haven't either, huh?

(CAROL gives him a wry smile.)

You still look good.

CAROL

Well you look like shit.

MIKE

Yeah, well—

CAROL

I like the hair though. It's nice. I didn't like that whole aging hippie thing that you were trying to pull off... it was horrible... that little rat-tail that you had. Plugged up the drain every day—little circle of ratty, nasty hair, like you were trying to farm it to make some kind of bath animal. Every day I had to throw that in the toilet cause you were too much of a lazy slob to pick your own hair out of the drain—

MIKE

Okay, all right—

Not very attractive.

CAROL

You used to like my long hair.

MIKE

Yeah when it was thick.

CAROL

Well—

MIKE

You know we found a wig the other day, maybe you could use it.

CAROL

Maybe.

(Pause. They look at each other.)

I uh...

(he trails off)

I'm sorry.

(Pause)

It's good to be home.

(CAROL looks at him.)

CAROL

I'm glad you're not dead.

(Pause. She leaves the room as lights fade.)