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THE END OF THE ROAD  
[EXCERPT]

a play  
by

Robert Kerr

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## CHARACTERS

PETER, 30s  
JUDY, 30s, Peter's wife  
GRAHAM, Peter and Judy's son  
LISA, Peter and Judy's daughter  
A GORILLA

The following parts played by a male actor:

- GAS STATION ATTENDANT
- NOAH
- DIPSY-DOODLE
- ROOM SERVICE
- A Dipsy-Doodle Land EMPLOYEE

The following parts played by a female actor:

- MERILEE
- WAITRESS
- A Dipsy-Doodle Land EMPLOYEE

## SETTING

The family's home in Minnesota  
Various locations along the road to Florida  
Various locations in the state of Florida

Summer

THE END OF THE ROAD was developed in The Juilliard School's playwriting fellowship program and at the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

(PETER and JUDY in the front seat of the car.)

JUDY

Suitcases?

PETER

Check.

JUDY

Sunscreen?

PETER

Check.

JUDY

Map?

PETER

I picked up this atlas. Did you know there's a town in Germany called Titz?

JUDY

Great. We'll stop there on the way back.

PETER

This atlas has everything. All seven continents, every town with at least a population of 50...

JUDY

As long as it has I-35, I'll be happy.

(Pause)

Does it have I-35?

PETER

Um... No.

JUDY

Does it have any roads at all?

PETER

It shows the Trail of Tears.

JUDY

Jesus! Why didn't you just get a road map?

PETER

This is so much more than a road map.

JUDY

At least a road map shows you the *roads*. We'll get one at the Amoco before we get on the freeway. Sunglasses?

PETER

Check.

JUDY

Drink boxes?

PETER

Check.

JUDY

Sun Chips?

(Beat)

PETER

Check.

JUDY

You got Sun Chips, right?

PETER

I got chips, yeah.

JUDY

You didn't get Doritos.

PETER

They were out of Sun Chips.

JUDY

I thought we agreed we were all going to eat healthy on this trip.

PETER

They're snacks. They're supposed to be bad for you.

JUDY

Magazines?

PETER

Check.

JUDY

Gas money?

PETER

Check.

JUDY

Travel guides?

PETER

(holding up three different guides)

Check, check and check.

Look at the house. It looks sad. Sad that we're leaving.

JUDY

It's a house. It doesn't have feelings.

PETER

Yes it does. The windows look darker. The drapes look heavier. See how the eaves are sagging? It doesn't know when we're coming back.

JUDY

(calling jokingly to the house)

Ten days.

The kids are taking a long time.

PETER

I'll go in and—

JUDY

Wait. Give them a couple minutes.

We should have told him last night.

PETER

He seemed so happy, packing and everything. Why spoil it?

JUDY

Let's tell him now, before we go.

PETER

It might start the trip on the wrong foot.

JUDY

Maybe we should get it out of the way before we—

PETER

Sh. Here they come.

JUDY

Better sooner than later.

PETER

When the time is right, we'll know.

(GRAHAM and LISA enter.)

*There* they are. Have you got everything?

LISA

I can't find Casey.

JUDY

Do you really need Casey?

LISA

We can't leave him behind. He'll be lonely.

JUDY

We'll only be gone a week and a half.

LISA

You wouldn't leave me alone that long.

JUDY

Did you look under your bed?

LISA

Yeah.

JUDY

How about behind the couch?

LISA

I looked everywhere.

PETER

You know, I think he might be in the dryer.

LISA

What's he doing in the dryer?

PETER

He was all wet after I put him in the washing machine.

LISA

Dad! You don't put Casey in the washing machine.

PETER

He looked like he could use a bath.

LISA

Mom washes him in the sink.

PETER

Listen honey, I'm sorry. I'll go get him right now, okay?

(PETER exits. GRAHAM and LISA get into the back seat.)

JUDY

Graham, Lisa?

GRAHAM

Yeah?

JUDY

Before we go...

GRAHAM

What?

(Beat)

JUDY

Do you have everything?

GRAHAM

For like the hundredth time, yeah!

(PETER returns, carrying a stuffed animal—a monkey. He gets into the car.)

PETER

Here's Casey, still warm from the dryer. And now the moment we've all been waiting for. Drumroll, please.

(Beat)

Drumroll *please!*

(JUDY, GRAHAM and LISA drum their hands.)

Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven! Keep drumming. Six! Five! Four!

(PETER starts the car.)

PETER (*continued*)

We have ignition. Three! Two! One! Blastoff!

(EVERYONE in the car lurches backward as PETER accelerates down the street.)

YEE-HAW!

(ACTORS 5 and 6 appear. They take turns holding up various road signs—town names, speed limit signs, etc.—to indicate the FAMILY's progress. They join the FAMILY in song.)

ALL

(singing)

JOHN JACOB JINGLEHEIMER SCHMIDT  
HIS NAME IS MY NAME TOO  
WHENEVER WE GO OUT  
THE PEOPLE ALWAYS SHOUT  
THERE GOES JOHN JACOB JINGLEHEIMER SCHMIDT  
DA DA-DA DA-DA DA DA...

(ACTOR 6 holds up a traffic signal: it is red.)

GRAHAM

Dad...

PETER

(continuing over following lines)

JOHN JACOB JINGLEHEIMER SCHMIDT

JUDY

Peter.

Daddy!

LISA

Look out!

GRAHAM

What?

PETER

RED LIGHT!

JUDY, GRAHAM and LISA

(Everyone lurches forward as PETER brakes suddenly. Beat.)

CHINESE FIRE DRILL! Come on!

PETER

(PETER gets the rest of the FAMILY to climb out of the car and run around it.)

(singing)  
NINETY-NINE BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL  
NINETY-NINE BOTTLES OF BEER  
IF ONE OF THOSE BOTTLES SHOULD HAPPEN TO FALL...

ALL

(ACTOR 6 holds up a green traffic signal.)

GREEN LIGHT! Get in!

PETER

(The FAMILY gets back in the car.)

NINETY-EIGHT BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL

ALL

(ACTORS 5 and 6 continue to flip up road signs.)

I spy with my little eye... something beginning with the letter A.

LISA

Apple orchard?

PETER

No.

LISA

Automobile? JUDY

Unh-unh. LISA  
(meaning "no")

Ass? GRAHAM

Graham! JUDY

As in donkey. GRAHAM

Nope. LISA

Um... Asphalt? PETER

(LISA shakes her head.)

Automobile?

I already said that. JUDY

Time's up! LISA

What was it? PETER

I spy... air! LISA

That was a good one! PETER

It's dumb. You can't spy air. GRAHAM

I did. LISA

GRAHAM

It has to be something you can see.

PETER

One point for Lisa.

GRAHAM

Dad, don't give her a point for that.

PETER

Lisa gets a point, and it's your turn. Okay?

GRAHAM

Okay. I spy with my little eye something beginning with... the letter C.

(GRAHAM shakes his head through the following.)

JUDY

Car.

PETER

Cantaloupe.

LISA

Cow.

PETER

Caterpillar.

JUDY

Curve. In the road.

LISA

Cat.

PETER

Comb.

JUDY

Cauliflower.

LISA

Cranberries.

PETER

Cloud.

GRAHAM  
Time's up. Silo.

JUDY  
Silo?

GRAHAM  
You know, like a grain silo?

LISA  
Silo begins with "S," retard.

GRAHAM  
It's spelled C-Y-L-O.

PETER  
One point for Graham.

LISA  
Daddy!

JUDY  
Peter...

PETER  
Graham's right.

LISA  
It's spelled S-I-L-O.

PETER  
The referee has spoken. I spy with my little eye something beginning with the letter H.

JUDY  
Horizon?

PETER  
How did you know?

JUDY  
That faraway look in your eye. One point for Judy.

ALL

(in a round)

ROW ROW ROW YOUR BOAT  
GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM  
MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY  
LIFE IS BUT A DREAM

(ACTOR 6 holds up a gas station sign. A bell chimes twice quickly: ding-ding! A GAS STATION ATTENDANT enters.)

ATTENDANT

Fill 'er up?

PETER

Sure.

(JUDY, GRAHAM and LISA go off.)

JUDY

No soda! Just fruit juice! We're eating healthy on this trip.

(PETER remains. The ATTENDANT pumps gas.)

ATTENDANT

Where ya headed?

PETER

Florida.

ATTENDANT

Yeah?

(Beat)

PETER

You ever been?

ATTENDANT

Huh?

PETER

To Florida?

ATTENDANT

Yeah. I been to Florida.

PETER  
Must have had a good time.

ATTENDANT  
I don't like to talk about it much.

PETER  
Oh. I'm sorry.

ATTENDANT  
For what?

PETER  
I... For—

ATTENDANT  
Did I say it was your fault, what happened?

PETER  
No.

ATTENDANT  
All right, then.

(Pause)

PETER  
Nice day we're having.

(Pause)

I said, nice day we're—

ATTENDANT  
I heard what you said.

(Pause)

Was all Shamu's fault.

PETER  
Pardon me?

ATTENDANT  
The whale, at Sea World. His fault, what happened.

PETER

So, what did happen?

ATTENDANT

I told you, I prefer not to talk about it.

(Pause)

PETER

We're going to Dipsy-Doodle Land. I want my son to see it before... Well...

ATTENDANT

Before he's too old to appreciate it?

PETER

Yeah.

ATTENDANT

Know what you mean. They get older, they think they're too *cool* or something.

PETER

Exactly.

ATTENDANT

Too *sophisticated*.

PETER

Uh-huh.

ATTENDANT

Too worldly. Lord knows, I waited too long with my boys. I spent years scrimping and saving, planning everything down to the last detail, so I could give them the vacation I'd always wanted but never had. I broke the news the day the oldest one turned fourteen. Dipsy-Doodle Land, Busch Gardens, the Everglades, Sea World, the whole kit and caboodle. The younger two, their eyes just lit up when they heard this. But the oldest, he got this look like he'd just bitten into a lemon. I asked him, doesn't it sound like fun? He said, "Yeah, if you're like three years old and retarded." The younger two idolized him, so when they heard this they got that same sour look. I started listing the things they'd get to see—all the rides, the wildlife, the scenery. No reaction, until I got to Shamu. The killer whale. Just for a second, the slightest glimmer of interest crossed their faces. Probably thought they'd get to see him kill somebody. Well, I thought, that's something. If I can show them just one thing they want to see, maybe they'll finally learn to appreciate me.

PETER

So, did you get to see him?

ATTENDANT

You got some kind of memory disorder? I told you, I don't like to talk about it.

PETER

I'm sorry, I was just curious.

ATTENDANT

Curious?

PETER

But if you'd rather not—

ATTENDANT

You're a regular nosy parker, aren't you?

PETER

Forget I ever—

ATTENDANT

No. You've just gotta know, don't you? Well, you're gonna find out, if that's what it takes for you to leave an old man in peace.

Off to Florida we go. First stop, Dipsy-Doodle Land. The Kingdom Where Dreams Come True. What do the boys do? Spend all day dumping slushies off the roller coasters, completely blind to the magic around them. Next stop, Busch Gardens: zebras, antelopes, giraffes taller than a house, but do they care? No. Instead, they teach themselves to make farting noises with their armpits and scare the animals away. We go out on the Everglades. The sun is sinking into the ocean like a ball of fire. Where are the boys? In the back of the boat, singing songs. Fart songs. "You Fart Up My Life," "I Left My Fart in San Francisco." "I'd Like To Teach the World To Fart." Those were the three longest days of my life. But through it all there shone a single ray of hope, the one thing in all of Florida the boys hadn't outgrown. Shamu. Over and over I said his name, like a goddamn mantra. It was the only thing keeping me sane.

The big day finally arrives. Sea World. There we are, front row center. There's a fanfare, a drumroll, and out comes Shamu. The boys are cheering, jumping up and down, really fired up for the first time since we left home. I'm starting to think maybe this goddamn trip was worth it after all. Shamu swims around the tank once, twice, three times, so close we can almost touch him. He gathers speed, dives under, skims the bottom, and *whoosh!* He bursts out of the water and does a triple somersault straight at us. The boys are going wild. Time slows almost to a stop. Loop... de-loop... de-THUMP!

ATTENDANT (*continued*)

The place turns into a madhouse. People screaming, covering their eyes, running for the exits. What the hell's going on? Then it hits me: Shamu has topped off his triple somersault by cracking his skull open on the side of the tank.

PETER

Oh my God.

ATTENDANT

I realize something else. The trip is over. The trip I'd saved up for for years, that I'd waited for my whole life, what could be my last chance to connect with my boys. Gone. Somewhere inside me, some last fraying thread finally snaps. I get everybody back to the car and tear out of the parking lot.

You can imagine what it's like in there. Three kids yowling like a squad of police cars and my wife yelling "shut UP shut UP shut UP" and my mother-in-law just sitting there, going (huff) (huff) (huff). What can I do? I don't know. I just drive, as fast as I can. The roads twist and double back on themselves, like a nest of snakes. Still, I keep driving, driving, driving, until I notice the sound under the tires has changed. We're on a dirt road. I pull over. I get out of the car. Ahead of us the road dribbles off into the swamp. Behind us I can't see where the blacktop turned to dirt. Nothing but green, green, and green as far as the eye can see, and me, in the middle of it, with five screaming mouths and the car door open and the buzzer going *eeeeeeeeee... eeeeeeeeeee... eeeeeeeeeee*. I have a revelation. If I want this noise to stop, there's only one thing to do. I do it. When it's done, there is complete, utter silence. The most beautiful thing I've ever heard.

ATTENDANT (*continued*)

But as they say, every silver lining contains a dark cloud. A week later the cops dredged up the car, found the family inside, tracked me down in Santa Fe, and stuck me in the joint for twenty years.

(Beat)

PETER

Um, look. The tank's full.

ATTENDANT

So it is.

PETER

Judy? Time to go!

ATTENDANT

Hey, I haven't checked your oil yet.

PETER

That won't be necessary. Judy?

ATTENDANT

Why are you looking at me like that?

PETER

Like what?

ATTENDANT

Oh. I get it. Listen, mister, I've paid my debt to society.

(JUDY, GRAHAM and LISA enter.)

GRAHAM

But Orange Crush has fruit juice in it. Look at the label.

PETER

Let's go. Get in the car. Now! How much is it for the gas, speaking of paying your debts?

ATTENDANT

Is that supposed to be some kind of joke?

PETER

It's, uh, sixty-four dollars?

ATTENDANT

I said, is that supposed—

PETER

Keep the change.

JUDY

What was that all about?

PETER

Never mind. Lock your doors.

ATTENDANT

You are doomed! All your plans will come to nothing!

PETER

(overlapping)

JOHN JACOB JINGLEHEIMER SCHMIDT

THE FAMILY

HIS NAME IS MY NAME TOO

(The ATTENDANT is left behind as the car pulls away.)

ATTENDANT

Hear me! The BOG will SWALLOW YOU UP! YOU WILL NEVER RETURN!

THE FAMILY

THERE GOES JOHN JACOB JINGLEHEIMER SCHMIDT!

[END OF EXCERPT]