

When Scott Comes Home

a one-act play

by

Jeff Barker

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Acknowledgements

While this drama has its roots in a true story, it is a play and does not pretend to be precise history. Nevertheless, I am grateful for Mignon Zylstra's investment in this play. She provided hours of personal interviews and many family documents in addition to her wonderful book *When AIDS Comes Home*.

The members of the Northwestern College Drama Ministries Ensemble made immense contributions to the development process of this play. They improvised many scenes prior to the writing. They analyzed Mignon's book and contributed their urgings about which scenes from the book made it into this short play. Above all, they prayed, as did Mignon.

Others who especially contributed to this script during its early stages were Rev. Harlan Van Oort, Rev. Matthew Floding, Carrie Dean, and, as always, Karen Bohm Barker.

This play draws from a small part of Scott Zylstra's life journey. That journey included time as a student at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. Even though this play has little to do with his student years, I am pleased to acknowledge this wonderful institution which nurtured Scott as well as so many of my own students and colleagues.

At this writing, Mignon and Bob Zylstra continue their work with their nonprofit organization "Support for The Journey" whose mission is "to walk alongside people living with AIDS, and their loved ones, offering physical, emotional and spiritual support." The address of that organization is:

Support for The Journey
P.O. Box 1794
Oak Harbor, WA 98277
(360) 675-1835

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Cast of Characters

This play was originally written for and performed by members of the Northwestern College Drama Ministries Ensemble. The first ensemble performed as follows:

Jason Barker:	Bob
Veronica Busby:	Mignon
Eric Connell:	Scott
Kenda Hallman:	Friend, Grandma Hofkamp, Patron, Salesperson, Prayer Chain, Barbara Johnson, a Church leader, Darcy, Nurse Jenette
Matthew Monthei:	Friend, Fred, Waiter, Shopper, Prayer Chain, Pastor, Man, Jerry
Angela Smits:	Friend, Bonnie, Patron, Shopper, Employer, Prayer Chain, Gossip, a Church leader, Lady, Nurse with Charly call
Cora Vander Broek:	Storyteller
Jasan Whitaker:	Friend, Bruce, Patron, Shopper, Prayer Chain, Charly, a Church leader
Betsie DeBoom:	Sound Operator
Colette Johnson:	Dramaturg
Mackenzie Thedens:	Stage Manager

Reconfigurations of this company size and casting arrangements are certainly possible and permissible.

The company performed *When Scott Comes Home* on tour, using a backdrop, five stools, a wheelchair, and some hand props. Some of the props were mimed.

for Jim

When Scott Comes Home

(The acting ensemble enters, taking casual listening positions around the stage.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER

Jesus once told his followers this story. He said, “When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me.’”

STORYTELLER

My name is, it’s a French name. Mignon. Don’t worry if it’s hard to remember, or say – not many people get it right the first time. “Mignon.” Try it. [They do.] You’re good.

In case you’re wondering...yes, I’m very willing for you to hear my story. It’s not as easy as my name. I’ll tell you the truth, some of it is...

(Pause, smiling.)

...very sad. But if it can be of any encouragement...

I remember so clearly the day that we brought him home from the hospital. A son. Our first born.

MIGNON

Scott.

Scott.

Scotty.

BOB

Scotter.

MIGNON

(A laugh.)

BOB

Scotter.

STORYTELLER

And love struck without warning.

(STORYTELLER also mimes holding the baby, becoming alter-ego to MIGNON.
MIGNON sighs. Is about to cry.)

BOB

Mignon?

(MIGNON shakes her head.)

BOB

What?

MIGNON

Oh, Bob. I don't know.

BOB

Try.

MIGNON

It's hard to put into words.

BOB

It's about Scott?

STORYTELLER,

I could never love anyone more than I love this child.

MIGNON

Yes, it's about Scott.

BOB

You don't want me to call him "Scotter?"

MIGNON

No, no, no, you can call him anything.

(beat)

He's too wonderful. I am so happy.

(ORGAN MUSIC. FRIENDS all come onto stage to join BOB and MIGNON for Scott's
baptism, facing front. MIGNON and STORYTELLER mime handing over the baby to
the pastor, who is invisible.)

STORYTELLER

(to the pastor)

Hold your hand under his head. Support his neck, support his neck!

VOICEOVER

Scott Henry Zylstra. I baptize you in the name of the Father . . .

STORYTELLER

Don't cry, Scotty. Mama's right here.

VOICEOVER

And of the Son....

STORYTELLER

Ohhh, the water's too cold. The water's too cold!

VOICEOVER

And of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

STORYTELLER

Are you sure you should kiss him? There are so many germs floating around.

(BOB mimes receiving the baby back.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

(pleased)

Well, I got through that without crying at all.

(MIGNON and STORYTELLER burst into tears.)

VOICEOVER

Let's take a minute and greet one another.

(ORGAN music. BOB mimes handing the baby to MIGNON as FRIENDS cluster around. MIGNON shows baby and all freeze.)

STORYTELLER

My dreams? Every mother's dreams. The hope of a lifetime of joy. Of watching him grow strong and beautiful. Same as every mother.

But I thought we were different. We were good people. A good family. Winners. We were "better than."

(STORYTELLER watches as SCOTT wheels himself in, sitting in his wheelchair, coming under MIGNON'S arms so her arms are around his neck. SCOTT looks up at MIGNON and they freeze. FRIENDS have remained frozen in baptism positions.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

I can't keep things in order.

(FRIENDS and BOB are leaving one at a time.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

(struggling to get the memory back)

He was baptized on March sixth, 1960. In our home church. Where Bob grew up. Where we belong. It's our place.

(All others are gone, except SCOTT and MIGNON.)

There have been times I felt so alone.

(MIGNON turns a page and begins to read from the book SCOTT holds.)

MIGNON

Prayer number 51. For a birthday.

STORYTELLER

(suddenly remembering, savoring)

“Watch over thy child, O Lord....”

MIGNON

“Watch over thy child, O Lord, as his days increase; bless and guide him wherever he may be. Strengthen him when he stands; comfort him when discouraged or sorrowful;

(SCOTT coughs horribly.)

MIGNON (continued)

raise him up if he fall; and in his heart may thy peace which passes understanding abide all the days of his life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

SCOTT

Amen.

(SCOTT and MIGNON exit.)

STORYTELLER

When we were leaving the hospital, I thought we had lost that book. We loved that book. An Episcopal priest gave it to me. Scott's priest. I wonder what Grandma Hofkamp would have thought about that?

(GRANDMA HOFKAMP enters, followed by children.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

She was from the old country. Not England. Holland. Not Episcopal. Dutch Reformed. Bob and I grew up in Dutch settlements. Him in Washington State. Me in Leota, Minnesota. There were two options for church in my home town: Reformed and Christian Reformed. No Episcopal. But very religious. No question about that.

GRANDMA HOFKAMP

(in Dutch)
Mignon, do you want coffee?

MIGNON

Yes, please, Grandma.

(MIGNON mimes taking coffee and cake.)

STORYTELLER

Every Sunday after church, we went to Grandma Hofkamp's house. It was the 1940's and even the kids had coffee and cake.

GRANDMA HOFKAMP

(in Dutch)
Bonnie, do you want coffee?

BONNIE

Yes, please, Grandma.

STORYTELLER

She was a good person.

GRANDMA HOFKAMP

(in Dutch)
Fred, do you want coffee?

FRED

Yes, please, Grandma.

STORYTELLER

We were a good family. We were winners. "Better than."

GRANDMA HOFKAMP

(in Dutch, to BRUCE, who is playing on floor)
Bruce, do you want coffee?

BRUCE

Uh, huh.

OTHER CHILDREN

"Yes, please, Grandma."

BRUCE

Yes, please, Grandma.

GRANDMA HOFKAMP

(in Dutch)
You're welcome.

STORYTELLER

We were allowed to read only one thing on the Lord's Day, and it wasn't the newspaper.

(STORYTELLER sets newspaper on the floor. BRUCE sees and rushes to it. The children notice what BRUCE is doing and they pass the information down the line.)

FRED

Bruce is reading the comics on Sunday.

BONNIE

Bruce is reading the comics on Sunday.

MIGNON

Bruce is reading the comics on Sunday.

(GRANDMA HOFKAMP makes a clucking sound with her tongue. Each child passes this down the line, and it gets bigger and bigger until BRUCE gets the message and resumes his seat. STORYTELLER picks up the paper.)

GRANDMA HOFKAMP

(standing, speaking in Dutch)
You are such precious, precious children.

(Freeze.)

STORYTELLER

(admiring the picture for a brief moment)
Grandma Hofkamp was a good woman, very religious. I don't doubt that she had an honest faith. So which part of your past do you erase?

SCOTT

(entering)
Mom.

(Actors playing GRANDMA and CHILDREN exit.)

MIGNON

Yeah, Scotter.

SCOTT

How do you spell "heaven?" With an "i" or with an "e?"

MIGNON

With an “e.”

(SCOTT erases furiously and then writes carefully.)

MIGNON

Whatcha workin’ on?

SCOTT

(Too busy to answer.)

MIGNON

Scotter?

SCOTT

Yeah?

MIGNON

Whatcha workin’ on?

SCOTT

Somethin’.

MIGNON

You don’t want to tell me?

SCOTT

Maybe sometime.

MIGNON

Okay.

SCOTT

Can I go outside?

MIGNON

If you want to.

SCOTT

(starts out, stops, holding out his paper)
You can read it if you want to.

(MIGNON takes the paper and reads to herself.)

STORYTELLER

(speaking aloud what MIGNON reads)

May 8, 1968. My name is Scott Zylstra. I am nine years old. I accepted Jesus as a very young boy at the age of three. I have called on Jesus for help and just to talk with him. I am very glad to share the gospel with you. God has supplied me with my needs. When I grow up, I want to be a missionary doctor so I can help people who are sick and also tell them about God. Now that I have accepted Jesus I will have eternal life in heaven with him.

MIGNON

That's beautiful, Scott.

SCOTT

Okay. It's a testimony.

MIGNON

Yes, it is.

SCOTT

Can I go now?

MIGNON

May I go now.

SCOTT

May I?

MIGNON

Yes, you may.

(SCOTT exits. MIGNON and STORYTELLER burst into tears as before. MIGNON exits other way.)

STORYTELLER

There were so many wonderful years. What are they? He was elected student leader. A talented singer. In 1978, he went off to Christian college. Then Bible school in England. He directed the—he was the—

(PHONE RINGS. STORYTELLER notices it and slowly attempts to talk it away.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

He did grow into a strong and beautiful and Godly man. And I did have the hope of a lifetime of joy.

(PHONE CONTINUES TO RING. MIGNON enters to work on something. Perhaps miming washing dishes.)

STORYTELLER (continued)
Don't answer it.

MIGNON
Bob, can you get that?

BOB
What, Mignon?

MIGNON
Can you get the phone?

STORYTELLER
I'd like to stop time before the phone rings again.

(PHONE STOPS RINGING. MIGNON freezes.)

STORYTELLER (Continued)
In the calm before the storm. I start thinking about him. That wonderful baby. That intense boy.

(PHONE RINGS.)

STORYTELLER (continued)
And then, the phone rings. And I answer it.

(SCOTT enters, on phone. MIGNON answers the phone.)

MIGNON
Hello, Zylstras.

SCOTT
Mom.

MIGNON
Scott!

SCOTT
Yeah.

MIGNON
How are you?! It's so good to hear your voice. How are you?

SCOTT
I'm fine. I'm on break, Mom. I've only got a minute. I was wonderin' what you and Dad are doing tomorrow.

MIGNON

Well, we'll be home. Would you like to come up?

SCOTT

Actually, no. I was wondering if you could come down. I'd like to take you out.

MIGNON

Scott, you can't afford that. Your Dad and I will be happy to pay.

SCOTT

Well, I'm -

MIGNON

Well, anyway, we'll come down.

SCOTT

Okay, I'd better go.

MIGNON

Are you doin' okay?

SCOTT

No, I'm fine. Is 6:00 alright?

MIGNON

That sounds great.

(They turn upstage to complete the conversation as they exit.)

STORYTELLER

(placing three stools for the restaurant)

The next night we traveled down to Seattle. We went to a really nice restaurant.

(beat)

The food was great.

(SCOTT, BOB, and MIGNON enter and mime eating. There are others in the restaurant as well, including PATRONS and a WAITER.)

BOB

Pass me the bread, Scotter.

MIGNON

Do you feel okay?

SCOTT

Yeah, great.

MIGNON

You've hardly touched your food.

SCOTT

You want it? You can have it. You want it?

BOB

I'm stuffed already. You take it, if you want it.

MIGNON

I think you should eat it Scott. Don't you like it?

SCOTT

It's fine, it's great.

BOB

So, really Scott, how are you doin'?' How are things goin'?

SCOTT

Great, fine.

MIGNON

Is there any particular reason you invited us down?

SCOTT

No, I just...

BOB

Is it anything about your money situation?

SCOTT

No, that's—I'm fine.

MIGNON

Is your apartment alright?

SCOTT

Yep.

BOB

How's your car runnin'?

SCOTT

Fine. Brakes squeak.

BOB

That's the warning gauge. Should have 'em checked.

SCOTT

Okay.

(Pause.)

MIGNON

Is it a girl?

SCOTT

No.

MIGNON

Have you been on any dates lately?

(Pause.)

It's okay, if that's too, if you'd rather not—

SCOTT

No, that's sorta why I -

(Pause. MIGNON and SCOTT begin speaking at the same time.)

MIGNON

I know this wonderful—

SCOTT

I was just gonna tell you guys—

(They stop.)

SCOTT (continued)

Go ahead.

MIGNON

No, please.

SCOTT

I just wanted—think it's—wanted you to know that—feel—I'm different.

MIGNON

How do you mean?

SCOTT

About my interest in dates—I'm different.

Do you mean... MIGNON

If you'd rather not talk about this, that's okay, I understand. SCOTT

Alright. MIGNON

Different? BOB

You know, dates, other people. SCOTT

Mm, hmm. BOB

I know this is not something people talk about. At least not us. You just kind of assume that somebody's one way unless they tell you different. SCOTT

Mm, hmm. BOB

Well, I'm different. SCOTT

(Nods.) BOB

Frankly, I'd rather not talk about this and ruin the evening, but I've thought for a long time that you might like to know. SCOTT

How long? BOB

Ten years. SCOTT

Well, I'd just like to say that I have lots of friends who are women. That doesn't mean that— MIGNON

Mom, this is different. SCOTT

MIGNON

Scott, this is not something we've ever talked about. I—. Just last week I heard someone on Christian radio talking about it. I didn't know why they were talking about it. Now here...

SCOTT

Do you still think I'm a Christian?

MIGNON

Oh, Scott. I don't think that's something you can just quit.

SCOTT

If you don't want me to come to church when I come home, I understand.

MIGNON

Don't be silly. It's your church.

SCOTT

Yeah.

(Beat.)

I don't think this is something I can just quit either.

MIGNON

You don't know that until you've tried.

(Others have been noticing.)

SCOTT

You don't know what you're talking about.

MIGNON

We'll hire a counselor.

SCOTT

Mom, I've tried for ten years.

(WAITER enters.)

BOB

Alright.

(WAITER hands them their check and exits.)

MIGNON

We've got a long drive.

BOB

Those brake pads will probably have to be replaced. It could be expensive. Here's...

(BOB fumbles for some money.)

SCOTT

No, Dad.

BOB

No, take it.

SCOTT

No, thank you.

(They exit. PATRONS have been eavesdropping.)

KENDA

Did I just hear what I just heard?

JASAN

Yes. He just told them right here.

ANGELA

What were they talking about? I didn't get it.

KENDA

How long did he say? Ten years?

JASAN

Ten years. That's a long time to—I feel sorry for him.

ANGELA

Yeah, what was the ten years thing about?

KENDA

I feel sorry for her.

JASAN

I don't.

KENDA

Why not?

JASAN

Because I feel more sorry for him.

(MIGNON has left her purse. SHE returns to get it.)

KENDA

Shhhhh!

JASAN

I hear the Space Needle's going downhill.

KENDA

Yeah, I hear the restaurant's terrible now.

JASAN

I heard the same thing.

KENDA

Have you guys heard about—

(Noticing MIGNON is gone.)

I think she heard you.

JASAN

I don't care.

KENDA

I feel more sorry for her.

JASAN

If they didn't want us to hear, they shouldn't have been talking about it.

(Pause.)

ANGELA

What do you think's wrong with the Space Needle?

JASAN

I don't know. I haven't been there for years.

(WAITER enters and signals to KENDA that their table's ready.)

KENDA

You guys, they have our table.

ANGELA

(as they exit)

I felt sorry for all of them.

STORYTELLER

The next day doesn't have anything to do with anything. I went to the mall.

(CHRISTMAS MUSIC. MIGNON enters, followed by a young man and young woman who are happy to be shopping and even happier to be together. MIGNON watches them, and then they exit.)

SALESPERSON

(approaching MIGNON with a tray.)

Would you like to try a sample? These two are \$3.99 and this one is \$4.69, but you can get all three today for only \$9.99.

(SALESPERSON waits. Smiles. Waits. MIGNON is lost in thought. SALESPERSON gives up and repeats speech to someone else as they exit.)

STORYTELLER

Was there anything that should have prepared me for the news from Scott's employer?

(EMPLOYER enters, talking on phone. STORYTELLER takes MIGNON'S shopping bag and places telephone in her hand. MIGNON, still in a numb state, listens.)

EMPLOYER

Well, Mrs. Zylstra, I've been calling everywhere, and I'm at my wit's end. He's been a good worker, but he didn't come in yesterday, and now not today. Unless you can tell me something I don't know, I'm gonna have to let him go.

(EMPLOYER exits.)

STORYTELLER

You can't let somebody go when they're already gone. Apartment cleared out. No message. Nothing. That was the Christmas I got sick. It wasn't the flu. Scott's presents sat under the tree, unopened. What did I get him? I wandered through the house, crying and praying.

MIGNON

What if I called the prayer chain at church?

PRAYER CHAIN MEMBERS

(in rapid sequence)

He's what?! He's what?! He's what?! He's what?!

MIGNON

Maybe I should just call the pastor.

PASTOR

You have heard of the unforgivable sin, haven't you?

STORYTELLER

Those were irrational fears, but if my dear, beloved Grandma Hofkamp had walked in the door, what would I have said?

GRANDMA HOFKAMP

(entering, speaking in Dutch)

My dear, dear Mignon, Jesus loves you. Tell me what's on your heart.

(MIGNON is unable to answer. GRANDMA HOFKAMP exits.)

STORYTELLER

Right. I couldn't tell anyone. Not just out of fear, but because it wasn't mine to tell. It was Scott's.

(MIGNON punches number into phone.)

MIGNON

Yeah, um, I was listening to your radio station a few weeks ago, and I just happened to hear—actually that was, I think it was probably more than just happened—

I'm talking about an interview that you—it was actually with a young man who said he was a Christian who was struggling with um—I'm not saying this very well. Yeah. Do you have any more information about—.

(SHE writes.)

Thank you, thank you very much, thank you. I don't, no, thank you. Bye.

(SHE hangs up and then dials.)

STORYTELLER

They gave me the number of a funny lady named Barbara. She had written a book called *Where Does a Mother Go To Resign?*. I'll never forget the simple words Barbara said to me.

BARBARA JOHNSON

(entering, speaking into phone)

Mignon, honey, now, you know, we're just going to wrap that boy up in a comfort blanket of love and give him to God, and let God take care of him. Did you know something, sweetie? This darlin' son of yours—. God loves your precious child even more than you do.

STORYTELLER

“God loves your precious child even more than you do.”

Her God was so big. My God was so big.

(MIGNON and BARBARA JOHNSON have finished their conversation, and they exit opposite directions.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

I got busy. And the next thing I discovered was the dangerous possibility that Scott might not have a home to come home to.

(BOB enters, followed by MIGNON.)

MIGNON

Bob.

BOB

(entering, lost in some administrative work)

Yeah.

MIGNON

I want you to hear this.

BOB

How much can you read about that stuff?

MIGNON

I think we need to know everything we can.

BOB

Well . . .

MIGNON

If you have something to say, I wish you'd just say it.

BOB

I'm not the one who wants to talk about it all the time. Frankly, I'd rather not talk about it at all.

MIGNON

Bob, this is our son we're talking about. He kept silent about it for ten years because he thought we probably wouldn't want to talk about it. What if he had been able to talk about it with us right away? Maybe we wouldn't be where we are today.

BOB

So, this thing is my fault because I don't want to talk about it.

MIGNON

No, no, no.

BOB

Then what are you saying?

MIGNON

I just want you to listen to this!

(Reads.)

“The parents of these children can suffer emotional trauma as well. The vast majority of their marriages end in divorce.”

(Beat.)

I don't want to be a statistic.

BOB

What do you want me to do?

MIGNON

(angered)

Nothing.

BOB

Mignon.

MIGNON

I want you to decide that for yourself.

BOB

I'm sorry. I'm trying. I don't know what else to do. I can promise that we won't be a statistic. But that's all I know to do right now.

MIGNON

Are you praying?

BOB

What do you want me to pray?

STORYTELLER

Prayer number 52. For the absent.

MIGNON

For Scott to come home.

BOB

I'm not a very good father right now.

MIGNON

That is not true!

BOB

I'm not feelin' like it. But I can pray.

MIGNON

Thank you.

BOB

You're welcome.

(BOB reaches out a hand. MIGNON takes it. They stand there a moment, and then exit.)

STORYTELLER

“O God, whose fatherly care reacheth to the uttermost parts of the earth: We humbly beseech thee to bless those whom we love, now absent from us. Defend them from all dangers of soul and body; and grant that both they and we may be bound together by thy love.”

My prayer for Scott to come home was answered. He came home for Thanksgiving. But he wasn't alone.

(SCOTT and CHARLY enter one way. MIGNON comes on from the other, stops, surprised.)

SCOTT

Charly, this is my Mom. Mom, Charly.

CHARLY

Hi, Mrs. Zylstra.

MIGNON

I'm sorry Bob is not . . . He's at work right now. It's a pleasure to meet you. I didn't realize that you were bringing anyone with you, Scott.

SCOTT

Oh, don't worry, we're not staying here. I know the house'll be full and all. We have a motel room.

MIGNON

Oh.

(Pause.)

CHARLY

Listen, why don't you take a minute to make arrangements, and then we'd better go get checked in. I'll be in the car. It's nice to meet you.

(CHARLY exits. There is a moment of awkwardness, and then MIGNON embraces SCOTT with all her might.)

MIGNON

Scott, I am so glad to see you, and your friend cannot be here on Thanksgiving. Your relatives are going to be here. If it were just you and your Dad and me, he would be welcome, but the others might not feel the same. I want you here, Scott. I want you here.

SCOTT

But Charly doesn't belong.

MIGNON

I'll fix some food for you to take to the motel.

SCOTT

Don't worry about that. I'm sure he'll understand.

MIGNON

No, I want to.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry.

SCOTT

No, no. No. No.

(SCOTT exits, following CHARLY. MIGNON exits the other way.)

STORYTELLER

Thanksgiving went according to my plan. And Scott left according to his plan - with no forwarding address.

(PASTOR is in.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And then word began to get around town. Who knew? Who didn't? I can only imagine.

GOSSIP

(poking her head around the corner)

Pastor, hello. I really do appreciate your willingness to meet with me.

PASTOR

Happy to. You know, my secretary didn't happen to write down what we're meeting about.

GOSSIP

Oh. Yes. I did not mention that to her. Not that I did not trust her, but I did not want to spread this around needlessly. So I thought it might not be better if I just talked with you first.

PASTOR

Sure.

GOSSIP

Good.

PASTOR

So, what is it that we're talking about?

GOSSIP

Yes, well I have heard some rumors and I thought that perhaps it would not be best if I spoke directly with you about it.

PASTOR

About what?

GOSSIP

The Zylstra boy.

PASTOR

I see. What have you heard?

GOSSIP

I am not sure how I should put this. If it is not true, I certainly do not want to be the bearer of bad gossip and whatnot.

(Beat.)

I have heard that he is involved in unnatural affections.

(Pause.)

PASTOR

I shouldn't have asked you what you've heard. Because frankly, I think the proper approach would be to talk with Scott first.

GOSSIP

Alright. Perhaps it may not be best if we did that.

PASTOR

I do want to say this. I appreciate the fact that you came to me instead of talking to other people.

(THEY stand to leave.)

GOSSIP

So you have already talked with the Zylstra boy and whatnot?

PASTOR

Not exactly, no.

GOSSIP

You have spoken with his parents.

PASTOR

No, not yet.

GOSSIP

But you do know about it.

PASTOR

Well, people talk.

GOSSIP

Oh, yes. People talk.

(THEY exit separate ways.)

STORYTELLER

I have no idea if that's how it went. But I've always thought it would be sorta fun to have a print out of who told who. A few people did speak to me.

WOMAN

Can't you send him somewhere to get it fixed?!

STORYTELLER

It was actually the silences that hurt the worst. They reminded me that my church was on a collision course with my son. But for now there were other secrets to be revealed.

(PHONE RING.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

The second call, and another surprise. I call them "the big three."

(PHONE RING.)

Why can't I just stay with the early years? No. No, no. These were good things.

(PHONE RING.)

Bob became less silent. And Scott came back to his faith.

(PHONE RING.)

Okay. The second call.

(CHARLY and BOB enter, on the phone.)

BOB

Hello.

CHARLY

Hello. Is this Zylstra's?

BOB

Yes, this is Bob.

CHARLY

Hi. This is - my name is Charly, Mr. Zylstra. I'm a friend of your son, Scott.

BOB

Is he there with you?

(MIGNON enters.)

CHARLY

No, not right now. I came down to my office—because I, um—Scott's back at the house, and I didn't—I wanted to be able to tell you some things in private.

(Sighs deeply.)

Oh, boy. I'm sorry, I'm not—

BOB

It's alright, son.

STORYTELLER

Scott!

(BOB shakes his head to MIGNON'S gesture.)

CHARLY

I just don't know what to do.

(Pause. CHARLY weeps. MIGNON tries to get her ear by the phone.)

BOB

Charly.

CHARLY

Yeah.

MIGNON

(whisper)

It's not Scott?

BOB

Can you give me the phone number where Scott is?

STORYTELLER

Keep him on the line, keep him on the line.

MIGNON

(rooting through her purse)
Where are all my pens?!
(SHE exits.)

CHARLY

I don't know. He's been talking about ending his life - and I think it needs to be taken very seriously.

BOB

Yes.

CHARLY

Mr. Zylstra? Do you and Mrs. Zylstra know that Scott is using?

BOB

Using?

CHARLY

No. That's not right. He's not just using. He's ad—he's addicted.

(Silence.)

BOB

Charly?

CHARLY

What?

BOB

You did the right thing.

CHARLY

The number's 714-971-

BOB

No, Charly, wait. Would you do me a favor?

CHARLY

Yes, sir.

BOB

First of all, don't call me sir.

CHARLY

Yes, sir.

(They get to laughing about this. MIGNON enters with pen.)

MIGNON

What? What's funny? What?

BOB

What I'd like you to do is this. I'd like you to tell Scott that you called us. And then, I'd like you to tell him that I'd like to send him a plane ticket to come home for a visit. If he'll accept.

CHARLY

Thank you, Mr. Zylstra.

BOB

Bob.

CHARLY

Thanks, Bob.

BOB

No. Thank you.

(CHARLY, BOB, and MIGNON exit.)

STORYTELLER

Scott came home.

(SCOTT enters. MIGNON and BOB re-enter, embracing SCOTT.)

BARBARA

(entering)

We're just going to wrap that boy up in a comfort blanket of love and give him to God, and let God take care of him.

STORYTELLER

No. Barbara's words don't fit anymore. It sounds like he was a baby again. Well, yeah. But the blanket of love was far from comforting. It was a drug and alcohol treatment center. He signed on. We signed on with him.

(BARBARA JOHNSON has exited. BOB and MIGNON bring SCOTT down front to sit on a stool. They take his coat and start off.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

A good family? Winners? Better than? Not my image. But Scott was changed. Changing.

SCOTT

Mom, Dad. Are you willing for me to go to church with you?

BOB

Sure.

(BOB and MIGNON exit.)

STORYTELLER

I said that Scott and the church were on a collision course. I can't deny that a collision occurred. Scott and the church leaders arranged to meet. Bob and I were not there.

(CHURCH LEADERS enter and sit upstage facing SCOTT, who sits downstage with his back to us.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

My heart's desire was Galatians 6:1. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." Restore. Like a cabinet maker with a broken piece of furniture.

(CHURCH LEADERS mime the build of the meeting until a man throws his Bible down in anger. Freeze.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

Am I imagining the worst? I don't know. I wasn't there. I learned the results of the meeting by reading about it in the church bulletin.

(MIGNON enters and hands the bulletin to BOB. He reads it.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

"Scott Zylstra's membership has been dropped from the rolls."

He was baptized on March sixth, 1960. In our home church. Where Bob grew up. Where we belong. It's our place.

(All others are gone.)

There have been times I felt so alone.

Scott was changing, but his tendency to cut and run remained the same. There were months, and months, and months of silence.

(PHONE RINGS. RINGS. RINGS.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

Call number three.

(DARCY enters. PHONE RINGS. MIGNON enters.)

MIGNON

Hello.

DARCY

Hi. Um. Is this—do you have a—are you related to a Scott Zylstra?

MIGNON

Yes. I'm his mom.

DARCY

Hi. Um, I'm—. Your son has—I think it's possible—I think—. Your son rents an apartment in my building. I'm the manager. I'm Darcy.

MIGNON

Hello, Darcy. My name is Mignon.

DARCY

Hi, Mignon. This is—I'm not—it's none of—but I thought—. Mrs. Zylstra, your son is sick. I think he's dying.

MIGNON

Darcy.

DARCY

I'm very sorry that I—if you don't—I'm sorry.

MIGNON

Darcy, you did the right thing.

DARCY

Thank you. I'm sorry.

MIGNON

Darcy. I need to tell you that I don't know where you're calling from.

DARCY

Oh.

(Beat.)

Oh.

MIGNON

Can you give me Scott's number?

DARCY

Ma'am, I'm glad you want to know. And, yes, I will give it to you as long as you understand that I have absolutely no idea how you got it.

MIGNON

I got it from a friend.

DARCY

Alright.

(DARCY and MIGNON turn upstage and exit as they complete their call.)

STORYTELLER

Scott asked if he could come home. Not for a visit. He brought with him our town's first known case of AIDS.

(SOUND of knocking. MIGNON pushes SCOTT on in wheelchair.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

Oh, boy. Scott developed pneumonia. Bob's father died suddenly of a heart attack. A fire broke out in the chimney at home. And a lady from the church came to the hospital for a visit.

LADY

(peeking into room)

May I come in?

MIGNON

Of course, come in.

STORYTELLER

The stress level was a hundred and ten. I have no idea how I kept my mouth shut.

LADY

This is a nice big room.

(LADY hugs MIGNON.)

LADY (Continued)

It's nice to see you, Mignon.

STORYTELLER

This is my son, pneumonia -

(STORYTELLER immediately corrects herself, and MIGNON introduces her son.)

STORYTELLER and MIGNON

Scott.

LADY

Hi, I don't think we've met, Scott. I'm from the church your folks attend.

SCOTT

It's nice to meet you.

LADY

Scott, I want to be perfectly open. May I?

SCOTT

Okay.

LADY

Scott, are you a Christian?

SCOTT

Yes, I am.

LADY

Let me be very open. Is it true you have AIDS?

STORYTELLER

Bob. Bob! I'm sinking here.

SCOTT

Yes, I have AIDS.

LADY

Do you know how you got AIDS?

STORYTELLER

Tell the boy you're sorry for him. Say a prayer for him. Sing him a song. Ask him how it feels to know you might not see another birthday. Why did you say that? Why did you say that! What possible difference does it make?

(MIGNON gets up and moves away.)

LADY

Scott, you got AIDS because of your sin, isn't that true?

(STORYTELLER puts out an arm to stop MIGNON from moving forward.)

SCOTT

Hmmm. Well. That's an interesting way of saying it. But I suppose you could say, if that's true, that everybody should expect to get AIDS.

LADY

Well, we're all sinners, yes. But there are different kinds of sins. And this one is the worst.

(SCOTT fumbles for a handkerchief and is caught with his hands in pockets when he suddenly coughs.)

LADY (continued)

Oh, my goodness. Cover your mouth! Don't you think about that what comes out of your mouth might hurt other people?!

(LADY covers her mouth and exits. MIGNON comes to SCOTT. MAN enters and speaks to MIGNON. STORYTELLER sees MAN, but MIGNON does not. They both seem to hear him.)

SCOTT

Mom.

MAN

So, now you know.

MIGNON

Shhhh. Shhhh.

STORYTELLER

There was no one there. And the conversation was very real.

MAN

Now you know there are other people like you.

SCOTT

Mom, do all Christians hate me?

MIGNON

I don't.

MAN

You, too, thought some sins were worse than others.

MIGNON

I don't know about other people. But I don't.

MAN

You thought you were "better than."

STORYTELLER

I know.

MIGNON

Scott, do you sometimes just want to walk away from your faith?

SCOTT

Someone once told me that's not something I can just quit.

MIGNON

Someone was pretty smart.

MAN

There are others like your son.

STORYTELLER

No.

MAN

They need to know about my love.

STORYTELLER

I can never love anyone as much as I love my son.

SCOTT

Why did I do the things I did?

MAN

I want you to go.

SCOTT

I want to find a church.

MAN

I want you to go.

(MAN exits.)

STORYTELLER

Scott was in and out of several hospitals—HIV wards. So, I took the opportunity.

(MIGNON gets up.)

SCOTT

Where are you going, Mom?

MIGNON

For a walk.

(MIGNON exits. SCOTT exits. JERRY enters. MIGNON re-enters.)

MIGNON (continued)

Hi.

JERRY

Hi.

(Pause.)

Did you come to the wrong room?

MIGNON

No. My son's in this hospital. I just thought I'd come and meet the neighbors.

JERRY

Oh, hi. I'm Jerry.

MIGNON

(puts out her hand)

I'm Mignon.

STORYTELLER

There was a lot of fear in those days.

JERRY

Ma'am, I have AIDS.

MIGNON

I thought so. And this is not how you get it.

(MIGNON keeps her hand out. JERRY shakes it.)

MIGNON (continued)

Do you have family here?

JERRY

No.

MIGNON

This can be a lonely place.

JERRY

I suppose.

MIGNON

AIDS can be a lonely disease.

JERRY

There's not much of anybody in my...who wants anything to do with this mess.

MIGNON

God does.

STORYTELLER

I can't believe I said that. I haven't taken any classes on how to do this.

JERRY

Oh. Can't really believe that, ma'am.

STORYTELLER

I should have taken some classes.

MIGNON

I believe it.

JERRY

How can you?

MIGNON

May I sit down?

JERRY

If you want.

(MIGNON moves a stool for JERRY to sit by her. She sits, and so does JERRY.)

MIGNON

When I was a little girl, my mother taught Sunday School.

JERRY

Yeah, I know all about Sunday School.

MIGNON

During Sunday School, I stayed with my Grandma Hofkamp.

JERRY

Wasn't she religious?

MIGNON

Oh, no, she was very religious. She wouldn't even read the newspaper on Sunday.

JERRY

That's wild.

MIGNON

But she loved me more than words can say. And I believe that God can love a person even more than Grandma Hofkamp.

JERRY

You know what, Mi—...?

MIGNON

Mignon.

JERRY

Mignon.

MIGNON

What?

JERRY

I wish I could believe that.

MIGNON

You can.

(JERRY grimaces as he reaches to grab for his lower leg. MIGNON comes to help him walk off a cramp, and he lets her. They exit.)

STORYTELLER

I didn't push or pry. But I visited every room on Scott's floor. Sometimes they just wanted me to rub their legs or their backs. I discovered several things. I discovered that cool hands feel good to a feverish body. I discovered that people facing death are extraordinarily interested in spiritual things. I sometimes thought I glimpsed eternity through their eyes. And I discovered that it is unconditional love that opens the door of change. Just as it had for my son.

(STORYTELLER has set four stools in a row to make a bed. Two NURSES enter and place a blanket and pillow on the fifth stool. The NURSES open a white sheet and place it over the four stools. NURSES exit. STORYTELLER places the pillow on the bed.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

Scott found a church. He didn't get to very many services that winter. But he read the scriptures daily. His spirit grew as his body wasted away. Spring turned to summer, the doctors could do nothing more for him. He made the decision to sign an order for non-resuscitation. Early in the morning on July twenty-first, I spoke with the hospital.

(NURSE JENETTE and MIGNON enter, both on the phone.)

JENETTE

He's in a lot of pain, Mignon. I think he'd like to have you here.

MIGNON

I'll be right there.

STORYTELLER

There was not a thing you could do. It was going to come out the same. That's what this does. It comes out the same every time.

MIGNON

I'll be right there.

JENETTE

I'm sorry, Mignon. I'm sorry I can't do a thing about it.

STORYTELLER

(to MIGNON)

He needs you to do something.

MIGNON

Me, too. Bye.

STORYTELLER

You wanted more time with him all your life.

MIGNON

Jenette!

JENETTE

I'm here, honey.

STORYTELLER

You have to say goodbye to him and mean it.

MIGNON

Would you, do you have time to go tell Scott that I'm on my way?

JENETTE

I have absolutely nothing better to do.

MIGNON

Thank you.

JENETTE

No, no, no, no. I'm glad to be doin' something.

STORYTELLER

You have to give up hope.

MIGNON

I'll be right there.

STORYTELLER

You have to mean it.

MIGNON

Bye.

(JENETTE exits.)

STORYTELLER

This is going to hurt more than anything has in your whole life.

(MIGNON runs out. SCOTT enters and, with great effort, lies down on the bed.
MIGNON enters. BOB enters, but holds back, listening.)

MIGNON

Do you want me to ask the doctor for morphine? Hold on, honey. Stay with me. Hold on. Hold on.

STORYTELLER

Scott. Dad and I are going to be okay.

STORYTELLER and MIGNON

We're going to miss you a lot, but we have each other, and we have the Lord.

MIGNON

And it's going to be okay. It won't be so long before we see each other again.

STORYTELLER

You may go.

SCOTT

Mom. Dad.

BOB

I love you, Scott. And your Mother's right.

(MIGNON begins to cry.)

STORYTELLER

And so my tears began to fall.

MIGNON

Scott. When I fell in love with you, I got no warning. I never got a warning.

STORYTELLER

It was then that I realized. It was then I came to know. That love and grief are friends. You cannot have love without sacrifice. And you cannot have sacrifice without grief. I wept for two days straight.

(MIGNON gets up and starts to leave.)

BOB

Where you going, honey?

MIGNON

I don't know.

STORYTELLER

We were facing life's most desperate questions. And we faced them through July, and August, and September.

(NURSE enters.)

NURSE

Scott, you've got a call. Insists you might want to talk to him. Says to just say, Charly.

(MIGNON nods. CHARLY enters, but we never hear him. HE carries a phone but mimes all his speech.)

MIGNON

Hello, Charly. I wish I could tell you better news, but he can't speak at all anymore, Charly.

STORYTELLER

I want to promise you, Charly.

MIGNON

But I'm going to put the phone up by his ear and you can talk to him.

STORYTELLER

I'd like to promise you that I will never again turn someone away from my thanksgiving table, especially not because of fear of what somebody else might think. I was raised to know that I myself am a sinner invited, unworthy, to the table of God. How did I get so good that I should have turned you away?

(CHARLY exits.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

The line fell silent. I could hear the dial tone. And then a tear rolled down Scott's cheek.

MIGNON

Scott, Dad's here, too.

SCOTT

Hi, Dad.

STORYTELLER

Those were his first words in days, spoken so lovingly and miraculously. And that was all he said. "Hi, Dad."

BOB

Scotter.

(BOB hands the prayer book to MIGNON and starts to leave but stays at doorway, listening.)

MIGNON

(reading)

A Commendation....

In the name of God the Father Almighty who created you;

In the name of Jesus Christ who redeemed you;

In the name of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you.

May your rest this day be in peace,

(closing book as SHE concludes)

and your home in the Paradise of God.

(BOB exits.)

STORYTELLER

Later, when Bob slipped out into the solarium to get some sleep, Scott's breathing became louder. All the while, he kept his eyes on me.

MIGNON

Scott, if you don't feel forgiven about something, from Dad or me or Jesus, just know that you are, claim that forgiveness, and go.

(shaking her head)

I know. You told me weeks ago that you were ready. There is nothing that should be causing this.

Heavenly Father, I know that you are the only One who can command Satan to release Scott's body, and I ask You in the name of Jesus Christ to do this.

(MIGNON sings part of "Jesus Loves Me." She stops. She holds a hand near SCOTT'S mouth. He is gone.)

MIGNON (continued)

Scott. Here we are alone in this room. Dad's in the solarium just steps away. Did you know that they wouldn't let him in the room when you were born?

(She kisses him on the forehead. BOB enters and comes to her side. He picks up the prayer book. MIGNON and BOB embrace and freeze.)

STORYTELLER

Scott Henry Zylstra died September 19th at Whidbey General. He is survived by . . .

(MUSIC in. STORYTELLER sees that BOB is holding the prayer book.)

See. I didn't know that Bob picked that book up. It was never lost.

(BOB and MIGNON freeze. SCOTT stands and faces the audience. HE is nine years old. But there is also the sense that HE is fully adult and in a state of agelessness. His testimony is perfect and joyous. As he speaks, STORYTELLER eventually speaks with him. Other actors come out and listen until end of play.)

SCOTT

Hello. My name is Scott Zylstra. I am nine years old. I accepted Jesus as a very young boy at the age of three. I have called on Jesus for help and just to talk with him. I am very glad to share the gospel with you. God has supplied me with my needs. When I grow up, I want to be a missionary doctor so I can help people who are sick and also tell them about God. Now that I have accepted Jesus I will have eternal life in heaven with him.

(MUSIC ends.)

END OF PLAY

APPENDIX OF DUTCH PHRASES AND PRONUNCIATIONS

ENGLISH: "Mignon, do you want coffee?"

DUTCH: "Mignon, wil je koffie?"

PRONUNCIATION: Minyaw'n, will you kawfee?

ENGLISH: "Bonnie...."

PRONUNCIATION: Bawnee....

ENGLISH: "Fred...."

PRONUNCIATION: Frehtt....

ENGLISH: "Bruce...."

PRONUNCIATION: Broosh....

ENGLISH: "You're welcome."

DUTCH: "Tot je dienst."

PRONUNCIATION: Tawt you deenst.

ENGLISH: "You are such precious, precious children."

DUTCH: "Jullie zijn zulke lieve kinderen."

PRONUNCIATION: Youlee zine sulkuh leefuh, leefuh kin-duh-run.

ENGLISH: "My dear, dear Mignon, Jesus loves you. Tell me what's on your heart."

DUTCH: "Mijn lieve, lieve Mignon. Jezus houdt van je. Wat is er toch op je hart?"

PRONUNCIATION: Mun leefuh, leefuh Minyaw'n. Yay-soos howt von how. Waht izzer togg ohp yuh hart?