

OLD BEFORE HIS TIME

by Mark Bellusci

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CHARACTERS

OLD MAN - That's all he needs to be.

JOHNNY - A man in his late twenties or early thirties. He starts the play as a vibrant young man who gradually begins to act like an old man, even though he physically doesn't change at all.

ASHLEY - JOHNNY'S girlfriend, also in her late twenties or thirties.

SCENE :

The express checkout line at a supermarket. OLD MAN is in the process of checking out thirteen items. The items are the kinds of things old people are associated with, including Metamucil, decaf coffee, DentuCreame, Depends, sugarless Jello, oat meal, creamed spinach, etc. A prominent sign states, "Express Lane. 12 items or less." Waiting behind OLD MAN are JOHNNY and ASHLEY, each holding a six pack of beer. They are obviously impatient with the slow moving OLD MAN, who is slowly removing items from his cart, and matching them up with various coupons. JOHNNY and ASHLEY not so silently indicate their displeasure at the slowness of the old man. There are plenty of snickers, snorts and other rude gestures. The old man is oblivious to it all. He continues moving at his slow, methodical pace, After putting down twelve items, he then puts down his thirteenth. JOHNNY counts the items.

JOHNNY

Hey pop, you got thirteen things, there. Can't you read the sign that's, like, two inches from your face?

ASHLEY

(Giggling reproach.) Okay, Johnny, stop already.

JOHNNY

Stop what? We're in a rush, and we got to wait for --

OLD MAN

What's your hurry?

JOHNNY

Unlike you, we got a life, okay?

OLD MAN

Better not rush it. Gone before you know it.

JOHNNY

(Snickering.) Obviously speaking from experience.

OLD MAN

Happens to everyone.

JOHNNY

Ain't gonna happen to me.

OLD MAN

(Laughing.) So you've decided to not get old, son?

JOHNNY

Going out young, in a blaze a glory. And you know where you can stick that "son" stuff. Now either put one of them things back or get the hell off the line.

ASHLEY

Johnny, just--

OLD MAN

Tell you what: I'll pass on this (He pulls out 1 item.)

JOHNNY

Hallelujah.

OLD MAN

(Chuckling.) Going to be fun watching you get old.

JOHNNY

What are you talking about?

OLD MAN

It's happening already -- you just haven't noticed. But from now on, you will. (He giggles as he takes his grocery bag and exits. From offstage we hear a creepy laughter.) Not going to get old, ha ha ha ha.

(Beat. ASHLEY and JOHNNY stare offstage.)

ASHLEY

Let's get to this party before *I* get old.

(They head offstage giggling. Lights down, then up on JOHNNY and ASHLEY in a car. They're looking for a house.)

ASHLEY

Where is it?

JOHNNY

Should be up here on the left.

ASHLEY

Man, a pool party. Remember the last one Jeannie threw?

JOHNNY

What'd we, start drinking around eleven? I was wasted by noon. You bring everything?

ASHLEY

What? We got the beer.

JOHNNY

You brought my swim trunks, right?

ASHLEY

(Giggling.) Never heard you say *swim trunks* before.

JOHNNY

Hmm ... never said it before. Don't know why--

ASHLEY

Swim trunks. Sounds like something my father would say.

(A triangle chimes from offstage.)

JOHNNY

(Alarmed, looking around the car.) What was--Did you hear?-

ASHLEY

(Now following his gaze.) I didn't hear anything.

JOHNNY

I could've sworn-- (Recognizing the house with the party.)
Oh, okay, here it is..

ASHLEY

Man, I could taste that beer now.

JOHNNY

(Going through the motions of parallel parking.) Floating
in the pool, Bud in hand. What ... (Even though he's going
in reverse, he never turns around to see. Instead, he just
looks in the rear view mirror.) could ... (He is having
trouble parking, and therefore must move the car forward
and back to retry the parallel park several times.) be more
...(He continues trying, but never actually looks behind.
Instead, he relies on that rear view mirror.) fun?

ASHLEY

What are you doing?

JOHNNY

Parking. (Still trying to park, with little success.)

ASHLEY

You've got to turn and look -- You *used to turn around*.

JOHNNY

(Realization.) Yeah ... I used to ...

(A triangle chimes from offstage.)

JOHNNY

There! Did you hear that?

ASHLEY

Hear what?

JOHNNY

That bell.

ASHLEY

Man, you're starting to scare me. Let's just park the car and get drunk, all right?

JOHNNY

But--

(Lights down. End of scene.)

(Scene: JOHNNY and ASHLEY walk on-stage, holding beers, checking out the rest of the party. JOHNNY is wearing high black knee socks and sandals, and shirt is tucked into is bathing, which is pulled up around his chest. As they're looking around, ASHLEY sees for the first time JOHNNY'S black socks and sandals. She stops, dumbfounded, and stares at JOHNNY. After a moment of walking, JOHNNY realizes that ASHLEY has stopped. He turns back to her.)

ASHLEY

You have *got* to be kidding me. Those socks?

JOHNNY

Oh. Yeah. Feels like a blister's starting, so I--

ASHLEY

Take them off now, or I'm leaving.

JOHNNY

Geez.

(He removes the socks.)

ASHLEY

And pull those pants down.

JOHNNY

Damn, you usually have a few beers before you get frisky--

ASHLEY

You know what I mean. Why so high?

JOHNNY

I don't know ... all of a sudden I got this urge to have them reach my chest. Maybe I'm starting a new style.

ASHLEY

You mean, the style my pop's been wearing for the last twenty years?

(A triangle chimes from offstage.)

JOHNNY
You don't hear that ... ringing?

ASHLEY
No. I hear ... kids.

JOHNNY
Kids?! What are kids doing at a Drunk Jeannie Bash?
(Offstage triangle.) Where's that goddamned bell?

ASHLEY
What bell?

JOHNNY
(Takes JANEY'S hand and rushes offstage, mumbling.) That's it, we're out of here. Hell is going on?

(Lights down. Lights up on JOHNNY and ASHLEY in a car, driving silently.)

ASHLEY
Look, you're just -- you're a little stressed. I know, let's get a big, sloppy burger and then go home anndddd ...

(Lights down, then up on JOHNNY and ASHLEY at the restaurant, giving their order to a waiter.)

ASHLEY
I'lllll taaaaaake ... a bacon cheeseburger -- with blue cheese and fried onions, fries and onion rings and aaaa ... chocolate shake.

JOHNNY
(Waiter looks to JOHNNY.) The chicken noodle soup, but not too hot! ... This turkey burger, it's lean? (Waiter nods his head.) All right -- but it better be lean.

WAITER
Fries with that?

JOHNNY

What are you trying to poison me with trans fatty acids?
Give me boiled potatoes -- no butter! And salad -- no
dressing! (Waiter leaves, but JOHNNY calls after him.)
And if that turkey burger's not lean, I'm sending it back!

ASHLEY

What the *hell* are you ordering?

JOHNNY

I ... I don't know. All of a sudden, I started thinking
about my colon. (Offstage triangle.)

JOHNNY

There! Did you hear that bell?

ASHLEY

(Sighing.) No. Probably a kitchen "pick-up" bell.

(JOHNNY shudders.)

ASHLEY

What's the matter now?

JOHNNY

There's a draft in here.

ASHLEY

What? I don't feel--

JOHNNY

It's right on my back!

ASHLEY

It's warm in--

JOHNNY

Waiter! WAITER!!

ASHLEY

Shhh.

WAITER

Is there a problem, sir?

JOHNNY

There's a draft in here.

WAITER

The air conditioning is not on--

JOHNNY

It's right on my back!

WAITER

Well, sir, if you'd like, we keep a shawl in the coat room.

JOHNNY

Get it.

(WAITER rolls his eyes and leaves.)

ASHLEY

You're going to wear a shawl?

JOHNNY

Just over my shoulders.

WAITER

(Returns with shawl and chicken noodle soup.) Here you go.

(WAITER wraps it around JOHNNY's shoulders. JOHNNY hunches over the soup and slurps it loudly.)

JOHNNY

Mmmm, it's clearing my sinuses.

(ASHLEY stares in horror. Triangle chimes offstage.)

JOHNNY

Did you hear?--

ASHLEY

No!

(Lights down. They stay down for the next scene. We hear sexual groans from JOHNNY and ASHLEY. We also hear a squeaking from the bed they're in. The squeaking is occurring fast at first, then slower, then it stops. There is a pause.)

JOHNNY

What the hell?--

ASHLEY

It's okay, hon. You're a little tired, a little stressed and--

JOHNNY

That never happened before! (Offstage triangle.) Ahhh!

ASHLEY

Look, From what I read in Cosmo, it's nothing to worry about. Happens to everyone.

JOHNNY

(The start of a revelation.) "Happens to everyone."

ASHLEY

Yeah, they did a survey, and--

JOHNNY

"Happens to everyone." That's what that old man said--

ASHLEY

What old man?--

JOHNNY

From the supermarket -- about getting ... old. (A triangle chimes from offstage.) Ahhhh, that bell!

ASHLEY

Oh no.

JOHNNY

It's a spell!

ASHLEY

Johnny--

JOHNNY

That old man. He's turning me--

ASHLEY

There's no such thing as--

JOHNNY

Into him!

ASHLEY

Look, all you need is a good night's rest--

JOHNNY

All I need is to see that old man again. Beg him to take off the curse.

ASHLEY

The old man has nothing to do with--

JOHNNY

I just want to be young again. I just want to be young again. I ... just ... want ... to ...

(Lights down, then up on supermarket. JOHNNY is frantically pacing and searching by the check-out counter. Beat, then OLD MAN appears and begins checking out items. JOHNNY rushes up to him.)

JOHNNY

Hey. I'm sorry. I --

OLD MAN

Had a feeling I might run into you again.

JOHNNY

Please take the curse off!

OLD MAN

The curse?

JOHNNY

The one you put on me yesterday. That made me old.

OLD MAN

I didn't put any--

JOHNNY

Please, sir. I'll never pick on anyone old again, so if you could just reverse--

OLD MAN

Look, sonny. There is no curse. There's just life, and it goes by a lot faster than any of us would like, so--

JOHNNY

But mine's going even faster since you--

OLD MAN

All I did was plant a seed in your head. Made you sensitive to the everyday reminders that you're a little older today than you were yesterday.

JOHNNY

But the bells. There were bells.

OLD MAN

Bells? Sounds like an overactive imagination to me.

JOHNNY

So ... all those things that happened--

OLD MAN

Would've happened anyway. You just wouldn't have noticed them.

JOHNNY

And this is the same me as the day before?

OLD MAN

Just a day older.

JOHNNY

But I don't like this me. I liked the me I was before I met you.

OLD MAN

Sorry, son, you can never go back.

JOHNNY

Damn it!

OLD MAN

Guess you haven't got time beat after all.

(OLD MAN goes back to checking out his items.
JOHNNY watches despondently, then:)

JOHNNY

Hey hey hey. What are you doing?

OLD MAN

What?

JOHNNY

There's a coupon for that. You could get forty cents off.

(The stage goes dark except for a spotlight on the OLD MAN. He laughs maliciously as he pulls out a triangle and rings it. This time the spot stays up as the OLD MAN continues his evil laugh. The spot fades to black as JOHNNY delivers the next line over the OLD MAN's laughing.)

JOHNNY

Oh my God, I'm old. I'M OLD. But I'm too young to be old.
Why me? Why me? No.. no... nooooooooooooo.

(END)