

A FREE PASS

**a 10-minute play
by Tom Baum**

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Characters

WAYLON. 60s.

TARA. 30s-40s.

The play is set in a hotel bar.

(WAYLON and TARA are sitting at a hotel bar, several seats away from each other, nursing drinks. They eye each other briefly.)

WAYLON: This is gonna sound a little weird...mind if I ask if you're waiting for anybody?

TARA: Why would you be asking?

WAYLON: Well...if a person is drinking alone at a bar...either that person is content to drink alone...or they're expecting somebody else to show up.

TARA: Which one are you?

WAYLON: I'm neither.

TARA: Well there you are.

WAYLON: Look, sorry, I'm getting off on the wrong foot here. My name's Waylon.

TARA: Nice to meet you, Waylon.

WAYLON: And you?

TARA: You can call me Tara.

WAYLON: So...are you staying at this hotel?

TARA: I've stayed here, yes.

WAYLON: Overnight.

TARA: Not necessarily.

WAYLON: *(pleased)* I see.

TARA: See what?

WAYLON: OK...I was in here about a month ago? I don't think you saw me...but I saw you...with an older man....Not an old man like me, but older than you... Hawaiian shirt...thinning hair... combed to the side...Is this ringing any bells?...And I thought to myself, they can't possibly be...what's the word I want?...a thing. And so I came back...hoping you'd be here again.

TARA: Well. That's very flattering, Waylon.

WAYLON: I mean I'm aware of the parameters. I'm a licensed contractor, I've built hotels, I know something about what makes them tick. People think they don't want...professionals...on the premises. Just the opposite, in my experience.

TARA: Mine too. I guess we've both been around the block.

WAYLON: Well no. I'm sure I can't hold a candle to you.

TARA: Unless that's your idea of a good time.

WAYLON: What? Oh. No. I'm a man of simple tastes.

TARA: A lot of men take their rings off first.

WAYLON: No. The ring is...part of the deal.

TARA: Your wife is staying here?

WAYLON: No! You're talking about a...Jesus no. Tell the truth, she advised me to take it off.

TARA: Advised you?

WAYLON: Just for the night. OK, how can I put this...my wife and I haven't been intimate for some time.

TARA: What's the problem, do you think?

WAYLON: I can still function, if that's your question. Otherwise I wouldn't be bothering you. All right, since we're talking, my wife hasn't been well for some time.

TARA: I'm sorry to hear that.

WAYLON: And so here's the thing. Before she...before Sally became seriously ill...while she was still...when she had all her faculties...She said she would understand...if it was temporary...a one-time thing.

TARA: A free pass.

WAYLON: That's the exact way she phrased it, yes. A free pass.

TARA: She knows you've come here. To this hotel.

WAYLON: No. She doesn't know a thing. See...my wife...some years ago...earlier than most people... Sally lost touch...with the person she used to be. That's when we stopped being intimate. She...well, basically, she turned into a child. Happens to folks every day, all over the world, but when it happens to you...when you've stopped having relations... with the person you love...that you loved the first time you laid eyes on her...You kinda forget what the fuss was all about.

TARA: But you're here now.

WAYLON: I'm here now. Bending your ear.

TARA: You'll go back home...you won't tell her where you've been.

WAYLON: Even though it gave her pleasure...to give me permission. She knew I...she knew I'd never do it on my own. Never did, never would.

TARA: And what about Sally?

WAYLON: What about her? Oh. I get what you're asking. No, if there's anything I'm sure of, it's that Sally and I were faithful to each other. From day one. From before day one. You might not think it to look at me now, but I was a very scrawny kid...no prize, that's for sure. And Sally, I guess you could say she was an ugly duckling. Orphans of the teenage storm, that was Sally and me. But compared to what she blossomed into later? I wouldn't have stood a chance. See this jacket I'm wearing? These socks, this shirt, these slacks? She bought them for me. Everything in my closet, down to the laces on my shoes. I'd head for the changing room, she'd toss things over the door.

TARA: She has good taste.

WAYLON: She had very good taste. We'd have clients in for dinner, she set a beautiful table. I was a clumsy host and she was so personable to everyone. All my buddies were crazy about her. They told me as much...afterwards...when it was safe...safe to say things like that.

(WAYLON falls silent, holding back emotion.)

TARA: Waylon? You OK?

(Pause.)

WAYLON: I used to lie in bed at night... knowing one of us could go like that...I'd listen for sounds from her side of the bed...and if I couldn't hear anything, or see her breathing, I'd reach over in the dark and touch her...(reaches out to touch TARA, withdraws his hand)...as softly as I could...just to see if she'd stir...and then...one night... nothing....no response. I turned on the light and there she was. Pale. Frozen stiff. Eyes wide open. I shook her and shook her. Nothing happened.

TARA: She was gone.

WAYLON: So the upshot was, I couldn't stand living in our house anymore, I had to sell it, sell everything, every stick of furniture, every knickknack, I couldn't bear to look at anything.

TARA: But you held onto the pass.

WAYLON: I did. While I considered moving to another state. One where assisted suicide is legal.

TARA: Waylon.

WAYLON: See, I wanted her to die. She was so angry with me all the time. Tantrums every night. I pictured what life was going to be without her, and I liked what I saw. Sally, she didn't want that herself, any more than a three-year-old child wants to die. But I wanted it. And I thought about it. The different ways, you know what I'm saying? Thinking how I could get away with it.

TARA: But you didn't...you weren't responsible.

WAYLON: I came so close. Makes my heart sink every time I think about it. If I can make it beyond the one-year anniversary, I might be all right. Right now it doesn't feel that way.

TARA: This is your way of bringing her back.

WAYLON: I wasn't thinking of that, but yes. You even look like her, come to think of it. A lot like her. In this light. Could be my eyes playing tricks on me again.

TARA: You were burned out, Waylon. That's all that was going on.

WAYLON: Thank you. Thank you for saying that. You're really something else, you know? I wish half my employees had the people skills you do. You can add it to the bill.

TARA: Not gonna happen.

WAYLON: Prior engagement?

TARA: Yeah, exactly.

WAYLON: Still...I'd like to pay you for your time.

TARA: Keep your money, Waylon. The hotel pays me well.

WAYLON: The hotel pays you? Just for sitting at the bar?

TARA: Not for just sitting. Bye, hon. That was my cue.

(Piano music has started up.)

WAYLON: What do you mean, your cue?

TARA: You're free to stay and listen.

WAYLON: Aw Jesus. So you're not—

TARA: No I'm not.

WAYLON: So wait...the dude in the Hawaiian shirt? *(peers)* Is that him? Wow, that's him. He's your piano player. I feel worse than ever now.

TARA: Waylon, listen to me. You had something most people never have. Love at first sight that lasted a lifetime. One of you had to go first, doesn't mean you have to follow her, no matter what you thought of doing. So no more suicide games, all right? No one should end their life alone. That's what she meant by a free pass. You need to find somebody new and stop feeling sorry for yourself.

WAYLON: I hear you.

TARA: You better hear me.

WAYLON: I buy my own clothes now.

TARA: There's an upside to everything.

(TARA starts out.)

WAYLON: Tara?

TARA: What, hon?

WAYLON: I wouldn't mind if our paths crossed again.

TARA: I'm here all week.

(TARA exits. WAYLON downs his drink. Piano music starts up.
Then:)

TARA: (off) Hi. Thank y'all for being here. This is for a friend of mine.

(A piano intro. We hear TARA begin to sing Frank Loesser's "I'll Know When My Love Comes Along." The lights fade on WAYLON. END OF PLAY.)