

Revival

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

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CHARACTERS:

SCOTT HARVEY: Mid-forties. A formerly famous playwright. Strong, good-looking, unpretentious.

DEKE PALMER: Early forties. A famous playwright and Scott's former partner. Handsome; acts a bit younger than his age.

MARVIN HORTON: Sixties. Theatrical agent but without the typical baggage.

PLACE and TIME:

The home of Scott Harvey in a small town in central Florida. July, present day.

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Revival

Scene 1

The setting is the living area of the home of SCOTT HARVEY. His home is modest but well-kept with comfortable furniture and bookshelves. There is a small dining area with a table and chairs, a couch and coffee table center, and an easy chair and a standing lamp. On the back wall is a sliding patio door that opens out to a garden area with the sky behind. Off to the side is a writing desk and chair with a computer atop and the usual accessories including desk lamp and a land-line office-style phone. There are exits to the front door, a kitchen, and the other rooms in the house.

At rise it is a morning in July. SCOTT is standing by the desk, talking on the phone. He is wearing shorts and a T-shirt. He is strong, good-looking, but unpretentious about both his appearance and his lot in life, which, at the present time, is as a formerly famous playwright who now makes a living doing something else.

SCOTT: No, it's not doing anything weird, I just have a feeling that something's off. ... None of the idiot lights have come on, either. Just... Yeah, exactly. After all these years, you kinda know something's up even if... Right. Okay, perfect. I'll get it in first thing tomorrow. Thank you so much, Jay. Love to Cheryl. Bye.

(SCOTT hangs up the phone, picks up a large coffee mug. He goes to the desk, sits, shuffles some papers, boots up the computer.)

SCOTT: Okay, Rivendell Charter Academy, let's see what we can do about getting you some dough.

(SCOTT begins working on the computer. The phone rings, and he looks at the caller ID screen.)

SCOTT: Unknown caller. Yeah, okay. *(Pushes the speakerphone button.)* Homicide, 27th Precinct, Detective Briscoe.

VOICE: *(non-American accent):* Hulloo...?

SCOTT: Yeah, this is Detective Lennie Briscoe, 27th Precinct homicide. How can I help you?

VOICE: I'm calling about your Medicare coverage –

SCOTT: Oh, you want the Fraud division. I'll transfer you. *(Disconnects the call.)* Asshole scammers.

(SCOTT goes back to work. Phone rings again. SCOTT snarls and punches the speakerphone button.)

SCOTT: What?

VOICE: I want to report a murder.

SCOTT: What...?

VOICE: Yeah, the murder of an attempt to do an impression of Jerry Orbach.

(Beat.)

SCOTT: Who the hell is this?

VOICE: It's me. Marv.

SCOTT: Marv. Jesus, where are you?

VOICE: I'm standing in your goddam driveway.

(SCOTT hangs his head in resignation, disconnects the phone call, gets up and goes off. We hear a door open.)

SCOTT *(off)*: Get your ass in here.

(SCOTT re-enters followed by MARVIN HORTON. Marvin is in his sixties, wearing casual vacation clothes – shorts and a Jimmy Buffett-style shirt and sandals – but he's in decent shape and can pull off the look.)

SCOTT: You want some coffee? I still got some.

MARVIN: No, thanks, I'm good. *(Looks around.)* Hey, looks nice. How many square feet?

SCOTT: Sixteen hundred under the air conditioning. Another four hundred if you count the enclosed patio. Two bedrooms – three if you count the junk room – and two baths. I'm renting it from a couple over in Lakeland.

(MARVIN goes over to the patio doors and looks out.)

MARVIN: Very nice. Cozy.

SCOTT: Thanks. So, to what do I owe the, uh, pleasure, I guess?

MARVIN: Adele and I brought the grandkids down to see Disney World and the rest.

SCOTT: In July? It's hot as hell and humid as a wet towel.

MARVIN: They're out of school and the prices are reasonable... for Disney.

SCOTT: Grandkids? Melissa's?

MARVIN: Charley's.

SCOTT: Seriously?

MARVIN: Seriously.

SCOTT: Wow. I always thought Charley played on my team.

MARVIN: So did we. Swim team, wrestling, high school musicals, clothes horse. Adele and I were ready for the coming-out-over-Thanksgiving-dinner ritual –

SCOTT (*interjecting*): Oh yeah.

MARVIN (*cont'd*): He's married to a nice girl named Nancy. They've got twin teenagers, John and Tim.

SCOTT: Damn, tempus really does fugit.

MARVIN: He's a CPA and lives in New Rochelle.

SCOTT: Like father, sorta like son. (*Beat.*) Wait; you have a grandson named Tim Horton?

MARVIN (*chuckling*): I know. He's named after Nancy's older brother. When they go skiing in Canada, he has to explain he's no relation to the hockey player or the fast-food joint. He doesn't even like their food. (*Beat.*) So, how the hell are you?

SCOTT (*shrug*): Good. Busy with grants applications and stuff.

MARVIN: I thought you'd be nestled in some hammock swatting horseflies.

SCOTT: Applications are year-round now. I don't even have a hammock.

MARVIN: Done any writing?

SCOTT: Yeah, supporting documentation, budget spreadsheets, and filling out management organization questionnaires.

MARVIN: I mean the kind that has me sending you a royalty check every quarter.

(*Beat.*)

SCOTT (*evenly*): I haven't, and you would know it if I did.

MARVIN: Because you love me that much.

SCOTT: Because our contract requires it.

MARVIN: Oh, yeah, that too. Speaking of checks, I have yours for the second quarter. I had Sheila get it ready so I could hand it to you in person. It's in the car; I'll go get it.

SCOTT: How'd I do?

MARVIN: I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

SCOTT: Great. I just made an appointment with my mechanic to get some work done on the Mustang.

MARVIN: You're still driving that piece of –

SCOTT: Hey, watch it. I bought it off my mom.

MARVIN: Okay, okay, I'll be right back. Don't go away.

SCOTT: Where would I go?

MARVIN: I dunno; you have a funny way of disappearing on me.

(MARVIN exits.)

SCOTT *(to himself)*: Yeah, funny.

(SCOTT goes to look off to see MARVIN. A moment, then his shoulders sag and he shakes his head.)

SCOTT: Oh, fuck me to tears.

(SCOTT turns to leave, but before he can exit, DEKE PALMER enters. He is very handsome, dressed in a polo shirt and jeans, and holding a small manila envelope. MARVIN follows him, but hangs back, perhaps bracing himself.)

DEKE: Hello.

(Beat, then SCOTT turns around to face him.)

SCOTT: Hello.

DEKE: Good to see you.

SCOTT: Been a while.

DEKE: Yeah. How've you been?

SCOTT: Okay. Busy. Work, y'know. You?

DEKE: Good. Busy too, y'know.

SCOTT: Uh huh.

DEKE: You look good.

SCOTT: So do you.

(Excruciating beat, then DEKE remembers he's holding the envelope.)

DEKE: Uh... Marv wanted me to give this to you. Your quarterly payment.

SCOTT: Yeah, he said.

(DEKE holds it out. SCOTT takes it, perhaps fingering the flap to open it.)

DEKE: He already gave me mine. It's ... uh ... pretty good.

SCOTT: I'm sure it is.

DEKE: No, I mean yours.

SCOTT: Yeah, well, I think yours has a couple more zeros than mine.

MARVIN: He gets his separately. This is for your split for you two. Together. For the –

SCOTT: Oh. Got it.

DEKE: Go ahead, take a look.

(A beat, then SCOTT opens the envelope and pulls out the check. He looks at it, nods, then puts the check back in the envelope and drops it on the desk. A thin smile.)

SCOTT: Nice. Thank you, Marv.

MARVIN: Hey, you two did all the work. I just –

SCOTT *(interrupting)*: So, Deke, I'm pretty sure you're not my new FedEx guy.

DEKE: Well, I was in Orlando to talk to Disney about doing some work for them. They're branching out now to do some more edgy projects –

SCOTT: Disney? Edgy? C'mon.

MARVIN: They contacted me and wanted to know if Deke would be interested in writing screenplays, and since I was coming down anyway with the kids, he tagged along.

DEKE: Just to talk.

SCOTT *(chuckle)*: Just to talk.

DEKE: Yeah, just to talk. *(Beat.)* Hey, would it be okay if I gave you a hug?

SCOTT: Yeah, sure.

(They hug, MARVIN looking on approvingly. At first it is a generic bro-hug, but it lingers, DEKE holding SCOTT close, perhaps rocking them gently as it verges on romantic.)

DEKE *(whispering)*: I've missed you.

SCOTT *(hesitant)*: Um... Yeah, me too.

(They hold this hug, then DEKE moves to kiss SCOTT on the mouth, but SCOTT turns his head, and it lands on his cheek. DEKE gets it and breaks away gently. They separate, both looking a bit unsettled.)

SCOTT: Close, but –

DEKE: Yeah, I get it.

(DEKE looks around the room, starts to explore, trying to get his mind off the hug and near-kiss.)

DEKE: Nice place. *(At the bookshelves.)* Got all our plays and that anthology of shorts we did for those off-Broadway gay play festivals where we first....

MARVIN: Where I first met you two.

DEKE: Right. And you were not interested in that first play we did there, *Vampires in Speedos*.

MARVIN: Aw –

DEKE: Hey, I admit it, it was crap. Wasn't it, Scott?

SCOTT (*shrugging*): If you say so.

DEKE: No, it really sucked. (*Beat.*) Get it: vampire joke.

MARVIN: It was cute. But I knew you guys could do better.

DEKE: I hate cute.

SCOTT: Uh...

DEKE: I mean in describing a play. (*To SCOTT.*) Where are they? The Tony nominations and the Obie? The posters? The finalist certificate from Columbia?

SCOTT: In the junk room.

DEKE: Wow.

SCOTT: Okay, so why don't you guys tell me why you're really here? My coffee's getting cold, and this school needs me to upload their application today.

(*MARVIN and DEKE look at each other. DEKE shrugs.*)

DEKE: Tell him.

MARVIN: *Sheridan Square.*

SCOTT: The intersection in Greenwich Village or the shopping center south of Fort Lauderdale?

MARVIN: C'mon.

DEKE: Knock it off, Scott.

SCOTT: I'm sorry?

DEKE: You know what he's talking about.

SCOTT: I do.

DEKE: So.

SCOTT: So, what?

MARVIN: There's this kid – well, he's not really a kid, he's twenty-eight or something – but he's putting together a bunch of investors to bring it back.

SCOTT (*snort*): What, in some barn out in the middle of fucking nowhere?

DEKE: No. Bucks County.

SCOTT: Like I said, the middle of fucking nowhere.

MARVIN: This guy is the real deal. He's got the money, he knows his stuff, he's getting the right people –

SCOTT (*to DEKE*): Where's Ozzie?

DEKE: He's in Paraguay. With his wife and kids. And his mother.

SCOTT: So, he won't be directing it.

MARVIN: No. A whole new team. Director, designers, publicity, everything and everyone new. Look, if we can get it going, I can almost guarantee that you'll be back on –

SCOTT: Don't say it.

MARVIN: Don't say what?

SCOTT: The B-word.

(*Beat as MARVIN gapes.*)

DEKE: He means Broadway.

SCOTT: I said don't say it.

MARVIN: What the fuck is wrong with Broadway? *Sheridan Square* won a Tony.

SCOTT: For best scenic design. We didn't get nominated for anything else. That's like getting the Pinecone award at camp.

MARVIN: Pinecone?

SCOTT: Participation award. You basically show up at camp, you get a prize. Might as well be the prize in a Happy Meal.

MARVIN: Hey, Ken did a fantastic job on that set. It looked like something out of Edward Hopper, right down to the streetlights and dogshit on the curb.

SCOTT: Yeah, it was so good nobody paid attention to the play. And speaking of dogshit...

DEKE (*exploding*): Oh, Jesus Fucking Christ.

SCOTT (*exploding right back*): Julie was not supposed to die. (*Beat while he inhales deeply.*) I went off to adjudicate a playwriting conference in Kansas during previews, thinking everything was great: the script was locked down, the actors knew their lines, the tickets were selling. When I got back, you'd rewritten the ending, changing it from an uplifting story about a bunch of kids in the Village trying to save their favorite bar from the wrecking ball to a tearjerker about the leader dying in the arms of her trans girlfriend. What. The. Fuck.

DEKE: I told you I made some changes while you were gone.

SCOTT: I got a WhatsApp at two a.m. saying “Made a few tweaks to the end I know you’ll like them. CYA.” So, what was that supposed to mean, CYA: “See ya,” or “Cover Your Ass”?

DEKE: I sent you the changes.

SCOTT: In a picture so small I’d need a fucking electron microscope to read them. Jesus, Deke, you knew we’re supposed to talk these things over together and then make the changes if we have to. That’s how we’d always worked. You knew that.

DEKE: We didn’t have time to wait for you to get back. The preview critics were coming that night. I had to or –

SCOTT (*interrupting*): There’s a marvelous new invention. It’s called the (*air quotes*) “telephone.” You don’t even have to dial it. Just say, “Siri, call Scott.” (*Beat.*) You had to or...? Or what?

DEKE: Ozzie was insisting on the change. He said that the ending wasn’t working; that it needed closure. And Myrna agreed with him. She –

SCOTT: Myrna? The actor playing Julie? Since when do actors have a say in anything except to learn the lines and hit their marks? They’re fucking props with feet.

DEKE: They both came to me. Together. They wanted an ending where she dies and –

SCOTT: What does she die from? Falling off a Ferris wheel? Hit by a crosstown bus?

DEKE: I don’t know; one of those diseases you see on TV, for all I know.

SCOTT: Oh, so she ODs on Metamucil gummies.

DEKE: It doesn’t matter. She dies. That rallies everyone to take the final stand as the walls cave in. We did an improv with it, everyone loved it, I wrote it in. It worked. You saw it.

SCOTT: I did. I hated it.

MARVIN: The audience loved it. The preview reviews were ecstatic. “Palmer and Harvey Do Their Magic Again in Sheridan Square.” Even the note in the Times was complimentary, which meant it sold out in the first week.

SCOTT: You still haven’t told me the answer.

DEKE: To what?

SCOTT: To the “or what.” What would have happened if you hadn’t changed the ending? No more blowjobs from Ozzie? Or was he gonna walk and take Myrna with him? You know he was doing her, too. He’s very open-minded, not to mention horny.

(*Beat.*)

DEKE: It was just that one time. (*Beat, then to MARVIN.*) Help me out here, willya?

MARVIN: I'm your agent, not your rabbi. And as much as I love seeing you two working together again like two cats in a burlap sack, we need to nail down this offer from this kid or he's gonna go on New Play Exchange and find someone desperate enough to give him the rights to their new play for a song and a bag of chips. You guys work it out. I told him I'd let him know by the end of the week.

SCOTT: Today's Thursday. Nothing like waiting until the last minute, Marv.

MARVIN: Give me a fucking break in life, Scott. This isn't like waltzing into BrandSmart and buying a washing machine. You both have to sign off on it.

SCOTT: Why? We never did before.

MARVIN: Because this kid has a very good lawyer who also knows that you two –

DEKE (*cutting him off*): Let him know we're working out the details. Buy us some time. (*To SCOTT.*) That okay with you?

SCOTT (*mildly exasperated but caving a little*): Fine. I still need to finish up this application. The two hundred kids at Rivendell Charter are more important than some play right now.

DEKE: Rivendell? What are they, hobbits?

SCOTT: Hobbits live in the Shire. The elves are from Rivendell. If you had read the books instead of just watching the movies, you'd know.

MARVIN: Okay, you two go ahead and have your nerd-gasm. I'm gonna call this kid. (*Looks at cell phone.*) Jesus, barely getting a signal.

SCOTT: Go outside.

MARVIN (*exiting*): All right. Be right back.

(*SCOTT and DEKE are alone. They look at each other. Long pause. Finally...*)

DEKE: Thank you.

SCOTT: Well, if all I have to do is sign off on some contract and never think about it again, then....

DEKE: I get it. But....

SCOTT: But...?

DEKE: I have a lot of notes, ideas, thoughts about how to really make it better this time.

SCOTT: Notes from when?

DEKE: From when you took off after opening night. Not answering your phone, not returning texts, ghosting me. I was this close to filing a missing persons report until Trevor called and told me to come get my overnight bag out of your apartment. Those notes.

SCOTT (*scoff*): Still good with the guilt trips.

DEKE: It's what I do because it usually works. (*Approaches him.*) That and nibbling on your earlobe.

(*SCOTT bursts out laughing, which deflates DEKE.*)

SCOTT: Oh, nice try. C'mon. You and Marv go back to Mouse World and leave me in peace, please.

DEKE: No, I'm gonna go back to the hotel and get my laptop. You finish off with your elves or whatever. We have work to do.

SCOTT: Deke –

DEKE (*heading for the front door*) See ya. (*Imitating the Terminator.*) I'll be back.

(*DEKE is gone, the door closing behind him with a thud.*)

SCOTT: I hate that movie.

SCOTT goes back to his desk, sits, begins to shuffle through the papers, trying to look like he's working, perhaps muttering to himself. After a moment, he stops, puts down the papers, gets up, looks off towards the door, then goes to the sliding door and opens it. He steps out onto the deck, carefully and gently closing the door behind him. He stands there for a moment, then he lets out a full-throated rafter-shaking, welkin-ringing primal scream.

End of Scene 1.