

Forgive Us Our Debts

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

Contact:

Philip Middleton Williams

16600 SW 77th Avenue

Palmetto Bay, FL 33157

pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com

305-807-9339

CHARACTERS:

LUKE: Mid-forties. A touch cynical, but not deeply.

JARED: Early twenties. Nice kid, well-groomed.

PLACE and TIME:

The back patio of Luke's home in suburban Miami, early summer. Present day.

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The setting is the back patio of LUKE's suburban home in Miami. There are a couple of patio chairs with footstools and a small table between them, and small cooler. There is a plant stand with a large philodendron, its runners and leaves draped over the side and spreading out, and an orchid or two. There are garden implements around such as a watering can, a trowel, a bag of potting soil, and a garden hose with a sprayer nozzle attached. The hose runs off the stage (NOTE: it does not have to be connected to a water source).

At rise, it is early afternoon. LUKE is puttering around the philodendron, pulling off dead leaves and such. He is in his mid-forties or so, in decent shape, wearing jeans, sneakers, a t-shirt, and a straw sunhat. He is humming to himself and talking to the plant as he works.

LUKE: Okay, you're looking good. Summer's on the way and so you'll get a lot of rain. That should make you happy, and ... yeah, yeah, be patient; I'll feed you.

(Picks up watering can and pours a little from the contents into the planter.)

LUKE *(cont'd)*: You are like a cat: feed you once and never hear the end of it. *(Chuckles.)* Okay, talking to plants. A sure sign of losing my shit.

(LUKE goes back to his gardening, humming to himself for a moment.)

JARED *(off in the distance)*: Hello?

(LUKE's shoulders sag as if to say "Now what?" He goes back to work.)

JARED *(off but closer)*: Uh, hello?

LUKE *(resigned, but loud enough to be heard)*: Back here. In the back. On the patio.

(JARED enters. He is a young man in his early twenties, if that. He is neatly dressed in polo shirt and slacks, loafers with socks, carrying a clipboard. He looks around for a moment, then smiles tentatively at LUKE.)

JARED: Good afternoon, sir.

LUKE: What can I do for you?

JARED *(glancing at the clipboard)*: Are you Luke O'Connor?

LUKE: Yes, I am. If you're taking a poll, I'm registered to vote but I have no opinions worth sharing. If you're selling bug spray, I have a contract with Orkin. I'm not wild about my cable TV service, but I'm not about to put in a dish. If you're selling religion, I'm not interested. *(Smirks.)* That about cover it?

JARED: Uh, no sir, I'm not doing any of that.

LUKE: Oh, okay. You don't look like a Mormon, anyway.

JARED: Uh.... Okay. (*Clears throat.*) Sir, my name is Jared Dunn, and it's my duty to inform you...

(*Looks down at the clipboard and reads from it.*)

JARED (*reading*): This is an attempt to collect a debt, and any information obtained will be used for that purpose.

(*JARED looks up at LUKE with trepidation, trying hard not to look like he's scared, but ready to flee if need be. Beat as LUKE looks back at him, then he laughs. At first JARED is taken aback by this response, but as LUKE continues to laugh, he smiles tentatively and relaxes a little.*)

LUKE: Okay, who put you up to this? Was it Bob? Ken? No, wait, I'll bet it was Thom; he's really good with the practical jokes. How much is he paying you?

JARED: No, sir, I'm with Consolidated Collections and –

LUKE: I'll bet it was Ken and you're one of his acting students at the university, right?

JARED: No, sir.

(*JARED pulls out a small wallet, flips it open to show the ID. LUKE looks at it.*)

LUKE: Wow, that looks real. Good job, whoever ran that off on Microsoft Publisher or whatever.

JARED: No, sir, it's real. I am here to, um, attempt to collect a debt.

(*LUKE looks at him and finally nods.*)

LUKE: Okay, then. But you're misinformed. I paid off all my credit cards, the mortgage is up to date, and my car is ten years old. So...?

(*Beat as LUKE looks at JARED expectantly.*)

JARED: Oh, no sir, I'm sorry, it's not you. (*Looks at the clipboard again.*) It's for Frank... Uh, Waylon-check –

LUKE (*interrupting*): It's Walenczak. Pronounced "wall 'n' zack." Like the tape recorder company, but no relation.

JARED: Tape recorder?

LUKE: Oh, never mind. Frank Walenczak.

JARED: Yessir.

LUKE: Well, he's not here.

JARED: Do you know to get in touch with him?

LUKE (*mild laugh*): Yeah. With a Ouija¹ board.

JARED: I'm sorry...?

LUKE: Yeah, me too.

JARED: A what?

LUKE: A Ouija board. You know, one of those things people use during a séance to talk to spirits. (*Beat.*) Google it. O-U-I-J-A.

JARED: So, you mean he's –

LUKE: Yeah. Croaked. Checked out. Took a dirt nap. Shuffled off this mortal coil. Boarded the Stygian Express. Bought the farm. Ate the big one. Departed. Deceased. Gave up the ghost. Moved into the Lord's nearer presence. Crossed the Rainbow Bridge. And let's not forget my favorite: "He's dead, Jim."

JARED: It's Jared.

LUKE: No, I know; it's from... Never mind.

(*Beat.*)

JARED: Um... Do you have any ... um ... proof?

LUKE: Proof?

JARED: Yeah, like... Like a certificate of death. Something...

(*JARED looks up and sees LUKE staring at him and stops. Long, deathly silence as LUKE tries to control himself. Finally, he lets out a deep breath.*)

LUKE (*sotto voce*): You'll have to ask his family.

JARED: Oh. They're in –

LUKE: Colorado.

JARED: Yes. Longmont.

LUKE: So, ask them. Why... why... what made you think you'd find him here? With me?

JARED: The records show that you and he once owned a house together.

LUKE: That was years ago when we lived in New Mexico. He sold it after we broke up. I thought he took my name off it. So, you tracked me all the way here?

JARED: I work for the local office. They've been –

¹ Pronounced "Wee-Gee."

LUKE (*the light comes on*): Wait, you said, what, Constellation Credit or something?

JARED: Consolidated Collections.

LUKE: Oh, shit, you're the ones who've been sending Frank all those letters.

JARED: Yessir, they've been trying to get in touch with him. And by phone, too.

LUKE: The phone calls go automatically to voice mail. And I thought Consolidated Collections had something to do with his model car collection.

JARED: Model cars?

LUKE: Yeah, he had about five hundred, everything from Hot Wheels to those big ones you put together with glue and plastic. His sister put an ad on eBay and never heard the end of it. But that was two years ago. I threw the letters out. Those were from you guys?

JARED: Yessir. Look, if we have the wrong information, I'll just –

LUKE: Jared... What kind of name is that?

JARED: What do you mean?

LUKE: What's it from? When I was your age, I didn't know anyone named Jared. Now all of a sudden, boys are named Jared and Ethan and Brandon and Hunter. No offense, but what's wrong with a name like John or Jim or Pete? One syllable.

JARED: Jared's actually from the bible. The Book of Genesis. He was the father of Enoch, and lived 962 years.

LUKE (*impressed*): Wow. Most of us are lucky to make it to fifty. Well, Jared, father of Enoch, live long and prosper. Even with this job.

JARED: Thank you, sir. About the debt...

LUKE: So, you tracked me down through Frank's old mortgage that he paid off in New Mexico all the way to Miami.

JARED: They're good at that. They know pretty much everything about you: where you live, where you work, how much money you make, who you're married to, who you're divorced from, how many kids you have; all sorts of stuff.

LUKE: So how come it doesn't say that Frank Walenczak died three years ago?

JARED: I don't know.

LUKE: Well, to be fair, the family didn't make a fuss about it. No funeral, no obituary, none of that weeping and wailing that makes everyone feel better. He'd have hated that, anyway. I didn't even know he was sick until a week or so before he... (*Beat. Deep breath.*) Anyway, we each of us – his sisters and some of his friends – got some of his ashes and...

JARED (*at a loss for words*): I...

The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com.