

Betty and the Burglar

A short play by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BETTY: White, mid 60s, suffers from post traumatic stress disorder and early stages of Alzheimer.

'MICHAEL': African American, early 20s, a burglar whom Betty mistakenly believes to be her son.

SETTINGS

Betty's living room and kitchen, crowded with last century objects and furniture.

TIME

The present

BETTY AND THE BURGLAR

Rain sound. A soft light reveals the ominous stage, which is split between a small kitchen and a living room crowded with antique furniture. BETTY is fast asleep on a rocking chair.

(A masked BURGLAR enters through a window. He threads lightly stuffing his pockets and backpack with items, including a makeup kit from atop a dresser. He tries to open a chest but it's locked.)

(Betty snores. Only then the Burglar notices her. He pulls out a gun but quickly puts it away as she continues to asleep. He attempts to take the necklace Betty wears around her neck.)

(Lights flash. Thunder sound.)

BETTY

Michael.

(The Burglar takes a step back and brings a hand to his gun.)

BETTY

I'm so sorry Michael. Please. Will you be staying the night? Like, like in the old days? It's pouring cats and dogs outside. Tea! Would like some tea? Yes, yes. Peppermint, your favorite. Hm?

BURGLAR

Ok..?

BETTY

Splendid!

(Betty claps and rushes towards the kitchen.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Don't go anywhere.

BURGLAR

No, no. I'm staying right here.

BETTY

Ok.

(Betty hums joyfully as she prepares tea. Meanwhile in the living room the Burglar notices a key chain on the couch. He takes the keys and approaches the chest.)

BURGLAR

How long on that tea, grandma?

(Betty freezes. Her humming stops. The Burglar is suspicious.)

BETTY

Please don't call me that. I know I wasn't, I... Should have been a better mom. But I was never like her, was I? I guess I was... Please forgive me Michael. No, no. Just please stay. If not for me, stay for her. What's her... Charlene. Stay for Charlene.

(The Burglar decides to play along.)

'MICHAEL'

Maybe I'll stay, maybe I won't. Why should I?

BETTY

Really? Well, because you have your whole life ahead of you. You remember your grandfather, right? He went to war and died. For what? For nothing. They sent me back a medal.

(Betty approaches 'Michael'.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

What is this on your face?

(Betty reaches for 'Michael's mask. He allows her to remove it. She can clearly see his features.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

If you want to marry Charlene, it's ok. Please?

(She hugs him.)

(Lights flash. Thunder sound.)

(Betty fidgets. The loud noise of the thunder causes a reaction in her. She's about to fall. 'Michael' holds her.)

(Betty seems to come to her senses. She stares at 'Michael' and slaps him across the face.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Get out of my house.

(He's at a loss.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

I put a roof over your head. I took care of you, you sucked on these tits until they sagged you ungrateful little brat. Get out!

'MICHAEL'

Shhh! Stop, stop.

(She tries to hit him.)

BETTY

Go! Go with her. Go be with that nigger.

(He restrains her and puts his hand over her mouth.)

'MICHAEL'

Shut up.

(Silence, except for the rain sound.)

'MICHAEL' (CONT'D)

If you make a sound I'm gonna punch you in the face then I'm gonna tie you up and gag you.

(The land line phone rings in the living room.)

('Michael' and Betty stay silent.
The voice machine picks it up.)

CRAIG (OFF)

Mrs. Livingston, is everything ok? C'mon, pick it up, I know you're in there. Do you need me to come down and see you?

'MICHAEL'

Ok, go answer. Don't you dare tell him that I'm here.

BETTY

You won't be living here for long.

('Michael' releases Betty. He
'escorts' her to the phone.)

BETTY

(into phone)

Who is this?

CRAIG (OFF)

It's Craig, from upstairs? Just checking on you, is everything ok?

BETTY

(into phone)

Everything is ok. Don't call here again.

CRAIG (OFF)

Is... Michael there with you?

(Betty glares at 'Michael'.)

BETTY

(into phone)

No. I kicked him out of my house.

CRAIG (OFF)

Ok. Just, please keep it down, ok? It's a little late in the night-

(Betty hangs up the phone.)

BETTY

You know the way out.

'MICHAEL'

Listen, mom... Is everything ok? Because a minute ago you were asking me to stay, now you want me to go.

BETTY

You remind me more and more of your father. Everything is just a joke to you, isn't it? Look at you. You're twenty years old and what are you doing with your life?

'MICHAEL'

I don't know. Why don't you tell me.

BETTY

You had a talent. My own son was the best student I've ever had. I couldn't believe it. You were a genius. But you threw everything away. And why? Because you wanted to be an engineer, and then you wanted to be a lawyer, and now you want to marry this waitress who can give you nothing but trouble.

'MICHAEL'

Interesting. Are you saying that you actually care about me?

BETTY

You could do so much better. I've seen her type before, she wants you to feel pity for her and she wants you to save her. She sees the potential in you and she's right, you are so much better than she could ever have hoped for. But she can't be saved, Michael. You think you're gonna lift her up, but it's she who's gonna bring you down. And when she's done with you, she's gonna take everything you have with her.

'MICHAEL'

Ok, ok. If this means that much to you, I won't see her again. Ok, mom? I promise. I won't see her again. Do I get to stay now? I'm serious.

BETTY

Don't play with me Michael.

'MICHAEL'

Do you care about me, mom?

BETTY

Of course, more than anything in the world.

'MICHAEL'

Then, can I stay here with you?

BETTY

Well, yes. You can stay as long as you want. Until you get on your own feet, I mean, but, but, that can wait. I am so... I'm so happy Michael.

'MICHAEL'

I'm happy too mom.

(Betty leans against 'Michael's chest. He takes the opportunity to remove her necklace in an awkward interaction.)

BETTY

Everything's going to be ok. I believe in you. If you want to be a lawyer, it's ok, or a businessman, whatever you want. Just don't take too long to make up your mind.

(Betty gently caresses 'Michael's face and he appreciates it.)

('Michael' sighs.)

'MICHAEL'

It's getting late mom, perhaps we should take you to bed.

BETTY

Early bird gets the worm.

(The teapot is boiling in the kitchen.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

What's that noise? Are you making tea?

'MICHAEL'

Oh, Yes. Peppermint. My favorite.

BETTY

Your favorite.

'MICHAEL'

Would you like some? Wait here, I'll get it.

('Michael' goes to the kitchen and stuffs his backpack with tea cups. Betty follows behind him.)

BETTY

Do you need help?

(She notices the gun resting on his waist.)

BETTY

Michael.

(He's looking for the knob to turn off the heat. The pitching noise of the kettle boiling gets louder.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Why do you have a gun on your waist?

(He turns abruptly and knocks over the kettle.)

(Betty fidgets. The loud noise of the kettle falling causes a reaction in her.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Oh my god, you stupid child. Did you burn yourself? What were you thinking, I told you not to use the stove if you don't know how to use it! Go get some towels.

('Michael' doesn't know what to do. He opens a drawer.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Look at this mess... Micky, what are you doing? That's not where we keep the towels. Where do we keep the towels Micky?

'MICHAEL'

Shh. Calm down.

BETTY

(screaming)

Don't you 'shh' me Michael Livingston Green. Where do we keep the towels? Where do we keep the towels?

(Betty is going crazy.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

I can't do this shit anymore. I can't do this. Fuck. Fuck shit, fuck my life. I won't sell my jewelry though. No. I would rather starve.

(Michael wants to get out of there. He quickly goes around the living room collecting a few more items.)

(Betty recomposes herself.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

I'm ok. I'm ok... Ok. Did you pack your lunch?

('Michael' brings his overly packed backpack to his shoulder.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Good. Here, let me give you some money. Where's my purse... Ok, c'mon. You're gonna be late for school. Have you seen my guitar?

(Betty goes to the dresser and looks at her image in the mirror.)

BETTY

Oh my god.

(Betty fixes her hair. She looks for her makeup kit but can't find it. She opens a drawer.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Micky, did you take my makeup kit? Micky, where did you put it? It's not funny. Let me see your pockets.

(With his pockets full of contents including jewelry, a gun and the makeup kit as well, 'Michael' decides to confess to avoid being searched.)

'MICHAEL'

Here. I took it. It was just a joke.

(Betty pulls his ear.)

'MICHAEL'

Ouch.

BETTY

It's not funny little man. You have to stop acting like a brat. Or do you want to end up like your father? Do you want to end up like your father?

'MICHAEL'

No, never.

BETTY

Go get my guitar right now!

('Michael' finds a guitar that has only two strings. Betty applies make up on her face. She also does a couple ballet twirls and practices singing.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

(singing)

Oooooohhh, aaaaaahhhh La, la, la la, la, laaaaaa.

(He hands her the guitar. She sings to the mirror and plays the guitar which is completely out of tune and has only two strings.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Good morning children. It's a beautiful morning to play.
Who's ready to play? 'Meeeeee!'

(Betty turns to 'Michael'. He's
staring at her.)

BETTY

C'mon Micky. You haven't been practicing have you? Here, play
something.

(She hands him the guitar.)

BETTY

C'mon now, you got to practice. What good is talent for if
you don't practice?

('Michael' shyly plays on the two
strings and Betty applauds
excitedly.

(He stops playing.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

'MICHAEL'

You're gonna be ok mom.

BETTY

Why are you just standing there? C'mon, you're gonna be late
for school.

'MICHAEL'

Because it is two in the morning.

(Betty looks around. She doesn't
understand.)

'MICHAEL' (CONT'D)

You woke me up in the middle of the night. You just got a
little confused. You're tired. C'mon, let me help you to bed.
Here...

BETTY

No. You're going to be late for school.

(`Michael' takes her to the couch.)

`MICHAEL' (CONT'D)

I like your pajamas.

(Betty notices she's wearing
pajamas.)

`MICHAEL' (CONT'D)

C'mon. Early bird gets the worm.

BETTY

Micky, I should be the one putting you to bed.

`MICHAEL'

That's nice mom.

(Betty lays on the couch.)

BETTY

I'm sorry I have been a little stressed lately. Since that
worthless father of yours left-

`MICHAEL'

I can be a lot of work for only one person.

BETTY

No, it's not your fault. You're only a child- I mean, a
teenager. Almost a man grown. Do you remember when I used to
tell you stories? How did it go... Once upon a time there was
a boy named 'Touch'.

(Betty touches `Michael's nose.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

And he had the most special gift, he could feel people's
feelings and all he had to do was touch them. But Touch lived
in a dark place, and the people around him were angry and
evil. Whenever Touch touched them he would feel these
horrible feelings. In time he was becoming just like them,
full of envy and hatred. He started to hurt people and not
care for them anymore. All that Touch wanted to do was to be
alone. But even when he was alone he felt sad. He needed to
get out of there. So one day he escaped. The boy named Touch
went out in the world on his own and vowed to never return to
that dark place that had once been his home.

But what he didn't realize was that he had the power to change people, but to do that he needed people to change him first. And so he went... In his journey he...

(Betty can't remember the story.
'Michael' remembers a story of his
own.)

'MICHAEL'

Up in the sky there was a little star, and she emanated the most beautiful light in the whole universe. Around the little star the other stars were all bigger and stronger, but none of them were as beautiful as the little star-

BETTY

I don't remember this story. Who told you this?

'MICHAEL'

My... You did, a long time ago.

BETTY

Hum.

'MICHAEL'

Yes... So, when the magical travelers of the universe came to visit, it was the little star they all wanted to see. She had always been their favorite. The big stars got jealous of the little star and came up with a plan. They decided to put all their energy to shine so bright that the little star became almost invisible. And when the magical travelers of the universe came by, the big stars were the only ones they could find. The little star was left alone. Nobody paid her any attention. She tried really hard to radiate as bright as the big stars did, but she ended up losing all her energy. She felt weak, her beautiful light started to fade, and one day she disappeared.

(Betty has fallen asleep.)

'MICHAEL' (CONT'D)

...Where the little star once stood there was emptiness, and the big stars had all the attention to themselves. But without the little star, less and less visitor came to see them. The big stars couldn't shine so bright all the time and started to get weaker. The big stars felt guilt and shame and finally grief for the little star they made disappear.

And out of their grief a black hole was born in the emptiness. And all the light from the big stars was sucked into that hole. The big stars became smaller and smaller, the hole became bigger and bigger. And one by one they all disappeared. The last dying light was finally sucked into the hole. But at this point the hole got so big that it burst! Giving birth to millions of new stars all of them just as beautiful as the little star had once been.

('Michael' stands and approaches the chest. He uses Betty's keys to open it. Inside he finds two army medals.)

(Lights flash. Sound of thunder.)

('Michael' turns to look at Betty, who's still asleep.)

('Michael' finds a jewelry box. He opens it and takes the jewelry on his hands. He looks at his image in the mirror.)

'MICHAEL' (CONT'D)

I'm sorry mom. I'm sorry.

('Michael' stuffs his jacket with the jewelry.)

(Betty is awake. She reaches under the couch and retrieves a shotgun.)

BETTY

Hands up.

('Michael' puts his hands up. The jewelry is caught in between his fingers.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Don't move. Old Betty's gonna open up some holes in you if you move. Toss me that necklace, slowly.

(He complies.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Your jacket, take it off and throw it over here.

(`Michael' tosses the jacket. Betty checks the pockets and finds more jewelry.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

These have been in my family for two hundred years, you little prick.

`MICHAEL'

I'm sorry.

BETTY

How old are you?

`MICHAEL'

I'm twenty one.

BETTY

Youth is really lost isn't it? Does your mother know you're here?

`MICHAEL'

No. I'm out into the world on my own.

BETTY

Hum? You don't know? How about the same place where you left her?

`MICHAEL'

What about Michael?

BETTY

Give me one good reason for me not to shoot you dead right here and now.

`MICHAEL'

He's dead isn't he?

BETTY

Yes, he's dead. That's what the medal means.

`MICHAEL'

I'm sorry he died. It's not your fault.

BETTY

Nice try. But my son has been dead for twenty years and I'm over him. So I ask you again... Give me one good reason for me not to shoot you to pieces.

'MICHAEL'

My mom told me a story once, about a boy named 'Touch'. I'm like the boy in the story. I ran away. I abandoned my family and vowed to never go back. But I want to go back. Please, just put the gun down and let me go home.

(Betty lowers her gun.)

BETTY

Who told you this story?

'MICHAEL'

My mom.

BETTY

No. You're lying. Tell me the truth.

'MICHAEL'

You did. You told me this story.

BETTY

No.

'MICHAEL'

Yes. You thought I was your son.

(Betty points the gun at him again.)

'MICHAEL' (CONT'D)

You're a good mom you know? Much better than my own. But I must be leaving now, she probably wishes for me to come back every single day.

('Michael' slowly walks away.)

BETTY

Stop.

('Michael' doesn't stop.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Stop!

(Betty aims at the ceiling and fires! 'Michael' ducks on the ground.)

(The loud noise of the gunshot causes a reaction in Betty. She doesn't know where she is. She climbs out of the couch and ducks behind it.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

They are here. The enemy is here.

(A war song plays.)

BETTY

Michael! Where are you?

('Michael' is on the other side pointing his gun at Betty's hideout.)

BETTY

I'm going to save you Michael!

(Betty comes out of hiding. They both points their guns at each other.)

(Lights out. Gun shots are fired.)

(The rain stops to fall.)

(A star light lamp turns on. The entire stage is full of stars. A spotlight reveals Betty on the ground. She has been shot.)

BETTY

So many beautiful stars...

(The phone rings. There are loud
knocks on the door. CRAIG breaks
in.)

(Lights up.)

(Craig finds the Burglar laying
dead on the floor. Craig knells
next to Betty. She looks deep into
his eyes.)

BETTY (CONT'D)

Michael. You're back.

(BLACKOUT)

(END PLAY)