

The Acceptance

A drama

By David Anthony Wright

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Robert is a retired foreign correspondent and journalist who has returned to his hometown for the first time in fifty years. Mary is retired from the restaurant business, having gone blind late in life. It's Robert's first day at the upscale retirement center and it's Mary's last, as her son is taking her to live with him in Florida the next day. Over cups of spiked lemonade on the sun-drenched patio they come to the realization that they were high school sweethearts, on their way to matrimony. Through a series of flashbacks, some touching and some searing, they examine the decisions they made, and how those decisions affected the arc of their lives. It is a story of love, loss, longing, and life.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The play was produced in a staged reading, January 17-18, 2026, by The Storefront Theater of Waxhaw, NC. The Producer was Judy Simpson Cook. It was directed by James K Flynn. The cast of the original production, in order of their appearance, included:

Robert Evans Atkinson	Jerry Colbert
Mary Mae Morris	Paula Baldwin
Young Mary	Erin Gambrel
Young Robert.....	Winston Sims
Off-Stage Voices	Mr. Flynn

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 3 w, and offstage voices)

ROBERT EVANS ATKINSON: 70s; retired journalist; new resident of the Laurel Grove Retirement Center; reserved; walks with cane; has returned to his hometown for the first time in fifty years.

MARY MAE MORRIS: 70s; retired from restaurant; long-time resident of retirement center; mentally sharp and witty; wheelchair bound.

YOUNG ROBERT: Ages from high school junior to young middle age; big man on campus in high school; college bound with ambitions of becoming a journalist.

YOUNG MARY: Ages from high school freshman to young middle age; attractive young woman; shy and reserved; product of a broken home; wants a stable family life after high school.

CAREGIVER (Female)

OFFSTAGE VOICES (OSV)

TIME

Late Spring 2022, with numerous flashbacks to Robert and Mary in high school and early adulthood.

PLACE

A medium-sized North Carolina town. The patio of the Laurel Grove Retirement and Assisted Living Center and various places in the lives of Robert and Mary, suggested.

SET

The action of the play is diagonally split between the USR patio and a DSL playing area, delineated only by lighting shifts. The patio is a pleasant area, with a small table, and wicker loveseat and chair, spaced to accommodate wheelchairs. A bar USC is a filled ice chest, a pitcher of lemonade, and red plastic cups. A simple wooden fence, with climbing rose bushes and various shrubs, establishes the patio structure. Behind the fence, small trees provide the final touches. The DSL area is open, allowing for placement of stools and folding chairs as necessary.

All patio scenes are in daytime exterior lights. Other locations will vary.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

The usual "page a minute" dictum gives way to the need for pacing, given the reflective nature of much of the dialogue. A measured silence can say as much as half a page of dialogue. A skillful director will make sure the moments "hold," and the play doesn't "drag."

Mary is blind, yet there are numerous occasions when the stage directions call for her to "look" at Robert or the action between young Mary and young Robert. The actor can direct their focus to the general area.

Keeping in mind copyright laws, producers must exercise discretion in the choice of music. The following are examples only:

- Opening and Curtain Call: "September Song," Dave Brubeck;
instrumental only
- Dance: "Stranger on the Shore," Aker Bilk
- Car Radio: "There's A Moon Out Tonight," The Capris
- Frat Party: "Louie, Louie," The Kingsmen

The play is set in North Carolina, with ACT I entirely there. Young Robert's acceptance to UNC provides the launching point for the play's conflict. However, to possibly make it more relevant to audiences in other parts of the country, with a college and other references that may be more familiar, the playwright hereby authorizes "localization" of the script with prior approval. The time setting for the flashback scenes in the 1960s is crucial and is not negotiable.

ACT I

(AT RISE: The patio of the Laurel Grove Retirement and Assisted Living Center. No one is on stage. MUSIC: A soft, romantic instrumental, up full until caregiver exits, then fades. LIGHTS reduce to 25%, then BLACKOUT. LIGHTS back up to exterior daytime.

ROBERT EVANS ATKINSON, 70s, enters. He carries a newspaper under his arm. He carries a cane and limps slightly. He looks around, as if discovering the place for the first time, which he is. His demeanor is that of quiet resignation. He crosses to the loveseat, sits, and opens his newspaper.

MARY MAE MORRIS, 70s, enters, being wheeled by a CAREGIVER. The caregiver jingles her keys to a rhythm known only to her.

Robert, seeing her enter, stands. He waits, somewhat awkwardly, as the caregiver places the wheelchair a few feet away from him. Mary looks up at the caregiver, smiles, and pats her hand. Satisfied that Mary is comfortable, the caregiver exits, her keys jingling. Robert, expecting some acknowledgement of his courtesy, finally shrugs, sits, and resumes reading his newspaper. Meanwhile, Mary has raised her face to the sun. After a moment, she speaks, still looking upward.)

MARY: Feels good, doesn't it?

ROBERT: *(Lowers his newspaper.)* Pardon?

MARY: The sun. Feels good on my face.

ROBERT: Uh, yes. It's... very nice.

(ROBERT raises the paper and, after turning several pages, resumes reading. A moment.)

MARY: Anything interesting?

ROBERT: What's that?

MARY: Anything interesting? In the newspaper?

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ROBERT: Not really. The Democrats are calling the Republicans liars. The Republicans are calling the Democrats crooks. Things are pretty much normal I would say. *(HE goes back to reading.)*

(A moment.)

MARY: Isn't that always the way it is? Of course, I've always voted straight Democrat.

ROBERT: Um huh...

MARY: Never voted for the GOP. That's what my grandma taught me. Said she got that from the Bible, King James Version.

ROBERT: *(Lowers his paper.)* How's that?

MARY: Grandma said we should only vote for Democrats because the Bible says, "beware publicans and other sinners."

ROBERT: I see. *(Tries to resume reading.)*

MARY: How 'bout you?

ROBERT: *(With an air of mild irritation, HE lowers the newspaper.)* What about me?

MARY: Democrat or Republican?

ROBERT: Neither.

MARY: Independent?

ROBERT: No, ma'am. No political affiliation.

MARY: Really? How come?

ROBERT: In my line of work, you needed to be impartial. Or at least look like you were. *(Opens his paper and tries to read.)*

(A moment.)

MARY: No politics in the workplace, right?

ROBERT: That's right.

MARY: That's a stupid rule.

(ROBERT lowers his paper. He is losing patience.)

End of Freeview

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