

STRING OF LIGHTS

By Terry Earp

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STORY OF THE PLAY

This is the story of two displaced people; Esther, an escapee from a nursing home, and Nathan, a young runaway who is fresh to the streets. Esther breaks into an apartment and feeds Nathan a meal he will never forget. Together they create memories that will take Esther into eternity and Nathan back home. About 30 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 w, 1 f)

ESTHER PINSKY: An elderly woman.

NATHAN: A young boy about twelve. *(Although written for a boy, the role can be played by a girl.)*

SCENES

An alley.

A studio apartment.

TIME

The present. Late afternoon in winter.

SETTING

The setting for Scene 1 is an alley with a large garbage can. Scene 2 takes place in a studio apartment. It is simply furnished with the exception of a large number of photographs of people.

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SCENE 1

(AT RISE: NATHAN is rummaging through a garbage can for food. HE occasionally finds something and takes a bite. ESTHER, an elderly woman holding two grocery bags, is watching him.)

ESTHER: Dining out?

(Startled, NATHAN jumps and makes a sound which in turn startles ESTHER causing her to drop groceries.)

NATHAN: Geez, lady! Do you always go around sneaking up on people?

ESTHER: Honey, at my age I don't sneak ... I only squeak. I'm surprised you didn't hear me. Guess it's hard to hear things when your head's caught up in garbage.

NATHAN: I dropped some money in here.

ESTHER: Really? Well, while you're at it, see if you can find my American Express card in there.

NATHAN: Leave me alone.

ESTHER: You're new around here.

NATHAN: What makes you think that?

ESTHER: Your choice of garbage cans. There's a much better restaurant down the street.

NATHAN: I'm not eating this junk. I'm getting my money out.

ESTHER: *(Kicking it.)* That sure is a strange looking automatic teller machine. *(Picking up groceries.)* How about some help with these groceries since you're the one who scared me and made me spill them?

NATHAN: I'm the one who scared you?

ESTHER: You're real jumpy for a kid. Who's after you?

NATHAN: No one's after me.

(NATHAN picks up cans of food though it's been a long while since he had any. He tries to stick a package in his jacket and ESTHER sees him.)

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ESTHER: You don't need to steal food from me, son. If you'll help me carry these bags home, I'll fix you a nice dinner.

NATHAN: Thanks lady, but ... I've got plans.

ESTHER: Don't worry; I'm not going to turn you in.

NATHAN: I bet.

ESTHER: No, I mean it. I won't turn you in, if you won't turn me in.

NATHAN: Turn you in? What did you do?

ESTHER: I escaped. Busted out. Flew the coop.

NATHAN: From jail?

ESTHER: Worse. I was in a nursing home.

NATHAN: Nursing home? Are you sick?

ESTHER: Only if you consider old age a disease.

NATHAN: You look fine to me.

ESTHER: I am fine, very fine. But there's only one thing that keeps me from feeling great.

NATHAN: What's that?

ESTHER: Someone to have dinner with me. How about it?

NATHAN: (*Suspiciously.*) I don't know. Why would you want to feed me?

ESTHER: Because I don't want to eat alone tonight. Besides it sounds like your stomach is 6.1 on the Richter scale.

NATHAN: But ... you're a stranger.

ESTHER: True, and it's smart of you to be suspicious. I don't blame you one bit for being scared. I could be dangerous.

NATHAN: Yeah, well maybe I could be the one who's dangerous.

ESTHER: That's true. Are you planning to rob me and beat me up?

NATHAN: Of course not.

ESTHER: Have you posed for any of those "most wanted" pictures down at the post office?

NATHAN: No, I'm definitely not on any "most wanted" list.

ESTHER: Well, then I think we can both breathe easier. But if you don't want to join me for dinner, I understand.

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(Starts to take her bag from NATHAN. He looks her up and down, looks inside the grocery bag he's holding and then looks at the garbage can.)

ESTHER: Lesson number one. Take what you need when it's offered.

NATHAN: This sack does seem kind of heavy for you to be carrying around, lady.

ESTHER: Yes, it is, just a bit. If you want to help me, I'll be happy to feed you up a meal you won't soon forget. What do you say?

NATHAN: I say ... okay. Let's go, lady.

ESTHER: Young man, do me a favor.

NATHAN: What's that, lady?

ESTHER: Don't call me lady. It makes me nervous.

NATHAN: Anything you say ... ma'am. What should I call you?

ESTHER: Esther, Esther Pinsky. And, what's your name, young man?

(Pause.)

NATHAN: Just call me ... Jack.

ESTHER: Very well, Jack. Let's get a move on it. I'm hungry.

NATHAN: Me too.

ESTHER: Lesson number two, Jack. If you're going to be dining ala carte, try reading the restaurant reviews. They come out on Wednesdays.

(NATHAN and ESTHER walk offstage together carrying groceries. BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene 1

SCENE 2

(ESTHER and NATHAN are walking in the door of a small apartment. It's a combination living room and kitchen and it is furnished comfortably. There are many photographs scattered throughout.)

ESTHER: Thank you so much for the help, Jack.

NATHAN: You're welcome, ma'am. Where did you learn to pick locks like that?

ESTHER: It was one of my unscheduled activities at the nursing home. I used to go into people's rooms and look at their things.

NATHAN: Why?

ESTHER: To see what made them tick.

NATHAN: Why didn't you just ask them?

ESTHER: Because most of them can't remember their lives.

NATHAN: Whose apartment is this?

ESTHER: I don't know. I saw a lady with a suitcase leave here yesterday. So ... here we are.

NATHAN: *(Worried.)* What if she comes back?

ESTHER: Don't worry; she had a very large suitcase.

NATHAN: Where should I put these groceries?

ESTHER: On the counter.

(NATHAN puts them on the counter as ESTHER takes off her coat.)

ESTHER: *(Cont'd.)* Take off your coat and stay a while.

NATHAN: *(Removing his coat and laying it down.)* I hope she doesn't come back!

ESTHER: Would you care for some cookies before I start dinner?

NATHAN: Cookies? Yeah, that would be great!

ESTHER: How about some milk to go with them?

(Takes milk carton and looks at it, comparing it to NATHAN's face as she crosses to him with milk in a glass.)

End of Freeview

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