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A Road To Nowhere

A Play in One Act

by

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Cast Of Characters

Sam Kaufman: Sam is in his early forties. He is average in looks and not amiable by nature, except when it suits his needs, at which time he is able to pretend quite effectively with an admirable amount of courtesy and charm.

Burt: Burt appears to be in his late fifties or early sixties. He is soft spoken with a friendly manner that is as genuine as his smile. However, one cannot help but sense an aura of mystery in him.

Pamela: Pamela is in her late thirties. She comes across as hard and course, a no-nonsense type. Quite the opposite of being demure, she does little to hide the agitation that burns within her.

Clarence: Clarence is the quintessential grumpy old man. He is in his late seventies or eighties and dressed in pajamas. Although often what he says may come across as sounding as humorous sarcasm, on the contrary, with Clarence he is always serious about everything he says and does.

Kate: Kate is a fashionably dressed lady in her mid-fifties. Whereas one can draw from her a hint of snobbish demeanor, she sometimes counters this with an occasional genuine display of compassion. But what stands out most, at first, is Kate's attire that appears to be straight out of the early 1940's.

Gary: Only in his late teens or early twenties, Gary is the youngest of the group. He is a street-wise youth with a tough exterior but, who shows signs of being scared on the inside.

Pilot: A male pilot in his late thirties.

The Set

The exterior inner courtyard of a roadside U-shaped motel.

Everything about the motel is drab, dreary, even depressing. In the courtyard there is no swimming pool, no foliage or tables, only three chairs that are placed haphazardly about. The walls of the motel are gray and the doors to the rooms a darker shade of gray. The U stage wall stretches to UCL and UCR with the large entrance to the motel courtyard UC. Beyond the entrance is black space with a L offstage red subdued light that flashes at slow dull intervals (this is the unseen motel sign). From the UCL and UCR corners of this wall the two side walls of the motel stretch diagonally to DL and DR. The stage R wall has three motel room doors evenly spaced (the center door is never used, but the other two open inward). The L upstage corner houses the small office. It is represented with a door that opens inward and a rectangular overhead frame depicting the invisible walls. On this frame is a dimly lit neon sign that reads, VACANCY. Inside this office is a registration desk and a door that opens inward behind it. The office is completely bare, except for a desk bell and a very large telephone book size registration journal. Continuing downstage from the office are two motel room doors (perpendicular to the two across from them). These doors also open inward.

Time

Present Day. Night

SETTING: A motel courtyard.

AT RISE:

(SAM KAUFMAN enters the courtyard and hesitates a moment before entering the office. He is dressed in suit attire, minus jacket, with an open collar dress shirt, loosened tie, and sleeves rolled up. His shoes and dress slacks up to his shins are covered with mud. He appears visibly shaken.)

SAM

(ringing the desk bell)

Hello!? Hello!? Anybody here? Hello!?

(BURT enters the office from the door behind the desk)

SAM (Continued)

Hi... I uh... I just wrecked my car a few hundred yards down the road. It's smashed up pretty bad. I was hoping I can use your phone to call the highway patrol and a tow.

BURT

Would you like a room?

SAM

No. I'd just like to get my car out of that ditch before it starts raining again. My phone is dead. Although I could have sworn I had a full battery before the crash. Must've been unconscious for awhile.

BURT

I don't think you'll find a garage open at this late hour.

SAM

(looks at his watch)

But it's only seven... Damn, even my watch stopped.

BURT

Why don't you take a room. Then I'll phone the highway patrol and call around to see if I can find a garage open with a towing service.

SAM

I suppose I'll have to. At night in this fog my wife wouldn't be able to find this place to pick me up in a million years.

BURT

You are quite right about that.

SAM

I was on my way home to Stockton --

BURT

Stockton, California?

SAM

Uh... Yeah. A client of mine in Placerville suggested I'd avoid a lot of rush hour traffic through Sacramento if I head south on forty-nine and then west on eighty-eight that will take me directly into Stockton. "The scenic route" he says. "Rolling hills and farmland" he says. "Nicer than highway fifty and Interstate five" he says. Yeah, real scenic this turned out to be.

BURT

Not what you expected?

SAM

Oh, there were plenty of rolling hills and twists and turns alright, but then it grew dark, then the clouds opened up. I'm tellin' ya, I've never seen it rain so hard. And then there was that curve in the road.

BURT

And that's when you suffered your accident.

SAM

I guess I was going too fast. Anyway, I didn't think there was anyplace around here I could go to until I saw your motel sign in the distance. I don't even know where in hell I'm at.

BURT

Well it's not hell, that I can assure you. Now you're obviously shaken up over your ordeal, so why don't you just take a room, get some rest, and figure out what you're going to do about your car in the morning. And don't you worry about paying because it's on the house.

SAM

Thanks, but that isn't necessary. I have money...

(searches for his wallet)

Well now, that's funny. I must have left my wallet back in the car. I could have sworn I had it on me.

BURT

You've been through a lot already. Please, let me help out.

SAM
I suppose you're right. I'll call my wife from the room. I assume there's a phone?

BURT
(hands SAM a pen and points to the registration journal)
Just sign here.

SAM
(signing the book)
This is an odd place for a motel, way out here in the middle of nowhere. Get much business?

BURT
You'd be surprised. We do fairly well.
(takes the pen from SAM)
That's all, thank you.

SAM
Just my name?

BURT
That's all we need.
(glances down at the book)
Sam Kaufman.
(closes the book)
Well, Mr. Kaufman, despite the unfortunate circumstances that brought you here, nevertheless, welcome to our motel.

SAM
Yeah, well... thanks. Although this certainly isn't where I expected to end up tonight.

BURT
No one ever does.

SAM
You know, I've always hated driving in weather like that.

BURT
Yes, those roads can be treacherous when it rains. In fact, I had a couple in here last week who experienced a similar fate out on highway 71. What a shame that was. They were so young too.

SAM
Highway 71?

BURT
That's right. It was down in Arkansas, about eight miles outside of Winslow. Now why don't I show you to your room. I'm sure you'll want to rest.

(SAM and BURT exit the office and walk across the courtyard towards SAM's room, DR. PAMELA enters the courtyard from her room, UR, stops and listens to the continuing conversation between BURT and SAM. SAM does not notice her.)

BURT

I think you'll find the room comfortable. It's nothing fancy, but then again that probably doesn't matter to you, just as long as the bed is comfortable.

SAM

Well I honestly don't think I'll be able to get much rest. I'm worried about my car and this rain. I'm afraid if it rains anymore they're going to have a hell of a time getting the damn car out.

(stops and looks down at this feet)

Look at how deep that mud was. Right up to my shins.

(continues walking)

I'm tellin' ya, this hasn't been my day.

BURT

I know what you mean. Everyone here has had one of those days.

(They stop in front of SAM's room.)

SAM

You know, the strangest thing is, it was raining like hell up until I skidded off the road making that curve and sailed off into a ditch hitting head-on this big oak tree,... and then it just stopped. And then there were these patches of fog. Really dense at times. Look,...

(looking towards the audience)

...you can't even see the end of this motel because of the fog.

BURT

As you said, perhaps you suffered a slight concussion. You might have blacked out for minutes or even longer.

SAM

You're probably right. But I feel fine now.

BURT

Well, I'm glad to hear that.

(MORE)

BURT (Continued)

*(without using a key he
opens the door for SAM)*

Now if there's anything more I can do for you Mr. Kaufman, my name's Burt, and I'll be over there in the office. Oh, and don't hesitate ringing the bell if I'm not behind the desk. I'm usually in the back room.

SAM

Thank you, Burt. Good night.

BURT

Good night, Mr. Kaufman.

*(SAM exits into his room.
BURT turns around and spots
PAMELA.)*

BURT

Pamela.

PAMELA

Concussion?

BURT

I haven't seen you for quite some time. Where have you been?

PAMELA

In my room. Where else? What was that crap I heard you telling him about a concussion?

BURT

(continuing to the office)

Don't concern yourself with matters that have nothing to do with you, Pamela. I know what I'm doing.

PAMELA

Do you? He doesn't know, does he?

BURT

(stops and turns around)

I'll take care of my guests the way I see fit.

PAMELA

(laughs)

Your guests?

(SAM exits his room.)

SAM

Excuse me, Burt. I just realized you forgot to give me a key.

PAMELA

Well, go ahead, Burt, give him his key.

BURT

Uh,... Mr. Kaufman, I'd like you to meet Pamela Hughes.

SAM

It's a pleasure. And please, just call me Sam.

PAMELA

How do you like your room, Sam?

SAM

Well, I can't seem to locate the phone.

PAMELA

(to BURT)

I think you should tell him.

BURT

There are no phones in the rooms, Mr. Kaufman.

*(CLARENCE enters the
courtyard from his room
DL.)*

SAM

Well has anybody got a cell phone I can burrow? I really would like to call my wife and let her know that --

BURT

I think it's wonderful that you're married. How many years?

*(PAMELA turns away in
disgust.)*

CLARENCE

Did he say he wanted a *phone*?

PAMELA

That's right, Clarence. Burt hasn't told him yet.

SAM

Told me what?

*(PAMELA and CLARENCE look
to BURT.)*

BURT

Mr. Kaufman,... there's something I should have told you earlier, but because you appeared rather shaken when you arrived, and unaware as to the extent of what you've just been through, I felt it would be better for your sake to delay what it is I'm about to tell you. Now in the past I've dealt with similar cases in the same way and always found it to be quite --

KATE (off stage)

Burt?... Burt?

*(KATE enters the courtyard
from the direction of the
audience)*

Burt, you have got to do something about that Lisa girl. She cries and cries and hardly ever stops. Talk to her again, or move her to another room. Just do *something*.

BURT

Maybe it would be best to move her to another room. Perhaps closer to the office where we can spend more time with one another.

KATE

Then do it *now*. It's been two weeks and she's driving me crazy. I've tried talking with her, but she doesn't respond. It's useless. I don't know how much more of it I can take. I've had my fair share of emotionally disturbed people moving in next to me, but nothing like this --

BURT

Kate! I'll take care of it. You know I do the best I can to make things halfway bearable here. And you know as well as I do that that's a near-impossible task. It'll take time and patience.

SAM

Something that I'm running out of. Listen Burt, you seem like a nice guy, and I do appreciate the fact that you're giving me this room for the night. But something weird is going on here. I think you want to tell me what it is, but I'm not so sure I want to hear it. All of a sudden I've got this eerie feeling... I don't know why... I *do* know it's not because of the accident... So, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll just be on my way.

(starts to leave)

BURT

Mr. Kaufman...

SAM

I'm sorry if I've offended any of you in any way. But I'll just feel a lot better if I go.

(again begins to leave)

PAMELA

Burt...

BURT

Mr. Kaufman...

CLARENCE

He can't leave!

KATE

Doesn't he know?

Mr. Kaufman!

BURT

Hell, I'll tell him.

CLARENCE

Clarence, don't!

BURT

You're dead, Mr. Kaufman.

CLARENCE

(SAM stops.)

PAMELA
(shaking her head)

Clarence...

SAM
(turns around)

What kind of a place are you running here? Huh!?

BURT

I must apologize for Clarence's rather blunt way.

SAM

What kind of a place are you running here!? He tells me I'm dead. She's complaining about some girl who's been throwing a tantrum for the past two weeks --

KATE

Burt, I had no idea.

SAM

What is this?

BURT

Have you ever heard of purgatory, Mr. Kaufman?

(GARY enters the courtyard from the room CL. SAM takes a moment to comprehend what he has been told, looks at all the others, backs away and heads for the exit.)

BURT

I know what you're probably thinking, but you mustn't leave!

(SAM turns around pointing his finger at BURT.)

SAM

You just watch me.

PAMELA

Sam, we're not here to hurt you. Just listen to him, please.

CLARENCE

Awe, let 'em go. He'll be back.

SAM

This isn't real.

BURT

It *is* real.

CLARENCE

I know what you're thinkin'. Who would ever imagine purgatory as looking like a Motel 6. Makes ya kind of wonder what heaven is like.

SAM

This is a joke, isn't it? Just a crazy God dammed sick joke.

CLARENCE

I'll bet it's some big resort hotel. Like the Hyatt Regency or The Ritz.

(GARY chuckles)

KATE

Me and my stupid mouth. I feel as though this is all my fault.

PAMELA

It's not your fault.

CLARENCE

With golfing and tennis courts.

PAMELA

Clarence...

CLARENCE

And cute little angels walkin' around the swimmin' pool wearin' bikinis.

(GARY breaks out laughing)

PAMELA

Damn it, shut up!

CLARENCE

Now you listen here, I don't have to take that from the likes of you!

BURT

Clarence!

(to SAM)

I can't keep you here, Mr. Kaufman. If you choose to return to your car, that's your privilege. But I must warn you, what you will find may be a horrible shock.

SAM

And just what is it you expect me to find?

BURT

Yourself. The body that you left upon passing over into this life.

CLARENCE

It could be pretty ugly.

PAMELA

(to CLARENCE)

Please...

CLARENCE

Well, he did say he was in an accident.

SAM

My God, you're all out of your minds.

(SAM exits. Silence.)

GARY

'Sup with that dude?

BURT

Oh, you know how it is, Gary. I'm afraid it's just another guest who found it hard to believe that his other life is over.

GARY

Well that's nothin' new.

PAMELA

Nothing new. Just another guest. Boy, you guys are something.

GARY

What the fuck? It happens all the time.

BURT

You've only been here a week, Pamela. You'll soon come to realize that situations such as this are quite common.

PAMELA

Do you think he'll be back?

CLARENCE

Of course he'll be back.

PAMELA

You don't know that for sure.

KATE

Some wander the earth forever. Never fully realizing that they're actually dead.

CLARENCE

Well then let him wander. Who gives a damn?

PAMELA

He should have been told when he first arrived.

CLARENCE

It's better this way.

PAMELA

Better for Burt or for that poor guy who has to see for himself his own body hunched over the steering wheel of a car he just walked away from?

KATE

I know that when I first arrived the disbelief and depression that I experienced was overwhelming. The after-life was something I never really thought about, something I wasn't prepared for. But then again, who is?

CLARENCE

I was. I knew I was dyin'. Layin' there on my death bed, I knew for a fact that I'd be ending up in one place or another. Though I sure as hell didn't think it would be a motel.

BURT

Alright everyone. There's no use in us all standing around waiting for him to return. Sometimes they come back, sometimes they don't. So I suggest we all just go back to our rooms and forget about him.

*(The group begins to
disperse, except for PAMELA.)*

PAMELA

Such an easy decision. Just like that, a decision is made as to what we should do and we do it, without hesitation, without... without a bit of *indecision*... *indecision*... I like that word, *indecision*. We're all victims of it when you think about it.

*(Everyone stops and then,
slowly, one by one, turn
around until they are facing
her.)*

PAMELA (Continued)

It almost explains why we're here. An indecision on somebody's part. Are we bad enough to go to hell? Or good enough to go to heaven?... Indecision... But what about the others who are uncertain of their death, and the emotionally disturbed spirits who roam the earth searching... searching for a way of completing something that they left unfinished? Are they victims of indecision also?

KATE

There are a lot of questions that are never answered here. Aside from the never-ending boredom, that's the worst part about purgatory, the unanswered questions.

PAMELA

But maybe if we talk about it, as a group, we can help answer those questions, and the biggest question of all,... why we're here. I'm sure some of you know but many of us don't.

BURT

Those who don't know, Pamela, will eventually learn why. In time... they will learn.

GARY

Yo, lady! A lot of us have been hangin' around here a long time. And when you've been around for so long you just stop asking yourself, why this and why that. It's like you just don't care anymore, you know what I mean? So you sit and wait. You might visit with the others here, or you might even visit the living world, if you can deal with that shit. But, no matter what you do you're always waiting, waiting for that time to come when you leave fuckin' purgatory for someplace better... or worse.

(SAM returns breathing heavily and physically drained of energy. His skin is pale, his eyes showing disbelief and shock.)

SAM

(to BURT)

You... You knew... You knew from the moment I arrived... and you didn't tell me. Why?

(BURT remains silent and bows his head.)

SAM (Continued)

Oh, God!

(SAM drops to his knees, buries his face into his hands and cries. The others continue to stare at SAM.)

(Eventually, KATE is no longer able to helplessly stand by and watch. She walks over to comfort him. BURT raises his head and slowly walks over to SAM until he is standing next to him.)

BURT

Mr. Kaufman, I'm sorry. Why don't I help you to your room where you can be alone?

(BURT attempts to help him up but SAM jerks away. He looks at BURT, then at KATE and the others, and then away from them all before standing. SAM's body trembles as he thinks to himself, trying to make logic out of what is happening. He finally turns to BURT expecting quick and precise answers.)

SAM

Who are you?

BURT

I told you.

SAM

Not your name. I mean, where do you fit in with all of this? Are you one of us?

BURT

I was assigned here. I've been in purgatory longer than anyone at this motel, and will probably continue to be so.

SAM

Why a motel?

BURT

Indeed. Why a motel? Not quite the *Purgatorio* that Dante describe.

CLARENCE

It's because this is what you wanted.

BURT

Clarence, please...

(MORE)

BURT (Continued)

(to Sam)

What he meant was... Purgatory is no particular place like heaven or hell. Spirits of purgatory are literally lost souls who can roam on earth if they choose. Typically at the place where they died.

KATE

But sometimes that can be worse than hell itself,... or so it may seem.

BURT

So they seek a place where they can find refuge. *Refuge*, not happiness.

PAMELA

In fact, practically everyone here will tell you that the never-ending night, the boredom, the horrible uncertainty as to where your ultimate destiny may lie, will make you wonder if this isn't the true hell.

BURT

But, fortunately for some, it isn't.

CLARENCE

He's talking about those who will only have to stay here temporarily.

BURT

Precisely. Nevertheless, this *is* a place where you can wait under the best conditions that *can* be offered. And it's with knowing this that so many spirits come here.

(*points towards the audience*)

Why just look at that. The only reason why you can't see the other end of this motel is because there is no end. It's room, after room, after room.

PAMELA

There are hundreds, if not thousands of us here.

KATE

And as long as they keep coming the size of this place will continue to increase.

BURT

Of course, some spirits don't find this refuge in the image of a motel. They may see it in something different.

GARY

Like you wouldn't expect a dude from hundreds of years ago to find refuge in a motel.

BURT

Exactly. Still, the conditions are always the same. Now when you left your body you found yourself on a road to nowhere. There was nothing you would have liked more than to see a nearby house, or farm,... or motel... where you could find refuge.

SAM

None of this mask any sense.

BURT

Every living thing eventually dies. What sets us apart is where we end up.

SAM

But why purgatory?

BURT

That, Mr. Kaufman, is something only you can answer.

SAM

(to himself in a helpless depression)

I suppose I know why. I suppose I could have been a better person in many ways. Better husband. Better father. Better person to everyone all around. Could have shown more compassion... more understanding... more love...

(grasping his head, crying out in agony)

So much I could have done differently!

(to the others)

I realize my faults. Is there any way that can help me now? I'll change. I know I can change. I swear I'll change!

(PAMELA suddenly looks at her door.)

BURT

There's no going back, Mr. Kaufman. There are no do-overs. You've already lived your life.

(spreading out his arms)

And *this* is the result of how you chose to live it.

(PAMELA's eyes fill with fear.)

SAM

Where will I go from here?

BURT

No one can say for sure.

KATE

Most of us here finally make it to heaven.

CLARENCE

I don't think so.

PAMELA

Oh, God.

*(BURT looks over at PAMELA.
The others continue.)*

KATE

Don't listen to him. I've been here far longer than he has and from what I've seen --

(KATE stops as she too notices PAMELA staring at her door which is now slowly beginning to open. GARY, CLARENCE and SAM also turn towards PAMELA.)

PAMELA

Oh, God no!

(The door opens wider.)

SAM

What's happening?

PAMELA

Please! It's a mistake!

SAM

What's happening!?

(The others turn away. SAM watches in horror as the door opens completely. Her doorway has become a portal into hell. From the billowing reddish fog that emanates from the ingress can faintly be heard the moans and cries of the damned in the foreboding doom. PAMELA is drawn in towards the opening as though it is against her own will. Like being pulled in with a magnet, or reeled in on a line like a helpless fish, the overbearing force draws her in. She is filled with terror.)

PAMELA

No! Another chance! Please no! No!

(Her horrifying screams are heard no more after she disappears into the darkness of hell. The door slams shut. There is a long chilling silence. BURT walks over to SAM who is still gazing at the door.)

BURT

Don't be frightened, Mr. Kaufman. Not all of us share the same fate as Pamela Hughes.

(He puts his hand on SAM's shoulder for reassurance and then enters the office where he exits into the back room. The others also retire to their rooms {Kate exits into the wings from whence she came}. SAM slowly turns away from the door and faces straight ahead. A young male PILOT enters the motel courtyard out of breath. He is wearing a leather aviators jacket. It is torn, as are the rest of his clothes. He rushes over to SAM.)

PILOT

Hey, you gotta help me...

(tugs at SAM's arm)

Hey! I said you gotta help me! My plane crashed a few hundred yards down from here! My wife and friend are badly hurt and I can't get them out!... Are you listening to me!?

(SAM looks at him with a petrified stare.)

PILOT (Continued)

C'mon, we've gotta get 'em out!

(MORE)

PILOT (Continued)

(The PILOT starts for the exit, but stops when he realizes that SAM is not following. Instead, SAM turns away from him looking again straight ahead towards the audience)

Well c'mon, God dammit! What's the matter with you!?

(BLACKOUT)

CURTAIN

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