

MRS. MURPHY'S PORCH

By Wysteria Edwards

www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PENNY, twenty something, narrator, assumes the role of her younger self in her memories, dealing with impending trauma through imaginative play.

HENRY, eight, obsessed with space, best-friend of Penny.

ELAYNE, late thirties, mother of Penny and Amy, trying to cope and looking for answers.

JIM, late thirties, father of Penny and Amy, a man desperately trying to keep his family together.

MRS. MURPHY, early sixties, widow, retired school teacher, a participant in Penny's adventures.

DR. MADISON, early sixties, town physician

AMY, sister of Penny

SETTING

The present and 1986.

SCENE 1

A bare stage lit in blue. News footage is projected onto a screen. It is January 28th, 1986 and the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger. Audio of RONALD REAGAN's speech to the nation.

Ronald Reagan (V.O.)

Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle challenger. WE know we share this pain with all the people in our country. This is truly a national loss...we mourn the seven heroes: Michael Smith, Dick Scobee, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis and Christa McAuliffe. We mourn their loss as a nation together.

The sound of children playing, screaming, etc. School has just been let out for the day. A small boy, HENRY, eight, sits on a bench in a homemade space suit. His head droops as he reflects on his loss. A spotlight illuminates a young girl of twenty, PENNY, on the opposite side of the stage. She glances over at him lovingly and begins to address the audience.

PENNY

Memories are a funny thing. They can cover you like a warm blanket or smother you like an intruder. My eyes were opened in 1986. As a child you cannot see the world as an adult does. It's a time woven together like strings on an ornate tapestry. Interlaced with the magic of my childhood innocence.

She takes out rubber bands and puts her hair in pigtails. During the rest of her monologue she adorns two unmatched socks, Keds tennis shoes, a Smurfs T-shirt over her tank top and a pink tutu, over her shorts.

PENNY (CONT'D)

(Referring to the boy)

That's Henry Sage. My best friend in the whole world. We met at nursery school when he stole my Jello and I socked him in the gut. After that we were inseparable. He was completely sexless to me. Never even realized he was a boy until years later. I just knew that he was my friend.

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PENNY (CONT'D)

He was always willing to go on adventures with me. In second grade he was obsessed with space. President Reagan had given a big push to the space program that year so we got to watch the live launches in the middle of school. My teacher, Mrs Anderson, made sure we were all watching when the Challenger took off...

Beat.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

There's been an explosion! The Challenger has just erupted into flames!

Henry takes off his space helmet and throws it at the ground.

PENNY

Henry took it really hard.

She assumes the role of her younger self. We have entered her memories. Everything is as she remembers it. Sitting next to him, she swings her legs and doesn't speak. She offers him a piece of gum and he shakes his head no.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Let's go get some ice cream.

HENRY

No thanks.

(Beat)

Do you think they'll find any of them?

PENNY

And what?

HENRY

You know.

PENNY

Oh.

(Beat)

I don't know.

HENRY

It was billions of degrees.

PENNY

Yeah.

(Beat)

Probably not.

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HENRY
What should we do now?

PENNY
Let's go spy on the witch.

HENRY
We did that yesterday.

PENNY
But we have to save the princess from her magic spell. We
have to finish!

HENRY
Fine.
(Picking up his helmet.)
But then I want some OREOS.

Blackout.

SCENE 2

Mrs. Murphy's Porch. MRS. DAPHNE MURPHY, a woman in her early sixties, is a retired school teacher. A matriarch of the community. She has been a widow since 1981, is self-sufficient, wise and well-read. She delights in Penny and Henry's adventures, easily playing along. She is seated in a wicker chair on her porch doing hand embroidery. Mozart is playing in the house and drifting through the window. Henry and Penny enter from the opposite side of the stage. Penny is dressed as Peter Pan, and Henry is wearing the tutu from the previous scene and fairy wings. In his hand he carries a small metal bell. Mrs. Murphy smiles as she sees them coming, but she pretends not to notice them. They walk to closer and stop to talk.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Why can't I be Peter Pan?

PENNY

Because your name doesn't start with a P.

HENRY

I feel stupid in this.

PENNY

Who else is going to play Tinker Bell? She...

(Correcting herself)

...HE is Penny Pan's trusted companion and cohort. You are the one who gives me the magical ability to fly.

HENRY

(Relenting)

Fine. What did the witch do this time?

PENNY

She's not a witch today, she's a sorceress.

HENRY

What's that?

PENNY
Stop talking! Use your bell!

He shakes the bell at her.

PENNY (CONT'D)
The Sorceress has the magic ingredients that we need to awaken the sleeping Wendy Bird.

HENRY
Wendy Bird?

She points to the bell, and he rings it again.

PENNY
The Wendy Bird is what Penny Pan calls Wendy Darling, the girl who is in the book...come on, Henry you know the story.

JIM, Penny's father, a man in his mid-thirties enters wiping his hands from working on the car.

PENNY (CONT'D)
We have to defeat our greatest enemy though, before we can reach the island of the Sorceress.

Henry rings the bell to ask "who?"

PENNY (CONT'D)
Why, Captain Hook, of course.

Jim magically transforms into Captain Hook.

JIM
Arr! There you are, Penny Pan! You thought that you'd outsmart me again, eh?

Penny takes a pretend sword from her belt, a turkey-baster.

PENNY
Hook!

JIM
Tis the Sorceress' magic herbs that you seek to disturb the Wendy Bird's sleep. I know you, Penny Pan. You won't get past me!

PENNY

(To Henry)

Fly to the Sorceress, Tinker Bell! I'll be right behind you, after I take care of this codfish.

Henry rings his bell and walks to the porch steps where Mrs. Murphy is watching with delight. She ruffles his hair as he sits down on the steps.

JIM

I shall skin you alive and feed you to the crocodile!

PENNY

The last I knew, that crocodile liked the taste of HAND!

Jim dramatically gasps, remembering the loss of his hand.

JIM

Shall we?

PENNY

Delighted.

They bow to each other and then fight with their sword and turkey-baster. Penny quickly overtakes Jim and pretends to cut him on the side.

Jim does a dramatic/comical death, and she runs over to the porch. Henry shakes the bell in approval.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Good, kind sorceress, please allow us to have a few of your precious herbs for my sleeping Wendy Bird.

MRS. MURPHY

(Assuming her role)

Brave, Penny Pan, you have fought the good fight and won. Please, take these magical herbs to your beautiful, Wendy Bird.

Picking flowers from her garden and handing them to Penny.

HENRY

Thanks, Mrs. Murphy!

Penny hits him in the arm to remind him.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Oops! I mean...

He rings the bell.

MRS. MURPHY

You're welcome, Tinker Bell.

A door appears on stage left. Isolated and tall. Penny and Henry rush up to it. He rings the bell at Penny.

PENNY

No.

(Beat)

We're leaving them outside the door because we could fall asleep too.

ELAYNE enters. She is a thin woman, in her mid-thirties, carrying a picture book. She laughs as she sees them.

ELAYNE

Well, hello there, Peter Pan and Tinker Bell.

PENNY

PENNY Pan, Mom.

ELAYNE

Oh, I see. Well, Tinker Bell's mother just called and is asking for him to fly home for supper. Walk him to the corner, Penny Pan!

PENNY

Okay, come on, Henry.

Jim enters.

JIM

I died again today, but I put up a good fight.

Watching them go.

ELAYNE

I'm worried.

JIM

Don't be. She'll get there.

ELAYNE

It's taking too long. What if...?

JIM

Shh, Laney. She is eight years old and has to do things on her own.

ELAYNE

Things are going to be different, Jim. She runs around in this pretend world where everything is...I'm just so tired.

JIM

Someday we'll be able to sleep again.

ELAYNE

Just not now.

Blackout.

SCENE 3

Penny is in the spotlight again,
just like in the beginning.

PENNY

It's funny how things look bigger as a child. A backyard seems endless, a street continues on forever...your parents seem wise and invincible. There's this covering of protection you feel around you. A tent of ignorance...innocence. It's a time that once it's gone, you can never recapture it. Nostalgia carries us to places filled with memories and longings, only to remind us that we are too wise...too adult to return again. A part of us aches.

(Beat)

A part of us understands. I climb the stairs of an old house, now proportioned to my size, but I cannot find what I am looking for...and then I realize

(Beat)

what I really miss is my childhood.

SCENE 4

Mrs. Murphy is planting bulbs. Henry enters wearing overalls and a striped, polo shirt. He is carrying his sketch book.

HENRY

Hi, Mrs. Murphy.

MRS. MURPHY

Well, Henry! Where is your partner in crime this morning?

HENRY

They went into the city. I've been waiting for her all day.

MRS. MURPHY

Waiting can be tough. Would you like some lemonade? I just made some.

He brightens a little bit at the suggestion. Sitting on the porch steps, he opens his sketch book and retrieves a pencil from his front pocket. Mrs. Murphy re-enters carrying two glasses of lemonade, handing him one. She also places a folded napkin wrapped around a cookie in his lap.

HENRY

Thanks.

MRS. MURPHY

Waiting is always easier when you have good company and treats.

HENRY

I love chocolate chip cookies! How did you know?

MRS. MURPHY

(Teasing)

I'm a sorceress, remember?

HENRY

Oh, yeah. I forgot.

He eats his cookie quickly and drinks his lemonade.

HENRY (CONT'D)

My mom makes really gross cookies.

MRS. MURPHY

Why is that?

HENRY

She ruins them with raisins. Cookies aren't supposed to be good for you.

She laughs at him.

MRS. MURPHY

I don't like raisins either. We have that in common.

HENRY

Mrs. Murphy, you've been around a long time.

MRS. MURPHY

(Teasing)

Since the dinosaurs.

HENRY

Really?!!

MRS. MURPHY

That was a joke, dear. But, yes, I've been around awhile.

HENRY

How old are you?

MRS. MURPHY

You're not supposed to ask a lady her age.

HENRY

But you're not a lady! You're Mrs. Murphy!

MRS. MURPHY

I'm old, honey. I've raised my children and now they are having children of their own.

HENRY

So you've had people you love die before?

MRS. MURPHY

Yes, I have. Mr. Murphy passed away five years ago.

HENRY

That's almost as old as me!

MRS. MURPHY

Almost.

HENRY

Do you miss him?

MRS. MURPHY
Every day. I loved him very much.

HENRY
Those astronauts died.

MRS. MURPHY
Yes, they did, and that teacher too. What a sad thing.

HENRY
Was Mr. Murphy brave like those astronauts?

MRS. MURPHY
I think so.

HENRY
The President said that we shouldn't be "ferth-herthed" about people dying.

MRS. MURPHY
(Correcting him)
Faint hearted.

HENRY
What does that mean?

MRS. MURPHY
To not be afraid. Brave.

HENRY
I think Penny is brave. She doesn't think so.

MRS. MURPHY
I do too.

(Beat)
Sometimes we don't know how brave we are until something hard comes along to test us. Testing is what shows who we really are.

HENRY
Can I have another cookie?

MRS. MURPHY
Of course, dear.

Blackout.

SCENE 5

Penny and Henry emerge both dressed as archeologists. We have entered the world of Ancient Egypt.

PENNY

Come along, Professor. We haven't much time before your mother calls you back to America.

HENRY

What are we searching for this time?

PENNY

The Jewel of the Nile. It is hidden under Cleopatra's throne. But we have to be careful because the evil Pharaoh desperately wants it too. He has been known to maim and kill to get what he wants.

HENRY

Why do things always have to be violent?

PENNY

(Exasperated)

Because it's an adventure.

HENRY

Fine, but NO SNAKES! I hate pretending there are snakes.

PENNY

Quick! Hide behind the sand dune!

They hide behind a bench.

PENNY (CONT'D)

There he is! And he's wearing his evil snake charm. Don't look into his eyes or he will curse you for all time.

Jim appears. He is dressed as a pharaoh.

HENRY

I told you NO SNAKES!

JIM

Ah, there you are, Penny the Brave. I know why you are here. The jewel is mine. I will never let it go. I will use it to become the most powerful man in all the world.

PENNY

We need that jewel to save the Governor's daughter. She was bitten by a scorpion and will surely die. Only the magic found in the Jewel will save her!

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HENRY

The Jewel of the Nile can weigh a man's heart. You and your quest must be worthy of its magic.

PENNY

Come, Cleopatra. Bring me the Jewel of the Nile!

JIM

You must be stopped! I call on the serpent of the sea!

HENRY

Oh, man...why a snake?

Jim points to Mrs. Murphy's garden hose and it instantly becomes a snake.

PENNY

(To Henry)

Cover your eyes, Professor!

(To Jim)

Your serpent doesn't scare me. For I am on a quest to save the most fair. Watch me fearlessly defeat your reptile!

She and Henry leap over the snake and land near Mrs. Murphy's porch. Jim reacts angry and defeated. Mrs. Murphy enters dressed in a Cleopatra costume. Holding a picture of an apple, obviously drawn by Penny earlier.

HENRY

Come forth, beautiful Cleopatra! Have mercy on us mere archeologists.

Penny slugs him in the arm correcting him.

PENNY

Archeologists, stupid.

HENRY

Yeah, what she said.

MRS. MURPHY

Brave, full-hearted archeologists. Your searching is over. With this Jewel of the Nile, you can save your lady fair from the clutches of death.

HENRY

(To Penny)

Why an apple? There aren't any apples in Egypt.

PENNY

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away". My mom says so, plus, I like the smell of the red, Mr. Sketch marker the best! So whatever I drew had to be red.

MRS. MURPHY

Now, that's real logic, Professor.

HENRY

Sure, okay.

PENNY

Thank you, Cleopatra. You have saved the Governor's daughter from the infamous scorpion bite.

HENRY

What does "infermerous" mean?

PENNY

(Exasperated)

Ugh! Never mind. Let's go.

She begins to exit. He starts to follow but turns around.

HENRY

Bye, Mrs. Murphy!

(Beat)

I mean, Cleopatra.

MRS. MURPHY

See you in the afterlife.

He stops, confused. Penny pulls him along as the door appears like before...isolated and illuminated. She bends down and slips the picture under it.

HENRY

What's the afterlife?

PENNY

Where the Egyptians went after they died.

HENRY

Are the astronauts in the afterlife right now?

PENNY

How would I know?

She grabs a box of Captain Crunch cereal and turns on the TV.

We hear the theme song to ***Scooby
Doo Where Are You?***

HENRY

Because you know everything. You're the smartest person I know.

PENNY

Besides Mrs. Anderson.

HENRY

Right.

PENNY

And Mrs. Murphy.

She offers him the box of cereal
and he takes some out and eats it
while watching TV.

HENRY

(Pointing to the TV)

But you're definitely smarter than Velma!

PENNY

(Surprised and honored)

Really?

(Beat)

Thanks.

Blackout.

SCENE 6

DR. MADISON appears in a spotlight. He wears a long, white doctor's coat and is in his early sixties. He addresses Elayne Bryant, but looks out straight to the audience. Elayne is illuminated by another spotlight on the opposite side of the stage.

It's concerning.

ELAYNE

I understand.

DR. MADISON

It's taking too long.

ELAYNE

I've seen these things work their way out in time, just like a kink in a hose.

DR. MADISON

What if it doesn't happen?

ELAYNE

It will.

DR. MADISON

What if she never...

ELAYNE

She will, Elayne.

DR. MADISON

I miss her.

ELAYNE

Yes, I know.

DR. MADISON

And you're sure she'll be alright?

ELAYNE

In time, she will be, yes. You'd be surprised at how resilient children can be.

DR. MADISON

All she does is play make-believe.

ELAYNE

DR. MADISON
Would you suggest she act like an adult?

ELAYNE
It's just life-changing.

DR. MADISON
She will have to deal with it, at some point.

ELAYNE
But when?

DR. MADISON
Is she doing well in school?

ELAYNE
Yes.

DR. MADISON
Still eating well?

ELAYNE
Yes.

DR. MADISON
Is she misbehaving?

ELAYNE
No.

DR. MADISON
Bed wetting?

ELAYNE
No. Goodness, no.

DR. MADISON
Displaying regular emotions with other things?

ELAYNE
Most things.

(Beat)
It's just...

Her emotions begin to overwhelm
her.

ELAYNE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

DR. MADISON
It's quite alright. Take your time.

ELAYNE

You must get tired of this, dealing with people's pain all day.

DR. MADISON

I understand that it's hard.

ELAYNE

It's just that...

(Beat)

she won't even go in the room.

Blackout.

SCENE 7

Mrs. Murphy is dividing lavender into bunches and hanging them above the porch to dry out. Elayne enters after returning from the doctor's office. She stands at the base of her steps unable to go inside.

MRS. MURPHY
Hello, Elayne. Is everything alright?

ELAYNE
I just saw Dr. Madison.

MRS. MURPHY
He's a fine physician. We went to see him up until Frank had to go to the specialists.

ELAYNE
Yes.

MRS. MURPHY
Always thought he would make quite a catch for someone. Wonderful eyes...

ELAYNE
He reassured me not to worry about Penny.

MRS. MURPHY
Penny will be just fine, Elayne. She's a smart girl.

ELAYNE
Maybe we aren't helping the situation by participating in her imaginary adventures.

MRS. MURPHY
We can do more harm than good over-protecting children from the world.

Elayne sits and helps Mrs. Murphy with the lavender.

ELAYNE
I can't sleep. I just toss and turn to the point that Jim has begin to sleep on the couch.

MRS. MURPHY
Oh, sweetheart. You need to try drinking some tea before you go to bed. It really does help.

ELAYNE

I have no energy. Life hasn't been normal for so long that it makes me terrified about the future.

MRS. MURPHY

Let tomorrow worry about itself. You are needed here. If you spend too much time in the future you'll miss the present.

(Beat)

No one knows why terrible things happen. Lord knows, I screamed at God too many times to remember when my Frank got sick. I just wanted to keep him longer. But it was in those moments of honesty that I felt God holding me, like a small child. He was there all along...he just wasn't talking.

(Beat)

You've been given this burden because he considered you faithful and worthy.

ELAYNE

No one should have to watch their child suffer.

MRS. MURPHY

This world doesn't make sense, honey. I agree. Just remember you're stronger than you think.

ELAYNE

I keep thinking that if I'm not strong enough, everything will fall apart. But that's just who I am. I'm a fixer. If there is a problem, I find a solution. I don't need anyone's help.

MRS. MURPHY

Life is too hard to be going at it alone. You'll end up hurting worse than when you started.

ELAYNE

I'm just trying to protect them.

MRS. MURPHY

From what? Seeing that you feel pain too?

(Beat)

Pain is a part of life. The world is full of people trying to put on a brave face...be real! That's the gift you can give your family. Feel whatever you feel right at that moment.

(Beat)

Penny will come around.

(Beat)

Now, what do you say we finish this and I'll make us some tea?

ELAYNE

How did I get so lucky to have you right next door?

MRS. MURPHY

I wasn't going anywhere. Frank memorized all the creaks in the floor so he wouldn't get caught on his midnight cookie raids.

ELAYNE

Thank you.

They hug.

Blackout.

SCENE 8

Penny emerges wearing cowboy boots, hat chaps, jeans a button down shirt and a Sheriff star on. Henry follows wearing a saloon girl outfit and a long, curly wig.

HENRY

I always have to be the girl! I can't even see!

PENNY

I think you're beautiful. Besides, there can only be ONE Sheriff. And it's my badge.

HENRY

Couldn't I be a cowboy?

PENNY

Nope. They're all out wrestlin' up cattle. You get to be Millie the Bar Maid.

HENRY

Fine. But next time I get to be a boy.

PENNY

Shh! We don't want them to hear us comin'!

HENRY

Who?

PENNY

Quick Draw Slick and his gang of thugs. The toughest, meanest robbers in ten territories.

HENRY

Let me guess, they maim, kill and destroy everybody.

PENNY

Yep, plus they'd shoot you in the back when you ain't lookin'.

HENRY

Are we after money?

PENNY

We're looking for the Golden Ticket. They stole it off the stage coach this morning from the Mayor of Backyard Territory. Without that ticket, all this will become a ghost town on a tourist map.

HENRY

Hey, we went to a ghost town last summer. It was neat. They had all of these people dressed up like cowboys and stuff.

She gets onto her belly, ignoring him and begins to crawl toward Mrs. Murphy's Porch.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I can't crawl in this dress!

PENNY

Then stay here!

Mrs. Murphy emerges from her house. She is dressed in black from head to toe, as well as a handlebar moustache. She lets out a villainous laugh.

MRS. MURPHY

Ha, ha! I am the richest scoundrel in ten territories thanks to this Golden Ticket!

She holds up the ticket.

MRS. MURPHY (CONT'D)

(Still in character)

Hello, Millie the Bar Maid. Where is your partner in law enforcement?

Henry stands transfixed by Mrs. Murphy's performance and points to Penny.

HENRY

She's right there.

PENNY

(Annoyed)

Henry!

MRS. MURPHY

The Bar Maid knows a handsome man when she sees one.

Henry giggles.

PENNY

It's over, Quick Draw Slick! We're here to take back the Golden Ticket and save our town!

MRS. MURPHY

There's no way you'll ever take this ticket! I'm the smartest, slickest robber in the land. Come and try and take it!

HENRY

We challenge you to a quick draw!

Penny is shocked and turns around to him.

PENNY

That's a cool idea!

HENRY

(Extremely proud of himself)

Yeah, I thought so.

MRS. MURPHY

I'm the quickest shot in the West! You dare to stand off with me?

PENNY

Walk off ten paces, Slick and say your prayers.

Mrs. Murphy joins her center stage. They touch backs and then pace off.

HENRY

Cowboys, turn!

Both Mrs. Murphy and Penny stare at one another, wiggling their fingers like in the movies.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Hey, Quick Draw, look!

He points to distract Mrs. Murphy, who looks.

PENNY

BANG!

Mrs. Murphy reacts with a dramatic death.

HENRY

Get the Golden Ticket!

Penny runs over to Mrs. Murphy and takes it. She doesn't move.

Henry approaches and stands over her.

HENRY (CONT'D)

That was awesome, Mrs. Murphy!

She lifts her head a bit.

MRS. MURPHY

Thank you, darling.

She puts her head back down. The door reappears as the lights fade on Mrs. Murphy.

PENNY

I, the Sheriff, have the fastest gun in the West. It is with great pleasure that I restore the Golden Ticket to the Mayor's Office where it belongs.

She slides it under the door.

HENRY

I liked that one. It was fun to watch Mrs. Murphy die. She was just as good as a cartoon, only realer.

Elayne enters after reading a bill. She is distraught, but Penny doesn't pick up on it.

PENNY

Mom, can Henry stay for dinner? I want macaroni and cheese with hot dogs.

Elayne sits down ignoring Penny while still inspecting the bill.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Mom?... MOM!

ELAYNE

(Exploding)

PENELOPE! You are not the only one in this house with needs. I can't do EVERYTHING!

HENRY

I'm going to go home now.

ELAYNE

I think that's a good idea, Henry.

He takes off the dress and wig and quickly runs out frightened by the outburst.

PENNY

(Whining)

But I want him to stay!

ELAYNE

I want enough money to cover this bill! This is more than your father's entire paycheck!

Want to read the entire script? Order a free electronic perusal copy today!