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Bobbie's Couch

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BOBBIE’S COUCH

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Bobbie’s Couch

Characters: Audrey, mid- to late 40’s  
John, her younger brother, mid-40’s  
Burrrhead, her youngest brother, early 40’s  
Bobbie, her sister, the youngest of the siblings, mid-30’s

Time: 1950’s  
Place: North Carolina

[The set is a yard and a verandah. Just inside the house, but not seen, is a living room with a TV. AUDREY and BOBBIE are seated at a card table on the verandah, playing chess. There are a few boxes on the verandah and a couch in the yard. JOHN and BURR are moving BOBBIE’S boxes from the front yard into the house.]

BURRHEAD  
I’m plum bushed, John. Not a week after Christmas and it’s 70 degrees. I’m dying in this heat. Bobbie, why’d you go picking a 70-degree day to move in for, huh?

JOHN  
Come on, Burr, we can’t quit now. Ain’t nothing left but boxes and . . .

BURRHEAD  
. . . and that durn couch! Look. I need to take a break before we tackle Bobbie’s couch, OK?

JOHN  
But it’s fixing to rain any minute! That couch is right smack in the middle of the yard!

BURRHEAD  
Well, can’t it sit there just a little bit longer?

JOHN  
Look at the sky! It’s gonna pour!

BURRHEAD  
It’s gonna rain late this afternoon. It’s gonna be an inch of rain, but it ain’t until late.

JOHN  
Now, how do you know all that, Burr? How? How do you know what the rain is gonna do?

BURRHEAD  
I heard it on the radio.

JOHN
Oh, Lord! [To AUDREY and BOBBIE] Burr don’t want to move your couch, Bobbie.

AUDREY

Checkmate!

BOBBIE

Oh, gracious! [Overlap the following]  

JOHN

Says he likes it right where it is smack dab in the middle of the yard.

BOBBIE

I never saw it coming.

JOHN

Says that now you can sit outside and enjoy the countryside. Only it’s gonna rain cats and dogs in about five minutes, so I hope you like sitting in the wet.

BOBBIE

One more game.

AUDREY

She wants another one!

JOHN

Burr is all knowledgeable about the weather, now.

AUDREY

Get ready to be trounced again, Sister!

JOHN

He has just become the new weatherman.

AUDREY

You say something, John?

JOHN

Brother here don’t want to move the durned couch! [Pause.]

AUDREY

Well, it’s almost time for the game, ain’t it?

BURRHEAD

Oh, that’s right.
JOHN
A football game! So that’s why Burr needs a break all of a sudden.

BURRHEAD
It ain’t gonna rain before half-time! Don’t fret yourself so much, John.

JOHN
Could’ve fooled me. I thought it was just plain laziness.

BURRHEAD
I swear, Brother, you don’t do nothing but fuss ever since your wife run off.

AUDREY, BOBBIE
Burr!

JOHN
Well, your wife’s run off too! Or didn’t you notice yet?

AUDREY
Burrhead! We three of us agreed--and in your presence!--not to bring up John’s unpleasantness! Why, he ain’t even had time to get used the shock! [To JOHN.] I apologize for brother’s behavior. He don’t always think before he speaks. Never has.

JOHN
So you all got together and had a little chit-chat on what to do about me, did you? What about him?

BURRHEAD
You don’t hear me fussing like a stuck pig.

BOBBIE
It not that, John. We just thought . . . it’s just that . . . well, you seem so . . . you know.

BURRHEAD
I don’t see why I have to take orders from him about moving a couch that ain’t got nothing to do with his durned wife leaving him! Can’t even look cross-eyed at him without an argument.

JOHN
You win.

BOBBIE
Don’t listen to Burr, honey! Why don’t you come over here and watch us play some chess?
JOHN
Chess? Is this what you and Audrey gonna do now you’ve moved in? Sit around and play chess every night? Oh, boy, are we all gonna have a good time living together! Burr watching TV and you girls playing chess every night. I just can’t hardly wait. But no couch to sit on neither, no sirree Bob! Oh, no. No couch!

AUDREY
John, what you need is a diversion. Something to keep your mind offa, well, being abandoned.

JOHN
Air. I need air, that’s what I need. Burr! C’mon, now. We got things to do. There’s more to life than TV, you know.

BURRHEAD
TV’s educational, John. Why, I just caught the tail end of a show about scurvy and the sailors getting it when they went on long trips. They got scurvy. That’s what happened to them back then. That’s exactly what happened. Back then they didn’t know nothing about limes and scurvy.

JOHN
Oh, Lord! Of course sailors got scurvy when they didn’t eat limes. He’s just now figuring that out? He needs the TV to tell him that? Shoot! That’s the kind of thing every school girl knows!

BOBBIE

JOHN
[To himself.] Son of a gun don’t even know that? C’mon, Burr, you don’t even know that? [Sighs, says to Audrey] He don’t stay informed, he don’t keep up with the world, he don’t even know what’s happening in the world.

AUDREY
Oh, John, for goodness’ sake. Maybe Burr ain’t educated like you are. But what is he doing if not informing himself this very minute? That’s an illegal move, Bobbie.

BOBBIE
Oh, my gracious! I am sorry!

BURRHEAD
Weather reports calls for rain late in the day. Late. Possibly not till evening. I just caught it. Don’t you worry none about your couch, Bobbie. [Pause.] He needs a hobby is what he needs. That’ll keep his mind off his wife skipping town.
AUDREY, BOBBIE
Burr! You promised . . . Now you know better. . .

JOHN
A hobby? Now what is the need of a hobby? What good’s a hobby going to do me? What do you know about me, anyway, Burr? What do you know about anything?

BURRHEAD
[To AUDREY AND BOBBIE] How come he don’t take up golf, or bowling? Or learn to play chess? He could play with you and Bobbie in the evenings instead of pacing around like a wild animal, picking on everybody. Why, he don’t even watch football! How come he don’t watch football?

BOBBIE
You have got a point there, Burr, a good point. John, why don’t you relax some and watch the game with Brother?

JOHN
Oh, Bobbie. Football! Now just think about it, think about it for just one minute. Now why should I get all excited about a bunch of grown men chasing a little ball up and down a field? Up and down and up and down! Why bother? And what difference does it make to me who wins a game?

BURRHEAD
Folks generally root for their school team. You went to college. Even if you didn’t finish!

JOHN
Oh, boy, we won the game! We beat Duke! Oh, boy! N.C. State is number one! Now why should I care? So I went to State, so now I’m supposed to get all excited and root for State? And hope and pray that Duke gets beat? I’m supposed to get all excited and jump up and down, oh, boy! in front of a TV set? Shoot. It’s just a bunch of grown men chasing a ball! [Pause] Now . . . now . . . I want you to think about something. [Pause] What if I’d gone to Duke? Think about it! What if I had gone to Duke? Then I got to get all excited and jump up and down, oh, boy, for Duke! Why? What for? What difference does it make?

BURRHEAD
John, it ain’t no use going on and on about it.

JOHN
Look. All I want to do is get that couch moved so I can . . .

BURR
So you can what, John? What you got to do that’s so important? Somewhere you got to be? Got an important appointment? Somebody waiting on you? Well? Tell us, we all ears! We dying to know!

[Pause.]

JOHN
I give up.

BURRHEAD
He’d rather just mope. I know he ain’t himself these days, but when I think how lucky some people are . . . college and all! He thinks I don’t know nothing just because I never went. And he didn’t even finish!

BOBBIE
I think he reads too much.

BURRHEAD
Well, and just where did all his reading get him? I’d like to know

JOHN
Game’s on, Brother! You’re missing it!

BOBBIE
Check. Sister, I think I got you this time! Yes, I do believe I have!

AUDREY
Don’t rejoice too soon, Bobbie. The game’s not over yet. [Pause.] Mate.

BOBBIE
Oh. Oh, no. [Laughs.] Oh, gracious, I sure didn’t see that one! I can’t think straight tonight.
All this bickering and carrying on!

AUDREY
I keep telling you--it’s not thinking. It’s all in the seeing. [Clears the board; sets up the pieces for the next game.] When you see it all, you can play with the best.

JOHN
Don’t you ever get bored with that damn TV, Burr? You even know what bored means?

AUDREY
John, I never saw you so restless. Picking on Burr every chance you get! You the one who’s bored. Maybe you oughta look for a new job or go back to night school or something. I don’t know. Do something with yourself. There’s all kinds of things you could do to get your mind off her forsaking you.
JOHN
Night school, huh? Night school! I went to night school, did real well, didn’t I? Am I the only one who remembers? And I was doing fine! I got an A in a data processing course and remember? Shelly took me to lunch the day I got my grades—My wife, she took me and Becky out to celebrate my good grades! We were so happy. And with money she had earned! Shelly was proud of me, remember? She even helped me study! She helped me with English. She did, she did! Didn’t she? She got a job, went back to work. And she wanted to! Yes, she did! I told her she didn’t have to work, but she insisted. We were happy! We were! She was my wife!

[Pause.]
Why’d she leave me, Audrey? Why’d she leave Becky and me? Why?

[Stunned silence. Then a loud crack of thunder; sounds of pouring rain.]

EVERYONE
Bobbie’s couch!

[Galvanized, BURR and JOHN run to the couch, BOBBIE grabs an umbrella, runs back and holds it—not very effectively—over first BURR, then JOHN; AUDREY clears away the board and card table to make room for the couch. BURR and JOHN struggle to get the couch onto the porch.]

BOBBIE
She’ll get in touch with us soon. I know it. I just know it!

JOHN
Get them breakables out of the way!

BOBBIE
I have introduced her name into our prayer circle at church. It’s far more than me now praying for her safe return!

JOHN
Watch out for that crate!

BOBBIE
And you know, John, now that you not drinking, I bet she’ll be back! I know she’ll be back!

JOHN
Careful, Audrey, all Bobbie’s knickknacks is in that crate!

BURRHEAD
How’s she gonna know he’s not drinking when we don’t even know where she is?!

JOHN
Haul it up onto the porch for now.

BURRHEAD
Besides, it ain’t the drinking.

JOHN
That’s it. You girls move on out of the way.

BURRHEAD
It’s all his fussing and complaining all the time!

JOHN
Keep at it, Burr.

BURRHEAD
He never has anything good to say about nothing or nobody! He don’t take no interest in life.

JOHN
Here we go!

BURRHEAD
She’s still a young woman. A young woman needs some excitement in her life once in a while.

JOHN
Where you girls gonna want this thing to go?

BURRHEAD
For example, when was the last time you took her out for dinner? I mean a nice meal, not the Pancake House.

JOHN
[Puts down his end of the couch.] Now, hold on! She loved the Pancake House!

BURRHEAD
[BURR keeps holding up his end of the couch.] Shelly was just too polite to say. She let things build up and never did say nothing about what was bothering her. I reckon she was bored.

AUDREY
Think we oughta finish moving the couch now, Burr?

BURRHEAD
And all your fussing and complaining? I bet she just couldn’t stand it no more.
AUDREY
Burr!

BURRHEAD
I reckon she just couldn’t stand it.

AUDREY
Maybe we oughta get going with this couch?

BURRHEAD
I just think he oughta taken her someplace besides the Pancake house once in awhile is all. Right?

AUDREY
Burr!

BURRHEAD
But it’s as plain as the nose on your face!

[Pause.]
Well, ain’t it?

[Pause.]
Come on, let’s us finish up with this couch.

[Pause.]
John?

[Pause.]
Don’t you think we oughta move this couch?

[Pause.]
John?

[JOHN slowly and mechanically picks up his end of the couch. They take the couch inside.]

[Black out.]