



# REGRETS

BY MATT CHARMAN



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REGRETS  
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Originally produced by Manhattan Theatre Club,  
Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer,  
on March 27, 2012.

REGRETS was presented by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) at City Center Stage 1 in New York City, opening on March 27, 2012. It was directed by Carolyn Cantor; the set design was by Rachel Hauck; the costume design was by Ilona Somogyi; the lighting design was by Ben Stanton; the sound design was by Jill BC Du Boff; the fight director was Thomas Schall; and the production stage manager was Hannah Cohen. The cast was as follows:

CHRISIE MEYERS	.....	Alexis Bledel
ROBERT HANRATTY	.....	Curt Bouril
CALEB FARLEY	.....	Ansel Elgort
BEN CLANCY	.....	Brian Hutchison
MRS. DUKE	.....	Adriane Lenox
GERALD DRISCOLL	.....	Lucas Caleb Rooney
ALVIN NOVOTNY	.....	Richard Topol

## **CHARACTERS**

CALEB FARLEY, 18

MRS. DUKE, 45

ALVIN NOVOTNY, 44

GERALD DRISCOLL, 41

BEN CLANCY, 42

CHRISSIE MYERS, 21

ROBERT HANRATTY, 28

## **PLACE**

Pyramid Lake, Nevada.

## **TIME**

1954.

# REGRETS

## ACT ONE

### One

*A July evening in 1954. Four wooden cabins sit on stilts in the middle of the Nevada desert. They are perched on what seems like the edge of the world, surrounded by a lunar surface of sand and rock.*

*In the cabin on the left, a man sleeps in a bed, at the foot of which is a typewriter on a worn bureau. In the cabin on the right, a second man washes himself at a night stand, while further back we can just glimpse the sliver of a fourth dwelling in the moonlight.*

*Center stage, the facade of the unoccupied middle cabin is cut away to reveal a sparse living area — a bed, three chairs and a table, with a door through to a tiny bathroom.*

*Just then Mrs. Duke, an African American in her mid-forties, enters carrying a clean set of sheets.*

*Caleb, a young man, follows with a canvas travel bag, stepping up into the vacant cabin after her.*

MRS. DUKE. Inventory. We run through it verbally and agree what's here so when you decide to go and steal my shaving mirror I can refer you to our verbal agreement. Bed. Pillows. Two of them. Mattress. Blanket. Sheets and cases. Fresh every five days, every

three if you pay extra. Lantern. One lace curtain. Towel rail in good working order. Soap dish. Bath mat. No bath ... You plan on working while you're out here?

CALEB. Well —

MRS. DUKE. Don't touch that! *(Caleb freezes, his hand has reached out towards an ugly porcelain dog on the sideboard.)*

CALEB. I was only gonna pick it up.

MRS. DUKE. You don't need to pick it up. You can see what it is, it's a dog. Leave it alone. Table. Three chairs. Rug with three cigarette burns, candlestick, fresh candles under the sink with a scrubbing brush and cleaning products. I don't clean up after you, I don't cook for you and I don't organize activities neither. This ain't the Boy Scouts of America. Six weeks is a long time for doing nothing, so I can recommend a few stores. You could bag up groceries. Buy a bike, go wait tables in town. Are you old enough to fetch drinks? *(She watches, intrigued, as Caleb unzips his rucksack and begins to load the empty shelves with books.)* I do a trip into town once a week for groceries and laundry. The men come along. I drive, so it'll cost you gas money. You do have money, I take it? It's three weeks' rent up front, and we'll settle the rest when you leave and the inventory is completed to my satisfaction. It's eight dollars a week.

CALEB. Eight?

MRS. DUKE. They got divorce ranches like this one all over the state, but none is cheaper than here. You got nature, got a bed, got it all ... lucky you. *(He counts his money onto the dining table and Mrs. Duke uses the opportunity to study him up close, he catches her looking and holds out the money. She counts it and tucks it into her apron, handing him the sheets. He starts making up the bed. She watches.)* Last thing. Most important thing. No girls. You hear me?

CALEB. Yes ma'am.

MRS. DUKE. I'm serious now. We have a problem with them showing up. You're a captive audience sat out here in the desert. You men talk dirty and look at magazines and get all riled up. Girls come here and we have trouble. So no girls. They're not interested in you, they're only interested in your money. This ain't a bachelor party, ain't the Wild West either. *(Outside, the man who was washing himself emerges. This is Alvin. He wears glasses and pressed pants. He holds a spoon and an enamel cup. He approaches a small fire in the center of the camp and stirs the contents of a steaming billycan.)* Any questions? Well, if you do — cabin number one has most of the

answers. Mr. Clancy. He's been here the longest. If you need me, I'm in the clapboard house beside the juniper tree, just head for the lake. But don't bother me after seven, because I listen to my radio shows. This is your domain — you men. I don't come down here more than I have to. Up there is my domain.

CALEB. Yes ma'am.

MRS. DUKE. And no trouble. Out here, getting people to trust me, it's been tough enough ... I don't need any more problems.

CALEB. No ma'am.

MRS. DUKE. Alright then. Well, good night ... *(She steps out of the cabin. Caleb stands in the sudden silence. He looks uneasy, he hasn't considered how he'd feel being alone out here. Quickly, he heads out after Mrs. Duke, stopping and watching from the porch as she passes Alvin on her way out of the camp. Just then he tests the soup. It's boiling hot.)*

ALVIN. Goddamn it!

MRS. DUKE. Really, Mr. Novotny? The Lord's name?

ALVIN. I'm sorry, Mrs. Duke, but this stew is hotter than lava.

MRS. DUKE. Well, it's been on a fire, Mr. Novotny. That'll happen.

ALVIN. Did my lawyer call, ma'am?

MRS. DUKE. No.

ALVIN. He said he'd call if there was any change in my situation.

MRS. DUKE. Well, I'm not your secretary so don't be giving out my number. Good night, Mr. Novotny.

ALVIN. How about any more news on getting my radio fixed?

MRS. DUKE. I'll take it up with my maintenance man.

ALVIN. If he even exists! You know, I pay eight dollars a week.

MRS. DUKE. And it's nearly seven P.M. I have my show starting now, Mr. Novotny. I think you know that. Danny Kaye —

ALVIN. I know, Danny Kaye. I love Danny Kaye, but my radio doesn't work! Fact is, I have a list of things as long as my arm that don't work too well around here.

MRS. DUKE. *(Turning to face him, sternly.)* Do you want to make a complaint?

ALVIN. God, no! But could I get some clean sheets?

MRS. DUKE. I changed them two days ago.

ALVIN. I sweat in my sleep. Always have. My wife used to change the bedclothes every other night.

MRS. DUKE. Then you've been spoiled, haven't you?

ALVIN. Yes ma'am, I have ... *(She stares at him, and Alvin gets the message. He shakes his head and pulls out some coins.)*

MRS. DUKE. I'm missing Danny Kaye for pocket change? (*Annoyed, he digs deeper and peels off a dollar bill instead. Mrs. Duke adds it to what Caleb paid.*)

ALVIN. Thank you. And can you make sure and tuck them under real tight? I hate a baggy bed.

MRS. DUKE. Can I give you some advice, Mr. Novotny, because I've seen a lot of men pass through, and you ain't even but halfway. The successful ones catch up on sleep. Write home to their kids. Maybe take up a hobby. But they relax and get their heads straight, ready to go back. You, on the other hand, are headed for an ulcer. The world ain't gonna come to an end without you in it. Not in six weeks it ain't.

ALVIN. Yes ma'am ...

MRS. DUKE. I'll get those sheets now. (*Alvin watches her go, then turns back to the fire despondently.*)

ALVIN. BEN! GERALD! THIS STEW IS STICKING TO THE PAN! (*Caleb slowly ventures down the porch steps and waits awkwardly, picking the right moment to declare himself. He's just about to when Alvin looks up and gets a shock.*) Where on earth did you spring from?

CALEB. Nowhere ... I was just inside.

ALVIN. So you do exist!

CALEB. Excuse me?

ALVIN. Maintenance, right? I was beginning to think Mrs. Duke had made you up. Now for starters, I want you to look at my radio —

CALEB. I'm not maintenance. This is my cabin.

ALVIN. This is your ... (*He looks Caleb and then at the cabin; he can hardly believe it.*)

GERALD. BEN. GET OUT HERE! We weren't expecting the new guy till tomorrow. Have you eaten?

CALEB. Well —

ALVIN. GERALD! YOU'RE NOT GONNA BELIEVE THIS ...

GERALD. (*Off.*) WILL YOU STOP SHOUTING, ALVIN! JESUS! YOUR VOICE GOES RIGHT THROUGH ME. (*Gerald, a bear of a man, emerges from between the two shacks, a pair of army binoculars round his neck and an enamel cup in his hand.*)

GERALD. Just call "Dinner" like any normal person. Or "Chow." Chow will do, you know ... (*Gerald freezes. Both he and Alvin stare at the boy now like a prize specimen.*)

ALVIN. This is ...

GERALD. No ...

ALVIN. That's right!



GERALD. The new guy?

ALVIN. Cabin number four!

GERALD. BEN. QUICKLY — YOU GOTTA SEE THIS!

ALVIN. BEN!

GERALD. Cabin number four. Well, well. Welcome. *(In the left hand cabin, the sleeping man stirs. This is Ben. He has faded good looks with a natural, quiet authority. He stretches and grabs his enamel mug. Outside, Gerald extends his hand, Caleb shakes it.)* Sergeant Gerald Driscoll. Grand Junction, Colorado. And you are?

CALEB. Caleb.

GERALD. Like in the Bible? Don't say another word, wouldn't make it a fair contest. BEN!

CALEB. Contest?

ALVIN. Ben likes to read people. You know, figure them out.

GERALD. We bet on it sometimes. He got me in a second. You wait, Caleb. You are not gonna believe what Ben already knows about you. You don't even need to open your mouth and he knows.

ALVIN. He's really got a genius for it.

GERALD. BEN, YOU'RE GONNA WANNA SEE THIS ...

ALVIN. BEN! *(Ben steps out of his shack carrying his mug. He stops as he locks eyes with Caleb. He looks astonished to see someone this young standing before him. As he steps down slowly from the porch, we notice a pronounced limp in his right leg, which he fights against with his whole body.)*

BEN. I'm Ben Clancy.

CALEB. *(Hesitating.)* Caleb Farley.

BEN. Welcome, Caleb. How old are you?

ALVIN. That's not fair.

GERALD. I thought we were only allowed "yes" or "no" questions.

BEN. We weren't expecting you till tomorrow morning.

ALVIN. I told him that.

CALEB. I'm twenty-one.

GERALD. Jesus.

BEN. Twenty-one? And you're out here for a —

CALEB. For the same reason as all of you.

GERALD. Well, that's impressive. Took me eight whole years to screw up my marriage.

BEN. Did you drive?

CALEB. I took the bus from Los Angeles. Mrs. Duke picked me up.

GERALD. Then you're trapped.

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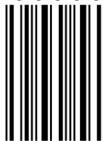
5M, 2W

Caleb Farley is the youngest man ever to show up at Mrs. Duke's cabins, a ramshackle desert retreat in Nevada — one of the only places to secure a quick divorce in 1950s America. But the other men, there to shed the lives and wives they've known and begin anew, quickly begin to suspect Caleb may be hiding more than just a broken heart. In a time of heightened fears and political distrust, this boy's presence is set to test each man's loyalty — to country and to one another.

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