



# THE PALACE OF THE MOORISH KINGS

BY  
**JON TUTTLE**

BASED ON THE ORIGINAL SHORT STORY  
BY **EVAN S. CONNELL**



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



## THE PALACE OF THE MOORISH KINGS

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“The Palace of the Moorish Kings”  
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*To my parents.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the late Evan Connell, who graciously allowed this adaptation; to Jim and Kay Thigpen, who spent their career helping others make careers; to Marta Praeger at the Robert A. Freedman Dramatic Agency, who does all the hard stuff; to Dewey Scott-Wiley, the object of my constant amazement; and to my family, who are with me always — thank you.

THE PALACE OF THE MOORISH KINGS premiered at Trustus Theatre (Jim Thigpen, Artistic Director; Kay Thigpen, Managing Director) in Columbia, South Carolina, on August 10, 2012. It was directed by Dewey Scott-Wiley; the set design was by Danny Harrington; the costume and hair designs were by Diane Wilkins; the lighting design was by Aaron Pelzek; the sound design was by Jake Kassel; and the stage manager was Charles Felsberg. The cast was as follows:

DAVE ZOBROWSKI..... Gene Aimone  
MILLICENT ZOBROWSKI.....Christina Whitehouse-Suggs  
ART STEVENSON..... Christopher Cockrell  
AILEEN STEVENSON ..... Becky Hunter  
AL BUNCE ..... Shane Walters  
BARBARA BUNCE ..... Kim Harne  
LEROY HEWITT ..... James Harley  
JUNIE HEWITT ..... Erin Huiett

## CHARACTERS

DAVE ZOBROWSKI — pushing fifty, a doctor. Conservative, buttoned-down.

MILLICENT ZOBROWSKI — same age, very much Dave's wife.

ART STEVENSON — same age, an advertising executive. More than anyone else's, his clothes describe an unquiet desperation to hang on to something.

AILEEN STEVENSON — Art's wife, same age, once very pretty, a cheerleader at the high school they all attended, now grown thicker.

AL BUNCE — same age, though older-seeming and frail, a bank president and dapper dresser. He walks with a slight limp.

BARBARA BUNCE — Al's wife, same age, smart and refined. At times her hands will tremble; at times her head will shake without her knowing it.

LEROY HEWITT — same age, a contractor, once the best athlete among these men, still sturdy and tan.

JUNIE HEWITT — Leroy's daughter, twenty-ish, attractive, and sort of earthy.

## SETTING

Thanksgiving, 1970; late afternoon. The Zobrowski household. We are in the den and adjacent dining area, all of which has just been remodeled and painted. Late '60s upscale décor abounds — tasteful, but still mod and showy. In the den: a lovely new couch, a television with new-fangled remote control, a hi-fi console, and a bar. In the dining area: a grand, decorated table almost ready for the feast. Around the stage are kitschy reminders of the era, most prominently a colorful telephone. Also, somewhere, a black wooden model bi-plane and a photograph of a young soldier, smiling proudly. An envelope — international post — has been left on one of the tables. Exits to foyer upstage, to kitchen on one side, to bedrooms/baths and the back yard on the other. Downstage: the suggestion of a broad picture-window looking out on the back yard.

*... we live in an arid land, even though we often seem to guide and rule you. Yours is the plentitude of life, the sap of the fruit, the garden of passion, the beautiful landscape of art. Your home is the earth ...*

—*Hermann Hesse*, Narcissus and Goldmund



# THE PALACE OF THE MOORISH KINGS

## ACT ONE

*Preshow: grown-up late '60s music appropriate to the age and class of the characters — e.g. Andy Williams, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra — the very last song being a nostalgic ballad like John Gary's "Once Upon a Time."\**

*At rise: Dave Zobrowski stands downstage, dressed for a party, holding a drink and looking out his picture-window into his back yard. The music now plays from the hi-fi in his den. At first he is admiring his yard, but then other thoughts crowd in, in small waves, and his expression changes, darkens. He pushes through, resolves something, and takes a drink. The moment holds, until finally it is broken by the sound — up and offstage — of a car horn merrily heralding an arrival. Millicent enters from the bedrooms, wearing a new dress and putting on her earrings. Dave knows she's there without looking.*

DAVE. ... Art and Aileen.

MILLICENT. ... Last chance.

DAVE. ... No. I'm ... (*He turns to her.*) ... Really.

MILLICENT. (*Meaning: "How do I look?"*) ... Well?

DAVE. Wow.

MILLICENT. Really?

DAVE. Yeah, it's — is that new?

MILLICENT. Is it new? You were standing right there.

DAVE. I — I —

\* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

MILLICENT. Goldwater's, Dave. Five days ago. *(She has gone to him and is straightening his collar or tie, and will turn to let him finish zipping her dress. This is a familiar ritual.)*

DAVE. Oooh yeah, I —

MILLICENT. "Ooooooh." You won't let him drink too much.

DAVE. Huh.

MILLICENT. Or swear. You know how Barbara is.

DAVE. I don't know how I —

MILLICENT. I know. But try. And make them use those coasters.

DAVE. She any better?

MILLICENT. She won't talk about it. Try to watch her. I told her to come see you, but you know how she is. *(She turns back to him. They look at each other — and have a brief, sad conversation with their eyes, something they both understand. Then she forces a smile — or squeezes his cheeks, kisses him, and forces him to smile.)* ... I made that pie. Black mince, rum sauce.

DAVE. Great. Okay.

MILLICENT. Do these earrings go?

DAVE. *(Sincerely.)* ... You're perfect. *(That stops her. She turns and beams. The doorbell rings. Pause. She takes a deep breath.)*

MILLICENT. ... Ready? *(Dave shrugs. She heads to the foyer to answer the door; he goes to the hi-fi to take the needle off the record. From the foyer we hear a ritual of greetings: "Hello! Hello!" "Happy Thanksgiving!" "Look at you!" "Come in! Welcome!" "I hope we're not too early!" and so on. Millicent returns with Art and Aileen Stevenson. Aileen is brassy and fun; she carries a covered dish. Art is more casually dressed and has a football.)* Dave? It's Art and Aileen.

DAVE. I had no idea. *(Art quickly laterals the football to Dave.)*

ART. Hey-hey, cap! Think fast!

DAVE. Alright now. — Aileen.

AILEEN. David, hello! You both look so wonderful. Come here, give me a kiss. Give me another one.

ART. *(Marveling at the room.)* Ho-ly —

AILEEN. Didn't I tell you? I told you you wouldn't believe it.

ART. My Christ — look at this place!

AILEEN. And the couch! You got the couch! — Look at this, Art. They had to special-order it.

MILLICENT. *(Meaning the covered dish.)* Want me to —

AILEEN. Oh: That's that sweet potato soufflé that Tammy made you liked so much. *(Millicent conveys it to the table.)*

ART. Leroy did all *this*?

DAVE. Pretty much.

ART. Well this is just — !

AILEEN. (*On the couch.*) I keep telling Art: We have got to have him over. Feel it Art — it's not even Naugahyde.

MILLICENT. Dave helped paint!

AILEEN. Have you done the bathrooms yet? (*Millicent's eyes say yes.*) ... Show me! I have to see! No: Wait. Listen — both of you: This needs to be said.

ART. Aileen.

AILEEN. Everything's going to be okay. We need to keep believing that.

DAVE. We do believe that.

AILEEN. I know you do, I know you do. This is so good of you. We could have done this at our place.

MILLICENT. Nooo, no, we —

DAVE. Tradition.

MILLICENT. You get New Year's, Barb gets the Fourth.

ART. And they had to show off their pad.

DAVE. That's exactly right.

AILEEN. You're so amazing. We have such amazing friends. They're like pillars of salt.

ART. You got a new TV?

AILEEN. A Motorola! With remote control. (*Art finds and examines the remote — and Dave gestures to him: "Not yet."*)

MILLICENT. (*To Dave.*) Why don't you pour us some Fresca.

DAVE. Why don't I pour us some Fresca.

AILEEN. I'll take a Mai Tai. You: Show me. (*Aileen leads Millicent off to the bathrooms. Dave will pour two Frescas and hand one to Art, who produces a pack of cigarettes and is about to light up.*)

ART. Man-oh-man: How much all this set you back?

DAVE. Well you know.

ART. Bunce set you up.

DAVE. We had some equity.

ART. He's comin' tonight, right?

DAVE. Can't smoke in here.

ART. What?

DAVE. No smoking in the house.

ART. Since when?

DAVE. New rules.

ART. The hell is this?

DAVE. Fresca.

ART. What's happening here? I'll take a Wallbanger. You got a Wallbanger? "Not since I married her."

DAVE. (*Simultaneously.*) "Not since I married her." (*Dave mixes Art's and Aileen's drinks.*)

ART. Ha! Shit never gets old. Listen, cap: Seriously: This place is.

DAVE. Thanks.

ART. I mean it. I'm so depressed.

DAVE. That's the idea.

ART. Everything looks *shiny*.

DAVE. Well, it's been good for her to ... you know —

ART. Oh yeah.

DAVE. — have a project, something to — (*He gives a "forge ahead" fist.*)

ART. Crazy.

DAVE. Kitchen's next. "Aqua." Aqua cabinets with sliding doors.

ART. Crazy crazy. (*Dave hands Art his drink. Pause.*)

DAVE. ... So how're *you* doing?

ART. ... Me? Fine.

DAVE. Doing alright?

ART. Yeah man. I was born fine. (*Dave gives him a look: "Come on now."*) ... No, I'm great. That was a, that was — you know.

DAVE. You two ... have a talk, or — ?

ART. Yeah yeah, we're good now, we're okay, we got it all — . It was a *good* thing, you know, it was a, it was a ... a *good* thing, everything's all sorted out.

DAVE. 'Cause you kind of had me —

ART. That was a glitch.

DAVE. Okay.

ART. That was *nothing*.

DAVE. ... Well okay. Good.

ART. ... Thanks, though. You know.

DAVE. I know. (*Pause. They nod. They sip.*)

ART. ... You uh. Heard anything yet? (*Dave shakes his head no.*)

... Yeah. Shhh — ... I'm sure he's okay.

DAVE. I know.

ART. Davy's a ... he's a really great kid.

DAVE. Thanks.

ART. I mean it. My kids are a wreck. I wish they'd take notice.

DAVE. Well. We're. Hanging in there. (*An awkward silence while Arthur nods, trying to think of something to say. Then he looks out the downstage window.*)

ART. Would you look at that.

AILEEN. (*From offstage.*) Oh my God!

ART. How'd you get your lawn so green?

AILEEN. (*Still off.*) Arthur! You've got to see this!

DAVE. That's that seed, that —

ART. Oh yeah yeah yeah.

DAVE. — winter rye.

ART. Look at that! Looks like a golf course. (*Aileen returns, followed by Millicent.*)

AILEEN. Arthur, come see these bathrooms. You have got to talk to Leroy. — They're coming tonight, aren't they?

MILLICENT. Just him.

ART. Look at the grass, Aileen. Middle of November.

AILEEN. He's not bringing — ?

MILLICENT. It didn't work out.

AILEEN. Oh thank God.

MILLICENT. I know it.

ART. Who?

AILEEN. That man cannot be allowed to pick his own women.

ART. No Janelle?

MILLICENT. Shut up, Arthur.

ART. I liked Janelle.

AILEEN. You're such a mystery. — Show him the master. — Salmon-tinted shower doors. Matching padded toilet seats. We're next.

ART. I know.

AILEEN. I'm serious.

ART. I know. (*Millicent escorts Art to the back. Aileen waits until they're gone. Then:*)

AILEEN. ... David.

DAVE. That's a great dress.

AILEEN. Thank you.

DAVE. Is it new?

AILEEN. ... I don't know even where to begin. (*Dave tries to deflect the topic with a gesture.*) I am so mortified.

DAVE. You don't need —

AILEEN. I didn't know who else to call.

DAVE. I understand.

# THE PALACE OF THE MOORISH KINGS

by Jon Tuttle

based on the original short story by Evan S. Connell

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Thanksgiving, 1970: The Cowboys and Packers are on TV, John Gary's on the hi-fi, and friends are gathered for their traditional American feast. Members of the Greatest Generation now settled into conventional marriages and predictable careers; they are vaguely aware of the world moving on and away from them ... and that something is coming for them. An unexpected call from a world-traveling old friend suddenly makes them confront all the choices they never knew they had, and that part of themselves that has died along the way. *THE PALACE OF THE MOORISH KINGS* asks us which terms of surrender we must accept in order to belong, and what we must abandon to stay free.

*"This is a play about choices, freedom, the past, the future, two wars, children, promises made, and promises broken ... Good writing, vital subject matter, and the magic of the theater: our brains are engaged and so are our hearts."*  
—Free Times (Columbia, SC)

*"A powerful and thought-provoking night of theatre. THE PALACE OF THE MOORISH KINGS leaves you in a state of thoughtful contemplation."*  
—Jasper Magazine

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