

PRIVATE PARTIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The plays of Allan Havis have produced by San Diego Rep, Old Globe/Malashock Dance, Vox Nova, Seattle's A C T, Odyssey, Long Wharf, South Coast Rep, American Repertory Theater, Hartford Stage, Virginia Stage, W P A, Berkshire Theater Festival, Trapdoor Theater, Coral Gable's New Theater, Interact Theater, Philadelphia Theater Co, K P B S Radio, Vox Nova, and Rowholt Theater-Verlag (National German Radio). Commissions from San Diego Rep, England's Chichester Festival, Sundance, San Diego Rep, Ted Danson's Anasazi Productions, South Coast Rep, Mixed Blood, C S C Rep, Malashock Dance, Carolina Chamber Chorale, National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and University of California. Fifteen full length published plays, and also a Harper & Row novel *Albert the Astronomer*. He has edited two anthologies: *American Political Plays* (2001) University of Illinois Press and *American Political Plays After 9/11* (2010) Southern Illinois University Press. Also, his book on ninety years of cult cinema, *Cult Films: Taboo & Transgression*, (2008) University Press of America. In collaboration with renowned composer Anthony Davis, his play *Lilith* was re-imagined as an opera, premiering at U C San Diego's Conrad Prebys Concert Hall December 2009 & broadcasted on U C S D T V in 2010. Recipient of Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Kennedy Center/American Express, C B S, H B O, National

Endowment for the Arts Awards, San Diego Theater Critics Circle 2003 Outstanding New Play for NUEVO CALIFORNIA (co-written with Bernardo Solano) and San Diego's 2008 Patté Best Play award for THE TUTOR. In June of 2010, Southern Illinois University Press will publish his second edited volume of AMERICAN POLITICAL PLAYS, POST 9/11. He earned an M F A from Yale. He is provost of Thurgood Marshall College/University of California, San Diego and a professor of Theater in the M F A program.

PRIVATE PARTIES was first produced by Sixth@Penn (Artistic Producing Director, Dale Morris). The cast and creative contributors were:

LETI Julia Fulton
PEARL..... Kristie Sessions
DirectorKirsten Brandt
Assistant director Robin Christ
Stage manager Madeline Cohen
Lighting & set design.....Rich Covert
Costume ddesignMary Larson

CHARACTERS & SETTING

LETI, late thirties/early forties attractive, edgy woman who lacks a permanent address, gainful employment, and a circle of friends or relatives. She has a habit of impulsive arguing and confiding, too often in the same breath. The latest love of her life is an old Ford Mustang which she is determined to sell to the truest buyer in California. She's an optimist, and prefers to kiss rather than punch. Cabo is a geographical goal, by detour through Tijuana and sleepy Rosarito—along Mexico's Baja peninsula.

PEARL, mid to late twenties, energetic, alert, as good looking as LETI, presently living in Los Angeles. Her knowledge of cars often impresses others, particularly car guys. There is something about her which defies analysis, but suffice it to say that she's rapidly approaching her very long awaited "defining moment". Freedom is a missing component in her life, yet she pushes herself to find the right opportunity to become utterly new to herself. LETI fascinates her; her excesses do not repel, they inspire.

Seven scenes set in La Jolla, California & Rosarito Beach, Mexico.

Time is the present; present is the time.

in memory of a young student playwright Eric Bowling

Scene One

(LETI's sidewalk in in front of her address in La Jolla, California. She's thinking about smoking the cigarette in her hand. PEARL approaches from the nearby mailbox.)

LETI: Pearl?

PEARL: Yeah.

LETI: White Pearl??

PEARL: That's right.

LETI: Pearly white Pearl? You said you had red hair.

PEARL: When the sun's out. But I don't dye my hair.
(Silence) The address was wrong.

LETI: No.

PEARL: No?

LETI: No. You wrote it down wrong.

PEARL: I guess so.

LETI: You don't look that stupid.

PEARL: I was off by one crappy number. *(Pause)* Is this your home?

LETI: No. I'm only staying for a few days. You know how it is.

PEARL: What?

LETI: Staying a day or two as a house guest. You become a goddamn nuisance.

PEARL: Yeah.

LETI: You're late.

PEARL: Am I?

LETI: An hour at least.

PEARL: Can't be an hour.

LETI: Look at your watch.

(PEARL *does.*)

LETI: Am I shitting you?

PEARL: I tried to phone, but your line was busy.

LETI: It was off the hook.

PEARL: I guess the car is sold?

LETI: Would it break your heart?

PEARL: I drove three hours.

LETI: A cop put down a hundred to hold it...but that wouldn't work.

PEARL: Yeah, ahuh.

LETI: Circumstances prevail.

PEARL: The cop low-balled you?

LETI: You know how cops are. The chubby ones with bushy moustaches and piggly warts.

PEARL: He didn't want the car?

LETI: No, he wanted the goddamn car.

PEARL: Oh.

LETI: But his focus was on the wrong chase. Maybe it was the way I was dressed. I try to be sensible. Otherwise I get in trouble. I've Byzantine dreams.

PEARL: Cool.

LETI: I chased him away. Didn't want his money. (Pause) I dreamt that I would die inside this Mustang. Hellish nightmare. Flying off a bridge over the Pacific.

Couldn't roll down the windows. Green water filling my lungs. Knowing this was my assigned page. Dying alone. End of a mystery.

PEARL: Dying is a mystery.

LETI: Right. I took this as a sign of punishment from above. That's how Stephen King got hit by that car in Maine. He had a tax to pay. You write horror, horror writes you back. I'm not saying that my hang up is yours. But my shadow sticks close to me. And there's comfort to that.

PEARL: I guess I should go.

LETI: I had a life before I fell into free-fall. Can't settle in California.

PEARL: Roots take time.

LETI: You're right. Don't go, Pearl. *(Pause)* You want this car badly, don't you?

PEARL: Yeah.

LETI: Yeah?

PEARL: Yeah. I like the car, yeah. My boyfriend got me started on Ford classics. T-birds, Cougars, the works. Pure Detroit metal wrapped and slapped. Mustang's a mythic star.

LETI: A classy star which aged beautifully. *(Sings)*
Pony car, pony car.

Won't you be my pony car?

Don't say no, here we go,

Ride across the plain *(She hums a few more bars)*

PEARL: Nothing's cooler than an early year Mustang.

LETI: What does your boyfriend drive?

PEARL: Nothing.

LETI: Oh?

PEARL: Not even a bicycle. D M V revoked his license. He flunked traffic school. Three D W Is and they crucify you and your first born.

LETI: Jail time?

PEARL: Six months.

LETI: He got off light.

PEARL: Nearly broke up his band.

LETI: What's the band?

PEARL: Pissin' In The Wind. Bluegrass with...

LETI: A twist of Lyle Lovett?

PEARL: No, that jerk called Moby.

LETI: How do they sound?

PEARL: Like white trash pissin' in the wind. *(Pause)* Can I test drive it, Leti?

LETI: Bring cash?

(PEARL nods her head.)

LETI: You're serious.

PEARL: About a lot of things.

LETI: Let's truck. You're about ten years my junior.

PEARL: Yeah

LETI: I can guess your weight too.

PEARL:

You and my boyfriend.

LETI: Don't get pissed.

PEARL: I'm not pissed. I like you. You're weird. *(Pause)* Isten, I'm buying the car, that's a fact.

LETI: You just have that certain feeling.

PEARL: It looks O K from here. I go on hunches.

LETI: The car's got a soul of its own, I swear.

PEARL: Don't see that many ads like yours.

LETI: A fading muscle car deserves respect.

PEARL: Pure Ford genius.

LETI: Lithe and agile. Radio full blast. The car that America made great.

PEARL: Just a short test ride. Up the freeway and down the coast.

LETI: Sure thing! Listen sweetie...I can't find the keys.

PEARL: What?

LETI: There's another set inside the glove compartment.

PEARL: Car's locked?

LETI: More or less. (*Looking across the street*) Beautiful bitchin' car. We'll get the keys, honey.

PEARL: Leti...

LETI: My auto ambivalence acting up on me... (*Pause*) What happened to your face?

PEARL: (*Adjusting her sunglasses*) Just a bruise.

LETI: Some fucked up guy in an amateur band?

PEARL: Skip it.

LETI: I'd report the asshole at once.

PEARL: I did.

LETI: Boys and their boundary issues.

PEARL: Past history now.

LETI: Did you hear that the "N R A" Senator from Texas was shot inside a carwash?

PEARL: Today?

LETI: A set-up. No witnesses. The killer got away. Probably was his girlie intern from Corpus Christi. What's Charlton Heston going to say?

PEARL: Hell's Bells! Doesn't he have Alzheimer's?

LETI: Carwashes used to be very safe.

PEARL: Except for hydrochondriacs.

LETI: You mean hydrophobics?

PEARL: Hydroponics. Whatever.

LETI: Fact is, he wasn't a real friend of the N R A since he pushed trigger locks whenever he left the state.

Texas is so fucking violent.

PEARL: Then again, there's Gary Condit from Modesto. He killed Chandra Levy.

LETI: You're so right, girl! *(Pause)* I'll probably get very upset after this Mustang drives away.

PEARL: So you said over the phone.

LETI: We need precious toys. Or a cherished house pet. The chestnut sweetness of a retriever. Lovely dog hairs everywhere. On the carpet, black dresses and the bed. Hugging an abandoned one from the pound makes me cry.

PEARL: That's so true.

LETI: I'm moving to Mexico. Had a fantastic dream about Cabo San Lucas.

PEARL: Cool. I've been there.

LETI: Selling everything I own.

PEARL: I did that a couple of years ago.

LETI: Good feeling.

PEARL: Lighter than a feather.

LETI: Going to design my own amnesia. A step toward absolute freedom.

PEARL: Money is freedom. That's my dad talking. *(Pause)* Thought about buying the new Mustang GT with the single-cam V8, 16 valves, duel exhaust.

LETI: Single-cam?

PEARL: Ahuh.

LETI: If the vibe is sweet, I don't sweat what's under the hood.

PEARL: I took a course through college extension.

LETI: Did you get your hands dirty?

PEARL: Never trust a mechanic with a hangdog smile sucking on a lollypop.

LETI: I like to hang a small rabbit's foot or a dream catcher under the mirror.

PEARL: How much will you take for it?

LETI: Didn't I say over the phone? If I really like you, three grand.

PEARL: Do you?

LETI: Better than blue book.

PEARL: Three grand?

LETI: I paid double that and rebuilt the engine.

PEARL: Mileage?

LETI: Odometer's busted. But I've got all the service records. Got to be under a hundred thousand.

PEARL: Three grand?

LETI: Look at the body. Not an ounce of rust. Pretty flashy for a '67.

PEARL: Obviously, it's had a paint job or two.

LETI: Who hasn't?

PEARL: My dad used to drive a Mustang. And he handled them like children. *(Pause)* You're going to use the coat hanger to get in?

LETI: Usually works.

PEARL: I hate when that happens.

LETI: I got a zillion coat hangers.

PEARL: Want me to do it?

LETI: No, I got this down pat.

PEARL: Got the proper title?

LETI: Of course.

PEARL

'Cause I drove two and a half hours in killer traffic.

LETI: Relax. My life is tied up with this sweet car.

PEARL: Yeah, I understand.

LETI: No you don't. I gave birth inside this Mustang.

PEARL: Really?

LETI: Couple of years ago. Right after Sinatra died.

PEARL: You're shittin' me.

LETI: Sinatra's not your guy, I can tell. You go for Sting or Harry Connick, right? Barry Manilow? I was late in my third trimester. I had some prescription painkillers and pulled myself down along the seat.

PEARL: Lamaze?

LETI: Lamaze my ass. A Christian SuperAgency came aboard. Jesus Family Values something or other. My blue haired aunt got involved. Thinks she's D A R. Those things matter to her. *(Pause)* A few pounds underweight.

PEARL: Boy or girl?

LETI: Auntie Clara gave her a temp name. Sounded like Mayflower. That's like having a freaking boat for a baby. Lost her to adoption services.

PEARL: That's kind of sad, Leti.

LETI: Yeah. *(She employs the coat hanger in the manner of a "fishing arm" to hook the inside door lock.)* Whenever I

slip in without a key, it's good to think about historic things like orgasms and the acquisition of fine jewelry.

PEARL: (*Attention on car lock*) For sure.

LETI: Yeah, just another flick of the wrist...

PEARL: I really really want this car, Leti.

LETI: Bingo! (*Successful in opening car door*) In time, she will return your affection beyond your dreams. And your happiness will lift my happiness. (*Pause*) Were you ever pregnant?

PEARL: Why do you ask?

LETI: Cause I like to know what I already know.

PEARL: I don't think you need to know.

LETI: Maybe. We've a few items in common.

PEARL: Most women do.

LETI: And you had an abortion.

PEARL: Excuse me?

LETI: Within the last two years.

PEARL: And if I did?

LETI: I doubt no one knows.

PEARL: My father knows.

LETI: At least he was compassionate.

PEARL: He was. (*Pause*) I think it's time for a test drive.

LETI: Yeah. (*Pause*) Can I see your license?

PEARL: (*Retrieving from her purse*) Just a sec.

LETI: Insurance says you got to do that, otherwise...not that I don't trust you. Want me to come with you?

PEARL: (*Hands over license*) That goes without saying...

LETI: I'll just make you really nervous. That's O K. Feel the car alone. You don't need to crash into a eucalyptus all because of me.

PEARL: I'll be back in five minutes.

LETI: I'll just hold on to your license, O K? Next month's your birthday. Only twenty-eight.

(PEARL *nods in agreement*)

LETI: There's enough gas in the car to hit the freeway. Feel the pick up at eighty. And if a cop comes, tell him the speedometer's busted and I have your I D.

PEARL: My dad's a cop.

LETI: Then absolutely no harm shall come to you. Amen.

(*End of scene*)

Scene Two

(*An hour later*)

PEARL: I love the car, Leti.

LETI: Ahuh.

PEARL: I really love the car.

LETI: Took you a fine freaking hour to figure that out?

PEARL: Time flew.

LETI: Where did you go, my dear?

PEARL: Here and there. Ran out of gas. Had to keep driving.

LETI: Yeah.

PEARL: I used to live not far from here. So I cruised around with the radio on.

LETI: Hope you didn't change the stations. I got them set just right.

PEARL: Doesn't matter.

LETI: You'll like my stations, honey.

PEARL: We'll see. Any budge on the price?

LETI: I gave you my best price.

PEARL: Three grand?

LETI: What do you want me to do, wrap it in a pink bow? *(Pause)* So where are we?

PEARL: I've cash.

LETI: Count it out please.

PEARL: *(Hands a wad of cash)* All hundreds. Nice, crisp and clean. Straight from the bank.

LETI: Not taking it to a mechanic?

PEARL: The car sounds and handles fine.

LETI: O K.

PEARL: O K.

LETI: Okey dokey. *(Pause)* I thought you might steal the Mustang.

PEARL: I don't steal.

LETI: We all steal sometimes. *(Counting cash)* I'd have gone to the cops. I'm not afraid of cops. I can charm a cop. My father wanted to be a cop.

PEARL: That right?

LETI: All his friends were cops or they looked like very glazed donuts. *(Putting cash in her pocket)* This counts O K, Pearl.

PEARL: I tried to get into the trunk. *(Next two lines overlap)* But this key doesn't work.

LETI: Sometimes the lock sticks. All you got to do is stop at a gas station or a 7/11. They'll fix it.

PEARL: Don't you have a trunk key?

LETI: It's lost in the crease of the rear seat. No big deal. It'll turn up after your first full car wash.

PEARL: I really should have a look inside.

LETI: I've got the title in my purse. (*Fishing it out*) It's got a coffee stain. Demons have chased away my angels. You know what I mean?

PEARL: Angels never really leave you.

LETI: (*Smiling*) Here's the title. And bill of sale. How do you spell your name?

PEARL: Like an ocean pearl. Last name Campbell.

LETI: Like the soup can?

PEARL: Like the soup can.

LETI: I wish you a lot of luck with this baby blue beauty, Pearl Campbell.

PEARL: Thank you.

LETI: I wish myself luck too.

PEARL: All one can hope for.

LETI: Yeah, girl. That's all one can hope for.

PEARL: Anything you need to get from the car?

LETI: If you find any tapes in the glove compartment, they're yours. Even Tom Petty. I give up everything. Such things you will inherit from me. I'm never going back. Don't miss my family. California's only going to bring me an early death. (*Pause*) And, for God's sake, please drive safe. Don't see any cute angels on duty today.

(*End of scene*)