

DUCK

A Play in One Act
by Christine Kallman
(excerpt)

Character

ELEANOR: 78 years old, retired business woman.

Place

Eleanor's upstairs bedroom in a southern Minnesota city, and outside her lake home on an island in northern Minnesota.

Time

The present and a few months earlier.

Setting: ELEANOR'S upstairs bedroom. The present. It is late morning, but not much light reaches this room.

At Rise: ELEANOR sits in a chair without moving. She perhaps wears slacks, sweater, slippers. Her clothes read a bit outrageous. There is a walker close at hand that she uses to move around the room.

(Silence)

(ELEANOR moves her eyes then her head toward the door, and strains to hear. Then she gets up and moves toward the door carefully. Looking around, she sees the audience and addresses them.)

ELEANOR

Don't blame me. I did all I could. A million gallons of diluted bitumen— heavy crude oil— sinking to the lake bottom, killing every kind of aquatic life. [beat] I *tried* to— well— but it wasn't enough.

(She turns her head back to the door as if hearing something, then turns to the audience again.)

Did you see anyone— oop!

(We hear a toilet flush and a distant door open. ELEANOR ducks down. Pause. She cranes to look out the door again. Then she whispers.)

It's them. They're everywhere. Always creeping up on me. Like mildew.

(She stealthily takes out a suitcase she has been hiding and starts to pack some clothes.)

Let me know if you see them coming. I'll be in deep doo-doo if they catch me in flight. It will close the deal. For good.

(She hides her suitcase again then speaks to someone outside the door.)

I'm fine. No I'm fine!! I think I'll take a nap.

(ELEANOR coughs.)

Little shits. [short pause] All for the love of Duck! Stuck in the second level of my own house while my two daughters have the run of my life. When they're not fighting they're scheming. My two girls— Audrey and Pepper. I named them for my favorite movie. *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Audrey Hepburn and George Peppard! Pepper— it fits her. Shake her too much and you get burned. I'm not sure, but I think I know what they are plotting.

Love. That is no reason to ship me off. Mom, they say, we didn't know you were such an *environut*. I wish I could say I cared that much—that I had done *enough*— but it was really just a few bread crumbs fed to a duck. And um, there was that other thing—mm—a bit— well— not really *dangerous*— well, maybe it was a bit— mm— *risky*. And I did break my hip. And, granted, I have been just the *teeniest* bit forgetful.

But love— in itself— couldn't possibly be a good reason to put someone away, even at a palatial retreat called "Imperial Oaks." [sarcastic] "Rolling hills of oak savannah surround a gracious estate in the Southern style. Enjoy family style dining in the hospitable 'Blue Skies Room.' Music on Tuesdays, Bridge on Thursdays."

What they don't say: They're putting me in the Sunset Unit. Behind not one, but two! Industrial. Steel. Doors.

Can you blame me if I begin scrambling away from the approaching horizon? Pondering possible escape routes? Like— [realizing] the windows!

(She checks the windows.)

That screen is tight as a prom-night virgin! [beat] Anyway, too high.

(ELEANOR coughs.)

Excuse me. I have this cough. Some things were never meant to be inhaled.

(She looks at the door again, resumes her packing. Then we hear a clock chiming 11:00. ELEANOR counts the strokes.)

Blasted little time. At the stroke of twelve they deliver the verdict. The tall man with the black mask will bring the hood— Really he’s a social worker and they say we’re going to “talk.” But I know better. I have until just noon to prepare my defense. To gather all the evidence to prove that the actions I have taken— all for the sake of a duck— have been those of a woman in complete possession of her sanity.

The charges against me: I went to the lake alone. That was only the first of my Great Sins. Can you imagine a senior, Grand Dame of Osteoporosis driving six hours north *totally unsupervised* to a secluded island where she might have the *audacity* to do something that would slightly inconvenience her two daughters? [beat] I want to show you something.

(She holds her phone out to show a photo of her lake home.)

This is my lake cabin. Yes I know it’s not really a *cabin*. Dreamy Crystal Lake property on private 3 acre island with 254 feet of sandy lakeshore. This spacious 6 bedroom 4 bath home has panoramic lake views, native stone fireplace, natural woodwork, lakeside deck. Walk-in pantry, walk-in closets, walk-in showers. Theater room. Granite countertops.

Yes, a pretty nice one. I worked forty-five years, sixty hours a week as an accountant and investment analyst to develop this into a place I could entertain my clients. I worked my tooter off. [beat] Oh— you work hard too! And you don’t have a cabin? Just what are you trying to say? That *I* had some advantages?! Of course I had advantages. One of them being I’m *damn smart*. But, well, yes, other things—I know I know!! I was born into “privilege.”

(Pause, not happy having had to admit this.)

I know what you’re thinking. Because I’m “privileged” I could have *prevented*— I should have done more— [beat] When I think of what it *was!*-- *Before*. In the great grand glorious *before*.

(ELEANOR is now at the lake in her mind, a few months earlier. ELEANOR’S cough is not present during the times at the lake, except when indicated.)

Pristine. [beat] You wouldn't believe the fish we catch up here! Northern, bass, sunnies, and yes walleye. Lots of birds—little birds like finches and redwing black birds— and big ones like bald eagles and golden eagles. Beaver and possum. Fox. Wolf. This would be Paradise if I didn't have to put up with so many damn inconveniences. Someone came into my kitchen and made off with the rest of the coffee beans if I find that thief I'm gonna *tie him to the dock!!* [beat] And let the mosquitos peck out his liver.

(She suddenly stiffens in pain.)

Oh god oh god oh god my back. If I was any stiffer you could iron shirts on me. I go to dry a load of towels and the dryer gives out! I'm about to throw all the towels in the boat and head home but then I think, did I come up here to this God-forsaken island for my health? No! I came up here to get away from Richard. I've never heard such a complainer as he is. "Ow ow ow ow, my legs are killing me!" Well, all I can say is, not fast enough.

So there is nothing else to do but take the whole load up to the clothesline. You'd think after all the things I've done for my daughters they would come and help their old mother but no they have "things to do." I know what it is. [ELEANOR smiles.] They can't stand to be around a cranky old bitch.

(after a beat, more serious)

Richard said this and I quote him verbatim: Eleanor Annabelle Cranberry Loesser you have never loved anyone or anything and you never will. [beat] I sure as hell am going to prove him wrong.

(beat, moving ahead with energy, breathing heavily)

I begin my trek— uphill— with the heavy basket— of wet towels— to the clothesline. Sisyphus— climbing Mt. Everest— on a pair of wobbly stilts. [climbing] Oh god oh god oh god oh god oh god oh god oh god. Panting and sighing— at the peak— of Mt. Everest.

[beat] Then I see her. [she sees Duck] Flying across the lake beatin' hell right at me and I think at first she's gonna take my noggin' clean off! But she veers down and disappears into the trees.

(Pause as ELEANOR watches the duck.)

Busybody. Bustling in the thicket. And that must be her mate. Making a nest I'd wager. Mighty saucy of you to frighten me that way, you old quack quack! Coming in here like you own the place! Ms. Duck! Ms. Duck! You come back here! [beat, getting an idea] Yes! Ah yes! You showed up just in time, Ms. Duck. I'll prove Richard wrong. I'll prove him wrong!

END EXCERPT

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