

Used Goods
By David J. LeMaster

(A hotel room. Jerry and Mabel enter
through the door and look around)

MABEL

Oh. Well, look at this.

JERRY

It's not very nice, is it?

MABEL

It's junky.

JERRY

You want me to call the front desk and ask for another room?

MABEL

It doesn't much matter.

JERRY

Sure it does. Can you be comfortable in here?

MABEL

It'll be fine.

JERRY

You don't have to be a martyr.

MABEL

I'm not.

JERRY

Look, if you're uncomfortable with leaving your sister—

MABEL

I've slept in a recliner by my mother's hospital bed for nearly a week. Gladys can watch her for a single freaking night.

JERRY

Okay.

MABEL

Okay. (pause) Besides, if Mother dies while we're away, they'll put the body on ice until we get there.

JERRY

That's cold.

MABEL

So is ice.

JERRY

Ha ha.

MABEL

What does she care? If she's dead, she won't know the difference.

JERRY

I thought you wanted her to die in peace.

MABEL

She'll be in peace. What does it matter if I'm there crying my eyes out? I'll be at peace, that's the difference.

JERRY

Okay, then, that's why we've taken a hotel. Relax and get our mind off the hospital. The room needs to be comfortable. Sure you don't want to switch?

MABEL

It's fine. (picks up cell) Gladys says we need a pair of shoes with high arches to put on Mother's feet.

JERRY

She's unconscious.

MABEL

But if she lies there much longer, her ankles will turn in.

JERRY

Does that matter?

MABEL

You want her in a wheel chair?

JERRY

Being alive in a wheelchair beats the alternative.

MABEL

Which is?

JERRY

Being dead inside a box.

MABEL

You're not funny, Jerry.

JERRY

Sorry. Just trying to lighten the mood.

MABEL (dials cell)

You failed.

(she gets frustrated with dialing. Pause. She puts the cell down)

I don't feel like doing this.

JERRY

Then don't. Gladys can hunt for shoes tomorrow. She owes you. Tonight, we're going to relax. Okay?

MABEL

Okay.

(Pause. They don't speak for a long time)

MABEL

Robert hasn't even called to check on Mother.

JERRY

Are you surprised?

MABEL

We should make him pay his own tuition.

JERRY

Kid's got a lot on his mind.

MABEL

So if you or I get sick, we can expect Robert to ignore that, too?

JERRY

Probably.

MABEL

When I think about what we've—

JERRY
Your mother's death isn't Robert's fault.

MABEL
She's not dead, yet.

JERRY
Near death.

MABEL
That's not funny.

JERRY
Almost death. Impending death. (pause) Does any child call his mother like he should?

MABEL
I called mine.

JERRY
So you were a saint.

MABEL
Well, he should call to check on her. Is a call too much to ask?

JERRY
Why don't you call him?

MABEL
No.

JERRY
All right, then.

MABEL
You're an idiot.

JERRY
And what's revolutionary about that?

MABEL
I'm just noticing it more and more, that's all.

JERRY
Who were you going to call about the shoes? I can—

MABEL

Forget it. It doesn't matter.

JERRY

Yes it does. She could still make it through this.

MABEL

Are you kidding?

JERRY

It doesn't hurt to have hope. You can always buy the shoes and take them back.

MABEL

You mean put them on mother until she dies, and then go back to the store with my receipt?

JERRY

No one will know.

MABEL

I'll know.

JERRY

Then keep them.

MABEL

I'd give them away, just like I'd give away all the other clothes in her closet.

JERRY

Well, there you go.

MABEL

It's chilling, don't you think? Those things I bought at second-hand stores.

JERRY

You don't shop at second-hand stores.

MABEL

When I was in college. Before I met you.

JERRY

You did?

MABEL

All kids shop in those places. Robert probably shops there now.

JERRY

I didn't.

MABEL

All kids but you, then. I had a cute sweater I bought for a buck and a half. Cardigan. It reminded me of my grandmother. It probably belonged to someone else's grandmother. Someone who died. It was treasure to her, but to her children it was just used goods, something to box and have taken away.

JERRY

Nice thought.

MABEL

Think about it. It's a connection to someone else—someone who went through the same thing we're going through now. Lost a parent and went through that parents' house. Closet. Personal things. The items you see every day. The things you forgot about and assumed were lost. The things that you never knew they had.

JERRY

You didn't do this when your father died.

MABEL

That's because he had a heart attack. It was different.

JERRY

It's still losing a parent.

MABEL

But it's my mother. Losing a father isn't the same at all. (pause) Will you give my things away when I die?

JERRY

You're not going to die.

MABEL

I will someday.

JERRY

I'm older than you. I'll probably go first.

MABEL

I could have a car wreck tomorrow. And will you give my things away?

JERRY

Do you want me to?

MABEL

I don't know.

JERRY

Well, I'll decide when the time comes, then.

MABEL

It's an interesting thought, isn't it? The things I loved being used by someone else.

JERRY

You've donated clothing before.

MABEL

It's not the same. This is like donating a part of yourself. It lives on after you die.

JERRY

You could donate your organs.

MABEL

That's morbid.

JERRY

And this isn't?

(He stretches out on the bed. Pause. She sits very still. Pause. She begins to cry)

What? What is it?

MABEL

The thought of seeing Mother's clothing on someone else.

JERRY

We'll throw them all away.

MABEL

No. She'd love the idea of sharing them with someone else.

JERRY

Okay, then.

MABEL

(Pause) But I don't. I don't want to share anything that's her. I just want to hold her and keep her to myself and not let anyone or anything take her away.

(They embrace)

JERRY

It's all right. Get it out.

MABEL

I can't help it.

JERRY

I know.

MABEL

It's so—horrible of me.

JERRY

It's natural.

MABEL

Why doesn't she just—die?

(Pause. She cries. He holds her. Pause)

I won't have anything left for the funeral.

JERRY

You'll surprise yourself. (pause) Mabel? Remember how strong you were your father passed away?

MABEL

Don't use that phrase.

JERRY

What?

MABEL

Passed away. You're anesthetizing it.

JERRY

I thought it would make you feel better.

MABEL

Well, it doesn't. It makes me feel worse.

JERRY

Well, okay then.

MABEL

I mean, it's an idiotic euphemism that makes me insane. People are afraid to mention death for fear that you'll break down. And I won't break down for that. It's stupid things that make me break down. Not the sound of the word, "death."

JERRY

Sure.

MABEL

It's like when Daddy died. See, I said it. Daddy died. Died. (spells it) D I E D. People said the most inane things. "I'm sorry for your loss." What is that? What loss? You mean, you're sorry my Daddy died, because if that's what you're saying, I agree with you. I'm sorry he died, too. Or they'd just not talk to me at all, for fear they'd make me cry. Or fear they didn't know what to say. Or sometimes maybe they feared talking to me would bring death to them. It's ridiculous, Jerry. Here I am in this ridiculous farce, trying to rest in a ridiculous hotel room while my ridiculous mother sits on a breathing machine—

(She's crying. He lets her)

I think it's time we take her off.

JERRY

Okay.

MABEL

I mean, don't you?

JERRY

I think whatever you think.

MABEL

Gladys won't do it.

JERRY

She will if she thinks your mother's suffering.

MABEL

She won't. She'd rather have Mother sit there in a vegetated state for another six months.

JERRY

Well?

MABEL

Well, what? I mean, we have no choice. She's not going to get better, the doctor said it.

JERRY

There's an outside chance.

MABEL

Oh, outside chance. There's an outside chance the sun won't come up in the morning, but you know it will.

JERRY

So, tell Gladys.

MABEL

No, let's wait for Gladys to go home.

JERRY

You're pulling the plug without telling her?

MABEL

Mother's been in the hospital for a week, and this is the first time Gladys has even shown her blessed little face.

JERRY

Baby, that's a big decision.

MABEL

Which is another reason Gladys shouldn't be around to make it. She hasn't made a good decision in the last twenty-five years. Ask her three husbands.

JERRY

But you need to tell—

MABEL

And start the war?

JERRY

It's a decision you should make together. If you reason with her—

MABEL

Jerry, since she got religion, she's so hung up on keeping people alive. Reason's out of the question. And you know she won't sit in that hospital room for a second longer than she has to. She'll say, "It depresses me, and I don't do things that are depressing." She'll leave the dirty work to me.

JERRY

Would you like something to drink?

MABEL

No. Why?

JERRY

I want something to eat. Maybe call room service.

MABEL

There's a vending machine down the hall.

JERRY

When was the last time you really ate something?

MABEL

You mean besides pretzels and candy bars?

JERRY (finds menu)

Here. They've got a BLT on rye with French Fries. How does that sound?

MABEL

Nauseating.

JERRY

What about a chicken sandwich? Or there's a grilled chicken with rice.

MABEL

I can't sit in here and enjoy myself.

JERRY

Why not? We got the room. Let all of this go.

MABEL

I can't.

JERRY (picks up room phone)

Yes, this is room—(to Mabel) What room are we?

MABEL

Seventy-six.

JERRY

This is Room Seventy-six. We want a BLT, and a grilled chicken with rice.

MABEL

If I'm going to eat, I want something horrible for me. Forget the calories.

JERRY

What do you want?

MABEL

A burger and fries.

JERRY (on phone)

Change that. We want a BLT and a burger and fries. Yes. (to Mabel) How do you want your burger?

MABEL

Charred to a crisp.

JERRY (on phone)

Well done. And two cokes.

MABEL

Diet coke.

JERRY (to Mabel)

Calories don't count tonight, remember? (on phone) Yes. How long will it take? Okay. (hangs up)

MABEL

I can't believe I'm having burger.

JERRY

Throw caution to the wind. Want me to call back and get a milkshake?

MABEL

A burger's enough.

JERRY

Okay, then. (grabs TV remote and turns on TV) Grab a pillow and stretch out. We're gonna shut the world out tonight.

MABEL

Okay. Thank you.

JERRY

What do you want to watch?

MABEL

What, no sports?

JERRY

Tonight's your night.

MABEL

Find something girly and fru-fru.

JERRY

Girly and fru-fru. You got it. (turns TV channels) How's this?

MABEL

I hate that show.

JERRY

She hates that one. (turns TV channels) How about that?

MABEL

Oh, go back one.

JERRY (turns TV)

Here?

MABEL

One more.

JERRY

Here.

MABEL

Yes, that. I love that.

JERRY

This, huh? Looks like tranquilizer material to me.

MABEL

Good. Go to sleep, then. I won't bother you.

JERRY

I can't. They're bringing me a BLT.

MABEL

Turn it up, then.

(he turns it up. We hear a speaker on TV.
They listen for a moment, and then drown
the speaker's voice out)

JERRY

What are they doing? Redecorating a house?

MABEL

That's right.

JERRY

They made a TV show about this?

MABEL

Look at that. See that? That's absolutely gorgeous.

JERRY

It is?

MABEL

Wouldn't you want a sofa like that?

JERRY

I guess. The flowers are a bit much, though.

(Her cell rings. Pause. They look at each other. Jerry mutes the TV. Mabel answers on the fourth ring)

MABEL

Yes? (listens) Okay, Gladys. We're on our way. (she hangs up. Long pause) They'll keep the body in the room for us. Gladys is filling out the forms.

JERRY

You want me to call Robert?

MABEL

In the car.

JERRY (pause)

We can come back here, Mabel. We've paid for the room already—

MABEL

No. I can't.

JERRY

Are you sure?

MABEL

I need to stay at home tonight, Jerry. I'm sorry.

JERRY

It's okay. (he puts things back into suitcase and closes it) I'd better call Room Service.

MABEL

Just call the front desk from the car.

JERRY

All right. (pause) You okay, baby?

MABEL

Yeah. I'm okay. (pause) Jerry?

JERRY

Yeah, baby?

MABEL

Do you think maybe tomorrow we can go buy her a pair of shoes? We'll buy them, and then donate them to Goodwill.

JERRY

Yeah, baby. Of course we can.

(Blackout. End of Play)