

Of Sound Mind and Body

By Kate Fitzgerald

Characters:

Charles Willis.....Middle aged man, reflective and conflicted.
Casey Flynn.....9th grade student, nervous at first, but bubbly and kind.
Paul Schneider.....Eighteen, tough and frustrated.
Carol Flynn.....Middle-aged woman, sardonic.

(At rise Charles stands in a pool of light.)

CHARLES: Day one: It's simpler in here than I thought it would be. The walls are grey, the door is white. There are no windows. I thought at first that this would bother me but it doesn't. It's not a terrible place to be it's just...not what I expected. Different from what you hear it's supposed to be like, you know? I mean I'm content considering the circumstances--but there's one thing I can't understand. At this table in the corner here *(He gestures to the table)* there are two chairs. Two. When they brought me in here they certainly knew no one was with me so--why two? At first I said to myself, "Maybe they thought I'd like to put my feet up and rest for a while"--but no. They would have given me a bed if they wanted me to rest. *(Beat)* Maybe it's here to torture me. To force me to spend hours staring at it...waiting...wondering...thinking. *(Snapping out of his trance)* But no-no. That's not it at all. The only logical reason why there would be two chairs would be that someone is coming. Someone *must* be coming.

(Lighting shift as Charles sits down at the table, shortly after Casey enters timidly, carrying a heavy book)

CASEY: Hi.

CHARLES: Hello.

CASEY: *(Confused)* I'm sorry I--I think they must have brought me to the wrong place. I was expecting to wait alone.

CHARLES: No, no. I thought someone might come. Look-- *(Gesturing towards the extra chair)* There's a chair for you right there.

CASEY: Oh, thank you. *(She sits down)* Just so you know, I don't think I'll be here very long. A few hours at most probably. They said they'd take me upstairs in a little while. Just some things needed to be sorted out first I guess...

CHARLES: You said...they told you you were leaving?

CASEY: Yes.

CHARLES: I see.

CASEY: Didn't they tell you...?

CHARLES: No--uh--they didn't mention it.

CASEY: Oh. *(Beat)* Well I wouldn't worry. I'm sure it was a mistake.

CHARLES: *(Reflectively)* Sure, sure. A mistake...

CASEY: They told me to leave this book with you. *(She places it carefully on the table, he recognizes it, begins to leaf through it)* So...how long have you been waiting?

CHARLES: Let's see. *(Glances at clock on wall)* Around...15 hours. It feels a lot longer than it sounds. *(Beat)* You know, while we're here we might as well get to know each other--I mean if fifteen hours felt so long I can't imagine what it will be like just sitting here, staring for a whole day.

CASEY: I guess you're right. Well...what do you want to know?

CHARLES: Our names might be a good place to start?

CASEY: Alright. *(She extends her hand to him)* I'm Casey Flynn.

CHARLES: *(He grasps her hand tightly)* I'm Charles. Charles Willis.

CASEY: It's nice to meet you Mr. Willis.

CHARLES: Charles is fine, really.

CASEY: *(She smiles)* Charles.

CHARLES: You seem a little young to be here, Casey.

CASEY: I'm in 9th grade. Although technically I should be in 8th grade. My mom always says I skipped a grade because I'm "gifted" (*She does finger quotes*) but really I just skipped kindergarten so I don't think it counts.

CHARLES: I'd say it does.

CASEY: (*Playfully*) Well then we can agree to disagree. Anyways when girls in school ask me how old I am I usually lie, but sometimes I feel bad about it and tell the truth later. I guess I won't have to worry about that anymore...

(She removes her coat to reveal a large blood stain on her white blouse. She sees Charles see it and waits nervously for his reaction. Charles is startled but does not comment.)

CHARLES: (*Beat*) I suppose you won't.

CASEY: (*After a short silence*) Do you have any children?

CHARLES: Yes, I do. Two sons.

CASEY: What are their names?

CHARLES: John and Hunter.

CASEY: Do you miss them?

CHARLES: (*Taken aback*) Yes I--I do. Very much.

CASEY: I think my mother must miss me.

CHARLES: I'm sure she does.

CASEY: She's probably very mad that I ruined her blouse. She didn't want me to wear it, you know, but I did anyway. On the way here I kept imagining that I'd wake up in my room and she'd say, (*in a mock scolding tone*) "Casey Elizabeth Flynn. I asked you not to wear my blouse to school and just look at this. I'll never be able to get that stain out!" And then I'd slam the door and shout into my pillow. I'd probably cry a little bit for no good reason and listen to loud music...and then we'd eat dinner together at the kitchen table. (*Beat*) I tried to say sorry before I left--about the blouse I mean--but I was speaking so quietly that I don't think she heard me. (*Shaking her head*) No. no. She didn't hear. (*Beat*)

CHARLES: Does it hurt you? *(He gestures towards the wound)*

CASEY: *(Smiling)* Not anymore.

CHARLES: I'm...I'm so sorry Casey.

CASEY: Don't be. It's not your fault. You seem like a very nice man.

(Suddenly the door swings open, a bright light shines through)

Goodbye Mr. Willis.

(She exits the room, the door slams shut behind her. After a short silence Charles crosses downstage. Lighting shift)

CHARLES: A very nice man. *(Reassuring himself)* I am a very nice man. *(Beat)* Everyone had to have a license. I wasn't selling them to kids or-or-or sick people. Of sound mind and body. No license, no gun. That was my policy...no license, no gun. *(Growing more passionate)* I mean for god's sake was I supposed to go on flipping burgers and shoveling sidewalks for the rest of my life? I had bills to pay. I had kids to feed. What was I supposed to do? God. *(Reflectively)* What the hell was I supposed to do?

(He sits in the chair holding his head in his hands, lighting shift, Paul enters the room looking around, nervous and alert. Charles recognizes Paul and stands to greet him)

CHARLES: Hello. *(He extends his hand to shake)*

PAUL: Hey. *(He walks past, ignoring the gesture, and still examining the room)* There are no windows in here. Kinda creepy. Don't ya think?

CHARLES: I hadn't noticed.

PAUL: *(Looks at Charles for the first time, notices him staring)* What? Do I know you or something?

CHARLES: No--uh--no you don't. My name is Charles.

PAUL: Paul Schneider.

CHARLES: *(Recognizing the name)* Paul Schneider... Well it's--uh--it's nice to meet you Paul. You're welcome to sit wherever-- *(He gestures to the table and chairs, but is cut off by Paul)*

PAUL: No need. I won't be here long. *(He glances around)* There's no way they'd leave me in this dump. I was a good Christian man. *(He crosses himself, mockingly)*

CHARLES: I see.

PAUL: They told me to leave this pack of smokes with you. *(Slams down a cigarette pack and lighter on the table)* Mean anything to you?

CHARLES: No--no, I don't smoke.

PAUL: Kay. *(Beat)* So what's your deal? Why are you here?

CHARLES: Nothing I--I didn't do anything.

PAUL: Right. *(Beat)* Well I shouldn't be here. If they don't take me upstairs I swear to god... *(Beat)* People make mistakes ya know? Everybody makes mistakes. Doesn't mean you're no good.

CHARLES: What was yours?

PAUL: What?

CHARLES: Your mistake?

PAUL: *(Laughing wryly)* Oh, yeah. My mistake. I hurt somebody.

CHARLES: Oh. *(Draws back slightly)*

PAUL: *(Laughing)* Well relax Charlie I'm not gonna hurt you. Do ya see any weapons in here? God I'm so sick of that reaction. Don't shit yourself I'm unarmed. *(Raises his hands above his head jokingly)*

CHARLES: Why did you do it?

PAUL: Why? Yeah that's the question isn't it. I don't know. I really don't. I'd tell ya if I did. I swear I would. But trust me when I say it was the biggest screw up I ever made. *(Beat)* You

know I knew there was something wrong with me from the start. I'm not crazy or messed up in the head or anything like that. I just get mad. Really *really* mad. I swear to god there are some days where anything that moves makes me start swinging. Red days. That's what my dad used to call them. *(Beat)* I always asked to take those stupid written tests in school--you remember those? Those mental health quizzes? I probably took twenty of those damn tests. I was just so sure something was off, ya know? They'd ask me about my childhood and my feelings and shit, but the results always came back the same. No ADHD. No dyslexia. No OCD. No depression. No problems...no help. "He's just quiet. Everybody has hard days. He'll get over it." *(Laughing darkly)* Yeah. I'll get over it. *(Beat)* I was having one of my red days when it happened. I'd been having dreams. Bad, bad dreams for about a week, so I talked to another stupid school psychologist who told me to "Walk it off." *(Laughing)* Walk it off. So I walked. I walked until I hit that stupid little kid and then--*(becoming emotional)* There's nothing I can do when I get like that, ya know? I--I--I couldn't stop it. It just--it...happened. I couldn't help it. *(Reassuring himself)* I couldn't have helped it. *(Beat)* Anyways, I'm not staying here. There's no way. I don't know if I'm going upstairs or down but there's no way in hell I'm staying here.

(The door swings open suddenly)

CHARLES: I guess you were right.

PAUL: I guess so. *(He crosses to the doorway then pauses)* Hey, Charlie?

CHARLES: Yes?

PAUL: You do believe me that I couldn't have helped it, don't you?

CHARLES: Sure I do.

PAUL: *(Pause)* Do you think I'm going upstairs or down?

CHARLES: I don't know Paul.

PAUL: Well, where are you going?

CHARLES: *(Beat)* I don't know.

PAUL: *(Beat)* Well I hope I see you there.

(Paul exits. Lighting shift as Charles crosses downstage flipping furiously through the book, he stops on a page towards the end)

CHARLES: Paul...Paul Schneider. I remember. *(Reading aloud)* April 7th. Smith and Wesson 9mm. \$749.50. Licensed. *(Beat)* Of sound mind and body.

(Lighting shift as he sits down. Door swings open, Carol enters)

CAROL: Hi.

CHARLES: *(Quickly hides book under the chair)* Hello. I'm Charles.

CAROL: Carol. It's a pleasure. *(Wryly)* Nice place you've got here. *(She crosses to the table and chairs)* Lovely feng shui. Really. So how long have you been here? *(She sits)*

CHARLES: *(Glances at the clock)* About a day now.

CAROL: Oh, god. I'd better get comfortable then. *(She places her feet on the table and reclines)* Boy, I'd give my left lung for a smoke right about now.

CHARLES: *(Remembering)* I have cigarettes.

CAROL: *(Sitting up)* Do you mind? *(He hands her a cigarette and lights it)* Thank god. I wasn't going to last much longer without one. God only knows when I'll get out of here.

CHARLES: You mean they didn't tell if you were going to leave?

CAROL: *(Blankly)* No. Did they tell you?

CHARLES: No, they didn't.

CAROL: Looks like we're here to stay then doesn't it. *(She takes a long drag on the cigarette)* So how did you get here?

CHARLES: I had a heart attack. And you? *(He looks at the side of her head, there is a stream of blood running from her hair down her neck)* It looks like you...hit your head?

CAROL: *(Laughs)* Sure. We'll leave it at that. *(Beat)* My kid would kill me if she saw me smoking. She was such a health freak. No smoking, no drinking during the week, I swear to god she was on her way to becoming a nun.

CHARLES: *(Laughing)* Every mother's dream.

CAROL: Yeah, yeah. She was alright. *(Beat)* Actually I was hoping I'd be able to find her when I got here but I haven't seen her anywhere. She's somewhere better I'm sure. Not that you aren't a swell roommate. *(She holds up the cigarette)* I'm starting to like you already.

CHARLES: *(Laughing)* Glad to be of service.

CAROL: Yeah. My daughter wouldn't like this one bit. Smoking in a room with no windows. Funny how there aren't any windows isn't it? She's a bit of a brainiac. She would have worried about ventilation and flammability and all sorts of things a high schooler shouldn't give a crap about. She was going places, ya know? She really was.

CHARLES: *(Beat)* Carol? Could I ask you a question?

CAROL: *(She smiles)* Shoot.

CHARLES: Why are you here?

CAROL: *(Laughing)* Have you seen my head?

CHARLES: Yes but--I mean why are you *really* here?

CAROL: Why am I *really* here. *(Brief silence)* I guess you could say I followed my daughter here. She left about three days ago. I didn't see any point in staying behind without her, so I followed her here. I didn't really think we'd end up in the same place anyway but I figured it would be worth a try so...here I am. *(Beat)* I'm sure wherever they put her is nice. It should be don't you think so? You know, for the best kind of person?

CHARLES: I'm sure it is.

CAROL: I just wish I could see where she was. I don't expect to stay with her because I don't think we deserve to end up in the same place but...I'd just like to know that it's nicer than the place she left.

CHARLES: And what about you?

CAROL: Me? *(She laughs)* No. No, I don't deserve much after what I've done. Somehow I don't think they hand out medals for weakness. *(Beat)* All I know is that my daughter better be living in a goddamn palace even if I never get to see it.

CHARLES: I'm sure you'll see her again.

CAROL: *(She laughs)* It all depends on who you ask I guess. I'd like to think I deserve to meet her upstairs but the Pope would beg to differ. *(She gestures towards her bullet wound)* She didn't deserve to go the way she did. *(Bitterly)* She was scared, and in pain, and I have to exist in this goddamn waiting room knowing that I couldn't save her. *(Beat)* She kept trying to say something to me before she left--she said it over and over but she was so quiet I couldn't hear. I'd give anything to ask her what it was she said. *(The door swings open)* Maybe I'll get a chance to ask her. *(She crosses to the door)*

CHARLES: Wait, Carol I'm...I'm so sorry for everything that happened to you and Cas...your daughter.

CAROL: *(Smiling)* Me too. *(Begins to exit, then pauses and turns back)* Hey Charles? *(He turns)* Maybe we'll see each other again sometime.

CHARLES: *(Beat)* Maybe. Maybe not.

(She exits the room. Charles crosses to the table and picks up the book, leafing through it as his hands shake)

CHARLES: *(Reading)* April 14th. Glock G29. \$629.99. Carol...Flynn. *(Beat)* Of sound mind and body.

(He sits in silence for a while. Eventually he lights a cigarette for himself, and lights the book on fire. The door opens, and he exits the stage)

End of Play