

the beginning of

## **WORDS I CANNOT SAY**

a short play by Rich Orloff

*Place:* The living room of a nice home.

*Time:* The present.

*Characters:* AUDREY, an easily frazzled woman  
NICKY, her young son (or NICKI, her young daughter)  
THE OLD MAN, her elderly father\*  
RUSSELL, her brother  
VICKI, her sister-in-law

(\**Note:* Although these two characters need not be played by actors of this age, they should not be played as caricatures.)

The tastefully decorated living room of a nice home in a nice neighborhood. As the play begins, AUDREY is placing an afghan on THE OLD MAN, who sits in an easy chair. Audrey is stressed, and when she addresses her father, she speaks with the kind of anxious forcefulness that comes when one is trying to convince someone of something they themselves don't truly believe. NICKY (or NICKI) sits on the floor, drawing pictures. The child is well-behaved, but his drawings are not.

AUDREY

You look good today, Dad.

NICKY

Mommy.

AUDREY

One moment, Nicky.

(to the Old Man:)

You look great. There's color in your cheeks, and you look handsome.

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

Relax. Everything's taken care of.

NICKY

Mommy.

AUDREY

I said one moment, Nicky.

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

You're okay, Dad. Russell and Vicki will be here soon.  
You know, they traveled a long way to see you.

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

Everything's fine, Dad.

NICKY

Mommy.

AUDREY

(her patience thin)

Yes, Nicky?

Nicky holds up a drawing.

NICKY

Lookit.

AUDREY

(barely looking)

It's very nice.

NICKY

You didn't look.

AUDREY

I looked.

NICKY

No, you didn't.

AUDREY

Nicky, please. I need you to be  
extra well-behaved today.

Nicky feels rejected.

AUDREY (cont'd)

Okay, let me look at it again.

Nicky shows her the drawing.

AUDREY (cont'd)  
(not very genuine)

It's very nice.

Audrey turns to her father as Nicky crumples his drawing and begins another.

AUDREY (cont'd)  
Now, Dad, I want you to –

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

Dad –

NICKY

Is Poppy going to pee in the chair again?

AUDREY  
No, Poppy's not going to pee  
in the chair again.

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

Do you need to go to the bathroom, Dad?

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

You went just two minutes ago.

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

The doorbell rings.

AUDREY  
Just calm down, Dad. Everything's going to be fine.

Audrey walks to the front door. The doorbell rings again.

NICKY  
Mommy.

AUDREY

Not now, Nicky. Your mother's  
having a nervous breakdown.

(to the door:)

Who is it?

RUSSELL (o.s.)

It's us!

Audrey opens the front door. Audrey's brother RUSSELL and his wife VICKI enters, carrying suitcases. Vicki is an endlessly perky sort; Russell is more reserved.

AUDREY

Hi!

RUSSELL

Sorry we're late. The airport –

AUDREY

I know, I know.

VICKI

(with oodles of warmth)

Hi, Audrey.

AUDREY

Hi, Vick.

RUSSELL

How is he?

AUDREY

The same.

VICKI

Poor thing.

RUSSELL

Have the doctors done any more –

AUDREY

There's no reason to, Russell, he –

RUSSELL

Next time we go off to Europe, I  
promise we'll check e-mail every single –

AUDREY  
Who expected –

RUSSELL  
I know, but –

VICKI  
(approaching Nicky:)  
Is that my favorite nephew\*?

(\*or “niece”)

Nicky looks at her and says nothing.

AUDREY  
Give your Aunt Vicki a hug, Nicky.

Nicky doesn't move.

VICKI  
C'mon, give me a hug.

AUDREY  
Nicky, I thought we agreed you  
were going to be a good boy today.

RUSSELL  
(walking by Nicky:)  
Hi, Russ. You don't have to hug me.

NICKY  
Hi, Uncle Russell.

VICKI  
Well, I'm going to hug you... Mmm-mm.

Vicki gives Nicky a suffocating hug.

RUSSELL  
Hi, Dad.

AUDREY  
Look who's here, Dad. It's Russell and Vicki.

RUSSELL  
You look good, Dad.

VICKI  
Hi, Walter. You look great.

I - I - THE OLD MAN

RUSSELL  
What is it, Dad?

I - I - THE OLD MAN

RUSSELL  
Are you glad to see us, Dad?  
Is that what you're trying to say?

I - I - THE OLD MAN

NICKY  
(having finished a picture:)  
Mommy.

AUDREY  
(barely looking)  
It's very nice, honey. Draw another one.

Nicky crumples the drawing and begins another one.

I - I - THE OLD MAN

RUSSELL  
What is it, Dad?

I - I - THE OLD MAN

VICKI  
We're so glad to see you.

I - I - THE OLD MAN

RUSSELL  
Dad –

I - I - THE OLD MAN

RUSSELL

Do you want something, Dad?

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

It doesn't mean anything, Russell.

RUSSELL

Are you too warm?

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

He does that all the time.

VICKI

I think he's just glad to see us.

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

RUSSELL

Are you thirsty?

VICKI

Are you hungry?

AUDREY

Russell -

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

RUSSELL

Do you want to sit somewhere else?

VICKI

Do you want to watch TV?

THE OLD MAN

I - I -

AUDREY

Russell -

NICKY

Mommy.

AUDREY  
(not even looking)  
It's great; draw another one.

Nicky crumples the drawing and begins another one.

THE OLD MAN  
I - I -

VICKI  
You look great, Walter, just great.

AUDREY  
We need to talk, Russell.

RUSSELL  
I know.

THE OLD MAN  
I - I - I -

AUDREY  
Relax, Dad.

THE OLD MAN  
I - I - I -

RUSSELL  
Everything's going to be fine, Dad. That's why  
we're here. To make sure everything's fine.

THE OLD MAN  
(the pace has quickened)  
I - I - I - I -

AUDREY  
Calm down, Dad.

THE OLD MAN  
I - I - I - I -

VICKI  
You've got nothing to worry about, Walter.

THE OLD MAN  
I - I - I - I - I -

AUDREY

Dad, just stop it.

THE OLD MAN

I - I - I - I - (and not stopping)

RUSSELL

Dad –

VICKI

You look great, Walter, just great.

NICKY

Mommy.

AUDREY

Draw another one, Nicky.

Nicky crumples the drawing and begins another one.

RUSSELL

Do you think we should take him to the doctor?

AUDREY

It doesn't mean anything, Russell.

RUSSELL

(to the Old Man:)

Do you need to pee?

VICKI

(to Audrey:)

How can you stand it?

AUDREY

What choice do I have?

VICKI

(to Audrey:)

Poor thing.

AUDREY

He always gives up eventually.

RUSSELL

We hear you, Dad. Calm down.