

**O FORTUNA**

or: Do You Like to Eat Fried Chicken?

A Play in One Act

written by  
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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

MAN – in his early 30s; baby-faced and clean-cut, but weeks of travel have seen his hygiene and grooming deteriorate; very intelligent and serious, but with a loose-cannon energy.

BOY – in his late teens; wishes he were an old man, with a corresponding dress (cane, antique hat) and behavior; pitches his voice lower than natural, and with a growl; feels out of place in the world and yearns for a bygone age and a life of freedom.

OLD WOMAN – in her early 70s; a parody of the fading Southern belle; theatrical bearing and gestures; dressed in gaudy nylon pastels—big dress, pillbox hat, gloves.

## SETTING

Spring of 1969. Late at night in the living room of an unassuming home in Southern California near the Mexican border. There is a couch, an armchair, and a bar cart.

*The old woman enters. She adjusts her dress and walks around the room, tidying. She rubs her fingers across a dusty surface and frowns disapprovingly. Suddenly, she starts singing, loud and performative, if only to herself. She moves around the room, continuing her tidying with more vigor.*

OLD WOMAN

*(singing)*

You're nobody til somebody loves you. You're nobody til somebody cares. You may be king, you may possess the world and its gold. But gold won't bring you happiness when you're growing old. The world still is the same, you never change it. As sure as the stars shine above. You're nobody til somebody loves you. So find yourself somebody to love.

*We hear the front door open, and the man and the boy coming into the house.*

BOY *(offstage)*

Welcome. Be it ever so humble.

*The old woman looks up, alarmed.*

MAN *(offstage)*

Should I take off my shoes?

*The old woman bustles offstage.*

BOY *(offstage)*

Nah, what does this look like, Buckingham Palace?

*The boy enters. The man follows in socks.*

MAN

I took them off.

BOY

Suit yourself.

*The boy moves around while they talk, making himself at home, while the man stays in the same spot, waiting to be invited to sit.*

MAN

They were full of sand, so –

BOY

Like I say, makes no difference from where I'm standing.

MAN

Well, I wouldn't want to abuse your hospitality with sandy shoes. It's nice to be in a home. Motel rooms can't quite compare to the homemaker's touch.

BOY

*(laugh)*

My mom'll be tickled you called her a homemaker. Anyway, afraid all we have is the couch. It's not a pullout, but it does the job if you're tired enough.

MAN

Anything would be better than another dingy motor lodge. Or, as I run low on cash, my car.

BOY

Yeah, when I see a man sleeping on the beach, I assume he isn't exactly flush.

MAN

Well, sleeping in the great outdoors IS one of life's pleasures, and when it helps manage the budget, all the better. It's a nice, dry warm out here. The good kind of warm. It's hot back home, but it's a wet heat.

BOY

Where is home? You didn't say.

MAN

Louisiana! The Pelican State. State of union, justice, and confidence. I did my military service in Puerto Rico, though, so I know a bit about heat.

BOY

Hey, a real globetrotter. I woulda thought San Diego was a long way from Louisiana, but Puerto Rico's a whole HELL of a long way.

MAN

Oh, you can make that trip in a day by air. I'd never driven further than Georgia before two weeks ago. I feel as though I'm on the moon.

BOY

Wow, so you just hopped in the car and took off, huh? Just wanted to see where the open road took you? An old fashioned adventure? Hot damn.

*The man nods, suddenly very tired, and he sits heavily on the couch, almost collapsing.*

BOY

Oh lordy, sorry. You must be real tired.

MAN

Rode hard and put up wet, as they say.

BOY

You want something to drink? Water? Or we got some whiskey.

MAN

*(big, bright)*

Yeah, you right!

BOY

Huh?

MAN

Nothing. Just something they say back home.

*(squawking)*

Yeah, you right!

*The boy hesitates.*

MAN

A whiskey would be sublime. Your mother won't mind?

BOY

Nah, she doesn't much care what I do so long as I pick up after myself. She's just happy I'm still around, haven't gotten sick of picking up her slack and hit the road myself.

*He opens a whiskey bottle and pours two.  
He holds one up for the man to approve.*

MAN

Oh, don't be shy now.

*The boy grins, pours another few glugs in each.*

MAN

Now there's a good man.

*The boy brings him his whiskey and they  
clink glasses. The man takes a large sip, and  
then sits straight up on the couch, holding his  
glass up as if giving a toast.*

MAN

*(singing Carl Orff, big booming baritone)*

O Fortuna! Velut luna! Statu variabilis!

*He sips his drink. The boy stands watching.*

BOY

You, uh...you having a fit or something?

*The man sits back against the cushion.*

MAN

No, I am not!

*(singing quietly)*

Semper crescis –

BOY

You're a wild one. I respect that.

MAN

*(singing quietly)*

Aut decrescis –

*(abrupt switch back to speech)*

I've been thinking quite a lot about something a friend once told me.

*(voice slowly rising in volume and bombast)*

Fortuna, the Greek goddess of fortune, you see, she has a wheel! An ominous wheel, with a terrible crank, and at her will, we either rise towards triumph, or we descend towards ruin.

We may reign, or we may be crushed beneath that dreadful wheel.

BOY

Like an armadillo on the highway.

MAN

Like an armadillo on the highway.

BOY

You got some real brainy words. You a professor or something? No, you'd be in school. You a scholar or something?

MAN

I was a professor, as a matter of fact. In another life.

BOY

How many lives you had?

MAN

More than my share.

BOY

So what do you do in this life?

MAN

I suppose that's what I'm aiming to find out.

BOY

A journey of discovery, huh? Wild. That's just wild. Hope I can follow your lead some day.

MAN

*(sudden)*

Are you familiar with the allegory of the cave?

BOY

Sounds sorta familiar from school, but I used to sleep a lot in –

*The man abruptly rises to his feet.*

MAN

Plato suggests you might imagine a cave, where men have been imprisoned all their lives.

*The boy sits down on the couch to watch the show, sipping his drink. The man begins to move about, using the space theatrically.*

MAN

These men are chained by the ANKLES and the WRISTS and the NECK. They can look in no direction but at the cave wall before them. Can you picture it?

BOY

Sure.

*The man moves towards the boy, crowding him, a bit threatening.*

MAN

He suggests you might imagine that behind these prisoners is a flame, a great and powerful flame, and that before these prisoners are displayed shadow puppets, depicting all manner of man and beast and other living thing. Can you picture it?

BOY

*(anxious)*

Sure.

MAN

Picture it! This is all that life is to these men! Nothing but shadows and echoes in the dark! Picture it!

BOY

*(very anxious)*

I am! Goddamn!