

Leap Year

by
Kathy Graivier

Kathy Graivier
Kgraivier@gmail.com

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Gloria	Grey hair in a braid, flowing blouse and blue scarf.	Over 60,	F
Albert	Veterans Baseball cap, Khaki Pant,	Over 60,	M

SCENE ONE

Elevator alarm sounds. Interior lights dim. Elevator screeches and stops.

Albert reaches out and holds the side of the elevator to steady himself.

Gloria bumps into the side of the elevator.

GLORIA

Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!

Gloria takes deep rapid breaths. Albert reaches toward her arm to steady her.

GLORIA

Don't touch me!

Albert recoils.

ALBERT

I'm so sorry. I was just trying to help you.

GLORIA

Just don't touch me. I don't know you.

Gloria looks down at the floor and talks in a lower octave to herself.

GLORIA

My horoscope said Mars was in retrograde. I should never have left the house.

Gloria pulls on her scarf. Albert is leaning against the opposite side of the elevator staring at her bemused. Gloria keeps her head tilted down. She continues to take rapid breaths. In between breaths, she speaks to Albert.

GLORIA

You are a MAN, you need to do something.

ALBERT

What exactly do you expect me to do?

GLORIA

Climb up there and get help.

ALBERT

I might be A man but this is not THE movies and I am not as spry as I used to be.

Gloria leans back against the elevator wall and slides down to the floor. She closes her eyes and repeats a mantra.

GLORIA

I am safe, I am strong, I am well. I'm safe, I'm strong, I'm well.

Albert sits on the floor with his back against the elevator wall.

GLORIA

I'm safe, I'm strong, I'm well.

ALBERT

Tell me about your happy place.

GLORIA

What?

ALBERT

Come on, it worked for my daughter when she was little and it might just take your mind off of this.

Albert gestures with his hand up and around. Gloria pulls on her scarf.

ALBERT

Just try it.

Albert leans back and closes his eyes.

ALBERT

Close your eyes and tell me a memory.

Gloria closes her eyes.

GLORIA

The beach. Walking along the rocky coast. Smelling the salt air. Having a picnic with my family in the summertime.

Gloria's hand pulls less on the scarf.

ALBERT

What beach?

GLORIA

My favorite place. Bodega Bay.

Albert opens his eyes.

ALBERT

I grew up in Bodega Bay.

Gloria sits up and snaps open her eyes. Gloria scowls.

GLORIA

You did not!

ALBERT

Yes, I did.

GLORIA

Prove it!

ALBERT

In college, I worked at The Birds Cafe in the afternoons. Best clam chowder in Northern California.

GLORIA

Yes, but what is the owner's name?

ALBERT

Tim Owens, wife is Sarah and their dog is Zeus.

Gloria's mouth is open in surprise.

GLORIA

Well, okay. I guess you are telling the truth.

ALBERT

Why would you think I would lie?

Gloria leans back and closes her eyes. Shoulders slump.

GLORIA

I'm sorry. I have become paranoid since Covid. The pandemic has made me anxious.

Gloria speaks in a softer tone.

GLORIA

I didn't used to be so anxious.

Albert stares up at the ceiling.

ALBERT

Yeah, it has been lonely these past few years. It seems that my only social interactions these days are doctor's appointments.

Gloria give a small laugh.

GLORIA

That was what I was doing today.

Gloria pauses. She looks up at the ceiling.

GLORIA

I remember an exciting life. One where I danced at midnight, swam in the ocean at sunrise and wrote romantic short stories for a local magazine. It was a wonderful life and I felt relevant. (pause) Do you feel relevant?

Albert sits up and turns to look at Gloria.

ALBERT

Some days, yes and somedays, no.

Gloria looks down at her hands twisted in the scarf.

GLORIA

I wish there were more relevant days than irrelevant days for me.

Both Gloria and Albert look at their laps in an uncomfortable silence.

ALBERT

What else do you remember about your younger exciting life?

GLORIA

My daughter, Willow... Willow had perseverance. She used to teach herself stuff by reading textbook after textbook. We moved around a lot when she was younger so she was always having to play catch up at school. Our fault, but that's just how it was when your husband is in the military. She wanted to get into Stanford University and by god she did.

ALBERT

Where did her perseverance end up taking her?

GLORIA

To the research labs. Willow loved looking at DNA strands. It was her passion. I didn't see the appeal, I thought it looked like stringy white slime.

ALBERT

Tell me about the military part.

Albert points to his hat.

GLORIA

Well, I was married to a very handsome guy who was in the Navy. We met each other right after college. He worked at a restaurant that my sister and I loved to go to near the beach.

ALBERT

Was it love at first sight?

GLORIA

No, my sister had a crush on him first. She is the one who dragged me there.

ALBERT

What changed your mind?

GLORIA

Change my mind?

ALBERT

What did he do to make you fall in love with him?

GLORIA

He had perseverance. After he took our order, he would sketch a picture for me on a small piece of paper. Picture after picture. I had quite a collection.

ALBERT

So it was the pictures that won your heart?

GLORIA

Partially, but I loved the stories that he told me that went with them. We would sit by the ocean and he would regale me with stories about magical places and adventures that only the two of us were a part of. Those memories are what inspired me to write the romance novellas.

Gloria plays with her wedding ring.

ALBERT

What else did he do that you loved?

GLORIA

He would build cushion forts with our daughter and tell her amazing stories. It made my heart so happy to hear him take her on a make believe journey too. The real world is fine to live in but the fantasy world is fun to visit.

ALBERT

Have you ever felt you couldn't come back from the fantasy world?

GLORIA

Only when I got really high.

Albert chuckles.

ALBERT

No, I mean, living in the memories of our youth. Do you feel that when your mind wanders, you are just playing the memories of your younger self over and over.

GLORIA

I don't know.

ALBERT

It is kind of peaceful.

Gloria looks at him.

GLORIA

Do you have children?

ALBERT

Yes, a daughter. She lives nearby.

GLORIA

Are you close?

ALBERT

Yes, my wife made sure of it.

GLORIA

What?

ALBERT

When my daughter, was 16 she started to ask the hard and uncomfortable questions. My wife told me that if I wanted to have a good relationship with her, I had to allow myself to be more vulnerable, less stoic.

Albert salutes.

ALBERT

Also, my daughter taught me Origami.

Albert takes out an origami swan from his jacket pocket and passes it to Gloria.

GLORIA

You made this?

Albert takes out a small square of paper and starts to fold it.

GLORIA

My daughter asked me uncomfortable questions too.

Albert raises his eyebrows.

GLORIA

Yes, well, she asked me things like, How did I know Dad was the one, What does love feel like and the real zinger, How many people had I been with? I told her that was between me and God and both of our lips were sealed.

Albert chuckles.

GLORIA

Well, we were both high on edibles at the time.

ALBERT

Edibles. Really? Hmmm. Maybe I should try those with my daughter sometime. Now that is something I can't imagine.

Gloria laughs.

ALBERT

My daughter, and I have our own bonding moments that don't include psychedelics. We have a tradition that every 4 years we can each ask each other one very specific personal question. It was cute when she was younger. But when she was a teenager, it got more intense. She said, "Dad, you said I could ask you anything." Well the way she said anything caused my anxiety to spike.

GLORIA

February 29th?

ALBERT

Yes, February 29th.

Gloria looks over at Albert again.

GLORIA

It's a tradition right. You have to answer. Isn't that the rules.

ALBERT

Yes. Those are the rules. But she wanted to know things about my life in the military. Things that I wasn't ready to talk about.

GLORIA

She wanted to know how many people you killed, right?

Albert holds up the origami swan that he folded.

ALBERT

Yes.

Albert puts down the paper swan.

GLORIA

You asked her why?

ALBERT

She told me that her friend's Dad...

GLORIA

Was a policeman.

ALBERT

And he killed a guy robbing the convenience store by her school.

GLORIA

It made her wonder.

Albert passes the new swan to Gloria.

GLORIA

Did you end up telling her the number?

ALBERT

No, I told her that actual number doesn't matter but what did matter was that it changed me forever.

GLORIA

Instead of defending the weak from evil, you wanted to heal the injured.

ALBERT

Yes, that is why I became a physical therapist when I left the Navy.

Mechanical whirring sounds. Lights flicker and then come on.

Albert stands up. He reaches his hand out and down to offer to help her up. Gloria looks up and smiles. Gloria takes his hand and tries to get up. Albert reaches over with his other hand and grabs her arm to help lift her up.

Albert and Gloria are both standing looking at each other.

GLORIA

Thank you.

Albert extends his hand to shake her hand.

GLORIA

Hi. Gloria

Gloria takes his hand and shakes it.

ALBERT

Albert.

Gloria straightens her clothes.

GLORIA

Would you like to go get some coffee?

Albert presses the first floor button and the elevator starts to move. He smiles at her.

ALBERT

We are meeting Willow for dinner my love.

END OF PLAY