

# **ROPE'S END**

**by  
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FIFTH DRAFT,  
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PRE SHOW -- As the audience is entering, we hear children's voices singing fragments of campfire songs -- Cum-bay-ah, Michael Rowed the Boat Ashore, 500 Miles ...

ACT ONE -- SCENE ONE

The last song swells up for a moment --  
"Not a shirt on my back,  
Not a penny to my name ..."  
-- and then fades out.

LIGHTS UP on TOBIAS BOONE. He's 45-ish, not quite shabby, but a bit soft and nondescript -- a man who could use some sunshine and exercise and a Tommy Hilfiger shirt or two.

He sits on a chair downstage in front of a scrim. The stage is basically bare -- a chair, a table with a laptop, an old Citizen Kane poster, perhaps a couple of empty pizza boxes on the floor. Toby takes a long slug from a bottle of beer, probably not his first of the day. It may have loosened his tongue a bit, but he's not drunk.

He's trying to tie a knot in a length of rope, talking more or less to himself, but including the audience as well ...

TOBY

(making a loop with the rope)  
And so we have a lake -- or a kidney-shaped pool -- or the fetid swamp of my imagination ... and then a snake, with all of its Biblical connotations, pokes its snout -- or whatever snakes have -- Noses? Probosci? -- up out of the lake, slithers sinuously around the limp pizzle ... and does a forward two and a half back into the pool like a veritable Greg Louganis, and voila, a perfect --  
(pulls the rope taut)  
-- clovehitch.

(but he ends up with no knot at all -- just a straight piece of rope)  
Turn in your grave, Lord Baden Powell. No problem --  
(gets up and goes to one side)  
I have just the thing, just the ticket for the clovehitch challenged male, if I can put my hands on it --  
(returns with an old shoe box)  
-- a shoe box, you say -- but not just any shoe box -- my magic shoe box, My Wonder Years shoe box --  
(removes the top, smells)  
-- the unmistakable aroma, redolent of -- my childhood -- in all its musty banality.  
(pulls out a large chestnut on a string)  
My chestnut -- Attila the Hun.  
(whacks the desk with it, continues to pull things out --)  
My sharp stick --  
(takes out a 45 record)  
Lorne Greene sings the theme from Bonanza --  
(hums a few bars as he pulls out other stuff)  
-- my beanie decorated with miniature toilet seats.  
(takes out a small round object)  
The skull of my dead hamster, Hammy. Alas, poor Hammy, I knew you well --  
(continues to take things out --)  
A broken buzzer from my Junior Jeopardy Game ... my dried and shrivelled lump of -- something ... And yes -- my little cub hat.  
(puts it on -- it's several sizes too small)  
You'll dyb dyb dyb! We'll dob dob -- and all that crap. And here it is -- before Google before Yahoo before the 24 Hour Poker Channel there was -- the Boy Scout and Wolf Cub Handbook. A fount of subversive information.  
(reading)  
This is to certify that I, Toby Boone, am a -- cud? -- And I was always told I was a bright child --  
(reading)  
Weight 59 pounds. Height -- 56 pounds? Forearm measurement -- forearm measurement?! -- 47 inches? God, a mutant cud ... Anyway --  
(flipping through the book)  
... clovehitch, clovehitch ... Here we are. Mmmm ... Actually, that wasn't a clovehitch at all. It was a bowline. No wonder I failed cuds. Anyway, it looks as if all I really need is a simple slip knot ...  
(ties one, checking the book, humming "Bonanza")  
Dum dede dum dede dum dede dum -- Bonanza! -- etc.

He gets the knot tied easily enough -- holds it up -- and we see that what he's made looks very much like a noose.

He continues humming Bonanza, looks around for a place to string it up -- stops ...

TOBY

What? -- Look, just keep whatever you're thinking to yourselves. The state has no business in the cud packs of the nation.

(throws the rope up over something. It falls -- )

Story of my life.

At this moment, something else in the box catches his eye. He takes it out, falls silent.

It's the torn half of an old photo.

(Note: Ideally the audience should see this photo -- projected on the scrim, or printed on the program. It shows a pretty girl of 13 or so -- vibrant, beaming, exuding joie de vivre. The image has a sunny, summery feel to it.)

TOBY

(stares at it -- ruminating, remembering ...)

Marisa ...

A soft, shadowy light comes up behind the scrim, suggesting the flickering of a campfire. (We may hear a fragment of one of the campfire songs from the beginning.) Toby turns to watch and it's as if, through the scrim, he's looking into his past ...

We see a girl, MARISA, silhouetted, beckoning to someone ...

MARISA

Come on! My parents are here already! We don't have much time!

During this the LIGHTS GO DOWN on Toby. He steps off -- and reappears behind the scrim with Marisa, in manner and body language magically 13 years old again. (Note -- these

are not children. These are adult actors  
playing 13-year-olds.)

TOBY

(a bit shy and tongue-tied)  
I ... I wrote you this.

MARISA

What is it?

TOBY

Uh, sort of, a poem ...I guess ... here.

MARISA

(takes it, reads)  
You are my sun,  
You are my moon,  
You are my shining star.  
Locked in my heart is where you'll be --  
Till I am where you are ...  
You wrote this?

TOBY

Don't you like it?

MARISA

I love it.

TOBY

Really?

MARISA

It's beautiful.

TOBY

This is for you too --  
(gives her a photo)  
It's ... us.

She says nothing, close to tears.

TOBY

What?

MARISA

It's just ... I feel like this is goodbye. Forever.

TOBY

Why? We'll see each other next summer

MARISA

We don't know that! My stupid parents are talking about moving to stupid Vancouver and ...

A car horn HONKS

WOMAN (OFF)

Marisa! Time to go!

MARISA

What if we're doomed to wander alone in the desert for the rest of our lives, parched and desperate, always missing each other, never knowing that the other was just beyond the next sand dune?!

TOBY

But why would we be in a desert?

MARISA

An emotional desert. It's a metaphor.

TOBY

Oh.

MARISA

It's unbearable!

She suddenly has an idea. She takes a barrette from her hair -- jabs her finger.

TOBY

What are you doing?!!

She uses the barrette to write something on the back of the photo, in blood. Then she carefully tears the photo down the middle --

TOBY

Marisa --?

MARISA (gives him half)

Read it.

TOBY

August 31, 2006. What's that?

MARISA

That's exactly 31 years from today. I want us to make a solemn vow that we'll meet on that day.

TOBY

But why 31 years?

MARISA

We met August 1. It's a year for each day we've known each other.

(gives him the barrette)

Stab your finger.

TOBY

Me?! Why?!

WOMAN (OFF)

Marisa!

MARISA

Just do it. Please --

He jabs his finger with extreme reluctance, yelps.

TOBY

God!! I'm bleeding!

MARISA

That's the point, silly. Take my hand --

(squeezes their two hands together)

-- and swear by our blood which will mix and mingle in our veins forever that we'll meet on that day -- and neither rain or sleet or typhoons or life's long and weary way will stop us. Or pestilence.

TOBY

What's pestilence?

MARISA

It's, it's -- you know. Just swear, please?

TOBY

OK. I swear --

The car horn HONKS repeatedly.

MARISA

I'm coming!!

(She throws her arms around Toby, kisses him)

You are my sun ... you are my moon ...

She runs off tearfully, waving ...



sunlight glinting in her hair. And you're lightheaded, almost giddy because you've glimpsed life's unlimited possibilities -- and you're haunted still by the idea that if somehow you'd grabbed onto that moment and never let it go, how different your life might have been ... how different ... and even now, you think -- what if -- what if you could somehow find her and recapture the clear blue innocence of that time -- then you could recapture something in yourself...what is ...

(silence)

Right. That's this story. Hey, I've even got a title - - Loser Looks Up Love of His Life. Or how about -- No Weddings and --

(holds up the noose)

-- a Funeral? -- Or, it would be this story, except I'm not going to do anything about it. This one's a non-starter, no-hoper, no way Jose-er.

(He gathers up the shoe box and heads off.)

Finito.

(He's all but off stage when he stops ...)

Oh, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I'm sitting here alone talking to Alex Trebek and imaginary people who apparently live in my wall!!! -- You're thinking I'm at rope's end emotionally, financially, sartorially -- so why in God's name don't I get off my Tubby Bum and do something?!... So who asked you?

(again he heads off ... then abruptly turns back and walks to the desk)

Oh, all right. Just to shut you up ...

(typing on the laptop)

You think I can just Google her after 31 years and she'll actually appear --

(tapping, clicking)

-- same name, no problem, on a platter, waiting for Prince Tubby -- You really think life is that ...

(stops abruptly, stares at the computer. It's obvious that her name has come up ...)

... simple.

BLACKOUT