

The Last Box

by Lavinia Roberts

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GENRE: Comedy/Light Drama

SYNOPSIS: A teenager struggles to make sense over her parent's separation and God's lack of intervention in keeping her parents together.

TIME: 7 minutes

CAST BREAKDOWN: 1F or 1M

THEME: Keeping Faith; Divorce; Youth; Prayer

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Deuteronomy 31:8, Psalm 46:1-3, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 40:28-31

CHURCH YEAR SEASON: Any

SUGGESTED USE: Youth Ministry; Outreach

CHARACTERS:
Leslie—a teenager

PROPS: A cardboard box, an old Bible, a handmade scarf

COSTUMES: A heavy winter coat and scarf, work gloves

SOUND: One wireless microphone (optional)

LIGHTING: General stage or spotlight

SETTING: Sidewalk in front of Grandmother's house

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

It's fun to work with teenage actors. They are often less inhibited than adults and ready to try new techniques. Feel free to explore the layers to Leslie's character with your teen actor. Have her look through the script to find clues about Leslie's life and craft them into a short bio (lived in Kansas, played tee ball, had her own room, and so on). Have her—as Leslie—write a letter to her dad explaining how she feels. Have her do the same for her mom. Have her write a description of her grandma and her grandma's house. All of these exercises will help your young actor understand the character of Leslie, which will give depth to her performance.

A Central Prop

The script centers around one prop—Leslie's last box of belongings. That box gives us the title, the closing line, and Leslie's impetus to be on stage. Given that importance, it's a prop you'll want to pay careful attention to and spend some time getting it "right." What kind of box is it? Do we have any clues in the script? Absolutely. Leslie tells us that they left in a hurry and didn't pack properly. So it's unlikely that this is a sturdy box from a moving company or U-Haul or anything official. It is likely something her mother had around the house. The script also mentions what is inside the box: the scarf Leslie hand-knitted for her dad, her old Bible (with a broken spine), old softball trophies and soccer shoes. While the contents of your box don't have to be exact as the audience won't ever see the trophies and soccer shoes, if you have them available, it's always nice to give the actor authenticity. You will definitely need the scarf and Bible since Leslie removes them from the box and talks about them.

Keeping Emotions in Check

If you and your actor worked through the character background exercises mentioned above, you'll be all set to make this emotional monologue full of depth. As you work through the monologue with your ac-

tor, ask her to point out or underline the clues in the script that tell her how Leslie is feeling. Here are some clues to get you started:

- She's a bit reluctant to go into her grandmother's house: "Once I move in this box, I will officially be moved in."
- She's upset as we see in the stage direction "*removes work gloves and throws them down vehemently.*"
- She has tried to hold her emotions in check and keep from crying about her parents' turbulent relationship for years as we see in her description of biting the quilt her grandmother made her.

These are emotional cues from just the first few paragraphs of the monologue. As you go through the entire script, you'll come up with many more. Does your actor have to display each of these emotions? No, not overtly. But her performance will be that much more moving if she is able to create an emotional arc for Leslie. At the beginning of the monologue, Leslie is reluctant to start this new chapter in her life. At the end, she is resolved as we see in the closing stage direction where she takes deep, decisive breaths... and decisively proceeds to the exit. How does she get from reluctant to resolved? In between we have a little anger, some confusion, and some time questioning God's presence in her life. Which of these emotions is on the surface? Which are just below the surface? Is there any part of her that is looking forward to her new life? Work with your actor to map out Leslie's emotional journey. As you decide which emotions are in her arc, be careful that you aren't making her appear schizophrenic. We want the audience to feel for her, to want to hug her, and to silently cheer for her that she is leaning on God for strength and comfort. We don't want them to be so worried about her that they're ready to have her committed.