

Heaven Forbid

A ten-minute play by Jake Lewis

Heaven Forbid

Characters

PHIL - 60s, recently deceased

VALET - any age, any gender

MOVERS - people who bring things on and off

Setting

Heaven

Heaven Forbid

Lights rise on an empty stage.

***VALET** is waiting, holding a sign that reads **PHIL MCAVOY**, like a chauffeur at an airport arrival area would do. He wears a pin or broach on his coat lapel that looks like it was made by a young child. **VALET** looks around anxiously.*

*Finally, **PHIL** enters, wheeling on a small suitcase.*

*He sees **VALET**, the sign, and stops, perplexed. **VALET** picks up on this.*

VALET: Phil!

PHIL: Um, yes?

VALET: Welcome! I'll be helping you from here!

PHIL: Ok...

VALET: Don't worry, it's normal to be confused. May I take your bag?

*At first, **PHIL** doesn't seem to understand what **VALET** has just asked, as though it is some foreign language, or words that have been haphazardly jumbled together. **VALET** points to the small suitcase that **PHIL** has wheeled on, causing **PHIL** to look at it. He doesn't seem to comprehend what it is, or how he came into possession of it.*

*Without waiting for a yes, **VALET** takes the suitcase, walks with it to stage center, and stops.*

VALET: Ah! Here we are!

PHIL: (Looking around) Where?

VALET: Your new home!

PHIL: (Still confused) But...there's nothing here.

VALET: (Like it's the most obvious thing in the world) Of course not! A clean slate!

PHIL: I'm sorry, I...Can I sit down?

Heaven Forbid

VALET: A chair is a wonderful place to start!

VALET snaps his fingers, and MOVER brings out a rather ordinary-looking chair, placing it right behind PHIL. MOVER exits. PHIL watches all this but does not sit.

VALET: Go ahead. It won't bite. (Beat) Unless you want it to.

PHIL cautiously eyes the chair, and then slowly sits in it.

VALET: How is it?

PHIL: Well...it's a chair.

VALET: Yes, but comfort? Material? Color, even?

PHIL: It's fine...?

VALET: Because if it's not "fine," you can request a replacement.

PHIL: A replacement?

VALET: Yes, like a La-Z-Boy, or one of those hammock-chair things. I never understood the appeal of those, personally, but to each their own!

As the VALET names the La-Z-Boy, two MOVERS bring one on; as the VALET mentions the hammock, it lowers from the ceiling.

PHIL: This will do. (Beat) Thank you.

The MOVERS nod pleasantly, and exit with La-Z-Boy; the hammock ascends back into the rafters.

VALET: Well, now that you're situated, let me introduce myself. My name is

As VALET speaks his name, a sound effect plays, obscuring the audience from hearing it.

VALET: But to you I'm your valet. Almost anything you want, I shall fetch for you. Like that chair, for instance.

Heaven Forbid

PHIL: Oh, that's very kind of you, but I'm afraid I don't have the money to afford such a luxury.

VALET: It's on the house.

PHIL: It is?

VALET nods.

PHIL: But...umm...why?

VALET: It's what you've earned for your life of hard work and good deeds! Think of it like this: You've paid the slot machine of life for (flips through clipboard and finds the correct page) 63 years, and now you get the jackpot!

PHIL: You're telling me...

VALET: You're dead. Yes.

PHIL: I'm dead.

VALET: Yes, you're dead.

PHIL: But, how is this possible?

VALET: It happens to everyone, sometimes natural causes, other times illness, or accident—

PHIL: No, not death, but *this*...walking, and talking, and getting chairs brought to me.

VALET: Ah! Right! This is Heaven, of course!

PHIL: Heaven. Of course it is. It's kind of...empty.

VALET: At the moment, you are correct! But, as you have seen with the chair, you can fill your own personal space in Heaven to have anything you want! Plus, whatever you brought with you in your suitcase!

PHIL: I don't remember packing it.

Heaven Forbid

VALET: Consider it a concierge service. Upon your death, our analysts determine the most important items from your life and send them along with you on your journey over!

PHIL and VALET eye the small suitcase.

PHIL: It's small.

VALET: (Aware how this might look like PHIL did not value much) I've seen smaller! And what I've come to learn in my years on the job is that sometimes the smallest items hold the biggest value. Shall we open it? (Begins to unzip suitcase)

PHIL: (Angrily) No!

VALET: Oh. Very well then.

There is an awkward silence.

PHIL: (Trying to cover his outburst with a more friendly tone) So anything, yes?

VALET: (Relieved the conversation has returned to an area he's more comfortable) Almost anything.

PHIL: How about The Mona Lisa?

The painting lowers from the rafters.

PHIL: Or a 90-inch, flat screen TV?

MOVERS bring on a 90 inch flat screen TV, place it down, and exit. VALET indicates it.

VALET: And it comes preloaded with any show you ever wanted to watch! Past or future!

PHIL: Heaven has cable. That's a new one.

VALET: Well, not cable. More like streaming. But yes, it blows most people's minds. God sure loves his Netflix. He won't stop raving about *Squid Game*. Like, we get it already.

PHIL: Huh.

Heaven Forbid

VALET: What else would you like? Something to eat?

PHIL: I...guess?

VALET: According to my records, your favorite snack is (reading from clipboard and trying to contain his reaction to how gross it sounds) nachos with maple syrup?

PHIL: Don't knock it til' you try it.

VALET: That's why they print menus, as my mother used to say!

VALET snaps fingers, and MOVERS bring out several enormous bowls of it.

VALET: Feel free to eat as much as you want and never worry about gaining weight, feeling sick, or having to use the bathroom!

PHIL: That sounds pretty good! (Eats a chip) Mmm...That's good.

VALET: Well, I won't bother you further, but if you need me, all you have to do is call out (he says his name again, but it is once more masked by the sound effect) and I'll be at your service!

VALET starts to exit, in what seems a bit of a hurry. PHIL eyes suitcase.

PHIL: Wait a sec.

VALET stops, as though he is caught.

PHIL: What about...other people?

VALET: (Showing the first sign of concern) Other people.

PHIL: Yes, I mean...am I to be here alone? For eternity?

VALET: Of course not! You have all the friends you need on the TV! And, of course, there's me.

PHIL: No, I mean *real* people.

VALET: I am as real as you. I had my own life once, you know.

Heaven Forbid

PHIL: I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that.

VALET: (Irrked) Not all of us led lives that allowed us to have this benefit upon getting here.

PHIL: I really put my foot in it, didn't I? All I meant was, I wouldn't want to bother you all the time, I'm sure you're a very busy guy. I just think it might get lonely after a while. Even with TV.

VALET: Are you a cat or dog person?

PHIL: Dog, I suppose.

VALET snaps, and MOVER enters with a dog on a leash, handing it to PHIL, then leaving.

VALET: There! You can tell him anything and he'll never talk back or judge you. What more from a friend could you want? If you don't like the breed, we can send him back for a new one.

PHIL: This little guy looks sweet and all, but...can I see my wife?

VALET, for once, drops his upbeat, friendly energy, and looks like the wind has been knocked out of him. He breaks eye contact with PHIL, as though he is ashamed.

VALET: No. I'm sorry.

PHIL: No? Why not?

VALET: That's...just the way it works.

PHIL: But this is Heaven. You yourself said I can have anything I want.

VALET: No, I said "almost" anything. Other people are the one thing we can't give you.

PHIL: But...she was my wife. Wouldn't she want to see me now that I'm here too?

VALET does not speak, as though PHIL has just answered his own question, and continues to look down.

Heaven Forbid

PHIL: I always thought that when you died, you'd get to be reunited with the people who went before you, who you loved and who loved you.

VALET: I did too.

PHIL: Why? Why is this...policy in place?

VALET: It's like what Satre said, "Hell is other people." So I guess Heaven is...not other people? (Nervous chuckle) I don't know.

PHIL: You must! You work here, don't you? I'm sure this is not a random request!

VALET: You'd be surprised.

PHIL: I am! I'm very surprised that this all-loving God I've prayed to all my life, and tried to be a good person in His eyes, would put a woman on Earth like my wife, who I knew I never deserved, and then not let me spend the rest of eternity with her!

VALET: I understand.

PHIL: Ha! I doubt that!

VALET: (Shouting) I do understand! I lost, too, you know! And when I got here, he was the first thing I asked for! Not a chair, or a famous painting, or a TV! But him!

PHIL is ashamed.

VALET: I'm sorry. I shouldn't have shouted.

PHIL: No, it's...it's alright. I apologize for—

VALET: No need. It's a lot to wrap your head around. The best sense I can make of it is this: Whoever gets here first gets to decide. Sometimes their version of Heaven doesn't include you.

PHIL: (Almost pleadingly) But we were married 42 years.

VALET: And I'm sure they were wonderful, each and every one of them.

PHIL: Most were. Yeah.

Heaven Forbid

There is a moment of silent reflection, and then VALET begins to leave, slowly, then stops.

VALET: When I got here, all I had was an envelope. Inside it was this...design.
(Indicates the object on his lapel). My son made this the same day...just before we...

VALET cries quietly for a moment, then regains his composure.

PHIL: I'm sure he loved you and wanted to see you again.

VALET politely nods, but doesn't find comfort in that statement, then exits.

PHIL takes a moment, then goes to his suitcase. He picks it up, places it on the chair, contemplates opening it briefly, and then reaches for the zipper.

As he starts to open it, lights fade to black.

The End