

Carry That Weight

A short play

By Jake Lewis

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Characters

JUDE - 30s-40s, resentful, not good at confrontation

PRUDENCE – younger than Jude, a peacemaker but not afraid to tell it like it is.

Setting

The cluttered attic of Jude and Pru's recently-departed father

Present day

Carry That Weight

Lights rise on a dusty, crowded attic.

JUDE and PRUDENCE are going through boxes.

PRUDENCE:

Well, if I can say one thing about our dear old Dad, he sure was a packrat.

JUDE:

I think a better word is hoarder. Look at all this garbage.

PRUDENCE:

I'm afraid of what I'm going to come across in one of these boxes.

JUDE:

Like porn from the 1950s where the ladies are showing some midriff?

PRUDENCE:

Or more likely love letters to a woman we never knew about.

JUDE:

Nah, Dad wouldn't have been that discreet. His affairs were out in the open.

PRUDENCE:

Touche.

JUDE:

Imagine if he'd had Tinder.

JUDE pulls out a small, wooden race car, but crudely made; not much more than a slightly shaved block of wood on small wheels with a childish paint job on it.

JUDE

Wow. Check this out.

PRUDENCE:

Is that your Pinewood Derby car?

JUDE:

Dad and I built this when I was in Cub Scouts.

PRUDENCE:
I'm guessing it lost.

JUDE:
Dead last. But I can still remember being down in his workshop making this damn thing.

PRUDENCE:
A good memory?

JUDE:
No. Not at all. I hated it. Then he got frustrated with my impatience...after all, I was seven. Then he was yelling at me, so I stormed out, and he ended up doing most of it himself.

After a few moments, a cell phone is heard ringing. JUDE and PRUDENCE check their phones, but it's not one of them. It is slightly muffled, like it is coming from inside a box, buried under other objects.

They track the noise to one box, open it up, pull stuff out, finally grabbing an old cellphone -- the kind that was first available when cell phones began appearing en masse. The ringing stops just as they reveal it.

PRUDENCE:
This must be Dad's cell. This thing is so old, it's not even a flip phone.

JUDE:
I remember when I got it for him. He totally hated it. Asked me, "Why do I need this when I have a perfectly good landline?"

PRUDENCE:
It's not like he ever went anywhere after Mom died anyway.

JUDE:
I know, but what if he fell and couldn't get to his one landline in the kitchen?

PRUDENCE:
That would mean he'd be carrying this with him when he fell. Which he wouldn't.

JUDE:
I thought he'd play Snake or Minesweeper on it, at the very least.

JUDE powers it up.

JUDE:
Still has juice.

PRUDENCE:
(She clicks around on it.) Wow, remember when you had to press the number three times just to get to the letter you wanted for a text message? No wonder he hated it.

JUDE:
It was the most basic model I could find for him. A lot of good it did, he probably never used it.

The phone rings again, startling them both.

PRUDENCE:
Here, you answer it.

JUDE:
Why can't you?

PRUDENCE:
Because you're the one who got it for him!

JUDE:
Weak excuse. *(He takes it, presses a button.)* Hello?

He listens and makes a strange face. He takes it from his ear. Ends call.

PRUDENCE:
So?

JUDE:
It was just breathing. *(Melodramatically.)* Maybe it's the man with the hook hand! HE'S
IN THE HOUSE WITH US!

PRUDENCE:
Or...! Maybe it was one of Dad's old flames. She got all hot and heavy when she heard your manly voice and her granny panties got so wet she couldn't think of what to say!

JUDE:

I do have a way with the geriatric set.

PRUDENCE:

That's not something to brag about.

JUDE:

Shaddup.

PRUDENCE:

Oh, lighten up! Might as well try to find some humor in going through our deadbeat dad's belongings.

JUDE:

Dead deadbeat.

PRUDENCE:

Touche.

The phone rings again.

PRUDENCE:

This guy is persistent.

JUDE:

Guy? Why can't it be a woman?

PRUDENCE:

Excuse me, PC Police.

JUDE:

Just ignore it. The number probably got reassigned and now someone's having a laugh. Some dumb kid, I bet.

PRUDENCE:

And keep digging through this crap? No thanks. Here, let a woman try.

JUDE:

Ok, show me one.

She rolls her eyes, but takes the phone from JUDE and answers.

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PRUDENCE:

Pru's Pizza -- if you don't like our food, too bad, we're the only pizza place in town!
What can I--

She stops in her tracks.

JUDE:

(Seeing this change.) What? What is it?

PRUDENCE:

(Into phone.) Dad?

JUDE:

Ha. Ha.

PRUDENCE:

(Into phone.) I'm here with Jude the Dude.

JUDE:

God, I haven't heard that nickname since...well, since I was little.

PRUDENCE:

Dad, can you hear me?

JUDE:

Pru, stop. It's not funny.

PRUDENCE:

(Hands him the phone.) I'm not kidding.

JUDE:

(Takes phone, playing along.) Hey, Dad, what's up?

He listens for a moment, then ends the call.

PRUDENCE:

Why'd you do that?

JUDE:

Do what?

PRUDENCE:
Hang up on Dad.

JUDE:
Pru, that wasn't Dad. Need I remind you, he's dead. And I doubt they have telephone privileges in Hell.

PRUDENCE:
I know he's dead, Jude, and as much as you two struggled, I know you don't believe in Hell. But something about that breathing, it sounded like his.

JUDE:
So does a balloon with a hole in it.

PRUDENCE:
I was the one holding his hand at the end. I know what I heard. And felt.

JUDE:
I didn't know you had a degree in breathing. Is this going to be admissible in court, like fingerprints?

PRUDENCE:
Forget it.

JUDE:
Great. Let's get back to these boxes or we'll be here all night, and I don't want to spend one more minute than I need to in this place. It's like it's haunted.

PRUDENCE:
Fine.

They return to sifting through the items, but each seems a bit shaken.

PRUDENCE:
You never listened.

JUDE:
Kiss my what?

PRUDENCE:
Can you be serious for a minute?

JUDE:

Ok, sixty seconds. Go. Who did I never listen to?

PRUDENCE:

Me. Mom. (*Beat.*) Erica--

JUDE:

You're really taking my ex-wife's side?

PRUDENCE:

--Dad.

JUDE:

Oh, don't you worry, I heard *plenty* of what he had to say.

PRUDENCE:

Not when it mattered.

JUDE:

You mean how I didn't visit him in the hospital? You know why!

PRUDENCE:

Yes, and part of me understands, but part of me...

JUDE:

Doesn't?

PRUDENCE:

No, I don't. He wasn't the Father of the Year by any means. But he loved you...in his way--

JUDE:

Strange way to show it.

PRUDENCE:

--and kept asking for you at the end. He told me he wanted to apologize.

JUDE:

Double guilt trip. Two points awarded to Pru.

PRUDENCE just looks at him in disbelief or dismay.

PRUDENCE:

You know what? I can't understand it either.

JUDE:

Thank you.

PRUDENCE:

No, I can't understand why *he* wanted to see *you*.

JUDE:

What is this, Shit on Jude Day? Has it been a year already?

PRUDENCE:

Look at you. A grown man who couldn't find it in his heart to at least say goodbye to his dying father. And why? All because he wasn't crazy about your wife? Seems like he was right, judging by how she ended up taking you to the cleaners in the divorce. He just thought you deserved better than her. We all did, but he took one for the team and told you.

JUDE:

How noble of him. But it wasn't just that.

PRUDENCE:

Because of who he voted for.

JUDE:

Well, yeah! How can you even look at a person who agrees that some people -- like my adopted son -- don't deserve basic human rights simply based on where they were born? Not to mention, a *father* with a daughter, no less, who sides with the pig that thinks its ok to grab women...there... or any number of other terrible things?!

PRUDENCE:

I didn't like it either, and I tell myself it was his loneliness and regret, not to mention his dementia at the end, that made him say those things. You ever wonder if he was doing that just to find some way to engage with you?

JUDE:

You mean, parroting awful rhetoric just so he could talk to me about something? No. You give him too much credit.

PRUDENCE:

But even with all his memories leaving him, he never forgot you. Seeing how you ignored him at the end, I wish he had. At least he'd have one less thing to suffer from before he died. *(Beat.)* He was a man. A man with a great many flaws, yes, but he would have laid down in front of a train for either one of us, and deep down, under all that resentment, you know that, whether you want to admit it or not. *(Beat.)* But you know what? I think I know the real reason why you're so angry at him.

JUDE:

Oh, you do? I can't wait to hear. Where's the couch I can lay on?

PRUDENCE:

Yes, I do, wise ass. And until you admit *that*, you're never going to be able to move on from him.

JUDE is speechless, but he looks slightly ashamed.

PRUDENCE:

I can't be up here with you right now. I'm going to go sit in my car and enjoy some of the pot brownies I just got, and hopefully cool down a bit. *(Exits.)*

JUDE sits there for a moment. He picks up the pinewood race car and pushes it on the floor. It zigs and wobbles, possibly even breaks. JUDE chuckles at how pathetic it is.

He goes back to the box and removes a record. It's The Beatles' "Abbey Road."

The phone rings again. JUDE answers it.

JUDE:

Ok, man, the joke is getting old.

He stops speaking suddenly, then listens.

After a few moments...

JUDE:

Who is this? One of Pru's friends? Did she put you up to this? You're going to keep calling until I say something about my Dad, aren't you? *(Beat.)*) I must be losing it. Alright, fine. I'll play along. *(Beat.)* You know how I know you're not my Dad? You haven't interrupted me yet. *(Beat.)* I'm not going to apologize, ok? *(Beat.)* I guess that

makes me sound a lot like him, doesn't it? *(Beat.)* People used to always tell me when I was younger that I looked just like him. I hated that. And if I'm being honest, the older I get, the more like him I am becoming. And it scares the hell out of me. I always said I'd be a better father to my kids than he was to me, but... I don't know if that's true anymore. *(Beat.)* The other night, Charlie was over, and we were deciding on a movie to watch together, so he obviously picked some kid thing about singing squirrels or something, and you know what I did? I told him we weren't going to watch it because *I didn't want to*. Sounds familiar, right? I cared more about my enjoying whatever it was we watched, rather than sitting through a 75-minute animated musical that he cared about. He cried, I yelled, and we ended up watching nothing, just sitting on different ends of the couch, him on his phone, me on mine. So, that worked out well. Like father, like son! There, I said it! I'm just like him, as much as I try to escape it! You hear that, Pru?!?

JUDE looks back at the "Abbey Road" record he's recovered. Sometime during the next monologue, PRUDENCE reappears, unseen by JUDE.

JUDE:

The night he died, I was at the hospital. In my car, in the parking lot. I was sitting there, listening to Spotify on shuffle. I was afraid to go in, but I could see his room's window from where I was. Mom and Pru were there, and I knew I should be there too. But then, "Golden Slumbers" by The Beatles came on. We both loved *Abbey Road*, one of the few musical tastes we had in common. So obviously I thought of him. How he sang that to me each night when I went to bed as a little kid. He was a decent singer. And I cried. And then I smiled. It was a good memory. *(Beat.)* Then, just as the song ended, Pru called. I turned off the music, but I knew even before picking it up what she'd say. *(Beat.)* I didn't tell her I was there. She would've asked me why I hadn't come up, and wouldn't have understood. I wanted to remember him as the guy who sang me to sleep with "Golden Slumbers," not the remains of the man who I'd find in that hospital bed. *(Beat.)* This is going to sound crazy, but, I think he was saying goodbye to me by playing that song right at that moment. *(Beat.)* Dad?

JUDE listens intently, then smiles.

JUDE:
Goodbye.

He ends the call.

PRUDENCE:
I'd have understood.

JUDE is surprised to see her, and looks slightly embarrassed.

PRUDENCE:

He'd have understood, too.

JUDE runs to PRUDENCE and they embrace. After they separate, she sees the record. She goes to it, and picks it up, looking at it.

PRUDENCE:

Good album.

JUDE:

Best Beatles album.

PRUDENCE:

Huh. That's ironic.

JUDE:

What is?

PRUDENCE:

The next track on *Abbey Road*, after "Golden Slumbers." It's "Carry that Weight."
(Sings.) "Boy, you're gonna carry that weight, carry that weight a long time."

JUDE:

Yeah, I guess I did. I still do. I should probably do something about that.

PRUDENCE:

C'mon. I think we've done enough here today. How do you feel about a brownie?

As JUDE and PRUDENCE exit, arms around each other, lights dim to focus on the pinewood derby racer. If one were to look very closely, they might think it moves slightly.

Blackout.

The End

(Beatles song optional)