

LOST SOLE

A playlet
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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Synopsis

An estate attorney pays a welfare visit to Francis Carcaise, a reclusive widower living in a once-elegant country home that has quietly fallen into disrepair around him. As Francis, charming but increasingly disoriented, fixates on finding his missing shoe and reminisces about his late husband, Nelson, the conversation shifts from polite concern to mounting unease. Greer gradually uncovers troubling financial stagnation and signs of neglect, while Francis offers a poignant meditation on love, loneliness, and the hollowness of inherited wealth. What begins as a tense but civil check-in deepens into a chilling realization: Francis has already made a final decision about his unfinished business, and the missing shoe becomes the devastating clue that brings clarity to what has just occurred.

Characters

FRANCIS CARCAISE Male, 60s or older

GREER MCNICHOL Female, 40s or older

Place

The countryside.

Time

Present.

Setting

A grubby living room in a once upscale home.

A grubby living room in a once-upscale country home. Late afternoon.

(The only light is sunlight filtering through two broken windows where greenery has begun to creep inside. A large dresser is wedged against the front door. A coffee setup rests on the coffee table. Two vessels sit side by side on the mantel, and a small telephone table with a drawer stands nearby. In the distance, a dog barks. A sudden knock at the front door, then another. A quiet moment.)

GREER

(Calling from outside.)

Mr. Carcaise?

(Greer moves to a window and peers in, her figure distorted through dirty, cracked glass, then returns to the front door and knocks again.)

Hello? Mr. Carcaise? I'm sorry to show up unannounced. It's been a long drive! I was hoping we might talk!

(Silence.)

I've tried calling! Several times! It just rang! No machine, no voicemail! So, I thought it might be better to come in person! Make sure you're alright!

(She crosses to another window and leans in, trying to see through the grime.)

Damn it.

(She steps away.)

FRANCIS

(Calling from inside, unseen.)

You'll have to let yourself in!

(Greer hurries back to the window.)

GREER

Mr. Carcaise?

FRANCIS

I said, you'll have to let yourself in! I'm looking for my other shoe! It has to be around here somewhere!

GREER

Oh. Well. I can wait! There's no rush.

FRANCIS

No, no, it's fine! The door's open!

GREER

Mr. Carcaine, it's Greer!

FRANCIS

Who?

GREER

Greer McNichol!

FRANCIS

I'm not sure I know a Greer McNichol!

GREER

It's been a while, but we've met!

FRANCIS

You're not here to rob me, are you, Greer McNichol?

GREER

No! Of course not!

FRANCIS

Because if you are, you'll be sorely disappointed! There's nothing of value here!

GREER

I assure you, that's not why I'm here.

FRANCIS

Good to know!

GREER

If I could just –

FRANCIS

Then come in! I wouldn't mind the company! It's been a while since I've had visitors!

GREER

You're sure?

FRANCIS

Of course! As long as you don't mind a distracted old man tearing the place apart looking for his shoe!

(Greer moves from the window to the front door and tries it. It will not budge.)

GREER

I think it's locked!

FRANCIS

What's that?

GREER

The door! The knob turns, but it won't open! It might be stuck!

FRANCIS

I just fixed it not that long ago!

(Greer tries again, with no success.)

GREER

I'm sorry, I can't get it open!

FRANCIS

I usually leave it unlocked! Where the hell is that other shoe?

GREER

Sorry?

FRANCIS

I said I'll be right out!

GREER

Oh! Alright! Take your time!

(Francis enters, neatly dressed in wool pants, a button down, jacket, perhaps a vest. His hair is combed. He wears one shoe.)

FRANCIS

Well, there's your problem. There's a dresser in front of the door.

GREER

A dresser?

FRANCIS

Yes. Your guess is as good as mine. Give me a moment. I'll move it.

GREER

Be careful.

FRANCIS

I will be nothing but.

(He reaches for the dresser, then pauses, noticing his hands. He turns them over, studying them, unsettled.)

GREER

Everything okay?

FRANCIS

Yes. Fine. Just the dresser. I can't seem to get it to budge.

GREER

Maybe I can push from here.

FRANCIS

If you've got the strength.

GREER

You might want to stand clear.

FRANCIS

Will do.

(Francis steps back. Greer forces the door, slowly pushing it open and shifting the dresser just enough to slip inside. She enters, dressed in business attire, light and summer appropriate.)

Well. That seems to have sorted everything. Greer McNichol, I presume?

GREER

Just Greer.

FRANCIS

And you can call me Francis. Come in. And close the door. Must be cold out there.

GREER

It's the middle of June.

FRANCIS

Oh. Right. Of course. Then it must be... warm.

GREER

A little. Cooler in here, though.

(She shuts the door.)

FRANCIS

The trees keep the place shaded.

GREER

They certainly do. Though I hope you don't mind me saying. It's quite overgrown out there. Took some effort just to reach the door. Thistles up to my elbows.

FRANCIS

I'm sorry to hear that.

GREER

And I had to get past your dog.

FRANCIS

My dog?

GREER

Mm-hm. Brownish-black. Short hair. Or none at all. Hard to tell.

FRANCIS

Ah. That's Duncan.

GREER

He seemed friendly enough, I guess. Though he just stood there, head tilted, watching me. I couldn't tell if he was guarding the place or welcoming me to it. I'll admit, it was a little unsettling.

FRANCIS

I'm sure he meant no harm.

GREER

No, I don't think he did. I got around him easily enough. He just caught me off guard.

FRANCIS

He's a good boy. A bit protective, perhaps.

GREER

Fair enough.

FRANCIS

And the yard... yes. I usually keep up with it. I suppose I've fallen behind. I'm sorry.

GREER

No, no, it's fine. It's your property; I really shouldn't interfere. But... if you'd like, I could have someone come out. Tidy things up a bit.

FRANCIS

"Tidy things up." How do you mean?

GREER

Hire someone. Landscaping, basic cleanup. Because... frankly, it's a mess, Mr. Carcaise—

FRANCIS

Francis.

GREER

Francis. And if you don't mind me saying, it looks like the house could use some attention as well. Outside and inside.

FRANCIS

Is that so?

(He turns, taking in the room.)

Oh my. What in the world...?

GREER

Something wrong?

FRANCIS

No. No. Just... surprised, I guess. I didn't realize how bad it had gotten. Looks like I've let everything go.

GREER

Don't be hard on yourself. It's a lot for one person.

FRANCIS

I suppose.

GREER

All the more reason to let someone help. A few minor repairs, some fresh paint, and it'll all be as good as new.

FRANCIS

I see. And why would you do that?

GREER

You really don't remember me, do you?

FRANCIS

I'm afraid not.

GREER

Mr. Car/caise...

FRANCIS

/ Francis.

GREER

Francis. Your... husband, Nelson—

FRANCIS

Late husband.

GREER

Yes. I was the attorney hired by his family to manage the estate. Executor.

FRANCIS

Right. Yes, I remember now. A rather drawn-out experience. A lot of ruffled feathers, more than a few sour dispositions, and some name calling, some of it amusing, some of it... less so. Though all of that was settled a very long time ago.

GREER

It was. And I'm sorry about what happened. I truly am. But I'm not here on business. I just thought I'd check in to see how you're doing. Whether you need anything. More of a welfare visit, I suppose. That's a nice outfit, by the way.

FRANCIS

Is it?

(He looks down, surprised.)

Oh. Well, thank you.

GREER

You look very nice.

FRANCIS

Perhaps a bit much for just sitting around the house.

GREER

Maybe. But why not? Sometimes a person just wants to look nice. Not for anyone else, just for themselves. If we wait for a special occasion, it may never come. Better to enjoy things while we can. Even alone.

FRANCIS

True enough. Though I can't seem to find my other shoe.

GREER

I'm sure it's here somewhere. I'd be happy to help you look. Or easier solution, you could just take off the other one.

FRANCIS

That wouldn't be appropriate. Not with a guest in the house.

GREER

It wouldn't bother me. You might even be more comfortable.

FRANCIS

I did try untying it, but I must have pulled the laces too tight. Couldn't quite work them loose.

GREER

Well, here, let me—

FRANCIS

No, no. I'll be fine.

GREER

Alright. In any case, I really only came here to make sure you're alright. And that you're getting what you need. And I want you to know you can trust me, Francis.

FRANCIS

I see.

GREER

You know, this wasn't exactly the plan. My life. This career. My father was a defense attorney, a very good one, the kind people asked for by name. And I grew up watching him work, watching how people's points of view could shift in an instant just because he chose the right words at the right moment. I picked up on that early. I was a sweet talker as a kid, always able to get what I needed, or wanted, by bringing people around to my side. Teachers, neighbors, my parents, it didn't matter. I liked finding an angle and then making it land. In school that turned into debate club, mock trials, all of it. I did well there. I even ran for student body president, built a whole campaign from scratch, and won. At the time it all felt like a straight line leading me to where I was meant to go. Law school was the obvious next step, and I went in fully intending to follow my father into defense work, the courtroom, the pace of it, the stakes. But then my mother got sick, and everything... shifted. I had to step away and go home to help take care of her. And those months were long, repetitive, and difficult but in a quiet, steady way. When someone close to you starts to slip, starts looking at you like they're not quite sure who you are, it changes how you see things, what matters, what's actually left at the end of it. When I went back, the courtroom didn't have the same pull. The arguments, the winning and losing, it all felt a little... removed. I found myself wanting something more direct, more personal. That's how I ended up in estate work. You sit with people at very specific moments, helping them sort through what's left, helping them make sense of their lives and their things in practical terms, sometimes helping them prepare for what's coming. It's quieter work, but it's closer to people. And it matters in a different way. I suppose, in the end, I'm still doing what I set out to do, just... not in the way I expected.

FRANCIS

Would you like some coffee, Greer?

GREER

Coffee?

FRANCIS

Yes. I have a fresh pot right there.

GREER

Oh, uh—

FRANCIS

It's no trouble. Plenty of it.

GREER

Alright. That sounds nice, thank you.

FRANCIS

Help yourself.

GREER

Oh. You want me to—?

FRANCIS

My hands... seem to be acting up today. Having some trouble with my grip. Sorry.

GREER

That's alright. I can manage.

(She moves to the coffee.)

FRANCIS

And a cup for me as well, if you don't mind?

GREER

Of course. How do you take it?

FRANCIS

A little sugar. Dash of cream.

GREER

Got it.

(Greer prepares the coffee.)

FRANCIS

So. Tell me, Greer...

GREER

Mm hm?

FRANCIS

What is it you think I need?

GREER

I'm sorry?

FRANCIS

You said you wanted to be sure I'm getting what I need. So, what is that, exactly?

GREER

Right. Well... I suppose it's time we got down to brass tacks.

FRANCIS

I've nowhere to be. We can talk about whatever you like. Though I get the sense there's something specific, something important you came to discuss.

GREER

Yes. As a matter of fact, there is.

(She grimaces.)

Yech.

FRANCIS

What's wrong?

GREER

The cream...

FRANCIS

What about it?

GREER

It's gone bad, Francis. And the coffee's cold

FRANCIS

Really?

GREER

I'm afraid so.

FRANCIS

That can't be right. I picked up the cream just yesterday. And the coffee... I made it not long before you arrived.

GREER

It's nothing to worry about.

FRANCIS

Of course it is. Why would I serve cold coffee with—?

GREER

Francis, are you alright?

FRANCIS

What do you mean?

GREER

How are you feeling? Your health?

FRANCIS

Aside from a bit of numbness in my hands, and that's recent, I'm perfectly fine.

GREER

And your... emotional health?

FRANCIS

Emotional health?

GREER

Your mental health.

FRANCIS

What are you suggesting, Greer?

GREER

Look, and I'm sorry if this comes as a surprise, but I do have access to your financial records. Yours and Nelson's. I've been monitoring your spending.

FRANCIS

I see.

GREER

And frankly, I'm concerned. Not so much by what I've seen but by what I haven't.

FRANCIS

I don't follow.

GREER

Aside from your utilities, which are paid month to month, you haven't spent much of anything. In fact, there's been virtually no activity for nearly a year.

FRANCIS

I get by on very little.

GREER

Francis—

FRANCIS

I have a vegetable garden out back. And I keep some cash here for groceries and the like.

GREER

Except you told me there's nothing of value in this house.

FRANCIS

And you told me you weren't here to rob me.

GREER

I'm not.

FRANCIS

That remains to be seen. And to be honest, Greer, I'm not sure I'm comfortable with you having access to something that rightfully belongs to me. That may be something we should correct sooner rather than later. Because I don't recall agreeing to that, and I'm perfectly capable of handling my own finances.

GREER

I understand why you'd feel that way. But I'm not entirely sure that's the case. Yes, Nelson left everything to you—

FRANCIS

That he did.

GREER

And while I can appreciate that you're being... frugal, it just doesn't make much sense to me that you're not using that money to take care of this place. Or yourself. Or even investing it in some way.

FRANCIS

That's really none of your concern. And in any case, I don't need more than what I have.

GREER

And that's all well and good, except—

FRANCIS

Except what?

GREER

You have family, Francis.

FRANCIS

Nelson's family.

GREER

Yes. And they could use a little help.

FRANCIS

The Carcaise family.

GREER

Alright. I think I see where this is going.

FRANCIS

My checkbook's in the table drawer. Foot of the stairs.

GREER

Your checkbook? I'm not sure I—

FRANCIS

(Moving to the table.)

Who do I make them out to? And for how much? Nelson has a big family, so I imagine—

GREER

This isn't the way to handle it, Francis.

(Francis reaches the table. He goes for the drawer and then stops, noticing his hands again. He rubs his fingers together, distracted.)

Francis?

FRANCIS

(Turning back to her.)

Nelson's been gone... what? Seven years now? Maybe more. I'm not very good at keeping track of these things, my mental health and all. It doesn't matter. He's gone. And he was all I had. The money, this house, the land... none of it means anything to me. Just like I mean nothing to his family.

GREER

That's not / true.

FRANCIS

/ Oh, but it is true. They didn't much care for me taking his name. I've come to regret it myself. And I've never been one to attach sentiment to things. Nelson doesn't live on in objects. He's not here in spirit. I don't feel him.

GREER

Right.

FRANCIS

You know, before he died... I'd never really felt loneliness. Not once. I was an only child, with indifferent parents, left to fend for myself. But I didn't mind. It was all I knew. I assumed that's just how life worked, so I made the most of it. I leaned into it. I was smart, resourceful. I had an imagination. And I learned early on how to be comfortable on my own. I wasn't lonely. I was simply alone. And I was fine. For forty-some years, I was fine. And then... Nelson. Out of nowhere. And for the first time in my life, I felt something I'd never felt before. Love. Real love. And an attraction to another person. And oh, he was... different. He kept boxes and boxes of hamburger wrappers from his travels, still up in the attic, if anyone's interested. No idea why. He just loved hamburgers. Maybe they're worth something. And he carried flat caps in the trunk of his car, every color, every fabric, depending on the weather, his mood. He looked very handsome in a flat cap. But more than that, he was kind. He cherished every moment of every day. And do you know what he appreciated most? That I didn't need him. I enjoyed his company, but I didn't depend on it. I had no expectations. I didn't need anything from him. I was just... happy he was there. Something he never quite got from his family

GREER

I see.

FRANCIS

His wife knew, you know. About him. About his... proclivities.

GREER

I didn't know. I don't think any of us did.

FRANCIS

Yes, well... she did. And she was fine with it. Or at least, that's what Nelson told me. And why not? By all accounts, they had a very nice life together. She was well provided for; he gave her children and all those grandchildren... an ungrateful bunch, for the most part. But what can you do?

GREER

Time does have a way of... reshaping things, Francis. Even the firmest opinions. It's been nearly nine years since Nelson passed. That's a long time to sit with loss. Long enough for people to reconsider what they thought they understood.

FRANCIS

Is that what this is? A reconsideration?

GREER

In part, yes. But more than that... perspective. Nelson's family... they've had time to reflect. About him. About you. About the life you shared.

FRANCIS

Have they?

GREER

They've come to recognize something they didn't, or perhaps refused to, at the time. That he was happy. Genuinely happy. And that you were a part of that in a way none of them could be. And for some of them, that's begun to matter more than anything else. I'm not suggesting it erases the past. But people do change. Or at least, they try to make peace with what they can't. And in doing that, some of them have come to believe that what you and Nelson had was real. And that it deserved to be.

FRANCIS

"Deserved."

GREER

Yes.

FRANCIS

That's an interesting word to arrive at. Nine years too late.

GREER

It may be late. But it isn't nothing.

FRANCIS

No. It isn't nothing. It's very conveniently something. Tell me, Greer, did this newfound clarity arrive before or after they found themselves in need of a little financial assistance?

GREER

That's not why I'm here.

FRANCIS

That's exactly why you're here. You can stop insisting otherwise. So, let's not pretend that approval was ever part of the bargain. Nelson and I didn't spend our lives waiting to be understood. Or accepted. Or deserved. We never asked for their blessing. Not then. Not ever. We were perfectly content without it.

GREER

Then what difference does it make now? Why should it bother you?

FRANCIS

It doesn't bother me. It amuses me. That after all this time, after all that distance, they've managed to arrive exactly where they needed to be... at precisely the moment it might benefit them most.

(In the distance, the dog barks again.)

GREER

Is he alright out there?

FRANCIS

Duncan? Oh, he's fine. Always happiest running free in the yard. No interest in being cooped up. A very good dog. Steady. Always close by. Though, if I'm being honest, he preferred Nelson. Nelson wasn't the disciplinarian, not the one fussing over his grooming or brushing his teeth or keeping him in line. That all fell to me. I was the one who had to say no now and then. But Nelson... he let him get away with just about anything, and Duncan knew it. Every night, without fail, he'd climb up and settle right on Nelson's chest, as if that was exactly where he belonged. He'd stay there until Nelson started to drift, and then he'd move down to the foot of the bed, same spot every time, like he was keeping watch, making sure we were safe. He was... very good company.

GREER

Was?

FRANCIS

Oh, yes. He's... been dead quite some time now. I remember because I had him cremated. He's up there on the mantel. Next to Nelson.

GREER

I... I'm sorry, I don't understand. Then what—

FRANCIS

I'm not a religious man, Greer, never have been, so perhaps we can spare ourselves that awkward conversation. Go on. Grab my checkbook, will you? We'll start there. Then perhaps we can meet again to discuss changes to my will. Over a proper cup of coffee. I'll make sure the cream is fresh. I do think it's important the Carcaise family gets what they deserve.

(Greer doesn't move.)

Go on. Table drawer. There's a pen in there as well.

GREER

I think it might be better if we scheduled a time for you to come into my office. For something a bit more formal—

FRANCIS

In due time, Greer. For now, consider it a gift.

GREER

Alright. If that's what you want.

FRANCIS

It is.

(Greer crosses to the table. She notices something on the floor.)

GREER

Francis...

FRANCIS

What is it?

GREER

Your... other shoe. I think it's under the table.

FRANCIS

It is?

GREER

Yes, right here.

(She picks it up. It's dusty and web covered. Francis moves toward her.)

FRANCIS

Well, I'll be... I knew it was around here somewhere. Now how on earth did—

(He trails off. A thought clicks. He smiles.)

Oh... my, my, my... Do you know what this means?

GREER

What?

FRANCIS

It means you're a day late and a dollar short, my dear.

GREER

How so?

FRANCIS

You know what? It doesn't matter. On second thought... best to leave things exactly as they are.

GREER

Except we still have some unfinished business here, Mr. Car—

FRANCIS

Francis.

GREER

Francis.

FRANCIS

It's only me who has unfinished business. And while I appreciate you making the trip all the way out here, I think it's best for everyone that we forget about the money, the house, the land... all of it.

GREER

Is there something you need to tell me?

FRANCIS

There's nothing to tell. And I think you should go.

GREER

Francis—

FRANCIS

I'm not asking.

GREER

Alright. I understand. Though I have to admit, I'm a little concerned.

FRANCIS

Don't be. There's nothing you can do. So please... go.

(Greer doesn't move.)

Should we add impertinence to your growing list of questionable qualities, Greer?

GREER

It takes more than this to rattle me, Francis. Whatever's going on, whatever's happened here, I can handle it. I'm here to help you.

FRANCIS

So, you keep saying. Well... alright then. If you must know. That shoe. The one you're holding...

GREER

What about it?

FRANCIS

It looks as though it fell off... when I did that.

(Francis tilts his gaze upward. Greer follows his line of sight. Her expression shifts: confusion to realization, then horror. From above, a rope drops, a noose slowly swinging into view. End of playlet.)