

LOST SOLE

A playlet
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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Synopsis

An estate lawyer pays a strategic visit to a man hellbent on finding his other shoe.

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.

PERUSAL

A grubby living room in a once upscale home in the countryside. Late afternoon. The only light is sunlight shining through a tattered/broken window that has greenery growing through it. A large dresser sits firmly against the front door. A coffee setup sits on a coffee table. Two vessels sit side by side on a mantelpiece. A quiet moment passes before we hear a dog barking in the distance, followed by a sudden knocking at the front door. All lights come up. Another knocking at the door.

FRANCIS

(Calling off from inside the house.)

You'll have to let yourself in!

GREER

(Calling off from outside the door.)

Mr. Carcaise?

FRANCIS

(Off.)

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

GREER

(Off.)

Oh... Uh... Well, I can wait!

FRANCIS

(Off.)

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

GREER

(Off.)

Mr. Carcaise, it's Greer!

FRANCIS

(Off.)

Who?

GREER

(Off.)

Greer McNichol!

FRANCIS

(Off.)

I'm not sure I know a 'Greer McNichol'!

GREER

(Off.)

Yes, well, it's been a while, but we've met!

FRANCIS

(Off.)

Are you here to rob me, Greer McNichol? If you are, you will be sorely disappointed because I can assure you there's nothing of value in here!

GREER

(Off.)

No, of course I'm not here to rob you!

FRANCIS

(Off.)

Good to know!

GREER

(Off.)

Look, maybe I / should...

FRANCIS

(Off.)

/ So, come on in then! I wouldn't mind the company! It's been a while since I've had visitors!

(Greer tries to open the door but can't.)

GREER

(Off.)

I think it's locked!

FRANCIS

(Off.)

What's that?

GREER

(Off.)

The, uh... The door! It's locked, I think! I mean, I can turn the knob but, uh... Or maybe it's stuck?

FRANCIS

(Off.)

Are you sure?

(Greer tries the door again but can't open it.)

GREER

(Off.)

Yes, I'm sure!

FRANCIS

(Off.)

Oh! Well, okay then! I mean, I normally just leave the door open, so I'm surprised you're not able to get in! Where the hell is that other shoe?

GREER

(Off.)

Say again?

FRANCIS

(Off.)

I say, I'll be right out!

GREER

(Off.)

Oh! Okay! Well, take your time, I'm in no rush!

(A quiet moment passes before Francis enters. He is dressed nicely in wool pants, a button down and a wool jacket, maybe a vest. His hair is neatly combed. He wears one nice shoe.)

FRANCIS

Well, my goodness, there's the problem right there. There's a dresser in front of the door.

GREER

(Off.)

A dresser?

FRANCIS

Yes, well... Your guess is as good as mine. Anyway, so, uh... Give me a second here and I'll just, uh... I'll move it out of the way.

GREER

(Off.)

Okay, well, be careful.

FRANCIS

I will be nothing but.

(Francis reaches for the dresser but then stops as he sees the back of his hands. He then turns his hands over and looks at his palms. He looks perplexed.)

GREER

(Off.)

Everything okay?

FRANCIS

Uh, yes. Everything's fine. It's just that the, uh... the dresser. I can't seem to get it to budge.

GREER

(Off.)

I see. Uh... Okay, well, maybe... Maybe I can push from here.

FRANCIS

If you've got the strength.

GREER

(Off.)

And you should probably stand clear.

FRANCIS

Will do.

(Francis moves away from the dresser. Greer turns the knob and, though difficult, manages to push the door open and the dresser out of the way. She enters. She is dressed nicely as well, businesslike, but more fashionable and appropriate for summer.)

Okay. And now it seems that all is right with the world. Greer McNichol, I presume?

GREER

You can call me Greer.

FRANCIS

And you can call me Francis. So, come on in. And close the door, it must be cold out there.

GREER

It's the middle of June.

FRANCIS

Oh. Right, right, of course. So, I guess it must be warm then.

GREER

A little warm, yes. Certainly much cooler in here.

(She closes the front door.)

FRANCIS

Well, the house gets a lot of shade from all those trees.

GREER

It certainly does. And I hope you don't mind me saying, but it's really overgrown out there. I had a hell of a time making my way to the front door. Thistles as high as my elbows.

FRANCIS

Oh, well, I'm sorry to hear that.

GREER

And it took me some time to get past your dog.

FRANCIS

My dog?

GREER

Mm hm. Kind of brownish black in color, short hair or maybe no hair at all, hard to tell exactly...

FRANCIS

Oh, well, that's Duncan.

GREER

...He seemed friendly enough, I guess, though he just sort of stood there with his head cocked to the side and his eyes trained on me. I was a little scared, I have to admit.

FRANCIS

I'm sure he didn't mean you any harm.

GREER

Oh, no, I'm sure he didn't. And I did manage to get around him without too much trouble. He just caught me a little off guard, I guess.

FRANCIS

He's a very good boy if a bit overly protective.

GREER

Fair enough.

FRANCIS

And I'm sorry about the yard. I normally take care of that myself, but I guess I've been a little behind on its upkeep.

GREER

No, no, no, it's fine. I mean, it's your property, of course, so I probably should mind my own business. But you know, I can have someone come out and take care of it for you if you like.

FRANCIS

Take care of it. How do you mean?

GREER

Well, what I mean is, I could hire someone to clean it up. A little landscaping maybe? Because frankly it's a mess. And it looks like you might need some work done in here as well?

FRANCIS

Is that so?

(Francis turns and surveys the room.)

Oh my. What in the world...?

GREER

Something wrong, Francis?

FRANCIS

Uh... No. No, I don't think so. I guess I'm just a little confused is all. I didn't realize how bad things had gotten around here. Looks like I've let everything go to pot.

GREER

Oh, now don't go beating yourself up over it. It's a lot for one person to take care of.

FRANCIS

I suppose so.

GREER

Which is why I'd be happy to make arrangements for someone to come over and whip things back into shape as it were. A few minor repairs, some fresh paint, and it'll all be as good as new.

FRANCIS

And why would you do that?

GREER

You really don't remember me, do you?

FRANCIS

Not that I can recall, no.

GREER

Mr. Car/caise...

FRANCIS

/ Francis.

GREER

Francis. So, listen. Your... husband, Nelson—

FRANCIS

Late husband.

GREER

Late husband, yes. Well, you see, I'm the attorney who was hired by the family to manage his estate. And to serve as executor.

FRANCIS

Right. Right, I remember now. Well, while I appreciate you stopping by, all of that was settled a very long time ago.

GREER

That's right. So, I'm really not here on business per se. Just thought I'd look in on you, to see how you're doing, how you're getting along, to see if you need anything. More of a welfare check in that respect, I suppose. That's a nice... outfit you have on by the way.

FRANCIS

Is it?

(He looks down at what she's wearing.)

Oh. Well, thank you.

GREER

You look very nice.

FRANCIS

Maybe a little too fancy for just milling around the house, though?

GREER

Maybe. But why the hell not? You know, sometimes a person just wants to look nice. I mean, if we all waited for a special occasion to dress up, we might never have the chance to enjoy the finer things in life. Better to do it alone in our own home than to not do it at all.

FRANCIS

True enough. Except I can't find my other shoe.

GREER

Well, I'm sure it's around here somewhere. So, anyway, like I said, I just thought I'd check in on you. It's been a while, and I wanted to make sure that you're getting what you need.

FRANCIS

Would you like some coffee, Greer?

GREER

Coffee?

FRANCIS

Yes. I, uh... I have a fresh pot right here.

GREER

Oh, uh—

FRANCIS

It's no trouble. I mean, there it is, ready to go. And there's plenty of it.

GREER

Well... Okay, sure. Sounds nice, thank you.

FRANCIS

You can help yourself.

GREER

Oh. You want me to—?

FRANCIS

My hands. They seem to be acting up a little today. Having some trouble getting a grip on things. Sorry.

GREER

No, no, no, it's fine. I can certainly serve myself.

(She starts for the coffee.)

FRANCIS

And if you wouldn't mind pouring me a cup as well?

GREER

No, of course not. I'm happy to. How do you take it?

FRANCIS

Just a little bit of sugar and a dash of cream, please.

GREER

You 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 that I was getting what I need. So, what is that exactly?

GREER

Right. Well, I guess it's time we got down to brass tacks then.

FRANCIS

I've got nowhere to be, so we can talk about whatever you like. But I get the sense that you have something in particular – something important – that you'd like to discuss with me.

GREER

Well, yes, as a matter of fact I do.

(Greer grimaces.)

Yech.

FRANCIS

What's wrong?

GREER

The, uh... The cream...

FRANCIS

What about it?

GREER

Well, it's gone bad, Francis.

FRANCIS

It has?

GREER

And the coffee's cold.

FRANCIS

Really?

GREER

I'm afraid so.

FRANCIS

Well, how can that be? I mean, I picked up that cream just yesterday. And I promise you, the coffee's fresh. I put it out not too long before you arrived.

GREER

It's really no problem.

FRANCIS

Well, of course it's a problem. I mean, why on earth would I serve cold coffee with—?

GREER

Francis, are you all right?

FRANCIS

How do you mean?

GREER

How are you feeling? How's your health?

FRANCIS

Well, other than a little bit of numbness in my hands – and that's only been very recent, mind you – I've been getting around just fine.

GREER

And your... emotional health?

FRANCIS

Emotional health?

GREER

Your mental health.

FRANCIS

What are you suggesting, Greer?

GREER

Look, Francis, and I'm sorry if this is a surprise to you, but you should know I have access to your... financial records. Yours and Nelson's. So, I've been able to monitor your spending...

FRANCIS

I see.

GREER

...And frankly I'm a little troubled by what I've seen. Or more precisely by what I've not seen.

FRANCIS

I don't understand.

GREER

Well, other than your utilities, which are paid automatically on the first of the month, you really haven't spent much. And in fact, I can't see that you've spent anything at all for almost a year now.

FRANCIS

I get by on very little.

GREER

Francis—

FRANCIS

I have a nice vegetable garden out back, and I keep some cash here in the house for groceries and other things.

GREER

Except you told me that you have nothing of value in here.

FRANCIS

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

GREER

I'm not.

FRANCIS

That remains to be seen.

GREER

Listen, Francis. Nelson left everything to you...

FRANCIS

He did.

GREER

... And while I can appreciate that you're being... frugal... I guess it just makes little sense to me that you're not using that money to take care of this property... and of yourself, of course. And that you're not interested in, perhaps, investing it in some way?

FRANCIS

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

Okay, well, I guess I can see where you're going with this.

FRANCIS

My checkbook's in the desk drawer at the foot of the stairs there.

GREER

Your checkbook? I'm sorry, I'm not sure I—

FRANCIS

(He moves to the desk.)

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

GREER

This is not the way to handle things, Francis.

(Francis arrives at the desk. He reaches for the drawer but stops as he looks again at his hands. He rubs his fingers together.)

Francis?

FRANCIS

(He turns to Greer.)

Nelson's been gone for almost seven years now? Maybe more, I think it's clear I'm not very good at keeping track of these things – my mental health and all. It doesn't matter anyway; the point is he's gone. And he's all I had. And the money, this house, that land out there... 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 certainly didn't appreciate me taking his last name, and I've come to regret that decision myself. And anyway, I'm sorry, but I've never been one of those people who attach sentiment to material things. Nelson doesn't live on in things. He's not here in spirit. I don't feel his presence.

GREER

Right.

FRANCIS

You know, until he passed, I never really experienced loneliness in my life. Not once. Even as an only child, with parents who were indifferent, and left to mostly fend for myself... I never minded. It was all I knew. I just assumed that's the way the world operated, and so I made the most of it. I leaned into it. I was smart, resourceful, I had a great imagination and, most importantly, I learned to find comfort in my solitude. I wasn't lonely, I was simply alone. And I was fine. And I would be fine for the next forty-some years. And then along came Nelson. Out of nowhere. And for the first time in my life, I was able to feel something that I'd never felt before: love – genuine love – and an attraction to another person. And, oh boy, Nelson was... different. In a lot of ways. Like, his collection of hamburger wrappers from his travels across the country – there are countless boxes of those packed away in the attic if anyone's interested; no idea why he collected them except that he loved hamburgers. Perhaps they're worth something. And the fact that he carried an assortment of flat caps with him in the trunk of his car, of nearly every color and fabric depending on the weather and his mood – he looked very, very handsome in a flat cap by the way. Also, his kindness, and the way he cherished every moment of every day. And do you know...? He appreciated that, while I enjoyed his company, I didn't require it. I had no

expectations; I didn't need anything from him; I was just happy to have him around. Something he didn't get with his family.

GREER

I see.

FRANCIS

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

GREER

No, I didn't know. I don't think any of us knew.

FRANCIS

Yes, well she did. And she was fine with it, or at least that's what Nelson told me. And you know, why not? By all accounts, the two of them had a very nice life together. She was well-provided for, he gave her children, and all those grandkids... An ungrateful bunch for the most part but what can you do?

GREER

(We hear the same dog barking in the distance.)

Is he okay out there?

FRANCIS

Duncan? Oh, he's fine. He was always happiest when he was running free in the yard.

GREER

Was?

FRANCIS

Oh, yes. He's, uh... Well, he's been dead for quite some time now. I remember this because I had him cremated. He's up on the mantel there next to Nelson.

GREER

I... I'm sorry, but I don't understand. So, then what—

FRANCIS

I'm not a religious man, Greer – never was – so, maybe let's spare ourselves that awkward conversation. Go on then. Grab my checkbook for me, will you? We'll start with that and then perhaps you and I can get together again soon to discuss changes in my will. Over a cup of hot coffee, I'll make sure the cream is fresh. Because I think it's important that the Carcaise family get what they deserve.

(Greer does not move.)

Go on. In the desk drawer. There's a pen in there as well.

GREER

I think it'd be better if we just scheduled a time for you to come to my office for a more formal—

FRANCIS

In due time, Greer. In the meantime, consider this money a gift.

GREER

All right. If that's what you want.

FRANCIS

It is.

(Greer crosses to the desk. She spots something on the floor.)

GREER

Francis...

FRANCIS

What is it?

GREER

Your, uh... Your other shoe. I think it's here under the desk.

FRANCIS

It is?

GREER

Yes, just here.

(Greer picks up the shoe, which is covered in dust and cobwebs. Francis moves to Greer.)

FRANCIS

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

(He pauses to think. He smiles.)

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

GREER

What?

FRANCIS

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

GREER

How so?

FRANCIS

You know what? It doesn't matter. And on second thought, I think it makes sense to just leave things the way they are.

GREER

Except that we have some unfinished business here, Mr. Car-

FRANCIS

Francis.

GREER

Francis.

FRANCIS

And it's me who has unfinished business here. And while I appreciate that you took time out of your busy day to come all the way out here, I think it's best, for everyone involved, that we just 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

I see. Well, okay then. Admittedly, I'm a little worried, though.

FRANCIS

Don't be. And besides, there's nothing you can do. So, please. Go.

(Greer doesn't move.)

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

GREER

You know, it takes a lot to rattle me, Francis. So, whatever it is, whatever's going on, whatever's happened here, I can handle it. I'm here to help you.

FRANCIS

So, you keep saying. Well, all right then. If you must know. That shoe. The one you're holding in your hand there...?

GREER

Mm hm. What about it?

FRANCIS

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

(Francis looks upward, followed by Greer looking upward. Greer is horrified. Francis smiles dimly. As lights lower, a shadow of Francis hanging from a rope with one shoe on is cast on the wall. End of playlet.)