

Final Placement

(from *Win/Lose/Draw*)

Ara Watson

Characters: Luellen (20s to early 30s), Mary (30s)

Setting: A large office

Premiere: Actors Theatre of Louisville, 1980

Publisher: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

Mary Hanson is a social worker. *Final Placement* concerns one of her cases: Jimmy James, a four-year-old victim of child abuse.

A doctor detects physical abuse and Mary investigates. Jimmy is placed in foster care and his physical and emotional states improve. His parents enter group therapy. They are said to make progress—especially Jimmy's mother. He is returned to them. Soon after, Jimmy's mother holds his hands on a hot stove. He sustains first- and second-degree burns. His parents abandon him, and he is put up for adoption.

While Jimmy is in foster care, his parents never contact the social worker. Until today. Luellen, Jimmy's mother, walks ten miles in the hot sun to speak to Mary. She wants Jimmy back.

Note: Luellen's feet are blistered; her shoes are off.

MARY: Here's your . . . (LUELLEN turns, takes the cup and drinks.) You walked a very long way on a very hot day to see me . . . Luellen? . . . (LUELLEN looks at her quickly and then away.) and I would like to know why—what I can do to help you—but you are going to have to tell me. (No response.) Will you? (No response.) Well, I'm sorry, I wish I had more time, but I do have this appointment, so, if you'll let me get my things together, I'll take you—

LUELLEN: (Quickly and with a new energy.) No, but, see,

see, I got this real good idea. It's real good, too. See, I'm fixin' to move out on ol' Ray. He just don't know it yet, but I am. I'm goin' to get me a place to live and I'm goin' to get me a job maybe with the phone company maybe. My girlfriend works for the phone company. Or a waitress. I could do that.

MARY: Jobs are a little hard to find these days, but . . . but that sounds . . . I think you'd enjoy working . . .

LUELLEN: (Big smile.) I think I would, too. And my girlfriend lives in a duplex and her neighbors is goin' to move maybe and I could move in there if they did. It's got a fenced-in backyard and a big side yard and I wouldn't even let ol' Ray even come visit only if he got over doin' them things.

MARY: (Realizing.) Wait a minute—

LUELLEN: (Going on.) I know he don't mean to. He just loses his temper sometimes is all, but he's gettin' a whole lot better 'bout it since we went to that group. I sure do 'preciate you makin' us go to them meetin's. See, we had a lot of pressure on us and we was probably just takin' it out on—

MARY: Luellen. Wait a minute here.

LUELLEN: No, no. I still wouldn't let him come and stay. Not no matter how much he yelled at me or how much he begged me, he couldn't. A daddy don't need to be with his son like a mama does. (Slightly choked, but going on.) A mama needs to be with her child. You know that, don't you? I know you do and I'm goin' to get a place for me and Jimmy to live and you can—

MARY: You know that's—

LUELLEN: (Going on.) And you could come visit Jimmy ever day. You could take him out in your car and you could buy him a Coke and ask him questions . . . I'd share him with you. We could share him. (She looks pleadingly at MARY. Pause.)

MARY: Luellen, please don't do this to yourself.

LUELLEN: I ain't—

MARY: You're hurting yourself with this. You're building up a fantasy that—

LUELLEN: It ain't a fantasy. I thought it all out.

MARY: Thinking it out doesn't mean it can happen that way.

LUELLEN: (A protest.) Yes!

MARY: No. I'm sorry.

LUELLEN: (Looks at her a moment—quietly.) You ain't sorry. MARY: Yes, I am. I'm sorry for how you feel right now. I know how very—

LUELLEN: You know what? You know what it's like to have your kid stole by the Welfare? To sit in a room and remember that your little boy ain't bein' quiet 'cause he's sleepin' or into somethin', but that he's bein' quiet 'cause he ain't even there no more? And you don't know where he is or when he's comin' back? You don't know.

MARY: No, I guess . . . no one can . . . really . . . but you have to . . .

LUELLEN: (Watching her coldly.) What? I have to what? Forget about him? You ain't got no kids, do you?

MARY: No.

LUELLEN: No. You want one?

MARY: Someday.

LUELLEN: Like my Jimmy? (MARY doesn't answer this.) I know you like him a whole lot. You like him better than the other ones? He your favorite? You know what ol' Ray told me onct after you'd come out to visit? He said, "You better watch out, Lu girl. That woman wants your baby for herself and she's a gonna get him, too." That's what he said, but I didn't believe him. Sometimes, though, that Ray knows what he's talkin' 'bout. You got him?

MARY: What?

LUELLEN: You got him at your house, ain't you?

MARY: No. That's—

LUELLEN: You don't want me to know where you live 'cause—

MARY: This is a state agency. There are rules here, Luellen. Even if I wanted to do something like—

LUELLEN: Oh, you want to. You want to and you did. (The two look at each other a long moment.)

MARY: (Reasonably.) No matter how much I care about Jimmy—and I do, I care about him—that simply isn't the reason he

was taken out of your home. You know that. I did not 'steal' him. He is not at my house. OK? Now, I want you to tell me precisely what it is you think I can do, so I can answer you in as clear a way as possible . . . so we understand each other.

LUELLEN: (Trying to be "reasonable" in turn.) I want to see Jimmy.

MARY: I understand that, but what do you want me to do?

LUELLEN: I want you to go get him.

MARY: I can't do that. I don't have that authority. It's out of my hands.

LUELLEN: You go get him and bring him here.

MARY: I can't—

LUELLEN: Go get him.

MARY: You were in the courtroom. You heard what the judge said.

LUELLEN: Then call him.

MARY: Who?

LUELLEN: Call that judge. Right now. Tell him I can have my baby back.

MARY: I'm not going to argue with you—

LUELLEN: Call him.

MARY: This interview is ended.

LUELLEN: Call him. (She moves in on MARY.)

MARY: I can't call the judge!

LUELLEN: Yes, you can! (Continuing to move in on MARY—cold and menacing.) And you better.

MARY: (Backing—fear showing.) Luellen.

LUELLEN: You better do it. (She is almost in MARY's face.)

MARY: Get out of my face!

LUELLEN: (Fists clenched.) I mean it!

MARY: Now . . . stop this!

LUELLEN: If you don't, I'll do something. I'll hurt you. I can. I ain't kiddin' either. (LUELLEN begins to raise her fists and as she does, MARY starts to turn to run from her, but instead knocks into the chair with everything still piled on it. The chair overturns making a loud crashing sound. The crash

causes both women to stop. MARY is almost immediately shocked into fury and LUELLEN is cowed.)

MARY: God-damnit! God-damn-it! (Turns on LUELLEN who steps back.) Just who the hell do you think you are? What do you think you're doing here? You can't ever—not ever in this life—see that child again. Not ever.

LUELLEN: (More of a cry.) Yes, I can.

MARY: Do you think the state or the judge would put that little boy back after what you did?

LUELLEN: I didn't . . . I never done—Ray. Ray done it.

MARY: You! You! Face that reality at least. You. You admitted it to me, to the judge—

LUELLEN: (Shaking her head.) Ray.

MARY: Ray may have done a lot of it, but not that last, Luellen.

LUELLEN: (Childlike.) Well . . . he made me.

MARY: He made you hold that child's hands on a hot stove 'til he had first and second degree burns? I'll tell you one thing, Ray couldn't have made me do that!

LUELLEN: (Meekly.) We was just teaching him—

MARY: (Going on.) And, then, you ran off and left him, just left him—and in all the months we've had him in foster care, you haven't contacted me once, not one time, to find out how he was doing. So why today? Why do you people suddenly turn up out of the blue and think—Christ. (Takes a breath to calm herself.) We explained everything to you six months ago. (Brief pause.) You could hold a gun to my head or a knife to my throat and it still wouldn't get him back for you. (Pause.)

LUELLEN: What am I gonna do?

MARY: I don't know. (Pause.) See someone. Let me make an appoint—

LUELLEN: Talkin' to a stranger ain't goin' to help.

MARY: It can.

LUELLEN: I was right 'bout you wantin' Jimmy, wasn't it? (No answer.) I know I was. That's how come me to come to see you. It gets so quiet sometimes, I thought you'd understand about it. Ray told me. He said, "The Welfare don't understand nothin' 'bout people's feelin's. They ain't never goin'

to help you." (Brief pause.) My girlfriend's fixin' to have a little baby. I been givin' her all Jimmy's baby things.

MARY: I'm sure that's very hard for you.

LUELLEN: I'm givin' her a baby shower at my house. (Pointing to the clothes.) Could I have one of those to give to her? (MARY gives her two boxes.)

MARY: I wish you'd let me get you in to see someone. (LUELLEN goes over and puts her shoes on.)

LUELLEN: Don't hurt none.

MARY: At least, let me take you—

LUELLEN: I don't want you to.

MARY: (Taking change from her billfold.) Let me give you bus fare, then. (MARY hands her the money and LUELLEN takes it without saying anything.) I'm . . . I'm sorry I lost my . . . I shouldn't have . . . (LUELLEN without ever looking at MARY turns and walks out, leaving MARY standing there watching her.)

Footfalls

Samuel Beckett

Characters: May (40s), Woman's Voice (89/90)

Setting: Dimly lit stage

Premiere: Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976

Publisher: Grove Press (from *The Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett*)

Samuel Beckett is the author of *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp's Last Tape*, among many other plays. The following is the complete text of *Footfalls*.

(MAY [M], disheveled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing.

WOMAN'S VOICE [V] from dark upstage.