

BOXCAR & EUGENIA by Art Shulman

TIME: The present. The play begins in mid-December.

SETTING: The play takes place at in Los Angeles, California at Eugenia's house and the porch/backyard outside.

The portion of the house we see are a living room/dining area, and small kitchen. A doorway leads to two bedrooms, which we do not see. A door leads to the porch/backyard.

The house is filled with dying plants. It has a bookcase, as well as books and toys and games for a 10 year old.

A hutch/kitchen cabinet has at least two drawers.

There are two framed photographs on a table/counter. One is of Frederick Gold (Eugenia's deceased husband), the other of Joey.

The rug is coming up in such a way that someone might trip over it.

A menorah is set with two candles, one in the center hole. A picture on the wall is askew. A stool is on the porch/backyard. As the play progresses, both yard and house become filled with flowers and plants.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

TIME: Late afternoon on a Saturday.

AT RISE: EUGENIA pours water from a tea kettle into a mug holding a tea bag. SHE takes an orange juice carton from the refrigerator, pours juice in the mug, sips, and spits out the unexpected mixture.

EUGENIA

You schmuck!

(EUGENIA takes a milk carton from the refrigerator. The doorbell rings once.)
Come in! Come in! Just open the door. I don't keep it locked.

(PATRICK enters holding a clipboard.)

PATRICK

Hi, My name's Patrick. I'm painting the curbs with addresses. It's a ten dollar value, but we're doing it today for only three dollars. Having your address on the curb is invaluable, if the police or the paramedics need to find your house fast.

EUGENIA

Three dollars for a job that's worth ten dollars. Sounds a good value to me. Welcome to my house, Patrick! Close the door. It's cold outside, even for Los Angeles. I'm Eugenia Gold. I think.

PATRICK

You think?

EUGENIA

Some days I'm sure of nothing. Like the difference between orange juice and milk. I thought you were the mailman. Then again, you only rang the doorbell once.

PATRICK

What does that have...?

EUGENIA

"The Postman Always Rings Twice", haven't you heard? Is my mail there?

(PATRICK collects the mail)

PATRICK

Here it is.

EUGENIA

Who sent me mail?

PATRICK

A brochure for a funeral home.

EUGENIA

Junk mail! The rest of my life is in front of me. Any other mail?

PATRICK

AARP Magazine.

EUGENIA

They used to call it Modern Maturity. I liked that name better. They should stop sending me that magazine. I can't read the print.

PATRICK

It's in large type.

EUGENIA

I need telescopes they have at the observatory to see across the room clear. What else came?

PATRICK

A bill from the electric company, a gas bill, and a phone bill.

EUGENIA

Put all the bills on the (counter/table). Susan writes the checks. Then I sign.

PATRICK

Susan?

EUGENIA

A friend who visits. You have a girlfriend?

PATRICK

No.

EUGENIA

You like bossy girls?

PATRICK

Depends on what she wants.

EUGENIA

Is my Social Security check there? It comes in a brown envelope. Susan takes care of that too. I endorse it, she cashes it at the bank. She'll be here any minute.

(PATRICK has an idea. HE holds out the brown envelope and notices that EUGENIA doesn't see it. At some point HE removes the check from the envelope.)

PATRICK

Nothing in a brown envelope. Say, speaking of work... are you busy just now?

EUGENIA

I'm up to my pupick in labor. A new roof I'm installing as soon as I find a ladder. But for you I'll find time.

PATRICK

Actually, there's something I can do for you, if you're interested. Besides painting curbs I have a second job. Eugenia, who's your long-distance carrier?

EUGENIA

No one carries me a long distance. I walk. Sometimes, if it's far, Susan drives me.

PATRICK

I mean, which company do you use for long-distance telephone service?

EUGENIA

The telephone company. What should I use, the gas company?

PATRICK

Well, my other job right now is signing up people for Comp-Dial. It's a new long distance telephone carrier, and you'll get a rate guaranteed to be 20% lower than you're paying now.

EUGENIA

I pay nothing now. I don't call long-distance. I have no family, and all my friends a long distance away don't have any phones.

PATRICK

Why not?

EUGENIA

They're buried in the ground. Their phone lines are dead, so to speak.

PATRICK

Even so, you could do me a favor by signing up. I get twenty dollars for each person I enroll.

EUGENIA

I don't need a new telephone, especially one that makes only long distance calls.

PATRICK

Oh, you don't have to change phones, and no one fools with the wiring. It all has to do with satellites and optic fibers, like that. Even I can't understand all the technical stuff. But it's the modern thing to do. If you sign up, I'll make twenty bucks, and you can be a part of the communication revolution.

EUGENIA

Okay, I'll sign up! I always wanted to be a revolutionary person. George Washington, Simon Bolivar, Otto Titzling, and now, Eugenia Gold.

PATRICK

Who was Otto Titzling?

EUGENIA

He invented the brassiere.

PATRICK

Of course, the brassiere Titzling. Just sign here. I'll put your hand right where you have to sign.

(PATRICK hands EUGENIA a pen and guides HER hand to the clipboard. SHE signs.)

EUGENIA

There! I am now a revolutionary. We shall overcome! Liberty! Equality!... *(Not recalling the next item in the series)*... Chastity!

PATRICK

Thanks, Eugenia. Now, you won't notice any change at all in your telephone service. Nice to have met you, Eugenia.

EUGENIA

Hey, you don't want money to paint my curb?

(EUGENIA goes to the hutch drawer, and removes a wad of cash. PATRICK notices.)

PATRICK

Since you just signed up with me, I'll paint your curb for free.

EUGENIA

An even better value. Sure you won't stay? I could use the company.

PATRICK

Maybe some other time.

(PATRICK exits, closing the door. EUGENIA puts the cash back in the drawer.)

EUGENIA

Such a nice boy. A revolutionary! I'm almost old enough to have been around during the Revolutionary War. A modern revolutionary.

(SUSAN enters with groceries. SHE notices the rug coming up, and fixes it. As the scene progresses, puts away the milk and juice cartons, the groceries, and tidies.)

SUSAN

Eugenia, your door's unlocked! Again!

EUGENIA

How else would you get in?

SUSAN

I'd ring the doorbell.

EUGENIA

You never ring the doorbell. Doesn't Social Services give you other clients?

(SUSAN fixes the rug coming up in such a way that someone might trip.)

SUSAN

None who needs constant watching over, like you. And, I thought you might be lonely, with Joey gone. Anyway, it's on my way home.

EUGENIA

Hey, I got someone I want you to meet.

SUSAN

Who is it now?

EUGENIA

With that attitude I won't tell you.

SUSAN

Why are you always trying to play matchmaker?

EUGENIA

So maybe you'll meet someone and spend time somewhere else and give me some peace.

SUSAN

My life is not your business.

EUGENIA

So why is mine yours?

SUSAN

It's my job.

EUGENIA

You come over far too often to suit the requirements of your job.

SUSAN

Our relationship is strictly business.

EUGENIA

A young woman should not spend so much time with an old woman, unless one's the mother and the other's the daughter.

SUSAN

A mother usually watches over the daughter. So I suppose that makes me the mother.

EUGENIA

Wrong! When a woman is eighty-two years old, the daughter comes to watch over the mother. So you're the daughter. You'll do as a replacement, I guess.

SUSAN

I'm sorry, Eugenia.

EUGENIA

I no longer have a daughter, or a husband, and thanks to your Department of Social Services, no grandson.

SUSAN

Eugenia, I had no choice about Joey.

EUGENIA

I know.

SUSAN

Okay, who?

EUGENIA

An artist.

SUSAN

An artist?

EUGENIA

That guy painting my curb.

(SUSAN looks out the window.)

SUSAN

I didn't notice anyone painting your curb, and there's no one there now.

EUGENIA

He must be a fast painter. We got mail. On the (counter/table). Bills.

(SUSAN finds the mail.)

SUSAN

Get your Social Security check yet?

EUGENIA

Not yet. Sometimes it's late.

SUSAN

You should have automatic deposit. The modern thing is to deposit money electronically.

EUGENIA

I am modern. Why else would I receive Modern Maturity magazine?

SUSAN

You owe me fifteen dollars.

EUGENIA

Write yourself a check. Then deposit it with electricity.

SUSAN

Ha ha. I'll take cash, thank you.

(SUSAN opens the drawer, takes fifteen dollars, and counts the remaining money.)

You have exactly two hundred ten dollars left.

(As SUSAN looks into the kitchen she notices a puddle.)

Eugenia, the floor's wet. And the carpet... If you break a hip... Eugenia, you know I always try to do what's best for my clients. But unless something happens, we'll have to consider a retirement home for you. I mean it this time.

EUGENIA

Something like what happens?

SUSAN

A miracle.... Oh darn! I forgot to pick up your pills from the pharmacy.

EUGENIA

Don't rush!

(SUSAN exits. BOXCAR, drunk, and in a Santa Claus outfit, enters the back porch. HE knocks over a stool, making a ruckus. EUGENIA goes to the back door and opens it.)
Patrick?... Patrick?...

BOXCAR

My name's not Patrick. I'm Santa Claus, lady.

EUGENIA

(*Smelling his breath*) A Santa Claus who's been celebrating. Are you Jewish?

BOXCAR

A Jewish Santa Claus?

EUGENIA

Why not? Santa has a beard. He could be one of us.

BOXCAR

Surprised to see Santa Claus in your doorway?

EUGENIA

Why should I be surprised? It's Christmas season. By some miracle, do you live on 34th Street?

BOXCAR

I live a few blocks away. I was going home when water got in my shoe, and I was getting it out when I knocked over your stool. So don't have a cow.

EUGENIA

Nice to meet you, even if you're not Santa Claus. I'm Eugenia Gold.

BOXCAR

My name's Boxcar Oldcastle.

(EUGENIA recognizes the name.)

EUGENIA

What Oldcastle?

BOXCAR

Boxcar. It's what everybody calls me. 'Cause I'm big.

EUGENIA

By a chance, is your real name John?

BOXCAR

How did you know?

EUGENIA

A guess. John's a common name. You must be soaked.

(EUGENIA feels BOXCAR's girth, especially his belly, checking his size.)

BOXCAR

Hey, quit feeling me up.

(EUGENIA removes her hand.)

It stopped raining a few minutes ago. I'll dry off.

EUGENIA

Bulldreck!

BOXCAR

Bull.. dreck?

EUGENIA

It's sort of Yiddish for bullshit. Come inside, Mr. Oldcastle.

BOXCAR

You're nuts if you let strangers in your house.

EUGENIA

I've nothing worth stealing and no one's made advances in three and a half weeks. Would you like tea?

BOXCAR

Got beer?

EUGENIA

No! Just keep me company while I drink tea. I don't get much company. Only that social worker. Yip yap yip yap. You can leave any time. Don't worry, I won't "feel you up".

(BOXCAR enters. HE sees that paper towels are dangerously close to the burners. He moves the towels away.)

BOXCAR

You almost set your paper towels afire. You oughta be more careful. You'll burn down your house. What are you, crazy?

EUGENIA

What, are you, a social worker too, sent here in disguise?

BOXCAR

I'm no friggin social worker. I'm... I'm... I... Hey, look at all the knickknacks!

EUGENIA

I call them chachkas.

BOXCAR

And your plants, they're not doing well.

EUGENIA

I forgot to water them.

(BOXCAR fills a glass with water and waters plants, including a wandering Jew.)

BOXCAR

This place is a filthy mess.

EUGENIA

Not filthy. Just maybe not so neat. The maid has the week off. She went to the French Riviera with her boyfriend, the butler.

(At some point BOXCAR adjusts the askew picture, but so it's askew the other way.)

BOXCAR

This is a wandering Jew.

EUGENIA

It's me who's the wandering Jew. Eighty-two years old. But not ready for the gas pipe yet.

BOXCAR

Why are you a wandering Jew?

EUGENIA

I traveled to many countries, me and my husband. I can say bullshit in five languages -- English, French, German, Spanish, and... I'm missing one...

BOXCAR

Perhaps Yiddish.

EUGENIA

Right! My husband Frederick Gold was in Yiddish theater, when there was such a thing. If he wasn't acting, he was teaching acting.

BOXCAR

(Referring to the photo of Frederick) That your husband Frederick?

EUGENIA

No, it's Amanda's husband from The Glass Menagerie. Of course it's my husband. He died, a long time ago.

(BOXCAR looks out the window.)

BOXCAR

Nice bicycle outside. Yours?