

The Celine Dion Songbook

a short play

by

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Cast

TRACEY a wife and mother, 30s

PAUL her husband, 30s

Setting

Kitchen of a semi-detached house.

Time

Night.

2am.

The Celine Dion Songbook.

Kitchen. 2am

PAUL sits at the kitchen table, a cup of coffee and notepad and pen on the table in front of him. He is still. Long pause. **TRACEY** enters, holding a syringe.

TRACEY: He seems to be quiet now.

TRACEY PLACES THE SYRINGE IN A DISPOSAL UNIT. SHE REMOVES HER GLOVES. SHE GOES TO THE SINK AND WASHES HER HANDS, THEN SHE BEGINS CLEANING SOME SMALL BOTTLES. NEXT SHE OPENS A SMALL BOX FULL OF VIALS. SHE BEGINS CHECKING THEM, HOLDING THEM UP AGAINST THE LIGHT.

TRACEY: Darling, I said he seems to be alright. We must go to Doctor Bourke again tomorrow. I'm running out of Dexihedrine. Have we still got that spare script we got last month from Doctor Ryan. We should get some Tamochotil at the same time. We must remember to claim for that. I don't think we got the full amount. We can get sixty percent, I think. What did we get last time ? Do you remember that nice lady we spoke to who said we could get sixty percent ? I think it was Barbara. Or Betty. Something beginning with B. Do you remember ? Darling ?

PAUSE. TRACEY CLOSSES THE BOX. SHE GOES TO THE TABLE AND CHECKS PAUL'S COFFEE. SHE TAKES THE CUP AND GOES BACK TO THE SINK.

TRACEY: Finished ? Another one ? What's the time ? Maybe we should go to bed. You have to drop me off on the clinic before work. I have to pick up those Test results. I'll just give him the Lachmose. (PAUSE. SHE STOPS AND LOOKS AT PAUL.) Paul ?

PAUL: Peter will be six in September.

TRACEY: That's right.

PAUL: September the twenty first.

TRACEY: Yes.

PAUL: How many Doctors do you think he's seen in that six years ?

TRACEY: (LAUGHS) What ?

PAUL: How many Doctors do you think he's seen in that six years ?

TRACEY: I heard you - it's just such an odd question.

PAUL: One hundred and thirty seven.

TRACEY: What ?

PAUL: (INDICATING PAD) I've worked it out. One hundred and thirty seven.

TRACEY: Well, it's a lot. I guess it could be right.

PAUL: Trust me. That's an average of twenty two point eight per year.
Give or take.

TRACEY: Give or take what ?

PAUL: You can check it if you like.

TRACEY: I haven't got a calculator.

PAUL: It's right.

PAUSE.

TRACEY: What's your point ?

PAUL: Nothing. Just an interesting statistic.

TRACEY: (SMILING) Maybe we should put up a chart. Keep score.
Another coffee or bed ?

PAUL: How much money do you think we've spent on those one
hundred and thirty seven doctors ? Roughly.

TRACEY: I have no idea.

PAUL: One hundred and forty thousand dollars. Give or take.

TRACEY: It could be. The insurance did cover some of it. Before it

PAUL: Not too mention - needles, syringes, medications, pills, ampules,
gloves, cotton wool, disinfectant, rubber sheets, thermometers,
blood pumps, stethoscopes -

TRACEY: Again, I don't see your point.

PAUL: But this is the big one. Money, Doctors - they don't come near this one. Time. How much time do you think has been spent in seeing those Doctors, in administering those medications, in monitoring that faint little heartbeat ?

TRACEY: He's your son. It shouldn't be about time.

PAUL: Fourteen hours a day. Fourteen hours a day for three hundred and sixty five days a year for six years. Let me do the sums for you. (READING FROM THE PAD) Fourteen hours times three hundred and sixty five days equals five thousand, one hundred and ten hours per year. Five thousand one hundred and ten hours times six years, give us a grand total of thirty thousand, six hundred and sixty hours. That's one million, eight hundred and thirty nine thousand and six hundred minutes.

TRACEY: So you can count.

PAUL: Or one hundred and ten million, three hundred and seventy six thousand seconds.

TRACEY: And I would not take back one single second. (PAUSE) Paul - please. It's late. Peter needs his Lachmose. I'll just give him his shot and we'll go to bed. You just need some rest for those tired eyes. And tired brain - after all those sums.

PAUL: How many children in the world suffer from Peter's condition ?

TRACEY: I don't think they know.

PAUL: Give or take.

TRACEY LOOKS AT PAUL. PAUSE.

PAUL: Humour me.

TRACEY: Well Peter is the only one in Australia. That we know. There's that little girl in Scotland. We spoke to her mother. The boy in India we heard about. There were two in the States. And that girl in Japan. Wasn't there a couple in China ?

PAUL: Three. That's one in Scotland, one in India, one in Japan, two in the US and three in China. That's of course that we know. There could be many more - in Africa, Thailand, perhaps Lithuania.

TRACEY: Perhaps.

PAUL: But of those we know, what was the maximum age any of them reached ? The maximum.

TRACEY: I couldn't tell you - off hand.

PAUL: I think you can.

TRACEY: It's not something I like to think about.

PAUL: I'm asking you to think about it.

TRACEY: Honestly I couldn't -

PAUL: Give or take.

TRACEY: I wish you would stop saying that.

PAUL: Give or take.

PAUSE.

TRACEY: Well, the Indian girl was five when she passed away, I think. And the three in China were a bit younger.

PAUL: Four. All three died when they were four.

TRACEY: The girl in Scotland was at least seven. And I'm sure the boy in the States was older than that.

PAUL: Seven years, five months and fourteen days.

TRACEY: The girl in the States is still alive and so is that girl in Japan.

PAUL: They are both two years old.

TRACEY: You must remember of course that they're making advances all the time. Doctor Robinson said that they're making real breakthroughs. And the girl's mother in Scotland. She said if they'd used more Lachmose, she's sure she would've made a least another year.

PAUL: But she didn't. Seven years, five months and fourteen days. (PAUSE) How old is Peter ?

TRACEY: I still don't see your point.

PAUL: How old is Peter ?

TRACEY: I'm giving Peter his Lachmose. You should go to bed.

PAUL: Five years, ten months and eighteen days. *If*, and it's only if, he were to match that boy in the States that would give him seventeen months and twenty six days. That's not even a year and a half. And that's if he makes it that far.

TRACEY: I still don't get your point. (SILENCE.) (GOING TO THE BOX)
I'm giving Peter his shot.

PAUL: My point is this : that even if you took his blood pressure every five minutes, consulted every specialist in the whole country every day, pumped him full of Lachmose till he couldn't take anymore, took one thousand tests and fed him a million pills - the most, the absolute most that you could hope for is that he might - just might - live for another year and a half.

TRACEY: Where is this going, Paul ? Where are you taking me ?

PAUL: Eighteen months. Five hundred and forty days. Two thousand, one hundred and sixty hours. If you're lucky.

TRACEY: Some children don't live even that long. Every hour is precious.

PAUL: If - you're lucky.

TRACEY: If *we're* lucky. There's always the first time.

PAUSE. **TRACEY** PREPARES THE NEEDLE. **PAUL** GOES TO HER AND TAKES THE NEEDLE.

PAUL: Give it up.

TRACEY: Paul - give me the needle.

PAUL: Give it up.

TRACEY: Give it to me.

PAUL: (MOVING AWAY) Give it up.

TRACEY: I don't understand what you're doing. Give me the needle.

PAUL: Give - it - up.

TRACEY: What are you doing ?

PAUL: Your obsession to keep this child alive. It's sucking you dry – from the inside out. Ever since the second he was born you've had this obsession. No matter what it took, no matter how many Doctors, no matter what the cost, no matter how much time - just so he could have a few more precious seconds of his miserable existence.

TRACEY: You're tired. You don't know what you're saying.

PAUL: A few more wheezy breaths to help stretch out your futile quest.

TRACEY: Your son's name is Peter. Call him by his name. But you can't. It's too painful. It hurts too much.

PAUL: Do you really think he's happy ? Do you think Pete likes being jabbed every five seconds, poked and prodded all day and all night - never a second's peace. Watched every moment in a glass cage - like a bloody lab rat. The poor little kid. If it was up to him he'd have left us years ago. Left his never-ending pain filled excuse for a life. Christ, he's only holding on because he sees you're so obsessed with prolonging his agony.

TRACEY: I'm going to bed.

PAUL TAKES OFF HIS WEDDING RING. HE HOLDS IT UP.

PAUL: I have this ring.

TRACEY: I have one too.

PAUL: I was married eight years ago. My wife was a beautiful young woman. Intelligent, funny, full of life. Then I had a child. We knew from the start, something was wrong. He wasn't going to make it.

TRACEY: There's always the first time. There's always one.

PAUL: And somewhere, I don't know quite where and when , but somewhere - I lost my wife. That beautiful young woman became a desperate, tired hollow shell - who just couldn't forgive herself for giving birth to an imperfect son.

TRACEY: Peter is my child. I am his mother. It's my duty to give him the best possible care I can. You're his father - it's your duty to protect him as best you can.

PAUL: I have done my duty. I have done more than my duty. I have given Pete all the time, money and love that I could possibly give. I have no more left. I have done enough. Now I want my wife back. I want my marriage back. I want our life to start again.

TRACEY: There's always one.

PAUL: It's time to give my son what he wants.

TRACEY: And what he wants is to be left to die !

PAUSE. **PAUL GOES TO TRACEY, HE TAKES HER HAND.**

PAUL: Give it up my wife. Let him go. We've done enough. Stop blaming yourself. It wasn't your fault. Or mine. It was a fluke. A lucky chance. One in ten million. We are not too blame here.

TRACEY: Then who is ? Why was my son born imperfect ? Why was he chosen for this condition ? This affliction ? Why did he have to suffer this horrendous pain ? If we're not too blame - then who is ? Who will pay for this ? Who will bear this burden ? Who will cherish his little life ?

PAUL: He has no life.

TRACEY: Who else will make him live ?

PAUL: No one can make him live.

TRACEY: I love my son.

PAUL: And I love him too. That's why I know it's time to let him go. (PAUSE) I'm not going to take the blame anymore. I've blamed myself for long enough. I'm too tired to do it anymore. We have given Pete six years. We have done all that was asked. Now it's time to let him go.

TRACEY: We can do more.

PAUL: Just for tonight, just for one moment, just for Pete - don't give him the Lachmose. Let it go. Give it up.

TRACEY: We all have to die sometime.

PAUL: Pete's time has come.

PAUSE.

TRACEY: It's nearly two am. It's late. We're tired. I'm going to forget this conversation ever happened. Put it aside as an awful dream. I'm going to take my son his medication.

WE HEAR A COUGH OFF, THEN A FAINT CRY. **TRACEY GOES TO PAUL.**

TRACEY: I'm going to give my son what he needs.

THE CRYING GROWS LOUDER. **TRACEY** REACHES FOR THE SYRINGE. **PAUL** GRABS HER HAND.

PAUL: What happened to our plans ? Our hopes ? Our dreams ? You were going to start your own business. You were going to make dresses, just like you did on our wedding day.

TRACEY: Things got in the way.

PAUL: He got in the way. We were going to have another child. And another. We were going to have a family.

TRACEY: We do have a family.

PAUL: We have one sick kid, wheezing and coughing his way to an early grave.

THE CRYING GROWS LOUDER AND THEN SUDDENLY STOPS. SILENCE. **TRACEY** BEGINS TO STRUGGLE.

TRACEY: I must go to my son.

PAUL: You've done enough.

TRACEY: Don't make me choose.

PAUL: He's not going to live.

TRACEY: Don't make me choose.

PAUL: We've done all that we can.

TRACEY: (SCREAMS) Don't - make - me - choose !!!

TRACEY STRUGGLES AND BREAKS FREE OF **PAUL** BUT SHE SLIPS AND BUMPS INTO THE TABLE. THE BOX OF PILLS FALLS TO THE FLOOR, SPILLING PILLS AND SMALL BOTTLES EVERYWHERE.

TRACEY SCRAMBLES TO PICK UP THE PILLS AND PUT THEM BACK IN THE BOTTLES.

PAUL: No Tracey. You chose. Pete or me. Right now. You make a decision because in front of god, I swear. I have no more to give, I want my life back. I want my marriage back. When I stood at that altar, beneath those trees, on that day - this is not what I wanted. This is not what I dreamt of.

PAUL: (CONT) This is not why I took those vows. I don't want this to be my life. I'm not going to let it be my life anymore.

PAUL TAKES OFF HIS RING. HE LAYS IT ON THE TABLE.

PAUL: Time to chose. Life or death. Us or him. Duty or love.

TRACEY: I love my son. I want my son to live.

PAUL: So do I. But whatever we do. No matter how hard we try. He won't. He can't. He's going to die. Don't fight it any longer. Don't make it any harder for him. Let him go.

TRACEY: I can't make that choice.

PAUL: Then let me.

PAUL PICKS UP THE SYRINGE. HE GOES TO THE SINK AND SQUIRTS THE LACHMOSE DOWN THE DRAIN.

TRACEY: (RUNNING TO HIM) No. No !!! You murderer. You've killed my son.

SHE COLLAPSES TO THE FLOOR - CRYING.

TRACEY: They'll be a trial. They won't let you get away with this. You will die.

TRACEY LIES SOBBING ON THE FLOOR. LONG PAUSE. PAUL GOES SLOWLY TO THE SINK. HE PICKS UP THE COFFEE CUP AND WASHES IT. HE PUSHES THE CHAIR UNDERNEATH THE TABLE AND CLOSES THE NOTE PAD.

PAUL: I'm going to bed. I'm going to sleep. Tomorrow - our new life will begin. (HE STARTS TO LEAVE.) I'll leave the light on.

PAUL STARTS TO LEAVE. TRACEY REMAINS ON THE FLOOR

PAUL: Turn it off when you come.

PAUL EXITS.

LIGHTS FADE.