

# OF ALL THE TREES

A play by Greg Jones Ellis

“The trees in the forest are members of their silent jungle. They crowd each other out of the sun’s rays, kill each other, then replace each other. There’s a season of spring and a there’s a season of death.” --Elia Kazan

## SYNOPSIS

Christmas season: the worst for those in mourning. Wylie is a grief counselor in the middle of his own grieving for his late husband, Val. Val may or may not have ended his own life. Wylie's friend and fellow counselor Fee sees through Wylie's wisecracks but can't seem to help her friend cope with his loss. She's got problems of her own, including a troubled son and an even more troubled client who has just texted her in crisis. Fee's son arrives, convinced that Fee has been abducted – or worse – by her disturbed client. Amidst all this chaos, Wylie is visited by a series of Yuletide “ghosts” (really his own personal demons): his late husband, a cranky embodiment of all Wylie's anxieties, a possible real ghost of Fee (if she's been murdered), and even his grieving cat, who comes out from under the bed to match Wylie wisecrack for wisecrack. This modern-day Christmas carol ends with all the real people starting to face their own limitations and the “ghosts” beginning to fade away.

## CAST

WYLIE, Male, 40s-60s: Grief counselor who uses his wit and sarcasm to avoid the pain of his own loss

FEE, Female, 40s-60s: Wylie's best friend, another counselor with problems of her own

MICHAEL, Male 20s: Fee's angry and troubled son

VERY SCARY PERSON, Any Gender/Age: Imaginary character who tries to bully Wylie out of his inertia

CLICHÉ, Any Gender/Age: Wylie's cat, who is very mad at Wylie for ignoring them *NOTE: In this script, all pronouns refer to Cliché as male. These can be changed. See also some optional lines where appropriate.*

VAL, Male, 30s-50s: the memory of Wylie's late spouse

## SETTING

TIME: The present, 1:00 pm some time during the December holiday season

PLACE: A living room with upstage kitchen and offstage bedroom of a decent ground-floor apartment or town house somewhere in a typical suburb of modern America.

## NOTES:

While the characters of Wylie and Val are written as gay males, it is possible, *with the playwright's permission*, to adapt one or both character's gender/sexuality.

The *theatricality* of the production is more important than the physical production values. Whether the production has a fully designed set (with functional “boat,” disappearing walls, etc.) and makeup/costumes or this is merely accomplished through clever use of lighting, sound, suggestive sets, props, costumes, etc., the goal has to be for the audience to experience what Wylie experiences.

TEN-PAGE EXCERPT FROM ACT ONE

*WYLIE sits down to a computer. He presses a few keys and the following voice, somewhat strained and hushed. It's Val's voice.*

VAL'S VOICE

So, this may sound weird, but I'm just feeling that something is about to end. I... just wanted to put this on the record in case I'm right. And if someone hears this, it's important to know that, even now, I do not regret anything in my life. Most especially—Wylie. I mean that, Wylie, if you ever hear this. But you know that sometimes I have to be on my own. Like now. I've always needed...for the world to go away once in a while. But, okay...I'm repeating myself, but, I don't regret not having accomplished anything really important. I certainly don't flatter myself that anyone, with the possible exception of Wylie, will have much trouble moving on in my absence. If there's anything to move on to. Oh, wow. That's bleak. *(Laughs.)* Sorry. Maybe I'll erase this and start over.

*WYLIE obviously finds this painful and switches it off. He sits on the sofa, angrily throwing the papers on it to the floor. He gradually recovers himself. He resolutely heads to the bedroom door. The beeping and hum stop.*

*Suddenly a VERY SCARY PERSON enters through the bedroom door, roaring at WYLIE, who recoils.*

VERY SCARY PERSON

*(Advancing toward WYLIE threateningly:)* Ahhhhhh!

WYLIE

Okay, okay! Jesus! I know you're angry! Calm down!

VERY SCARY PERSON

I should say I'm angry!

WYLIE

I'm sorry I haven't tended to your litter box.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Well, I should say—my what?

WYLIE

Really, Cliché. I know when you're trying to scare me.

VERY SCARY PERSON

I'm—you think I'm the fucking cat?

WYLIE

Well, yes and no.

VERY SCARY PERSON

How yes and how no?

WYLIE

Well, my cat weighs nine and half pounds and hides under the bed. You look like you're, what, 200, 210? But Cliché—you—like to growl at me when you're angry. Sometimes it's even scary. So, I'm guessing, you're my feelings of guilt about neglecting you. You're the personification of my conflicted relationship with my cat, particularly since I've been grieving the loss of Val.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Huh. Okay, but I think the cat thing is a stretch. Look me in the eye and tell me you really feel so guilty about ignoring your pet that it grew into the very scary person you see before you.

WYLIE

Point taken.

VERY SCARY PERSON

So, who am I?

WYLIE

You're everything that keeps me from getting a good night's sleep.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Be more specific.

WYLIE

You're my nameless fears.

VERY SCARY PERSON

What else?

WYLIE

My unresolved issues.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Yes. Such as—?

WYLIE

My anger that Val might have killed himself. And my guilt about that.

VERY SCARY PERSON

*(Sits, assuming the role of an interested “therapist.”)* Let’s explore that.

WYLIE

Don’t make fun of what I do for a living.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Oh, was I? *(Thinks about it and starts to laugh.)* Yeah I guess I was. *(Mock Freud voice, complete with Viennese accent:)*. Tell me: if you were a citrus fruit which one would you be?

WYLIE

We don’t do—

VERY SCARY PERSON

Orange?

WYLIE

We—

VERY SCARY PERSON

Tangelo?

WYLIE

Now you’re just—

VERY SCARY PERSON

Perhaps a...yuzu? Or kumquat?

WYLIE

Finished?

VERY SCARY PERSON.

Yeah. (*Back to serious business:*) Okay, but really. I scared you back there. What is it about me that is scaring you?

WYLIE

I don't want to do this.

VERY SCARY PERSON

No, you do. Else I wouldn't be here. Do you want me to leave?

WYLIE

Yes. No.

*The beeping and hum begin again. WYLIE  
flinches.*

WYLIE

Oh, Christ! What the hell are they doing out there? They can't all be driving backwards.

VERY SCARY PERSON

What are you talking about?

WYLIE

The beeping.

VERY SCARY PERSON

What beeping?

WYLIE

You don't hear it?

VERY SCARY PERSON

No. (*Mock therapist again:*) When did you start hearing things?

WYLIE

It's a truck backing up! But they must be doing construction or something. That beeping and that humming.

VERY SCARY PERSON

You hear somebody humming? Is it a happy song?

WYLIE

No, a *hum*. You don't hear it?

VERY SCARY PERSON

I do not.

WYLIE

Maybe I am going crazy.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Good! Now we're getting somewhere. Maybe you *are* going crazy.

WYLIE

I—I just want it to stop.

VERY SCARY PERSON

This, um, humming and beeping.

WYLIE

(*Beginning to lose his cool again:*) All of it! I'm—I'm scared. I'm scared of it all. I can't separate it out.

VERY SCARY PERSON

(*Genuine now:*) Okay. Can you separate one thing out? Besides the beeping and the humming.

WYLIE

I'm reliving the phone call. All the time.

VERY SCARY PERSON

(*Adopting the VOICE of a policeman:*) Uh, I'm trying to reach Mr. Wylie.

WYLIE

What are you doing?

VERY SCARY PERSON

Mr. Wylie, I'm afraid I have some bad news. You are Mr. Wylie?

WYLIE

I don't want to—

VERY SCARY PERSON

You *are* Mr. Wylie, sir?

WYLIE

Wylie is my first name!

VERY SCARY PERSON

Oh. Yes sir. Are you, um familiar with a man named Val?

WYLIE

*(Reliving the moment in spite of himself, becoming more unglued:)* Yes – what happened?

VERY SCARY PERSON

Um, Mr. Wylie—

WYLIE

What happened?!

VERY SCARY PERSON

There's been an accident.

WYLIE

*(Losing his grip:)* No, no, not again. *(To VERY SCARY PERSON:)* Get out.

VERY SCARY PERSON

*(Continues undaunted:)* Mr. Wylie—

WYLIE

Wylie is my first name. Please—

VERY SCARY PERSON

Okay. Uh, Wylie, Val has been in an accident.

WYLIE

No.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Well, it seems that he, um, well, he, we're not sure how it happened, but—

WYLIE

What are you saying?

VERY SCARY PERSON

Mr...Wylie, Val is dead.

WYLIE

Yes, I know.

VERY SCARY PERSON

*(Stops playing policeman, instead honestly asking if he does:)* You do, don't you?

WYLIE

Of course I do!

VERY SCARY PERSON

Then get over it!!

WYLIE

What?

VERY SCARY PERSON

Just what I said! Get over it! Move on! Like Fee said!

WYLIE

She didn't say that. She's a trained professional.

VERY SCARY PERSON

Okay, then I'm saying it! Get over it!

WYLIE

Get out! Go away!

VERY SCARY PERSON

You know I'll be back!

WYLIE

*WYLIE rushes the VERY SCARY PERSON and tries to push VERY SCARY PERSON out the door. This turns into a scuffle in which it is clear that the VERY SCARY PERSON has WYLIE in a hold he can't break. Finally, the VERY SCARY PERSON breaks the hold.*

VERY SCARY PERSON

*(Very serious and very scary now:)* You know I'll be back.

*VERY SCARY PERSON grabs WYLIE for one last violent hold, then releases him with a brutal shove and walks into the bedroom.*

*WYLIE once again tries to recover himself, with some difficulty. After a long struggle with himself, he adopts the fake façade from the beginning of the act and begins singing to himself:*

WYLIE

*(To the tune of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing":)*

Hark, a scary monster's gone.

God knows what is going on.

Maybe I'll be sane by New Year's...

*WYLIE goes to a cabinet and gets out a bag of cat treats. He shakes it as he approaches the bedroom door. He talks coaxingly.*

WYLIE

Cliché...Here, kitty. I've got some deliciousness for you. Your favorite.

*A silent anticipation. Nothing. WYLIE decides to open the door cautiously. WYLIE is about to close the door when CLICHÉ jumps out. CLICHÉ is not a cat at this point but a human. A very sarcastic and bitter one.*

WYLIE

Jesus!

CLICHÉ

Nope, guess again.

WYLIE

I have no idea.

CLICHÉ

Sure you do. Look deeply into my eyes.

*WYLIE looks at CLICHÉ, who opens eyes wide and stares.*

WYLIE

Cliché? It is you this time, isn't it?

CLICHÉ

Bingo. How'd you know?

WYLIE

You look like you want your wet food.

CLICHÉ

Bingo again.

WYLIE

But you won't come out from under the bed.

CLICHÉ

Uh, hello?

WYLIE

But you're not really here. I mean, you don't look like yourself.

CLICHÉ

I could say the same about you.

WYLIE

No, I mean, you're not a cat.

CLICHÉ

I'm not?

WYLIE

You're—

CLICHÉ

What? Neglected? Sad?

WYLIE

Human.

CLICHÉ

You mean I appear to have feelings?

WYLIE

No, I mean you appear to have no fur and a human body.

CLICHÉ

Oh. Right. But the other stuff: I am *not* please with you. You're just lucky that I prefer to hide rather than piss on your pillow. Although that's still on the table.

WYLIE

So, why are you angry with me?

CLICHÉ

Seriously?

WYLIE

Yeah.

CLICHÉ

*(Thoughtful pause.)* I lost him too, you know.

WYLIE

Oh.