

## **ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

**CAUTION:** Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this play is subject to royalty. It is fully protected by Original Works Publishing, and the copyright laws of the United States. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion pictures, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

The performance rights to this play are controlled by Original Works Publishing and royalty arrangements and licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur royalty fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a royalty quotation and license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Royalties are payable with negotiation from Original Works Publishing.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured from Original Works Publishing through direct contact.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing, and advertising for the play:

**“Produced by special arrangement with  
Original Works Publishing.”**

**[www.originalworksonline.com](http://www.originalworksonline.com)**

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

*Roberta Laughs*  
First Printing, 2010  
Printed in U.S.A.

# **Roberta Laughs**

A series of dramatic moments  
Involving a lady  
based on my grandmother

by  
Bekah Brunstetter

For:  
David Chapman  
(who knows her too)  
(... which is perfect.)

**Characters:**

**Roberta, 75.** An extremely independent lady with a knack of big jewelry, arts and crafts. Don't dare try and help her. She can do it her goddamn self.

**Billy, 65.** Once a pharmacist – but we don't really need those anymore. What, with machines and what, with mass-production of drugs. A recently-widowed man with good manners. Don't you dare try and do it yourself. He can do it for you.

**Roger, 17.** Roberta's grandson who she doesn't know very well. He constantly tries too hard to be interesting. He's recently started to play the accordion – ironically. For girls. He's named his bike Roberta.

## ROBERTA LAUGHS

### PROLOGUE

**Roger**, tall and skinny and uncool, with good intentions, stands with an accordion.

ROGER

Hey, could you take a picture of me holding this accordion real fast?

Cool.

Hold on, let me –

*(He maneuvers it, poses it, smiles.)*

Okay, cool. Go.

No wait, don't do it yet –

*(He fixes his hair.)*

*( A flash. A picture is taken.)*

Cool. Now I can have a picture of me with an accordion.

Even though I don't really play it, but I will. Soon.

My grandma plays the accordion. Played? I don't know if she does anymore but she used to. I think now she – quilts? And experiments with party dips. And takes naps. And forwards me chain mail about blind men winning the lottery. And the triumph of the human spirit and pictures of cats. Wearing sweaters. She might also do watercolor. I can't remember, we don't really talk much, but she is wicked awesome. I think. She lives by herself and takes care of herself which I think is cool.

When she first told me, *Roger*, when I was your age, I played the accordion, I was all no *way*, Grandma. I had a tough time imagining her playing it. She probably had very long braids.

And bread cost a nickel. And she worked in a factory. And she had to walk uphill in the snow to school. Both ways.

Or was that the depression?

I think she's older than that.

But the ACCORDIAN! Hell *yes*, Grandma! How freaking – historic. How *dusty*. Infinitely more amazing than the bass guitar. Douchebags with their hair, and their underage dragon tattoos. Fuck them. I'm cool too. I'm not just – I'm not *nothing*. Just –

*(Beat.)*

So! I figured I'd try it too. The accordion. I just had my first lesson, and –

*(hoisting the thing up)*

I already feel VERY attached to it. Like it is a part of me.  
If I stick with it I'll get really good. And I'll show up at parties with it.  
I don't go to parties.  
I'll bring it to class. And I'll be all, *okay so maybe I DON'T play varsity soccer and maybe I DON'T have balls like fucking tangerines and guns like cantaloupes and maybe I CAN'T recite any poetry or sing or dance and maybe I DID get kicked out of the robot club but I STILL HAVE A LOT TO GIVE*  
*I HAVE A LOT TO GIVE*  
And bitches will be all – (*Beat.*) Bitches will must likely not be anything.  
Well, probably not.  
But I can at least try.  
Want to hear what I learned so far?  
Hold on, okay.  
Hold on.

*(He positions his fingers. Plays a chord. Perhaps not well. He beams. Tries to play another. Messes up.)*

I'm gonna get better. I will.

*(He focuses.)*

*(Lights switch to -)*

**I.**

PIP

*ROBERTA's backyard.  
A bright, sunny day. Sounds of birds.  
A rock which is a grave.*

ROBERTA

Well, I don't know where the others are, so I guess I will just get started!

Henry, I have many things to say to you, all of which are wonderful, a few of which you are not going to like.

*(Pause. She gathers herself.)*

I have laid you here, in your favorite place. I hope you like it in there.

I hope it smells good and is not too dark or damp. I hope it's nice and warm.

I have not – I have not slept. I can no longer sleep, I never realized what a lullaby the sound of your breathing was. Like waves or a ceiling fan. That soft hum. I miss it. I got a fan out of the closet but it blew dust in my face and I woke up with a cold so I had a green tea and I set my tea bag on the counter and you didn't – you weren't there to –

*(Beat.)*

Today I started a quilt for Roger.

I took the fabric from the piece of his mother's blanket and joined it with the square of moon and stars because he likes star wars at least he did when he was little so maybe he still likes it? Or maybe doesn't like that at all. I could always start over. Who knows what he likes there. I'm going to make it for him, and he'll take it with him to college. He'll put it on his bed. I missed you today. I –

*(Beat.)*

I look at all the places you liked in the house best and they repulse me.

But I have to touch them anyways, I find myself running my hands over things, just because. You took over the whole house. The whole house was yours, you wandered around sitting on things like the king of the castle and I let you do it. I liked that you did it, that you made yourself at home.

And the house is so goddamn quiet without your stupid fucking sounds, you motherfucker, you *dier*, you little shit, little rat, you love of my life!

*(Pause.)*

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, but I have never been so mad at you. *(Pause.)*

Why did you have to – I wasn't ready., I wasn't ready for you to die, Why did it have to be so sudden? Couldn't you have given me a sign? That it was coming? Did you know? Peed in an unnatural place? Kissed me in a different way? Henry?

You're my best friend.

I don't know what I'm going to do –

I just don't know -

*(Pause.)*

Are you in heaven? How does it feel to love me from there? Do you still love me? Send me a sign. Please, just send me a sign.

*(Pause. Roberta waits and waits. Silence. Softly, she lets the thing in her hand drop. It's a leash with an empty collar attached to it. She holds one end of the leash. She closes her eyes and whispers to herself.)*

Send me a sign Send me a Sign Send me a Sign.

*(Closes her eyes tight. Nothing. She sings, softly. Does ROGER play along from somewhere else?)*

ROBERTA

*I'll be seeing you  
In all the old familiar places  
That this heart of mine embraces  
All day through.*

*In that small cafe;  
The park across the way;  
The children's carousel;  
The chestnut trees;  
The wishin' well.*

*(BILLY, a handsome old man in smart slacks and a smart sweater, walks softly into the yard, following the sound of the singing. He holds a cup of tea.)*

*I'll be seeing you  
In every lovely summer's day;  
In every thing that's light and gay.  
I'll always think of you that way.*

*(She stops singing. Kneels down towards the grave. Kisses her finger, lays it on the rock. Thinks. Remembers.)*

Henry – Ha!  
Remember when you – Ha! Remember when you got into my bubble

gum?? I was at class and you ate my whole sack of bubble gum!!  
And I got home – and you – and you – YOU WERE FARTING BUB-  
BLES

*(She laughs and laughs. BILLY smiles, watching.)*

THEY WERE COMING OUT OF YOUR TUSH!!

*(She laughs harder. She's pretty when she laughs.)*

*(BILLY starts to laugh too. ROBERTA hears him, gets up with a start.)*

ROBERTA

Who are you?

BILLY

Oh – beg pardon – I heard you - singing.

ROBERTA

From where?

BILLY

My porch next door.

ROBERTA

Your porch?

BILLY

I just moved in. Next door. I'm your new neighbor.

*(He extends a polite hand.)*

BILLY

Billy.

ROBERTA

Roberta. Bobby.

BILLY

A kid's name!

*(ROBERTA laughs.)*

ROBERTA  
Yours too!

BILLY  
Yes I guess we never grew up.

ROBERTA  
You and your wife?

BILLY  
What?

ROBERTA  
And what's your wife's name?

BILLY  
Violet.

ROBERTA  
She'll have to come say hello!

BILLY  
Oh – she's – not with us. Anymore.

ROBERTA  
...Oh – I'm so sorry –

BILLY  
So am I. I'm sorry, I should have mentioned – sooner. It was quite abrupt, I'm not used to it yet.

ROBERTA  
It's alright.

BILLY  
So It's just me. I needed a new place, a new start. It was a quite a – long – but when she was finally gone, there was relief. And a sense of – newness. I all of the sudden want to go water-skiing.

ROBERTA  
Lately I keep wanting to jump out of an airplane! Jump right out of one, isn't that crazy!

BILLY

I want to go surfing to I think.

ROBERTA

Florence.

BILLY

Firenza!

ROBERTA

Or Bali!

BILLY

Just do something.

*(ROBERTA laughs.)*

You have a very happy laugh.

ROBERTA

As opposed to a sad laugh?

BILLY

Ha – yes, I guess.

Am I – interrupting anything? A – concert?

ROBERTA

A funeral.

BILLY

A - ?

ROBERTA

For my – friend.

My dog, Henry. My Maltese. He was just 12 years old. This was his favorite spot. This is where he most liked to pee.

*(BILLY steps to the side a bit.)*

ROBERTA

*(laughing more)*

Not directly there, a bit to the right, where the stone is. Where the grass is yellowed. Where the grounds a bit squishy.

BILLY

Ah, very good.

*(ROBERTA turns back to the stone, fashioning a flower on it.)*

BILLY

Care for company?

ROBERTA

It's alright. I don't mind being alone.

BILLY

I'd like to pay my respects, I'm very fond of dogs.

*(ROBERTA hesitates.)*

ROBERTA

Alright.

*(BILLY lowers his eyes, folds his hands.)*

ROBERTA

What are you doing?

BILLY

A quick prayer.

ROBERTA

Thank you.

*(Beat.)*

I sent out invitations. To this funeral. No one came. I had copies of his best picture made, I wrote on them, *please join me to mourn the untimely and random death of our good friend Henry, my best friend*. No one came. *(Pause.)* My son, his wife. They're busy. It's alright. He's got a business to run, she's got – she's got – curtains to – pick out. My granddaughter in graduate school. My grandson in high school *(Pause.)* My once-husband and his new wife, their endless trips to Europe. *(Pause.)* I feel overlooked.

*(Beat. BILLY smiles at her warmly.)*

Do you ever think: Who will bury me?

BILLY

Oh – Roberta- someone will bury you.

ROBERTA

But what if – what if they are too busy, or forget?

BILLY

But they won't.

ROBERTA

But what if they do?

*(Pause.)*

BILLY

I won't let them.

ROBERTA

*(laughing, liking this)*

Oh, you won't, huh?

BILLY

What's more, I'll make sure you're buried right here, next to Henry!

ROBERTA

*(liking this)*

Thank you.

*(a young, awkward beat.)*

I'm being morbid.

BILLY

No, just honest!

*(ROBERTA looks up.)*

It's getting cold. I've got a chicken roasting.

*(She turns to go.)*

Oh – it was nice to meet you, Billy.

BILLY

You too –

*(She starts to go the house.)*

Roberta – I love chicken.

ROBERTA

I'm sorry?

BILLY

I – I was just saying that I love chicken.

ROBERTA

Oh – *Oh.*

*(Beat.)*

I'm sorry, I – I usually eat my dinners alone.

BILLY

Oh?

ROBERTA

When I'm at home at least. For 35 years since I got divorced. Dinners alone. Unless I'm out or have company. It's just how I do it -

BILLY

I'm still getting used to it.

ROBERTA

Well - goodnight.

*(She goes again towards her house. BILLY heads towards his. ROBERTA stops, re-considers.)*

ROBERTA

There's usually leftovers.

BILLY

Oh?

ROBERTA

And Henry would eat them. We'd eat it together.  
And since he's not here – I can't stand leftovers. And I'm not one to  
be wasteful.

*(BILLY smiles, nods. Follows ROBERTA into the house.)*

*(Lights switch to ROGER, with the accordion, again. He's getting  
better.)*

ROGER

So I am very SLOWLY getting. Better. Check this. Check this out.

*(He plays, slowly, still struggling with the notes.)*

This song's called 'The Lonely Accordion.' Like for my loneliness.  
Like I'm *playing* my loneliness. It's Czech. Yeah like Czechoslova-  
kia.

Awesome.

Okay, so – see –

Hear that?

I thought about calling my Grandma and telling her about it but then I  
couldn't find her number and then I thought it'd be weird to just call  
her like out of the blue after not talking to her for so long. And then  
we'd have to talk about other stuff and it'd just be painful.

*Roger, I got your some Star Wars Video's from a garage sale! Star  
Wars videos!!*

*Grandma, I'm not 12.*

*How old are you now?*

*18.*

*Big man!*

*I know, I know.*

*Are you going to university?*

*Yes, I'm going to college.*

*What are you going to study??*

*Girls.*

*You should study philosophy. I always wanted to study philosophy.*

*I'll think about it.*

*I'm proud of you. I love you.*

*I love you too.*

Awkward. Stiff. Too much.

So I just figured I'd wait and show her at Christmas.

*(He continues playing.)*