

***The Big Red Naugahyde Booth***  
***(or, Would-be Elks)***

a comedy about acceptance and the cost of belonging

**by Jennie Webb**

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## ***The Big Red Naugahyde Booth (or, Would-be Elks)***

### **CHARACTERS:**

**THE SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN** is nearing her mid-forties and not particularly thrilled about it. She likes to count on things, drinks red wine unless she remembers to order scotch on the rocks. She hates people who take advantage of other people, but doesn't usually do anything besides getting pissed off. She's all-too aware of her own limitations which often stops her in her tracks.

**THE VERY SMALL WOMAN** is in her late-forties, or could be fifty. She pretty much sticks to white wine. She prides herself on having a balanced view of the world. That way she doesn't have to really look at her own life, in which she tends to put off or hide under the carpet all the stuff that weighs too heavily.

**THE YOUNGER WOMAN** is barely thirty. She needs a martini. And a lot of other things. She sometimes doesn't pay attention but is thrilled to be included. So much so that she could be more discerning. She spends most of the time questioning herself, and maybe should spend more of it on questioning the people and world around her.

**THE DRAMATIC WOMAN** might not admit that she is somewhere in her forties. She gimlets. Enthusiastically. She loves being the center of attention, but is totally willing to admit it, and readily acknowledges the imperative nature of having followers. What she doesn't admit is ever needing to follow, or feeling like an outsider. Or having needs and feelings in general.

**THE EARNEST WOMAN** is in her mid- to late-thirties. She doesn't really drink much. Not really. Maybe she should. Something is maybe telling her she should do lots of things she never thought she would. She listens. And cares deeply. Maybe too deeply. She sees the big picture and loses herself in it.

**THE YOUTHFUL-LOOKING MAN** is, surprisingly, already in his mid-thirties. He's a martini guy. On the rocks. Probably because this gives him the impression of being far more grown up than he feels. He's been waiting a long time for something. But doesn't quite know what it is.

### **SETTING:**

A big red naugahyde booth somewhere in America.

*NOTE: Although there are massive amounts of alcohol and food in this play, note that the actors don't actually consume any of it, nor it suggested that they play the effects of either. The food and beverages are open to stylization, which probably escalates as the evening wears on and becomes more and more absurd.*

***The Big Red Naugahyde Booth***  
***(or, Would-be Elks)***

*We see two women sitting together in the center of a red naugahyde booth which—along with its active, sensitive environment—definitely has a surreal aspect to it. Whatever size the booth is initially, it expands—coming alive?—to fit the characters and action as the play progresses and ultimately spans the width of the entire stage, or a good portion of it.*

*One woman onstage can best be described as substantial in presence and personality if not physicality, and the other is a very small woman, literally and figuratively; both have nearly empty glasses of wine.*

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Yikes.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Yeah.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Yeeeeesh!

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

You said it, darling.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Well?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Probably.

*The two women drain what's left of their glasses, if anything, and take out their bags.*

God I'm glad we have this. I live for these nights, you know.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

I love you.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

I love you!

*The very small woman raises her hand and into it falls—or is placed from an unseen source, or in some other way very obviously appears—a restaurant check.*

The total's sixty-seven. We'll just split it?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
What? Fine.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
You sure? That's all right?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Yeah, good, sorry, I'm just— Wait. What about Ava? (*pronounced AAva*) What did Ava leave?

*The very small woman counts cash already with the check.*

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
Eighteen.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Eighteen? Ava had a steak!

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
She didn't drink.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
And some of our appetizers!

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
But she didn't drink.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
A steak alone's gotta be... what?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
I don't know...

*She starts counting her own cash.*

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Can I say something? Ava did that last time, too.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
Did what last time?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Didn't leave enough. That pisses me off.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
She left eighteen.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
For a steak? And the calamari *and* the potstickers. Plus tax and tip?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
But she didn't drink.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Whatever. I mean, I love her and everything...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
I totally love her. Next time we'll say something.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
You'll say something? It shouldn't always be me.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
We'll figure it out. Next time.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
I just hate that, that's all.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
I know.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
I love her, but it pisses me off. You don't—

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
*(interrupting, holding the check and accumulated cash)* I really gotta' get going here.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Me too. So. Where are we?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
Sixty-seven minus eighteen.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Say fifty. Twenty-five?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
Plus tax and tip.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Right. So thirty? No. What's tip on sixty-eight?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Isn't it sixty-seven?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Thirteen?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

What's the tax? Figure it out from that.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

No. Say fourteen.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

And fourteen plus sixty seven is...

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Say eighty.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Eighty-one.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Divided by two.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Minus eighteen.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Yeah. So...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Sixty...

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Sixty-three? Say thirty-two each?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

*(taking back the check)* Plus eighteen, that's a big tip.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

They love us here. So... *(pulling out a bill)* I only have a twenty. Can I get that fifteen you owe me from Denise's present?

*Pause.*

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
What?

*Pause.*

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
The present. It was fifteen each. I don't think I got that from you, did I?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
I thought so. I thought I gave it to you at her dinner. I gave you money for the present and money for the dinner.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Oh. Really?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
Yeah. At least that's what I remember.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Oh. No. I mean, if that's what you remember.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
Fifteen for the present and forty-five for the dinner.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Okay. (*short pause*) To me?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
That's not what you remember?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
That was such a crazy night...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
You don't remember?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
You know, I wasn't doing the money for the dinner. So maybe...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:  
Look. It's okay. I was glad that I didn't have to mess with the present. Thanks for doing that. So you have twenty? I'll leave another, what, twelve?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

No! If you paid it. I mean, I don't think I got it...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

I completely remember paying it. But that's okay. *(adding more cash)* Here's twelve.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

No! I feel awful. I thought probably you'd forgotten...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

No, if I owed you money I wouldn't forget.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

No, I know you wouldn't forget. I just thought you might have—

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

*(interrupting)* No, never mind. It's fine. So we're fine?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

No. *(handing her back the twelve dollars)* Take this. If you said you paid it...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

But you said you only had a twenty!

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

I'll put it on my card.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

This is silly. It's twelve dollars! It's fine!

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

But I really thought— I mean, I wouldn't have asked you—

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

*(interrupting)* Why not? It's no big thing. Next time you get me.

*She scoots out of the booth.*

I have to go. I love you.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

I love you... I feel awful. I really didn't think—

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

*(interrupting)* Don't be ridiculous! That was a crazy night. See you next time?  
Two weeks?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Um, yeah!

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

I really need to get home. Unfortunately. You're fine?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Fine! I feel awful.

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Don't! I love you!

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

I love you!

*They embrace.*

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

We're okay? You ready?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Yeah. I mean no. I mean, I'll just hang here until... *(short pause)* I'm meeting...

*Pause.*

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

Oh. Here? I thought you said you were going, that you had to—

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

*(interrupting)* Well, I mean... I meant...

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

I just didn't know. Because you said... *(short pause)* Okay, then. Give him my love.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Yeah! Definitely! And a kiss for your sister. How's she doing, anyway?

VERY SMALL WOMAN:

They had her working at a copy place, but that ended tragically. Some collating crisis. Which she re-lives, every day, over and over again. See you!

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Thanks! Love you!

*The very small woman leaves. The substantial woman moves back into the center of the booth at the same time it increases in size, as if it's stretching between rounds.*

*She takes a small mirror out of her purse and gives her face a once-over. Satisfied by—or resigned to—what she sees, she puts it away and pulls out a credit card.*

I need another drink. (*shouting in a civilized tone*) **Hello?**

*A younger woman hurries in, looking flushed.*

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
Hey!

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Oh! Hi!

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
Sorry I'm so incredibly late. I couldn't get out of work. And then my car— Ack. You don't want to hear about it...

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
No, I—

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
(*interrupting*) So where is everybody?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Well—

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
(*interrupting*) I mean, I know I'm late.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Yeah.

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
I just hoped— I mean sometimes you guys are still here. You know? Sometimes later, I mean.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
(*looking at her watch*) It's—

YOUNGER WOMAN:

*(interrupting)* I know, I know. But you're here, right?

*Determined, she moves into the booth and sets her bag down.*

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Yes, I'm—

YOUNGER WOMAN:

*(interrupting)* Good. Thank god. I need a drink. You need a drink? Can I get you a drink? *(looking around)* Is anyone...?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

They already closed out the check.

YOUNGER WOMAN:

Oh! I *am* late. I didn't think it was that... I mean sometimes... You're leaving?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Actually, no, I'm—

YOUNGER WOMAN:

*(interrupting)* Then I'm getting you a drink. *(picking up the check)* I'll take this to them... I mean, if that's okay. Is that okay?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Um, sure...

YOUNGER WOMAN:

I'll be right back. White wine?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Red.

YOUNGER WOMAN:

*(starting out of the booth)* Okay.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

No. Wait!

YOUNGER WOMAN:

What?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:

Scotch.

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
Scotch?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
On the rocks. Single Malt!

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
*(standing)* Okay.

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
*(rising with her credit card)* Take my card!

YOUNGER WOMAN:  
No, it's okay. I was late.

*She grabs her bag and leaves. The booth expands a bit more, making the substantial woman seem very alone. She checks to see if any wine is left in her glass. There isn't.*

*A youthful-looking man enters.*

YOUTHFUL-LOOKING MAN:  
Am I safe? Are they gone?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
Hi!

*He slips into the booth and gives her a kiss.*

YOUTHFUL-LOOKING MAN:  
So like I told you on the phone, I'm so glad we could do this. You know I would never, ever intrude on you guys and your... your whatever—I'm not even going to guess what goes on here, but it's *your thing*. That's totally and completely clear. It's just that... God. I don't know how to say this. Okay. You know how I'm kind of starting to figure things out, *my thing*. For a long time I feel like I've been on the verge of... whatever, but not sure what to... I mean, *you know*. We've talked about it. You sometimes have to do something even if you're not 100% sure why you're doing it, or even what you're doing, right? So. This is going to sound out of blue maybe, or maybe not, but today... *(short pause)* Are you okay?

SUBSTANTIAL WOMAN:  
No, I'm icky.