



THE OLD FRIENDS

BY HORTON FOOTE



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THE OLD FRIENDS received its world premiere at the Pershing Square Signature Center in New York City, on September 12, 2013, presented by Signature Theatre (James Houghton, Founding Artistic Director; Erika Mallin, Executive Director). It was directed by Michael Wilson; the set design was by Jeff Cowie; the costume design was by David C. Woolard; the lighting design was by Rui Rita; the original music and sound design were by John Gromada; and the production stage manager was Cole P. Bonenberger. The cast was as follows:

GERTRUDE HAYHURST SYLVESTER RATLIFF ... Betty Buckley
JULIA PRICE Veanne Cox
SIBYL BORDEN Hallie Foote
ALBERT PRICE Adam LeFevre
TOM UNDERWOOD Sean Lyons
HATTIE Novella Nelson
CATHERINE Melle Powers
HOWARD RATLIFF Cotter Smith
MAMIE BORDEN Lois Smith

CHARACTERS

GERTRUDE HAYHURST SYLVESTER RATLIFF

JULIA PRICE

SIBYL BORDEN

ALBERT PRICE

TOM UNDERWOOD

HATTIE

CATHERINE

HOWARD RATLIFF

MAMIE BORDEN

PLACE

Harrison, TX

TIME

1960s

THE OLD FRIENDS

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The sitting room of the Borden-Price home. It is informally furnished.

Julia and Albert Price are in the room. Julia is in her early 50s and does everything she can to make herself look young and attractive. She is given to wearing a good deal of make-up and dressing in vivid colors, but in reality achieves only a certain expensive, hard effect.

Albert is four years older than Julia and makes no attempt to hide his age. He is a large man, over-fed, over-indulged, with a petulant, sulky manner about him. He is making cocktails for them as Julia looks out the window, humming absent-mindedly to herself.

Mamie Borden, 80, Julia's mother, comes into the room. She is small and wizened and has worked hard all her life; she now seems spent and purposeless. She wanders in unnoticed by the other two.

Albert pours a drink for Julia and hands it to her. She lights a cigarette. Mamie stands, watching her.

MAMIE. It's five o'clock. *(Julia glances perfunctorily at the diamond watch on her arm. Mamie walks about, hoping they will comment. They*

go on sipping their drinks as if she weren't there.) Why aren't Sibyl and Hugo here? *(They still say nothing — if they have an opinion.)* They should have been here at a quarter of four. *(A pause. Mamie again waits for an answer, but gets none.)* Albert, was that a safe driver you got to meet them at the airport? *(Again no answer.)* Albert ... *(Still no answer.)* Albert ...

JULIA. *(Snapping at her.)* My God, Mama! It was Vernon. He's driven you to Houston a million times.

MAMIE. Don't bite my head off. I'd forgotten if you told me. *(A pause. She sighs.)* I was always accused of arranging that match. Well, I did, in a way, I certainly always liked Sibyl, and when she and Howard Ratliff broke their engagement, and Hugo told me he was going to ask her to marry him. I told him it would be the smartest thing he ever did. He always consulted me in those days. The only time he went against my wishes was when he went into the oil business. "Stay here with your friends and family," was my advice to him. But no, he had to go running around the world looking for oil. He was going to end up richer than Standard Oil, Magnolia, and Texaco, all put together. *(Gertrude Hayhurst Sylvester Ratliff, 54, enters. She is expensively dressed and is a heavy and constant drinker, always a little drunk. She tends to talk very loudly.)*

GERTRUDE. Hey!

JULIA. Hello, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. Having a little drink? Give me one, honey. Vodka anything, just as long as it's vodka. I just finished deciding on Gaynor's tombstone. Oh, it's depressed me so.

MAMIE. Who did you get it from, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. Matthew, Miss Mamie. I got the most expensive they had.

MAMIE. Did you have something put on it?

GERTRUDE. Yes, ma'am. *(Opens her purse, takes out a paper, and reads.)* "An honest man is the noblest work of God." *(Puts the paper away, snaps the purse shut, and reaches for the drink Albert has silently and morosely fixed for her.)* This time last year, Gaynor and I were packing for our New York trip. I had decided on all the plays I wanted to see and he had sent for my tickets and we had our reservations at the Waldorf.

MAMIE. How long were you and Gaynor married, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. I am not going to tell you, because then you'll start guessing how old I am.

MAMIE. I know how old you are.

GERTRUDE. Well, don't tell a soul. I want to forget all about it. Even though I do have a birthday coming up in ten days. *(She has finished her drink and hands Albert the glass.)* Give me another one, honey. *(Albert takes the glass and fills it.)* Are you all going to Mae Evans' cocktail party?

JULIA. Uh huh.

GERTRUDE. So am I. I asked Howard to come by here and get me. I told him last night since we were kin to each other by marriage, he just had to help me keep my spirits up. Don't you think so? *(No one says they do or don't.)* I do. I said to him last night that I think he ought to take me to New York for my birthday to see the plays like Gaynor did when he was alive.

JULIA. Is he going to?

GERTRUDE. He's worried that people will gossip about us. Albert ... *(Albert looks up at her.)* Why don't you take Julia and you all come and go to New York with us day after tomorrow to see the plays? I'll treat. The crops are all in. You could chaperone me and Howard, and people wouldn't gossip. We could all have a lot of laughs.

ALBERT. You don't have to pay for us.

GERTRUDE. I know that, but I want to. I want it to be my party — my birthday party.

JULIA. Oh, I'd love that. Let's go, Albert.

ALBERT. Suits me. *(From the hall, we hear a man's voice call, "Anybody home?")*

JULIA. *(Calling.)* Come on in, Howard. *(Howard Ratliff enters. He is a handsome man about Julia's age.)*

GERTRUDE. I have good news for you, Howard. Julia and Albert are going to New York with us for my birthday.

HOWARD. Who said I was going?

JULIA. Aw, don't be an old poor sport. *(Goes to him.)* You beautiful spoiled thing. You make Gertrude happy and take her to New York. Albert and I will go along and chaperone and see that you two behave yourselves, won't we Albert?

ALBERT. Sure.

HOWARD. *(Laughing.)* All right, if that's what you all want to do, it's OK with me.

JULIA. Isn't that wonderful! We'll have such fun. We always have a wonderful time when we're with Gertrude and Howard. Don't we

Albert? I think that trip we took to New Orleans with you all was the best time we ever had. I want to go dancing every night.

GERTRUDE. Howard needs to rest, you know.

HOWARD. (*Laughing.*) Aw, come on, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. You do. Why, he's up at five every morning going to the farms, seeing everything's going well.

HOWARD. That's just an act to get your sympathy.

GERTRUDE. You know what's he's doing now? Clearing that land he and Gaynor bought together.

ALBERT. Are you going to divide it?

GERTRUDE. Howard wants to, but I don't see any sense to it. It's all in the family anyway. We've got more land to farm than we know what to do with.

JULIA. I never thought I'd see him take to farming. Albert thinks he'll do more with your farms than even Gaynor did, Gertrude.

HOWARD. I think that's a little exaggerated, Miss Julia, don't you?

JULIA. You be quiet. I'm gonna brag on you.

GERTRUDE. Look at him — he's blushing. Old Howard's blushing. Isn't that cute? Now I'm gonna brag on you and make you blush some more. (*Puts her arm around him.*) Old Gaynor thought everything was going to stop the day he wasn't here to tend to it. Lord knows it hasn't stopped. Nothing's stopped.

JULIA. Albert says Howard's not only gonna have those farms running better, but he's gonna make more money than Gaynor.

GERTRUDE. (*Withdrawing her arm.*) One thing you can't take away from Gaynor is he knew how to make money, didn't he, Albert?

ALBERT. He did.

GERTRUDE. He was a fine old money-maker.

ALBERT. He was, and Howard's just taking care of what Gaynor made.

GERTRUDE. And my papa made. Don't give Gaynor all the credit. My papa was the original maker ... just like Julia's and your papa. (*Goes to Howard.*) The rest of you boys are just caretakers, right?

HOWARD. Why, sure, that's what I am. Just a caretaker out looking for a good time.

JULIA. Isn't he cute? (*Kisses him.*) You cute thing.

GERTRUDE. (*To Julia.*) Cut that out, please. He belongs to me.

HOWARD. I'm everybody's friend, Gertrude. I'm good old Howard, remember?

GERTRUDE. (*Interrupting.*) Gaynor never thought his little brother Howard would have a dime, though. I remember when

Sibyl Leighton was running for Beauty Queen that time in high school. Old Howard bought \$300 worth of votes. Gaynor just shook his head and said, "He'll never have a dime to his name."

MAMIE. Sibyl and Hugo should have been here by now. I'm worried to death.

JULIA. (*Glares at her mother and changes the subject.*) What plays you all want to see?

GERTRUDE. Just hits. I've got them all written down at home. Gaynor hated plays. He took me, but he'd just go to sleep.

JULIA. I want to shop.

GERTRUDE. Without me ... I despise shopping. I'm just going to see plays, and I tell you right now I just want to see light things and musicals.

JULIA. I thought you wanted to see hits.

GERTRUDE. I do. But I don't want to see any depressing hits. (*Turns to Howard.*) Do you?

HOWARD. Whatever you want to do is all right with me.

JULIA. Well, I'm gonna go shopping. And I'm going to go to night clubs and not worry about my figure and eat all the rich food I want and stay up late and sleep as long as I want to in the morning.

ALBERT. Hell, why go to New York for that. You do all that here.

JULIA. But we'll be doing it together in New York. (*Puts her arm around Howard.*)

HOWARD. Come on, drink up. Let's go to the party. I feel like a party.

JULIA. Albert and I can't go until Hugo and Sibyl get here. They should have been here by now.

GERTRUDE. Well, we'll go on and meet you there.

JULIA. Wait a little longer ... Howard wants to see them, don't you?

HOWARD. Yes, I'd like to see them.

GERTRUDE. Maybe they'll want to go to the party with us.

MAMIE. I'm sure they'll be too tired for that.

GERTRUDE. Don't they like to party?

MAMIE. I wouldn't know.

GERTRUDE. I didn't see them when they were here last. How long since they were here?

JULIA. Nine years.

HOWARD. No, it's eight years. It was eight last summer.

MAMIE. Howard's right. It's eight years. I thought they should have stayed here then.

GERTRUDE. Do they have any children?

MAMIE. No. They had a child. It only lived a year, poor little thing. A little boy. It was named Carson after her daddy.

GERTRUDE. Are they gonna live here with you all?

JULIA. No, I'm renting them that old house that used to belong to Sibyl's family. *(Turns on the phonograph and goes to Howard.)* Let's dance while we're waiting. *(They begin to dance. Gertrude watches nervously for a moment, tries to ignore them, turns to Mamie.)*

GERTRUDE. Who won the beauty contest the year Sibyl Leighton ran?

MAMIE. Asa Gilbert.

GERTRUDE. That's right — old Asa Gilbert. Miss Mamie, you remember everything, don't you?

MAMIE. Just about.

GERTRUDE. Whatever happened to old Asa Gilbert?

MAMIE. She was burned to death in a New Orleans rooming house.

GERTRUDE. My God!

MAMIE. She had no money left.

GERTRUDE. Is that so? I never thought she was all that pretty, did you?

MAMIE. Yes, I thought she was very beautiful.

GERTRUDE. In my opinion all those beauty contests amounted to were personality contests. That's why when Papa was on the school board, he stopped the whole business. He'd never let me enter. The prettiest girl never wins, he said, just the one whose friends are fool enough to throw their money away buying votes. *(She can't stand Howard and Julia dancing any longer, and goes to them.)* All right, my turn now.

JULIA. Let's finish this one. You dance with Albert, Gertrude. Albert, dance with Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. You dance with him. He's your husband. *(Takes Howard by the arms.)* Come on and dance with me.

HOWARD. That's right ladies — fight over me.

GERTRUDE. You're going to dance with me.

HOWARD. *(Smiles graciously and bows.)* All right, Gertrude, honey. Anything you say. *(He takes her in his arms and begins dancing. Gertrude snuggles even closer than Julia had. Julia watches for a beat and starts away.)*

JULIA. If we wait any longer, that party will be over before we get there. I'm going.

MAMIE. But, Julia, wait just a little longer ... Please.

JULIA. We'll only stay a few minutes, Mama. Mae Evans is only across the street. *(She goes out, followed by Mamie and Albert. Gertrude and Howard continue dancing.)*

GERTRUDE. Everybody thought Sibyl was gonna marry you and be my sister-in-law. Poor thing. I bet she wished she had been a hundred times. Julia says Hugo never amounted to anything. Just wandering around oil fields, always broke. *(Julia and Mamie come in, Albert following.)*

JULIA. Come on, we're ready to go. *(She starts out. Albert and Gertrude follow.)*

HOWARD. Do you mind if I stop by and say hello to Hugo and Sibyl after the party?

MAMIE. No. I hope when Hugo is strong again you'll help him find a job, Howard.

HOWARD. I'll be glad to do whatever I can.

MAMIE. They'll need their friends now.

HOWARD. I'll help in any way I can.

MAMIE. Thank you. Howard, Hugo used to be jealous of you.

HOWARD. He had no need to be.

MAMIE. I'm sure. Oh, Howard, I'm so concerned about them. I don't know what they're to do. I'm not allowed to mention the subject to Julia or ... *(Gertrude calls: "Come on, Howard.")*

HOWARD. We can discuss it later, Miss Mamie. *(He goes out. Mamie starts to pick up around the room, turns off the phonograph, and goes on cleaning.)*

MAMIE. *(Calling.)* Hattie ... come take these things for me. *(She puts everything on a tray. Hattie, middle-aged, comes into the room and takes the tray.)*

HATTIE. Not here yet?

MAMIE. No. I hope your supper doesn't cook to death. Albert and Julia went to that party. You'd think they could have waited.

HATTIE. I do.

MAMIE. Call the airport again.

HATTIE. Now stop worrying.

MAMIE. I can't help worrying. Why aren't they here?

HATTIE. Vernon just got into heavy traffic. I hope they're planning to eat supper. I'm cooking four chickens.

MAMIE. I wrote and told them I was gonna have supper waiting for them. I don't know how much supper Albert will eat. He never eats when he's drinking heavily, and he was half-full when he left here.

HATTIE. Maybe he won't drink any more today. (*Mamie gives her a look but doesn't say anything.*)

MAMIE. (*Goes to the window.*) From the looks of the cars, Mae Evans has invited half the town. (*Hattie joins her at the window.*) I'll tell you a secret. I have my bags packed in my room. I'm going to ask Sibyl and Hugo if they'll let me live with them. I am going to throw myself at their mercy. I can't live in this house any longer. Julia's indifference and Albert's rudeness are too much for me. There's Vernon's car driving up. They're here. There's Sibyl ... Where's Hugo? (*Turns to Hattie.*) Do you see him in the car? I don't understand, do you?

HATTIE. No. (*Mamie turns and goes to the front door and opens it. Sibyl Borden, in her late 40s, comes into the room. She is simply but tastefully dressed. She has a natural and unaffected beauty. She's very distraught.*)

MAMIE. Sibyl ... Sibyl ... I've been so worried. Where's Hugo?

SIBYL. Miss Mamie ...

MAMIE. What is it? What is it, girl?

SIBYL. Hugo ... Hugo is dead.

MAMIE. Oh, my God! Oh, my God! (*Reaches out, embracing Sibyl and pulls her close. Neither one is crying, but both are deeply disturbed.*)

HATTIE. Miss Mamie ... I'm so sorry.

MAMIE. Oh, my God! Oh, my God! (*Lets go of Sibyl and walks to the window.*)

SIBYL. He had a heart attack as he left the plane. He died on the way to the hospital. (*Momentarily loses her composure and covers her face with her hands.*)

MAMIE. Oh, my God! Oh, my God! (*Goes back to Sibyl and clutches her once more. Sibyl takes her hands from her face and Mamie walks around the room, shaking her head in disbelief.*)

SIBYL. Vernon made arrangements at the hospital to have his body brought back here. He wanted to phone you, but I felt I should come to you right away and tell you.

MAMIE. Thank you. Hattie, go call Julia at Mae Evans'. Tell her to get right over here. (*Hattie goes out. There is a pause.*)

SIBYL. He seemed in such good spirits. Of course, you know he hadn't really been well for a while. But this morning he seemed so much better.

MAMIE. Did he?

SIBYL. And happy. He kept telling me when his health improved what he planned to do. He had gotten your letter that Julia was

renting us the house I used to live in. He'd never seemed interested in my family before, but he began to ask a hundred questions about my mother and father, and ...

MAMIE. (*Interrupting.*) Had he been upset by my letter?

SIBYL. Well ...

MAMIE. I want to know the truth.

SIBYL. Yes, he was upset. Of course, he had been making quite different plans, thinking ...

MAMIE. I couldn't write any sooner.

SIBYL. I'm sure he understood that.

MAMIE. There was absolutely nothing else I could do.

SIBYL. I understand that, Miss Mamie, and I'm sure he ...

MAMIE. Julia won, that's all. She won. (*She is becoming very agitated and excited.*) When I told her I intended dividing my property between her and Hugo, she became very angry. She said through the years Mr. Borden and I loaned Hugo more than his share and he'd lost it and never paid anything back. That's true, but now he had nothing and she and Albert have so much.

SIBYL. (*Interrupting.*) I know ... I know ... I understand.

MAMIE. I tried every way I knew how to get her to compromise, but she refused for me to give him anything. She threatened to make me leave here and live by myself in a rented room.

SIBYL. Don't agitate yourself. You don't have to explain to me.

MAMIE. I have to tell somebody. I was planning to explain the whole thing to Hugo and now I can't. (*Cries.*)

SIBYL. Miss Mamie. Miss Mamie.

MAMIE. I've gone about crazy with worry. I'm an old woman. My friends are all dead. Julia said she'd let me stay here only if I signed everything over to her. I agreed. That was six months ago. I didn't write Hugo as soon as it was done, because I didn't know how to, and then when I heard you all planned to come back because of his health, I knew I had to write him what had happened. (*A pause. She wipes her eyes and moves to the window.*) Julia did say she would take care of him until he got well and I wrote him that. And I was so hoping she would be generous and not charge you any rent or when she saw you all, take pity on you and give you the house, instead of renting to you, and one of her farms. She and Albert have so many. (*A pause. She seems very tired and sits.*) Oh, there will be so much to do. I was having a special supper for Hugo, and now ... (*Cries again.*) Oh, my God! (*Closes her eyes.*) You don't

have to worry about the funeral expenses. I had a little policy on Hugo and that will take care of everything. Did he have any money at all when he left Venezuela?

SIBYL. No. I have a little money. I sold a ring and bracelet from the jewelry my grandmother left me to get us here.

MAMIE. I thought they would have gone long ago.

SIBYL. No, I still have almost all of them. *(Hattie comes in.)*

HATTIE. Miss Mae says she'll tell Miss Julia to come on home.

MAMIE. Albert and Julia don't get along at all, particularly when he's drinking and he was drinking heavily. I hope he'll be sober enough to help us. *(Gertrude, now very drunk, comes into the room.)*

GERTRUDE. Miss Mamie, Julia's flirting outrageously with all the men over at the cocktail party, including Howard. And he's too big a fool to know it. "You watch out for her," I said. "Albert's going to kill somebody one of these days." I told Julia I was going to tell you on her, because I don't want her flirting with Howard.

MAMIE. Well, now you have and so be quiet. You're drunk. I'm gonna call Howard to come and get you. *(She goes out. After she leaves, Gertrude stands for a beat, looking at Sibyl. Not recognizing her, she comes towards her, extending her hand.)*

GERTRUDE. How do you do. I'm Gertrude Hayhurst Sylvester Ratliff.

SIBYL. Hello, Gertrude. I'm Sibyl ... Sibyl Borden. *(Hattie goes out.)*

GERTRUDE. Oh, Sibyl. You sweet thing. Your daddy and my daddy were the best of friends. *(Kisses and embraces her. Holds up her hands.)* You recognize any of these diamonds? I think one or two of them might have belonged to your sweet mother. Daddy had to take them from your daddy for a debt ... or something. I can't remember exactly what happened. Anyway, everybody got mad at everybody. Let's not get mad. Did you hear about my husband dying? I had an inscription put on his tombstone today. *(Begins to fumble in her purse for it.)* What was it I said. Oh, yes. "An honest ... an honest ... an honest man is the noblest work of God." Oh, who are we kidding? *(Stuffs it back in her purse and snaps it shut.)* Right? I hated him and he hated me. Thirty-five years of hell. No children ... no nothing. Plenty of money. Rich. Oh, my God. People say he got rich cheating nigras out of oil leases, but it's not so. I've always been rich. Look at these diamonds ... at this bar pin ... and lots more from my mama and daddy. We keep our money and our land. And I'm a fighter, too, don't forget that. I

don't forget nothing and I don't forgive nothing. Learned that from my mama. Mama's brother tried to cheat her out of some land, and she stopped speaking to him. And Mama's mother, on her deathbed, tried to get her to forgive that older brother and speak to him, but she refused. And when her brother died, Mama put on her brightest dress and sat on her front gallery and rocked as the hearse went by. But we're not going to fight, are we? Not two old friends. You know who's taken care of my every need? Howard. I can't tell you how attentive he is. Howard manages everything I have. Everybody thought I was crazy to turn my affairs over to him, he's been such a failure most of his life, but I knew what I was doing. (*Howard and Mamie come in. He goes over to Sibyl. He takes her hand.*)

HOWARD. I'm so very sorry, Sibyl.

SIBYL. Thank you. (*Gertrude walks over to Howard. She is sulking.*)

GERTRUDE. You owe me an apology, Howard.

HOWARD. Now, now, lady.

GERTRUDE. You humiliated me. I don't like being humiliated.

HOWARD. (*Goes towards her.*) I'm sorry, Gertrude. I think I better take you home.

GERTRUDE. Ask my pardon.

HOWARD. I just did.

GERTRUDE. Ask it again. I didn't hear you.

HOWARD. I'm sorry, Gertrude. (*Mamie has covered her face with her hands, crying softly. Gertrude sees her.*)

GERTRUDE. What's she crying about? What's going on?

HOWARD. Hugo died, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. Who?

HOWARD. Hugo.

GERTRUDE. I'm sorry. I wanted to see old Hugo. I wanted him to go to New York and see the plays. (*Points to Sibyl.*) Who's that?

HOWARD. That's Sibyl — you remember, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. (*Goes to Sibyl.*) My goodness, are you little Sibyl? Sibyl Leighton? Your daddy and my daddy were the best of friends. (*Albert comes in, now very drunk. He pays no attention to anyone, goes to a desk, and starts to look through drawers.*)

HOWARD. (*Goes to him.*) What do you want, son?

ALBERT. I'm looking for my gun. I'm gonna kill Julia.

GERTRUDE. You're not going to kill Julia, Albert honey. You've been saying that as long as I can remember.

ALBERT. I'm gonna kill her. She's flirting with Howard.

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