

THE SHELF LIFE OF SUSHI

A very short play

by

William Missouri Downs

CAST

HOPE

(A woman with a baby)

ROBERT

(A man with a beer)

SETTING & TIME

A sofa, a coffee table, and perhaps a door

The present

THE SHELF LIFE OF SUSHI

(A six-pack sits on the coffee table. A knock.
ROBERT enters with a beer.)

ROBERT

Coming.

(At the door he finds HOPE, a woman holding a baby wrapped in a blanket. - She's been crying but manages to pull herself together and give a gracious grin.)

HOPE
(*High-strung*)

Hi! You don't know me, but rest assured I'm not trying to sell you anything, nor am I one of those religious wackos who goes around randomly knocking on doors telling people about their personal relationship with Buddha.

ROBERT

Excuse me?

HOPE

I know this is strange, but - I grew up in this house.

ROBERT

What house?

HOPE

This house – This house you currently occupy. Only it was painted sky blue then--. Spent my childhood here--. Oh, by the way, I love dark green; it's much better than sky blue. Sky blue is such a crappy color.

ROBERT

Ah, look lady--.

HOPE

My husband--. That's him out in the car. Wave.

(She waves. Robert half-heartedly joins in.)

HOPE

Hiiiiii! (*Back to Robert*) We just happened to be passing by...

ROBERT

And you wanna see the place.

HOPE

It brings back so many memories. We live in San Bernadino now. Total suburbia - Our house looks just like every third house. And all of them yellowish-brown. Everything yellowish-brown. Once I wasn't paying attention and went into the wrong yellowish-brown house - They thought I was one of those religious wackos who goes--.

ROBERT & HOPE

Around randomly knocking on doors--.

ROBERT

Look Lady--.

HOPE

And no backyard – Only these crappy little modern patios. But we have a life - Charlie, his mother, and little Rachel – She's a handful, let me tell you, never sleeps through the night – Got little ones?

ROBERT

Children? No.

HOPE

No, I meant pets.

ROBERT

No pets either.

HOPE

Too bad--. But I digress--. May I come in?

ROBERT

Well--.

HOPE

Thank you.

(HOPE turns and shoots the bird to her husband before she enters - ROBERT sees this. Then she marvels at a room she hasn't seen in years.)

HOPE

Wow, I mean, wow! It's changed - Could I have a tour? It would be like way cool if I could see my childhood bedroom again.

ROBERT

I'm cleaning fish.

HOPE

It's the one in the back near the bathroom.

ROBERT

You mean the fish cleaning room?

HOPE
(*Disappointed*)

Oh. Guess you can't go home again.

ROBERT

Look, lady the Dodgers are playing and--.

HOPE

I totally understand, I'll be going. Just not the right time...

(HOPE starts for the door but then she cannot hold back anymore – she loses it. At first, it's hard to tell what she's doing, it's sort of snorting hiccups but then the tears flow.)

ROBERT

It's okay – we're winning.

HOPE
(*Pulling herself together*)

Sorry. I guess I'm at sort of an emotional point. Could you?

(She hands the baby over.)

ROBERT

Lady, I'm not good with.... (*Taking the baby*) Okay... Oh my gosh.

(He awkwardly accepts the wrapped baby. For the next few moments he wonders which end is up. HOPE grabs a tissue from her purse and wipes her eyes. ROBERT rocks the baby.)

HOPE

I'm sorry. I promised Charlie I wouldn't lose it again.

ROBERT

Charlie?

HOPE

My husband...the guy waving from the car--. Please understand, my dog passed away last night. Nineteen years old. Can you believe it? That's like a thousand and something in human years.

ROBERT

That's pretty old.

HOPE

I'll always love Sushi.

ROBERT

Sushi?

HOPE

She was a Boston terrier - My father, before he died - matter of fact we found his body in the front bedroom here - use to call her the Boston "terror." The Boston terror - he had such a sense of humor.

ROBERT

Your father died in the front bedroom?

HOPE

He was a manic/depressive sort - We all saw it coming. I just wish he hadn't made such a mess of it. He was nothing like Sushi, she was happy all the time - And she loved that big backyard. You know, after I married Charlie we moved to San Bernadino - all that smog, no backyard - she wasn't a patio dog, a lap dog yes, but not a patio dog--.

ROBERT

(Attempting to bounce the baby)

Yeah, smog is hell--. Which bedroom did you say your father--?

HOPE

(Pointing at the six pack of beer)

May I?

ROBERT

Ah--.

HOPE

Thanks

(HOPE pops open a beer and takes a long gulp.)

HOPE

Okay. Better. Breathe... So I was wondering. I hope you don't think this is weird, but my husband says I never ask for things because I'm afraid to get "no" for an answer.

ROBERT

(Bouncing the baby)

I think she's getting a little moist.

HOPE

It would mean the world to me, and Sushi, if you'd--. Hold on. Right back.

(She steps out.)

ROBERT

Ah, Lady--.

(She returns with a shovel.)

HOPE

Could I bury her in your backyard?

ROBERT

Excuse me?

HOPE

Under the Bougainvillea bush, if it's still there. It was her favorite place. On hot summer days, Sushi would lie back there - so content. I used to watch her sleep - She'd twitch - You know how dogs, like, run in their sleep. *(The tears come back)* And I took her away from it. I took her away to marry a man who loves cats. Cats don't twitch in their sleep--.

ROBERT

Look lady--.

HOPE

I agree, not with the same enthusiasm - But terriers, they really get into it - You can see they have little souls - Probably chasing a cat. Terriers don't like cats. But Charlie does. If I'd known he was a cat person I never would've married him.

ROBERT

Lady--.

HOPE

So, what do you say, may I make her happy for eternity?

ROBERT

You want to bury your dead dog in my backyard.

HOPE

Ah-huh.

ROBERT

And you brought your own shovel.

HOPE

(Indicating the bundle in Robert's arms)

And Sushi.

ROBERT

(Beat)

I'm holding...?

HOPE

You're holding my childhood.

ROBERT

I'm holding a dead dog! Oh my god! Oh My God!

(ROBERT dumps the bundle on the coffee table.)

HOPE

I'm not a nut! My husband thinks I'm a nut! He says that I need therapy. We fought all the way here - Two hours of accusations! But how do you trust a man who likes cats!

ROBERT

This is an awful lot to ask, Lady!

HOPE
Have you ever loved anything?

ROBERT
I'm really kinda freaked out right now!

HOPE
I think that's why we have pets. Cause we screw up our lives so badly we want to make someone else's perfect.

ROBERT
I--.

HOPE
And sometimes it takes so little - All it takes is a smile. A kind thought - A tiny insignificant gesture.

ROBERT
I...

HOPE
Just saying "yes" knowing I've brought my own shovel even.

ROBERT
I ripped out the Bougainvillea - It's a patio now!

HOPE
What?

ROBERT
It's a cement patio!

HOPE
Sushi hated patios.

ROBERT
So you said!

HOPE
What's beside the patio?

ROBERT
A... A flowerbed.

HOPE
Perennials?

ROBERT
I don't know, I think so.

HOPE
I can't believe you said that - Sushi loved to pee on perennials! It was her flower of choice. *(Beat)* What do you say? Maybe between rows? And perhaps a little marker - Nothing big. And if I could have visiting rights.

ROBERT

Um, Lady--.

HOPE

And Sushi would be where she loved it the most. Running in her sleep. Twitching. Chasing cats. She hated cats - She was a good dog--.

ROBERT

I hate to say this--. But I think your husband might be right.

HOPE

You think cats are better?

ROBERT

No, I think you might need therapy.

HOPE

(Getting pissed)

A person lives with a little being - A little sweet being for nineteen years. Loves her, takes care of her, and wants to bury her in a place of honor and you say *they* need therapy? Well let me tell you mister, we live in a sick screwed up world, full of selfish people and cat loving men who don't understand twitching dogs! I mean, what do you know about anything? How would *you* know if someone needs therapy?!

ROBERT

I'm a therapist!

HOPE

Isn't that convenient! Did you know that every person I know who's had therapy came out of it more neurotic than when they went in? Suddenly they gotta dominate the conversation, choose the restaurant, and flirt with the nurse while you're in labor! *(Beat, she pulls herself together)* Sorry. I guess I've given you plenty of reasons to say "no."

ROBERT

I can recommend a good therapist in San Bernadino. And a... a....

HOPE

What? A grief counselor?

ROBERT

I was going to say a marriage counselor. I'm just trying to help.

HOPE

No, you're not; you're trying to get me to leave.

ROBERT

That too.

HOPE

Fine. I'll go bury my dog on the patio in a smog filled city she never liked.

ROBERT

I'm sorry... I have a problem with death. I can't deal with dead fathers in the bedroom where I sleep, or terriers in my--.

HOPE
The fish you're cleaning are deceased.

ROBERT
That's different...

HOPE
How?

ROBERT
They're food.

HOPE
That's death.

ROBERT
God, I'm just trying to have a typical Saturday--!

HOPE
You know, I'm not upset that Sushi died - She was nineteen for god sakes. I'm just upset with people's reaction. Charlie wasn't grief stricken, or even sad, but disappointed, cause his typical Saturday routine was going to be ruined. And you... Afraid of death... Who isn't? But you need to stop avoiding it. Maybe even embrace it. We're all going to die.

ROBERT
Look I--.

HOPE
Admit it you are going to die!

ROBERT
...Okay, fine, I'm going to die!

HOPE
Doesn't that feel better?

ROBERT
No.

HOPE
I'm going to die. And you're going to die. And my husband's going to die. Everything dies. Youth dies, species dies and someday the earth and the sun are going to die. Do you know what Shakespeare, Louis Armstrong and Adolf Hitler all have in common--? They all died!

ROBERT
I think I'm having mild angina.

HOPE
It happens to everyone! Get use to it! I'm going now! Home to my patio! I will trouble you no further!

(She walks out with her shovel. ROBERT falls to his knees, he's having a little trouble breathing. She walks back in.)

HOPE

I forgot my dead dog.

(She grabs Sushi. Beat.)

HOPE

You okay?

ROBERT

I'm going to die.

HOPE

Yes.

ROBERT

Maybe not today but someday.

HOPE

Isn't that something? *(Beat)* Okay look, how about if we compromise. What if I freeze dry Sushi for a few weeks until you're emotionally ready--. Or how about if I cremate her and then someday when you're not home, I sneak into your backyard and sprinkle her around? I mean, this house has been here almost a hundred years - you have no idea how many beloved dogs, goldfish, parakeets and hamsters are buried in your backyard already. It might be the Arlington National of pet cemeteries out there and how would you know?

ROBERT

Fine! Just... Just go away.

HOPE

That's a yes?

ROBERT

Yes!

HOPE

You're the best. *(Yelling out the door to her husband)* He said "yes," but first we have to find some place that freeze dries dogs or maybe a crematorium! *(Back to Robert - Kindly)* Thank you. And Sushi thanks you. Now go back to cleaning your dead fish. And drink your beer made up of barley and hops, which are dead. And your baseball game, which is played with bats made of dead trees and balls covered with dead cows--.

ROBERT

Oh my god.

(ROBERT sits.)

HOPE

You okay?

I'm going to die.

ROBERT

That's right. And there's nothing you can do about it. Except...

HOPE

What?

ROBERT

(Beat.)

...Have you ever noticed that beer tastes better on Saturdays when the Dodgers are winning?

HOPE

(Beat. Thinks about this for a moment.)

...Yes, I've noticed that.

ROBERT

That's what you can do. Enjoy your Dodgers and beer but never forget that the end isn't far away. And that life is like sushi. Best when it's raw and really really fresh.

HOPE

(HOPE exits with her shovel and dead dog.
Beat. ROBERT just sits there for a moment.)

(Then he takes a sip of beer. It's good. He smiles.)

Go Dodgers.

ROBERT

(As the lights fade, we hear the sound of the DODGER'S game. They're winning. The lights fade.)

The End