

ASH

By Hank Boland

Wright Now Play Later: October

Prompt: Traveling with Ashes

Synopsis: While traveling cross country with his aunt's ashes, a young man strikes up a conversation with a waiter in a diner. Cast:

1 M/1 FLEXIBLE

STAGE DIRECTIONS: A roadside greasy spoon. Paxton, Nebraska. 2pm. Last week. CUSTOMER sits in a booth. Backpack at his side. WAITER approaches with the bill.

WAITER: Here you go. Coffee and apple pie: \$5.29. You can pay up front when you're ready. Top that off?

CUSTOMER Sure. Hey, you ever been to Utah?

WAITER Nope. Got a cousin out there. Lives in Salt Lake. Always say I'm gonna visit. Never do. You headed out there?

CUSTOMER Yeah.

WAITER Where?

CUSTOMER Don't know yet. Asking people if they have a favorite place.

WAITER Cousin loves it.

CUSTOMER All of it?

WAITER Two Thanksgivings ago he said he loved it. I said I should come visit.

CUSTOMER Gotcha.

WAITER What's taking you?

CUSTOMER My aunt.

WAITER She live out there?

CUSTOMER Nope.

STAGE DIRECTIONS: CUSTOMER takes a plastic Folger's Coffee canister from his backpack. Puts it on the table.

WAITER Oh. That's?

CUSTOMER Yeah.

WAITER And you didn't leave it in the car?

CUSTOMER Clearly. I'm taking this trip with her. I wouldn't leave anyone else in the car if I was taking a trip with them.

WAITER Would you leave a dog in the car?

CUSTOMER I don't have a dog.

WAITER Right. You mind if I?

CUSTOMER Yeah sure.

WAITER I've never seen.

STAGE DIRECTIONS: Waiter opens lid and looks in.

WAITER Oh.

CUSTOMER Yeah.

WAITER Like the bottom of a Webber Grill. Sorry.

CUSTOMER No. You're right.

WAITER Why the Folger's? CUSTOMER You know... bringing an urn everywhere...

WAITER But coffee.

CUSTOMER Right. My aunt: spinster. Do people use that word anymore? I don't know. But she was. Nice lady. Amazing. Traveled the world. Collected Ashtrays. Wasn't a smoker but collected ashtrays. I know, right? She didn't want to be buried alive, though.

WAITER But?

CUSTOMER Didn't say she was sensible. No instructions about, about distribution. No 'scatter to the wind on a cliff with a harp playing 'Danny Boy'' sort of instructions. Been dealing with her house. All the other stuff. There's a lot of 'other stuff'.

WAITER Yeah, my dad. A few years back. I know.

CUSTOMER Sorry.

WAITER Yeah.

CUSTOMER So it's been almost three months sorting stuff out. One day I'm sorting through ashtrays. And they aren't nice ones. Not vintage things you could sell on eBay. They're gift shop ones. Lookout Mountain. Tower of London. The Great Wall. Machu Picchu.

WAITER Wall Drugs?

CUSTOMER Wall Drugs. She went everywhere. So I'm sorting these: Asia over here, Europe over there, United States here. And I'm going through them: no Utah.

WAITER That's really. That's beautiful. Going to Utah to find a place to/

CUSTOMER No. No, I'm taking her there to buy an ashtray.

WAITER You're not gonna?

CUSTOMER No.

WAITER But?

CUSTOMER She didn't have a Utah ashtray. We're going to go get a Utah ashtray, then we're going home to New Hampshire.

WAITER What about? Maybe in Utah?

CUSTOMER Yeah, well thanks, but I think. I mean she went everywhere, and she didn't go to Utah. I don't think she was 'saving' Utah; I think it was at the bottom of the list. I think Utah was the last place she wanted to go; but not, you know, the last place she wanted to go.

WAITER So what about?

CUSTOMER I don't know. I'm pretty focused on the ashtray thing right now. I think it'd make her happy for me and her to complete the collection together. 4

WAITER This trip is probably a really good thing for the two of you right now.

CUSTOMER Yeah.

WAITER I mean, two months together.

CUSTOMER Three.

WAITER Three, working out all the details of a life. Getting it all wrapped up. Makes you think.

CUSTOMER Makes you think a lot.

WAITER Pie and coffee are on the house.

CUSTOMER I couldn't.

WAITER Take the five bucks. Bring me back an ashtray from Utah. You'll do that, right? You'll swing by on your way back and drop off my ashtray?

CUSTOMER Seriously?

WAITER Got to start somewhere.

SCENE