

NECESSARY SUSPENDERS

A comedy in one act
by
Bradley Hayward

PREVIEW ONLY!

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SYNOPSIS

A married couple who built an empire from nothing pulls levers at a tacky casino as they plan how to turn their latest fortune into a community lifeline. While their son obsesses over luxury cars and infinity pools, they find more thrill in the tension of a slot machine than the shine of a mansion. While exchanging playful barbs and warm memories, they prove that a pair of flashy suspenders aren't just for holding up a pair of pants...they're for pulling up a whole town.

CHARACTERS

(1m, 1f)

WALLY: (60s, m) A playful multi millionaire who looks more like a handyman on vacation than a mogul. He wears a half unbuttoned Hawaiian shirt and ill fitting jeans that are held up by flashy neon orange suspenders.

VAL: (60s, f) A tireless community caregiver who carries her success with quiet efficiency. She's dressed for action in a practical windbreaker and sensible slacks.

SETTING

A tacky casino, with two slot machines. They are vintage slot machines, with spinning fruit on the dials and blinking lights on the top. Two stools sit back to back in front of the machines.

RUNNING TIME

10 minutes.

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(The lights rise.)

(WALLY and VAL sit back to back on tall stools between two fruit themed slot machines in a tacky casino. WALLY is a portly man in his late 60s. He wears a playful Hawaiian shirt and large neon orange suspenders to hold up his ill fitting jeans. VAL is a fit woman in her late 60s. She wears a brightly coloured windbreaker and sensible slacks.)

WALLY: Come on, you harlot, give me the fruit!

(He yanks the lever with the enthusiasm of a man starting a lawnmower. The reels spin. A buzzer sounds.)

Hot diggety! Foiled again!

VAL: Watch your language, Wally. The machine isn't a harlot, it's a math equation. And right now, the equation says you're down forty bucks.

WALLY: It's not about the forty bucks, Val. It's about the torque. You don't get this kind of resistance on those new digital screens. Touching a screen is for ordering a sandwich at Arby's.

(He pulls the lever again. The reels spin. Another buzzer.)

WALLY: Two out of three! She's flirtin' with me!

VAL: She's taking your lunch money and you're thanking her for the privilege.

WALLY: (Twists in his seat to look at her) You know, you're awfully focused for a woman who says she doesn't care about the money. Look at you. You're sitting there like you're at a piano recital. Relax! Wiggle a little! You gotta seduce the lemons.

VAL: I'm not seducing a piece of galvanized steel.

WALLY: Then how 'bout a little wiggle for me?

(He winks, then pats her on the behind. She laughs.)

VAL: Go wiggle with the harlot. I'm using my rhythm. There's a cadence to the payout.

WALLY: Is that what you call it? I saw a woman three rows over. Bright blue hair and smelling like menthol cigarettes. She was doing a little shimmy every time she pulled the handle and now she's got a bucket full of quarters. Maybe I should go ask her for some pointers.

VAL: If you want to spend the rest of the evening with menthol Mary, be my guest. But don't come crying to me when she steals your suspenders to tow her trailer home.

WALLY: (Pulls his suspenders) Oh, she couldn't handle these. These are professional grade.

These are the Val Stoppers.

VAL: The what?

WALLY: The Val Stoppers! Because if I didn't have these neon orange beauties holding me together, I'd be a loose cannon. I'd be out there buying fancy cars and getting hair plugs. These things keep me grounded, just like you. Only, you're a little less stretchy.

VAL: I'm stretchy enough to have put up with you for forty two years. Now sit forward. You're blocking my peripheral vision. I need to see when the Wild Cherry machine opens up.

WALLY: You're cute when you're accounting. Did I ever tell you that?

(He chuckles as he playfully pinches her cheek.)

You've got that "time for an audit" look in your eyes. It's very attractive.

VAL: (Bats him away) Wally, go pull your own lever.

WALLY: I'm pulling, I'm pulling!

(He yanks the handle. The reels spin. Another buzzer. He leans back, snapping one of his suspenders against his chest with a loud pop.)

WALLY: You know, I was thinking. If that Thompson deal closes, maybe I should buy you something fancy. A real prize.

VAL: We don't need prizes. We have a roof and a furnace that works.

WALLY: No, I mean something big. Like a golden calculator. Or an industrial pressure cooker so you can feed the whole town at once instead of just the neighbourhood.

VAL: Don't be ridiculous.

WALLY: Or we could be like Russell. I could get you a fountain for the front yard. A statue of me in my suspenders, shooting water out of my –

VAL: (Sharply) Don't you dare finish that sentence.

WALLY: (Laughs) Out of my pockets! I was going to say pockets! Your mind is in the gutter.

VAL: My mind is on the fact that our son wants to build a personal bowling alley in a town where the only thing people strike is a match to light their barbecues. Did you see the email? The Thompson tract went through. We're officially the owners of twelve hundred acres of prime topsoil.

WALLY: Twelve hundred? Lord, that's a lot of grass to mow. What are we gonna do with it?

VAL: Something good. Something real good.

(She pulls her lever, then shakes her head.)

Russell told me he's importing marble from Italy. For his garage. He says the Tesla deserves to breathe in a Mediterranean environment.

WALLY: It's a car, not an iron lung. I kept my first tractor in a lean-to made of old plywood.

And that machine thanked me every morning by coughing up black smoke. Marble.
Ridiculous!

VAL: And a wellness center. Can you believe that? He's not even calling it a bathroom anymore. He wants to put in a cryotherapy suite. He says he wants to freeze himself to stay young.

WALLY: He's already got the personality of a frozen pizza. Why would he pay for a cryotherapy suite when he could just stand outside in January for thirty seconds? That's how I stayed so youthful. That, and these suspenders keeping my organs from migrating south.

VAL: He's also talking about a meditation grotto, with a waterfall that plays ambient whale sounds.

WALLY: Whales? We're hundreds of miles from the nearest ocean. The only ambient sound in Midale should be the creek hitting a rusty culvert. If I want to meditate, I'll sit on the porch and listen to the mosquitoes debating which part of my ankle tastes best.

VAL: That's why we're taking the Thompson money and building that community clinic. A real one. With a waiting room that doesn't smell like wet dogs and floorboards that don't groan when Dr. Benson walks in.

WALLY: And the little league field! I want a scoreboard that actually lights up. I want it to glow so bright you can see the score from the next town over. I want the kids in Halbrite to look at the sky and say, "Midale wins again!"

VAL: You just want to see your name in lights.

WALLY: No, I want to see our name on a place that actually helps people. Russell can have his infinity pool. I want an infinity playground. I want swings that go so high the kids feel like they're gonna loop the bar! I want a community center where the seniors can play cards without having to wear their winter coats inside because the furnace is held together by chewing gum.

VAL: We'll put in a kitchen, too. A real commercial setup. I'm tired of making funeral potatoes for eighty people using two Crock Pots and a toaster oven. I want six burners and an industrial oven I can fit a whole hog in.

WALLY: (Grins) See? That's the difference. Russell is building a gilded manor to keep people out. We're using the Thompson dirt to pull people in. It's the tension, Val! You gotta pull the suspenders tight to keep the whole town from sagging!

(He yanks his lever with a surge of adrenaline. The machine shakes. WALLY leans in, excited at this new development, but then it's followed by another buzzer. He shouts at the machine.)

WALLY: You flirt! You were one cherry away from greatness!

VAL: The machine isn't the one flirting. Your blood pressure is. Now, settle down.

WALLY: (Adjusts his suspenders with a snap) I can't help it! I'm fired up! Thinking about

Russell's grotto makes me want to buy his house and turn it into a public library. Can you imagine? A cryotherapy suite full of paperback mysteries and a librarian who tells you to hush while you're freezing your tail off.

VAL: He doesn't know what nothing looks like, Wally. We didn't exactly raise him with a silver spoon in his mouth, but he definitely had spoons. He doesn't remember the trailer with the hole in the floorboards.

(WALLY's eyes light up, remembering the good old days.)

WALLY: The hole! I forgot about the hole! We didn't need a refrigerator that year. We just duct taped a milk crate over the gap in the floor and let the snow keep the butter hard. I'd wake up in the morning and have to kick a stray badger off our breakfast. I'd say, "Beat it, bandit! This is my margarine!"

VAL: (Smiles) I can still see you at the town hall dance. You were wearing a suit three sizes too big. God knows whose grave you stole that from. And it was held together by a piece of twine. You asked me to dance, and just as Hank Williams finished, that twine gave up the ghost.

WALLY: (Chuckles) It was a structural failure! Those pants had no integrity. They were built for a man of leisure, not a man who was about to dip the prettiest girl in town.

VAL: You stood there with your trousers around your ankles and your boxers showing. Those ridiculous little red hearts. Most men would have bolted for the door, changed their name, and moved to another area code. But not you. You didn't even lose the beat. You just looked me dead in the eye, pulled them up with one hand, kept your other arm around my waist with the other, and said, "Val, I hope you're ready. Because I'm a man who's going places, even if my pants want to stay behind."

WALLY: (Nods proudly) Confidence is half the battle. The other half is a sturdy grip on your waistband. I knew right then, if I could survive that dance floor, I could survive anything the world threw at me.

VAL: I married you because of those pants. I figured if a man can maintain that much dignity while his fly is visiting the floorboards, he can handle anything.

WALLY: Turned out pretty good, eh?

VAL: We started with forty dollars and a shovel. I did the books on the back of greasy napkins while you were out there buying swamp land because you had a feeling the mosquitoes would eventually move out and the humans would move in.

WALLY: I remember our honeymoon. We couldn't afford a hotel, so we camped in the back of the truck on that lot in Weyburn. The very lot where Russell wants to build his gilded grotto, or whatever he's calling it. It rained so hard the truck sank to its axles. I spent our first night as a married couple waist deep in mud, trying to lever us out with a fence post. I looked up at you, and you weren't crying. You weren't calling a tow truck we couldn't afford. You were holding a flashlight and shouting, "Angle it to the left, Wally! You've got more leverage if you put your back into it!"

(He leans back and pulls the lever again. The reels spin. Another buzzer. He slaps the side of the machine.)

That's when I knew. I didn't need a mansion. I didn't need a bowling alley. I just needed a woman who knew where to put the lever. That's what these suspenders are, Val. They're the fence post. You pull 'em tight, you gain the leverage, and you lift the whole world up out of the muck. Russell wants to build a pool so he can sit in the water and forget the mud even exists. He's forgotten the tension!

VAL: He's forgotten that the best view of the stars is from the back of a stuck truck, not through a skylight in a great room. You can't see the sky clearly when you're looking through that much money.

WALLY: And that's exactly why we're here! People see us and think, "Look at those two old fossils, throwing their retirement into a blinking box." They don't get it. They think we're desperate.

VAL: I saw a cocktail waitress look at your Hawaiian shirt with such pity she almost gave me a free ginger ale.

WALLY: (Laughs) Pity! I love it! That's the magic of this place. In the real world, I'm Mr. Wally Knight, Chairman of the Board, and I have to wear socks that match. But in here? I'm just a guy whose pants might fall down at any moment, battling a mechanical banana.

VAL: You put a dollar in, you pull a handle, and the universe tells you no in three different colours. No board meetings, no zoning permits, no Thompson tract soil samples. Just the unadulterated rejection of a lever and some springs.

WALLY: Exactly! And the sounds!

(He puts his ear against the slot machine.)

Listen to that. That's the sound of hope being processed through a grinder. It's like a heartbeat, if your heart was made of brass gears and burned out light bulbs. I come here to feel the friction. Everything else in life is too smooth now. You want a house? Click a button. You want a car? Sign a digital pad. But you want to line up three bananas? You gotta sweat for it!

VAL: You certainly do sweat. Mostly through your shirt.

WALLY: It's a workout. And the people watching! Look at that guy over there at the lobster machine. He's got a system involving a rabbit's foot and two lit cigars. He thinks he's outsmarting the house.

VAL: (Watches the man) He's currently losing to a crustacean with a digital hat.

WALLY: That's why we don't play those fancy new machines. I sat at one once. I was congratulated for winning ten cents by a hologram of Vanna White.

VAL: I especially hate the mega pay line ones. You get a screen full of dancing leprechauns, a choir starts singing, the chair vibrates like an earthquake, and the screen says, "Total win: one dollar." It's an emotional roller coaster to nowhere.

WALLY: It's dishonest. Give me the fruit, or give me the buzzer! I want my failure to be concise.

VAL: It's the only place we can be failures, Wally. We're so good at everything else, it's nice to come somewhere and be absolutely terrible at something.

WALLY: We're the world's best losers. It's our greatest achievement.

(They laugh together as he yanks his lever. The reels spin. Another buzzer.)

See! It's a psychological thriller! I love this place!

END OF PREVIEW

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