

Till Gerbil Do We Part
A ten-minute play.

By Al Taylor

CHARACTERS

MITCH CRAWFORD	Middle-aged, male, incredibly stubborn. The kind of person to leave a five-paragraph one-star review on a restaurant that forgot mayo on his sandwich.
DEBBIE CRAWFORD	Middle-aged, female, meticulous. Files her nails to be the exact same length every single day without fail.
JUDGE GEORGE	Elderly, female. A good grandmother and a reasonable woman. Has been working on this suit for the past five years.
AUDIENCE MEMBER	A plugged actor in the audience. Very passionate about the well-being of gerbils. Gender, age, etc., irrelevant.

SETTING

A divorce courtroom.

TIME

Mid-day, modern.

SCENE 1

(A divorce courtroom, there's no jury, implying the jury is the audience. Judge George sits at her stand looking incredibly tired as Mitch and Debbie bicker.)

MITCH

(Screaming)

You'll never like him like I do!

DEBBIE

(Also screaming)

I'm the one who tucked him in every night!

MITCH

(Still screaming)

I specially cut his organic celery!

DEBBIE

(Yep, she's screaming)

Whore!

MITCH

(He's screaming)

Oh, *I'm* the whore? Well, *you*—

(Mitch is cut off by a change in the lights, the spotlight shining on Judge George. Mitch and Debbie are still fighting in the background, but the sound is muted. Judge George turns and faces the audience.)

JUDGE GEORGE

(To the audience.)

They've been at this for five years now.

(The Crawfords have been briefly unmuted as the spotlight switches to them.)

DEBBIE

Oh, I'll shove your "prize-winning" celery up your—

(The Crawfords are muted again. The spotlight is back on Judge George.)

JUDGE GEORGE

Delightful, aren't they?

(The Judge sighs and pulls out a manilla folder.)

JUDGE GEORGE (CONT)

Deborah and Mitchel Crawford. Aged 47 and 46, respectively, are currently at their *fifteenth* court meeting this year, and it's only March. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford have been in the process of divorcing for 63 months, or five years and 12 weeks. This is the longest-running divorce I've ever needed to supervise. Normally, when a separation between couples takes longer than average, it's

due to money or family heirlooms or because someone wants to push to press charges. The Crawfords, however? None of that. They already sorted out the money split, no issues with anything of the like.

(The Crawfords are unmuted once again. Judge George walks off stage.)

MITCH

You never brushed him like I did!

(Muted again. Judge George returns, standing in the middle of the stage. She holds something in her hands.)

JUDGE GEORGE

I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Peanut Malachi Bentley Hugo Leopold Daniel-Donovan Terrance Micheal Stanley Finnegan Chamomile Augustus Justin Louis Winston Pierre Vernon Quincy Crawford. The first.

(Judge George uncups her hands. A small rodent is revealed.)

JUDGE GEORGE (CONT)

Young Mr. Peanut is none other than the Crawfords' prized, four-time winning, purebred, Pachyuromys duprasi longhair. Commonly known as a fat-tailed Gerbil.

(The Judge returns the Gerbil off stage and returns to her seat. The spotlight fades away, and everyone is unmuted.)

MITCH

Mr. Peanut doesn't even like you.

DEBBIE

How *dare* you.

JUDGE GEORGE

Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, I will ask you once, and only once, to calm down, or this meeting will be adjourned.

MITCH

She started it!

DEBBIE

He started it!

JUDGE GEORGE

And I'm finishing it. Now I am going to request that you plead your case *quietly and calmly*.

(Both Debbie and Mitch start bickering nonsensically.)

JUDGE GEORGE

(Assertively)

One at a time, Mr. and Mrs. Crawford. Let's start with you, Mrs. Crawford.

(Debbie steps forward, a spotlight shining on her while the rest of the stage dims.)

DEBBIE

I've known Mr. Peanut my entire life. I held him after he was born, bottle-fed him until he could chew, I even taught him to read . . .

JUDGE GEORGE

Gerbils can read?

DEBBIE

Let me have this. Mr. Peanut is the rock of my world. He's more than just a rodent. He's my best friend. I've cared for him in ways you couldn't possibly imagine. *Some* people will tell you I'm a negligent mother, but what do they know? I laid him to rest in sheets with higher thread counts than days I've been alive. His food is hand blended freshly by me every morning, and he's given a lavish bubble bath every night. *My competitor* is delusional if he thinks Mr. Peanut was ever his son.

MITCH

Oh, you are so full of it—need I remind the court of the *luggage* incident.

DEBBIE

That wasn't my fault! *You're* the one who booked the tickets in the first place.

MITCH

But it was *your* idea to fly!

JUDGE GEORGE

Ma'am and sir, respectively! What on Earth is the luggage incident?

DEBBIE

Don't you dare—

(Mitch grins and pushes in front of Debbie, the spotlight is on him now.)

MITCH

I'd like to set the scene. March, the Tiny Rodents of America 20th Anniversary Pagaent. All the big wigs are there; Cheeto Chewyton McAllister, Jellybean Hifferhophenshire III, Daisy Biscuit Thomson, William Whiskers, *Gus*—

JUDGE GEORGE

Your point, Mr. Crawford?

MITCH

These pageants are a big deal in the modeling rodent world, alright? It's based out in Cincinnati, so a bit of a hike from here. Now, *I* suggested we cut our losses and drive, it's safer for transporting good ol' Peanut, but *Deborah* here insisted we fly. Yes, I booked the tickets, but how was a father to know they don't allow Gerbils in first class? So because of my opponent's incompetence, Mr. Peanut was *forced* to sit with the common pet for three hours of flight, amongst the luggage and cargo!

DEBBIE

You're so full of—

JUDGE GEORGE

(Banging her gavel)

SHH! Can we get some order in the court, please?

(The lights dim as the Crawfords keep arguing, though now they're muted. Judge George is still banging her gavel but is also silent. A single spotlight shines on the stage table, where Mr. Peanut emerges. Stagecrew dressed in black move him slowly across the table as dramatic, swelling music plays. Mr. Peanut freezes before being pointed toward the sky. With a dramatic crescendo, he falls onto the table, left upside-down. The lights go back to normal.)

DEBBIE

You sold our conditioner routine to the Hartlands! Chrysanthemum's signature scent is always peaches and cream, but for that ceremony, she had Peanutykins apple-blossom aroma. You gave our soap formula to their team because you had a thing for Mrs. Hartland! What, with her sweet southern charm and those massive, bulging, disgustingly plastic b—

JUDGE GEORGE

Both of you calm down *now*. We have forty minutes of designated court time left, and if you two don't sort your relations out, I'm afraid I will have the jury make a custodial decision *today*.

(Suddenly, AUDIENCE MEMBER stands up and points at the stage. There's no spotlight on them, so the actual audience doesn't realize this is an actor.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER

(Screaming)

He's dead! Mr. Peanut's dead!

(The audience member sits back down. Both Debbie and Mitch scream in horror as they look back to see their prized gerbil dead on the table.)

DEBBIE & MITCH

(Screaming in terror.)

JUDGE GEORGE

(Attempting to yell louder, simultaneously banging the gavel.)

QUIET!

(The courtroom goes quiet. Debbie approaches Mr. Peanut's corpse and gently picks him up.)

DEBBIE

Oh, Mr. Peanut. You were too young. Too good for this wicked world!

MITCH

He couldn't bare to live with you anymore. He probably went and dropped dead because of you.

DEBBIE

(Protectively shielding Mr. Peanut)

Take it back, you whore!

JUDGE GEORGE

Ladies and gentlemen! He *probably* went and died because he's a seven-year-old gerbil who's sick and tired of hearing you two bicker all day.

(Debbie and Mitch both freeze. They stare at each other, then Mr. Peanut, then each other again. It's just now dawning on them they might have killed their gerbil.)

MITCH

(Sobbing)

My God, you're right! All this fighting killed our boy.

JUDGE GEORGE

Now, Mr. Crawford, I'd hardly say—

DEBBIE

We killed him! Lock us up! Take us away! Death row!

JUDGE GEORGE

A gerbil dying in court isn't warrant for incarceration, Mrs. Crawford. Now if we can *please* get on with the division of assets, I believe now that neither of you can receive custody of Mr. Peanut, we'll be able to get your separation going a lot quicker.

DEBBIE

Oh, that's right . . .

MITCH

. . . The divorce.

(The Crawfords hold their gerbil in their hands, staring at each other sadly. They look like they're realizing something.)

MITCH

Your honor, all this fighting, this division of assets, what's the point if we can't have our Peanut?

JUDGE GEORGE

. . . I beg your pardon.

DEBBIE

We only got divorced in the first place because we couldn't decide who deserved him, but now that he's gone . . . what's the point in any of this?

(In their empty, non-dead-gerbil-filled hands, the Crawfords take each other's hands, fingers intertwined.)

DEBBIE & MITCH

We've decided to call off the divorce.

JUDGE GEORGE

I changed my mind. Lock them up.

THE END.