

THE POTHOLE EFFECT

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARY JANE. Sixty-nine-year old woman. She has been friends with LAUREN since high school.

LAUREN. Seventy-year-old woman. MARY JANE has been her best friend since high school.

TIME

2020. Winter.

PLACE

MARY JANE and LAUREN talk with each other on the phone. They both live in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

LAUREN

It's almost over. Mother receives her first dose of the vaccine next week. It should be our turn in a couple of months.

MARY JANE

Do you think everything will be normal by spring?

LAUREN

I don't know. I wonder if we'll ever see normal again.

MARY JANE

Why? (Pause) I know it will take some time for the economy to bounce back. But before long we'll be able to travel. See our grandchildren. Go to out for lunch!

LAUREN

You mean escape from Sam.

MARY JANE

Yes! I married him for better or for worse, but I didn't marry him for lunch. Every. Single. Day.

LAUREN

Is he driving you crazy?

MARY JANE

I passed that point in June.

LAUREN

How do you deal with it?

MARY JANE

I try to find things to do that he can't supervise, like sewing and knitting.

(Pause)

But if he reorganizes my pantry one more time...

LAUREN

A female jury would let you off scot free.

MARY JANE

Back to re-entering the real world. Do you think it can be the same again?

LAUREN

I'm afraid of the pothole effect.

MARY JANE

What's the pothole effect?

LAUREN

For last twelve years, I driven downtown to work. I exit the BA Expressway at 7<sup>th</sup> St. In all those years, there has always been a pothole in the far-left hand lane.

MARY JANE

They didn't fix it in twelve years?

LAUREN

They fixed it every eight months or so.

MARY JANE

I don't understand. If they fixed it, why was a pothole always there?

LAUREN

Because they never really fixed it. They'd pile some paving junk into it; but within three months, the pothole would reappear. By the time they came to fix it again, the hole was so big that drivers were coming to a complete stop to keep from breaking an axle.

MARY JANE

Then they'd come back and fill it in again?

LAUREN

Yes. They kept filling it in every eight months. Where do you suppose all that paving junk went?

MARY JANE

I have no idea.

LAUREN

That's the point. The pothole is unfillable.

(Pause)

2020 is an unfillable pothole in our lives.

MARY JANE

So, it's a blank space.

LAUREN

It's more than that. It's a hole where something should have been—where events should have happened—where memories should be.

MARY JANE

Like not being able to attend my niece's wedding.

LAUREN

Like sitting here alone on my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

MARY JANE

Let's celebrate your birthday in a few months and make those memories.

LAUREN

I thought about that. But there is no time machine that can zip open the hole and fill it up.

MARY JANE

Why not? I'm already planning post-pandemic partying. It will be great.

LAUREN

But doubling up on birthdays and holidays can't fill the hole!

MARY JANE

Why not?

LAUREN

Because the hole is not really empty.

MARY JANE

Then what's in it?

LAUREN

Everything we've experienced this year.

MARY JANE

I don't have any experiences that I want to remember from 2020.

LAUREN

I learned what it means to be absolutely alone.

MARY JANE

I wish I could say that. Sam is underfoot every time I turn around.

LAUREN

I've been terrified that I'd get sick. I have no one who could take care of me.

MARY JANE

I didn't know you felt like that. I'd have come over.

LAUREN

I wouldn't have let you. You'd be vulnerable, then Sam, and so forth.

MARY JANE

Your pothole is filled with the terror of being alone.

LAUREN

That's the thing! I'm no longer terrified. In 2020, I learned how to take care of myself. Not just physically but mentally.

MARY JANE

Mentally?

LAUREN

Yes. I've put iron plates over the old hurts and resentments. I paved them all over, even the Sinkhole of Love.

MARY JANE

The Sinkhole of Love? That sounds like awful porn movie.

LAUREN

That's what I called it when Mark filed for divorce and left me \$30,000 in debt.

MARY JANE

How can you forgive that?

LAUREN

Not forgiven or forgotten—but obliterated. It is insignificant. All the old hurts are paved over. It took 2020 to give me perspective.

MARY JANE

I've done that too. My mother-in-law's criticisms are like tissue paper now. I wad them up and throw them away. Before, I stored them up like ammunition for a big blowup. Now, I don't care.

LAUREN

The Pothole of 2020 deserves respect. Every death left a ripple of grief for spouses, children, parents, cousins, and so on. 350,000 lives lost. We are the lucky ones; we haven't lost anyone.

MARY JANE

Yet.

LAUREN

Yes, yet. But I'll never pave over 2020. I need to draw from it. I need to cherish the gift that it gave me.

MARY JANE

What gift was that?

LAUREN

Time to consider—a chance to choose.

End of Play