

# THE LONG PRESENT

A Play in Five Scenes

By Richard Ehrlich

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## SHORT SYNOPSIS

*The Long Present* is an intimate family drama that unfolds over several years at the same dining room table.

When retired history teacher Frank refuses to postpone a long-planned trip after receiving a troubling medical diagnosis, a dinner conversation with his daughter Rachel escalates into a confrontation that fractures the family. Rachel leaves the house and refuses to return, forcing Frank, his wife Ellen, and Rachel's husband Daniel to live with the consequences of that night for years afterward.

Through letters, absences, small gestures, and difficult conversations, the family confronts pride, fear, endurance, and the complicated ways love survives even when reconciliation does not.

Set entirely around one table that witnesses the passing of years, *The Long Present* explores how families carry one another forward — even when someone is no longer in the room.

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## EXTENDED SYNOPSIS

Frank, a brilliant and formidable retired history teacher in his early seventies, has spent a lifetime equating dignity with resistance and certainty with strength. His wife Ellen has spent decades translating his intensity into something the world can live with.

When their daughter Rachel and her husband Daniel visit for dinner, they urge Frank to postpone an ambitious international trip after a concerning medical diagnosis. Frank hears the request not as concern but as an attempt to diminish him.

The conversation becomes a clash of pride, fear, and accumulated history. When Frank tells Rachel to “control” her husband during the argument, Rachel reaches a breaking point and leaves the house, declaring she cannot keep returning to a room that erases her voice.

The years that follow unfold in the same dining room. Rachel refuses to return. Frank struggles to acknowledge the cost of his pride. Ellen confronts the long endurance required by marriage and family life. Daniel becomes the uneasy bridge between worlds that no longer meet.

Through letters, missed moments, and the slow erosion of certainty, Frank eventually learns that dignity may not lie in controlling the terms of life but in accepting what remains.

The play concludes years later as Frank and Ellen set a third plate at the table — not in expectation of Rachel’s return, but in recognition that absence is also a form of presence.

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## **DETAILED SCENE BREAKDOWN**

### **Scene One — The Break**

Late autumn evening.

Frank and Ellen prepare for dinner with their daughter Rachel and son-in-law Daniel. Beneath the ordinary warmth of family conversation lies an unspoken tension surrounding Frank’s recent medical diagnosis.

When Rachel and Daniel urge Frank to postpone an ambitious trip abroad, Frank interprets their concern as an attempt to control him. The argument escalates as Frank turns the discussion into a defense of independence and dignity.

Rachel finally confronts the pattern that has defined their relationship: Frank’s need to turn every disagreement into a debate he must win.

When Frank tells Rachel to “control” Daniel, she refuses to accept the old dynamic. Declaring she cannot continue returning to a room where her voice disappears, Rachel leaves the house.

Frank refuses to go after her.

The family fractures.

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### **Scene Two — Aftermath**

Four months later.

Winter.

Rachel has not returned to the house. Frank and Ellen continue living with the quiet aftermath of the rupture.

Frank insists Rachel chose to leave, but Ellen forces him to confront the deeper truth: his pride made the room uninhabitable.

As they discuss the holidays that passed without Rachel and her children, Ellen reveals the private cost of maintaining family continuity while Frank defended his position.

Frank begins to acknowledge — haltingly — that his fear of losing control drove him to lose something far greater.

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## **Scene Three — Consequence**

One year later.

Spring.

Frank struggles to write a letter of apology to Rachel but cannot find language that does not sound like argument. His instinct to defend himself continues to sabotage reconciliation.

When Ellen discovers Frank has secretly attempted to attend their granddaughter Lily's recital without Rachel's knowledge, she confronts him with painful clarity: longing does not entitle him to reclaim access.

Frank finally writes a short letter that acknowledges the damage he caused.

Ellen then reveals the long emotional cost of remaining in a marriage defined by endurance and translation.

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## **Scene Four — The Bridge**

Two years later.

Daniel visits the house alone.

Rachel still refuses to return, but time has softened the immediate anger.

Daniel describes how Rachel has built a full life beyond the house, though the memory of that dinner still shapes her. Frank acknowledges his mistakes more directly than before and asks Daniel to carry a message to Rachel.

For the first time, Frank speaks without defending himself.

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## Scene Five — The Long Present

Three years later.

Seven years have passed since Rachel left.

Frank and Ellen now live quietly within the accumulated history of their family. Rachel still has not returned to the house, though she remains deeply present in memory and in the lives of her children.

Frank has come to understand that dignity is not the ability to control outcomes, but the willingness to sit honestly with what remains.

At dinner, Ellen sets a third plate at the table — not as hope or accusation, but as acknowledgment.

The family remains incomplete.

But it remains.

The table holds them all.

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## ABOUT THE PLAY

*The Long Present* explores the emotional architecture of family life: the rooms we build together, the ways pride can fracture them, and the endurance required to keep them standing.

The play examines:

- the confusion of resistance with dignity
- how language can both protect and isolate
- the long labor of marriage
- the cost of leaving and the cost of staying
- the persistence of love after irreparable conflict

Set entirely around a single table over several years, the play uses time and absence as its central dramatic forces. Characters change not through sudden revelation but through the slow accumulation of consequence.

The result is a portrait of family life that is neither sentimental nor despairing, but deeply human.

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# PRODUCTION INFORMATION

**Cast:** 4 actors

FRANK – early 70s in Scene One, aging through the play

ELLEN – late 60s in Scene One

RACHEL – early 40s

DANIEL – early 40s

**Running Time:**

Approximately **90–100 minutes** with no intermission.

**Set Requirements:**

One dining room set that evolves subtly over time.

The table is the central visual element. Small changes in props, lighting, and décor mark the passing years.

**Ideal Venue:**

Intimate theatres or black-box spaces where audience proximity allows the language and emotional detail to resonate fully.

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## FULL SCRIPT (PRODUCTION FORMAT)

The **complete production script** is contained in your finalized document:

This version includes:

- all five scenes
  - stage directions
  - character descriptions
  - the complete dialogue as finalized
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## For Your Website

I recommend structuring the page like this:

## THE LONG PRESENT

A Play by Richard Ehrlich

1. Poster Image
  2. Short Synopsis
  3. Extended Synopsis
  4. About the Play
  5. Character List
  6. Scene Breakdown
  7. Download Full Script (PDF)
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If you'd like, I can also create **three extremely useful things for your playwright website next:**

1. **A 1-paragraph “pitch synopsis” theatres use when selecting plays**
2. **A playwright’s statement for this play**
3. **A director’s note version (very attractive to theatres)**

These help enormously when literary managers read the work.

shorten the scenes and add my credentials not dentistry to about

Below is a **cleaned and shortened version** of the materials for your website. I shortened the **scene descriptions**, tightened the **synopsis**, and adjusted the **About the Play** section to include **you as a playwright** rather than anything unrelated.

This is the style typically used on **playwright portfolio sites and theatre submission pages**.

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## THE LONG PRESENT

**A Play in Five Scenes**

by **Richard Ehrlich**

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## SYNOPSIS

*The Long Present* is an intimate family drama set entirely around a dining room table over several years.

When retired history teacher Frank refuses to postpone an important trip after receiving a serious medical diagnosis, a dinner conversation with his daughter Rachel escalates into a confrontation that fractures the family. Rachel leaves the house and refuses to return, forcing Frank, his wife Ellen, and Rachel's husband Daniel to live with the consequences of that night for years afterward.

As time passes, letters are written, apologies attempted, and lives move forward without easy reconciliation. Through absence, memory, and difficult conversations, the family slowly confronts pride, fear, endurance, and the complicated ways love persists even when people can no longer share the same room.

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## SCENE SUMMARY

### Scene One — The Break

During a family dinner, Rachel and Daniel urge Frank to postpone a long-planned trip after a troubling medical diagnosis. Frank hears concern as control, and the conversation escalates into a painful confrontation. When Frank tells Rachel to “control” her husband, Rachel refuses the old family dynamic and leaves the house.

### Scene Two — Aftermath

Months later, winter settles over the same dining room. Rachel has not returned. Frank and Ellen confront the quiet consequences of the rupture, and Frank begins to recognize the cost of the pride that drove his daughter away.

### Scene Three — Consequence

A year later, Frank struggles to write an apology letter that does not sound like argument. When Ellen discovers he plans to secretly attend his granddaughter's recital, she forces him to confront the difference between longing and entitlement.

### Scene Four — The Bridge

Daniel visits the house alone. Rachel still refuses to return, but time has softened the anger. Frank speaks more honestly than before, asking Daniel to carry a message to Rachel that contains no defense.

### Scene Five — The Long Present

Years later, Frank and Ellen continue their lives at the same table. Rachel has never returned, but she remains present in memory and family history. Ellen sets a third plate at the table — not as hope or accusation, but as acknowledgment.

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# CHARACTERS

**FRANK** – early 70s in Scene One, older as the play progresses. A retired history teacher: brilliant, articulate, proud, and deeply attached to dignity.

**ELLEN** – late 60s in Scene One. Frank’s wife. Practical, perceptive, and emotionally exact. She has spent decades translating Frank to the world and the world back to Frank.

**RACHEL** – early 40s. Their daughter. Thoughtful, morally serious, and long practiced at maintaining composure in difficult rooms.

**DANIEL** – early 40s. Rachel’s husband. Direct, steady, and resistant to grand rhetoric when plain truth is required.

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# SETTING

The same dining room across several years.

At the center is a solid wooden dining table that remains constant throughout the play. Small changes in objects — photographs, cards, medicine bottles, hearing-aid cases, flowers — mark the passing of time, while the table remains the emotional and physical center of the family.

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# ABOUT THE PLAY

*The Long Present* explores the emotional architecture of family life: the rooms we build together, the ways pride can fracture them, and the endurance required to keep them standing.

Through a single location and four characters, the play examines how language, memory, and time shape relationships between parents and adult children. Rather than offering easy reconciliation, the play focuses on the difficult work of living with consequence.

The story unfolds over several years, revealing how love and absence can coexist — and how family members remain present in our lives even when they are no longer in the room.

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# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

**Richard Ehrlich** is an American playwright whose work focuses on intimate character-driven stories exploring family, memory, aging, and the moral tensions within ordinary lives.

His plays are known for their intelligent dialogue, emotional precision, and theatrical simplicity, often unfolding within a single location where language and performance carry the dramatic weight.

*The Long Present* continues Ehrlich's exploration of how families navigate pride, regret, and enduring love over time.

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## PRODUCTION DETAILS

**Cast:** 4 actors

**Running Time:** approximately 90–100 minutes

**Structure:** One act, five scenes

**Set:** Single dining room set with subtle changes marking time

Ideal for **intimate theatres, black-box productions, and actor-driven staging.**