

TIME TO GO

By Paul Lief Rosengren

Final

Cast of Characters:

Sara (Saraqael):	A flamboyant older woman in her 70s. Sarcastically hopeful. Tour leader, carries a clipboard.
Remi (Remiel) Stone:	A serious former successful businessperson, age 50.
Gabe (Gabriel):	An older gentleman in his 70s or older. Down-to-earth and centered, wearing overalls.
Anne of Kleeves	A woman age 65, thin, blonde (dyed hair), wearing a floral dress.
D.D. Drake	An arrogant, conceited man, age 97 – looks age 30.
Emma Smith	A woman, age 55. Like the mother in “The Lottery,” before the stoning.
Mathew	A man, age 50.

Setting: The Presidential City – a “retirement” community

Time: In the future

Playwright Notes:

All characters can be played by the opposite sex. If a sex is changed, please adjust the pronouns and titles in the script to reflect the sex of the actor. This script version assumes Remi is played by a woman.

The Pool can be an aboveground pool – or a blue cloth or simply a stool the actor jumps off and simply leaves.

SCENE 1: SARA, REMI, group

A group of older people walk across the stage in front of the closed curtain. As she speaks, Sara hands out Presidential folders to each person on the tour.

SARA. Congratulations on reaching your 50th birthday and for choosing – or at least being successful enough to afford – the Presidential City. Each of you has been assigned to villages of between 500 and 5000 citizens. These are the people you will eat with and do activities with, and, of course, those with whom you will grow old together. With a life expectancy approaching 115, for most of you – hopefully, all of you -- you will be spending more time here in Presidential City than you have Out There.

Hand shoots up in the back

Yes?

REMI. Do we get to see the activities on this tour?

SARA. Excuse me?

REMI. You said there were activities we could do with others. What kinds of activities?

SARA. The possibilities are really infinite -- what kinds of activities interest you?

REMI. Maybe a book club, current events group, or art classes, maybe sky diving -- that kind of thing: something to keep the mind sharp.

SARA. Sky diving -- no. All activities take place here at the community. There is one book club – I happen to coordinate it. Definitely not a current events club. There are some very active puzzle groups.

REMI. You mean they solve puzzles? Like math puzzles or logic problems?

SARA. Noooo, what do you call them? ... Jigsaw puzzles. Some quite large – and some even complex. And each City develops its own culture with a big event. Presidential City, not surprisingly, centered its events around the week of July 4th – but the celebration of the Revolution made ... some people ... uncomfortable, so now it is around President’s Day – February 22nd.

REMI. Doesn’t President’s Day move around?

SARA. It does move around Out There. To make a three-day weekend, isn’t it? The concept of “weekend” has lost its meaning in here, so someone decided, let’s just make it a set day – not sure why they went with February 22nd.

REMI. In walking here I saw a lot of gathering rooms – but not too much gathering. Where are all the people?

SARA. All activities are optional. The puzzle rooms get quite busy before and after lunch. Some also spend a good deal of time on Vid-vizes.

REMI. On what?

SARA. Oh yes, there is some slang in here that you will quickly get used to. Vid-vizes are video visits – to people from Out There or at other cities. And, of course, some people do Vid-vizes with people right down the hall – though that makes no sense to me.

REMI. I know we can’t visit people Out There but how about visiting people in other cities?

SARA. I just said you could -- via video.

REMI. So, you can’t travel between cities?

SARA. Everything you need is right here at The Presidential City.

REMI. I just saw on a news clip about two people living in different Cities, falling in love, and getting married. And now their families actually get together and socialize, “Out There,” as you say.

SARA. Their families do spend time together – and the couple, they... kind of do. They got married – remotely. Having a big screen TV of your spouse sleeping in another City may not be entirely satisfying – but at least you can turn down the sound if they snore.

REMI. I didn't realize they restricted travel. Was that after The Challenges, following what you call here, in slang I believe, "The Vote?"

SARA. I see you have been doing some historical research. I wasn't sure you could still do that Out There. Anyone else know about The Challenges?

No one else does – or seems interested.

SARA. *(To Remi)* Maybe we can continue this conversation later.

REMI. OK – Just one more question -- "What is a departing pool?"

SARA. Each village has most of their own facilities -- dining room, library, swimming pool, etc. But there are some facilities, like the departing pool, that are shared by the whole City. They are all listed in your brochure.

She looks down at her clip board and quickly moves to another subject.

SARA. Now let me send you off to your villages. You and you are off to James Buchanan. You are off to Trump. You to JFK, nice, and, oh, you *(Pointing to Remi)* are in Maria Espinoza – fancy. Off you go – and if you need anything, you know where to find me.

REMI. But we don't know where to find you.

SARA. Don't worry, I will find you.

SCENE 2 - REMI, GABE, SARA, ANNE OF KLEEVEES,
D.D.DRAKE, EMILY, MATHEW

Office on the left. Stairs lead up to an above-ground pool.

REMI. Hello?

GABE. I'm in here.

Remi walks into the office.

REMI. Hi, I'm Remi. First day here. I hope I'm not intruding, just looking around – naturally curious.

GABE. Unfortunately, less and less of that around here. I'm Gabe, short for Gabriel, welcome to the departing room.

REMI. Not sure what that means. The tour guide quickly moved to another subject.

GABE. Sara doesn't like to go into details about this room on the tour. This is what they call a departing room. You come here when you want to depart – as in, say your final good-bye.

REMI. You mean a suicide room?

GABE. We find that word a little harsh. No, you come here when you think – it's time. They come here and jump in the pool – a mixture of strong chemicals that immediately dissolves anything that touches it. Painless and quick – almost every time.

REMI. Almost?

GABE. Well, one time, some idiot -- used to be a Congressman -- tried to dangle his feet in the pool. Lost everything below the knee -- then decided he didn't want to go. I really didn't have a choice but give him a little help. See that pole – looks like it's there to save people. Nope. It's to push them in. Got it after the Congressman. I call it The Congressman Pole. I try to make sure people are ready before they do anything irreversible.

REMI. So, **I** could just go and jump in?

Gabe. I don't recommend it on the first day. Sara almost did. Could not envision a life of leisure. I convinced her to give it a chance. She got the tour job and now is full in. Any interest? (*signals to the pool*)

REMI. It has its appeal. I am having a hard time imagining myself here. "Out There" I lived for business and was good at it. I imagine I'm one of the wealthiest people here -- got one of the biggest units in the best village, in the best City. You work for a few decades for what -- just to get the best spot in a city where you slowly rot for the second half of your life?

GABE. Some people get very into puzzles.

REMI. I've heard.

GABE. The virtual room is popular, too -- simulates vacations. You can go to Venice during the Age of Enlightenment or join a Native American pueblo. You used to be able to join the Roman Senate. It grew quite popular -- everyone joining the assassins against tyranny. "Someone" decided it was a little risky, so it has been temporarily out of order -- for the last 10 years.

REMI. Isn't it kind of depressing -- people coming here to commit hara-kiri?

GABE. First of all, no hara-kiri. Only way to go -- if it is time -- is in The Pool and not everyone goes in. A lot of them like to talk. I get to know some interesting folk -- not all, but some.

REMI. So is it your job to convince people to jump or to stop them? Is a day just of talking a good day or a bad day?

GABE. The gatekeeper is never supposed to encourage a jump. I have to admit, this being the cream-of-the-crop City, we get some real assholes. Sometimes I have to say to myself, "put us both out of this misery -- go jump in the damn pool already." But I just say that in my head.

REMI. I really don't approve of the mandatory retirement community. I mean, in the old days, people could have second careers: They could completely reinvent themselves after 50.

GABE. Would you want to reinvent yourself or just hang on to your job, keeping the young and ambitious out of it?

REMI. Point taken. I had more impact on the bottom line than on people's lives. I do regret that.

GABE. So, what kind of job might you have taken?

REMI. I don't know, Maybe a job where I interact with people – I avoided getting close to people Out There.

GABE. Why?

REMI. You don't want to hear this.

GABE. I do. I am a good listener.

REMI. Well, I was early in my career: an eager beaver, happily married, good friends. So, balancing work and home – never easy -- but I was doing it pretty well. And then things changed.

GABE. What happened?

REMI. My wife, Ariel. She was one of the last people still driving a PD-car. PD, that's for people-driven. She liked to be in control, and by that time people were getting rid of the PDs left and right, so they were cheap, and she could pretty much pick any one she wanted. So, she had a nice racy one. She was driving with her best friend Mary,

Beat

A kid ran out of nowhere, Ariel swerved and rammed into a self-driver. Ariel was killed instantly.

GABE. Wow – that's rough.

REMI. At the inquest, they decided that her action saved the kid and her friend. And if the car had been a self-driver, Ariel would have survived, and Mary and the kid would have been killed. She saved two lives but gave up her own.

GABE. Really rough.

REMI. Being a widow affected the way people treated me. Mary and Joe felt so guilty about it that they just pulled away. I lost my wife and my two best friends. Lost myself in my job, amassing credits. Maybe I was trying to avoid reality.

GABE. Did you connect with people in the business world?

REMI. Lots of business associates, cordial acquaintances – no friends. Just didn't want to get close to anyone again.

Beat

I never talked to anyone about this.

GABE. I have that effect on people – or maybe it's my job.

REMI. Do you talk too -- or just listen?

GABE. What do you mean?

REMI. Well for starters, what did you do Out There?

GABE. I didn't do. I amassed my credits by outliving three wives. The last was a self-made businesswoman. She died here – as in The Pool.

REMI. Doesn't that make this job impossible – a constant reminder?

GABE. Not at all. Sometimes the timing is right. We had discussed it. Wanted me to go too, but I wasn't ready. Back then I was more hopeful. Like Sara. Sara still has hope things can change.

For me, now, a little peace, in a little place, for a little time — I think that is all we can hope for.

OK, Remi, how would you do things differently?

REMI. Who knows, but I was kind of hoping – I might have an impact on lives -- doesn't have to be a huge impact but knowing that I have a purpose. Are there opportunities here where you might impact lives?

GABE. A few, here and there. Any family members you could make up for lost time with via vid-vizes?

REMI. To be honest, not sure anyone would care if I jumped in right now. What's going on?

GABE. Right on time. Anne of Kleeves, was in two weeks ago and reserved the screen room. You can have up to 50 people view-in to say so long - and friends from here too. She gathered friends Out There via Video-vizes. Promising – or implying -- that some would be getting credits.

But no matter how many join you in there, you must come into this room by yourself. Just to make sure this decision is yours and yours alone.

In walks a woman wearing a floral dress and a purse. She sips a soda from a straw.

GABE. Anne of Kleeves, how did it go?

ANNE OF KLEEVES. Oh, it was wonderful. There were people from all over. I succeeded in having guests from every continent – EVERY continent – imagine that.

GABE. Many family members?

ANNE OF KLEEVES. Oh, my family have become religious fanatics – don't believe in the pools. Wouldn't come if I paid th... *(Cuts herself off.)*

GABE. Friends from here?

Anne gives Gabe a look that could kill, then recovers.

ANNE OF KLEEVES. Well, you know me. Always spending so much time with my friends Out There – taking advantage of the wonders of technology -- that I just

didn't have the time or energy for those here. No matter. It was a great crowd, a wonderful send-off.

The woman walks with exaggerated dignity to and up the stairs. She opens her purse and takes out several envelopes, kisses the letters and places them in the mailbox. She undresses to reveal a floral bathing suit. She places all of her clothes under a sign "All clothes left here are donated to F3." She walks over and, with a small bit of hesitation, jumps in the pool and is not seen again.

REMI. That's it?

GABE. Yep

REMI. You didn't try to stop her?

GABE. Nope.

REMI. Didn't take long.

GABE. Sometimes it doesn't – sometimes it does.

Gabe takes the letters, and places them in his pocket. He starts to gather the clothes.

REMI. The letters?

GABE. We have some people who come here spur of the moment. If they don't write a note, they kind of just disappear. It unsettles people. We encourage them to write a note to at least one person. I'm supposed to push it – but I don't. I expect her letters were mainly for me. Appearances meant a lot to her, all the way to the end.

Remi walks over to the pool and stares..

GABE. So, are you going in?

REMI. If I were going to, I would have already. In the business world I had a reputation: fast decisions – fast action. I might come back tomorrow.

GABE. I think maybe you might.

REMI. And what is F3?

Remi points to the sign.

GABE. One by one the groups I donated the clothing to went under: first the Cancer Foundation, then the Heart Association and then, with a burst, most of the others: killed out by their own success. F3 stands for Foot Fungus Foundation. I think it is a foundation to employ all of the people who used to work at the other foundations. They don't seem to be in a rush to solve the problem, and nobody really cares -- and I have a place to send the "donated" clothes. A win, win, win.

REMI. Except for those with really bad foot fungus.

GABE. I suppose.

Gabe and Remi return to the office in silence.

GABE. Want some coffee?

REMI. What's coffee?

GABE. It's from the old days. People used to drink it when they were chatting – sometimes when they weren't, I think. People stopped drinking it because of some study – later proved wrong. Sara thinks it was a government plot.

Remi tastes the coffee.

REMI. This is awful.

GABE. Give it a chance. After three to four cups you will love it. After a few more, you won't believe you ever got through a day without it. I got my hands on a lifetime supply – actually several lifetimes.

REMI. So, what do you think of the communities?

GABE. I think they are a waste of good talent – but they are here to stay. Since they lowered the maximum voting age to 50, there just is no support for making

them optional. During The Vote – everyone here thought the repeal of the mandatory retirement law would pass easy. The vote wasn't even close. The 15 to 25 year old vote went nine to one against it.

REMI. I was 30. I voted against it. All I could think of was some 55-year-old coming back stopping me moving up the company ladder. Looks pretty shortsighted and stupid now.

GABE. The pools were particularly busy right after the vote and then again after the failure of The Challenges.

Remi looks to the pool questioningly.

GABE. That is an option. But it is your first day here – you might want to give it a chance.

Sara enters.

Ah, here is Sara.

SARA. Am I interrupting?

GABE. No, we are just chatting (*looks at Remi*), right?

REMI. Oh, yeah, I'm not going in – at least not today. Join us.

Sara goes for the coffee pot.

REMI. Wait, you like this dirt water, too?

GABE. Oh, yes, she's one of the chosen few I have hooked on it -- the nectar of the gods. You know, Sara, when she arrived, could not see herself lasting days, let alone decades.

REMI. What changed?

SARA. Well, I thought in a city of thousands I could find a few people who were intellectually stimulating. It's not easy. The Boards have not been big into organized activities – as you noticed – since The Challenges. Then I had the idea to give the tours – which gives me an opportunity to look for like-minded people.

GABE. It was quite a sacrifice since Sara really hates people.

SARA. Not people in general, just most individuals. *(To Remi)* And you can see why. Other than you, that tour was a bunch of sheep – and the Presidential City is supposed to be the cream of the crop. But I find two or three people a year worth befriending – and I connect them with other similarly interesting people.

GABE. She is amazing. She has figured out ways to integrate her chosen few into a little hidden community – through book clubs, lunch groups, silly clubs like flower arranging – all under the nose of The Board.

REMI. The Board?

SAR. The Board is made up of people who are totally controllable and crave a sense of power. They try to make decisions and control stupid stuff . Two years ago, the Board tried to ban Halloween decorations. Since no kids were here to go trick-or-treating, they thought the decorating was “unnecessary.”

GABE. So, Sara decided to get a few of us to dress up as children and go Trick or Treating -- but we only went to the doors with Halloween decorations.

SARA. Next year, there were a lot more decorations, and hundreds of people had dressed up as children. Now, it’s spreading to other cities.

GABE. Sara really is quite the revolutionary.

SARA. Yes, I mine for interesting people as they come in, and Gabe desperately searches for interest in people as they leave. And on that note, I need to go – get ready for another tour.

Sara leaves.

REMI. You’ve been friends for a while?

GABE. I was her first recruit. And being first, she is a lot more tolerant of me, despite the fact that I have been a disappointment.

REMI. You? How so?

GABE. Well, my role in her revolution is to stop her recruits from leaving. I won’t do it. If they think it’s time, it’s time.

REMI. But do you try harder with some rather than others? Seems like you didn't make much of an effort with Anne of Kleeves – and she *did* want to talk.

GABE. Talk or brag? Maybe I try harder with some than others – and increasingly with fewer and fewer. Ultimately, I don't force anyone into the pool – well since the Congressman. I never have had regrets.

DeeDee Drake enters the room. Despite his appearance as age 30, he looks like the weight of the world is on his shoulders.

GABE. (*Yells*) DeeDee, how are you doing?

D.D. DRAKE. Look great, feel like shit.

GABE. Want to meet a new arrival?

D.D. DRAKE. No time. I am late – very late – for an appointment.

She shuffles to the stairs and laboriously climbs them, grumbling all the way. She undresses completely, strewing her clothes across the deck. She stands up straight, puffs out her chest looking proud. Shows off her muscles. Then sighs and lowers back into a hunch. She holds her nose and drops in the pool.

REMI. Who was that?

GABE. You said that you were one of the wealthiest people here. Well, that was the wealthiest. Name is – was – D.D. Drake. He was 97.

REMI. What?

GABE. Paid to replace pretty much every part of his body he could – his personal quest for eternal youth. Kept a platoon of doctors and researchers employed. Resulted in a lot of medical breakthroughs. They helped him look young, but the brain and the organs still got old. Money couldn't solve that.

REMI. Had he been in before?

GABE. Several times. Always wanting me to say, “You are too good-looking to depart.” And I said it -- because he clearly was not ready to go. You noticed this time he didn’t stop to talk -- he didn’t want me to convince him to change his mind. He was ready. When my wife came here, she was ready. When I jump in, it will be because I am ready.

Emma enters.

GABE. Emma, I didn’t expect to see you so soon – you haven’t changed your mind, have you?

EMMA. No. Actually, I was beginning to think a little more about here when I got a sign. I am not a big believer in signs, well, I am – or wasn’t – a big believer in signs at all. But I just got one, and I didn’t know whom to share it with – so I rushed down here to tell you.

GABE. A sign, do tell.

EMMA. Well, I had the video wall on, and it was doing the messages of the day, birthdays and then the list of all of the new people arriving today. You know, I never really pay attention to these things, but I glanced at it and there ... she ... was.

GABE. Who was there?

EMMA. The woman! Remember I told you the story of my son.

GABE. The son has exactly one hour a week, at a set time, to talk to his mother?

EMMA. That is because he is so busy working. And I am very grateful. It is why I could afford to be here.

Turning back to Gabe.

This woman is the reason my son is a big shot executive.

GABE. He was his mentor?

EMMANo, I don’t think they ever met. Arnold, my son, caused the accident that killed his wife. Arnold became obsessed with Mr. Stone. Followed all the blogs,

vogs and clogs on her. Took the advice she offered, emulated her career – it paid off. I know that Ms. Stone is very busy, but I need to find her, explain how much – how grateful I am for the actions – the kindness, of her wife – and that her death was not in vain. Oh, that sounds like I am happy her wife died – that won't do.

GABE. Well, I think ...

EMMA. Do you think she will want to see me? Will she blame my son for her loss? I really don't want to find out that she hates Arnold or me.

REMI. Why would she hate you? Or your boy? He was only five at the time.

EMMA. I was watching him. Turned for a moment and bam – he was in the street. Wait, how did you know his age?

She turns to Gabe.

EMMA. I didn't say his age, did I?

She turns back to Remi.

EMMA. Who are you?

GABE. I'm going to guess that this is Ms. Stone.

REMI. Please, just Remi. Tell me about your son. I have always wondered. You sound very proud.

EMMA. I am proud. He is a real success. Now he is the subject of the blogs, vogs and clogs – maybe you have even heard of him.

REMI. Arnold Smith? Yes, I have heard of him – and I never made the connection. Wow, that is the boy. I have heard people make comparisons between him and my early career. (*Happily*) So I had an impact on his life?

EMMA. Impact – that is an understatement. You shaped almost every aspect of his life.

REMI. Did he marry? Have Kids?

EMMA. No time.

REMI. I would love to talk to him. Though I don't know if he will like what I have to say: Now that he has "made it," take time to stop and do what really matters – make friends, connections, find a mate, raise kids.

EMMA. Oh, that would be fantastic. I talk to him Sundays . For you, I think we can break the schedule. Are you tired of the food here yet? I love to cook if you would like to come for a meal.

REMI. It's my first day, so the jury is out on the food – but lunch would be great. Tomorrow?

EMMA. What a day. This is a lot to digest. I am going to call Arnold right away – thank you. Ms. Stone. Remi.... Thank you.

Emma exits

GABE. Look at you, making connections already. You know, that is a life you could make a real difference in – maybe two.

REMI. My guess is that Arnold will be the tougher sell, but I am game to try.

GABE. That is where Sara and I differ – she wants to make one huge change all at once. I am satisfied one life at a time.

REMI. Or one death at a time?

(Gabe ignores him)

GABE. Hold down the fort while I use the restroom, OK?

Gabe exits. Mathew enters.

MATHEW. Are you Gabe?

REMI. No, he stepped out, will be just a moment.

MATHEW. Sorry to interrupt. The sign did say "not in use."

REMI. Oh, no problem. We were just chatting. I'm not using the pool – are you?

MATHEW. No, I mean, maybe -- I am not sure. I thought I would come and figure out the logistics. A friend told me to check in with Gabe.

REMI. Well, just learning this myself. Seems pretty straightforward – you jump in the pool. Supposed to write a letter to someone, but that appears to be optional.

MATHEW. I forgot the letter. Can I write one here?

REMI. There is paper and pen on the desk. Whom would you write to?

MATHEW. My wife.

REMI. Are you going to tell her you love her ... or you hate her?

MATHEW. I can go either way. I really do love her. But since coming here a few weeks ago, I really don't know what she expects. We grew apart before coming here, and I don't know what she wants. I seem to be out of sorts all the time. I think I might just be ready to go.

REMI. Did you love her once?

MATHEW. Well, I did at first. We both loved the romance and the seduction. Then it grew just normal – and then remote. That is where we are now. Are you single?

REMI Yes.

MATHEW. I know this is strange, but it has been bothering me -- was there sex stuff in your medicine cabinet?

REMI. What?

MATHEW. You know, when you got here, your medicine cabinet was stocked – with toothpaste, dental floss, aspirin, thermometer etc. – was there sex stuff?

[Viagra if played by a man] There was in mine. My wife said it came standard – I was just not sure if they did that for singles or just married couples -- I guess I was surprised they stocked it with that at all. Just saying.

REMI. No, there was none in mine -- not because I was single or because I am a woman, but because I didn't check it off the supply list.

MATHEW. What?

REMI. They didn't magically stock your medicine cabinet. They asked you what you wanted. My guess is that your wife made the list – and, yes, put Viagra on it.

MATHEW. *(Taken aback)* Really?

REMI. Really. I have a suggestion. Feel free to ignore it. Why not take your wife on a romantic vid-vacation? Maybe to Venice. Maybe pretend you are a rich powerful man in Venice, and your wife is your secret lover or ...

MATHEW. Or that she is the head of a powerful house, and I am her servant she falls in love with. Maybe in the court of Marie Antoinette or Flora the Uniter. You think she will go for it?

REMI. All you have to do is ask. Might be fun.

MATHEW. I think it might be.

Gabe comes in.

GABE. Sorry to keep you waiting.

MATHEW. I was just leaving. Thanks.

Mathew leaves.

GABE. Nicely done. I was listening at the door.

REMI. You should have come in. I was killing time until you came back.

GABE. No, it was just what I needed to hear. For the longest time I had many reasons to stay, recently I have had just a few not to go. That checks one more thing off the list.

Gabe takes a piece of paper from a drawer and places it on the desk. He takes a letter from the same drawer and places it in the out-box.

REMI. What are you doing? Is someone coming?

GABE. No, I think it is time.

REMI. Time for what?

GABE goes across the stage and up the stairs.

Remi follows and stops at the bottom of the stairs.

REMI. You are not going to ... you know?

Gabe nods his head yes.

REMI. But who will be in charge of this place?

GABE. You are.

REMI. But I don't know how.

GABE. The keys are on the hook, and I left instructions on the desk.

I can see why you might want to dangle your feet first.

Gabe gives a lighthearted jump into the pool.

Remi walks slowly to the office. She reads the address of the letter.

REMI. My Dearest Sara She is going to be so mad I didn't try to stop him.

He picks up the sheet of paper.

REMI. Instructions: How to make coffee

Lights out.

Playwrite note: For curtain calls. Anne of Cleaves and D. D. Drake should be in black bath robes. Gabe in a long white (luxurious) white bath robe.