

ASHLANDIA

CHARACTERS

HANK, mid-70s, retired, grumpy, an avid gardener.

MILDRED, early 70s, Hank's wife.

SARAH, late 70s, Hank and Mildred's next door neighbor, also a gardener.

SETTING

Ashland, Oregon. Hank and Mildred's dining room / kitchen.
Sarah's outside deck. The present.

SCENE 1

Dining room / kitchen, coffee pot on stove.

*(MILDRED seated at table reading on her tablet, sipping coffee.
HANK storms in from outside, coffee mug in hand, muttering to
himself, sits at table, slamming down mug)*

HANK: Gone, every damn one of them, and it's all her fault! *(Nods
toward Sarah's house next door)*

MILDRED: Now, calm down, Hank. All what's gone?

HANK: My tulips! Every damn one! I swear to God, Milly, I'm going to
call the cops on that woman. It's all her doin'.

MILDRED: Now, Hank, why would Sarah want to eat your tulips?

HANK: Don't be stupid, woman. It wasn't her ate 'em, it was those damn
deer. But she's the one inviting them into my garden.

MILDRED: Don't you call me stupid, Hank Wilkens. Just 'cause you're angry about something else doesn't give you leave to yell at me.

HANK: You're right, and I am sorry. I'm just angry about them deer.

MILDRED: You know very well there's always deer wandering around here. Part of the charm of Ashland. You've just been lucky up to now. You should stop putting it off and build a real deer fence instead of that netting.

HANK: No deer fence is going to stop that woman. She was sitting out on her deck when I first saw them nipped-off buds, so I went over to see if she'd lost any plants, too, and what was sitting there but a plate of deer pellets? She's feeding them damn deer right there on her porch! Begging them to come up here and have a meal at my expense!

MILDRED: Are you sure it was deer food? She shouldn't feed the deer, but you still need to put up that fence.

HANK: And do you know what she said when I called her on it? "This was the deers' land first. They've got as much right to be here as we do." Damn loco, I call that.

MILDRED: She's right about that, you know.

HANK: Damn loco is what she is. And when I told her how much work it is to grow them tulips, she said she knew that, and she felt sorry for me. Sorry for me! And then she said, in that syrupy voice of hers, "I guess you'll just have to plant daffodils next year." Jesus H. Christ! Daffodils! Any fool can grow daffodils. I want something that matters.

MILDRED: Then stop whining about Sarah and get a proper fence built. You know that's the only answer.

HANK: There ought to be a law about feeding them deer. That do-nothing mayor of ours called a meeting last year about "the deer problem." I guess I should have gone. I heard a lot of people protested. Destroying gardens. Threatening dogs and children. Causing that limestone disease. I'll bet they passed some law about it.

MILDRED: Well, if you'll remember, I did go to that meeting. And most of the folks there preferred to live with the deer. Find ways to share our space.

HANK: What does that have to do with anything?

MILDRED: And besides, that meeting wasn't about passing laws, it was about the City Council understanding peoples' concerns, so they can take appropriate action.

HANK: City Council! That bunch of ignorant liberals, throwing our money around. They wouldn't do anything to harm the "poor, hungry creatures." Hell, I don't mind living with a reasonable number of deer around town. But not if they eat my plants. And we've got lots more than is reasonable.

MILDRED: Maybe we wouldn't have "lots more" if we didn't keep building houses and hemp farms where they've always lived.

HANK: Woman, you don't know nothing.

MILDRED: There you go again, Hank, blaming me. You're way too grumpy this morning. You're mad at everybody.

HANK: Mostly at Sarah. That "...you'll just have to plant daffodils..." really pisses me off. And where the hell does she get that deer food anyway? It should be illegal to sell that stuff in this town. I'll bet it's that Grange Co-op. I'm going right down there after breakfast and give them a piece of my mind.

MILDRED: You should call first and see if they even carry deer pellets. I'll bet they don't. Maybe it's the big Co-op in Medford, or online from Amazon.

HANK: Amazon! You're right. That's why those UPS trucks keep showing up next door. I always wondered what she was up to, a single woman like that, living alone, getting all that stuff from Amazon.

MILDRED: Now, Hank, we don't know if Amazon even sells deer feed. I'll just look it up on the internet and see.

HANK: Don't bother. You know I'm right. You just want to show off how great you are on that new smartphone you're so proud of.

MILDRED: Not half as proud as you are about never owning one.

HANK: Well, I'm still going to complain to the police. I tell you, Milly, I don't care how long we've known Sarah. I'm not going to put up with this.

SCENE 2

Later that morning. **SARAH**'s deck, two chairs and side table.

(SARAH sits drinking coffee. MILDRED enters)

SARAH: Hi, Milly. Thank you for coming over. Let me get you some coffee. It's been so long since we just settled down and chatted of a morning.

MILDRED: It has been a while. But I thought... You said that you needed to talk about what happened earlier. Shouldn't we do that first, then chat?

SARAH: Oh, I do need to talk that over, about Hank. It's why I called. But, I'm still in a bit of a tizzy about what happened, so, can't we just work up to it? Chat a little first? We used to do that every morning. Wonderful talks. And remember how the four of us had dinner a couple of times a week, back before Wayne passed?

MILDRED: Of course I remember. Sure, we can chat a bit first, if that's what you're wanting. I guess I will take that coffee.

(SARAH leaves, returns with a mug of coffee, hands mug to MILDRED, sits)

MILDRED: Thank you, Sarah. Yes, we did have some lovely times together.

SARAH: Those were the good old days. And here we are still, sitting on the deck those two men built for us. Back then, it was for both our families. You could use it any time you wanted. Now, I'm lucky to see you once a week, from across the way.

MILDRED: We're all slowing down, aren't we. Are you ready to talk about this morning?

SARAH: Oh, all right. You see, when Hank saw those precious tulip buds of his were gone, he rushed right over here, God knows why. Then he saw my plate of deer food on the edge of the deck and he exploded. You'd think he was back to being a drill sergeant, the language he used.

MILDRED: I'm sorry. He shouldn't yell at anyone like that.

SARAH: Of course he was right. Just because I would never grow plants that deer like, that doesn't give me leave to feed them. But they do come around when they're hungry, with those big soft eyes of theirs.

MILDRED: I imagine they get plenty to eat, just naturally.

SARAH: I've never understood why that old grump of yours won't put up a decent deer fence. He's the one attracting the deer. But that's not the point.

MILDRED: You know, Sarah, Hank's already told me all about what happened.

SARAH: Oh, dear! All of it?

MILDRED: Everything you mentioned.

SARAH: Nothing more?

MILDRED: What more?

SARAH: Well, I did apologize for feeding the deer, and told him I was sorry he lost his plants. And he cooled off, said it was all right. And then...*(Trails off)*

MILDRED: And then what?

SARAH: *(Pause, sigh)* And then he started up again, that same old game of his. You know what I mean. He sat right there in that chair you're sitting in, and looked me up and down — me in my nightgown and robe — and said "You're still a beautiful woman, Sarie. I think that every time I look at you."

MILDRED: Oh, dear.

SARAH: I said “Don’t you start that again, Hank Wilkens. I thought you got the message years ago. I’m not interested in the likes of you.” And he had the nerve to say “It’s been a long time since Wayne died. A beautiful woman like you, all by yourself. It isn’t natural. You need some comforting.” With that I threw my plate of deer food right in his face, and he stormed off cursing. I wanted you to know.

MILDRED: I’m sorry for the pain he caused you, stirring up those old memories of Wayne. I’ll see that he doesn’t do that again.

SARAH: Thank you dear. I can see his words hurt you, too. But I just had to tell you because... *(Pause)* Because he’s right, you know. I am so lonely. And I do need comforting. Some nights, I could just cry and cry. I wouldn’t hurt you for the world, Milly, but I’m not sure what I’ll do if he comes on like that again. Damn! I thought this kind of thing didn’t happen when we got old. I guess wrinkles don’t protect you from life.

SCENE 3

The next morning. Dining room / kitchen, coffee pot on stove.

(HANK and MILDRED seated at table sipping coffee, HANK reading newspaper, MILDRED reading on her smartphone. HANK looks up)

HANK: I don’t see how you can do anything with that tiny screen. Instead of watching fake news on the internet, why don’t you read the newspaper and watch TV like a normal person.

MILDRED: “Normal” people don’t get their news from a paper that never mentions anything outside the Rogue Valley. I want to know what’s happening in the rest of the world, Portland, Washington D. C., Hong Kong. And I won’t find that in the “Tidings”, or on FOX News either, for that matter.

HANK: Well, I’ll bet the internet doesn’t have anything as entertaining as this advice column. You wouldn’t believe the questions people ask Aunt Ellie.

MILDRED: Hank Wilkins, after all these years you should know what I’d believe. I used to read that column before you ever started it, and I can tell you there’s a thousand more like it on the internet.

HANK: Okay, okay. Sorry I brought it up. (*Folds newspaper, sets it on table*) I think I’ll run on over to Home Depot, get the materials for that deer fence you’ve been bugging me about.

MILDRED: It’s ten miles to Home Depot. Why not just buy what you need here in town?

HANK: And pay Ashland prices? No way.

MILDRED: You’re always talking about how good the service is at Ace Hardware. And the lumber yard is almost next door.

HANK: You’d be right, if I needed help. But I know just what I want and where it is at H-D. And they have self-service checkout, so no lines to stand in.

MILDRED: Oh, get on with it. I’ll be glad to have some time to myself.

(HANK exits)

MILDRED: *(To herself)* Now, what am I going to do about that scheming bitch? Do I confront her, or speak to Hank, or both? I need to talk this over with someone, get some advice. And I don't know who. ...

That's it! Aunt Ellie's advice column. She always has something interesting to say. And maybe the old fool will read it and wake up to what going on.

(Picks up her device and pecks away, looking for the proper place to enter a message to the column) Here's her input form. (One last peck, a pause, then types as she speaks, thinking out loud)

Dear Aunt Ellie,

Yesterday the widow next door hinted that she was going to take my husband away from me. This isn't the first time. She's been after him for years, even while her poor man was still alive. I've worked hard to keep them apart and still keep peace in the neighborhood. For the past couple of years, we've gone our own ways, but now she's back at it again.

My guy may be too dumb to recognize what's going on, but like most men, let some woman show an interest and he starts thinking with his you-know-what. She came up with some cock-and-bull story about him making a pass at her, but I don't believe that for a minute. If anyone's doing the seducing, it's her.

And if she's expecting some sex out of this, she's in for a disappointment. He just can't manage it nine times out of ten. I've told him to go ahead and use Viagra, but he's too proud for that.

But that's beside the point. My question for you is, what's the best way to go about nipping this scheme of hers in the bud. Talking with him, or confronting her? I await your advice.

MILDRED (*cont.*):

By the way, we're all in our 70's.

Sincerely,

Too Old For This Kind Of Stuff.

SCENE 4

Several mornings later. Dining room / kitchen, coffee pot on stove.

(HANK and MILDRED seated at table sipping coffee, HANK reading newspaper, MILDRED on her device. HANK looks up)

HANK: Milly, wait 'til you hear this. Damnedest thing I've seen yet from Aunt Ellie. This woman writes that some widow next door has been after her husband for years, and just told her, to her face, that this time she was going to get him.

MILDRED: Sounds like a regular Peyton Place.

HANK: And the funniest thing is, the guy doesn't sound like he's worth fighting over. Any sensible woman would tell the neighbor, "Go ahead,,, take the old fool. You'll be sending him back soon enough."

MILDRED: This is happening here in Ashland?

HANK: I guess. Don't think Aunt Ellie appears in any other newspapers. I'll bet it's those crazy Californians that keep moving up here and ruining the town. Nobody local would act like that.

MILDRED: Why do you say the guy isn't worth fighting for? Seems like someone who's been around for years is probably worth keeping, just 'cause he's familiar..

HANK: Nah. The woman says he's so dumb he don't recognize when a woman's after him, and he can't stop from making a fool of himself when one plays up to him. And then she says he's not much good in ... that he can't do his duty as a husband.

MILDRED: Well. She must really be annoyed.

HANK: I guess. I'm glad I've got nothing to do with a woman like that. She's probably some frustrated old broad who's making it all up, anyway.

MILDRED: Is that right? *(Pause)* Hank Wilkins, you are even more out of it than I imagined. I'm the "frustrated old broad" who wrote that letter. What do you say to that?

HANK: You? I don't believe it. You think I'm too dumb to know what's... And the widow next door is Sarah? You think there's something going on between me and her? How can you think that?

MILDRED: Maybe nothing's happened yet, but I don't trust her an inch. That's why I wrote that letter.

HANK: And you told everyone in this entire town, all my friends and everybody, that I ought to use Viagra?! My God, woman! I'll tell you this, every word you're saying makes Sarie look better and better.

THE END

Author's Note

Our town has many deer, wandering freely and, when they can, enjoying shrubs, fruits and flowers. Accompanying them at a distance are their predators, bears, cougars, etc.. And the deer cause traffic problems as tourists (phones and cameras in hand) and residents alike stop while the deer slowly meander down the streets with their young ones.

Opinion here is divided as to whether the deer are a nuisance that should be eliminated (or severely controlled), or original inhabitants with whom we should be grateful to share the land, or a tourist attraction that helps define what makes Ashland special, or ...

I hope the spirit of this controversy is captured in *Ashlandia*.