EXTRACT

Hold ‘em

a one –act play

By

Alex Broun

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Cast

AMARI

KELLY-ANNE

Time

The present

Settings

Robstown, Texas

Buffalo and New York, NY

Las Vegas, Nevada

Hold ‘em

AMARI: Texas Hold ‘em is a game with seven cards. For those of you not in the know it’s a kind of poker. But not any kind. It is the most popular form of poker in casinos and card rooms across North America and Europe. And not just in casinos and card rooms – online too. It’s estimated that about six million people play Texas Hold’em on line everyday. Many of these are boys and girls our age.

KELLY-ANNE: We’re too young to go to the casino.

AMARI: So if you hear the busy click-click of a mouse coming from little Jenny’s or Jonny’s room – don’t get too worried. They’re probably just on Facebook playing Texas Hold ‘em with

KELLY-ANNE: Sapan from India

AMARI: Anas from Saudi Arabia

KELLY-ANNE: and Matthew from Pittsburgh.

AMARI: Although little is known about the invention of Texas hold 'em, according to Wikipedia the Texas State Legislature officially recognizes Robstown, Texas as the game's birthplace. It’s also where I was born.

KELLY-ANNE LAUGHS.

AMARI: Something amusing you.

KELLY-ANNE: Nothing.

KELLY-ANNE KEEPS LAUGHING.

AMARI: What is it?

KELLY-ANNE: That’s pretty obvious.

AMARI: What is?

KELLY-ANNE: It’s called Texas Hold’em. Pretty obvious it was invented in Texas.

AMARI: See this isn’t going to work.

KELLY-ANNE: What?

AMARI: It’s not going to work if you keep butting in.

KELLY-ANNE: I’m not.

AMARI: Yes you are. We agreed you’d let me tell it.

KELLY-ANNE: I’m letting you

AMARI: Then stop butting in.

KELLY-ANNE: Just want to make sure you tell it right.

AMARI: And I will – but you gotta let me.

KELLY-ANNE: Okay.

AMARI: Okay.

AMARI TURNS TO FACE THE AUDIENCE.

AMARI: Now, where was I?

KELLY-ANNE: Robstown.

AMARI: Thank you. Robstown, Texas was the game's birthplace back in the early 1900s. After its invention in Texas, Hold 'em was introduced to Las Vegas in 1967 by a group of Texan gamblers and card players, including Crandell Addington, Doyle Brunson, and Amarillo Slim. And that’s where I come in. I’m named after him - Amarillo Slim. But you can call me Amari.

KELLY-ANNE COUGHS.

AMARI: I guess my Dad wanted a boy –

KELLY-ANNE COUGHS AGAIN.

AMARI: What is it now?

KELLY-ANNE: You have to introduce me too.

AMARI: Oh, I’m sorry. This is Kelly-Anne. And she ain’t named after anybody. Back to the story. I guess my Dad wanted a boy but then he thought ‘Well Amarillo can be a girls’ name too” – which I guess it can. So he kept it. Or I kept it. You know what I mean. But that’s all just history – what you want to know is what makes Texas Hold’em so good. Much better than regular poker. When Crandell Addington first saw Hold ‘em played in 1959 he said:

KELLY-ANNE: (AS ADDINGTON) They didn't call it Texas hold 'em at the time, they just called it Hold 'em... I thought then that if it were to catch on, it would become *the* game. Draw poker, you only bet twice; Hold 'em, you bet four times. That meant you could play strategically. This was more of a thinking man's game.

AMARI: I don’t know about thinking man’s game. Or a thinking ladies’ game. But it is a good game. There are two things that make it so good. First it’s bigger than regular poker.

KELLY-ANNE: Everything is.

AMARI: What?

KELLY-ANNE: In Texas. Everything is. Bigger.

AMARI: In regular poker you only get five cards but in Texas Hold’em you get seven.

KELLY-ANNE: (HOLDING UP FINGERS) Seven.

PAUSE. **AMARI** WAITS FOR SOMETHING.

AMARI: That’s your cue.

KELLY-ANNE: What?

AMARI: Seven.

KELLY-ANNE: Seven?

AMARI: That’s your cue. For the …

KEELY-ANNE: Oh. Sorry.

KELLY-ANNE PRODUCES A DECK OF CARDS. SHE MOVES TO THE TABLE AND STARTS LAYING OUT CARDS.

AMARI: (TO AUDIENCE) But you don’t get all seven cards at once. At the start you just get dealt two cards.

KELLY-ANNE: Now?

AMARI: Yes Kelly-A. Now.

KELLY-ANNE DEALS TWO CARDS TO EACH OF THEM.

AMARI: These are known as your hole or pocket cards. The best starting hand you can get is double Aces. Also known as “pocket rockets”

KELLY-ANNE: Or “American Airlines.”

AMARI: Then comes king-king

KELLY-ANNE: “King Kong”

AMARI: And next –

KELLY-ANNE: “Ladies” –

AMARI: Pair of Queens. So once everybody has their two cards, then comes the flop.

KELLY-ANNE DEALS THREE CARDS FACE UP ON THE TABLE.

AMARI: These are community cards which means they’re available to every player. The idea is to make up the best hand you can using your pocket cards and what’s on the table. But it’s not done yet. Next up the dealer gives you a fourth community card.

KELLY-ANNE DOES SO.

AMARI: This is called the “turn”.

KELLY-ANNE: Or “fourth street.”

AMARI: No it ain’t.

KELLY-ANNE: Yes it is.

AMARI: I never heard it called “fourth street”. Who called it “fourth street”?

KELLY-ANNE: If you don’t believe me look it up.

AMARI: Okay. Okay. The fourth card is called the “turn” or “fourth street”. This is a chance to use the four cards now on offer to everybody, with the cards you got in your hand, to make an ever better hand. But we’re not done yet. There is one last community card. This is called –

KELLY-ANNE: “Fifth street.”

KELLY-ANNE DEALS THE FIFTH CARD FACE UP. **AMARI** LOOKS AT HER.

KELLY-ANNE: It is. Look it up.

AMARI: Okay. Some people – a very small some – may call it “fifth street” but the fifth card is more commonly known around the world by lots and lots and lots of people as the “river.” And as a player you either hate it or you love it. And that changes all the time. It can either save you or kill you – depending on what you’ve got and what the other player’s around the table have got. So after the river is dealt you once more calculate your best possible hand and then comes the showdown. This is when the last player’s remaining – the ones who haven’t folded like pussys – show their hole cards and the player with the best hand wins the pot. That’s the other great thing about Hold ‘em – the betting. Like ol’ Crandell Addington said. In regular poker you only get to bet two times. But in Hold ‘em you get can bet four times. (TO **KELLY-ANNE**) Raise you 50.

KELLY-ANNE: Raise?

AMARI: I’m betting.

KELLY-ANNE: I didn’t know we were betting. I just thought we were showing the audience how to play.

AMARI: We were. But I got such a good hand.

AMARI PUTS DOWN HER CARDS.

AMARI: Full house. Jacks to tens.

KELLY-ANNE: Aren’t you going to tell them about your Dad?

AMARI: I’m getting to it. (TO AUDIENCE) My Dad is the reason why I love Texas Hold ‘em and the reason I started playing. One my oldest memories was toddling in to one of my Dad’s poker nights – I was two or three at the time and I’d just learnt to walk. Not sure what I was doing up. It was way past my bed time. But I walked in and there was all these men crouched around a big old table playing Hold ‘em. And there in the middle of them was my Dad.

KELLY-ANNE PLAYS **AMARI**’S DAD.

AMARI: A huge beaming smile on his face. I don’t think I’d ever seen him so happy. I found out later he was a terrible player. The world’s worse bluffer. He was just too damn nice. He’d go all in on a pair of 6s and the guy next to him with a flush to King would be just about to fold and Dad would say: “No. Stop. I only got a pair of

AMARI: (CONT) sixes.” Like I said, just too damn nice. He’d lose all his money every single poker night. They were only playing for nickels and dimes – and they all went back in the glass jar at the end - but still, it was money. But he loved to play – and he sat there that night with this huge smile gazing around the table at his poker buddies.

KELLY-ANNE BECOMES THE POKER BUDDIES.

AMARI: There was Leo Badasci who drove over all the way from La Paloma just to play.

KELLY-ANNE: (AS TONY) How you doin’?

AMARI: Little Pete, who ran the gas station out on Highway 44.

KELLY-ANNE: (AS PETE) Evening everyone.

AMARI: Big Tony, who was actually smaller than Little Pete. Never really understood that.

KELLY-ANNE: (AS TONY) I’m calling you Mick.

AMARI: And that was the last of the quintet. Slick Mick – who never looked all that slick.

KELLY-ANNE: (AS MICK) And I’m raising you right back Tony.

AMARI: And then there was my Dad – Grantham Morace Nobile.

KELLY-ANNE BECOMES **GRA** AGAIN.

AMARI: All though everybody just called him Gra. He’d gone bust hours earlier but he was still sitting there, smiling. Just happy to be sitting at a table where people were playing Hold ‘em. Then he looked down and saw me and his smile got even wider, if that was possible.

KELLY-ANNE: (AS **GRA**) Here she is. My little Ami. *(Pronounced ‘Ammi’)*

AMARI: That’s what he always called me. His little Ami.

KELLY-ANNE: The most beautiful girl in the world.

AMARI: And then they all turned to look at me. All these big, red sweaty faces – staring straight down at me. I don’t know if I’ve ever been so terrified in my life. And then I started coughing. Dad laughed, all of them laughed, and then he swooped down and

AMARI: (CONT) picked me up with his big soft hands and carried me back into the lounge room to where mom was waiting. You see? That was it. The other poker tradition. They all smoked cigars. Big fat stogies. They smoked ‘em from the moment they arrived till the moment they left - Leo Badasci, Little Pete, Big Tony, even Slick Mick. All except Dad, who never took a single puff. And of course – as life goes – he was the one who suffered. Second hand smoke. Lung cancer. In the ground by the time he hit thirty eight and I was just seven.

KELLY-ANNE BECOMES **AMARI**’S MOM IN MOURNING.

AMARI: Mom went very quiet after that. Everybody came in to town for the funeral. All his poker buddies, Leo Badasci even drove over from La Paloma. But Mom never said a word to them. To anyone. She never said anything for five years. We moved here –

KELLY-ANNE: To good old Buffalo.

AMARI: and then one day she started talking again but I’ve still never heard her laugh. (BEAT) I don’t remember much that my father ever said to me but I do remember one thing. Few years after that first night I was sitting on the floor under the poker table.

AMARI CRAWLS UNDER TABLE AND SITS THERE.

AMARI: That seemed to be my favourite spot to play. Sitting under the table, listening to the cards being dealt on the table above me. The clinking of the nickels and dimes. The ribbing, the laughter, the coughing. That was my Dad. He was already getting sick. Couldn’t they see what they were doin’ to him. Big boneheads.

KELLY-ANNE: Ami.

AMARI: What?

KELLY-ANNE: You mustn’t get angry like that. The councillor said.

AMARI: I can get angry if I want.

KELLY-ANNE: Just tell them what your Dad said.

AMARI: Dad lost again as usual. And he leant down and pulled me out from under the table. Carried me back to Mom. And as he carried me through the house he said to me:

KELLY-ANNE: (AS **GRA**) Sometimes Ami, the best hand doesn’t win.

AMARI: “Sometimes Ami, the best hand doesn’t win.” I can never forget that. I just wish I could remember more that he said.

KELLY-ANNE: Tell them about your Dad’s dream.

AMARI: I’m getting to it. (TO AUDIENCE) My Dad’s one dream was to go to Las Vegas to play Texas Hold ‘em at one of those fancy casinos. He was always saving up to take us all down there. Play one hand. But he never got there. So that became my dream. I’d go to Las Vegas for him. Play a hand in one of those fancy casinos. And I’d win. But first I had to practice. So I started playing. But always in secret. My mom saw me playing once and got all upset. Said it reminded her too much of Dad. So I never let her know I was playing. But I played and I played and I played.

KELLY-ANNE: And that’s where I come in. Finally.

AMARI: Of course I needed someone to play with and I became friends with Kelly-A.

KELLY-ANNE: We go to the same school.

AMARI: So we’d sit on boxes out the back and play hand after hand. I’d always win.

THEY SIT ON BOXES AND PLAY.

KELLY-ANNE: Cause you never told me the rules.

AMARI: That’s not true. You just couldn’t remember them. So we’d play. Flushes, straights, straight flushes, two of a kind, three of a kind, full house.

KELLY-ANNE: What’s better? A flush or straight?

AMARI: (TO AUDIENCE) I told you she couldn’t remember.

KELLY-ANNE: Hey, I’m trying here.

AMARI: Okay. Now listen good cause this is the last time I’m going to tell you. The best hand you can get is a Royal Flush.

KELLY-ANNE: Which is?

AMARI: Ace, King, Queen, Jack and 10 – all in the same suit.

KELLY-ANNE: Suit?