

Free Byrd

Synopsis:

JAY BUTLER, 50, is a lovable underachiever, a talented but failed actor who is divorced and now works as a van driver at an old folks home. One of the home's residents, HARRY BYRD, 80, is being kicked out for general irascibility. Jay is assigned to drive Harry to a new home, Golden Oaks, which is two days distant.

Before they take off, Jay is shocked by the sudden death of his own father, GRIT. At the funeral, Jay receives a further shock – his wealthy but hard-hearted father has left Jay and his family nothing. This is the final insult in a long and troubled relationship. Meanwhile, Harry's three adult children, CHARLES, LIBBY, and KATHERINE, meet with a trust lawyer to review papers they've had their father sign to establish a voluntary conservatorship. An important document is discovered to be unsigned.

By now Jay and Harry have set off on the road. Harry is grumpy and uncommunicative at first, but starts to open up when they stop at a diner. Then, on Harry's whim, they take a nostalgic ride on a miniature train. That evening, they check into the Riverside Inn. Harry comments that they aren't far from a seacoast spot called Olompali, where he and his now-deceased wife, HARRIET, used to go. Harry asks Jay to take him there, "for one last look." Jay diplomatically declines.

The next morning, Jay wakes up to find Harry missing – he has gone to the river to launder his underwear. Jay brings him back to their room, only to find his phone and wallet missing. Jay insists that they continue on, to Harry's chagrin. In the meantime, Charles flies into a small airport near the Golden Oaks, with the document his father must sign. He heads to a bar to kill time while waiting for Jay and Harry to arrive.

At a freeway rest stop, Harry makes off with the van while Jay uses the rest room. Jay recruits the help of a colorful group of burlesque artists, RED (55, their leader), BLOOSOM, IRIS, and GEMINI. They pursue Harry in the girls' old RV. It isn't long before they find the van on the side of the road – Harry has ruined the transmission. The girls offer to give Jay and Harry a lift to their own destination – a Native American casino where they are giving a show that night. Jay and Harry accept.

On the way, the girls stop at a natural hot springs to skinny dip, to Harry's delight. Harry happily recollects the adventures he and Harriet used to take, and then asks Jay, "what happened to you?" Upon learning Jay was an actor, Harry surmises that Jay is a good one, and urges him to try it all again. Jay brushes off the suggestion – he has decided there is no money, stability, or sense in pursuing his passion any longer.

Arriving at the Casino, Jay is frustrated because no rental cars are available until the evening. Jay calls the Golden Oaks and leaves a message that he and Harry are delayed at the casino, but will arrive later. When Charles finds out, he's pissed, and decides to drive to the Casino to fetch Harry himself.

Harry wanders off and begins playing slots with EVELYN, 78, who happens to be Jay's Aunt. Evelyn, up for the day on a bus trip, is a Jewish mother type who has always liked Jay. In the meantime, Jay has a drink with Red, who tells him not to worry. She suggests Harry and Jay stay for her show that night, but Jay says that's out of the question.

Harry, however, likes the idea of staying, and again pumps Jay to take him to Olompali. Jay refuses, then ruminates about his life. "From where I stand," Harry says, "you got it pretty good." Harry encourages Jay to appreciate all that he has and make the best of it. Jay takes this in, then leaves a conciliatory voicemail for Susan.

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A complication arises when Red's comedy act, Fritz and Hans, fail to show. The casino manager threatens to cancel their performance unless a comedy act is produced. Red asks Jay if he and Harry can ad lib something. Harry is for it, but Jay declines – doing stand up is his greatest fear. Disgruntled, Harry disappears again. A rental car is now in, so Jay searches for Harry, and finds him backstage with the girls. Harry has told the girls they are doing the comedy act. Jay reconsiders. In the meantime, Charles arrives at the Casino and begins searching for Harry.

The girls, using the stage name “Pussy Gato & The Kittenettes,” start their show. It is an old-timey, only slightly naughty burlesque routine. Jay and Harry, wearing the traditional “baggy pants” of burlesque comics, take the stage. Jay bombs with a few jokes, but Harry rescues him by singing a song and prompting an impromptu exchange between Jay and Red, who is garbed as “Nurse Nice.” Jay hits his stride and brings down the house.

Charles is shocked to see his father, Harry, performing, and angrily confronts Jay and Harry backstage. Charles takes Harry away, vowing to sue Jay and his employer. Before he can get Harry out of the casino, however, Harry recruits Evelyn to distract Charles, so he can escape. Once again Harry asks Jay to take him to Olompali. This time Jay agrees, but his rental car has been given away. Jay asks Red for help. Red, Jay, Harry and Evelyn pile into the RV and head for the coast, while the other girls sidetrack Charles in the parking lot with some biker friends.

Red and Jay get closer on the late night drive, while Evelyn and Harry sleep in the back. Early in the morning, they arrive at a dramatic overlook. Harry shambles down a long path with Jay, fondly taking in the spectacular view, and feeling fully alive.... Back in the parking lot, Charles arrives with the police. He demands Jay be arrested for kidnapping, but Harry says he was a willing guest and refuses to leave unless Jay is let off the hook. As Harry drives away with Charles, he sees a vision of his late wife, Harriet, there at the overlook, smiling and waving .

In voiceover, Jay relates that was the last time he saw Harry in the flesh. Harry has a peaceful passing, seeing Harriet once again outside his window at the Golden Oaks, and taking off with her into the afterlife. Jay makes his peace with his father at Grit's gravesite, and then is summoned to Harry's attorney's office for an unusual will reading.

Appearing in a recording, Harry leaves everything to his kids with one exception – an old theater, which he leaves to Jay, encouraging him to resume his acting passion. Continuing in voiceover, Jay relates that he got on his feet financially, and got back to performing too. In the final scene, Jay performs on stage with Red and the girls, Aunt Evelyn proudly cheering him on.