

Ever, After

A collection of four one-acts that may be produced separately, but may also be produced together as one play that compiles the snapshots of the reoccurring character, Juney, into her larger story.

A Man's Cave

CHARACTERS

JUNEY: College student, early twenties

GEORGIA: JUNEY's mom, early fifties

CATHY: Georgia's sister-in-law, late forties

SCENE

A middle class family in a suburban neighborhood in Kentucky. A front door opens into a kitchen. Center stage, a kitchen table with four chairs. Upstage left, a "kitchen island." Upstage right, a modest Christmas tree.

Note: The use of a "kitchen island" can be suggested.

Play begins at noon on a gray winter day that casts a cold light through the kitchen "window." Action begins when GEORGIA and JUNEY return home from Sunday church service.

JUNEY and GEORGIA are carrying plastic bags of groceries lined looped around their wrists into the kitchen. JUNEY holds a pamphlet that had been propped inside the screen door.

JUNEY

(Flippantly.) How do you view the Bible?

(JUNEY sticks the pamphlet between her teeth as she and GEORGIA pile bags on the kitchen island.)

(Pamphlet in her mouth.) Wud you ay itz a boog uhv isdom?

GEORGIA

Get that out of your mouth, June Bug. Shoo.

JUNEY

Would you say it's a book of myths and legends? Or—wait for it—is it the word of God?

GEORGIA

Thought you'd had enough church for one year. Want to give me a hand here?

(JUNEY hops onto the island to sit, facing AUDIENCE.)

JUNEY

Says here, “All scripture”—now that’s with a capital S—“is inspired by God.”

(JUNEY unbuckles her heels and kicks her shoes onto the floor.)

GEORGIA

You’re really starting to get on my nerves, girl.

JUNEY

Don’t see how they can go door-to-door interrupting perfectly good weekends. Not when they know they can’t make good on their promises. Seems as if there’s no more room in Heaven.

(JUNEY shimmies her hands under her skirt and removes her pantyhose. She wads them up and tosses them onto the kitchen table.)

GEORGIA

That’s what you took from the sermon?

(GEORGIA pours eggnog and rum into two glasses and sprinkles nutmeg over the drinks.)

JUNEY

Getting earlier and earlier around here.

GEORGIA

It’s going to go bad. (*Beat.*) You know, June, we can’t know the exact number of people God’s going to save.

(JUNEY hops off the island and grabs her phone from the kitchen table.)

JUNEY

Preacher said so. Something like the population of Lexington. (*Speaking as she types.*) How many people will go to heaven? Yahoo says 144,000 are getting in.

(SOUND CUE: *The doorbell rings.*)

Don’t answer that. (*Beat.*) They’ll talk your ear off.

GEORGIA

Relax. It’s your Aunt Cathy. (*Flicking her hand.*) Get your underwear off the table.

(JUNEY shoves her pantyhose in an island drawer. GEORGIA opens the door. CATHY enters holding a breadbasket.)

JUNEY

We thought you were the Jehovah's Witnesses.

CATHY

I didn't know they came around on Sundays.

GEORGIA

Don't get her going with this nonsense again.

CATHY

(Handing basket to JUNEY.) Fresh out of the oven.

GEORGIA

I'm never going to get this girl out of my house if you keep bringing food over.

(CATHY pulls out a chair and observes it before sitting down.)

CATHY

(To GEORGIA.) Did you have these re-caned?

GEORGIA

I did. The Amish.

(GEORGIA pours a drink for CATHY and refills hers and JUNEY's. All three sit at the table, drinking.)

JUNEY

(To CATHY.) Did you know that only 144,000 people are getting into heaven?

CATHY

A hundred and forty-four? Couldn't they make it a round number like 125 or 150? *(Beat.)* I'll tell you someone's who's not going to make the cut. *(To GEORGIA.)* Your brother. Yep. *(To JUNEY.)* Cross him off your list of competitors.

GEORGIA

What's Davis done now?

CATHY

Prostitutes.

(JUNEY and GEORGIA look at each other, speechless. GEORGIA goes to the island for three plates. She opens a drawer for a butter knife and pulls JUNEY's pantyhose out.)

GEORGIA

(To JUNEY.) Really?

(GEORGIA returns to the table with the dishes and tosses the pantyhose onto JUNEY's lap.)

CATHY

Really. Y'all 've seen the garage. Not exactly fit to store cars.

JUNEY

Is he bringing hookers there?

CATHY

No, he's got more sense than to bring 'em home. That garage is more like his communications hub. He lays on that couch in there watching his games, scratching his balls, ordering up his wants and needs over the phone.

GEORGIA

Maybe you should talk about this with him.

CATHY

I have. Have been for seven years.

GEORGIA

You mean you're not finding out about this now?

CATHY

Shoot no, Georgia. I've always known. (*To JUNEY.*) Sorry, honey, these things happen.

JUNEY

I get it.

GEORGIA

Why are you telling me this now?

CATHY

You need to hear about your precious brother. He's slept with every tart in town. I can't get him to sleep with me. And I still want him to! (*Beat.*) This isn't even the half of it.

GEORGIA

Come on Cathy. You must be exaggerating.

CATHY

He's the exaggeration, Georgia. Your Daddy would die all over again if he were here to see what's goin on. He's blown your Daddy's money.

GEORGIA

So he went overboard on Christmas presents. He gets that from Daddy.

CATHY

Son of a bitch blew it all on hookers and Italian leather. He didn't get that from Daddy.

(JUNEY *takes a second roll. CATHY pats her hand.*)

(*To* JUNEY.) Good to see you eating, honey.

JUNEY

Maybe it's not my place, but how many hookers are we talkin about? I can't imagine the going rate's that high.

CATHY

Enough. Colleen's tuition check bounced. She can't schedule her classes unless the check clears.

GEORGIA

See JuneY, even your younger cousin's trying to finish college.

CATHY

We've all got our burdens to carry, Georgia.

GEORGIA

Can't say I'm surprised. Davis couldn't keep his hands off my Barbies. Scalped every last one of them come to think of it. I'd find their little heads bobbing in the—

CATHY

(*Interrupting.*) He doesn't hate women, Georgia. He's crazy about 'em. Like he wants to consume 'em. He consumes everything these days but me. (*Drinking.*) He's loaded up that man cave with possessions. Stacked boxes of shoes clear up to the ceiling. Never been opened. Not a one. Stuff's still got the tags on it. He's even got tents. Four of 'em. Know how many times we've gone camping?

JUNEY

None?

CATHY

None.

(GEORGIA *walks to the island and takes a small, packaged spiral ham from a grocery bag. The women continue to drink.*)

JUNEY

Y'all have stuck it out this long. Seems like he wants to be with you, you want to be with him, right? So what's the problem?

CATHY
The problem is urine.

GEORGIA
Urine?

CATHY
Urine, Georgia. I found jars of it in his man cave. He's peeing in jars and hiding them behind the shoeboxes.

GEORGIA
Um—why?

CATHY
He thinks he has AIDS.

GEORGIA
AIDS?

CATHY
Did you miss the part about prostitutes?

(JUNEY *walks to the island and takes the packaged ham from* GEORGIA.)

JUNEY
I got this, Mom. You sit down.

CATHY
(*Continuing.*) He thinks there'll be some sign in his pee. Like a funny color or some shape or something.

GEORGIA
Shape?

CATHY
Like debris or something.

GEORGIA
Debris?

CATHY
Squiggled follicles or some shit.

(GEORGIA *holds her glass up to the gray light coming from the window, examining the flecks of nutmeg floating in the eggnog.*)

JUNEY

Why doesn't he just take a test?

CATHY

Are you kidding me? How does a married man—in this town—ask the doctor he's had since he was a kid for an AIDS test?

JUNEY

You know, they have at-home tests you can order. (*Grabbing her cell phone and typing.*) I'll show you.

GEORGIA

What do you know about that?

JUNEY

I'm only trying to—

CATHY

(*Interrupting.*) Davis likes to handle things his way. Now that he knows that I know about the jars, he's asking me if I think there's anything funny looking in 'em.

GEORGIA

The whole thing's absurd, Cathy.

JUNEY

Absurd? Mom, you believe in that Bible prophecy prediction shit.

GEORGIA

Language, June.

JUNEY

My language? That's inappropriate?

(*JUNEY takes a handle of bourbon from the island cabinet.*)

GEORGIA

Oh, June. Don't you think you've had enough?

JUNEY

It's for the ham, Mom.

(JUNEY pours brown sugar and bourbon into a skillet to simmer. She cuts the plastic seal on the ham, struggling to get the scissors to cut completely through the packaging. Juices gush from the opening in the package and run onto JUNEY's hands and the counter. JUNEY, ham juice dripping from her hands and pooling on the countertop, pours a shot of bourbon into her eggnog glass and kicks it back.)

GEORGIA

(Clapping her hands together.) Oh Cathy! You're gonna love this ham. I've tried to make it just like Juney does but it never turns out as good. I think she's keeping some of her ingredients a secret from me.

JUNEY

The secret is—

(JUNEY stirring the bubbling brown sugar and bourbon mixture, loses her train of thought.)

The secret is feeling it out. There's a color and consistency I'm going for. I've never been able to measure stuff ahead of time. I know it's right when I see it. When I feel the sugar and juices thickening around the spoon just so.

GEORGIA

So how do you think y'all will take care of Colleen's tuition?

CATHY

Ebay. It's lookin' like our best option. The stuff's never been used. 'Cept to conceal a few jars. But it's not like we have to tell anybody that. It's all in as-new condition if you ask me. Should draw respectable bids.

JUNEY

Numbers, numbers, numbers. Gives three reasons for hope here. Says to turn to Romans 15:4 when we have doubt. That the things written are written to give us comfort. That we can trust these words. Because the words are His words. Words already proven true. Words that "foretold the destruction of Babylon." *(Beat.)* Do they really expect us to take comfort in that? In destruction promised and destruction delivered? So we fall to our knees like children on a playground and cry for Dad to save us. Is salvation really as simple as three bullet points? And what is it with three's that's so reassuring? Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane. For what? He was still arrested. Still hung on the cross. Thirty-three years old. Dead for three days. Dead for three nights. Dead is dead is dead. And Heaven is full. *(Beat.)* Does God ever make an exception to his numbers? Can't he make room for one more? Just one more. *(Beat.)* What a mess I've made.

GEORGIA

June, do you have something to tell me?

JUNEY

There's nothing to tell. I fucked up. I made a mess. I cleaned up my mess. (*Dusts her hands off.*) All gone.

GEORGIA

(*To CATHY.*) Do you know what she's talking about? (*Beat.*) You do, don't you. (*Walking to the island.*) Y'all are just full of surprises today. You think I don't know about the trouble men get us into. Raised you by myself, for the most part. Think I don't know about being caught between a rock and a hard place? Sit. I can handle this.

(*GEORGIA sprays a disinfectant on the counter and wipes up the ham juice. CATHY remains seated, staring out to AUDIENCE. JUNEY turns the Christmas tree lights on. She stares at the angel on top of the tree. She touches her stomach.*)

JUNEY

I'll remember to grin and bear it next time.

GEORGIA

(*Breathes deeply.*) I do love the scent of brown sugar boiling in a skillet. It cuts the air, like the first snowfall of winter.

Lights fade to black.

-END-

Leave It Open In The Back

CHARACTERS

JUNEY: woman in her early thirties

BILLY: mid-thirties, JUNEY's husband

HARRIS: late thirties, JUNEY's best friend and colleague

LYNN: late thirties, HARRIS' wife

DR. HOFFMAN: ER doctor

SCENE

Evening, present day.

JUNEY is in the emergency room wing wearing a hospital gown, sitting up in a portable bed/cot in a small "examination room," the type that only has a curtain for a door. Both BILLY and HARRIS sit in chairs, cramped beside the bed. JUNEY is waiting on the results of a urine sample when the doctor enters the room.

DR. HOFFMAN

So what brings us in?

JUNEY

I have a urinary tract infection. A bad one.

DR. HOFFMAN

Ahh. (*Scans the room and eyes both men.*) The Honeymooners Delight.

JUNEY

Trust me, we're past that. That's like a nursery rhyme right up there with snips and snails and puppy dog tails compared to this.

DR. HOFFMAN

What symptoms are you experiencing?

JUNEY

Pain.

DR. HOFFMAN

Does it burn when you go to the bathroom?

JUNEY

Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN

On a scale of one to ten, how bad does it burn?

JUNEY

I'd say eleven, but I'm sure you get that all the time. So I'll say ten. But it's really eleven. And I have a high tolerance for pain. So, it's more like a twelve.

DR. HOFFMAN

(Glancing to HARRIS.) He looks pretty worried.

BILLY

That's just his face.

JUNEY

Expression. You mean expression.

BILLY

Yeah, it's just an expression.

JUNEY

No, what you said is not an expression. People don't talk like that. That's his face. Who says that?

(JUNEY shifts and pulls the hospital gown closed tighter around her back.)

DR. HOFFMAN

(To JUNEY.) And how often do you feel the urge to urinate?

JUNEY

Right now.

DR. HOFFMAN

Yes, right now. How often are you having the urge to urinate?

JUNEY

Right now. I have the urge right now. I have it every second.

DR. HOFFMAN

(Looking at her chart.) I'm reading here that it hurts when you stand. Does it hurt to stand?

JUNEY

Very much.

(HARRIS *texts on his cell phone.*)

DR. HOFFMAN

Sir, we don't allow phones in here.

HARRIS

Sorry about that. I was just letting my wife know where I am.

DR. HOFFMAN

Probably a good idea. (*To BILLY.*) So that means you go with her.

BILLY

For better or worse.

JUNEY

(*Indicating toward HARRIS.*) We work together. We were working on a big project when I doubled over onto the floor.

DR. HOFFMAN

Here's what we're going to do. I'm going to give you something for the pain. I'm also going to take a blood sample and order an ultrasound.

BILLY

An ultrasound? Isn't that what you do when someone's pregnant? It would be some voodoo magic if she were pregnant, doc.

HARRIS

I had one when I had a cyst on my leg.

JUNEY

(*To DR. HOFFMAN*) You think I have a cyst? Oh my god. It's a cyst on my ovaries, isn't it?

DR. HOFFMAN

I'm just covering all our bases here. We'll have those results from your urine sample for you soon.

DR. HOFFMAN EXITS.

BILLY

Nothing to worry about. (*Kisses JUNEY's forehead.*) I'm hittin the head.

JUNEY

Think of me.

BILLY EXITS.

(JUNEY is getting loopy from the pain meds and IV drip.)

JUNEY

You better keep him out of here. You know they're doing a pregnancy test. That's what they wait on before they run more tests.

HARRIS

You told them you have a urinary tract infection. That's what they're checking.

JUNEY

All I'm sayin is you might not want him in here when she comes back. Cause the way I feel right now, I won't give a shit.

HARRIS

Do you think you could be pregnant?

JUNEY

Would that be so bad?

HARRIS

No. It wouldn't.

JUNEY

What if that's not all.

HARRIS

What do you mean?

JUNEY

What if there's more?

HARRIS

What more could there be?

JUNEY

There could always be more. More. And more.

HARRIS

Being pregnant would be one way to get out of this.

JUNEY

Get out of what? This lie? Lying here? Lying there? Lying? (*Beat.*) I'm sorry for all this.

HARRIS

I'm not.

BILLY ENTERS.

BILLY

How's our girl doing?

JUNEY

Billy! Harris, you know Billy was named after Billy Joel. So many Billy musicians. Billy Darin. Bill Dylan.

BILLY

I see she's feeling better.

HARRIS

Those are Bob's.

JUNEY

Billie Jean. Not my lover.

HARRIS

(*To BILLY.*) Want to get some fresh air?

JUNEY

Billy Corrigan. Lots of Billy's in music.

BILLY

Can we get you anything?

JUNEY

Take your time. (*Sings.*) Now I've had the time of my life. Doo dee doo. And I owe it all to you—ouou.

BILLY *and* HARRIS EXIT.

JUNEY

(*Loudly.*) Bill Medley, bitches! Bet y'all didn't even know that one. Dirty Dancing. Time for horseshoes and croquet. And putting around. Dad someone's in trouble she says. Can I borrow \$200? (*Beat.*) Dad called me his little outlaw. Outlaw with a golf club. Billy the Kid. Billy club. Never could yell four in time. Foooooooouuur. Shoulda stuck with golf. Lotta money in golf. Lady golfers aren't butch anymore. Very hot these days. If only I'd known. I could of stuck the ugly years out. I'd have made a cute golfer. The first. Trendsetter.

BILLY *and* HARRIS ENTER *with* LYNN.

BILLY

Look who we ran into in the parking lot.

LYNN

I got Harris' text. I'm worried sick about you June Bug.

JUNEY

All this fuss over a bladder. You guys are swell. All's swell that ends swell.

HARRIS

(*To LYNN.*) They've hooked her up with some pretty good pain meds.

LYNN

(*To JUNEY.*) We'll get you all takin care of, dear.

BILLY

If there's one thing I know for sure about JuneY, when she gets sick she really goes for it.

JUNEY

When I go for it, I go for it don't I?

LYNN

That's what we love about you.

JUNEY

Oh Lynn, Lynn. My sweet Loretta Lynn.

BILLY

She's on some music kick.

DR. HOFFMAN ENTERS.

DR. HOFFMAN

I see we've added another friend.

JUNEY

This is Lynn, named after Loretta.

DR. HOFFMAN

Well I have what I think will be good news. (*Scanning the room.*) You're not pregnant.

BILLY

Like I told you, doc. You'd have to pull a rabbit out of your hat for that to be the case.

DR. HOFFMAN

We're still going to run more tests to rule everything out.

LYNN

(*To HARRIS.*) You okay?

HARRIS

I need to get that fresh air.

DR. HOFFMAN

(*Loosening the back of JUNEY's gown.*) Leave this open in the back. The nurse will be in shortly for that ultrasound.

JUNEY

Oh we'll leave it open, doc.

BILLY

Is the bar open yet? Lynn, you got this, right?

BILLY and HARRIS EXIT.

DR. HOFFMAN

June, I'm concerned about this pain in your abdomen. (*Glancing at LYNN.*) Is it okay if I go on?

JUNEY

Now that's a good doctor, right there. See what she just did? Giving me a chance to duck. Fooouuurrr! (*Beat.*) Sure. We're all friends here.

DR. HOFFMAN

I'm concerned you may have what's called an ectopic pregnancy, meaning you have a fertilized egg that's attached to your fallopian tube, not your uterus. This isn't viable. It's one possible explanation for the severe pain. But so is a kidney infection that's commonly mistaken for a urinary tract infection.

JUNEY

I told that Billy Boy I wasn't overreacting.

LYNN

(*To* DR. HOFFMAN.) Is it alright if I stay with her for the ultrasound?

DR. HOFFMAN

If she'd like you to. I think that would be a good idea. Keep her comfortable. I'll be right back.

DR. HOFFMAN EXITS.

LYNN

I thought you and Billy haven't been—

JUNEY

We aren't.

LYNN

You scared me for a second.

LYNN *leans over* JUNEY *and kisses her. The two continue a passionate kiss.*
BILLY and HARRIS ENTER.

BILLY

(*To* LYNN) You?

HARRIS

Juneey?

LYNN

Umm. Look. Now's not the best time for this conversation.

JUNEY

(*To* HARRIS.) I know what it looks like. But it's not what it looks like.

HARRIS

So all this time you and I...how we were going to come out in the open—

BILLY

I was waiting on that.

LYNN

I'm missing something. So when I asked if you were still sleeping with your husband, I should have asked if you were sleeping with my husband.

JUNEY

What can I say? It's like some spell came over me. It all kind of blurred together. (*Beat.*) Is the room spinning? Foouur!

FADE to black.

-END-

THIS IS NOT A PIPE DREAM

CHARACTER

JUNEY: a woman in her thirties

SCENE

Present day. A kitchen table with four chairs.

JUNEY delivers monologue as if she's talking to friends who would be seated at the kitchen table with her. She sits, stands, and moves around the "kitchen" naturally.

My parents' divorce has been a long road for me. Maybe it's not my road to travel. That's the thing about family isn't it. No matter how carsick their problems make you, you're stuck. Strapped in the backseat. Hands pushing against doors locked in child safety mode. You hang your head out the parted window, panting. "Are we there yet?"

Right after it happened I spent a few days in Paducah. (*Beat.*) I told y'all I'm from Kentucky, didn't I? I'm so far from home sometimes I forget to mention it. Anyway, I went there to comfort mom. She was beside herself. Saw it coming for decades but she'd held on for thirty-four years. Wasn't easy to let go when it was gone. I didn't stop by my dad's house that weekend. Mom wouldn't let me. Tests of loyalty are her new thing. She was pretty sure dad had been having an affair. She'd found an acrylic fingernail in the guest bedroom before he moved out. (*Beat.*) It wasn't my sister's or my sister-in-law's. The women in our family don't wear press-ons. Not even our housekeeper.

Mom needed to know how far back the affair went. (*Beat.*) I wouldn't want to know either. (*Beat.*) Mom had kept the key to dad's office. She made me ride over to his office with her when she thought he'd be out for a meeting. (*Beat.*) What if he came back? See, that's where I came in. We were there because I was making a surprise visit and wanted to pop in on my father.

Mom went straight to his file cabinets on the right-hand side of his desk. She pointed for me to take the left, just in case. I found nothing out of the ordinary. Notepads, pens, paperclips. You know, the usual shit you expect to find in a desk drawer. She opened the bottom drawer. It was full of bank receipts. All from a separate account mom couldn't verify existed, until that moment. From the looks of his statements he had set up an automatic withdrawal. For at least twelve months, as far back as the receipts in his desk went, dad had been depositing \$500 to something or someone. No specific entity was listed. Having found proof enough for her, mom said we should shake our tail feathers before we got busted. I stopped my half-assed search of the left side of the desk.

I know, I know. Why didn't I just ask dad if there was another woman. Maybe the way it works in your family is you ask a direct question and you get a direct answer. That's not the way I was raised. Awhile back I asked for an innocent explanation and couldn't get one. It was my wedding day. (*Beat.*) It was beautiful wasn't it. Let me tell you how I got there. I hailed a cab outside the hotel. (*Beat.*) Yep. I stood in the rain on St. Paul in full wedding gown regalia and whistled like a sailor. I made the cab driver's day. She'd never driven a bride before. To this day I don't know why dad didn't meet me out front with the car. Something about shuttling the groomsmen and a bad chilidog he ate. (*Beat.*) Of course y'all had no idea. You're not supposed to know what goes on behind the scenes in a family. That's the southern way.

When it comes to dad's romantic life, unraveling the issue of "the other woman" is more delicate work than tatting Belgian lace. Not long after the divorce he took a vacation to Europe. He showed off pictures from his trip that weekend he came up here. I felt like the tourist sightseeing the hidden wonders of dad's world: Dad at the Parthenon—with Other Woman, Dad at the Coliseum—with Other Woman, Dad at the Tower of London—with Other Woman. As we flipped through the photos, he told me about *his* trip. It was as if the other woman wasn't in the picture.

Each image felt like one in a series of obvious betrayal to the eye. Like they belonged in a gallery alongside that Magritte painting. You know, the one of a pipe with the caption, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." That's right, "This is not a pipe." Her smile, her arm around my dad's waist. Pixelated to perfection. But dad's stories failed to capture her existence. It was like he was saying, "This is not a girlfriend."

He carried on with this surreal charade when he got back to Paducah. I called him at home once and heard a yappy dog in the background. I asked him, "Did you get a dog, dad?" You know what he said?

"No, that's just the TV," he said. "Let me turn it down." And sure enough, the noise stopped.

The next time I called I heard the same yappy dog. I could barely hear him over the barking. So I asked him, "Watching the Dog Channel again, Dad?"

"Let me turn that down," he said.

And once again, the sound that I swear could only be made by a dog, a real, live dog, disappeared. I made a mental note, "This is not a dog."

By the third call I'd grown more annoyed and direct. "That dog sounds pretty real to me," I said. Dad conceded in as much as, "It belongs to a friend of mine," can be taken as a validation of my sanity. Maybe he didn't want me to think I was losing my mind. But that's as far as we took it.

Then Christmas came around and I met him in Chicago at my aunt and uncle's house. My uncle has dementia, barely remembers who we are. Yet he remembered to ask dad, "How's that girlfriend of yours doing?" Dad and I looked at each other with shrugged shoulders. "Girlfriend? What girlfriend?" Uncle Sid's totally lost his mind.

Imagine the irony. It's the season we all pretend that a bearded fat man in a velvet velour suit can squeeze down billions of chimneys in one night without catching fire, not once. But we can't believe what's in front of our own eyes. (*Beat.*) That's not irony? It is too irony. Whatever. You get my point.

This goes on for more than a year. Finally I decide I'm ready to go back to Paducah and spend a weekend at his house. He's got a For Sale sign up in his yard. So I ask him, "Dad where ya moving to?" Like every question, he answers with more questions.

Florida, North Carolina, maybe Ohio to be closer to his sisters, maybe one block over. He's not sure. It's the one block over I'm most interested in. I get a feeling dad already spends most of his time there and not in his house.

Opening his front door is more like unearthing a time capsule. The place is dusty and smells as if it's been closed up for decades, like his marriage to mom. Everywhere there are signs he's not living in this house. The fridge is empty. The box of brownie mix I bought two years ago when he first moved in sits on the counter. The water from the kitchen and bathroom faucets runs brown at first. A clue that the pipes have sat off. My mind goes back to that illustration, "This is not a home."

Yet there are feminine touches that stage a lived-in appearance. A vase arranged with flowers and peacock feathers garnishes the dining room table. Potted ferns and ficus plants sprawl across the den and living room. All are artificial and without needs like sunlight and water, but inspired by the other sex nonetheless.

At first I have aspirations of warming the place up by buying groceries and cooking us dinner, but dad has only one pot to cook with.

"All you need's one pot," he says.

We order pizza and decide to rent a movie. I offer to run out to a Redbox.

"What's a Redbox?" he asks.

He's never seen one of those, but offers to go get a movie anyway. I ask the straightforward question I imagine gets straight answers in your households: "If you don't know about Redbox, where are you going to get a movie?"

"I'll go to some peoples' houses," he says.

Go ahead, laugh. I did. I pictured dad toting a wicker basket door-to-door as if on an Easter egg hunt. But sure enough, he returns half an hour later with a stack of DVDs. The titles and cases are familiar. He's brought back his own movies. *Our* movies. The ones we've watched together hundreds of times. I don't ask. I pop in *Dennis the Menace* and eat my pizza.

The next morning I go for a jog. It's the middle of August, one of those humid late-summer days that Kentuckians grumble about. No one's outside but me. I don't stand a chance of running into anyone. Still, I run away from the neighborhood. Away from the one block over. Away from the some peoples' houses that supply dad with movies, food, and a life. Sweat beads on my face as I pass each doorway that could be the other doorway. I'd recognize her if I saw her. I've seen her face in the pictures. But, "This is not a picture," I think.

When I get back to dad's, a white Chihuahua attacks me in the hall. He growls and bares his miniature fangs at my ankles.

"Stop that barking," dad yells from his recliner.

I wobble on one leg, trying to get my shoe off without being bit.

"A little help in here, Dad!" I call from the hallway. Dad scoops the dog into his arms.

"This is Little Rico," he says, introducing us.

Little Rico trembles and snarls even though dad shields him from me. I move in slow motion to the couch. The dog yelps at every step as though I'm stepping on *his* toes. I'm convinced *this is not a dog*. This is more than a dog. This is the next step. Possibly the last step before the other woman from the photos comes to life. Into my life. And I'll finally get the answer dad's held back, "This is my girlfriend."

(*Beat.*)

And then what do I do? He hasn't asked yet. But he will. If he gives me an answer, he'll want one in return, right? You don't think I owe him one, do you? Not yet, right? He took his time. Maybe he didn't have any answers for me. Maybe he was too in it to know the answers.

I don't have any answers for him. I'm too in it, you know. He'll come here to visit soon. He's overdue. "Where you been hiding that husband of yours?" he'll ask. "That boy works too hard," he'll say.

Maybe I'll give one of his answers. Mutter something about cab rides and rain on your wedding day. Ramble about decades lost and some peoples' houses one block over. This is not a marriage, I think.

Lights fade to black.

-END-

BIRDSHOT

CHARACTERS

TERRY: *early forties, homeowner*

JUNEY: *mid-thirties, TERRY's wife*

JEB: *early forties, lives with TERRY and JUNEY*

All stage positions are from the actor's point of view, facing audience.

SCENE

Present day, evening.

Three armchairs form an open triangle around a large area rug. A vintage-style trunk serves as a coffee table in the center of the rug. Flowers and shards of glass from a large broken vase are scattered across the table and rug. Pieces of Plexiglas or clear vinyl can substitute for glass. Otherwise, the effect of the set should be one of a clean, traditional family room.

Lighting should give the effect that there is nothing outside the space defined by the chairs and rug.

Lights up.

JEB and TERRY are faced off against one another, each breathless and holding large pieces of broken glass. Their clothing is torn and stained with blood.

JUNEY is seated in an armchair, stage left. JEB and TERRY drop the pieces of glass and wipe their hands off on their clothes. JUNEY lights a cigarette.

JEB

I knew it would come to this one day.

TERRY

It was bound to happen.

JEB

Was it? Was it really?

TERRY

It was.

JEB

And if I said antlers will grow on our asses one day? You'd say, it's bound to happen. You repeat everything I say.

JUNEY

Give it a rest already. Any more of this puffin up of egos and your balls are gonna burst like that vase. Y'all have done enough for one night without adding a mess like that for me to clean up.

TERRY

(*To JUNEY.*) I really wish you'd stop smoking in the house.

JEB

Don't you mean your house?

TERRY

(*Bandaging his hand with an armrest cover.*) You gonna start with that again?

JEB

Might as well finish it the way you started it. It's all my house this, my house that with you. No wonder she wants to leave.

JUNEY

Well those are my chairs. (*Taking a long drag.*) I wish you wouldn't get your blood on my chairs.

TERRY

She never smoked until she met you.

JUNEY

What's the harm. (*Points with cigarette for emphasis on "this."*) This is taking more years from us than this.

TERRY

Why'd you bring this guy into our house? (*Puts the armrest cover back on the chair.*)

JEB

Oh now it's our house.

TERRY

You think it's your house? You think because I allow you here you got some say in it?

JEB

There. Right there. You said it again.

TERRY

No I didn't.

JEB

You implied it. You allow me here.

JUNEY

It's so like you too to talk around the problem. (*Flicks cigarette ashes on the floor.*) You're talking about walls. Walls. Wood, steel, concrete. These walls aren't your problem.

JEB

(*Dabs his shirt against his forehead and checks it for blood.*) It didn't have to happen.

TERRY

No. It didn't.

JEB

Don't you have one original thought?

TERRY

(*In JEB's face.*) You stole my wife. How's that for original?

JEB

I didn't steal your wife. You're the one who told me not to leave. Remember that night? I was packing up my stuff and you—not her, you—begged me to stay. Remember?

TERRY

God, you're right. You're right.

JEB

There you go agreeing with me. I did steal your wife. That's exactly how you should feel. (*Beat.*) I would.

(*Places his hand on TERRY's shoulder.*)

JUNEY

By all means, don't let me come between you two. Takes the pressure off me if y'all look like the lovers.

(*JEB sits in chair, stage center.*)

TERRY

(*To JUNEY.*) Well *our* marriage has gone to shit since you met this guy.

(*TERRY sits in chair, stage right.*)

JUNEY

To shit, huh. Must be in the air today. Jeb's sister accused me of turning his life to shit. Not to my face, of course.

JEB

Or mine.

JUNEY

Or his. (*Beat.*) She wrote him this nasty email. Called him a drunk. No, an emotionally imbalanced drunk. Blamed me. Said I wasn't good enough to pet her dog.

JEB

Well, she said she didn't want you around her dog.

JUNEY

Meaning, she thinks I'm lower than a dog.

JEB

You're giving my sister way too much credit. I think she just meant she's embarrassed of the dog. It's only got one eye.

JUNEY

Technically it has two.

JEB

Technically. If you count a marble as an eye. It's not like he can see out of it. It's sewn up.

JUNEY

And she paid for that? Your sister's the one who's lost her marbles.

JEB

She didn't want the dog to have a dent in its eye. She'd rescued it, before the eye thing.

JUNEY

Makes you wonder doesn't it? How successful the rescue was if the dog loses an eye on her watch.

TERRY

Um, so you're hanging out with his family now?

JUNEY/JEB

Aren't you listening?

JUNEY

I can't have anything to do with his family. Or mine. Or yours.

TERRY

My family is your family. That's the thing about marriage.

JUNEY

Any family. None of us can have anything to do with any of our family since this whole living arrangement started. It's weird.

JEB

It's fucked up.

JUNEY

It's totally fucked up.

TERRY

What's wrong with helping a guy out? Jeb's like family, right? That's all anyone has to know while we sort this thing out.

JEB

Are you fucking serious?

JUNEY

And all this time I thought we weren't having people over because we're so run-of-the-mill. (*To TERRY.*) Call your parents up. Tell 'em to drop on by any time.

JEB

They can have my spot on the couch.

JUNEY

Or mine in the guestroom. (*To TERRY.*) We can all squeeze together in your bed.

JEB

I'll take the middle. I love being in the middle.

TERRY

Ha ha. You guys know what I mean. As far as how it looks from the outside.

JEB

I don't know how you do it. No, I take that back. You actually believe nothing's going to change. Why would it? We told you we were in love. And nothing changed but the sheets on the bed and a guest on the couch.

JUNEY

(*Gently.*) We've all been trying to sort through this. But both of you have made it very clear that I'm the one who has to make the move. And I'm not in a position to do that.

TERRY

I'm not the one who wants out of my marriage. I want my wife back.

JEB

Your marriage. Your wife. Your house. Christ. I sound whiney just repeating you.

TERRY

Damnit. You do. I do. What's wrong with me?

JUNEY

You're in limbo with the rest of us.

JEB

He's not in limbo. He's in possession. You. This house.

TERRY

(Jumping out of his chair.) Then get on outta here. What's stopping you? Oh that's right, you can't. You can't take care of her, you fucking drunk.

JUNEY

Terry.

TERRY

He's a drunk, Juneey. Everyone knows it. *(Walking to JUNEY.)* Even you. *(Kneels in front of JUNEY and places his hands on her knees.)* You know it's true.

JEB

Original. Call Jeb a drunk. His sister with a one-eyed dog did. Must be true.

TERRY

That's why it's true. Why would people accuse you of something you don't do?

JEB

Because I left a wife and son. I left a home. Because I'm here. Because she's here. Because you'd rather have it this way than no way at all. Because round and round we go. I must be drunk or crazy. That's the easiest explanation.

TERRY

Sometimes the simplest explanation is the best one.

JEB

You see me every day. We are with each other every day, all day, all the livelong fucking day. It's like we're a sequestered jury trying our own damn case. Do I want a drink? Yeah.

TERRY

(Standing.) That's why you lost your job. Isn't it? *(Kicks a piece of glass toward JEB.)* Downsizing my ass.

JUNEY

That's enough, Terry.

TERRY

(*Walking past JEB.*) I smell it on his breath. (*Sits in chair.*) Don't tell me you don't smell it, June.

JEB

You've got it all figured out.

TERRY

Our water not good enough for you?

JEB

What?

TERRY

Filtered water not to your taste? You got some special bottled water stashed in your car? Water so good you have to take a pull off it at six a.m. to get you going?

JEB

I always make trips to my car. You've seen my car. I'm practically living out of it. Sometimes I need a clean shirt or a hat or space that's mine. I make trips back and forth, back and forth. It's exhausting. It makes me thirsty.

TERRY

Ask him.

JEB

Go ahead. Search my car.

TERRY

Ask him.

JEB

Go take a look.

TERRY

He hides it under the driver's seat.

JUNEY

(*To JEB.*) If I were to go out to your car right now, would I find alcohol in there?

TERRY

You know you would.

JUNEY

Jeb, if I searched your car right now would I find alcohol?

JEB

(*To TERRY.*) What are you smiling at?

JUNEY

He smiles when he's nervous. You know that.

TERRY

I'm not smiling.

JEB

You think this is funny?

TERRY

I lost my sense of humor.

JEB

Maybe it's in my car. (*Stands up.*) Want to look for it? Maybe it's under the driver's seat next to the bottled water.

JUNEY

Let's all take a field trip. (*Lights another cigarette.*) I can smoke outside. You two can fight over who belongs in the driver's seat.

(*SOUND CUE: JEB's phone alarm rings.*)

JUNEY

Why's your alarm going off?

TERRY

He always sets an alarm.

JUNEY

I know he always sets an alarm. But not at night.

JEB

You're right, Terry. I do always set an alarm. I set one every morning. I make coffee to help Junej ease into her day. You seem to appreciate it too.

(*Takes a drag off of JUNEY's cigarette.*)

TERRY

You still haven't answered the question.

JEB

(*To TERRY.*) I'm supposed to call my son.

JUNEY

I bet he's got good news. That Andy got himself into UVA. What do y'all want to bet?

TERRY

Not that question. Booze. Car. Six a.m.

JEB

(*Miming the routine of actions.*) You're right, Terry. You're right. I set an alarm for six a.m. every morning. I wake up, I get dressed, I fold the blankets on the couch, I make a pot of coffee. Then I walk upstairs to her room, I give Juneey a cup of coffee, I sit on the edge of the bed, legs crossed and hands in my lap. Then I hear you wake up on the other side of the wall in your room, I walk back downstairs, I pour you a cup of coffee, I pour myself a cup of coffee. Then our trio convenes here to sip coffee and talk about nothing before Juneey goes to school and you wander around in your pajamas doing whatever it is that you do. I set an alarm for six a.m. because before all this goes off without a hitch, I walk out to my car, smoke a cigarette, and glug, glug, glug from a water bottle stashed under the driver's seat.

TERRY

(*Laughing.*) Do I really walk like that?

(JEB and JUNEY *nod.*)

JUNEY/JEB

Yep.

JUNEY

(*To JEB.*) Your sister's right. You're completely imbalanced.

TERRY

What does she know. How'd her dog lose an eye anyway?

JEB

It got into a fight with the neighbor's dog.

JUNEY

The neighbor shot it.

TERRY

Nice neighbor.

JEB

It was just a little birdshot to sting him. Got him in the eye, though.

JUNEY

Could have been worse.

TERRY

What kind of dogs are we talking about here?

JEB

A bluetick hound and a dachshund.

TERRY

You're fucking kidding me. I thought you were talking about pit bulls or rottweilers. Dogs of that nature.

JEB

All dogs go dog sometimes.

TERRY

What if he'd missed and shot his dog? He could have just pulled them apart.

JUNEY

You never get between two dogs.

TERRY

Never had one. My mom was allergic.

JUNEY

That's what moms say because they know they'll be the ones scrubbing pee stains out of the carpet.

TERRY

Is that how moms think?

JUNEY

What do I know about it anymore. (*Beat.*)

(*To JEB.*) You should call Andy. He's pacing with excitement to share his good news with you.

JEB

I will. I want to be with you right now.

JUNEY

Is that so? (*Smiles.*) Forgive me for playing hard to get.

(JEB stands and takes the cigarette from JUNEY. He takes a drag and puts out the cigarette. He picks a flower off the table and places the flower in her hand. He cups his hand around hers.)

JEB

You weren't as good at it as you think, darlin'.

TERRY

I always feared it, in the back of my mind. Your car in my driveway, loaded up and ready. The day I'd wake up to your six a.m. alarm and find it gone. Carrying away everything I had left. But I knew what you refused to see. She was never going to leave this house. She was never going to sleep in a bed other than that one where our daughter slept. I was fighting that battle before there was you. *(Beat.)* You've never lost a child. I wouldn't wish that sound, the wails of a young girl on the other side of your wall every night. The sound of your wife's tears muffled into the pillow beside you. *(Beat.)* You have a teenage son. They don't need convincing that they're beautiful. *(TERRY stands and pushes the coffee table off the rug.)* I lost Juneey that same night. In the flash of one bullet. One dent left in the wall. She won't let me patch that dent. I can't patch the memory. The memory is possessive. These walls are possessive.

(TERRY kneels on the rug beside JEB.)

JUNEY

The other night I let a thought slip. I cut it short before the few words formed a prayer. A prayer familiar to that room. To put an end to this. I was too late. The first half of my sentence pricked the ears of the universe. It heard: how convenient if I, if one of you, if one of us would... But I silenced myself there. I didn't say the word. The universe picked up the scent. A blind dog sniffing the trail of one word. It will cross you in its hunt. It sat quiet at the foot of your bed while you made love and babies and more love. It lay in your lap, wagging its tail back and forth. Back and forth it wags its tail. Every swish implies that life is good, life is good. Then it picks up a scent in the room. A scent on the tongue. Die. Sic 'em. The tail shoots up. Off the dog goes, gnarling its teeth til its gums redden and it recalls its taste for blood. This time I could stop it. This time I could control the dog on the scent. It was my thought that slipped. Not your hands.

(JEB and TERRY lift JUNEY out of the chair. JUNEY's shirt is red and bloodied around her torso. JEB and TERRY shuffle, kicking away glass and flowers to lay JUNEY on the rug. JEB and TERRY fold the rug over JUNEY.)

Loretta Lynn's "Fist City" plays as lights fade to black.

-END-