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Samuel French Acting Edition

The Realistic Joneses

by Will Eno

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THE REALISTIC JONESES was commissioned and first produced by the Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, CT on April 20, 2012. The performance was directed by Sam Gold, with sets and costumes by David Zinn, lights by Mark Barton, sound by Ken Goodwin. The Stage Manager was Jenna Woods. The cast was as follows:

BOB JONES.....Tracy Letts
JENNIFER JONES Johanna Day
JOHN JONES.....Glenn Fitzgerald
PONY JONES.....Parker Posey

THE REALISTIC JONESES had its Broadway premiere at the Lyceum Theatre in New York City on April 6, 2014, and was produced by Jeffrey Richards, Susan Gallin, and others. The performance was directed by Sam Gold, with sets by David Zinn, costumes by Kaye Voyce, lights by Mark Barton; sound by Leon Rothenberg. The Production Stage Manager was Jill Cordle. The cast was as follows:

BOB JONES.....Tracy Letts
JENNIFER JONES Toni Collette
JOHN JONES.....Michael C. Hall
PONY JONES.....Marisa Tomei

CHARACTERS

BOB JONES – male, 40s

JENNIFER JONES – female, 40s

JOHN JONES – male, late 30s-40s

PONY JONES – female, late 30s-40s

SETTING

The town in which the play takes place is a regular and semi-rural town, not far from some mountains.

The porch and backyard of **JENNIFER** and **BOB**'s house.

A grocery store.

The kitchen of **PONY** and **JOHN**'s house.

The backyard of **PONY** and **JOHN**'s house.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Run-on sentences punctuated with commas are meant to represent speech as it's generally spoken. These may look ungrammatical but are entirely consistent with the way contemporary speech is generally spoken. There shouldn't be too many pauses or too much effort shown in changing the direction of the line, within the line, unless indicated.

All of these characters, though they each have a different mode, have a fairly dry way of speaking. This is not to say that they don't have large and complicated feelings that they're working through. All four characters are trying to deal, in some way, either directly or indirectly or evasively, with illness and death and therefore with the whole idea of mortality. But they are also just trying to get through the next minute of the day (pick up groceries, etc.). Certain emotional responses, such as anxiety and fear should probably "leak out" or be glimpsed, rather than being presented in a very forceful way. A straight and serious approach to the play seems best, in terms of allowing for the play's humor and sadness.

Scenically, something realistic and detailed but simple-enough that the play can move quickly from scene to scene is probably best. In the first production of this play, there was a very large and very high wall, painted black, at the base of which were sliding glass doors, which served as the doors to both couples' houses (i.e., the door out to the patio at one house in one scene, and, the door into the kitchen of the other house, in another scene). I mention this only because I think the high wall gave some sense of the largeness of the sky and the night and the Universe.

I think transition sounds, such as crickets or buzzing fluorescent lights, are probably better than transition music.

To Tracy Letts

Scene One

(Porch and backyard of JENNIFER and BOB's modest house, late spring, late night. Silhouette of mountains in the background. JENNIFER and BOB are seated at a picnic table, drinking water and tea. BOB looks as if he's trying to remember something. All is calm. An owl hoots, in the distance.)

JENNIFER. I love that sound. *(brief pause)* When was the last time we painted the house?

BOB. I don't know. It's probably years.

JENNIFER. Maybe we should do it over the summer.

BOB. Then wouldn't we just have to do it again?

JENNIFER. Isn't that what people do?

BOB. I guess.

JENNIFER. It's not some crazy theory. People paint their houses.

BOB. So then we'll paint the house.

JENNIFER. I think that'd be good. *(brief pause)* It's going to be okay.

BOB. No, I know.

JENNIFER. You don't act like it. *(brief pause)* It's such a pretty night. It's so quiet. You can almost hear the clouds go by.

BOB. Almost. *(brief pause)* Remember the night I was, um – *(He feels a small sharp pain.)* auughh. *(He makes a quick adjustment to the way he's sitting.)* That's better.

JENNIFER. Are you okay?

BOB. I was just sitting funny.

JENNIFER. I didn't think it was funny.

(BOB smiles. He glances at his watch. Brief pause.)

JENNIFER. What night? Remember which night?

BOB. Oh, right. *(He tries to remember.)* Nope. Totally gone.

JENNIFER. Clouds, beautiful nights?

BOB. Yeah, I know. *(tries again)* Yeah, sorry. All gone.

JENNIFER. You've been doing that.

BOB. There hasn't been a lot of memorable stuff going on.

JENNIFER. Oh, is that it?

BOB. *(He takes a sip of water.)* This glass tastes terrible.

JENNIFER. It's been sitting. *(pause)* Do you want to talk?

BOB. What was just the whole thing about painting the house? And the other night about Belgium?

JENNIFER. That was two very short conversations. I don't have some particular, I'm not... it just seems like we don't talk.

BOB. What are we doing right now? Math?

JENNIFER. No, we're – I don't know – sort of throwing words at each other.

BOB. What? Come on, throwing... I thought we were just sitting here. But, fine, let's talk.

JENNIFER. Good. *(brief pause)* What's the thing you're most, or just, what's your biggest fear?

BOB. My biggest? Like I have so many, they have to be ranked?

JENNIFER. I'm asking if there's something you're worried about.

BOB. *(sharply:)* I was just sitting here, you know, and now we're suddenly getting –

JENNIFER. *(interrupting:)* We're not suddenly anything. It's fine, we can just sit. *(gently:)* It really is a beautiful night. It's like that night when we – *(She is interrupted by the crash of metal garbage cans, offstage.)* What was that?

BOB. Skunk. Maybe a raccoon.

JENNIFER. Should we look?

BOB. Yeah, but wait.

(They both listen.)

(A shared but very subtle moment of excitement. She puts her hand on his.)

JENNIFER. *(quietly:)* The unknown.

BOB. *(agreeing quietly:)* I know.

(Some muffled off-stage voices. JOHN enters, finishing a conversation with PONY. He's holding a wrapped bottle of wine.)

JOHN. ...but, yeah, it was definitely much more powerful when I was a kid. *(to JENNIFER and BOB.)* Hey, hi. Sorry. We heard you talking back here.

PONY. Very softly.

JOHN. Yeah. Sorry about the, um – that was your garbage cans. They almost had me. We just wanted to say hi. We brought you a little – well, I think it's obvious.

JENNIFER. Wow, thank you. Hi.

PONY. Hi. We're Pony and John. You must be the Joneses. It's on your mailbox. We're Joneses, too. We're renting the house at the end of the road with the blue shutters and the –

JOHN. *(interrupting)* It's like two-hundred feet from here. It's right over there.

BOB. Sure, we know that house. Someone else used to live there.

JOHN. Wow. Who knew the place had such an interesting history.

PONY. Look at these salt and pepper shakers. Cute.

BOB. *(picking one up:)* These were made at a factory.

JENNIFER. Bob is filled with fun facts like that. *(to PONY and JOHN:)* Can you sit down?

JOHN. I practically invented sitting down. Actually, that's not true.

(PONY and JOHN sit.)

PONY. It's so nice here. Our old town was built right on top of this huge leak of dry-cleaning chemicals.

JOHN. The leak happened later. I don't think they built the town on top of the leak.

PONY. Well, whichever – I think I was allergic. I'm just glad we're gone.

JENNIFER. How'd you end up deciding on here?

PONY. I always wanted to live in one of these little towns near the mountains. So, one night, he comes home and literally just says, literally... I forget what you said exactly.

JOHN. Just, something about moving to one of these little towns near the mountains.

PONY. That was it. It was all sort of a whirlwind.

JOHN. The time had come. (*Noticing a tiny white particle on PONY's sweater, he gently removes it, while speaking.*) It's what my lady wanted. And what my lady wants, with some huge and basic exceptions, my lady gets. (*to PONY:*) Styrofoam.

PONY. It's from that box. (*to JENNIFER:*) You must really like it, here. (*to JOHN:*) Is it still there?

JENNIFER. We do.

JOHN. I bet. (*to PONY, referring to Styrofoam:*) No. All gone.

BOB. Moving is a pain.

JOHN. It is. Well said. Staying still is no picnic, either.

BOB. No.

JENNIFER. But here you are. I'm Jennifer, by the way.

PONY. My mom's name was Jennifer. Hi.

JENNIFER. Pony is a wonderful name.

PONY. My dad thought it up.

BOB. Well, it was already a word.

PONY. Yeah, but it didn't mean me. He said my arms and legs looked too long and weak. He's, um, he –

(*She subtly and kind of lazily makes a throat-slitting gesture.*)

JENNIFER. He was murdered?

PONY. No. God, no. But, thank you. (*Checking her sweater for bits of Styrofoam. To JOHN:*) Is there any more? I got inside the big box our TV was in. I was calling out, "I'm in the secret room."

JOHN. I started thinking, "Wow, this place has a secret room?" Then I heard you laughing. The whole box started shaking.

PONY. Then he tried climbing in with me.

JOHN. We were really laughing. (*brief pause*) Yeah, that's it, that's the end of the story. Now you say something.

JENNIFER. Oh, okay. Let's see.

BOB. Bob.

PONY. What?

BOB. Did I say that before?

JENNIFER. His name is Bob. That sounds like a nice first day.

PONY. It was really good.

JOHN. We try to enjoy ourselves.

PONY. I'm sorry, can I use your bathroom?

JENNIFER. Sure. It's down the hall, on the left.

PONY. Thanks.

(*She exits.*)

BOB. (*Pause. To JENNIFER, as if to say, "I'm not going to start the conversation":*) Don't look at me.

JOHN. Yeah, don't look at him. No, I'm kidding – you can look at him.

(*Looks around the yard and then up at the sky.*)

Do you guys know any of the constellations?

JENNIFER. I used to know some. Orion?

JOHN. Oh, yeah – where's that one?

JENNIFER. I just remember the name.

JOHN. Well, it's probably up there somewhere. (*brief pause*) This is weird, sorry, but, do you have another bathroom?

JENNIFER. Ah, we do, actually. It's in the basement, bottom of the stairs.

JOHN. Don't get up. Bottom of the stairs. I'll find it. Thanks. Sorry.

(*He exits.*)

BOB. (*long still pause*) Orion means "the bear."

JENNIFER. Isn't that *Ursa*? *Ursa Major*, the big bear?

BOB. (*looking toward the house:*) What are they doing in there?

JENNIFER. I would guess it's probably one of two things. It'll be nice to have someone over there.

BOB. I liked when it was empty.

JENNIFER. Yeah, that was a lot of fun, too.

(*Pause. PONY enters.*)

PONY. Hi, sorry. Where did – did John leave? Oh, no. Did he go?

JENNIFER. No, he's using the other bathroom. You think he would just leave?

(*PONY sits down, next to BOB.*)

PONY. No, of course not. I like that flower poster you have.

JENNIFER. Oh, in the bathroom, the print?

BOB. I used to stare at it when I was in there.

JENNIFER. And you don't anymore?

BOB. I probably still do. I think I used to generally stare more. These days, you know – no time. (*He picks a piece of lint off PONY's sweater.*) Another piece.

PONY. I think John got it all.

JENNIFER. Yeah, Bob, maybe you should not touch our guests.

(*JOHN enters.*)

JOHN. Whoa, what did I miss?

BOB. No, she had some... you didn't miss anything.

PONY. (to JOHN:) We left them all alone out here.

JOHN. (to JENNIFER:) Oh, my God – are you all right?

JENNIFER. (*amused*) I'm fine.

BOB. (*perhaps feeling ganged up on*) What's this, all of a sudden?

JOHN. That's exactly what I'm always saying. It should be on my gravestone. Or maybe just my name and dates, I don't know. (to BOB:) We're not so different, you and me.

BOB. I think we're probably very different.

JOHN. Yeah, me too, actually.

JENNIFER. (*She begins unwrapping the wine bottle. To BOB:*) Do you want to get some glasses?

BOB. I was kind of sitting, but –

JENNIFER. (*interrupting:*) I'll go.

BOB. No, I'll go.

(*He exits.*)

JENNIFER. This looks good.

PONY. It's from Europe.

JOHN. Just outside Europe. (*very brief pause*) There was free iced tea where we had dinner.

JENNIFER. Do you want something different to drink?

JOHN. I was explaining the bathroom.

PONY. We probably drank a gallon each. I hope it doesn't keep me up.

JOHN. It's not the worst night for insomnia.

PONY. I hate insomnia. I don't even like saying it.

JOHN. You'll sleep. It's a pretty night is all I meant.

JENNIFER. I was just saying that to Bob. (*a quieter voice:*) He's, um, the last few months, he's ill. So we're just kind of laying low and trying to figure that out.

PONY. What's there to figure out?

JENNIFER. Well, plenty, actually. They keep changing the treatment and the drugs. But you have a point.

PONY. What does he, I mean, is it contagious?

JENNIFER. It's most likely congenital. It's very rare.

PONY. So, I'm sorry, so it's not?

JENNIFER. No. They don't know much about it. There's a chance it's more popular. I mean, common.

PONY. I hope he's, wow, yeah –.

JENNIFER. Well, we do too – thank you. One of the best doctors for his thing is right here in town. Actually, the best.

JOHN. Yeah?

JENNIFER. And there's a patient of his, Elliot, and I talk with him and his wife to get a sense of how the disease, just, how it goes from month to month. It's interesting, he's an albino, Elliot, which I always thought was interesting. But it's, um, it's hard, it's really... yeah.

PONY. Say no more.

JENNIFER. Have you had experience with something like this?

PONY. I just didn't want you to say any more.

JENNIFER. No, of course – Bob doesn't like talking about it, either. In fact, we kind of distinctly never do.

JOHN. Then let's do that.

JENNIFER. I'm sorry. I just kind of blurted all that out.

JOHN. That's all right. That's what separates us from the animal. You never hear animals blurting things out. Unless they're being run over by a car or something.
(BOB enters, with a glass of water and no wine glasses.)

JENNIFER. Did you bring the...

(BOB turns and exits.)

PONY. (to JOHN:) That's like you.

JOHN. Sometimes, I forget stuff. On the other hand, sometimes I remember stuff.

JENNIFER. So, wow – you can do it all.

(JOHN smiles.)

We had a leak in the roof, almost a year ago, and everything is still kind of musty. So we like to sit out here.

JOHN. Nothing wrong with any of that.

PONY. (*picking up a CD audiobook from the table*) Is this any good? “Every House is a Halfway House.”

JENNIFER. It’s supposed to be a memoir. We never listened. Those are from, Bob had trouble with his vision, a few months ago. I mean, he couldn’t see. I got some audio-books, because I thought it’d be nice to listen to a story, but then he just got better.

PONY. Does he work with, like, insulation and heating stuff?

JENNIFER. No. Why?

PONY. Because John just had that, for a few days.

JOHN. Guilty. Actually, guilty’s not what I mean – I just couldn’t see anything.

PONY. It turned out it was from this material they used to use inside wood stoves.

JENNIFER. Really? No, this was nothing like that. It was called cortical blindness, and it comes from high blood pressure. Bob thought it was from a dinner I made. So now he’s never eating artichokes again. It’s scary, though. Losing your eyesight. I mean, I imagine.

JOHN. Yeah. It’s highly personal, going blind.

PONY. It was only a few days. Thank God.

JOHN. (*picking up the audio-book*) I found this company that’ll send you the transcript of any audio-book.

JENNIFER. (*brief pause*) Wouldn’t that just be the book?

JOHN. You know what, you’re right. That would just be the book.

PONY. (*to JOHN:*) Afterward, remember? (*to JENNIFER:*) He went into kind of a thing.

JENNIFER. What do you mean?

JOHN. I guess I was trying to –

PONY. (*interrupting:*) Just, he wouldn't eat, wouldn't sleep.
You were really weird.

JENNIFER. Well, you were probably pretty shaken up.

(BOB returns with wine glasses.)

JOHN. I probably was.

PONY. Then he went down to the ocean. (*to JOHN:*) You said you wanted to be near something really vast.

JENNIFER. Vast.

PONY. That was his exact words. (*brief pause*) I wasn't very supportive. I'm just not, I mean, that whole stuff... luckily we had a good neighbor.

JOHN. No, come on, you were great.

JENNIFER. What whole stuff?

JOHN. People getting moody and going blind. It's just not really her thing. (*to PONY:*) Not your thang.

PONY. (*to JOHN:*) It really isn't my thang. (*brief pause*) When you took that trip, I thought you were leaving me. I thought he was leaving.

JOHN. But I wasn't. Or, I was, and I didn't do a very good job at it. (*Brief pause. To BOB:*) The topic is: things that have happened.

BOB. I can see wanting to go down by the ocean.

JENNIFER. You don't even know what we're talking about.

BOB. Well, whatever you're talking about, I can see wanting to go down to the ocean. Being near something vast.

JOHN. See? He knows.

BOB. Where'd you go, exactly?

JOHN. I guess about a week and half.

BOB. I said, where?

PONY. The ocean. It seemed like a year. When you got back is when we started talking about moving.

JENNIFER. Pony, what do you do?

PONY. I have a greeting card business? It's mostly online, so I can do it from anywhere. I could also not do it from anywhere, and, that'd be fine, too. But it's good, it pays some bills.

JOHN. (*Very brief pause. To PONY:*) I think she meant, like, hobbies.

JENNIFER. No, that's what I was asking. And how about you?

JOHN. For work? Space program. Astronaut.

JENNIFER. You're kidding. That's amazing.

JOHN. Well, I use the term loosely.

JENNIFER. I didn't know the term could be used loosely. But still.

JOHN. I know. Still.

PONY. I never know what he's talking about. Say one of your things.

JOHN. (*very brief pause*) Oh, this is a good one. So, if you take the letters from the words "The United States of America," and you scramble them all up, it doesn't spell anything. It's just gobbledygook, total nonsense.

PONY. See?

BOB. So don't scramble them up.

JOHN. Actually, that's not a bad idea.

BOB. She asked what you do for work.

JOHN. Heating and air-conditioning.

JENNIFER. Oh, nice.

JOHN. I got some part-time work and I'm going to try to pick up some jobs on the side. What about yourself?

JENNIFER. Well, a job is a job.

JOHN. Wrong! No, you're right.

JENNIFER. Okay. But, so, anyway, I do bookkeeping for a couple of businesses in town. And Bob works for the Department of Transportation. He does all the ordering, like for paint and signposts. Don't you, Bob?

BOB. (*brief pause*) What do you want me to say?

JENNIFER. How about, "Yes."

BOB. Yes.

PONY. It's funny, all that paint on the road – I never thought about who orders it. Do they ever use something other than yellow for the lines in the middle?

BOB. No, but, actually, do you know why those lines are always yellow?

PONY. No, why?

BOB. I think somebody just picked it a long time ago.

PONY. Oh.

JOHN. It's exciting to get the inside story.

PONY. (*to BOB:*) You seem fine.

BOB. You too.

PONY. (*She stands, looking around the yard.*) Does the yard go all the way around?

BOB. It just goes back around there a little. You should do modeling.

(*Brief pause, as JENNIFER and JOHN look at BOB.*)

No, I mean, just, everyone should. Everyone should do modeling. (*brief pause*) I'm on leave, right now. Taking some time off.

JENNIFER. We used to never see each other, we were both so busy. I used to never be able to hear who Bob thought should do modeling.

PONY. (*brief pause*) John, look.

(*She shows him her hand. A tiny, practically invisible bruise.*)

JOHN. It looks better.

PONY. I closed a drawer on my thumb.

BOB. Ouch.

PONY. (*with surprise:*) That's exactly what I said.

JOHN. It sort of says it all, doesn't it. (*brief pause*) It really is quiet. You really *can* almost hear the clouds go by. (*very brief pause*) We were listening in on you guys, earlier.

PONY. Not in a weird way.

JENNIFER. Oh, good.

PONY. Yeah, we were just standing over there in the dark, totally still.

JOHN. It sounds worse when you put it into words.

BOB. Everyone should try modeling, if they want. Or any occupation. That's all I was saying.

(Distant church bells ring.)

PONY. Listen to that, John. It's like a real place.

JOHN. Yeah. It just makes you feel right in the middle of the whole lonesome thing.

JENNIFER. What do you mean, lonesome?

JOHN. I don't know.

PONY. He meant something better.

JOHN. We heard an owl or something, earlier.

JENNIFER. I heard that! I see him every once in a while. He has these huge whooshing wings.

PONY. Nature was definitely one of the big selling points of here. Plus, the school system's supposed to be good.

JENNIFER. Oh, do you have kids?

PONY. No, it's just, John hates stupid children.

JOHN. I was under a lot of stress when I said that.

JENNIFER. The schools are supposed to be pretty good.
(brief pause) I love this time of night.

JOHN. Me too. What's out there, you know? What's it waiting to do?

PONY. You don't have to make it into some, like, make it be all scary.

JOHN. I'm not. There's things out there, is all I'm saying.

PONY. *(Brief pause. To BOB:)* You got very quiet.

BOB. Well, you know what they say about still waters.

JOHN. *(very brief pause)* Mosquitoes? Malaria?

JENNIFER. *(with a smile:)* I think he means: they run deep.

JOHN. Okay, but, we both have a point.

JENNIFER. (to BOB:) You are kind of still waters. But we communicate pretty well, even without words.

BOB. (somewhat sharply:) Yeah?

JOHN. (Brief pause. Looking at BOB's wristwatch.) Is that the real time?

BOB. (Somewhat indignant. "Of course it's the real time.") This is a watch.

JENNIFER. So, you're all moved in?

JOHN. Pretty much. (responding to something he senses going on with PONY:) What?

PONY. Nothing, I was, just – I like it here.

JOHN. We'll be really happy here, Pony.

BOB. It's a nice area. You have to leave so I can go to bed.

JENNIFER. Bob's been taking a Toastmaster's class. Anyway, we should head in. But this'll make a good story someday. (to JOHN.) We thought you were a raccoon or a skunk, some crazy nighttime animal.

JOHN. (an almost proud smile) Yeah, nope. Sorry about that. My night vision was really good when I was a kid. (brief pause) Actually, wait.

(All remain still and listen.)

BOB. What are we listening for?

(JOHN puts a finger to his lips, as if to say, "Quiet.")

PONY. (quietly:) John's been reading a book about great mysteries of the world.

JOHN. (Still listening intently. Quietly:) It's a magazine.

BOB. (brief pause) It's really late.

JOHN. (He listens, intently, for a few more seconds, then, suddenly:) It is pretty late. Well, it was nice meeting you guys. It's funny. The new neighbors move in. It's, like, the world's oldest profession.

BOB. What?

JOHN. I mean, the greatest story ever told. Oldest, I mean.

PONY. John and words – forget about it.

JENNIFER. I think you have a nice way with words.

JOHN. (*Irish accent:*) Do you, now?

PONY. This was really nice. It's almost – (*She moves away, having spotted something underneath a chair or table.*) oh my God.

JOHN. What?

PONY. There's an animal or something.

JENNIFER. It's a squirrel. I don't think it's... (*Moving closer. She pokes it with a large barbecue spatula.*) Yeah, it's all right, it's dead.

PONY. It's not all right.

(BOB, *having moved away, stands near PONY.*)

BOB. We should call animal control.

(JENNIFER *begins to pick it up with the spatula.*)

No, don't touch it.

JOHN. What are you going to do with that – flip it over?

JENNIFER. There's plastic bags under there.

BOB. This is why we don't have people over.

JENNIFER. *This is why?*

JOHN. I wonder why he picked here. Not that your patio isn't a great place to die.

PONY. (*looking in the other direction*) You should call the fire department and have them spray at it.

BOB. (*to PONY:*) I'm sorry about this.

PONY. (*to JOHN:*) Put it, throw it in the thing.

JENNIFER. (*Pointing to a small garbage can:*) That's garbage, right behind you.

JOHN. (*looking into the bag*) And off you go, into the great oak tree in the sky, where there's no such thing as Jack Russell Terriers or angry teenagers with –

BOB. (*interrupting*) Would you just throw it away.

(JOHN *does so.*)

JENNIFER. Well. That was... sorry... Phew. (*very brief pause*)
It'll be nice to have another girl around here.

(*A very small shrug from PONY.*)

It was good meeting you both.

JOHN. Yeah, you too. Nice work. This was fun. (*to BOB, clarifying:*) I mean, not fun, but, definitely some other word.

PONY. Definitely.

JOHN. (*very brief pause*) Well, when the dead squirrel gets thrown away, that's usually our cue to head on home. (*to BOB:*) Don't look so sad. You'll live.

(*He moves to put an arm around PONY, who recoils, in a not unloving way.*)

PONY. I need to take a shower. You have to wash your hands. Bye. Sorry. I just wasn't expecting that. Or I guess I was expecting that there wasn't going to be that.

JOHN. It's sad, isn't it. His little eyes, and the little paws. Running around, collecting acorns. "I'm a squirrel, I'm a squirrel." I'd love to say something in Latin, right now. (*to BOB:*) You know what I mean, big guy?

BOB. I don't.

JOHN. (*to PONY:*) All right, beautiful. Let's go back to the new place.

PONY. (*remembering and brightening, a little:*) "The new place." I like that. Bye.

(*PONY and JOHN exit, muffled conversation.*)

JENNIFER. Bye. Oh, we never had the wine. Thank you. (*long pause*) Well, wow... (*brief pause*) They were certainly... did you like them?

(*BOB nods, non-committally.*)

They seem nice.

BOB. She seemed to like the yard. (*brief pause*) Look how much I'm shaking.

JENNIFER. I don't see any... is it doing it?

BOB. No, it stopped. (*He stands and moves to the door.*)

JENNIFER. It was nice watching you with people.

BOB. I wasn't any different. Are you coming in?

JENNIFER. Do you want me to? (*brief pause*) I'm just going to sit here and listen for a while.

BOB. All right. (*Very brief pause. Standing in doorway, behind screen door.*) It was nice watching you with people, too. You have a pretty smile.

JENNIFER. Oh, Bob. Just when I think you're not going to –
(*We see BOB flick a switch as he exits the doorway. All light goes to black.*)

Scene Two

(Grocery store. JOHN is eating some free cracker samples at a card table at the end of an aisle. Grocery-store Muzac is playing. JENNIFER enters, with a purse and a plastic drug-store bag.)

JOHN. Well, hey, if it isn't you.

JENNIFER. No, it is. Hi.

JOHN. I'm just saying, you know, what if it wasn't?

JENNIFER. Okay. John, right?

JOHN. Yeah. I supposedly had some work here, working on a freezer.

JENNIFER. But you don't?

JOHN. I guess they already got it fixed. They only called about it yesterday or the day before.

JENNIFER. Well, it's a freezer.

JOHN. Yes, it is. I messed up. Pony's coming to get me, later. This took a lot less time than I had originally estimated.

JENNIFER. What did, doing nothing?

JOHN. Yeah. Wait, I love this part.

(He points toward the source of Muzac, and they listen for a second.)

That wasn't it, actually. So, what are you doing?

JENNIFER. Just errands. I had to pick up some stuff for Bob. I think I told you guys about his – yeah, I told you.

JOHN. You did, yeah. *(He sits on the edge of the wobbly card table.)*

JENNIFER. Is that a good place to sit?

JOHN. Totally.

JENNIFER. Okay. Well, I have to get some things here.

JOHN. What do you have to get?

JENNIFER. Groceries.

JOHN. Oh my God, I love groceries. (*standing, referring to the card table*) Actually, you're right, this is really wobbly.

JENNIFER. Well, I'll see you later.

JOHN. It's weird. You want this conversation to end, but, I want it to keep going.

JENNIFER. That is weird.

JOHN. I know. I saw you before. A few weeks ago, out in the parking lot. You were on the phone, crying, and eating a power bar. I thought, wow, that's one sad busy person.

JENNIFER. Oh. When were you here, a few weeks ago? I thought you just moved here.

JOHN. Oh, we did, but, yeah, I had told Pony I was at the ocean.

JENNIFER. Okay.

JOHN. It's actually sort of ironic.

JENNIFER. (*brief pause*) Are you... I thought you were going to expand on that.

JOHN. No, I think that was it.

JENNIFER. I should really get –

JOHN. (*interrupting*:) Going, you want to get going. I know. So don't we all. I don't know what your normal look is. I mean, when you're okay.

JENNIFER. Why, how do I seem? I probably look like I'm, like...

JOHN. (*brief pause*) You don't have to say anything.

JENNIFER. I know. I like when they put out free samples.

JOHN. As do I.

JENNIFER. This has been such a... I brought Bob a coffee, this morning, and he spilled it all over himself.

JOHN. Is he all right?

JENNIFER. He's okay. But he never, just, he didn't do anything. Boiling hot coffee, all down his front. Then he said, "It smells like work."

JOHN. He was probably in shock.

JENNIFER. He didn't even flinch. And then he just stared at me. I have no idea what he was thinking.

JOHN. He was probably thinking all kinds of things. (*brief pause*) I have a great flinch. Watch this. (*He demonstrates a tiny flinch.*) See? Just very subtle, it's almost classical. (*brief pause*) No, but mornings are tough.

JENNIFER. It's not mornings. It's one of the stages and the stages don't go backward. Copper starts building up in the blood – which, that's just one of the problems. And then this thing starts called “sensual mortification.” Isn't that an awful phrase? But you never know what's a sign of what, because things get bad and things get better. They talk about symptoms being “sluggish” and “seething.” There's this whole awful vocabulary. Bob has something called Harriman Leavey Syndrome.

JOHN. It sounds like a jazz combo.

JENNIFER. It isn't. It's just the name of the person who discovered it, and then, Syndrome. (*brief pause*) Do you do other kinds of work, other than refrigerators?

JOHN. That's not something I really need to talk about. Unless you need some work done?

JENNIFER. No. We're thinking about painting the house.

JOHN. Well, make sure you pick a color you like. Anyway, go on – you were talking about Bob's thing, the Benny Goodman Experience.

JENNIFER. It's the Harriman Leavey Syndrome. It's an irreversible and degenerative nerve disease. Do you have a hilarious punchline for that?

JOHN. No. Actually, wait. (*He may have thought of a punchline.*) No, that wouldn't work. (*very brief pause*) I'm sorry, go ahead. I'll listen.

JENNIFER. I don't talk to anybody about this. (*very brief pause*) So, yeah, now he's doing this treatment, which is, just, the AMA doesn't recognize it because there isn't a whole protocol, yet. It's hard, because he never... I mean, Bob doesn't want to know anything about any of it. He keeps saying, “Just tell me where to be and what to take.”

JOHN. I could understand that.

JENNIFER. I don't know if you could.

JOHN. Probably not. Did you hear me listening, just then?

JENNIFER. Oh, is that what that was.

JOHN. The secret is not saying anything.

JENNIFER. That's, yeah, that's actually pretty good advice about listening. The doctor says it's probably good for us to keep it simple and just have a positive attitude. (*referring to the bag:*) This is supposed to reduce the copper uptake. It builds up in the brain. Mainly in the language centers.

JOHN. The language centers – yowza. Watch out for oysters and liver.

JENNIFER. I know. They're really high in copper. Why do you know that?

JOHN. I do work for a lot of hospitals and clinics. On my breaks, I usually read those medical journals. Just to see what's out there.

JENNIFER. What else have you read? What do they say about treatments?

JOHN. I stopped reading. At a certain point you just stop and say – I don't know, probably different people stop and say different things.

JENNIFER. This all started when Bob was filling out some thing for a raffle to win a trip to Canada. I thought he was having a stroke. He kept saying, "How do you say our address?"

JOHN. Oww.

JENNIFER. We used to travel. I have a picture of us on camels. Just in Texas, but still.

JOHN. (*very brief pause*) So is he taking other stuff, other than the stuff for copper?

JENNIFER. Oh, God, the drugs are a whole other thing. Some people have a negative reaction that seems like a positive change. So it's just all these different levels of not knowing anything.

JOHN. There's a lot to not know, isn't there.

JENNIFER. Yeah, there is.

JOHN. You have a lot of composure.

JENNIFER. Thank you.

JOHN. Oh, you took that as a compliment – okay.

JENNIFER. How did you mean it?

JOHN. Like you took it, however you took it.

JENNIFER. You seem kind of committed to not being sympathetic.

JOHN. That isn't what I'm trying not to be.

JENNIFER. If you say so. There's a guy I always see at the clinic.

JOHN. The albino guy.

JENNIFER. I told you this.

JOHN. No.

JENNIFER. He's in a wheelchair and he's always asking what just happened. He's always saying, "Did something just happen?" Today, I was thinking, is that Bob, tomorrow? Bob, next year? I don't know how everybody does this.

JOHN. Yeah.

JENNIFER. (*brief pause*) I studied Italian in school.

JOHN. Say something Italian.

JENNIFER. You have to speak it all the time.

JOHN. Yeah. (*He gently grasps her arm, at the bicep.*)

JENNIFER. What are you doing?

JOHN. I don't know. Reaching out.

JENNIFER. Why?

JOHN. Because. And because you have pretty eyes. They're sad, but they're pretty.

JENNIFER. Well, that's very – I actually need glasses to read.

JOHN. Interesting.

JENNIFER. Is this what you do, comment on women?

JOHN. It's one of my things.

JENNIFER. I'm married.

JOHN. Who isn't.

JENNIFER. I don't know why I'm still standing here.

JOHN. Me neither. This might not be what it seems like.

JENNIFER. So, is this, are you making fun of me?

JOHN. No. (*He gently lets go of her arm.*) I just was, you know, holding on to you.

JENNIFER. This isn't a good day, okay?

JOHN. No, of course not.

JENNIFER. I'm sure I just look like a person in a store.

JOHN. You don't look like a person in a store.

JENNIFER. I really try. With Bob. To just be there.

JOHN. Yeah. (*Brief pause. With understanding:*) It's not the greatest name, is it.

JENNIFER. Which? Bob? You're criticizing my husband's name?

JOHN. Someone had to.

JENNIFER. I'm not sure that's true. I always liked it.

JOHN. Okay.

JENNIFER. I did. "Bob." It's easy to remember. I think dyslexics find it comforting. (*brief pause*) Do my eyes really look sad?

JOHN. No. A little. (*very brief pause*) Don't say anything to Pony, okay?

JENNIFER. About what?

JOHN. Maybe, to be safe, about anything. Just never say a single word to her, about any topic.

(*They share a tiny smile.*)

JENNIFER. Okay.

JOHN. Thanks.

JENNIFER. (*very brief pause*) I love my husband.

JOHN. Oh my God, who doesn't? Listen, I should get out front, but, here's a little haiku:

The frog is dark green.

He is breathing like crazy.

It's starting to snow.

JENNIFER. (*brief pause*) I don't know if a haiku is the best way to end a conversation.

JOHN. No, I'm sure it isn't. But, hey, I'll see you later.

(*lights down*)

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