Acting Edition

Packing Up Polly

by Leslie Kimbell

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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PACKING UP POLLY received its world premiere production at OnStage Atlanta in Scottdale, Georgia on April 9, 2021. The show was directed by Barry West. The Stage Manager was Meghan Zern. The scenic design was by Barry West. The lighting design was by Harley Gould. The sound design was by Sylvia Veith. Costume design was by Scott Rousseau. The cast was as follows:

CAROLINE PORTER COOK . . . . . Marita McKee
ELIZABETH JENNINGS . . . . . Irene Polk
DONNA JO MARTIN . . . . . Cat Rondeau
REBECCA BAILEY . . . . . Kelley Gray

PACKING UP POLLY received a rewrite and second premiere at Winder-Barrow Community Theatre in Winder, Georgia on October 14, 2022. This production was directed by Leslie Kimbell with Assistant Director Ann Mitchell. The Stage Manager was Savannah Hardegree. Scenic design was by Leslie Kimbell and Ann Mitchell. Lighting and sound design was by Aaron Mitchell. Costume design was by Eddie Nadeau. The cast was as follows:

CAROLINE PORTER COOK . . . . . Léland Downs
ELIZABETH JENNINGS . . . . . Andrea Barra
DONNA JO MARTIN . . . . . Bryn Adamson
REBECCA BAILEY . . . . . KAT Marie Mitchell

CHARACTERS

CAROLINE PORTER COOK – 40s – Polly's daughter – former Head Cheerleader, Homecoming Queen, Prom Queen, and all that goes with it.

ELIZABETH "LIZZY" JENNINGS – 40s – Caroline's high school best "frenemy." Owner of the Miss Georgia Belle pageantry system.

DONNA JO MARTIN – 40s – Drama queen, local theatre diva and one-time Off Off Broadway actor. Married eight times.

REBECCA "BECCA" BAILEY – 40s – Frumpy mother of four…currently expecting number five any minute…and soon to be single.

SETTING

The den and kitchen area of Polly Porter's ranch style home – Savannah, Georgia.

TIME

Spring – 2015.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The set should be very heavily cluttered with…well…clutter. Cardboard boxes, newspapers, clothing on coat hangers hanging in the doorways, shopping bags, odd out-of-place items, stacks of mail and shipping boxes, multiple televisions, an ironing board, a Christmas tree, misplaced furniture, overflowing shelves…etc. This all strikes during intermission. Though never used, it can be quite impactful to have a door stage left in the kitchen area that is fully blocked with all the hoarding and is only revealed after intermission. In Act One, Scene Two, the effect of the pull-out sofa is dynamic, but it is not absolutely necessary to have a pull-out sleeper sofa. Instead, sleeping bags, pillows, and blankets will work.

Have fun with the odd and bizarre hoarded items.

For the gospel music, the author suggests a song in the style of "Looking for a City" by Vestal Goodman. However, a license to produce *Packing Up Polly* does not include a performance license for this music. The author suggests using other up-tempo gospel songs for scene transitions.

For Eddie Nadeau

Who told me I wasn't an imposter...

and made me believe in myself.

I love you forever.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(Lights up.)

(We are in the den and kitchen area of a modest open-concept ranch home, built in the late '60s.)

(The décor consists of faux wood-paneled walls, accented with orange and avocado green. A plaid pull-out sleeper sofa is center. Stage left is a small kitchen area with a refrigerator, a few cabinets, and a simple 1970s dinette set. The table is loaded with casserole dishes, pies, and colorful, well-used Tupperware. Stage left is a door that leads to the formal part of the house, but we can't yet see it as it has chairs, boxes, and other items stacked in front of it. Upper center is a small, raised area with a brown wood railing and the back door that opens to the carport. Stage right is a cased opening into a hallway leading to the bedrooms and bathroom. There is a bookcase overly filled with books, record albums, framed photos, and mementoes. In the living area, there is an old console-style stereo with built-in record player. A rotary phone sits on the end of the console. There is a real feeling of being in the '70s.)

(There is heavy clutter everywhere...stacks of boxes, mail, magazines, decorations for several different holidays, newspapers, blankets, books, dolls, odd out-of-place items, knick-knacks and multiple unopened shipping boxes. The walls are covered with pictures and art. Clothing hangs on metal coat hangers in the hallway opening. Someone lives here...someone who likes to keep things...a hoarder.)

*(***CAROLINE PORTER COOPER** *enters. She is well put together, dressed in black, and carries a tote bag. She is talking on a cellphone.)*

CAROLINE. ...of course I'm not surprised... Chelsea has always been self-centered...and Michael...well...all I can say is...bless his heart...ya' know? *(Laugh.)* God help me, I love my baby brother...even though he *may* or *may not* be a gambling-addicted grifter. *(Beat.)* Oh yes...yes... He ran out of the church so fast he nearly knocked over the minister. *(Beat.)* No...she stayed for the whole service...but she kept looking at her watch. The second Pastor Wofford said the last Amen, she got up and ran out the side door. *(Beat.)* I have no idea where she is. *(***CAROLINE** *calls out.)* CHELSEA?! *(Beat.)* CHELSEA? *(Beat.)* Well...she's not here. *(She crosses to the kitchen.)* Lord have mercy, you should see all this food...there's enough Kentucky fried chicken in here to sink the *Titanic*...and *(She opens a container and smells it. She scowls.)* I don't have any idea what some of this stuff is. *(She looks under the container for a label.)* Lord have mercy, this is Lucy Jenkins' Nine Bean Fiesta Salad...it would gag a maggot! *(Beat.)* Of course I appreciate it...but who's gonna eat it?

(She drops the container into a nearby trashcan.)

Looks like it's just gonna be me here. Lord only knows how long this is all gonna take…Momma is such a pack rat *(Beat.)* was…*was* such a pack rat.

> *(***CAROLINE** *crosses to the sofa and sets down her tote. She is suddenly overcome with grief and it registers on her face. She sits…barely holding herself together.)*

Listen honey… I've gotta go…yes I'm fine…no…no… I just need to…you know…get myself together…and I need to call Patrick too…and I've got to run over to the Piggly Wiggly or somewhere and get some boxes. *(Beat.)* Oh…it's a grocery store. *(Beat.)* No really… I'll be fine. I'm gonna try to get this done and be back to Atlanta next week…there's a lot I have to deal with there too. Thank you for taking care of everything on that end. *(Beat.)* Yes… I promise I'll call you tomorrow… *(Beat.)* OK sweetie… I've gotta go…bye.

> *(She hangs up, looks around the room and begins to softly cry.)*

Oh Momma –

> *(She reaches into her tote bag and pulls out a tissue. She then pulls out a small cardboard box and sits it in her lap. These are Polly's ashes.)*

Well…here we are… I can't believe it. *(Beat.)* Oh, Mommy this can't be real…what am I gonna do without you? I need you. Who am I gonna talk to about Patrick? *(Beat.)* How am I gonna reconnect with the girls…like we planned? We were gonna do it together… I can't do it by myself…oh Momma I need you to tell me what to do…send me a sign or –

> *(There is a quick knock on the front door and* **ELIZABETH "LIZZY" JENNINGS** *enters. She is a peppy and perky beauty pageant*

professional, perfectly dressed in a twinset, skirt, heels, and pearls. She carries a designer purse and a "to go" Styrofoam food container. She wears pearls and a Miss Georgia Belle nametag. **CAROLINE** *is shocked to see* **LIZZY**...*and vice versa.)*

LIZZY. Yoo hoo Miss Polly...it's Elizabeth... I brought you some meatloaf from Earl's –

CAROLINE. Oh my God –

(**LIZZY** *stops dead in her tracks.)*

LIZZY. Caroline?

CAROLINE. Lizzy?

LIZZY. Oh my God –

CAROLINE. Oh my God... Oh My God –

LIZZY & CAROLINE. What are you doing here?

LIZZY. I came to check on Miss Polly.

CAROLINE. What? Why are you checkin' on my –

LIZZY. Wait what's going on Caroline...where's Miss Polly... is she OK? *(Realization.)* Oh no –

(Beat.)

CAROLINE. Lizzy... Momma died.

LIZZY. Oh, Caroline...no –

(Beat.)

CAROLINE. Mommy died.

LIZZY. Oh Caroline...no... I don't believe this... I am so sorry.

(**LIZZY** *rushes to* **CAROLINE** *to hug her and stops short. It is an awkward moment.)*

CAROLINE. Did you say you were checkin' on my momma?

LIZZY. Well yes, I've been checkin' in on Miss Polly for years…didn't she tell you? I love your sweet momma. She's like a second momma to me…to all the girls. I come by and bring her dinner sometimes too.

CAROLINE. *(Soft.)* No…no…she never told me.

*(***CAROLINE** *sits the box of ashes on the coffee table.)*

LIZZY. I have been over in Valdosta all weekend with the Little Miss Georgia Belle pageant. I can't believe nobody called me. Oh Caroline, when did this happen?

CAROLINE. Sunday night. *(Beat.)* Chelsea came over Monday to check on Momma…which is of course her code for "ask for money" and she found her. *(Beat.)* Momma just went off…and died in her sleep.

LIZZY. Oh Caroline, I am so sorry…but I am so glad it was peaceful…that's a real blessin'. That's how I want to go –

CAROLINE. *(Tearful.)* Yeah –

LIZZY. How old was Miss Polly?

CAROLINE. *(Smiling through tears.)* Well, if you asked her…she was fifty-nine *(Giggle.)* but she was really seventy-eight. *(She looks up.)* Sorry Momma.

LIZZY. I just can't believe no one called me… I am so sorry I missed the service.

CAROLINE. We didn't have much of a service, really. The obituary doesn't even go into the paper 'til tomorrow… and there hasn't been a press release…so none of her old fans know yet. Michael didn't get here 'til this mornin' …so we just had a small service at the funeral home. Most of Momma's really *good* friends are already gone. It was nice though…they played some of Momma's music –

LIZZY. Oh, that's sweet Caroline.

CAROLINE. It was just –

*(***CAROLINE** *is lost in emotion.* **LIZZY** *senses and changes the subject.)*

LIZZY. Now where did you do the service? Not Williams Brothers, I hope.

CAROLINE. No… I used Owens Funeral Home.

LIZZY. Thank God…did you know those Williams boys have started doing *theme* funerals.

CAROLINE. Theme funerals?

LIZZY. Yes! They have a receiving room called, Granny's Kitchen…and you can have your sweet Mee-Maw laid out right in the middle of a kitchen setting…stove, refrigerator, and all.

CAROLINE. NO! That's awful…*really*?

LIZZY. IT IS! I was there last week… Tootie Jackson passed…rest her soul…and people were just standin' around eatin' cake over her body…with a pot of beans on the stove…and a big ole' skillet of cornbread on the table.

CAROLINE. You can't be serious –

LIZZY. Yes it was awful…tacky, tacky, tacky! And listen to this… Freddy Tillman passed back in February…rest his soul…and Mavis had him laid out in their *Man Cave* theme room.

CAROLINE. I shudder to ask…

LIZZY. YES! She had him laid back in a recliner, with a Georgia Bulldogs game playin' on a big screen TV. He was wearin' his old flannel pajama pants and a NO FAT CHICKS T-shirt…remote control in one hand and a beer in the other. *(Beat.)* Everybody said he looked so natural.

CAROLINE. That sounds dreadful.

(Pause.)

LIZZY. It was. So…where are Chelsea and Michael?

CAROLINE. Who knows? *(Beat.)* I haven't seen or heard from either one of them in over two years…until this. I'm surprised they even called me…well actually…no I'm not…they *do* want someone to clean out the house.

LIZZY. Clean out the house? *(Beat.)* This house?

CAROLINE. Yes…they want to pack up the whole thing and get it ready to sell…as soon as possible. Chelsea wants to donate *everything* and put it on the market by next weekend.

LIZZY. *Next* weekend? That's fast –

CAROLINE. Well…the faster we sell it…the faster Michael can get to the casinos in Biloxi…and Chelsea…well… I'm sure she will use her share to have somethin' lipo-sucked, tucked, or implanted –

LIZZY. Aren't they comin' to help you?

CAROLINE. *(Snicker.)* I *highly* doubt it…they said *WE* need to get the house packed up…and then they both disappeared. So, as usual… I guess it's up to me to deal with all the hard stuff. . I've done it all our lives…why should this be any different?

LIZZY. Well now honey…who is the executor of the estate?

CAROLINE. Estate? Oh Lizzy…that's funny…Momma didn't have a pot to pee in –

LIZZY. That can't be true. Surely Miss Polly must have a will or somethin'. I mean…after all those concerts and record sales…and all those years tourin' with the band? Polly Porter and the Praise His Name Singers were the top tourin' gospel band of the seventies and eighties.

CAROLINE. I don't know…Momma and I didn't talk about money and that sort of thing… I guess I thought she was gonna live forever. *(Beat.)* I just don't know what I'm gonna do –

*(***LIZZY** *awkwardly touches* **CAROLINE***'s shoulder.)*

LIZZY. When's the last time you saw Miss Polly? She just came up to see you didn't she?

CAROLINE. Yes…she flew up to Atlanta last month, for a few days…but we talked on the phone all the time. I mean… I just talked to her Saturday mornin'…and she sounded great.

*(***CAROLINE** *dazes off.)*

LIZZY. Caroline, Miss Polly is so proud of you.

CAROLINE. What do you mean?

LIZZY. She talks about you all the time…nonstop.

CAROLINE. Really?

LIZZY. She brags on you…about your big fancy job at that Investment Bank…and Patrick. Hey…where *is* Patrick? Is he here?

*(***LIZZY** *rises and looks around.)*

CAROLINE. *(Uneasy.)* Oh, no…he had this big business thing in California and couldn't get away.

LIZZY. *(Puzzled.)* He couldn't get off work to come to your momma's funeral?

CAROLINE. It's a deal that has been in the works for a year…and it could mean a big promotion.

LIZZY. *(Skeptical.)* Uh huh…okay –

(Awkward beat and then a change.)

Listen sweetie… I know this is strange…me showin' up here and all out of the blue…but why don't you let me help you out around here? I've got three weeks until my next pageant…and… I would like to help you get through some of this…if you'll let me.

CAROLINE. Oh Lizzy… I… I don't know –

LIZZY. Caroline… I know we've had our differences…but I really want to help.

CAROLINE. Well –

LIZZY. Let's just let…bygones be bygones. Besides darlin'…there is *no way* you can do this by yourself.

CAROLINE. Thank you Lizzy…that would be…nice… I really appreciate it.

*(***CAROLINE** *and* **LIZZY** *take in the room.)*

LIZZY. Lordamercy I feel like I am steppin' back in time when I come here –

CAROLINE. I know…there are so many memories. It hasn't changed a bit since we were kids. Well…except maybe all this…um…clutter.

*(***CAROLINE** *wipes her eyes. There's a change in her voice.)*

Well… I'm gonna go change out of this dress. You hungry?

LIZZY. No…not really –

CAROLINE. There's enough food in the kitchen for fifty blue million people. If you *get* hungry…make a plate or two…or three…in fact…go out and feed the homeless… there's enough porkchops and sweet potato pie in there for everybody in Savannah.

*(***CAROLINE** *exits right.)*

LIZZY. Thanks honey but I just ate lunch at Earl's place.

CAROLINE. *(Offstage.)* I can't believe they brought so much food from the church.

LIZZY. Well…you know how us Southern Baptists are about death and hospitality…we want to make sure you've got enough fried chicken and green beans while you're mournin' your loss. God forbid you be sad *and* hungry.

> *(As soon as* **CAROLINE** *exits,* **LIZZY** *takes out her cellphone and makes a call. Her voice is low.)*

LIZZY. Hello… Donna Jo? It's Lizzy. Did you know that Polly Porter got on the Jesus bus? *(Beat.)* Yes…it's awful… I just came by to see her and found out…*from Caroline. (Beat.)* Yes… I'm here right now. *(Beat.)* Yes, I'm serious. *(Beat.)* What are you doing right now? *(Beat.)* Dress rehearsal…for what? *(Beat and scowl.)* Oh. Well…get your booty over here to Miss Polly's ASAP. Caroline has to pack up Miss Polly's whole house and she is gonna need help…it's a long story… oh and listen…call Becca and see if she can come help too. *(Beat.) I know that*…but she can be moral support *(Beat.)* What? No, I didn't tell her I was callin' you… I just want y'all to show up. I'll confess later. Oh, oh she's comin'…gotta go…bye.

> *(***CAROLINE** *enters in sweatpants and a T-shirt as* **LIZZY** *tucks her cellphone back in her bra.)*

That was fast.

CAROLINE. Were you on the phone?

LIZZY. Yeah… I just called Bobby to let him know he'll have to heat up leftovers for dinner tonight.

CAROLINE. Tonight? You're stayin' *now*?

LIZZY. Well of course…someone has to help you plan…and you know how I love to make lists.

CAROLINE. Oh…well thank you Lizzy… I don't know what to say –

LIZZY. Just say thank you and let's get goin' …where do you want to start? I guess we need to make a game plan.

*(***CAROLINE** *is overwhelmed.)*

CAROLINE. Well… I don't know…there's just…so much stuff… 'specially in the back of the –

*(***LIZZY** *gets a pad and pen from her purse.)*

LIZZY. Okay…let me go look in the bedrooms…while you get your thoughts together.

CAROLINE. I'm not sure I'm ready to…I mean… You may want to wait before –

LIZZY. *(Ignoring.)* I'll make a list of the supplies we need… and then I'll make a run for some boxes…and tape –

CAROLINE. Well… I…think that –

LIZZY. *(Pacing.)* And then we'll just go room-to-room and pull things out and make decisions… I mean… I'm sure there's some things you'll wanna keep…like pictures and mementoes and so forth…and then we can always donate the rest of the stuff over to the church thrift store or the Goodwill…whaddaya think?

CAROLINE. OK…but…maybe you should –

LIZZY. I watch those home organizing shows all the time on HGTV…so this is gonna be a snap. Ooooo…maybe we can have a little estate sale thingy on Saturday? Whaddaya think?

CAROLINE. Estate sale? Uh…well… I suppose we *could consider* –

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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