Acting Edition

Ugly Lies The Bone

by Lindsey Ferrentino

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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UGLY LIES THE BONE was first produced by the Roundabout Underground at the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Center for Theatre in New York City on October 13, 2015. The performance was directed by Patricia McGregor, with sets by Tim Brown, costumes by Dede Ayite designer, lights by Jiyoun Chang, sound by Jessica Paz, projections by Caite Hevner Kemp, prosthetics by Vincent T. Schicchi and Thomas Denier Jr., and wigs by Cookie Jordan. The cast was as follows:

JESS . . . . . Mamie Gummer
KACIE . . . . . Karron Graves
STEVIE . . . . . Chris Stack
KELVIN . . . . . Hayness Thigpen
VOICE/THEIR MOM . . . . . Caitlin O'Connell

UGLY LIES THE BONE was developed and given a staged reading at Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut, as part of their 2014 National Playwrights Conference on July 9, 2014. The reading was directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch.

CHARACTERS

JESS

Early 30s, severely distorted by third degree burns, uses a walker
quick-witted, intelligent, tough
trying to have strength in her body, vulnerability in her life

KACIE

Jess' older sister by a few years, was probably beautiful once
sweet, trying hard for positivity

STEVIE

Early 30s, an inviting smile that makes you want to live in it
life just keeps happening to him

KELVIN

Older than Kacie
too comfortable in his own skin

VOICE/THEIR MOM

60s, passionate, powerful, maternal
a strong vocal quality

*Cast can be any race and should hopefully
reflect some diversity in this world.

SETTING

Titusville, Florida
the heart of Florida's space coast

TIME

The end of NASA's shuttle program
the end of an era

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My understanding of this play would not have been possible without Christianna Nelson's dedication to the Bloomington Playwrights Project production; Matthew Maguire, Jedadiah Schultz and the passionate students and designers behind the Fordham production. I'd also like to thank: directors GT Upchurch, Sherri Eden Barber, Jaime Castaneda; Yale actors for our Sunday living room readings; and the generous support from The Laurents Hatcher Foundation, The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, The Newman/ Woodard Drama Award, as well as the ever-fierce Kilroys. And lastly, but certainly not least, all of my gratitude goes to Roundabout Theatre Company for giving me my first artistic home; Todd Haimes, Robyn Goodman, Josh Fiedler, and Jill Rafson (whose notes are always right) as well as the creative team, cast and crew behind the Roundabout production for their four month residence underground. Thank you to Patricia McGregor for being both a trusted peer as well as a woman I greatly admire.

It takes a village and I'm the luckiest writer to be included in all of yours.

For my three in Florida who are my home.
For C.B. who works with veterans daily and
shows me the science behind compassion.
For every veteran who shared their time with this country
and their stories with me, both before I wrote this play
and after productions; thank you so much.
For the person who wouldn't give "all the things,"
you gave me this play and so gave me
everything.

Beauty is but skin deep
Ugly lies the bone
Beauty dies and fades away
But ugly holds its own.

– *Albert Einstein*

(As house lights fade, "WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME" plays in the dark.)

("WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME")

WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME AGAIN,
HURRAH! HURRAH!
WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME AGAIN,
HURRAH! HURRAH!
WELL THE MEN WILL CHEER AND THE BOYS WILL SHOUT
AND THE LADIES THEY WILL ALL TURN OUT
AND WE'LL ALL FEEL GAY WHEN
JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME!

(A **WOMAN'S VOICE** *speaks on top.)*

VOICE. Open your eyes.

(Lights up to a small lit area downstage where **JESS** *stands alone, in an army green T-shirt and men's sweatpants. Her hair, forehead, and ears are wrapped tightly in a scarf. Large virtual reality glasses cover her face.)*

("WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME")

GET READY FOR THE JUBILEE,
HURRAH! HURRAH!
WE'LL GIVE THE HERO THREE TIMES THREE –

JESS. Excuse me – Can – Hello?!

("WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME")

HURRAH! HURRAH!
THE LAUREL WREATH IS READY NOW
TO PLACE UPON HIS LOYAL BROW
AND WE'LL ALL FEEL GAY –

JESS. HELLO?

("WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME")

– WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME…

(**JESS** *rips off goggles and headphones as the music cuts off. Her face and neck are severely distorted by third degree burns. Skin is stretched tight with the rippled sheen of melted plastic.)*

VOICE. Are you alright?

JESS. Um…

VOICE. Is there a problem?

JESS. That song –

…Are you kidding me?

VOICE. We had some stock song files donated. Looks like there's a uh, few patriotic anthems…and Paul Simon.

JESS. Look at me.

Aren't I suffering enough?

VOICE. Loud music will *overwhelm* your senses… It's the same as – when you were a child and your mother said *look over here* so you didn't notice while she ripped your bandaid off…that's *all* we'll do. Distract your brain with enough stimuli, it can't THINK about your pain. It simply won't have time…

Please trust me.

JESS. …

VOICE. How do you *feel?*

JESS. …

VOICE. *(tapping the mic)* Am I still coming through the speakers?

JESS. *Yes.*

VOICE. Describe your pain.

JESS. I don't know.

VOICE. *Try* to know.

JESS. Pressure under my right eye –

VOICE. From the goggles? When fitting equipment, I need to make sure the goggles themselves don't add to your pain.

JESS It took three surgeries to give me back my eyelid. So no. It's always there.

VOICE. We cannot undo what is done, but how do we move on from here?

JESS. You think this'll help?

VOICE. We hope.
In time.

JESS. …*How long –?*

VOICE. That's what you're helping us to figure out.

JESS. …

VOICE. Until now, pain management has not improved since World War II.
You could stay on morphine…or *try this*… Okay?

JESS. *(softly) Okay.*

VOICE. Good. So. Take a deep breath. *And let's begin again.*

*(***JESS** *inhales sharply. Lights shift and the song picks up where it left off.)*

*(***JESS** *removes the goggles to look up at the sky, speckled with a billion stars.)*

(A lived in living room in a lived in house slides in around **JESS**. *Walls are covered in framed family photos. Red, white and blue streamers descend. A handmade "Welcome Home" sign printed from the computer. The night sky looms behind it all.)*

*(***JESS** *takes a deep breath, her last look at the sky, grabs her walker, and turns into the house.* **KACIE**, **JESS***' older sister, empties bowls of soggy potato chips, trying enthusiastically for positivity.)*

KACIE. Looked like you and Kelvin really hit it off…?

JESS. …Is that seriously his name?

KACIE. What do you mean *is that his name*, I've been talking to you about him for the last year!

JESS. Yeah, on the phone I thought you were saying *Kevin*.

KACIE. We met on one a those free websites…

JESS. Maybe the L was a typo.

KACIE. Very funny.

JESS. What's with all that *hair* on his chin?

KACIE. 'Cause of his disability.

JESS. Something's wrong with him?

KACIE. No, no. He gets monthly checks so he doesn't wanna – *appear* – too *employable*.

JESS. Oh. That explains it.

KACIE. What?

JESS. … He asked what I thought of his goatee. I told him he looked like a shit–bag. And he went – *"yes!"*

*(***KACIE** *laughs.)*

(beat)

KACIE. Kelvin couldn't *wait* to meet you. Even offered to fly with me to Texas to pick you up from the hospital, but –

JESS. I'm happy you're happy.

KACIE. – oh I am I guess – *sure –

*(****JESS***' leg cramps.)*

– That's –

JESS. Nothing.

KACIE. That's – normal?

JESS. A muscle spasm to hold the bone in place.

KACIE. Right. Is there anything –

JESS. Nope.

KACIE. I'm happy to –

JESS. No.

KACIE. Right.

(beat)

Well we should all go visit her tomorrow. Together. You could put on one of the sundresses you used to wear, they're still in your room.

JESS. What's wrong with what I'm wearing?

KACIE. You're in *boys* clothes.

JESS. These are *MY* clothes now.

KACIE. I know, I'm – Do…you think people liked the scratch offs? Billy won twenty bucks! – only cost me fifteen to get one for everybody who came… So – *we're ahead!*

JESS. You invited *fifteen* people here?

KACIE. You love parties… Remember?

*(***JESS** *empties the closet.)*

– What're you looking for?

*(***JESS** *pulls a decorated poster board out.)*

That's – no –

JESS. What. Is *this?*

KACIE. – nothing – no – put it away.

JESS. …?

KACIE. It's, um, my dream board…

JESS. Your *what.*

KACIE. You glue on – your *ideas*, what you want from life. So you can see it… The universe could see it too… That's how I got Kelvin.

JESS. No. You got him from OkCupid.

KACIE. – stupid, give it to me.

JESS. What's with all the pictures of snow –

KACIE. You know I've never seen it. Me and Kelvin're renting an RV next summer, drive through the Rockies. *I* wanted to go *tent* camping, but Kelvin wants a refrigerator when we go, so we're saving –

*(***JESS** *keeps searching the closet.)*

You're the one who loves it here, I always thought Florida was too hot… Not a big deal. Seriously. What're you looking for?

JESS. We had a mirror on that wall.

KACIE. – No. No we didn't –

JESS. I didn't forget what our house looked like.

KACIE. I dunno what –

JESS. Under our graduation pictures.

KACIE. *Oh,* I threw that away forever ago.

(**JESS** *tries getting down on all fours.)*

Get up! Can you – You're gonna hurt yourself!

(**JESS** *pulls the large mirror out from under the couch.)*

…Alright. C'mon, get up.

(beat)

JESS. You don't have to change anything. I don't want things different.

KACIE. They're not.

JESS. I'm only staying here until I get a job…

KACIE. It's your house too.

JESS. It's actually not either of ours 'cause she's not *dead.*

(beat)

KACIE. So we'll go visit her tomorrow?

JESS. Maybe. Just so I can tell Mom you moved into her bedroom.

KACIE. I – She has a bigger bed.

JESS. Yeah, I don't wanna think about what you need a bigger bed for these days –

KACIE. Jess – really…

JESS. I wanna see her, okay?

I – need my head clear first.

Did you ask about a job for me at your school yet?

KACIE. May – take time to – find the right – *fit.*

(**KACIE** *dismantles the "Welcome Home!" sign.)*

…He printed this at his house! *Kelvin…* A lotta ink…

(beat)

We thought you needed a little fun. I got cupcakes before I flew to pick you up, they had these tiny toy

soldiers on top. Then we just started inviting people – he – he gets big ideas.

JESS. – not ideas about *employment* I guess…

KACIE. …Even if you stayed outside most of the night, it's good for people to see how *brave* you are.

*(***JESS** *lowers herself to the couch. Rubs her leg.* **KACIE** *sits next to her and they stare into the mirror, neither knowing what to say…)*

JESS. We look like shit…

*(***KACIE** *laughs.)*

They were all probably saying, – *the fuck* happened to those Knox sisters. Especially you. *I* at least have an excuse.

*(***KACIE** *laughs and hands over her scratch off ticket.)*

KACIE. You didn't do yours yet.

*(***JESS** *goes at it with a coin.)*

Anything?

JESS. I can't tell.

KACIE. Lemme see –

JESS. A lot of money?

KACIE. Another ticket! That's good! *You still got another chance to win…*

(Lights shift to **JESS** *downstage with the* **VOICE**.*)*

VOICE. We will measure your pain on an eleven point scale. Zero means no hurt whatsoever, before the accident, waking effortlessly in your bed, on an average morning. Do you remember what that was like?

JESS. …yeah. I do.

VOICE. One to three is mild, an ingrown toe nail that nags or annoys. Four to six interfere with ADLs.

JESS. *ADL?*

VOICE. Activities of Daily Life… And seven to ten will cripple you. Long after injuries heal, everlasting *pain* disables. *Wild pain* lingers on.

Standing here now, where are you?

JESS. …Seven and a half.

VOICE. I'm sorry to hear that…

Could you tilt your head to the left?

JESS. Nine.

VOICE. Lift your right arm.

(She does.)

Higher.

(She winces.)

JESS. Nine.

VOICE. Bend at the waist –

(She won't.)

Bend at the waist.

JESS. Stop.

VOICE. …Ten?

JESS. – When the bigger grafts stretch, it – feels like I'm still on fire.

VOICE. I know life's different now. That's no great revelation.

But I only deal with your body – your physical being.

JESS. From up there? I can barely see you –

VOICE. I stay in the booth. Less distraction.

JESS. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with this.

VOICE. *Do you know what paradise looks like?*

JESS. Uh… Palm trees?

VOICE. You can see palm trees on any street in this state. I'm not sure that's what you'll *choose*…

What we'll do…is craft a virtual place for you to go, totally unfamiliar to your senses, so they forget how much you hurt.

Next time, bring your ideas of where your – *Eden* may be.

(A run-down convenience store slides in.)

We're going to build you a perfect world.

(Lights shift. **JESS** *enters the store, lottery ticket in hand. She grabs a bag of chips. Every movement is a struggle.* **STEVIE** *appears from the back in a ridiculous uniform – striped shirt and hat, reminiscent of a court jester's.)*

STEVIE. *(flatly)* – Welcome to Space Coast Convenience. *(on seeing* **JESS***)* Could – can I give you a hand? Here, here, why don't we put your candy over –

(He grabs her candy and scratch off ticket.)

JESS. Stevie –

STEVIE. Yeah, do –?

JESS. Oh no, no! Name tag.

(**JESS** *turns abruptly to leave, but her leg cramps. She grabs it, trying to get out the door.)*

STEVIE. Um. Ma'am. Are you –

JESS. *(sharply) What?!*

STEVIE. Nothin' – I – I already started ringin' you up.

JESS. So – ?!

STEVIE. – ah, well it's kinda like a pain in the ass to cancel, I gotta call my manager…

JESS. …

STEVIE. – So – please don't leave.

JESS. …fine.

(She turns back to him.)

STEVIE. *Sa–weet.*

(He rings up her purchases. She tries not to make eye contact, pushing over her lottery ticket.)

Congrats! I hafta – I hafta ring this bell when somebody wins.

JESS. There's *nobody* in here.

STEVIE. – manager's like – six hundred pounds. He gets mad.

*(…***STEVIE** *rings the bell.)*

JESS. …*Are you serious?*

STEVIE. Crazy Eights, Lucky Lady, or –?

JESS. Stevie, it's *me.*

STEVIE. What?

JESS. It's me. I'm – Jess.

STEVIE. Holy shit – AH!

JESS. Hi.

STEVIE. Oh God. Oh my *God*, you must think –

JESS. No, it's –

STEVIE. You know I'm like – I'm always an idiot. I'd *never* have *ever* –

(laughs hugely, uncontrollably)

– Whew! HA–HA–HA–*Oh–ma–God!!*

JESS. How've you / been?

STEVIE. GREAT, actually. Oh, yeah, *things're –

*(*He gestures two thumbs way up.)*

JESS. Great!

STEVIE. Your sister told me about the IUD.

JESS. That's birth control, Stevie.

STEVIE. Right.

(beat)

You're back now. I had NO idea! We should / like –

JESS. My sister threw me a party the day I got home, so I already saw everybody important.

STEVIE. …

JESS. I had an incredible time, it was awesome.

STEVIE. Still – CATCH UP. I got A LOT go in' on.

JESS. Looks like it.

STEVIE. I got married.

JESS. That doesn't mean you got a lot going on.

STEVIE. …We're buying a house, kind of. Her brother-in-law's got foreclosed property he'll maybe lend us –

JESS. Yeah, I don't actually wanna hear the whole sketchy thing you're workin' on. I didn't meant' see you.

STEVIE. Yes you did.

JESS. – Sorry?

STEVIE. Kacie knows I lost my job. I see her when she gasses up Mondays.

JESS. She mentioned you were fired, not that you're workin' *here* –

STEVIE. They cut the shuttle program, I didn't get FIRED.

JESS. …Guess you can't lie about workin' at *NASA* anymore.

STEVIE. I *did* work at NASA!

JESS. On a panini press.

STEVIE. I filed papers in the control room before the first round of layoffs. I had top security clearance.

JESS. Well. Now you make hot dogs.

STEVIE. Did you want one?

JESS. No.

STEVIE. Only the manager eats 'em. I hafta steam him two every time he comes in. Sometimes three. – he weighs like –

JESS. You told me.

STEVIE. Disgusting. And these little – taco things. Want one of these?

JESS. I'm good.

*(***STEVIE** *takes his hat off.)*

STEVIE. …He makes me wear this? I don't know why.

JESS. …

STEVIE. *(a confession)* I don't…ah. I *really* don't know what to say.

JESS. Why do you have to say anything? You shouldn't *SAY* anything.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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