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# **Distance**

By

JERRE DYE

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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JERRE DYE

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*Distance* was developed and had its first workshop production with Voices of the South in Memphis, Tenn., in October 2014.

Cast:

Luvie ..... Jenny Odle Madden  
Dylan..... Jon Castro  
Irene ..... Jo Lynn Palmer  
Leonard ..... Steve Swift  
Dolly ..... Cecelia Wingate

Production Staff:

Director ..... Alice Berry  
Stage Manager ..... Brent Davis  
Costume Designer..... Caleb Brown Blackwell

*Distance* received its premiere production at the Strawdog Theatre Company in Chicago on Aug. 25, 2016.

Cast:

Luvie ..... Anita Deely  
Dylan..... Caleb Fullen  
Irene ..... Janice O'Neill  
Leonard ..... Stephen Rader  
Dolly ..... Loretta Rezos

Production Staff:

Director ..... Erica Weiss  
Assistant Director..... Skye Robinson Hillis  
Set Design ..... Ashley Ann Woods  
Light Designer ..... John Kelly  
Assistant Light Designer..... Jessica Fialko  
Costume Designer..... Brittany Dee Bodley  
Props Designer ..... Richard Latshaw  
Sound Designer..... Heath Hays  
Dialects ..... Sammi Grant  
Stage Manager ..... Becca Levy

# Distance

## CHARACTERS

IRENE RADFORD: 60s. A widow and mother.

LUVIE RADFORD-JOYCE: Mid-to-late 40s. Irene's daughter.

DOLLY JEAN DANVERS: Mid-to-late 40s. Health care worker and single mother.

DYLAN DANVERS: Mid-to-late 20s. Dolly's son. On the autism spectrum but undiagnosed.

LEONARD MAPES: Mid-to-late 40s. Hairdresser.

## SETTING

Memphis, Tenn. Present. Early fall.

## NOTES

We should get a clear sense of the impermanence that comes from living alone in a transitional or “step down” apartment. Irene’s living space should be sparsely decorated. Simple vestiges of her previous home might remain. Irene’s armchair is prominently placed with an afghan draped across the back. Throughout the play, the stage must transform quickly and elegantly as we shift to multiple locations, allowing Irene to witness the worlds bleeding, one into the other. Scenes should overlap. These ever-changing landscapes, sliding realities and reconstituted worlds should reflect the collision of ideas inside Irene’s head. Lights and sound should support and amplify this forever-shifting narrative. A single lighting practical hangs above a kitchen island.

In the Chicago production, each location shift was punctuated by various hanging practicals that descended from the grid throughout the show. By the end of the performance, the sky above the playing area was filled with a vast ceiling of assorted practicals. This collection of lights served as the night sky for Irene’s final monologue.

Scene shifts should be executed by the ensemble in plain view of the audience.

# Distance

## ACT I

*(Fading evening light. IRENE RADFORD is alone. She sits in a comfortable chair in the living room of her small efficiency apartment. She reaches for the TV remote. She pushes a button. Nothing. Puzzled, she examines the remote. She turns the remote around and pushes the correct button. The television begins rumbling softly.)*

*IRENE stares blankly at a program—maybe a travel show. She flips channels. Eventually, the sound of the show fades into something a little more peculiar to her ear—voices from her past, music, fragmented sounds. She tries turning off the television with the remote control. It doesn't work. The strange sounds continue. Eventually, the sounds are replaced by the intermittent flickering of an overhead kitchen light. She approaches the light and stares at the irregular pulse of it for a while. The lightbulb flickers to black one final time. She stares at the darkened bulb for a moment.)*

IRENE. You lose the thread of it. You lose the thread and there's really no way of getting it back. You just can't. The more you try and grab at it, the deeper you fall ... backwards-like.

*(Strange sounds.)*

IRENE *(cont'd)*. Because there's this ... there's this kind of horrible noise around the edges of everything ... this terrifying noise and so you panic, because it's all coming



undone right in front of you. Too much and you fall and fall and fall backwards and by then, it's gone ... this thing you tried so hard to hold onto. It's gone. You're gone.

*(More sounds.)*

IRENE *(cont'd)*. The peculiar thing is what does remain in the mind ... my mother's voice, for instance. A crease in his lapel. Rainwater through tin gutters. Some lonely afternoon where absolutely nothing at all happened. *(Picks up one of the lightbulbs resting on her kitchen island and stares at it with curiosity.)* A word whose meaning has long since faded, but the sound of the word remains. The clattering sound of it hangs in the air like fog.

*(Sound of distant voices. IRENE looks around the room as if someone is watching.)*

IRENE *(cont'd)*. Words watching you ... following you around the house like a balloon while you wander from room to room. "Where am I?" I think ... *(Looking at the lightbulb.)* ... as I hold something smooth ... something familiar in my hand. How did I get here?

*(Bustling sound of a train station overwhelms the space. IRENE retreats to her chair and closes her eyes as the sounds subside. The lightbulb flickers again.)*

DYLAN DANVERS quietly enters IRENE's apartment. He sees the flickering fixture above the island and climbs atop the furniture to unscrew the flickering bulb. The bulb burns his fingers. He stifles an expletive.

*IRENE sees DYLAN.)*

IRENE *(cont'd)*. Who are you?

DYLAN. What?

IRENE. You heard me.

DYLAN. Umm ... yeah. Sorry. I thought you were asleep, so I didn't mean to, like, wake you up or anything.

IRENE. I wasn't asleep.

DYLAN. Your eyes were shut.

IRENE. I wasn't asleep.

DYLAN. OK.

IRENE. I wasn't.

DYLAN. OK. Cool.

IRENE. I was resting my eyes. People do that.

DYLAN. I guess. Look, my mom told me—I mean, Dolly or whatever, told me to come in here and change your lightbulb, 'cause she said you couldn't reach it or whatever. And I tried, but there's like something stuck up in there or like rust or I dunno. I mean, I can't like unscrew it 'cause like, I dunno.

IRENE. Do I know you?

DYLAN. Kinda. I mean, not great or anything. I mean, we met. Like a couple a times we met, I guess. I'm Dolly's son. Dylan.

*(DYLAN wipes his hand on his jeans and puts it out for a shake. IRENE ignores this offer.)*

IRENE. OK.

DYLAN. OK. Cool. So, I can't change the bulb, 'cause, I dunno why. Something is stuck in the thing. I'm not, like, an electrical engineer-type person or anything, so anyway ... you're welcome. *(Places the lightbulb in IRENE's lap and backs away.)* So, yeah. I'm gonna get the fuck outta ... umm ... leave. Sorry. Go. Right. OK. Bye. Jesus. Fuck. *(Starts to leave.)*

IRENE (*standing*). Young man!

DYLAN. Yeah.

IRENE. Can I ask you a question?

DYLAN. I guess.

IRENE. Can you see me?

DYLAN. Is this a trick question?

IRENE. No.

DYLAN. Yes?

IRENE. You don't sound sure.

DYLAN. No. I mean, yeah. Yes. I can see you.

IRENE. You can see me standing here?

DYLAN. Yes.

IRENE. In front of you?

DYLAN. Yes.

IRENE. Are you sure?

DYLAN. Yes.

IRENE. Good. I must be here then. You can go now.  
(*Approaches the window.*)

DYLAN. Right. I'll leave the key in the plant thing ... planter  
or whatever thing.

(*DYLAN exits briskly.*

*Train sounds.*)

IRENE. I'll go away again soon, I think. I should get ready.  
Hard to know what to bring anymore ... what to leave behind.

(*Train sounds crescendo to a terrifying pitch. IRENE braces herself. Suddenly, the sound is replaced by faint country music.*)

IRENE (*cont'd*). Listen to that.

*(Lights up on LEONARD MAPES.*

*IRENE remains onstage, listening to some distant voice.*

*LEONARD is working at the beauty salon after hours. He speaks to an offstage coworker in the next room. LEONARD is backcombing a large gray wig atop a rolling work cart. He periodically mists the wig with spray.)*

LEONARD (*hollering to the coworker*). Listen, honey, if you need to go on and git, have at it. It's gonna take me a while to finish up. And by the way, thank you for scrubbin' out that shampoo bowl, darlin'. You didn't have to, but I'm sure proud you did. I love me some folks that takes initiative.

Anyway, s' yeah, to answer your question, "No." I actually do like Memphis. I mean, it ain't Atlanta or nothin', but it's "home." And people ARE gettin' better with their sense of personal style. So that's nice. As a licensed beauty operator it's my job to notice these things. My momma was a hair jockey too. I used to sit in the corner of my momma's shop pretendin' to do my homework, watchin' her beat out hair for hours on end. Course I do do facials and whatnot too. Expanded here a while back. But I don't do nails, cause I don't do feet. Can't stand the look of 'em. I do facials, cut, color, permanents, weaves, weddings, prom, pageants, pieces, cotillions ... an a'course corpses. Plenty a them. Pays nice and death don't bother me. When you work on the elderly like I do, it's bound to happen at some point. Folks gonna kick off. Way-a-things.

In fact, here in a bit I gotta run on over and work on one of m'gurls at her apartment over there off Poplar and Perkins. Hard for her to get out the house these days, so we just have us a little home visit. I've done Miss Irene's hair since

Jesus was in diapers. She was actually one-a my momma's old clients. I took her on after Momma passed. Or she took me on is more like. That's how they do you, the older ones. Back in the day, she'd make me give her one a-them 'ole terrible Pat Nixon lookin' hair helmets. Don't make 'em like her no more. One of a dyin' breed. Lived in Memphis her whole life. Husband sold air conditioners. She's practically blood-kin to me, really. Not much family since Momma passed. Millions-a tiny conversations in that chair just kinda add up over time. You get close. They tell you things. You listen.

*(LEONARD exits.)*

*(IRENE's apartment. Late morning. IRENE is seated now. Her daughter, LUVIE RADFORD-JOYCE, enters the apartment, carrying a grocery bag filled with items. IRENE ignores her daughter and, instead, stares at the television. LUVIE empties the plastic grocery bags, putting away items throughout the house as she speaks. LUVIE moves with aggravated purpose throughout the scene. The following dialogue is awkwardly and aggressively brisk. They talk over one another.)*

LUVIE *(setting down her purse)*. Well, good afternoon.

IRENE. What?

LUVIE. I said afternoon, old woman. Am I intruding on your day or what?

IRENE. Well, no.

*(LUVIE exits to drop off bags and items offstage.)*

LUVIE *(off)*. Then how 'bout a, "Wonderful to see you, daughter," or, "My, don't you look nice," or, "Kiss my foot"?

IRENE. Kiss my foot.

LUVIE (*off*). There we go. Wadn't hard, was it?

IRENE. What?

LUVIE (*off, loudly*). I said, "That wasn't hard, was it?"

IRENE. You just be glad you didn't give birth to a daughter ...

LUVIE (*re-entering*). Oh, really?

IRENE. An ungrateful daughter that barges in mid-nap to call her mother an old woman.

LUVIE. If I had a daughter like me, I assure you I would be damn near grateful, twenty-four-seven ...

IRENE. You'd be apoplectic.

LUVIE. On my ever lovin' knees with gratitude ...

IRENE. Did you get the readers I asked for?

LUVIE. Momma, I swear to God, if you ask for another damn pair of readers ...

IRENE. And a mouth fulla filth, ta boot ...

LUVIE. Swearin' is the least of my goddamn worries ...

IRENE. Your daddy wouldn't have it and neither will I, sister!

LUVIE. If you knew the lengths I go through just to keep you in readers and roses. Here. There just like the other ones.

IRENE. They're blue.

LUVIE. They are gray.

IRENE. I can't wear blue glasses, I'll look like a clown ...

LUVIE. They're gray, Momma.

IRENE. The most ridiculous powder blue color I've ever seen ...

LUVIE. Where the hell are you goin' that you need to look like a style show?

IRENE. Awful robin's egg blue.

LUVIE. Powder or robin's egg, Momma. Make up your damn mind.

IRENE. So, I'm supposed to just die and keel over?

LUVIE. Keel first, die second.

IRENE. Disrespect your whole life. Ever since you were three years old ... three blessed years of age ...

LUVIE. Really? We goin' here again?

IRENE. Spoiled rotten. Nothing was good enough for you.

LUVIE. Forty years ago ...

IRENE. And I told your father not to do it ...

LUVIE. Like a terrier with that damn story.

IRENE. I told him, but he just couldn't help himself.

LUVIE. He was a good man.

IRENE. I MARRIED him, young lady! I know very well what kind of man he was!

LUVIE. OK ... OK ...

IRENE. He was a fine man!

LUVIE. OK!

IRENE. The best kind of man!

LUVIE. Who loved his daughter.

IRENE (*mockingly*). What? And I didn't? I didn't love you?

*(They stare. A silence.)*

IRENE. Did you hear what I said, Luvie?

*(LUVIE attempts to walk away.)*

IRENE (*cont'd*). I am talking to you, young lady!

LUVIE. And I'm forty-five years old, Momma! Hardly a young lady.

IRENE. I KNOW how old you are. I am your mother. And you're young to me and I am speaking here!

LUVIE. So, go ahead and speak. Don't hold back.

IRENE. Well, if you're going to be cruel then you should just go on and go.

LUVIE. Oh, so now I'm cruel. OK.

IRENE. What?

LUVIE. Anything but. You're impossible.

IRENE. What?!

LUVIE. I SAID, "Anything but!"

IRENE. You will not yell in my presence! Not in my house!

*(DOLLY JEAN DANVERS enters.)*

DOLLY. Y'all ladies visiting?

*(LUVIE mouths "Thank you" to DOLLY.)*

IRENE. What's that?

LUVIE. "Are we visiting." Dolly's here, Momma.

IRENE. Who?

LUVIE. Dolly!

DOLLY. Sorry to interrupt.

IRENE. I KNOW who she is, Luvie. I'm not an imbecile.

LUVIE. You just said ...

DOLLY. Sure is a pretty day for it, Miss Irene.

IRENE. Pretty day for what?

DOLLY. For visitin'.

IRENE. I can't see through that window with all the dirt.

Needs a goin' over. I told that girl to bring me a dust rag ...

DOLLY. Now you're just gonna have to let me take care of that, Miss Irene.

IRENE. Stays filthy twenty-four-seven.



DOLLY. 'Cause we sure wouldn't want you to mess up that pretty blouse a-yours. I came in here to ask after dinner? I'm gonna cook us up somethin' good. You want meatloaf or a piece a this here cod?

IRENE. Cod?

LUVIE. Cod, Mother. Like the fish.

IRENE. Cod?

DOLLY. Cod.

LUVIE. Cod.

IRENE. That a white fish?

DOLLY. I believe it is, Miss Irene.

LUVIE. The fish is white.

IRENE. How do you know?

LUVIE. I bought it, Momma.

DOLLY. Looks white to me.

IRENE. Is that the only fish she brought?

DOLLY & LUVIE. Yes.

IRENE. Then, it'll just have to do, won't it?

LUVIE. I can't ... I just ... I can't ...

DOLLY. Well then we'll cook 'er up good then. (*Changing subject.*) Such a pretty blouse today, Miss Irene.

IRENE. Well, I like it.

DOLLY. I'm always tellin' Miss Irene what a great style-sense she's sportin'.

IRENE. She does.

DOLLY. I do. Every day.

IRENE. Every damn day.

DOLLY. I keep sayin' she's gonna have to give me some fashion tips. (*Winks at LUVIE.*)

IRENE. I reckon I could.