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*Dramatic Publishing*

# Ordinary Time

Drama by Thomas W. Rieser

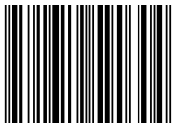


# Ordinary Time

**Drama. By Thomas W. Rieser. Cast: 5w.** When her husband dies, May is alone and needs her family. Although her sons live far away, all three of her sisters live in the same town and agree to gather at May's home once a month for Sunday dinner. Everyone brings something to the table, from green bean casserole to potato salad, from self-righteousness to deep grief. Outspoken Kendra has a stable marriage to John. A somewhat melancholy Vickery married Greg when she was older. Devil-may-care Justine has been married several times and is planning to take the plunge again. Friction develops as the sisters discuss their personal lives, and May explodes with angry sadness about how neglectful her sisters have been to her. Several months later, they gather for their second Sunday dinner. Justine did not get married, May is coping better with her loss, and Kendra is still busy with her life. Vickery faces a turning point in her life. Violet, May's neighbor with whom she has become close friends, has also recently lost her husband, and she joins them for dinner. The dinner table conversation becomes more heated when Justine decides to push back after enduring Kendra's incessant judgments. Reproach, loneliness and bitterness surface, culminating in one of those memorable family arguments that changes the course of personalities and relationships. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes. Code: OA3.*

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By

Thomas W. Rieser



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*Ordinary Time* was premiered at Gallery Theatre, West Chicago, Ill., in October 2013. Directed by Janet Gilleland.

VIOLET ..... GINNY LENNON  
MAY ..... CAROLYN LARSEN  
JUSTINE ..... CAROL TOWNSEND  
KENDRA ..... JENI DEES  
VICKERY ..... MAKHAILA SCOVILLE

The play also recieved a subsequent production by Broadway Bound Productions, Inc., at Canton Theatre, Canton, Ga., from August to September 2014. Directed by Ralph Zaffino.

VIOLET ..... CHARLOTTE DIBBLES  
MAY ..... ANN BURGESS  
JUSTINE ..... LISA FINLAYSON  
KENDRA ..... CHERYL LAMBERT  
VICKERY ..... CHRIS GRASS

# Ordinary Time

## CHARACTERS

**VIOLET “VI” THOMPSON:** A neighbor. Married to Sellman “Dusty” Thompson. She is an active, vibrant 55+, thoughtful African-American woman.

**MAY-BELLE “MAY” (LANGSTON) NICHOLS:** Recently widowed, 60-year-old, reserved woman. Mother of two grown children. She is quiet and understanding. The loss of her dear Ken, her husband of almost 40 years, is evident in her manner and disposition, although she does not display emotion easily. She has three younger sisters. Her birthday is May 1st.

**JUSTINE “JUJU” (LANGSTON) MANCHESTER:** At 48 years old, she is the youngest of the sisters and the most flamboyant, vocal and promiscuous. She has been married several times with each marriage lasting 4 years or less:

Lyle Manchester:	2 years, divorced
Corey Ramsden:	4 years, deceased veteran
Harley Jenkins:	1 year, divorced
Larry “Bud” Sweeney:	3 years, deceased
Denton Manchester:	2 years, divorced
Lonnie “Smokey” Link:	engaged

**KENDRA “KENNY” (LANGSTON) COURT:** Mid- to late 50’s. Married to John Court, the local postmaster. Mother of two college-age boys; a real estate agent; an ardent, righteous Christian woman; outspoken and judgmental.



VICKERY “VIC” (LANGSTON) NEVJIC: A shy woman in her early 50s. Married late, once, to Gregor (Greg) Nevjic. She has no children. There is an indefinable sadness about her. She works in a law office as a private secretary. Greg seems to be her life.

TIME: The present.

JUSTINE. I've known Lonnie a long time, but we got re-acquainted at the Hot Plate. Where else?

KENDRA. Does he know ...

JUSTINE. Yes. He knows all about them.

KENDRA. All five of them?

MAY. He knows about the Manchester boys?

JUSTINE. Yup. Number one and number five. Lyle was the first. I loved him, but he drank. And drank. I couldn't live like that. He got real bad. He was an alcoholic.

MAY. He died.

JUSTINE. Yes. Shortly after the divorce he did die. Got hit by a truck. It was sad. I was on the rebound and met Corey. Lance Corporal Corey Ramsden. What a guy.

KENDRA. He was.

MAY. He was a brave man. (*Finally sits down.*)

JUSTINE. Thanks. He was. He was a lot like your Ken, May. He was kind and considerate. And brave. Probably too brave.

MAY. He's a hero here in town. Always will be.

KENDRA. That's right. John still has his picture up in the post office. Right there by the American flag, framed with the article from *The Sentinel*. I think Corey was the only man to die in Desert Storm from this whole county. John says he was a hero.

MAY. And then there was Harley.

KENDRA. And then there was Harley.

JUSTINE. Oh, yeah. Harley. Can you believe it? Didn't even have to divorce him. He finally told me after he took off with one of his biker-buddies that the minister from the First Church of Holy Celestial Light was not really a minister. He wasn't legal and then neither were we. We weren't really married. That's OK. Goodbye and good riddance.

KENDRA. Was he really a cross-dresser?

MAY. Kendra!

KENDRA. Well, I want to know. I heard rumors. It has never come up in conversation and now just seemed like an appropriate time to ask. (*Beat.*) So, was he?

JUSTINE. I never asked and he never said. But he left soon after I found the size 12, 4E, red patent-leather, open-toed pumps in one of his saddle bags. Holding them in front of his face I calmly asked him if they were his. He said they were. Took them from me and left. Got a nice letter from him several weeks later telling me about the First Church of Holy Celestial Light. (*Beat.*) The envelope smelled real pretty. (*They all laugh.*)

KENDRA. And then Larry happened and we don't need to hear about that again.

JUSTINE (*with fondness*). And now there's Lonnie.

KENDRA. And how many in between?

JUSTINE (*indignantly*). What?

KENDRA. Well, there must have been somebody.

MAY. Honestly, Kendra. That's nobody's business.

KENDRA. I'm just saying there are rumors floating around that you ate supper at the Hot Plate and drank dessert at the VFW. And there's other little tidbits too.

JUSTINE. That's a damned lie, Kendra. Who told you that?

KENDRA. John heard it from Sylvie McMasters at the post office.

JUSTINE. John is as big a gossip as Sylvie is. My God! I went to the VFW once. Once! They were honoring Corey and I went. John should focus on selling stamps and not on spreading lies.

KENDRA. My John does not lie. He only repeats what he hears.

JUSTINE. Even if it is a lie?

KENDRA. Don't be ridiculous. He's the postmaster and he is very responsible.

JUSTINE. If he is so responsible, he wouldn't believe or repeat anything Sylvie McMasters says! I'm going out for a cigarette. (*Exits.*)

KENDRA. I wish she would stop smoking. It is such a dirty habit.

MAY. Spreading lies is a pretty dirty habit too.

KENDRA. I was not spreading lies. I was after the truth and I got it. I'll tell John to tell Sylvie she got it all wrong.

MAY. Just stay out of it. Leave it alone. (*KENDRA sighs.*) Why can't you leave Juju alone? Why do you always have to antagonize her?

KENDRA. Me? She starts it. Always has.

MAY. Now you know that isn't true.

KENDRA. Yes it is. She picks and picks and says the most outrageous things to me. (*Beat.*) I think she is just jealous.

MAY. Jealous?

KENDRA. Yes: jealous. I have a great husband. I have two beautiful boys, both in college, a place she never dreamed of going. I have a good job and I am respected in the community.

MAY. You don't know what her dreams are.

KENDRA (*totally ignoring MAY*). I'm a full-time realtor. Full time. Yes, I am. And I am a full-time member of the Chamber of Commerce. And I make enough selling real estate to send my boys to good schools. At least I did before this recession. It's a little harder now.

MAY. Justine is not jealous of you. She is different than you.

KENDRA. Well, you tell me what she's accomplished in her life. Just list three things.

MAY. Sometimes you are impossible.

KENDRA. I am not. Just tell me what she's done. We were raised to get out there and earn a living.

MAY. She is.

KENDRA. We were taught to better ourselves. How is she better off now than she was 10 years ago?

MAY. She's not. She's working on it. Leave her alone. She's not like us.

KENDRA. Well, the only thing she can pride herself on is that she's had five husbands. Oops. Four and one cross-dresser.

MAY (*infuriated*). Stop it! (*Long pause, regaining composure.*) So, you made the green bean casserole?

KENDRA (*sheepishly*). Sort of.

MAY. Well, what do you mean "sort of?"

KENDRA. I got a quart of it from the deli. (*Emphatically.*) Don't tell Justine. (*Continuing.*) I then fixed it up a little: put a little fried onion in it; some of those capers ...

MAY. Don't you use those french-fried onions?

KENDRA. Yes. Of course.

MAY. And you add more onion?

KENDRA. You can't have too much onion, unlike green pepper. (*Continuing.*) And finally I browned some butter and drizzled it over the top.

MAY. Browned butter? (*Making a face.*)

KENDRA. It'll be fine. I made it before. (*Beat.*) Are we going to eat as soon as Vic gets here?

MAY. I hope so. I can't imagine where she is.

JUSTINE (*entering*). I'm right here.

KENDRA. She didn't mean you. She was talking about ...

JUSTINE. Vic. I know. She just pulled up.

KENDRA. And then you duck inside instead of helping her with anything.

JUSTINE. I wasn't avoiding her. I have to pee. Is that OK with you, Kendra?

KENDRA. Honestly.

JUSTINE. I better go before I wet my pants.

*(MAY and JUSTINE laugh.)*

MAY. By all means. Please. Go.

*(JUSTINE exits.)*

KENDRA. My Lord, she just reeks of smoke. I hate that stink. I bet that stink in her clothes is just as dangerous as second-hand smoke. I think she purposely just blows the smoke right at herself so her clothes reek. *(MAY looks admonishingly at KENDRA.)* Well, she would do that. You know that. And the health risks of smoking are very high. Does she realize how much money she spends on cigarettes? Does she know how much of her money goes up in smoke? *(Deliberately and somewhat staccato.)* Literally: up in smoke? *(Back door slams.)*

VICKERY *(offstage)*. I'm here. Hello!

MAY *(pointedly, yet hushed, to KENDRA)*. It's her money! *(Full voice.)* We're in here.

VICKERY *(enters with three yellow roses)*. Hello. *(Kisses KENDRA and moves to MAY.)* Oh, May. *(Kiss.)* How are you doing? I brought you some roses from my garden.

MAY. They're beautiful. *(Sniffing at the roses.)* So fragrant. *(Pause.)* We had a rosebush at our first house ...

KENDRA. I remember. Right by the front door.

MAY. Yes. Right by the front door. I can remember sitting in the living room, just the two of us, on warm summer nights. The front door was open and the fragrance of roses would gently fill the room. And then Ken would say, he always said the same thing: "Roses smell pretty darn good." *(Laughs a little and tears up.)* They were beautiful roses ... *(Regaining composure.)* and so are these.

VICKERY. I'll get them in some water. I brought the potato salad. It's on the counter. Should I put it in the refrigerator?  
(*Exiting.*)

KENDRA (*calling after VICKERY*). I think we are going to eat right away.

(*JUSTINE enters immediately after VICKERY's exit.*)

JUSTINE. I thought I heard Vic.

MAY. She's in the kitchen. We should start thinking about eating.

JUSTINE. I'm starved. (*Crosses downstage.*)

KENDRA. I've been thinking about it for the past half hour.

MAY. Well then, let's get the food on the table.

KENDRA. I was thinking we would just leave the food in the kitchen and sort of do a buffet style.

MAY. I was hoping for a sit-down Sunday dinner, Kenny.

KENDRA. It's just extra work.

VICKERY (*entering with the vase of roses, placing them on the dinner table*). These will look perfect on the table. A nice Sunday dinner. Remember how mother would always put just a little glass of flowers on the table for our birthdays? (*Laughs.*) And even if she couldn't get real flowers she would put plastic ones in a glass of water. (*All smile, fondly remembering those days.*)

JUSTINE. Hi, Vic.

VICKERY (*crossing down to JUSTINE*). Juju! How are you?  
(*The sisters embrace.*) You lightened your hair.

JUSTINE (*surprised*). You noticed.

KENDRA. Chemicals.

VICKERY. It looks nice.

KENDRA. I guess I'll start bringing in the food.



JUSTINE. I'll help.

KENDRA. What did you bring?

JUSTINE. My charm and sparkling personality. *(Exits.)*

KENDRA. Uh-huh! That's filling. *(To VICKERY and MAY.)* I know I'm fed up with it. *(Exits.)*

VICKERY. Those two just don't stop.

MAY. No.

VICKERY *(moving close to MAY)*. Are you OK?

MAY *(beat)*. Are you OK? *(VICKERY shrugs. MAY puts her hands on VICKERY's shoulders and looks her square in the eye. VICKERY shrugs again.)* Well. I'm doing ... I don't know how I'm doing. My friends say I'm doing well. The boys say, "Mom, you sound great." They both say that, so I think it is a conspiracy. *(Chuckles.)* I guess I'm all right.

JUSTINE. Here's the potato salad. What are we drinking?

KENDRA *(reacts to JUSTINE's question)*. Here are the beans. Do you want me to put the chicken on a platter?

JUSTINE. Or we could just eat it out of the bucket.

MAY *(laughing. VICKERY and JUSTINE laugh also)*. I fried that chicken myself. There's a pitcher of ice water in the refrigerator.

VICKERY. I'll get it.

KENDRA. If I had made that crack about the bucket you would not have thought it funny at all.

JUSTINE. I'm just funny! You're not funny. *(MAY chuckles.)*

KENDRA. That's not funny.

VICKERY *(entering and carrying both the potato salad and the pitcher of water. She sets the pitcher on the table)*. So who is going to say grace?

MAY. I'll get the chicken.

JUSTINE. What did you do to your arm, Vic?

VICKERY. I fell. I was trying to cut some roses and I got tripped up in a bramble and fell into it.

KENDRA. You should keep those trimmed up better.

VICKERY. Yes, I should. But I didn't and I fell and scratched up my arm pretty well. Bruised it too.

JUSTINE. That is a deep scratch.

VICKERY. I know. I'll take care of it. Let's not have so much talk about me. Let's say grace and eat up all of our favorite sister's fried chicken. Who is saying grace?

JUSTINE. I'll say grace.

KENDRA. You? You know any grace?

JUSTINE. Sure do.

MAY (*entering with the chicken and placing it on the table*).  
Who wants to say grace?

*(All sit.)*

KENDRA. Justine says she can.

MAY. Then you say grace, Justine. (*All bow their heads.*)

KENDRA (*under her breath*). This ought to be good.

JUSTINE (*solemnly folds hands, bows head and blurts out*).  
Rub-a-dub-dub. Thanks for the grub. Yay God!

KENDRA. That is disgusting. (*MAY and VICKERY start to laugh, and JUSTINE joins them.*) It is not funny! It's blasphemous!

JUSTINE. I'm funny, Kenny. You can't get around it. I'm funny.

KENDRA. You are not.

JUSTINE. Am too.

KENDRA. You are *not* funny.

*(JUSTINE mouths "Am too.")*

MAY (*abruptly*). Enough. (*Beat.*) I'll say the grace. (*Reverently.*) Dear Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for this time we are spending together. It means a lot to me. It gets a little lonely. I'm glad my sisters are close. I am real thankful for that. And I am thankful they all can cook and made something for the meal. (*KENDRA shoots a mean glance at JUSTINE.*) But it is more important that they are just here. And thank you for this food. May we use it to give us strength and do what you have told us to do: to love each other. In Jesus' name. Amen.

ALL. Amen.