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Dramatic Publishing

WAIT!

A Full-length Play
by
JULIE JENSEN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(WAIT!)

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For David Mong, Mike Dorrell and Mame Hunt.

And for all the homeless people who
found a home in the theatre.

* * * *

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This play owes a debt to the following actors who worked improvisationally with this material: Jeanette Puhich, Marylynn Alldredge, Michael Boswell, Anne Cullimore Decker, Richard Scott, Katherine Atwood and Don Glover, directed by David Mong.

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CAST

Wendy Burger BRENDA SUE COWLEY
Dad MORGAN LUND
Lu MORGAN LUND
Modesto ANNETTE WRIGHT
O Vixen My Vixen ERIN HIATT
Jen-ya. ANNETTE WRIGHT
Hazar MORGAN LUND
Floating Piñata Head ANNETTE WRIGHT

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director KIRSTIE GULICK ROSENFELD
Set Design KEVEN MYHRE
Lighting Design JAMES M. CRAIG
Costume Design BRENDA VEN DER WEIL
Sound Design CYNTHIA L. HEHR
Dramaturg MIKE DORRELL
Production Stage Manager TANNER BROUGHTON
Executive Producers . . ALLEN NEVINS, NANCY BORGENICHT

WAIT!

A Full-length Play

For 1m., 3w., may be expanded to 3m., 5w.

CHARACTERS

WENDY BURGER a woman in her 20s with boots
O VIXEN MY VIXEN a woman in her 20s, a vixen
DAD (Actor I) Wendy's father, in his late 50s
LU (Actor I) a man in his 20s, outrageous
HAZAR (Actor I) a man from Armenia, in his 50s
MODESTO (Actress I) a woman who's been there, in her 50s
JEN-YA (Actress I) a woman from Rumania, 50
FLOATING PINATA HEAD (Actress I) . . a woman of the theatre, 50

PLACE: An old opera house and wherever Wendy says.

TIME: Now and before. Whenever Wendy says.

SETTING: An old theatre, unused for a long time. Old stage paraphernalia is scattered about. Old flats. A wind machine. A pin rail. And an act curtain that rolls down. Within that space the settings are multiple and varied, as is the time, wherever and whenever Wendy says.

PRODUCTION NOTE: Actors who play multiple roles do not change clothes. They merely inhabit the new role on the spot. Various items from the stage junk are pressed into service for chairs, tables, etc.

With regard to the narration, it is intended that if Wendy narrates any piece of stage business, we do not see it. In other words, the verbal text augments what we see; it does not repeat it. Otherwise, the style should be brisk, the stage business efficient.

WAIT!

SCENE ONE

(We are in a theatre. Old stage paraphernalia is scattered about. Old flats. A wind machine. A pin rail. And an act curtain that rolls down. The same space also serves as Wendy's house, her yard, multipurposes, multiplaces. At the point we join the action, WENDY is moving some gunny sacks full of seed.)

(Note: Lines that are underscored are meant to be addressed to the audience.)

WENDY. Anyways, I always wanted to have something to do with the arts. I just never thought it'd be the theatre. It was really my dad's idea. After I quit beauty school. He was real pissed about that.

DAD. What the hell's the matter with you?

WENDY. I don't know, Dad. I just can't hack it.

DAD. Beauty school. The opportunity of a lifetime, and what do you do with it?

WENDY. I been there a whole month, Dad, and I never says a word. Not to nobody. I got the personality of wallboard. That's what he usually says. But this time he don't. Besides that, Dad, I think I'm allergic to the hair spray.

DAD. All right, you can move back in here for a couple of weeks.

WENDY. That's when I get this job driving truck for the UPS. Which is a really good job. Except it makes my dad nuts when he has to tell people what I'm up to. "So what's Wendy up to?"

DAD. Driving truck.

WENDY. Makes him nuts. I tell him, "You say I am a delivery agent. They'll think I'm a stewardess." But he can't say that many syllables in a row. Leastwise, not when he's drunk. So anyways, all this is happening just about the time Lu gets this hair up his butt. He's an old friend from high school. We used to date each other 'cuz no one else would have us. He don't know what to do with hisself since Danton's death. So he decides he is gonna open up the old Opera House.

LU. We will do only the classics in here. It will be my grief work.

WENDY. Hell, Lu, that place is full of bat guano and pigeon shit.

LU. Pull-eez! From now on, we speak only the language of dreams.

WENDY. Well, your dream has been empty since 1928. Storing seed corn for the church farm and old engine blocks from dead hotrods.

LU. We will raise her from the dust of her degradation. We will cause her to speak again!

WENDY. And so it's this thing, this theatre thing, that gets my dad going. And that's a surprise because him and Lu are coyotes and cats. Can't stand each other. But anyways, I come out the house one day on my way down to the theatre. The old man is laying under the front end of a Chevy listening to a ball game.

DAD. Wait up here.

WENDY. Yeah?

DAD. Well, I got this idea.

WENDY. What's that, Dad?

DAD. Why don't you do some acting?

WENDY. Right, Dad. I just humor him along.

DAD. That's what they gonna do down there, ain't it? Put on plays, act away.

WENDY. Yep. That's it.

DAD. So why don't you do some of it? Some of the acting, I mean.

WENDY. Good idea, Dad. I'll do that.

DAD. Help you talk.

WENDY. Right.

DAD. 'Cuz you never talk enough.

WENDY. Nope.

DAD. People could think you're a 'tard.

WENDY. Right, Dad.

DAD. Well, listen up. You wanna hear the real reason?

WENDY. I know the real reason, Dad. You'd a helluvah lot rather say I'm a actress than a truck driver.

DAD. 'Cuz I'd a helluvah lot rather. Yeah.

WENDY. He's looking at me like he's sizing me up. Like I'm an '83 Chevy he's about to buy.

A few months go by. Lu's out and about.

LU. Speaking the language of dreams.

WENDY. And I'm hauling junk. That's always the way it was, he'd get the ideas. I'd do the heavy lifting. And so I forgot all about the acting thing. But not my old man. He is fixed on it. Wants to know what plays they're doing. And what parts I'm trying out for. They're doing *Gilbert the Twelfth*, Dad. I'm making stuff up. I'm going out for the part of Tedelia. I make up a name.

DAD. Who's Tedelia?

WENDY. It's a princess, Dad. She drives truck.

DAD. No, goddammit, I am serious here.

WENDY. She hangs around the kitchen, Dad, and bosses the cooking. Her old man's the king. He fights lotsa battles.

DAD. What's she do besides that? She fall in love?

WENDY. Yeah Dad, she falls in love...with the guy that takes care of the silverware. That really pleases him. You can tell by the way he tightens the nut.

DAD. So what's the name of this guy?

WENDY. What guy, Dad?

DAD. The guy that takes care of the silverware?

WENDY. Gordonion, I say. His name is Gordonion.

DAD. Jesus, that sounds Italian!

WENDY. No, Dad. It's Saxonian. He's the Thane of Saxony. You can tell he thinks "Thane" is a faggoty word. But he don't say nothing. Because "Saxony" gets him. And he is experiencing a growing sense of pride in me.

DAD. Thane of Saxony. That is up there. I mean, this guy is a comer.

WENDY. Yeah, Dad. He's on his way up.

DAD. I'd like to meet him. What I mean is, I think I'd have some things to say to him. You know what I mean?

WENDY. Real good, Dad, I'll bring him over.

DAD. Sure. Bring him on over.

WENDY. And so then after that, I start doing little shows for the old man. Acting out bits. Little bits. Makes it seem like I got things to say. Here, Dad, here's a little show for you.

DAD. All right, all right, but make it quick, I'm on my way to the head.

WENDY. "Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew."

DAD. Huh. That's not bad. Is that what happens?

WENDY. Yeah, Dad, that's what happens.

DAD. His flesh melts?

WENDY. Yeah, Dad, his flesh melts.

DAD. Huh. That's one I wanna see.

WENDY. And he goes into the bathroom, closes the door. Then he's yelling at me from the other side of the door.

DAD. Hey, Wendy.

WENDY. Yeah, Dad.

DAD. Next time you should do one with dancing and singing.

WENDY. Right, Dad. Dancing and singing. *(DAD opens the door. He's holding his pants up.)*

DAD. Because the dancing and the singing. That's the only reason people go to the thee-ater.

WENDY. Yeah, I know, Dad.

DAD. So you ought to do some of that.

WENDY. Right.

DAD. And here's something else.

WENDY. Yeah.

DAD. You ought to do something with bathing beauties in it.

WENDY. That ain't a play, Dad. That's a strip show.

DAD. The hell it is. It's naked bathing beauties. And that is art with a capital A.

WENDY. Right, Dad.

DAD. They got feather headdresses and sparkles all over their body. And that makes a classy show!

WENDY. You know everything, don't you?

DAD. I know plenty.

WENDY. And you learned it all at the Black Cat Lounge.

DAD. That's right. (*DAD goes back in the bathroom again. Door shuts.*)

WENDY. Well, life is going on pretty much as usual. My old man yelling at me from one side of the bathroom door. Me yelling at him from the other. And then one day the old man comes home with this new girlfriend, name of Modesto. (MODESTO enters with a swagger.) She works in the slaughterhouse wrapping meat. And she's got these hands that look like steaks. Permanently red. Permanently swolled up. With her it seems I always got something to say. But the two of us, me and her, we are fire and water.

MODESTO. So, Wendy, let's me and you go out to the beauty parlor. We'll get your hair done up.

WENDY. Gosh darn, Modesto, I just got back from the beauty parlor.

MODESTO. You never seen the inside of no beauty parlor.

WENDY. Once a week, regular as the rising sun.

MODESTO. Which one you go to, Sheila or Red?

WENDY. Neither one. I go out of town. (*MODESTO hisses and turns away.*) That ticks her off. She does a little hiss and turns away like she's a board-certified bobcat. Dad, you gotta watch out for her.

DAD. What I gotta watch for?

WENDY. She's got plans for you.

DAD. Well, good for her.

WENDY. No, Dad. Because she's got the soul of a cat-faced spider.

DAD. Oh, for God's sake...

WENDY. Just then she starts naming all the things she has shot.

MODESTO. I have shot a gopher snake and a forked horn lizard. I have shot two cradle foxes and a stampeding cave marmot. And when I shot the wilderness box chicken and her mother, I was only nine.

WENDY. Dad, you got to be careful of her. But he don't care. He's feeling the fire. Dad, you got to make sure you don't set her off.

DAD. The hell you talking about?

WENDY. Do not tangle with her.

DAD. I like to tangle with her.

WENDY. You tangle with her, you'll lose a limb.

DAD. Lose a few, gain a few. I'm a gambling man.

WENDY. Yep, he's feeling the fire. Dad, you notice she's got a crucifix tattooed on one of her ears?

DAD. Yeah. I noticed that.

WENDY. What you think it means?

DAD. It means...it means she is a God-fearing person.

MODESTO. Wendy, why don't me and you go out for a pedicure?

WENDY. Go out for a what?

MODESTO. A pedicure.

WENDY. Thanks anyway. But mine's already cured.

MODESTO. What I mean is, you need some refinery.

WENDY. Maybe I got all I want.

MODESTO. Well, it ain't enough. *(She lights a cigarette. Blows smoke.)*

WENDY. She's fired up like a pig-iron furnace. Big red hair and big red hands, big red face and big red mouth.

MODESTO. So tell me, Wendy. What you make driving that truck?

WENDY. About what you make wrapping that meat.

MODESTO. You don't make what I make.

WENDY. How do you know I don't?

MODESTO. The slaughterhouse is a union shop.

WENDY. That don't mean wrapping meat is a union job.

MODESTO. All the children think they all know all about everything.

WENDY. Her face is big. Like a colored plate.

DAD. Wendy.

WENDY. Yeah, Dad.

DAD. Well listen here.

WENDY. Right, Dad.

DAD. I want you to get along with her, you understand.

WENDY. Right, Dad.

DAD. Because she is...

WENDY. Yeah, Dad.

DAD. She is...

WENDY. Yeah, Dad.

DAD. She...is...

WENDY. Yeah.

DAD. ...A very beautiful person.

WENDY. But the real reason the old man likes her is that she brings home a sack of meat from the slaughterhouse every night. She peels off a steak. She adds the tip of a roast. A couple of ribs. And she brings it all home in her snake-skin purse at the end of the day. Then she sits at the kitchen table like she's at a casino. Her big red hands dealing out the meat.

MODESTO. This one's too close to the muscle. That's tough. Give it to the dog. This one's a rib. Make a good breakfast with eggs and some cheese. This one's a loin. Sometimes called tenderloin. Fourteen-fifty a pound in

the store. When you can get it. Fry this one up with a few onions and a box of Tater Tots.

WENDY. I take them off, do what she says. While her and my dad is laid out on the couch, their feet propped up on two cases of 10-30 motor oil. They got the TV on 'cuz it's Barbara Stanwyck week. She's threatening people with her long skirt and her tall boots. "Get outa my way, or I'll set fire to this whole spread." She's the woman of the spread.

DAD. I'm in the process of buying a big spread, you know.

MODESTO. Are you now?

DAD. Out on Buckhorn Flat.

MODESTO. Out on the Buckhorn.

DAD. Two thousand five hundred acres of the finest wire-grass meadow.

MODESTO. Two thousand five hundred.

DAD. Gonna raise me some Black Angus cattle.

MODESTO. A man of vision, I see.

DAD. Wave of the future. The Black Angus.

MODESTO. Maybe that's what we have in common. A vision of the future. Beef.

DAD. You can't go wrong. Not with meat.

MODESTO. There's meaning in meat.

WENDY. That there is a meeting of the minds. About then we sit down at the table. Suddenly everything's quiet. No one speaks. Not even Barbara Stanwyck. We're eating and watching, like wild dogs with a kill. Modesto's sitting there, her arms propped up on the table, a bone slipping in and out of her fingers, in and out of her mouth. Could be a bone. Could be a crucifix. No one speaks. It's quiet as snow in here. (Pause.) Well, look here, maybe I'll do a little show for you. (She bows her

head, breathes deep, then looks up.) “O, speak again, bright angel, for thou art as glorious to this night, being o’er my head, as a winged messenger of heaven.”

MODESTO. What’s that?

WENDY. A little show.

MODESTO. What’s she doing?

DAD. That’s acting. She’s doing some acting.

MODESTO. Acting? That ain’t acting. That’s nothing.

DAD. No, that there is acting. That’s what it is.

MODESTO. Look here, I been around. I never seen nothing like that. Now Barbara Stanwyck, that is acting. “Get out of my way, or I’ll wrap this bullwhip around your head.” That is acting.

DAD. Acting is acting. She’s working on her acting.

MODESTO. The hell for?

DAD. She’s gonna be an actress. It’s all in the works. She’s gonna have a new career.

MODESTO. She needs to get her hair done. That’s what she needs. Listen here. You have something to do with that Opera House?

WENDY. I do.

MODESTO. Well, I got something to say about that.

WENDY. Oh yeah?

MODESTO. Yeah. The place is full of nothing but shit. Batshit, birdshit, bullshit.

WENDY. We finish dinner in silence. The silence of the beef. Then later that night Modesto comes up to me. She’s holding my boots in her hand.

MODESTO. Listen up.

WENDY. Yeah.

MODESTO. Well, it’s time.

WENDY. Time for what?

MODESTO. Time to move on.

WENDY. Right. Time to move on.

MODESTO. Time for you to move on. Move on out. Because you're cramping my style.

WENDY. I'm cramping your style.

MODESTO. Because I think I can set your old man on fire.

WENDY. That right?

MODESTO. That's right. With my fancy footwork.

WENDY. With your fancy footwork.

MODESTO. And my fancy handwork. But I gotta have the place to myself.

WENDY. She's fingering my boots with her steak-like hands.

MODESTO. Yeah, I gotta have the place to myself.

WENDY. Then she hands me my boots.

MODESTO. So I think it's time you was on your way. Because in case you didn't know, I got time and meat enough. I can outlast you.

WENDY. And I know she's right. She does have time and meat enough.

MODESTO. Because I'm a woman of meat.

WENDY. And she's right. She is a woman of meat. That same night I have a chat with the old man. Remind him that I don't exactly have a place to go. But he don't say anything. And I know I've lost the battle. So I back the truck up to the front door, load up my boxes, and move on into the UPS truck. You'd be surprised what a nice house you can set up in the back of a UPS truck. And that's where I do my practicing now. That's where I rehearse my audition pieces. Here's one of them: (Bowing her head and repeating the same preparation ritual.)

“When I awoke this morning, I saw the sunshine streaming in. It touched the birches outside my window, and my heart leapt up. I felt a passionate longing to be back home again, in Moscow once again.” Well, what do you think? I got talent? Go ahead, be honest. (Slight pause.) I think the answer is yes.