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# **Bonnie and Claire**

By

BO WILSON

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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BO WILSON

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(BONNIE AND CLAIRE)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-289-6

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“Originally produced by Virginia Repertory Theatre, Richmond, Va.”

*Bonnie and Claire* was originally workshopped by Virginia Repertory Theatre (Nathaniel Shaw, Artistic Director; Bruce Miller, Founding Artistic Director) in February 2020.

CAST:

BONNIE..... Catherine Shaffner  
ZOE .....Meg Carnahan  
CLAIRE .....Jan Guarino

PRODUCTION:

Director .....Steve Perigrard

The play received its world premiere at the Hanover Tavern Stage of Virginia Repertory Theatre (Rick Hammerly, Desiree Roots and Todd D. Norris, Artistic Directors; Bruce Miller, Founding Artistic Director) on May 13, 2022.

CAST:

BONNIE.....Melissa Johnston Price  
ZOE .....Sydnee Graves  
CLAIRE .....Jan Guarino

PRODUCTION:

Director .....Dr. Jan Powell  
Set Design .....Terrie Powers  
Costumes..... Marcia Miller Hailey  
Lights .....Matthew Landwehr  
Sound .....Jacob Mishler  
Stage Manager ..... Joe Pabst  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Amber Hooper

# Bonnie and Claire

## CHARACTERS

**BONNIE:** Begins the play as a woman of 67. She is tough and hard-shelled with an acid humor. She tends to assume that things can and will get worse.

**CLAIRE:** Begins the play as a woman of 62. She is Bonnie's vivacious, exuberant and demonstrative younger sister. She is the half-full to Bonnie's half-empty.

**ZOE:** Begins the play as a young woman of 18. She is Bonnie and Claire's niece, the daughter of their brother. She is highly efficient and relishes new ideas. Unfashionably avid. She doesn't miss much.

**PLACE:** We're in a small mill town, which would feel smaller if it didn't have a university of about 20,000 students. Those who know such towns will be able to imagine its odd amalgam of old businesses and new, student-centered enterprises.

**TIME:** The play and its characters move through about 10 years, from 1990 to 1994 to 1999, and age accordingly:

ZOE's age goes from 18 to 22 to 28

BONNIE's age goes from 67 to 71 to 77

CLAIRE's age goes from 62 to 66 to 72

**PRODUCTION NOTES:** Notes about dialog, the cars/driving and a complete timeline can be found in the back of the book.

This play is for my mother, Rosaline Wilson

# Bonnie and Claire

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(The stage is dark. We hear the sounds of complaint—pained, exasperated.)*

BONNIE'S VOICE. Ow! Careful ...

ZOE'S VOICE. I'm sorry ...

*(Lights up. We can now see that ZOE is helping BONNIE into the back seat of ZOE's car. BONNIE is on crutches and keeps one leg straight.*

*It is spring 1990. BONNIE is 67. ZOE is 18.)*

ZOE. Here, if you—

BONNIE. Good, this is, [hang on—]

ZOE. Yeah, just turn [a little—]

BONNIE. Yes, I just—

ZOE. The other—

BONNIE. I *know*, I'm just [trying—]

ZOE. No, the *other*—

BONNIE. But there's no—

ZOE. Your *other* [other—]

BONNIE. You mean—

ZOE. Right, now I can—

BONNIE. I've got it, I've got it. *(She is in the back seat, sideways, with the one leg up.)* Oh thank god.



ZOE. Hey, where's Aunt Claire?

BONNIE. Taking a bubble bath. At three in the afternoon!

ZOE. I was hoping I could say hi.

BONNIE. What for??

ZOE. She's been back for over a week, and I still haven't seen her.

BONNIE. If we keep moving, your luck might hold, chop chop.

ZOE. Did she know I was picking you up?

BONNIE. I wouldn't hazard a guess about what Claire does or doesn't know.

ZOE. Is she going to worry when she finds you gone? Did you leave her a note?

BONNIE. Claire doesn't worry about anyone but Claire. Can we just go??

ZOE. I'm slowing us down, I'm sorry ...

*(A beat as they get underway.)*

BONNIE. I didn't mean to snap. I'm grateful to you for doing this.

ZOE. It's like I said, Aunt Bonnie, you can call me anytime  
[you need anything—]

BONNIE. I hate not being able to do for myself. I hate being looked at like some sort of invalid. And I hate all the questions people ask.

ZOE. You mean like, "Oh nooooo, what did you do to your leg?"

BONNIE. Exactly like those. How is it their business?

ZOE. Because people like to show you they're concerned?

BONNIE. What people like is when they see bad luck hit someone who isn't *them*.

ZOE. Hm.

BONNIE. Yes indeed.

ZOE. You said the post office.

BONNIE. Yes, please.

ZOE. Eleven minutes. Plus or minus two minutes.

BONNIE. If you say so. How's Charles?

ZOE. Cha—oh, ha! Sorry, Daddy, yes, he's, um, fine?

BONNIE. He doesn't care for me and Claire, you know.

ZOE. Oh, well, he ...

BONNIE. Doesn't care for us. Never has, not even when he was little.

ZOE. When I try to imagine him as a kid, nothing comes to me.

BONNIE. He was never a kid. He was the world's first fifty-two-year-old baby.

ZOE. So he was always ...

BONNIE. Serious. Cranky. Scornful. Yes.

ZOE. He said to give you his love.

BONNIE. He did not.

ZOE (*caught*). Well ...

BONNIE. He doesn't care for us. (*She notices their route.*)  
You don't want to take Primrose?

ZOE. The daycare jams things up at this time of day. We'd lose time. Also, Daddy does care for you, he's just terrible at feelings. How come Aunt Claire doesn't have a driver's license?

BONNIE. She's too fancy to drive a car.

ZOE. Oh! *That's* interesting. What does it mean?

BONNIE (*adopting a voice that is smiling and condescending*).  
“Oh, Bonnie, *no one* drives in the city.”

ZOE. Do you think that's true?

BONNIE. No one drives in the city—you never *see* a picture of the place when it isn't *jammed* with cars! (*Doing the voice again.*) “Oh, *darling*, that's taxis and delivery trucks and bridge and tunnel. No one who *lives* here drives.”

ZOE. I've read they have terrific public transportation.

BONNIE. As if she'd ever set foot on a subway! And the *bus*?

Please. In her mind, a bus is just a slum on wheels. She wouldn't want anyone to rub up against her diamonds and furs.

ZOE. Oh! She has diamonds and furs?

BONNIE. No, but she *behaves* like she does! "The city." As if there were no other cities.

*(BONNIE shifts a bit and winces, hissing in pain.)*

ZOE. You OK back there?

BONNIE. It's just pain. It'll pass.

ZOE. Should I slow down?

BONNIE. You're fine. You know what hurts the most?

ZOE. Your pride?

BONNIE. No, my—wait, my *pride*? Why should my pride hurt?

ZOE. I don't think it should.

BONNIE. Then why would it?

ZOE. Some people are embarrassed when they take a tumble.

BONNIE. It was a wet floor—Fred *Astaire* would have fallen on that floor.

ZOE. I've heard dancers are actually very clumsy.

BONNIE. It wasn't clumsiness, it was a clerk who forgot to put up those signs they have.

ZOE. Some people sue when that happens.

BONNIE. Please. That's what's wrong with the world.

Nobody believes in accidents anymore. They're paying for the doctor, that's good enough for me.

ZOE. I wonder if they're relieved about that ...

BONNIE. Zat what your dad said? He was on the phone to me so fast I couldn't believe it. And he never calls. He doesn't care for us.

*(ZOE might try to protest this, but BONNIE continues.)*

BONNIE *(cont'd)*. I thought someone must have died, but all he wanted was to talk about the accident and damages and liability. I told him no thank you. Too many lawsuits already. Too many lawyers. You know what you call a hundred lawyers at the bottom of the ocean?

ZOE. [Hundred lawy—]

BONNIE. A *start*. Turn right up here.

ZOE. Yes. Are you glad the floor was wet?

BONNIE. Am I what?

ZOE. I mean, are you glad there was a reason you fell?

BONNIE. Who falls for no reason??

ZOE. Starting over—our neighbor, Mrs. Nesbit, was out walking last month and she just ... fell. There wasn't any ice or anything in her way, she just ... fell. She broke her hip. Which is bad.

BONNIE. It certainly isn't good.

ZOE. But the thing that upset her, when she talked about it? She couldn't really explain it. She just ...

BONNIE. Fell. Yes. Well I'm not at the random-falling-down stage of my life yet.

ZOE. Oh! I forgot, I'm sorry!

BONNIE. About ... ?

ZOE. You were going to tell me what hurts the most.

*(BONNIE is puzzled.)*

ZOE *(cont'd)*. About your leg?

BONNIE. I was?

ZOE. You asked, "You know what hurts the most?" I asked, "Your pride?" Then you said—

BONNIE. Got it, OK, right, well, that's the thing, it's not the leg at all. It's my armpits.

ZOE. Hm. Oh! The crutches!

BONNIE. It's 1990! We can put laser guns in outer space, but we can't invent a crutch that doesn't hurt?

ZOE. I don't understand why you have to do much moving around though.

BONNIE. Why not?

ZOE. Doesn't Aunt Claire help out, you shouldn't [have to—]

BONNIE. Please.

ZOE. She won't help??

BONNIE. Oh, it's not a direct refusal, no. She just makes sure she's *terrible* at helping. "Would you like me to bring you some breakfast?" "Well, I wouldn't mind a poached egg." Then a minute later, she's back. "*Darling*, where do you keep your pans?" Then a minute later she's back again, "Don't you have any kosher salt?" I tell her Episcopalians don't *need* kosher salt." Then it's "Bonnie, you know that Wonder Bread is mostly sugar and *air*," and you know what, fine, I'll just do it myself.

ZOE. You think she's being strategic.

BONNIE. I think she's being *fiendish*.

ZOE. They say it's hard to live with people.

BONNIE. It's hard to live with *her*. Listen, I took care of my folks until their dying days, and that was easy as *pie* compared to living with Claire. Everything's an *issue*. Even little things, like, the day she got here, just before I fell, I took us out so she could pick up a few things? And she had to sit in the *back*. Like it's a *limo*.

ZOE. That seems ...

BONNIE. Stuck up? I know. She *says* that it frightens her to sit up front. "Everything comes so quickly!" she says.

ZOE. That's interesting. If all she knows is taxis, if she's never even *driven* a car—

BONNIE. Can you *imagine*?

ZOE. I'm trying ...

BONNIE. I mean, I *hate* being back here, if I didn't have to keep my leg elevated ...

ZOE. I don't even really *know* her. I've really only ever spent time with her once, when show choir went to New York and I got to stay overnight at her apartment, and she just seemed really ... cool.

BONNIE. I know. Everybody loves Claire.

ZOE. She must be easy to love.

BONNIE. And I'm not?

ZOE (*thank goodness!*). We're here! What do you need?

BONNIE. I got one of those slips that says they're holding a package.

ZOE. I'll run and get it then.

BONNIE. Oh don't be silly, I can—

ZOE. If I go, it's quick. If you go, I come around and help you out. Then I get your crutches. Then we get you and your crutches arranged for walking. Then we get to the doors, [that's a whole 'nother—]

BONNIE. Fine.

ZOE. If I go, you can rest [for a minute.]

BONNIE. I said fine. Could you put the window down here first? I can't find the handle ...

ZOE. It's electric, here.

BONNIE. Faannncyyy ...

ZOE (*hayseed voice*). Why, they reckon the whole *town's* gonna have 'lectricity by summer!!

*(BONNIE is mystified and doesn't care for it)*

ZOE *(cont'd)*. That's, uh, I was— *(She surrenders to the urge to flee.)* I'll be right back.

*(ZOE exits.)*

BONNIE looks around.

*She is spotted by someone she knows, and she maybe tries to duck away or hide, but she's been spotted, so she puts on a biiiig smile. It is harder to maintain at some moments than at others, but it never falters.)*

BONNIE. Oh hello Roberta!

Oh yes, I'm fine, you're so sweet to ask.

Oh, yes, she's still here. She's here to stay. No more show business ...

Oh, no, she's doing fine.

Oh, it was, *such* a shame, she loved him very much ...

Well, he wasn't *so* young.

No, he was seven, maybe eight years older than Claire?

And she's no spring chicken herself!

Oh, no, she's hasn't done any television in *forever*, and even then it was only a few ... oh do you?

That is so sweet. I will absolutely pass that on, yes ma'am.

No, that's fine, I know how busy you are, thank you for saying hello!

*(Now to herself.)* Has she done any TV lately, for the love of god, she's not Angie Dickinson! *(She sees ZOE coming.)*

Oh good.

ZOE *(climbing in with a parcel and handing it back to BONNIE as she gets in)*. Your package is marked "Fragile" all over it, I tried to inspect it before I accepted it from the man, [but it was—]

BONNIE. Did you open it?

ZOE. No!

BONNIE. OK.

ZOE. What kind of person would open a someone else's package?

BONNIE. All right ...

ZOE. Where can I take you next?

BONNIE. I need to get to People's Drug.

ZOE. Six minutes.

BONNIE. I'm supposed to soak this thing in Epsom salts ...

ZOE. Your package??

BONNIE. My *ankle!*

*(ZOE pulls out. After a beat, BONNIE confides.)*

BONNIE *(cont'd)*. I used to open everyone's Christmas presents way before Christmas.

ZOE. You did not!

BONNIE. Well, not everyone's. Only my own and Claire's.  
And your father's. We should take Branchway.

ZOE. It adds two minutes.

BONNIE. I like it.

ZOE. OK.

*(Quick beat.)*

ZOE *(cont'd)*. Tell me more about the presents? Please?

BONNIE. You have to be very careful. I used a razor, right along the edges, and I always re-taped. It was a work of art. You'd've been impressed.

ZOE. There *is* something very secret-agenty about it. Was it because you couldn't wait to see?



BONNIE. Hardly. Christmas was my annual lesson in the fact that how hard you hope for something doesn't matter. I never got anything I wanted, OK? And I am *not* an actress, phony-fakey voices and faces are Claire's department, so when I opened something I didn't want? It showed. And people would be mad at *me* for not seeming more overjoyed about the wool socks or the ugly hat or whatever. Meanwhile, everyone else always got all this great stuff, and I'd be jealous, and that showed too. So, all morning long, over and over again, it was "Oh Bonnie, cheer up, it's *Christmas!*" So I figured it would be better to find out everything ahead of time so that on Christmas morning ...

ZOE. You could be a *little* phony-fakey.

BONNIE. Yes, because I'd had time. Claire can do it on command, on instinct. *I* needed the chance to get ready. When I know what's coming, I can be however you need me to be.

ZOE. That sounds like you were doing something wonderful.

BONNIE. Does it?

ZOE. You were making sure that you could give them the Christmas morning they wanted. That was your present. To them.

BONNIE. You are a very perceptive girl.

ZOE. But I would never open your package.

BONNIE. I know.

ZOE. But I *am* curious. Especially because it's so fragile.

BONNIE. It's a new Clayfisher.

ZOE. I don't ... [know ... ]

BONNIE. Oooh, he's an artist, Lawrence Clayfisher, he does ceramic figures?

ZOE. Like those Bumbles?

BONNIE. Hummels, and no, not like those, these are *much* better. He started out doing people fishing, and he called them Clayfishers, I have quite a few of them, you've seen them [on the sideboard ... ]

ZOE. Oh! In your front room, yes!

BONNIE. Yes.

ZOE. Wait. They're not fishing.

BONNIE. Oh, no, not all of them, not anymore. His fishing figures were when he started but when he became popular he had to expand. He started making larger scenes that could go *around* the people fishing. Maybe there'd be one of a little boy fishing with a bamboo pole, so he would make one of the boy's dog, watching him. Then, maybe two or three more to be the boy's family, sitting around a picnic basket hoping he'll catch lunch. He must have over a hundred now, I can barely keep up.

ZOE. What's that one you just got?

BONNIE. I think this is one of the Mama Fishers. She's got one hand cupped to her mouth, like she's calling everyone home.

ZOE. Let's see! (*Count an awkward two or three.*) Oh! I'm sorry—it's like Christmas, you don't want me to see if you're disappointed.

BONNIE. No, it's not that. This is something I know I'll like.

ZOE. Well then ...

BONNIE. I like to save them. For the right time. It's nice to have a couple of smiles saved up. For when you *need* one.

ZOE. I understand that.

(*Count three.*)

BONNIE. Of course, a quick peek couldn't hurt. Keep your eyes on the road.

(*BONNIE carefully opens just a bit of the package. We can't see what's in it ... but we can see her face, which positively beams with pleasure and something like a moment's relief.*)

ZOE adjusts her rear-view mirror to peek.

(Without looking up, BONNIE murmurs.)

BONNIE (*cont'd*). Eyes on the road.

(ZOE restores the mirror; smiling.)

ZOE. Yes ma'am.

(Lights fade.)

## Scene 2

(It's a couple of weeks later. Lights up in a small area on CLAIRE, who is 62 years old. She is wearing sunglasses and a silk scarf arranged in a manner that's impossibly chic. She's speaking to an unseen neighbor whose hearing is, at best, selective.)

CLAIRE. Hello, Mrs. Gentry! How are you this lovely morning?

No, no, how *are* you?

Oh, that's *splendid*, darling, I am *so* glad to hear—

No, splendid.

*Splen-did.*

No, darling, no one *did* anything. I'm saying: I'm. Glad.

You're. Well!

Oh, just a quick nip into town. I'm waiting for Zoe to come and get me.

ZOE.

What a *sweet* thing to say. I'll be *sure* to tell her; she'll be flattered all to pieces—

No, darling, I said I'll *tell* her.

I'm sure she'll—oh, I see, walking away—we're done.

OK, ciao!

What'll she think "ciao" was?

## PRODUCTION NOTES

**DIALOGUE:** These are assertive people who know one another well; any dialogue in brackets may be stepped on or spoken over. There are also a few times when the script provides a phrase of italicized thought in parentheses prior to the spoken dialogue. This is intended as a hint from a playwright who doesn't trust adverbs as acting notes.

**THE CARS AND DRIVING:** This play can be staged with four matching chairs and/or two matching benches. When the text refers to a part of the car in quotation marks, it is meant to indicate that this is imaginary (e.g., she taps on the “window.”)

In keeping with this simplicity, there are some delicate decisions to be made regarding how realistic you'd like to be. It's entirely possible that certain sounds—car doors shutting, engines starting, passing traffic—would be entertaining and help to fill in the illusion of the car. But it's also possible to forego many such temptations, relying almost entirely upon the skills of the actors and the imaginations of the audience. Our goal should instead be a subtle specificity that gradually allows us to forget that there's no car there at all.

It is up to the producer to navigate these decisions. There are a few outright necessities—the sound of a car horn for the angry driver, the sound of a siren and a simple way/place to “plug in” the phone cord—but this play is intended as a simple presentation of complicated people. The simpler, the better.

As for the route taken by the sisters that puts them in Cleveland: the author has taken some liberties, and the play isn't set in a particular, real place ... but there is an actual area, so for those who like to look at maps, here are a few way-points:

The ladies approach Akron from the northeast, traveling southwest on state route 261. They then take I-77 north into Akron, but their arguments (and the police) cause Bonnie to miss her exit. By the time the police pass their car, they're well north of Akron. When they decide to exit and ask for directions, the exit they take is onto Valley View Road, headed west. Valley View becomes Canal. Bonnie's line about things "looking like a city" is around where Canal crosses Rockside.

**TIMELINE:** This timeline has been drafted to help the performers locate themselves in time for both the play and for those periods not covered by the play. It will also be of use to designers.

- 1923 or '24: Bonnie is born.
- 1928 or '29: Claire is born (five years after Bonnie).
- 1934 or '35: Charles Junior is born, perhaps an unplanned additional mouth to feed during the Depression.
- 1945: Claire has just turned 16, quits high school and goes to New York with an opportunity to join a USO show. Shortly after she arrives, the war ends.
- 1972: Zoe is born. Charles is a little late to fatherhood due to law school/practice.
- 1987: Zoe visits New York as a freshman or sophomore with her high-school show choir.
- 1989: Claire's husband Johnny dies.
- 1990: Spring. (I.1) Zoe is 18. Bonnie is 67. Claire is 62 and has been back in Ohio for eight or nine days. (I.2) A couple of weeks later.
- 1994: (I.3) April. Zoe is 22. Bonnie is 71. Claire is 66. (I.4) September.
- 1999 (I.5; II.1-3) October. Zoe is 27-28. Bonnie is 77. Claire is 71.