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Dramatic Publishing



FAMILIAR

By
KIRSTEN GREENIDGE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(FAMILIAR)

ISBN: 1-58342-175-0

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Familiar was first presented as a workshop at the Iowa Festival of New Work at the University of Iowa on May 2, 2001 (Alan MacVey, department head; Art Borecca, head of playwright and dramaturgy). The play was directed and sound designed by Kristin Horton; it received dramaturgical guidance from Tom Gibbons; the set was designed by Janet Peterson; the lighting design was by Kirsten Johnson; it was stage managed by Josh Zeman and advised by Alan MacVey. The cast was as follows:

Jill	AMY OLSON
Archibald	SCOTT ARNOLD
Maya	PAULA GRADY
Lane	CHARMAINE CROOK
Paul	NEIL CAMPBELL

FAMILIAR

A Full-length Play
For 2 Men and 3 Women

CHARACTERS

ARCHIBALD mid-twenties
JILL his older sister, mid-twenties
MAYA their mother, mid-twenties
LANE a cashier at their clam shack, mid-twenties
PAUL a lifeguard, mid-twenties

SETTING: Martha's Vineyard.

TIME: The present.

NOTE: Although race is not an integral part of the story that this play tells, I feel that it is important to note that the family depicted in Familiar was originally conceived as being African American.

Prologue

The Apartment.

(Darkness. The sound of three door locks clicking “open” one at a time.

Lights up on ARCHIBALD at the door to the apartment. He waits, looks out the peep-hole, goes to a mirror that hangs on the wall nearby, looks into it, smooths the sides of his baseball cap against his head and finally tugs on the bill. He does this two more times. He carefully locks each lock “closed” again. He stares at the door. He sits in his armchair.

JILL crosses to ARCHIBALD, stands behind him, and places her chin on the top of his head. She cups ARCHIBALD’s chin with her hands and massages the sides of ARCHIBALD’s neck as one would an animal’s.)

ARCHIBALD. I get, like, stuck, so easy, you know?
(Beat.)

JILL. I know.

ARCHIBALD. I try not to.

JILL. Not hard enough, I guess.

ARCHIBALD. Not hard enough at all. *(Beat.)* But. *(Beat.)*
If I had nine lives, right? I’d have eight left over. Eight would be extra. In one of those eight, maybe I wouldn’t be stuck. I could go anywhere I wanted during that eighth extra one.

(JILL whispers into ARCHIBALD's ear. ARCHIBALD's body slumps. JILL sits, snaps her fingers. ARCHIBALD is revived. JILL mimes removing a baseball cap from her head. ARCHIBALD removes his baseball cap, rises, walks to the door. Bessie Smith's "Carless Love Blues" is heard. ARCHIBALD stands at the door until JILL extends her arm and turns her hand as if she is turning a doorknob. As she does, ARCHIBALD turns the knob of the door and exits. The song continues.)

On the Beach.

(Bessie Smith still plays. Lights up on a hole dug in the sand. Smoke rises from the hole.)

The Apartment.

(Darkness. The sound of three door locks clicking "open" one at a time.

Lights up on ARCHIBALD at the door to the apartment. He waits, looks out the peephole, goes to a mirror that hangs on the wall nearby, looks into it, smooths the sides of his baseball cap against his head and finally tugs on the bill. He does this two more times. He carefully locks each lock "closed" again. He stares at the door. He sits in his armchair.

JILL crosses to ARCHIBALD, stands behind him, and places her chin on the top of his head. She cups ARCHIBALD's chin with her hands and massages the sides of ARCHIBALD's neck as one would an animal's.)

ARCHIBALD. I get stuck so easy, you know?

JILL. I know.

ARCHIBALD. You, um, you um...you don't want to go out?

JILL. No.

ARCHIBALD. 'Cause, you know, like, I...I want to go out. Very much: I do. *(Beat.)* We used to go out a lot more. Remember: you as me; me roaming around. So... like I miss that, you know? 'cause I really dug that—

JILL. Tough.

ARCHIBALD. I guess I gotta stay here.

JILL. Yeah.

ARCHIBALD. 'Til you say.

JILL. 'Til I say. So?

ARCHIBALD. Nothing.

JILL. Nothing?

ARCHIBALD. It's just that, well, you get to go to the clam shack and I don't get to go anywhere at all.

JILL. Who's stopping you?

ARCHIBALD. I'd like to at least be able to go to the clam shack.

JILL. You do.

ARCHIBALD. Not alone. I'd like to be able to go because it's summer.

JILL. Not yet. It isn't.

ARCHIBALD. Almost.

JILL. Who cares? Not me.

ARCHIBALD. The new girls, the Louises, they come in the summer. You hire them. They shine. The sun beats down on them and their skin glows. Beads of sweat sometimes even run down their ankles, collects in a pool

right above their heels. They're glossy, those Louises.
(Slight pause.) It's been a lonely winter.
JILL. You've had me.
ARCHIBALD. It's been a sad, sad spring.
JILL. You've had me all to yourself.
ARCHIBALD. You want to keep me away from those new girls, from all those Louises. They might like me.
JILL. They might not.
ARCHIBALD. Might: it's possible.
JILL. Not: I'm sure.
ARCHIBALD. But they're coming. They always do. You'll hire some and maybe—
JILL. I'm very picky. I might not choose to hire anyone at all. *(JILL exits via the door. ARCHIBALD is left. He frantically repeats his ritual: he waits, looks out the peephole, then goes to a mirror that hangs on the wall nearby, looks into it and smooths the sides of his cap against his head and tugs on the bill. He does this two more times. He locks each lock "closed" again and crumbles.)*
ARCHIBALD. Out. Out. Out. *(Stillness. ARCHIBALD folds into himself.)* Out, out, out, out, out, out.

SCENE 1

A picnic table outside Fred's Clam Shack.

Monday morning.

(JILL and LANE sit at the table. JILL smokes, exhales in LANE's face. LANE doesn't move. JILL smiles.)

JILL. Okay, so: you're hired.

LANE. Don't you want Fred to meet me first?

JILL. What do you mean, “Fred”?

LANE. Your sign says this is Fred’s clam shack.

JILL. Fred’s dead, so Fred doesn’t matter.

LANE. Don’t you want to ask me questions about myself?

JILL. You can add?

LANE. Um, yes—

JILL. Subtract?

LANE. Well, of course.

JILL. Exactly. Now: the new girls usually stay upstairs.
You can too.

LANE. Oh: I need lots of light. I like to be reminded of the sky. I like to be able to look out and remember that I’m part of something that’s very big. I keep my equilibrium that way. So anywhere I stay I have to make sure that there’s enough light. I’ll go plum crazy if I’m trapped with no sky.

JILL. You talk a lot.

LANE. People say that but I don’t think they mean it. I actually think I hold a lot in.

JILL. I meant it. *(She exhales in LANE’s face. LANE coughs.)* You want a room or not?

LANE. Is there lots of light?

JILL. I don’t have to hire you.

LANE. I have to live here to work here?

JILL. All the new girls live here.

LANE. Like a big family.

JILL. No. Not like that at all. Well?

LANE *(thinks)*. Yes, please, I want a room. *(JILL writes.)*
This is kind of...this is all very romantic. Very Jennifer Grey/*Dirty Dancing*. We all work together and live together. They had great parties in *Dirty Dancing*. Music and watermelons. All after hours. All without the rich

people nagging them all the time. Hey, I'll have a limbo party. How's that? With barbecued chicken and wedges of pineapple. Do you limbo?

JILL. No. I don't limbo. Rent comes out of your pay at the end of the week.

LANE. I could teach you.

JILL. No, thanks.

LANE. It's no trouble.

JILL. Really: *No*.

LANE. This is a nice place, this restaurant. Right by the water.

JILL. It's not a restaurant: it's a clam shack.

LANE. A "clam shack." Is it yours?

JILL. Don't feel you have to chitchat. I'm not into that kind of stuff. You can start this afternoon.

LANE. It's really true? I'm really hired?

JILL. I just said so, didn't I?

LANE. I'm hired. I'm hired: Oh, oh thank you. Oh, oh my goodness. *(She goes to hug JILL. JILL does not complete the gesture.)*

JILL. You don't have to touch me. *(She hands LANE a name tag. LANE looks at the tag, then hands it back.)*

LANE. This is a mistake. My name's not Louise. This tag says Louise and that's not me.

JILL. Have you worked in this clam shack before?

LANE. No.

JILL. No, because you're new: a new girl.

LANE. A "new" new girl.

JILL. You could work here for the next five years and you'd still be a new girl and you'd still wear this tag that identifies you as Louise. All you new girls are Louise. You could have varicose veins and eleven kids and

psychic friends on your speed dial and you'd still be Louise. That's part of the deal. It comes with the room and the job. But if you don't *want* the job...

LANE. I want the job. Really, I do.

JILL. So wear the tag and mind your P's and Q's.

LANE. I will. I promise I'll be very respectful of your clam shack.

JILL. It's not mine, it's my mother's. She comes around every so often. When she does you don't have to do anything special for her. She can fend for herself.

LANE. What's her name, so I can be polite.

JILL. Mrs. Frisby.

LANE. Like the movie *The Secret of Nimh*. Like the book *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of—*

JILL. I am not a rat of Nimh and there is no secret of anything here. Really, you don't need to slobber all over my mother because it's me who does everything around here. I'm the one that matters. All she does is walk around.

LANE. Mrs. Frisby.

JILL. Right.

LANE. But you are not a rat. (*LANE holds up her arms like Richard Nixon:*) "You are not a rat. You are not a rat." (*LANE laughs. JILL does not. LANE stops laughing.*)

JILL. So: that's everything. You can add, subtract, you have a room and you don't have to chitchat with me or my mother.

LANE. I'm going to love it here. I know it. I can feel the excitement between my toes. And I'm a good worker, a hard worker.

JILL. There is *one* more thing. It's about my brother. He's not so good with people. So stay away from him.

LANE. What's wrong with him? Is he sick?

JILL. No.

LANE. Is he (*whispers*) "funny"?

JILL. He's not funny, either. I already told you: he has trouble with people. If you see him and he bothers you—

LANE (*figuring it out*). The other "Louises" don't like him because...because maybe they're...they're afraid of him. So afraid, in fact, that when he strolls by...by under the broiling hot Cape Cod sun—

JILL. This is Martha's Vineyard and he doesn't leave the house.

LANE. When he strolls by with his clothes and skin drenched by the smell of heavy, salty, ocean air with drops of briny water slipping down to his ankles—

JILL. Are you a crazy? I can't hire you if you've just escaped from someplace and are supposed to be locked up.

LANE. I'm not supposed to be locked up.

JILL. Good. Because: we're very careful about Archibald.

LANE. *Archibald. (Beaming:)* That's your brother. (*As if she is picturing the name in lights:)* Archibald: I'll bet he's lovely.

JILL. If lovely is watching "Sportscenter" on ESPN twenty-four-seven, then he's downright divine.

LANE. Heavenly, I'll bet.

JILL. He'll be very easy to ignore. Trust me. I know my brother very well and it's easy to go around pretending he doesn't exist.

LANE. Oh. Well, no matter. Because: I am not talking about the parts of Archibald you know.

JILL. I know all the parts of Archibald.

LANE. I am not talking about his exposed self; his physical self. I am talking about Archibald's metaphysical self.

JILL. Really.

LANE. I can sense it. That self is the one your Louises cannot see. I sense that self, Archibald's self, is...it's...
(She looks up into the sky and concentrates. She loses herself. JILL smokes; stares.) Um. And. And: oh gracious, where am I? Where was I?

JILL. My brother Archibald is aching and ailing. According to you, someone he's never even met.

LANE. Oh, we've met.

JILL. When?

LANE. In the clouds.

JILL. In the clouds?

LANE. We've all met in the clouds. We all know each other extremely well in the clouds where we all started once; where parts of us still cling together in a delicate mass. *(Beat.)* I was remembering him just now, as a matter of fact. *(She breathes in. Looks up into the sky. She smiles.)* I can see him. I can see you. Too.

JILL. Oh yeah? What am I wearing?

LANE. Your cloudy self is wearing...rose. *(Slight pause.)*
Um. No. Not rose: I'm mistaken. Roses. Clumps of them arranged all around your body. But your skin shows in parts. And those parts are cold. You shiver those parts are so cold.

JILL. What's my brother wearing?

LANE. He's whistling.

JILL. He's naked?

LANE. I can't see that far. I can only hear him whistling.

JILL. He doesn't know how.

LANE. Up there he does. So obviously when he first began he did. I know it's him. Even though he's way far away. But you aren't. I can almost touch you. *(She opens her eyes, blinks, sighs:)* Well. I'm back now. I'm back from the clouds and I'm gathered together: yes and yes. *(Beat.)* I let my mind float up so it can see every angle and take its rest on a cloud where we all began in the first place: I say to myself, when I want to make sure my self is behaving in as cloudy a way as possible: *(She cups her hands around her mouth and yells as if she is yelling across a great distance.)* Rest on the clouds. Rest on those clouds. *(LANE holds up her arm as if pledging an oath:)* I will be very nice to your brother. I will be so nice part of him will even remember me from the clouds. You can count on that. It's a promise. Now: what else should I know before I start?

JILL. Nothing.

LANE. And my room's upstairs?

JILL. No, it definitely is *not*.

LANE. I don't under—

JILL. This isn't going to work out.

LANE. Why not?

JILL. We already have one wacko here and that's my brother. We don't need another one.

LANE. I'm not a wacko.

JILL. You might rub off on him and then he'd be even more messed up.

LANE. I can add. And I can subtract and I'm very polite. I'm so polite: when your mother comes around I'll smile at her so much my cheeks will fall off—