

BETWIXT

A DECONSTRUCTED FARCE
IN 2 ACTS

Written by

L. A. BROOKE

Synopsis-

“ A rift appears between the writer and his imagination as one character decides to get a word in edgewise and explore the other side of the universe.

Over all the play deals with the rules that govern the duality of humanity, masculine and feminine, tangible and intangible finding out what it takes to make things real.”

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CHARACTER LIST AND NOTES-

PLEASE NOTE: All of the characters, except for MAUDE and the WRITER, are slightly heightened in keeping with the early 1950's film style. The basic premise is that the characters act like actors might in a rehearsal situation, only these are characters from the writer's imagination. As the play progresses, the worlds merge and imagined characters take on a realer hue.

The Writer(Benjamin) - Awkward, honest, bookish, intelligent if not wise, earnest in his desires if not always successful. He is frustrated by the question that frustrates most of us- Why won't the world go my way?

Maude-The secret muse. She is real, independent, and out of place in this stylized fantasy. She is too real to be anything but a character part, too human to be a cliché.

June The epitome of the perfect leading lady. She is sure that justice wins in the end and that she is Justice. She relies on the comforts of her role, ignoring the still silent voice that longs for more.

Vera-- the gossip. She is the dry, sarcastic commentator who loves telling tales . Life is an observational sport for her but underneath her caustic facade, she's never really dared to play the game.

Cynthia- is the innocent one, hopeful, upbeat, high energy, eager to please. She is begging to be noticed, struggling to make things right but never sure she has.

Tallulah- the villainess. All ego, a toddler with tits. She wants what she wants when she wants it. She is a tramp with dreams of glory as blind to her true desires as she is beautiful.

The Duchess- is the Deus Ex Machina, Muse emeritus, a Diva past her prime, used to the spotlight, unused to the sidelines but wise enough to find a way to make it work.

Lou Anne- is the salt of the earth. She's a pioneer woman used to fixing things and finding a little gold for herself when the writer isn't looking.

Jason/The waiter/stagehand/Cody- Jason's a bully. The waiter is an actor looking for a break. The stagehand doesn't care. He's a union man. Cody is beefcake but honest beefcake.

NOTE ON **The SET-** Most of the set is a projection as much imagination as reality. ACT ONE will require an office cubicle open to the audience. Stage needs only furnishings and the illusion of place for each scene. ACT TWO, 2 sets -Motel corridor - 3 practical doors. The Dude ranch- barn SR with practical barn door and loft window, Hay pile, Porch with rocker and practical door. The ranch should have a sign or the projection of a sign, clearly readable. Saying "LONELY STAR DUDE RANCH MAKING DIVORCE A PLEASURE SINCE 1929" and "NO MEN ALLOWED"

The TIME- divided between the present day reality of the writer's cubicle and the early 1950's film style reality of the play.

BETWIXT

A DECONSTRUCTED FARCE IN TWO ACTS

ACT 1 SCENE 1 THE HAPPY SCENE

The lights rise on the WRITER. He sits at a desk in a small cubicle above the stage. It's the type of cubicle given to the night shift worker bees of a large law firm. The outline of a desktop monitor frames him. The rest of the office is not visible. His world is this cubicle. There is a Helium Balloon with Happy Birthday floating above his desk. He stares out through the monitor frame as if there was a universe beyond it.

We see a laser dot land on the Writer's balloon. It pops. He jumps, his head out of range of the light.

WRITER

(Looking off stage) Stop it! Jason! You're going to burn someone's eye out with that thing. *(Sits again)*

WRITER V/O

(As he types) Act one, scene one Draft..... 33. Lights up on a plush New York apartment. The time: the year? 1948? No. 1953. The style in keeping with the home of Jim, a Broadway director, and JUNE, his ex-Broadway singing sensation wife-

JASON

(With frat boy sarcasm) How's that romance novel coming?

WRITER

It's a pastiche.

JASON

A what?

WRITER

A play. *(Under his breath)* Idiot *(Goes back to typing)*. Fuck!

WRITER V/O

Delete! JUNE the ex-broadway - No, said that. *(As he presses the key playfully)* "The Happy Scene" June, the faithful wife, and Maude, *(stops to think)* the faithful friend, are seated looking through an album of old photos. *(He goes on typing)*

The lights rise on the apartment and two frozen figures seated on the sofa

THE DUCHESS V/O

(As the cues unfold) One of the nice things about working on the night shift of a large law firm is that no one bothers you... almost. When there's a brief, you type it. When there's not, you can type your dreams. You may be small potatoes at the law firm of Jablonski, Ritterhouse, and O'Neill. You may be invisible to most of the human race. But on the page, you can be God... Almost.

Lights fade on the WRITER Sound of typing fades

NOTE: JUNE & the other characters act in the slightly heightened style of an early 1950s women's film. MAUDE remains natural.

JUNE and MAUDE come to life, looking at a photo album. JUNE has an air of brittle brightness Cheerful in spite of whatever is bothering her. MAUDE is Bored.

JUNE

Oh. Maude, Maude, Maude. Memories, Sweet Memories. How many years has it been since that dreadful Greek chorus in Pittsburgh?

MAUDE turns to say something-

No, no. Don't tell me.

Oh look Max, when he had hair. He asked me the other day if I missed my days in the theatre. Well...noooo... not really. Don't get me wrong, adulation's nice every now and again but I don't think men really understand the true needs of a woman. Hearth and home and well.. *(Takes sip of her martini)* other things. Plenty of other things like Jim , Jim, dear sweet Jim. He hasn't changed a bit has he? Not one iota in all these years. How does he do that?

MAUDE turns-

No, don't tell me. Oh, and there's me with Reginald Bumbry in the seltzer scene from, "Gay Paree". I always thought I looked best when I was slightly wet. That's where I met Jim, dear, sweet Jim.

Look there's our honeymoon in Acapulco. All those high cliffs and all those dark young boys flinging themselves into the sea. There was one young diver named Paco who was quite taken with me, but Jim was my life, Jim is my life. Every day is a pleasure. Every hour is a joy. Every moment a symphony. Every second a...a...an-

MAUDE

(Aside) Agony?

Everything stops as JUNE give her a cool stare.

JUNE

*(A small voiced)*What?

MAUDE

An Agony, June. Every hours a joy. Every moment a symphony!*(Looks up at the 4th wall as if the writer were there)* It's not.

JUNE

(Discreetly) Is that your line?

MAUDE

It should be.

JUNE

Delete, delete, delete. *(Totally confused by what she's said.)* That is not my line.

MAUDE

No.*(looks up again at the 4th wall.)*

JUNE

That's what I heard

MAUDE

He's just tired. *(Still looking curiously at the wall)*

JUNE

(Still confused) Jim?

Lights up on WRITER. He's staring astonished at his computer.

(June mouthing to Maude)- "I'm not getting anything" (pointing to 4th wall) Oh , yes Jim, Dear sweet Jim.

MAUDE

(Shrugs and looks out at the 4th wall guessing) He tired. Late night.

JUNE

(Still not getting anything. Still ad libbing) Oh, yes.....well.... He's been having trouble with his new star Tallulah Delightly. They say she's quite a handful.

MAUDE

No, not Jim. the Writer. He's probably got Writer's Block. That's why your not getting any lines. I saw it coming. How many drafts has it been, huh? 33? Here we are. Same damned happy Scene. *(to Writer)* I was pretty enthusiastic until the 12th draft and then-

JUNE

Maude, Shhh!

MAUDE

Why? He's not listening. If he was listening he'd be writing this down. What's he doing? *(She looks up at the 4th wall Guessing but not really seeing)* Staring at the screen? Nodding off? Whatever. I can't just sit here one more time and watch him ruin what could be a very interesting story. I'm a good character. I deserve better. So do you. How can we do our job, if he doesn't listen to the characters he wrote. I tried to let him know. I've tried all the normal lines of communication. Impulse, whim, sub conscious chatter. He's not listening.

JUNE

I thought that was our job. To listen.

MAUDE

Well, it is to a certain extent. But it's a two way street. We are creatures of Imagination, inspiration June. Our job is to inspire him. To expand his horizons. His job is to make manifest. Creativity is a collaboration.

JUNE

Oh, really? I've never thought of it that way. I've always thought that my job was to get that happy ending come hell or high water.

MAUDE

Well, you're the leading lady. You're a traditionalist.

JUNE

I guess so. Being responsible for a happy ending is a big *(Can't think of another word)* Responsibility. No time to really philosophize, just do, do, do.

MAUDE

Yes, I suppose it's different for me. I'm just a convenient plot device. I've got plenty of time for creative thinking.

JUNE

So writer's block, hmmm. *(long pause)* You want another martini?

MAUDE

No. We've got the Luncheon scene with Vera and Cynthia coming up next. I like to be sober whenever I'm dealing with Vera.

JUNE

That's funny, I always like to be slightly tipsy.*(another long pause)**(June says the line as if she were hinting at the WRITER)* Jim's awfully late this evening. He's been having problems with his new star Tallulah DeLightly. They say she's quite a handful. A Director's lot is not a happy one.

MAUDE

You already said that.

JUNE

*(whispering to Maude)*Yes, I did. I was trying to nudge him forward Maude, really! Why did you have to ad lib in the first place? It always startles him when you ad lib.

MAUDE

I never ad lib unless I think it's important.

WRITER V/O/JUNE

I have an idea. Why don't you never do it again? Why don't we just go back to the lines? I think if we just go back to his lines all this will work itself out quite nicely.,

MAUDE

(To writer) STOP it! *(To June)* He's feeding you lines June.

JUNE (CONFUSED)

That's what he's supposed to do.

MAUDE

(To Writer) You know, I can hear you, right? June, have you noticed a certain echo in your head?

JUNE

*(Looks at Maude confused)*Isn't that's him?

MAUDE

Yes. Of course it's him. He's steering us back to the same damned plot line we had before. I was hoping we could escape that.

JUNE

That's not your job. You're the faithful friend and as the faithful friend you should... do whatever faithful friends do.

MAUDE

I thought I was. There are some major problems to be addressed.

JUNE

You're not his faithful friend. You're mine.

MAUDE

I'm everybody's.... I think. Except maybe Jim. I don't think I can help him.

JUNE

What about Jim? He's awfully late-

MAUDE

You've said that. (*considering pause*) June as your friend, I think I should warn you-

WRITER V/O

Stop it!

MAUDE looks up as if she can see him thru the 4th wall NOTE-ONLY MAUDE CAN HEAR HIM

JUNE

Maude, I am shocked and appalled! That's Vera's line. She'd rip your teeth out if she knew.

WRITER V/O

This is the Happy scene! There are no warnings in the happy scene!

MAUDE

Why not?

WRITER V/O

Because then it wouldn't be the happy scene. It would be the warning scene which you can't have first off because then someone comes in late to the show and says, "What have I missed?", and someone else says-

JUNE

Why not what?-

Nothing. MAUDE

Nothing What!? JUNE WRITER V/O
Exactly! Which is why this is the happy scene. Which is why we leave the structure to me, okay?

Maude are you listening? MAUDE
(*To June*) Yes, Shhhh! (*To Writer*) It's a cliché!

It's a pastiche! WRITER V/O

Same thing! MAUDE

WHO are you talking too? JUNE

The writer. MAUDE

Why's he talking to you? You're the faithful friend. I'm the leading lady. If he's going to talk to anyone, it should be me. Make sure he knows that! JUNE

He does. He's listening. Sort of. MAUDE

What do you mean sort of? JUNE

I've got his attention. MAUDE

Good. (*To MAUDE*) Now sit down and look at the album! I've got something to say to him. JUNE

MAUDE sighs, sits feeling resigned and rebellious

(*In Anger*) You're not letting her get away with this are you?!!! I'm your leading lady! You're not sticking me alone in the happy scene with a totally dysfunctional faithful friend?!!

Awkward Pause

Door bell rings

JUNE

Thank you.

WRITER V/O

You're welcome.

JUNE hasn't heard him but is content as-

STAGEHAND wheels out a small dolly on which a cardboard cutout of an elegantly dressed man is frozen in position. The cutout looks like a spruced up version of the Writer. STAGEHAND exits.

JUNE

(JUNE looks at Maude triumphantly) It's Jim! Darling, you're home. I bet you need a cocktail.

JUNE goes to pour Jim a martini

MAUDE

Me Too.

WRITER V/O

CUT IT OUT MAUDE! STOP IT NOW!

JUNE ignores MAUDE brings one cocktail back and sticks the glass in a convenient holder in his hand.

JUNE

(To the cardboard) So how's that Tallulah Delightly working out?

MAUDE gives the audience a look of impending doom

LIGHTS TO BLACK