

WOMEN BEHIND THE BUSH

by Ed Valentine

7 W

Inspired by a photograph in the New York Times.

*When six Society Women (and one sassy waitress)
gather behind a bush in a Big-City park to witness a humiliating event,
one marriage will be changed forever.*

**[TO READ THE COMPLETE SCRIPT, OR TO INQUIRE ABOUT RIGHTS,
PLEASE E-MAIL ED@EDVALENTINE.COM.]**

WOMEN BEHIND THE BUSH

SETTING:

First day of spring. A lawn in a park in the middle of a city.
In the middle of the lawn: a huge flowering bush.
At rear, perhaps a line of tall trees. Over the trees, the skyline of a city.

CHARACTERS:

6 SOCIETY WOMEN:

JANE: Youngest - in her 30's. New to Society.
MARJIE: Drinks heavily.
SHELBY: The most fashionable.
BOUKI: Unflappable. Maybe European.
WINNIE: Always hungry - never eats.
QUILTY: Fury personified.

WAITRESS Works for "Glorious Foods."

VOICES:

YOUNG WOMEN, OLDER MEN

WOMEN BEHIND THE BUSH

PRODUCTION HISTORY:

First Produced by En Avant Playwrights at the Loewe Theater, Hunter College in May, 2003. Directed by Jennifer O'Donnell.

CAST:

JANE:	Bobby Lynn Rice
MARJIE:	Karin Hein
SHELBY:	Annette Guarrasi
BOUKI:	Theodora Loukas
WINNIE:	Tracy Baker
QUILTY:	Kathleen Warnock
WAITRESS	Carrie Haugh

Subsequently produced by

- The Bug Theater, Denver as part of the 2004 Festival of New Work (director, Edith Weiss)
- Strawberry One-Act Festival at the Producer's Club, NYC (director, Rita Pietropinto)

WOMEN BEHIND THE BUSH

Scene 1: Glimmer hour – just before dawn. Ghost of a moon in the sky. Sky brightens to morning as the play goes on.

Silence for a moment. Then, two women pop up from behind the bush. MARJIE looks through binoculars and drinks a cocktail; she wears tailored, expensive clothes of the highest fashion; also, an absurd hat. JANE's outfit is also expensive but simpler than MARJIE's - perhaps a pair of slacks and a silk blouse with pearls.

JANE

Anything yet?

MARJIE

Not yet.

JANE

I knew it. Let's go home.

MARJIE

Oh, there'll be something to see, don't you worry.

JANE

Frankly, Marjie, I don't know why I let you talk me into this.

MARJIE

When it happens – and it will – there's nothing you can do about it, is there? So why worry?

JANE

Who's worried?

(WAITRESS pops up through the bush with a tray of drinks. MARJIE exchanges her empty glass for a full one.)

MARJIE

Relax. Have a drink, Jane.

JANE

I don't want a drink.

MARJIE

It's better with a drink. Well, if not better: bearable. Have a drink.

JANE

The sun isn't even up.

MARJIE

Never stopped me before. Cheers!
(Drinks. WAITRESS exits.)

JANE

Marjie, is it really true? Everything you've told me?

MARJIE

Why, this Event has been a staple of the social scene for years. Years! Of course, it used to be more informal. My first year, when we gathered at dawn on the first day of spring, here, in this very bush - we brought picnic. Picnic! Well, by the third year we had it catered, but when we started with the open bar it really took off. At least for me.

JANE

I had no idea.

MARJIE

Few do. The lucky few. It's the most select invitation in the city. And now you're part of it, Jane. Your very first year. Lucky. By the way, Jane: didn't I tell you this was a dress-up occasion?

JANE

This outfit isn't right, is it?

MARJIE

It's your first year, dear, you can be excused. Somewhat.

JANE

Look, even if you're right - even if this - *thing* happens year after year, I know Frank wouldn't have any part of it.

MARJIE

But you're here.

JANE

I know him too well.

MARJIE

But you're here. And isn't everything exactly as I told you? Doesn't the earth itself look ready?

JANE (Looking through binoculars:)

I couldn't say. How could I say?

MARJIE

Well, use your imagination, Jane, see what I see. The mound there, overlooking the pasture – it's like – why, it's like a giant rumped bed. The dew is like the thinnest, airiest sheet you ever did see.

JANE

Frank and I have flannel sheets.

MARJIE

The mottled sky's like a quilt – the stars like buttons sewn carefully on ...

JANE

Flannel wicks away the moisture.

MARJIE

Buttons! And we're here under the quilt ourselves, huddled, waiting, waiting... And the whole world waits for an earthy assignation. Shivers!

(QUILTY pops up from the hedge. She holds a stone.)

Splendid, really. Or it would be splendid.

(Furious, QUILTY throws a rock out at a spot far away. Exits below.)

If it wasn't quite so mean. Anything yet?

JANE

Nothing.

(WAITRESS pops up through the bush with a tray of drinks. MARJIE again exchanges her empty glass for a full one.)

MARJIE

Want that drink now?

JANE

No, thank you.

MARJIE

You will, Jane. You will.

(All three exit below.)

Scene 2: Two other women pop up from the other side of the bush: SHELBY and BOUKI. Both look through binoculars. They swivel, and see each other through the binoculars.

SHELBY

Bouki? Bouki Moniker? Is that you?

BOUKI

No.

SHELBY

Why, Bouki - it *is* you! Oh, Bouki - love the dress. And how brave of you to wear it again.

BOUKI

It's brand new, Shelby.

SHELBY

So simple: is it Amish? My dress, on the other hand, is - well, no secret. It's a Germini.

BOUKI

I couldn't tell.

SHELBY

You couldn't? A Germini original. Germini modeled it on me, in fact! Such a handsome man. Such thin hands - the fingers, darling, the way they play up and down my body, like he's playing a sonata.

BOUKI

Gay as a goose.

SHELBY

I love Germini. And so do you, I know it. Now guess what mine's made of? You'll never guess. Guess! Alright, I'll tell you: it's food.

BOUKI

Food?

SHELBY

He's working in Food. I'm Lady Candy. The Queen of Cake. Bouki, my dress is made of marzipan - marzipan!

BOUKI

Marzipan?

SHELBY

Yes - *Marzipan!*

(SHELBY exits below. After a pause, BOUKI complains about Shelby in a foreign language. Exits below.)

Scene 3: Two other women pop up: WINNIE and THE WAITRESS.

WINNIE (To WAITRESS:)

Wait. Hold on. Any more of those emu frittatas?

WAITRESS (Offering tray.)

Plenty! Like one?

WINNIE

Oh, yes, well – no. I shouldn't, but – wait, don't go. Wait, let me just – look at them. Wait – let me just – smell them. Wait – may I just – lick one?

WAITRESS

Ma'am, if you're gonna lick it, you might as well eat it. If you lick it, I have to throw it away.

WINNIE

But...

WAITRESS

Health codes, right? In fact, since you had your nose so close to that frittatta, I really ought to pitch it.

WINNIE

Maybe I should just eat it.

WAITRESS

I think you should. They're very good.

WINNIE

Well, I'll just – no, I don't dare. So I'm just going to rub it on my lips. Do you mind?

WAITRESS

Whatever you like, Ma'am.

(WINNIE rubs the hors d'oeuvre on her lips.)

WINNIE

Mmm Mmm MMM! Quick - napkin? Napkin!

(WAITRESS hands her a napkin, into which WINNIE spits the hors d'oeuvre. Hands the napkin to WAITRESS, who drops it onto the silver tray. WAITRESS exits below. WINNIE sighs.)

Why, I could almost taste it.

(Exits below.)

Scene 4: JANE rises, horrified. MARJIE rises with cucumbers on her eyes, her fingers soaking in a bowl; through the following she receives 'the spa treatment' from a pair of disembodied hands.

JANE

No, he wouldn't join in. How could he? Frank's the sweetest, most considerate... Brings me presents? For no occasion. Pearls, delphiniums... even shoes? Can you believe it? Buys me boxes, closets full of shoes.

MARJIE

You always do have the best shoes.

JANE

And the apartment, not to mention the renovation - my God! The money I spend and he never complains. Never. Plus the house upstate, up in -

MARJIE

It's fabulous, divine. I saw the pictures: *House Beautiful*.

JANE

Right, but no no no, Marjie - it's not just the house, not the apartment or the - shoes. It's our Life. We're happy in our *Life. House Beautiful?* We could be in *Life Beautiful!* Here's the kind of man Frank is: he leaves me notes. Love notes to surprise me. Say, between the slices of a loaf of bread?

MARJIE

No.

JANE

Yes! Sometimes, they pop up from the toaster. Sometimes they burn - so sweet! Inept, but sweet. All that, plus: works late, weekends, earns a good living. A good living. Loving to the children, just - great with the boys.

MARJIE

You have -

JANE

Twins, twin boys. Just started kindergarten. Frank insists on private school. Though I once taught in public -

MARJIE

Why?

(JANE, stunned, has no answer, so she continues...)

JANE

Look, Frank's a good man. Loving, caring - open. We tell each other everything.

MARJIE

Everything?

JANE

Everything. That's why I can't fathom... I'm going home, Marjie. I've been here half the night and nothing's happened yet.

MARJIE

The night's not over, Jane. You've stayed this long, stay a little longer. You sure you don't want that drink?

(A hand pops up with drinks on a tray.)

JANE

I'm sure.

MARJIE

Whatever you say.

(They exit below.)

Scene 5: SHELBY and BOUKI. BOUKI has binoculars and a drink.

SHELBY

Almost dawn. Anything yet?

BOUKI

You'll hear them.

SHELBY

Oh, Bouki, are you looking at my hat?

BOUKI

No.

SHELBY

Now, you don't have to ask: it's a Giorgio. He's a genius, a genius! He hires a team of Polynesian Pearl Divers in deepest Tahiti to find the Lavender Coral Oyster that vomits forth its purple seed pearl, if you tap it ever so gently on its back. Like this: *hack!*

(She demonstrates, hitting a fist with the other hand, and giving a delicate, oyster-like cough. QUILTY enters on the other side of the bush holding a stone.)

And you can only dive for them on certain Wednesdays in August, and only if the moon is right. Very expensive - very expensive. But it's worth it: it's my Johnson's money. I spend like a sailor. I make him pay. It's worth every penny. It's important to look your best here, of all places, don't you agree with me, Bouki?

(Again, QUILTY throws a rock out at a spot far away, then runs off.)

SHELBY (continued)

I agree with me. And still, sometimes, when I think of all that expense, and of course those poor oysters, all those empty purple shells on a Wednesday, on the beach – just to make one hat for *me* - I sometimes wonder: maybe I should wear them more than ONCE? My, they're late today. Everyone's always late. I don't know what that means. I don't know why I said that.

BOUKI

You know, I'm going to talk to someone else now.
(BOUKI exits below.)

SHELBY

Oh... *BOUKI!*
(Laughs. Exits below.)

Scene 6: JANE and MARJIE. JANE with binoculars, MARJIE drinking.

JANE

Nothing. Nothing! And nothing's going to happen.

MARJIE

No?

JANE

No. And I have to say I don't like being played for a fool. Dragged out here, in pearls and heels, to a field in the middle of the night...

MARJIE

Jane, think: why would we ALL come up to the Park before dawn just for nothing? Just for drinks, and the view and for –

WAITRESS (Appearing with a tray:)

Appetizers?

MARJIE

No, thanks.
(WAITRESS leaves.)

JANE

No one eats all this food, anyway.

MARJIE

Who eats anymore, really?

JANE

Right.

(JANE fixes her hair, nervously. Peers out.)

MARJIE

Nervous?

JANE

Me? No. It's just – society's rituals are foreign to me – it's like I'm Jane Goodall, and you're all apes. Well, I mean... Sorry. I wasn't – I wasn't born wealthy. Maybe you didn't know?

MARJIE

Oh, I knew.

JANE

I was born in New Jersey.
(Pause.)

MARJIE

We shall never speak of this again.
(They disappear behind the bushes.)

Scene 7: WINNIE and THE WAITRESS. WINNIE sniffs the tray of food.

WINNIE

When I get nervous –

WAITRESS

Yes?

WINNIE

When I get nervous, I want to eat and eat and EAT.

(QUILTY enters on the other side of the bush holding many stones.)

I'd eat up the whole world if I could. I'd start with a horse, just because we always say, "Oh, I'm so hungry I could eat a horse." Maybe I'd eat two horses, even. Then, I'd move on to geography.

(QUILTY throws many stones.)

I'd start with lush meadows, full of green grass and chewy flowers. Then orchards: peach, apple, plum, pear, I'd eat them, trees, pits, stems, and all. Then, cool, refreshing fjords and icebergs, like heaped-up whorls of sherbet, and big salads of acorns, oak, seaweed, and plankton.

(QUILTY stares out, spent.)

I'd grit my teeth and grin like a whale. I'd give a huge whale grimace and a fake whale smile...

(QUILTY smiles.)

WINNIE (continued)

...and I'd take it all in, suck everything in, and what I couldn't handle, my teeth, my baleen would filter out. And believe it or not, there's quite a lot I can't take in. I'm so hungry I'd like to eat up the world. I'm so hungry. I'm so hungry. I'm so very hungry. But somehow, I can't - eat - a *thing*,

(WINNIE and QUILTY exit. BOUKI enters, scrutinizes the WAITRESS's tray.)

BOUKI

Teriyaki rice balls?

WAITRESS

Emu frittatas.

BOUKI

Pity.

(WAITRESS exits. BOUKI's cell phone rings:)

Hello?

SHELBY (Pops up with her own cell:)

BOUKI. I have an important question that must be answered at this very moment. The fate of the universe might hinge on it.

(Holds up absurd shoes:)

What do you think of my shoes?

BOUKI

Shelby: What do you think of my eyes? Look closely. What do you think of my eyes?

SHELBY

You've had them lifted?

BOUKI

Not just lifted, dear: *entirely new!*

(QUILTY enters, wearing a helmet. She has a pea-shooter.)

Dr. Vellman, a genius, a genius! Why, Vellman took a melon-baller dipped in Vaseline and just - *popped* my eyeballs out, *POP! POP!* When I came to, I could see my old brown eyes lying there on a platter, and in my sockets I had these brand new eyes - violet! As you can see. So I picked up the platter and carried it around and chanted like some Renaissance saint. Oh, Shelby, what a relief! This year I'm looking at the Event through entirely new eyes - literally! In the fall I'm going to have everything done. Everything. My liver, my lungs, my pancreas, my spleen. I want to be 29 again. So Delsen doesn't leave me. Every bit of me entirely new. Nothing at all left of the old me. Not a hair. Not a cell. Glory!

(QUILTY spits one pea at a spot far away. Smiles.)

WAITRESS (appearing:)

Another drink, Ma'am?

SHELBY

Do you have Vellman's number on you?

BOUKI

Always.

SHELBY

Darling!

BOUKI

Honey!

(Air kiss. Air kiss.)

MARJIE (Entering in a rush:)

The husbands are coming! The husbands are coming!

(The SOCIETY WOMEN enter and greet each other with varying degrees of delight, suspicion, dislike. VERY quickly:)

SHELBY: Marjie.
MARJIE: Quilty.
WINNIE: Shelby.
SHELBY: Winnie.
JANE: Sukie?
BOUKI: *Bouki.*
JANE: *Bouki - sorry.*
BOUKI: First time here?
JANE: Sorry. Yes.
WINNIE: Quilty.
BOUKI: Quilty!
JANE: Quilty? Shelby!
MARJIE: Quilty, Shelby.
SHELBY: Jane: *Germini!*
BOUKI: Jane...
WINNIE: Jane...
MARJIE: *Jane! HERE THEY COME!*

(They all raise binoculars and focus on a spot stage left.)

**[TO READ THE COMPLETE SCRIPT, OR TO INQUIRE ABOUT RIGHTS,
PLEASE E-MAIL ED@EDVALENTINE.COM.]**