

cart
before
the horse

The Short Plays of
John Patrick Bray

POLYCHORON PRESS

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A note from the playwright:

Many thanks for picking up this volume of shorts! These plays have been produced at festivals and in venues around the country. Some have been published in anthologies with Applause and Smith and Kraus; while another has appeared on Indie Theatre Now. It's been a fantastic ride!

Six of the seven plays (excluding "Blue, Blue Moon") were all presented together under the title *Bray's Plays* by UGA Theatre at the University of Georgia, as part of the Studio Season. I've decided to leave them in the order as they were produced. I have also included the cast and creative team lists below.

Please note: the characters in these plays can be played by men, women, and by any ethnicity. *Green Sound*, for example, has been performed by two women. *Cookies* has been performed by three men, three women, a mix of men and women, and children. Yes, children (without amending the language – those poor kids!)

I owe a huge debt of thanks to UGA Theatre, University of Georgia, Rising Sun Performance Company, Ensemble Theater of Chattanooga, Heartland Theatre Company, EagerRisk Theatre, Cold Basement Dramatics, Axial Theatre, Rachel Klein Productions, Dennis Wayne Gleason, Ning Bhanbassha, GOOD Works Theatre Festival, re:Directions Theatre, Wishbone Theatre Collective, Greenhouse Ensemble Theatre, Athens Playwrights' Workshop, Rose of Athens Theatre, Gregory Bray, and so many more for having faith in these plays! My sincerest thanks!

A very special thank you, also, to Taylor Gruenloh, Todd Ristau, and the Hollins Playwright's Lab: great people doing great things!

A final word of thanks to Danielle, Daniel, and Sadie for being an amazing family.

“Blue, Blue Moon” received its world premiere as part of the GOOD Works Theatre Festival at the GOOD Acting Studio in Marietta, Georgia.

The production was directed by Emma K. Harr, and featured the following cast:

Jeanine: Laura E. Meyers

Gregory: Ralph Del Rosario

Little Greg: Sean Fife

Voice of little Jeanine: Sky Cameron Johnson

Production Stage Manager: Jim Walsh

Costume Design: Emma K. Harr

Lighting Design and Set Design: Robert Drake

Producer: Mario Good

Bray's Plays ran February 4-9, 2014 at the Seney-Stovall Chapel in Athens, Georgia as part of the UGA Theatre Studio Season, featuring the cast and creative team:

The directors:

Alicia Cortis: "Eleanor's Passing"

Chris Eaket: "Coffee On?"

C.A. Farris III: "On Top"

Mike Hussey: "Southern Werewolf"

Kristin Kundert-Gibbs: "Watery Grave" and "Cookies"

David Saltz: "Green Sound"

The ensemble:

JayIn Fleming (Gus, Eleanor's Passing; Broussard, Love Bites; Jake, "Watery Grave")

Chris Stalcup (Moe, "Eleanor's Passing"; Michael, "Coffee On?"; Richard, "Watery Grave")

Jeofrey Wages (Tall Glass, "Eleanor's Passing;" Toby, "Cookies")

Luke Georgecink (Bill, "On Top")

Jase Wingate (Taylor, "Green Sound"; George, "Watery Grave")

Bryan Perez (Walter, "Cookies")

Brooke Owens (Molly, "Green Sound")

Abby Holland (Wendy, "Coffee On?", Dirk, "Cookies")

Kayla Sklar (Janice, "On Top")

Suzanne Zoller (Missy, "Love Bites")

Production Coordinator: George Contini

Stage Manager: Caroline Caldwell

Assistant Stage Managers: Haley McIntosh, Caroline Caldwell

Special Effects: Josh Marsh

Lighting Design: Arnab Banerji

Graphic Design: Clay Chastain

Run Crew: Giselle Fernandez and Walker Smith

Dramaturges: Dr. Fran Teague, Will Dunlap, and Weldon Pless

Blue, Blue Moon

Characters:

JANINE, 20's-30's. A city gal.

GREGORY, 20's-30's. Her brother.

LITTLE BOY, about 8-10

LITTLE JANINE, about 8-10, an off-stage voice.

(Note: LITTLE JANINE may appear if the director so chooses.)

Setting:

The woods near a campfire/Not too long ago.

(Night. A blue moon. A campfire. A couple of sleeping bags. An urn holding someone's cremains. JANINE and GREGORY are discovered. They are cold, and have been here for a little while. Neither one are used to the 'great outdoors,' though their flannel shirts suggest they are trying to make a go of it. JANINE looks at GREGORY, as if waiting for an answer. GREGORY looks away.)

JANINE

Oh, come on, Gregory.

(Pause.)

You don't think this is a good way to...you know?

GREGORY

It's cold. I'm cold.

JANINE

Well. Sit a little closer. I brought s'mores!

GREGORY

You want me to find sticks?

(She pulls out a box of packaged/industrially made s'mores. She opens one. He reacts.)

JANINE

In the morning, we'll climb to the overlook. Scatter his ashes.

GREGORY

Then what?

JANINE

You know. Closure.

GREGORY

Ah.

(Pause.)

JANINE

He said he always wanted to come back with us when we were a bit older. When we weren't so scared.

GREGORY

There was plenty to be scared of.

JANINE

Bugs. And the Wolf man. Remember?

GREGORY

(Beat.) I remember.

JANINE

Kids' stuff. My mind was playing tricks on me. *(Beat.)* It was a blue moon like this. I guess awful stuff comes out in a blue moon, doesn't it?

GREGORY

Maybe it does. *(Beat.)* You didn't come all the way up here to scare me, did you?

JANINE

Am I so juvenile?

GREGORY

No. *(Beat.)* Yes.

JANINE

It was a blue moon like this one. You, me, Dad. S'mores. Real s'mores, not, you know. *(Indicates box.)* So, there I am, looking out at the moon. Walking around. I'm supposed to look for sticks, but that moon. It doesn't seem right. "Blue moon," that's just an expression but...it does look blue to me. And somehow, two-dimensional, like I can just pluck it out of the sky, and it would be like a coin of paper. The world gets funny, it shifts, and there's a

rustle...I see its fur...wouldn't have been so...I mean, I've seen bears, wolves, mountain lions...but then I see its shirt, Gregory.

GREGORY

Probably a mountain man.

JANINE

No...I see its ears. Pointed. It has blue jeans, and big shaggy hands. So, I freeze...and wait...it moves away from me. It looks like it's going to attack something...a neighboring camp. That's when I race out and scream –

GREGORY

WOLFMAN! WOLFMAN!

JANINE

And the creepiest thing – the next day, we go back and...

GREGORY

No one's there. Just this urn.

JANINE

Can you let me tell the story, I was about to get melodramatic?

GREGORY

Okay, sorry.

JANINE

Right. (*Melodramatic.*) There was no one there. Just the urn, which we now carry, containing Dad's cremains.

GREGORY

Right.

JANINE

I hate the word 'cremains.' It's...I don't know. Sounds like there should be cream in there. You know? Like. 'Cream of Dad Soup, With Mushrooms.'

(GREGORY gives her a look.)

JANINE

What? Dad would find it funny. He would. (*Beat.*) What did we ever do with the cremains that were in here? Did we dump them out? Eat them? (*Beat.*) Not even a smile?

GREGORY

I saw something too that night.

JANINE

Oh. Your turn, huh?

GREGORY

I'm telling the truth, okay? Something I never...this is stupid.

JANINE

Don't begin it like that. (*Imitating.*) "This is stupid." You have to build it on, I don't know. Something...mysterious. Atmosphere, Gregory. Think *atmosphere*.

GREGORY

How do I do that?

JANINE

Say, "It was a dark and stormy night."

GREGORY

It wasn't. It was a night just like this one.

JANINE

Oh, even better! *It was a night just like this night.*

GREGORY

Forget it.

JANINE

No, go on! I'm gonna eat all the s'mores if you don't!

GREGORY

Fine. Okay. So.

JANINE

(Helping.) It was a night just like this night.

GREGORY

It was a night just like this night. I'm with you and Dad. And he's...I don't know. It just seems like he's not into it. Like he's being forced to hang out with us. Like he'd rather be with...Buddy or Al or...what was the red-headed guy's name?

JANINE

Red.

GREGORY

Oh. Well, Red. Drinking beer. Fishing. Telling dirty stories. But, Mom sticks him with us, so. I can't blame him for being upset.

JANINE

This isn't really...you know.

GREGORY

What?

JANINE

Doing it for me. It's not scary, it's sad.

GREGORY

Oh.

JANINE

So, can you try, you know? Just a little?

GREGORY

Right.

JANINE

A little harder?

GREGORY

Right. Okay. *(Beat.)* Once upon a time, on a night dark as this, my Dad took me and my sister to go camping. Now, we had never been camping before. We liked the city. So, we go camping near Frost Valley. He builds a fire, tells us to get sticks for marshmallows, and we both wander. You run off in one direction, I run off in another. I have my trusty slingshot with me, thinking I'd take down a bear if I see it. David and Goliath. You know, I practiced with bottles every day, so. I could nail a bear between the eyes.

JANINE

You sucked at it.

GREGORY

No, I didn't!

JANINE

How many bottles did you hit?

GREGORY

I don't know-

JANINE

Half the stones went into Mrs. Rosalotti's window. That's why you gave up the damn thing, remember?

GREGORY

That's not... *(Beat.)* I'm walking. I see the glow. An orange glow of another fire. I approach it, and there's this person sitting there. I can't quite make out the face, but...this person has glowing hands.

JANINE

Oooh.

GREGORY

And I approach this person. They look at me. Close. They hold up their glowing hand and say something about...I can't

remember...phoning someone?

JANINE

(In E.T.'s voice) E.T. phone home!

(GREGORY reenacts holding up his slingshot.)

GREGORY

It comes closer with its glowing hand. WOFLMAN!

(He makes like he releases the shot.)

GREGORY

It falls. "WOLF MAN, GREGORY!" You scream. I see the glow, and I run off. I nailed whatever it was. Whoever it was. Right between the eyes. *(Beat.)* It wasn't til I got back to camp that I realized I dropped my slingshot. I never made another one. *(Beat.)* You're screaming WOLF MAN, and Dad, well. He just looks embarrassed. Like the squirrels are laughing.

JANINE

The wolf man was probably laughing.

GREGORY

I don't get a wink of sleep. Especially with Dad playing that jaw harp.

JANINE

He really did like the country.

GREGORY

And the next morning, we get up. And there's no body...

JANINE

No wolf man.

GREGORY

Right.

JANINE

(Melodramatic.) There's no one there. Just this urn.

GREGORY

And my slingshot is lost forever.

(Pause. GREGORY picks up a s'more.)

GREGORY

Here's to you Dad, and the weirdest night of my life.

JANINE

To you. You old bastard.

(JANINE and GREGORY give each other a hug.)

GREGORY

On that note. I gotta drop the kids off at the pool.

JANINE

Gregg –

GREGORY

I was going to say 'take a dump,' but –

JANINE

Good taste prevailed.

GREGORY

Right.

JANINE

Hey. We're going to be all right.

GREGORY

Yeah?

JANINE

It's a blue moon.

(She looks up. LIGHTS CHANGE.)

GREGORY

Yeah. Wow. Haven't seen it look like that since...huh. Maybe it's just the way the woods look, you know?

JANINE

Mmm.

GREGORY

Be back in a sec.

JANINE

Don't wipe with poison ivy!

(GREGORY exits. JANINE crouches by the fire. LIGHTS CHANGE slightly. JANINE notices. There's a rustle.)

Gregory?

(Beat. She takes out her cell phone and starts texting Gregory.)

JANINE

I.Will.Hear.You.Receive.This.Text.You.Can't.Scare.Me.Enter.

(She looks at her phone. A LITTLE BOY enters holding a slingshot. She leaps back holding her phone. He raises the slingshot.)

JANINE

It's a phone. Damn it. I just sent you a text!

LITTLE JANINE

(Off-stage.) WOLF MAN!!

(Startled, LITTLE BOY releases a stone, JANINE is hit, and drops.)

LITTLE JANINE
WOLF MAN! GREGORY! WOLFMAN!

*(LITTLE BOY drops his sling shot and races off.
Rustling. A WOLF MAN (GREGORY) - furry face,
big ears, sharp teeth, furry hands - LEAPS OUT.)*

GREGORY
RAARRRGH! *(A moment.)* *Ahem.* RAAARGH!! *(Beat.)*
Really? Did you see me? *(Beat.)* You can't scare me, Janine. I
told...

*(He notices the slingshot. He raises his mask. He
walks over and picks it up. He looks at JANINE. He
races over and holds her up. He looks at the phone
in her hand. He holds her close. JANINE takes in
air, very sharply.)*

GREGORY
Is this a joke? Is this a...? Janine, shit. Janine, are you there? Are
you...

JANINE
(Coming to.) You're a terrible friggin shot.

GREGORY
What?

JANINE
You're a terrible friggin shot.

GREGORY
Your scalp is bleeding.

JANINE
God.

GREGORY

Stay with me. We'll get you to a hospital. Just...can you lean on me? Come on...

JANINE

Wasn't even close to my eyes....wait...what about...?

(She turns, forcing him to turn. They look at the urn. GREGORY gives her a look. He sets her down carefully. He picks up the box of s'mores. JANINE smiles. He gets her back up. They slowly exit, as the fire and moon reflect off the urn. END OF PLAY.)

Eleanor's Passing

Characters:

MOE, in his 70's

GUS, in his 70's

TALL GLASS, in his 70's

Setting:

A back porch in Southwest Louisiana, close to the Texas border

(LIGHTS UP. A back porch. Two rocking chairs with a table in between. It is late evening in the late autumn in Southwest Louisiana. The lighting is dim. MOE enters with a small electric lantern. He is dressed mostly in black. He walks with a little bit of a limp. He sets it down between the chairs. He turns and looks at the chairs. A moment. He sits in one. He looks over at the other one. GUS enters. GUS, also an old-timer, is carrying a hunting magazine. He is holding a Bud-light. He looks at MOE and at the other rocking chair. MOE looks up at him. Then away. GUS continues to look at him, drinking his beer.)

MOE

You going to keep on staring at me, or are you fixin' to take her chair?

GUS

I wouldn't ask it of you.

MOE

Go ahead.

GUS

I'd say yes, but I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I like to think we're close, but not that close.

(MOE chuckles.)

GUS

Bud light?

MOE

If I start at this point, I doubt I'd stop. Ever.

GUS

Right.