

LU ANN HAMPTON LAVERY OBERLANDER

BILLY BOB: *(Grabbing her arm.)* Now wait a minute, Lu Ann. *(They are very close now.)* Oh, boy, uh, uh. Ah will talk to Dad tonight and ask for the car again, okay?

LU ANN: Swell, Billy Bob. *(She kisses him.)* Good night, now.

BILLY BOB: Good night. By gollies, Lu Ann, ah'm gonna make danged sure we git that car.

LU ANN: Fine.

BILLY BOB: Danged sure! *(He exits.)*

(LU ANN watches him for a moment and then enters the house.)

NICE PEOPLE DANCING TO GOOD COUNTRY MUSIC

by Lee Blessing

Jason (15) - Catherine (22)

The Play: It is a late afternoon in September in Houston, Texas. The title of the play is the name of a local bar—and an immediate indication of the kind of event Lee Blessing's play will detail. This playwright's plays are filled with unique people, richly drawn, and as much fun to play as to watch. This one-act play is a companion (forming the second part) to Mr. Blessing's *Toys for Men*, where some of the characters inhabit the same place. In *Nice People Dancing to Good Country Music*, we see the meeting of Eve Wilfong and her niece Catherine. Eve lives above the bar and is friends with many of its patrons. Catherine's problem is that she has just been expelled from the convent where she has been a novice nun. The circumstances are peculiar. Catherine was asked to leave the convent because she has an unsettling habit of blurting out inappropriate language (often off color) at inappropriate times. She is even given to making animal noises—and all of this without any intention of doing so. She can't control herself. Having been asked to leave the convent, she now has no direction in her life. Eve believes she just needs to settle down, meet someone nice, and get on with her life. In fact, Roy, one of the bar's patrons is real interested in her. However, before accepting his advances, Eve advises she learn about men from an expert, herself. Added to this mix, Eve's son, Jason, is visiting. Jason is on the brink of sexual awakening and this setting is full of the ingredients to make his visit a turning point in his manhood. The result is a delightful, often touching play. Mr. Blessing never provides a cliché, but rather offers a glimpse of an unusually universal microcosm of human relationships.

The Scene: Eve has gone downstairs to head off Roy, who seems determined to court Catherine. Eve feels she's not yet ready. Jason has been causing trouble in the bar—picking at the patrons. He's come to the roof deck to escape. Catherine is there still attempting to sort out where she should go now that she's been expelled from the convent.

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[(EVE exits. JASON regards CATHERINE)]

JASON: Hey, you look OK in real clothes for once. How come you're not wearing your nun stuff?

CATHERINE: I don't want to talk about it.

(A pause. They look out over the city. The bar door opens.. We hear Johnny Cash singing, "Life ain't easy for a boy named Sue..." and the door closes. JASON hurries over, looks down, returns)

JASON: False alarm.

(They look over the city)

CATHERINE: Don't you have something to do?

JASON: I think I'll just hang out.

(A pause)

CATHERINE: It's a nice view. You can see most of the city. Isn't it nice?

JASON: It sucks. This whole town sucks. Four billion people all talking like Gomer Pyle.

CATHERINE: Well, it's not Minnesota.

JASON: I'm going back tomorrow. About time.

CATHERINE: I suppose you'll be glad to see your Dad again.

JASON: Anything'd be better than here. Jim is nuts.

CATHERINE: Oh, I don't think he's...

JASON: What do you know? You only been here a few hours. I been here all summer. He's nuts. He makes me work in his crummy business. I'm on my vacation, and he makes me push beer cases around in the back room down there. He's a creepoid jerk.

CATHERINE: Well, I wouldn't say that...

JASON: 'Course not; you're a nun. Today he told me to move twenty cases of Schlitz from the front wall to the back wall and restack 'em. It's the same twenty cases I moved from the back wall to the front wall yesterday. He can't decide where they're "the most efficient." Efficient, my roaring butt. I'm going home tomorrow—what the hell do I care where they are?! *(A beat)* Does swearing bother you?

CATHERINE: I've, uh...I've heard worse.

JASON: So, anyway, I'm doing all this work for him, and when I'm done he comes in and looks at it, and says he liked it better the other

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way. So I dumped three cases of Schlitz on his foot.

CATHERINE: You didn't.

JASON: I sure as hell did. He started screaming like crazy, and threw a bottle at my head. It missed by this much. He could've killed me, the stupid mother. Day before I go home.

CATHERINE: Maybe if you tried talking with him...

JASON: Advice for teens, huh? Actually, I didn't feel like waiting around to talk. There were three guys holding him down when I left. Besides, he's killed people. Did you know that?

CATHERINE: No.

JASON: He told me. Said he used to have a son by his first marriage, and the kid was always pissing him off, so he killed him.

CATHERINE: How?

JASON: With a Schlitz bottle.

CATHERINE: That's ridiculous.

JASON: How do you know? He said he did it.

CATHERINE: He was probably just trying to make you behave.

JASON: *(Picking up the flower pot, taking it to the edge of the deck just above the bar door, and sitting with it in his lap)* I behave. I'm a damn good kid. But he's pushed me too far this summer, that's all I can say. Working in the back room—how'm I supposed to meet any girls?

CATHERINE: *(After a pause)* What are you doing?

JASON: I'm going to wait for him to come out and drop this on his head.

CATHERINE: Jason!

JASON: Jay Bob.

CATHERINE: Jay Bob, you are not. That's absurd. Put that down.

JASON: You know, that's the only thing Jim ever did I liked. Started calling me Jay Bob. Jay Bob is just as stupid a name as Jason, but at least you can claim your folks didn't know any better.

CATHERINE: Look, um, Jay Bob—why do something like this? You're going home tomorrow. You'll be with your Dad again.

JASON: So what? He's not much better than Jim. Always talking to me about Latvia. He talks in a foreign language like eighty percent of

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the time. Nah, it doesn't matter where I am. I'm caught in a war between the generations.

CATHERINE: How about your mother? Don't you care about her?

JASON: She sleeps with Jim. Before that she slept with Dad. I mean, it's a pattern, you know? I know what side she's on. Go back and read your book. Don't mind me—I'll be all right.

CATHERINE: I'm going down and tell Eve.

JASON: You do, and I'll drop something on you.

CATHERINE: Jason, it's my duty to warn you that Roy Manual may be up here any minute.

JASON: Roy Manual? Why's he coming up?

CATHERINE: He wants to dance with me.

JASON: What do you want to dance with him for? He's the biggest dipstick in Houston.

CATHERINE: So I'm told.

JASON: Besides, you're a nun. You can't dance. There's a commandment about it or something.

CATHERINE: Well... I left the convent.

JASON: How come?

CATHERINE: It's a long story.

JASON: You're not a nun then, huh? You're just, like—what—like nobody, right?

CATHERINE: Pretty much.

JASON: (*Considers this, puts the flower pot aside, stands*) You wanna dance?

CATHERINE: What?

JASON: Come on, if you wanna dance, dance with me. I'm a lot better than Roy Manual.

CATHERINE: What happened to the war between the generations?

JASON: It'll wait.

CATHERINE: Jason...

JASON: Jay Bob. Come on—you're not a nun anymore. Hey—that's good; that's like an oldie. (*Dancing with her momentarily, singing part of the chant from "I want to be Bobby's girl"*) "Your're not a nun any-more..."

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CATHERINE: (*Breaking away*) I'm your *cousin*, is what I am.

JASON: You're not that much older than me.

CATHERINE: Jay Bob. Listen to me. I—am—your—cousin.

JASON: So? There won't be all that getting-to-know-you crap. Come on, I've been trying to meet girls all summer. Everybody here talks like hicks. (*Approaching her again*) Come on, we'll do a close number. I'll sing. (*Softly*) "You're not a nun any-more..."

CATHERINE: (*Breaks aways*) No! I'm going to tell your mother.

JASON: You a virgin?

CATHERINE: Jay Bob!

JASON: I am. I'm not ashamed to admit it. I've been saving myself. I get a feeling you have, too. Is that true? If we want, we could do something about it.

CATHERINE: *You shut up! Right now! Shame on you!* (*She slaps him hard*)

JASON: (*Beginning to cry*) Why'd you hit me? Geez!

CATHERINE: You're the most offensive teenager I've ever known!

JASON: (*Still in pain*) Geez!

CATHERINE: Well, don't cry...

JASON: I'm not crying! Damn grownup. Why's everybody always trying to hit me?

CATHERINE: Well, you were being so... aggressive.

JASON: I'm supposed to be aggressive. They said to be aggressive.

CATHERINE: Who? Who said?

JASON: The book I read.

CATHERINE: What book?

JASON: (*Pointing*) That book! *Sexual Advice for Teens*. Dating chapter. You just haven't gotten there yet.

CATHERINE: They said to be aggressive?

JASON: Well, kind of aggressive. I don't know. I never picked up a girl before. 'Course I'm not going to do it right the first time. *Geez!!*

CATHERINE: I'm sorry.

JASON: I'll be glad to get back to Latvia!