

CHRISSEY: I didn't wanna make you feel bad. (SUSAN stops. *Very gently, she looks back at CHRISSEY.*)

SUSAN: Chrissy, it's really very nice. It's like you do it yourself, only it's a surprise.

CHRISSEY: Oh.

SUSAN: Yes.

CHRISSEY: Thank you for asking. And don't be mad at me, okay?

SUSAN: No. I'll see you at work. (*And turning, she leaves.*)

Laundry and Bourbon

James McLure

Characters: Hattie, Elizabeth (both mid- to late-30s)

Setting: Elizabeth's back porch

Premiere: McCarter Theatre Company, Princeton, New Jersey, 1980

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Elizabeth is a "strong, sensuous woman, straightforward and without self-pity. She is capable of handling most men other than Roy, her husband. Therein lies the attraction." She is out on her back porch when her best friend, Hattie, comes over. Hattie is quite a talker. She enjoys watching "Let's Make a Deal" reruns and is used to getting her own way. She blames everything that has gone wrong in her life on her husband, Vernon. After a disastrous morning chasing her kids around J.C. Penney, she drops them off at her mother-in-law's. It is a hot summer afternoon. The two women fold laundry and drink bourbon on Elizabeth's back porch.

ELIZABETH: God I hate laundry.

HATTIE: Try doing it for three kids.

ELIZABETH: Week in. Week out. It's the same old clothes.

HATTIE: You can only look at so many pairs of Fruit of the Loom before you want to puke.

ELIZABETH: I'd like to burn everything in this basket and start all over. Everything except this shirt.

HATTIE: Why that shirt's all frayed.

ELIZABETH: It is now, but I remember the first time Roy wore this shirt.

HATTIE: When was that?

ELIZABETH: On our first date. He drove up in that pink Thunderbird in this shirt with all the pearl buttons. He looked just like Paul Newman in *Hud*. (HATTIE holds up a pair of boxer shorts.)

HATTIE: God these shorts are big.

ELIZABETH: What?

HATTIE: These Jockey shorts they're so big. They're not that wide. They're for a narrow body, but they're so long . . .

ELIZABETH: I suppose.

HATTIE: . . . Why're they so long.

ELIZABETH: Roy likes them big. Says he needs a lot of room.

(Pause.)

HATTIE: Whew it's hot out here. (Pause.) Lordy, how's a body supposed to keep cool?

ELIZABETH: Nothing to do but fix a bourbon and Coke and just sit and sweat.

HATTIE: I can't do that.

ELIZABETH: You can't sweat?

HATTIE: No. Fix a drink in the afternoon in front of the kids.

ELIZABETH: Why not?

HATTIE: Children learn by example.

ELIZABETH: So?

HATTIE: Well, all I need is to come home to a house full of kids sitting around drinking margaritas. You don't know what it's like raising a family.

ELIZABETH: No, I don't.

HATTIE: And lemme tell you, summertime is the worst.

ELIZABETH: What do you do?
 HATTIE: I send them outside.
 ELIZABETH: In this heat.
 HATTIE: I give 'em a salt pill and say, play outside.
 ELIZABETH: Don't they collapse from heat prostration?
 HATTIE: Anything to slow them down.
 ELIZABETH: I wish you'd let me take them sometimes.
 HATTIE: Elizabeth, you're not used to kids. The strain would kill you. (ELIZABETH moves *downstage*. *Leans against porch post looking out over the land*. *Pause*.) Elizabeth, what are you staring out at the road for?
 ELIZABETH: No reason. There's nothing to see.
 HATTIE: That's the truth. Nothing green to look at. God, it's depressing living on the edge of a desert.
 ELIZABETH: But just think millions of years ago all this land was under water.
 HATTIE: Well . . . at least it would have been cool.
 ELIZABETH: I like this land, but sometimes it gets too hot and burnt for people. It's still too wild and hard for anything to grow. (*Pause*.) Oh, look Hattie!
 HATTIE: What is it?
 ELIZABETH: Look at that cloud.
 HATTIE: It's just a cloud.
 ELIZABETH: Yeah, but look how it's throwing a shadow across the land. God, doesn't that shadow look peaceful gliding over the land. Doesn't it look cool? It reminds me of a cool dark hand stroking a hot surface. (*Pause*.) Lately I've felt so hot and hollow inside I've wanted something to come along and touch me like that.
 HATTIE: Elizabeth, what's the matter with you?
 ELIZABETH: Nothing, Hattie nothing.
 HATTIE: (*Pause*.) You're doing it again, staring out at that hill. There ain't nothing out there but the highway and the road up to the house. Now, what're you expecting to see?
 ELIZABETH: I was hoping to see a 1959 pink Thunderbird convertible come over that hill.
 HATTIE: You've got tears in your eyes! Don't you tell me nothing's the matter! What is it? (*Pause*.)

ELIZABETH: Roy's been gone two days. (*Silence*.)
 HATTIE: Why that son of a bitch! No wonder you've been so weird. Here, you sit yourself down here. I'm gonna fix you a drink and you're gonna tell me all about it.
 ELIZABETH: I don't want another drink.
 HATTIE: Hush up. Hattie's taking care of you now. The doctor is in. (ELIZABETH sits. HATTIE exits to kitchen, talking.) I knew there was something wrong the minute I laid eyes on you. First you don't answer the doorbell, and as soon as I saw you I could tell something was the matter. That son of a bitch. (HATTIE returns, having mixed drinks in record time.) Well, what brought it on this time?
 ELIZABETH: I don't know. Things haven't been the same since he came back.
 HATTIE: From Vietnam?
 ELIZABETH: Yeah.
 HATTIE: I know. I seen the change. But believe me you've been perfect about it.
 ELIZABETH: I haven't been anything. I haven't done anything. He was the one that went off for two years. He was the one got shot up. He's the one that has nightmares.
 HATTIE: Nightmares.
 ELIZABETH: Yeah, almost every night. (*Pause*.) Anyway, now he's back and he can't seem to get nothing started. He made me quit the job at the pharmacy. He worked some out at his dad's place. He's done some rough-necking out in the oil fields. But then always gets in fights and gets himself fired.
 HATTIE: Well . . . what's he got to say for himself.
 ELIZABETH: He says he's looking for something.
 HATTIE: Hmmm. What?
 ELIZABETH: He doesn't know what. He says everything has changed here in Maynard.
 HATTIE: Nothing's changed in Maynard since the Civil War.
 ELIZABETH: I want him back the way it used to be.
 HATTIE: Elizabeth, he's always been wild and unmanageable.
 ELIZABETH: (*Flaring*.) I don't want to manage him. I don't want to break his spirit. That's why I married him, his spirit. Roy Caulder wasn't going to take no crap from anyone or

anything. He and Wayne Wilder were gonna shake up the world.

HATTIE: Need I remind you that Wayne Wilder is currently serving five to ten for car theft?

ELIZABETH: (*Quietly.*) Roy's different than Wayne.

HATTIE: I wouldn't be too sure.

ELIZABETH: I just wished I knew he was safe. He could be hurt.

HATTIE: Or he could be with another woman.

ELIZABETH: I hope that's all it is.

HATTIE: Elizabeth, how can you say that?

ELIZABETH: Any man worthwhile is gonna look at other women. That's natural. And sometimes they wander a bit.

HATTIE: A bit? That man's done more wandering than Lewis and Clark.

ELIZABETH: You're exaggerating.

HATTIE: Last year? Last year! He took off for five days.

ELIZABETH: (*In spite of herself, smiling.*) Yeah. He had himself quite a time.

HATTIE: You mean he told you what he did?

ELIZABETH: Oh, sure.

HATTIE: Well, you never told me.

ELIZABETH: No.

HATTIE: But I'm your best friend. You're supposed to tell me everything.

ELIZABETH: It was different then. We'd had a fight and he left in a huff. Drove off to El Paso. Picked up a girl hitchhiking.

HATTIE: What was her name?

ELIZABETH: Hattie, how should I know? She was a hitchhiker.

HATTIE: A little tramp probably! A little hippie road slut! What's she look like?

ELIZABETH: Blond.

HATTIE: A little blond hippie bitch that never washed or nothing I'll bet!

ELIZABETH: Oh yeah, and there was one other thing . . .

HATTIE: What?

ELIZABETH: She had a tattoo.

HATTIE: A *tattoo* on her arm?

ELIZABETH: Not exactly on her arm.

HATTIE: God . . . where?

ELIZABETH: On her behind.

HATTIE: No! On her behind! How disgusting! . . . What did it say?

ELIZABETH: "Born to be wild."

HATTIE: Oh Lord! Lord!

ELIZABETH: Then Roy went down to El Paso, got in a four-day poker game, won a hundred bucks and come on home. HATTIE: Weren't you mad?!

ELIZABETH: Yes.

HATTIE: Didn't you want to shoot him?!

ELIZABETH: Yeah.

HATTIE: I would've.

ELIZABETH: I thought it was what he needed to get something out of his system. For a while it seemed to work. (*Pause.*)

HATTIE: Y'know half his trouble is that damn car of his.

ELIZABETH: What do you mean?

HATTIE: He gets behind the wheel of that car and he thinks he's the cock of the walk, the best-looking thing in these parts.

ELIZABETH: (*Proudly.*) He still is.

HATTIE: (*Grudgingly.*) Yeah.

ELIZABETH: Even the girls in high school today. I see them in town looking at him the way we did.

HATTIE: I never looked at him that way.

ELIZABETH: Hattie you still do.

HATTIE: I tell you it's that damn car. When he gets in it he thinks he's young and free again. (*Pause.*) Somebody ought to take that car away from him.

ELIZABETH: (*Warming to the memory.*) I remember the first day he drove into town in that car.

HATTIE: So do I.

ELIZABETH: He'd worked three years, summers and winters, for the down payment.

HATTIE: Only slightly used.

ELIZABETH: Roy and Wayne drove right through the center of town.

HATTIE: They looked like a couple of sultans.

ELIZABETH: It was bright pink.

HATTIE: It glistened like sin.

ELIZABETH: I remember I was coming out of the drug store with an ice cream cone.

HATTIE: What flavor.

ELIZABETH: Vanilla. And the sun off the hood was blinding. Couldn't even see the car. Then it passed into one shadow and I saw it. For the first time. It was beautiful, and Roy hardly knew me then but he waved at me, and I dropped my vanilla cone right there on the pavement. And I knew . . . he was the one.

HATTIE: Yeah. All through high school we double-dated.

ELIZABETH: Remember drive-ins, Hattie.

HATTIE: I sure do. More like wrestling matches.

ELIZABETH: One couple would get the car one night.

HATTIE: The other the next.

ELIZABETH: We'd drive around and drive around and then go make out.

HATTIE: Wayne and me didn't even drive around.

ELIZABETH: (*Rising.*) God, I want them back. I wished tonight was ten years ago. And Roy was coming to pick me up in that pink Thunderbird. I wished I could buy back some of the nights of summer I had in that car. When everything was cool and free and driving along the highway away from this stupid town. With the wind coming at you and the stars all the way to the horizon, like diamonds that went all the way to dawn. (*Pause.*) Then driving off the road somewhere. By a lake maybe. Anywhere. Being off from town with the boy you loved better than anything ever in your whole life. I remember us making love for the first time. Really slow and gentle. God. He was gentle then. He taught me my body. I'd never really felt with my body before Roy. Suddenh it was like every pore of my skin was being opened like in a

rain storm, feeling and holding everything you possibly wanted right there in your arms. What I wouldn't give to have those nights again. Just one night when the back seat of that Thunderbird was sweeter than all the beds in the world. (*Slight pause.*)

HATTIE: They took a lot of girls out in that car.

ELIZABETH: We were different.

HATTIE: Were we? (*They stare at each other.*) Look how he's treating you now. (*Pause.*) Elizabeth you're getting all sentimental and romantic. That happened to me once. I let a man run all over me.

ELIZABETH: What'd you do?

HATTIE: I wrote a poem.

ELIZABETH: You?

HATTIE: Yep. Worst afternoon of my life. Never do it again. That's what happens when you get all sentimental and miserable. You write poems. Just like old Emily Dickens.

ELIZABETH: Emily Dickinson.

HATTIE: That's the one. Poor gal was a miserable godforsaken old maid all her life and when she died all that was left was just a drawerful of poems.

ELIZABETH: What was your poem about, Hattie?

HATTIE: I wrote a poem about Wayne Wilder. He was a mean person and it was a mean poem. It was right after high school graduation. Wayne told me he was jilting me. You and Roy was getting married and Wayne Wilder was jilting me. Hit me like a ton of bricks. I went out back of the girls' gym, cried and wrote a poem. I still remember it.

"Oh Wayne you don't know, I love you so well

But you son of a bitch

I hope you roast in hell."

(*Pause.*) Not much of a poem, I guess. But then I decided to get practical like Hattie's always had to be. I went back to where everybody was in their caps and gowns and I saw Vernon Dealing standing there. He'd just been fiddlin' under some car hood. Even in his cap and gown his hands were dirty. But he was a good man and I knew he liked me. I got him to take me out. I got him to propose. Within a month

we were married. Poor Vern. Never knew what hit him. (Pause.)

ELIZABETH: What are you telling me this for?

HATTIE: Roy's just like Wayne. He ain't never gonna change.

ELIZABETH: Maybe not.

HATTIE: I've known you all my life. I know you need a marriage and you want a family. Am I right.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

HATTIE: Then wake up. You can't leave the important things in life like marriage and children up to the menfolk. If they had their way they'd just stick to their football and their fishing and their Thunderbirds and just be boys forever. (Pause.) Now, if Roy straightens up, that's one thing. If not . . . well, you got to make a decision.

ELIZABETH: (Private.) Maybe it's already been made for me.

HATTIE: What do you mean?

ELIZABETH: Nothing, Hattie. Forget I said that.

HATTIE: Don't tell me it's nothing . . . you're pregnant aren't you? (Silence.)

ELIZABETH: Yeah.

HATTIE: I knew it! I knew it the minute I walked in here today. Oh Elizabeth! That's wonderful!

ELIZABETH: What's wonderful about it? It comes at the worst possible time.

HATTIE: Wrong. It comes at the best possible time. Well, don't you see? This might be just the thing to make Roy straighten up and fly right.

ELIZABETH: And if it doesn't?

HATTIE: Then . . . to hell with him.

ELIZABETH: (With difficulty.) I guess . . . you're right.

HATTIE: Oh honey! Let me give you a hug. That's the smartest thing you ever did.

ELIZABETH: (Pulling away.) What do you mean?

HATTIE: Getting pregnant, of course.

ELIZABETH: Hattie, I didn't get myself pregnant, on purpose I didn't plan it this way. (Pause.)

HATTIE: Are you sure?

ELIZABETH: (Slightest hesitation.) Yes! Yes, I'm sure. I don't know if Roy can take this right now. He doesn't know what he's doing himself.

HATTIE: Well, that's not your problem.

ELIZABETH: (Angry.) It's every bit my problem. It couldn't be any more my problem.

HATTIE: (Pause.) I didn't mean to get you all upset. I just meant . . .

ELIZABETH: (Calm.) I know, Hattie, I know. I just don't want to talk about it anymore. (Awkward pause.)

HATTIE: Oh, well sure. Sure. Uh, say mind if I use your phone?

ELIZABETH: (Smiling.) Of course.

HATTIE: Figure I better check on the kids. No telling what devilment they've gotten up to. (Dialing.) Everything gonna turn out fine you'll see.

Lydie Breeze

John Guare

Characters: Lydie Breeze (15), Beaty (early 30s)

Setting: A house in Nantucket, New York City, 1895

Premiere: American Place Theatre, New York City, 1982

Publisher: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

Fifteen-year-old Lydie Breeze lives with her widowed father and their Irish serving girl, Beaty. Lydie has been temporarily blinded in an accident. This scene, which takes place at dawn, opens the play. *Lydie Breeze* is part of a cycle of plays about the history of a nineteenth-century Nantucket family.

(LYDIE HICKMAN enters the parlor, carrying a lit candle. She places it on the table, kneels, her hands in prayer.)