

THE JACKSONIAN

BY **BETH HENLEY**



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THE JACKSONIAN
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To my nephew, Craig, and to Mama

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to especially thank the actors who have collaborated with me since the play was first read in my living room: Ed Harris, Amy Madigan, Bill Pullman, and Glenne Headly. (Glenn Headly, Glenn Headly, Glenn Headly!)

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Robert Falls, through your patience, theatrical acumen, and unobtrusive genius, you helped me find the play I was longing to write.

And finally deep love and thanks to Cherry Dude (who dearly knows me) and Patrick Henley, my beloved son and long time supporter.

THE JACKSONIAN premiered at the Geffen Playhouse (Gilbert Cates, Producing Director; Randall Arney, Artistic Director; Ken Novice, Managing Director) in Los Angeles, opening on February 7, 2012. It was directed by Robert Falls; the set design was by Walt Spangler; the costume design was by Ana Kuzmanic; the lighting design was by Daniel Ionazzi; and the composer and sound designer was Richard Woodbury. The cast was as follows:

BILL PERCHEd Harris
EVA WHITE Glenne Headly
SUSAN PERCH Amy Madigan
FRED WEBER..... Bill Pullman
ROSY PERCH..... Bess Rous

THE JACKSONIAN was presented in New York City by the New Group (Scott Elliott, Artistic Director; Geoff Rich, Executive Director) at the Acorn Theatre at Theatre Row, opening on November 7, 2013, with the same creative team. The cast was as follows:

BILL PERCHEd Harris
EVA WHITE Glenne Headly
SUSAN PERCH Amy Madigan
FRED WEBER..... Bill Pullman
ROSY PERCH.....Juliet Brett

New York Stage and Film Company (Johanna Pfaelzer, Artistic Director) presented a reading of THE JACKSONIAN in 2009.

CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

ROSY PERCH, daughter of Bill and Susan Perch.

BILL PERCH, a dentist and motel resident.

EVA WHITE, a waitress and motel maid.

FRED WEBER, a motel bartender.

SUSAN PERCH, wife of Bill Perch, mother of Rosy.

PLACE

The action of the play takes place at the Jacksonian Motel — an establishment on the outskirts of Jackson, Mississippi.

The motel exists as a haunting memory, a sort of purgatory that was Jackson circa 1964.

There are three playing spaces: the bar/restaurant, a motel room, and the outside ice machine.

TIME

March – December 1964.

The scenes are not played linearly.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

The direct addresses of Rosy are evoked by the murder. Rosy's terror and her will quake the landscape of time, space, and memory. In these monologues Rosy may break theatrical conventions that are established for the rest of the play.

THE JACKSONIAN

Scene 1

Time: the night of the murder.

December 17, 1964.

Lights up on Rosy Perch, 16. She wears pajamas and is wrapped in a blanket.

ROSY. There's been an accident there's going to be I need to stop an accident at the motel. The Jacksonian Motel.

(Rosy watches as Bill Perch enters and goes to the ice machine. He has blood on his hands and shirt. Perch violently digs an ice bucket into the ice. ICE CRASHES! He holds the ice in the bucket and stares out for no more than a moment. Perch exits.)

We need to leave.

We need to leave in time.

The time is. What time is.

(The following lines overlap Fred and Eva's entrances in to the bar.)

It's not Christmas. It's near around before — before Christmas.

There is a Christmas tree at the motel. But it is not the real tree.

The real tree is at home. And it is before —

Before a time that makes the time of murder.

A bar/restaurant at the Jacksonian motel.

Time: The night of the murder.

December 17, 1964.

There is a manger scene and a string of Christmas lights.

Eva White is staring coldly across space. Fred Weber is smoking a cigarette with a burning tip. A sinister silence.

EVA. I know what it is.

FRED. What?

EVA. What ya got me in my stocking.

FRED. No.

EVA. It's a surprise.

FRED. No.

EVA. I like Christmas. Jesus was born. He likes me. Jesus loves all the little children. Want to know what I got you? It's easy to guess. You wear it on *this* finger. I'm saving it for Christmas. Like we said.

FRED. I never said.

EVA. You said you're my *fiancé*. Fred, my *fiancé*.

FRED. Don't say it like that.

EVA. I know you don't think you deserve me. But I won't let you throw away your one chance at happiness. There's not many chances people get. I'm your one and only chance. You think life is nothing but sorrow, and misery is a blessing from God. But you deserve happiness, you deserve me. I got my shoes dyed bone ivory to match the bridal dress. We might as well think about having children. Some kids would be nice.

FRED. It's not going to work out like everybody hoped.

EVA. It's going to work out like I hoped. Right after Christmas we're going to the Justice of the Peace and tying the knot.

FRED. Eva, I didn't wanna bother you with this and cause you to have a nervous breakdown.

EVA. What?

FRED. There's a muscular constriction. My heart's hard. It's not pumping as much blood as it should. It'll kill me. Two or three months. Could be days. The heart is a muscle and mine is decayed.

EVA. I don't believe you have such a heart like that. A decayed heart.

FRED. It's the way it is with my heart. (*They look at each other steadily.*) I won't make a widow out of you. Wouldn't be right. I can't let a young woman marry a terminal man. God would strike me down for selfish pride. You don't wanna make me look bad in the eyes of the Lord? Would you?

EVA. No. Not that.

FRED. Not more of that. Keep me out of hell, Eva. The dentist is single.

EVA. He's married.

FRED. Separated. A long time. For good.

EVA. Maybe not.

FRED. Wife's filing for divorce. Got a big-time lawyer. She's serving papers after Christmas.

EVA. How do you know?

FRED. She let it slip after some scotch.

EVA. Fred, we're engaged.

FRED. That was before my heart's muscular constriction.

EVA. It's sworn between us.

FRED. Set your sights on the living.

EVA. Remember back in April? The filling-station lady?

FRED. Wasn't that a terrible tragic thing.

EVA. It sure was sad at the funeral visitation. Seeing her in a coffin. One of her kids, a little girl, was crawling up on the coffin like she never realized her mama was dead.

FRED. You already told me the whole story.

EVA. Everyone could see her underpants. Pink. The little girl's underpants. It was a funny sight.

FRED. "A funny sight."

EVA. Her daddy had to carry her off that corpse. Crying all the way. He was the widower. Manager of the Texaco station. To his everlasting regret he was not there the night his wife got shot and killed.

FRED. You'll get the money. The running-away money. I won't need it dead.

EVA. When do I get it?

FRED. I'll give it to you on Christmas. In a wrapped package.

EVA. How much of it do I get?

THE JACKSONIAN

by Beth Henley

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Jackson, Mississippi, 1964. When his wife kicks him out, respectable dentist Bill Perch moves into the seedy Jacksonian Motel. There, his downward spiral is punctuated by encounters with his teenage daughter, a gold-digging motel employee, a treacherous bartender, and his now-estranged wife. Revolving around the night of a murder, THE JACKSONIAN brims with suspense and dark humor and unearths the eerie tensions and madness in a town poisoned by racism.

"[A] delectably lurid play. Ms. Henley isn't flirting with the clichés of Southern Gothic and pulp fiction. She's embracing them with such ardor that she squeezes new life out of them. The result is her most entertaining work since she won the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award for Crimes of the Heart three decades ago."

—The New York Times

"There's a healthy vein of black humor running throughout which turns Henley's Southern Gothic soap opera into an even more surreal experience."

—Entertainment Weekly

"Henley takes her time building up the characters and situations, able to transcend the inevitable ghost of Tennessee Williams by her absolute security with her own voice ..."

—The Hollywood Reporter

"This black comedy, set in Jackson, Miss., in the tinderbox year of 1964, proudly waves its Southern Gothic flag. You know you're deep in Flannery O'Connor country when the quotidian merges with the grotesque and genteel manners are accompanied by a fist in the face."

—The Los Angeles Times

Also by Beth Henley

CRIMES OF THE HEART
THE DEBUTANTE BALL
THE WAKE OF JAMEY FOSTER
and many others

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