

FARCE OF HABIT

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

FARCE OF HABIT
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*We dedicate this play, with love and gratitude,
to our dear friends, Chris and Rick Manheim.*

FARCE OF HABIT received its world premiere at Pintello Comedy Theatre in Gilroy, California, on February 3, 2017. It was produced by Rod and Marion Pintello and directed by Marion Pintello; the technical director was Charley Gilmore; the set design was by Whitney Pintello; the house manager was Simon Pintello and the original Jones Hope Wooten show logo was designed by Jason Jeffers. The cast was as follows:

WANELLE WILBURN April Ouellette
D. GENE WILBURN Jim McCann
MAXIE WILBURN SUGGS Maureen Haney
NIGEL ST. CLAIR* Jeff Patereau
JENNA SEALY WILBURN Angela Doss Santiago
TY WILBURN Derek Barnes
HUDDLE FISK Kel Whisner
SISTER MYRTLE AGNES Barbara Bottini
BARB STRATTON Dena Gregory

*This character name has since been changed to Jock McNair.

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Under no circumstances should any female role in this comedy be played by a male, or any male role in this comedy be played by a female.

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All of the characters portrayed in *Farce of Habit* are fictional creations, and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

AUTHORS' NOTES

We suggest up-tempo music be played pre- and post-show, at intermission, and especially during scene transitions.

We urge that scene changes be made as quickly as possible to maintain a lively pace for the play. This is especially true in Act Two for the transition from Scene 1 to Scene 2.

Sounds effects in Act Two should never mask any of the dialogue.

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

WANELLE WILBURN

D. GENE WILBURN

MAXIE WILBURN SUGGS

JOCK McNAIR

JENNA SEALY WILBURN

TY WILBURN

HUDDLE FISK

SISTER MYRTLE AGNES

BARBARA STRATTON

PLACE

Lobby of a small fishing lodge
in the Ozark Mountains, Arkansas

TIME

The present.

FARCE OF HABIT

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Early morning. Lights come up on the lobby of the Reel 'Em Inn, a rustic, family-owned fishing lodge on Lake Lorraine in the beautiful Ozarks. The front door is upstage center, a coat rack beside it. Upstage left is the door to the owners' living quarters. On the stage left wall is a swinging door to the kitchen. A window with floor-length drapery panels on each side is on the stage right wall. Downstage right is a hallway door to the guest wing. Downstage from the hallway door is an easy chair and a small table. A small sofa with two throw pillows on it sits center stage. An attractive fruit basket, a phone, and an open laptop sit on the registration desk downstage left. Downstage left of the registration desk is another easy chair and side table. Wanelle Wilburn, 50s, a determined ball of fire dressed in slacks and a blouse, enters through the kitchen door, carries an oversized coffee mug and a dish towel, crosses to downstage right chair, speaks lovingly to the mug.

WANELLE. Ahhhhh. Good morning, caffeine, my dark-roast beauty, my steamy inspiration, my delicious cup of courage. *(Sits.)* It's just you and me...alone. *(Starts to take a sip, phone rings. She wilts. It rings again. She grunts, sets the mug down, races to phone. Bright and professional, as if a recording.)* Thank you for calling the Reel 'Em Inn located in beautiful Mayhew, Arkansas. Please hold for the next available reservationist. *(Hits a button, runs back, grabs*

the mug, takes a big swig, sighs satisfied, races back to desk. Then, brightly into phone.) Reel 'Em Inn, this is Wanelle Wilburn, how may I help you?... Uh-huh, that's right, *Arkansas*... No, you're thinking about *Alabama*. We're two states to the left and up one... Uh-huh... Well, yes, down here most of us *do* talk like this, but don't worry, we can get you a translator... Yes, we have lovely rooms and the best bass fishing in the Ozarks... (*As she talks, her husband, D. Gene Wilburn, 50s, good-hearted guy, dressed to fish—rod, reel and tackle box in hand—slips through upstage left door, unnoticed by Wanelle, tiptoes slowly toward kitchen door.*) Great! And once you firm up those travel dates, give us a call back... You bet! Bye now! (*Hangs up, checks the computer. Without looking up, threatens...*) Don't even think about it, mister. (*D. Gene freezes, then:*)

D. GENE. Aw, babe, what the heck's the point of having a lake stocked with bass and crappie if I'm stuck in here and can't get out there to catch 'em?

WANELLE. D. Gene Wilburn, there *are* other things to think about in the springtime besides fishing! (*Walks toward him, flirts.*) For example, you know that look a woman gets when she's in the mood for some frisky romance?

D. GENE. (*Baffled.*) Uh...not really.

WANELLE. (*Peeved.*) Well, take one more step toward that door, buddy boy, *and you never will!*

D. GENE. (*Drops his gear.*) I just wanted to enjoy a nice, peaceful weekend.

WANELLE. And you can...soon as we check in a fellow who's arriving this morning, tend to that gaggle of nuns bunking in the barn, and make sure we treat our celebrity guest *real special*.

D. GENE. *Why* do we have to treat that stuck-up know-it-all special?!

WANELLE. Because he's *famous*! He's got the number one radio talk show in the country—"Clear the Air with Jock McNair." The man's an expert on human nature, he knows everything about relationships and marriage.

D. GENE. Well, so do I. Any man who says marriage is a fifty-fifty proposition doesn't understand two things: women and fractions.

WANELLE. (*Unamused.*) Ha-ha. The reason he's so popular is because he's all about honesty. Something we could use a lot more of.

D. GENE. Agreed. Here's some for you—I *honestly* want to go fishin'.

WANELLE. Mr. McNair chose our lodge to step out of the spotlight for a while and our job is to make him glad he did. In fact, run this fruit basket to his room.

D. GENE. (*Scratches his neck.*) Aw, man. Do I have to start my day talking to that blowhard? He's so stuck on himself and for some unexplainable reason he treats me like a hick! I don't like it and I make it a point to avoid weirdos every chance I get. (*Just then, Maxie Suggs, 60s, D. Gene's sister, hearty, no-nonsense country woman, bursts through front door in a police uniform, cowboy boots and Stetson, throws herself through several exaggerated and incorrect karate poses.*)

MAXIE. (*Dead serious.*) Mornin', brother. Kai-yah!

D. GENE. But sometimes I don't succeed.

MAXIE. (*Totally concentrated, does a kick.*) Kai-yah! (*Tries it backwards.*) Kai— (*Kicks, gets a cramp, howls.*) Ow, ow, ow, ow! (*Limps badly.*)

WANELLE. You're still doing that martial arts training, Maxie?

MAXIE. Yeah, 'cause I'll never make it to my pension if I don't play along with the chief's dumb ideas. I'd like to see that tub of lard try some of these moves. I'm tellin' you, that man is one Bloomin' Onion away from meetin' his maker.

D. GENE. (*Deadpan.*) I am so proud my tax dollars are being spent on cop karate—though I guess it *will* be easier to cuff a perp when he's doubled over laughing.

MAXIE. Oh, shut up. (*Limps to the desk.*) Coffee sure smells good. I'll grab me a cup from the kitchen—got a big mornin' ahead.

D. GENE. More sobriety tests in the Pentecostal's parking lot?

MAXIE. Nah, I've drawn the great job of warnin' folks to check their roofs, tie down their lawn furniture, you name it. First big storm's comin', might even have us a twister. Speakin' of which, I figured you'd be out on the lake. Best fishin's always just before a storm.

D. GENE. (*Glares at Wanelle.*) Gee, that must've slipped my mind.

WANELLE. (*To D. Gene.*) Okay, if you don't want to get your feelings hurt by Mr. McNair, then at least take that basket of sandwiches out to the barn. The Sisters are going on a hike this morning and Jenna made them a picnic lunch.

MAXIE. That flock of nuns is still here? I thought roughin' it three nights in a barn would've sent those gals runnin' by now.

WANELLE. Oh, no, they're having a ball. They've said this is the best nature retreat they've ever been on and the barn suits them just fine.

D. GENE. (*Mindlessly scratches one hand, then the other.*) Once and for all, I am *not* taking anything to the barn. You know how I feel about... (*Shudders.*) nuns.

MAXIE. (*Can't resist.*) Wel-l-l-l, after all these years, you still haven't gotten over your fear of *The Sound of Music*?

D. GENE. (*Defensive.*) Will you get it through your skull that I am *not* afraid of some silly old musical! I just had a...bad experience when I was a kid in that *production* at the community theatre. And you know we don't discuss it.

MAXIE. (*Sing-song.*) You're scared of nuns, you're scared of nuns, you're—

WANELLE. (*Annoyed.*) For pity's sake. *I'll* take the sandwiches to the nuns, then *I'll* take the fruit basket to Mr. McNair. (*Shoots D. Gene a look.*) Could *you* at least get the ladder and check the shingles over the porch? Unless, of course, you've developed a paralyzing fear of *Fiddler on the Roof*. (*Exits into kitchen.*)

MAXIE. (*Mock sympathy.*) Poor thing. She just doesn't get it, but I understand.

D. GENE. (*Surprised.*) Well...thank you. I appreciate that.

MAXIE. You bet. What are big sisters for? (*Whips the dish towel over her head like a wimple, screeches.*) Nunzilla! (*Unnerved, D. Gene yells, runs. Maxie chases him around the sofa just as Jock McNair, late 40s, handsome, macho, self-centered womanizer, wears pressed khakis and white shirt, loafers, no socks, enters hallway door. He watches, clears his throat. D. Gene and Maxie freeze.*)

D. GENE. Oh. Mr. McNair. We were...just...uh—

JOCK. Why not try something new, like honesty, Mr. Washtub?

D. GENE. It's Wilburn.

JOCK. (*Ignores him.*) I'm *always* honest. In fact, I've based my entire *compelling* and *widely embraced* philosophy on it. That's why I'm a star. For example, I don't hesitate at all to say you strike me as some backwoods rube who'd do anything to avoid work. There. Right off the bat—wasn't hard at all. Just honest. See? Now, I'm asking *again* for another pillow in my room and a brighter lightbulb for the lamp. And step on it! I'm a busy man.

D. GENE. (*Could throttle him.*) Oh, I'll get you a pillow... (*Mutters.*) and I know right where I'd like to put it. (*Exits through hallway door. Maxie stares at Jock.*)

JOCK. Don't let me keep you. There's got to be some local moonshiners you need to harass.

MAXIE. Yeah, that would be fun, but we only do that on Wednesdays. Sooo, you're the "honesty guru." Reckon it was some of that honesty that's landed you in the middle of a big, ugly divorce? (*Off his look.*) It's on all the gossip shows.

JOCK. (*Bristles.*) F.Y.I my wife and I have parted as friends. We were *honest* and accepted the truth that we'd outgrown each other.

MAXIE. I see. Was it all that growin' that made her ram your Maserati and threaten you with a nine iron? (*Off his look.*) I read the tabloids, too.

JOCK. Well, much as I enjoy interacting with simple country folk, I've got things to do.

MAXIE. Yeah, me too. And one of *my* things is to let you know that in these parts we simple country folk watch out for family. I don't take to anyone mistreatin' my baby brother. (*Tough, checks her gun.*) And, when provoked, I am one crack shot. And *that's* the honest truth. Just remember, Mr. Big Stuff... (*Points two fingers at her own eyes, then points them at him.*) I'll be watchin' you. (*Exits into kitchen.*)

JOCK. Oh, darn! And just when I was counting on the delusional hillbilly demographic to boost my ratings. (*His phone rings, he answers.*) It's Jock. Start talking... Steve?! (*Checks to see he's alone. Moves downstage right.*) ...What sort of communications skills did they teach you in law school?! We agreed you wouldn't contact me until the deadline has passed... Of course, my wife's

FARCE OF HABIT

by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope, Jamie Wooten

4M, 5W

Comic fireworks explode in FARCE OF HABIT, an absurdly funny Southern-fried romp that takes us back to the Reel 'Em Inn, the finest little fishing lodge in the Ozarks. The proprietor, D. Gene Wilburn, is looking forward to a peaceful weekend on the lake. But there are only two chances of that happening: slim and none. Why, for example, has his wife, Wanelle, picked these three days to white-knuckle her way through caffeine withdrawal? Why is his son Ty's marriage to Jenna falling apart so fast? Could it have something to do with the French can-can costume Ty is wearing? How on earth would D. Gene's feisty sister, Maxie, allow herself to get caught up in such a bizarre undercover police assignment? And that's just his family. If this isn't enough to thwart D. Gene's weekend plans, he's got a gaggle of nuns who've converged on the Inn, hell-bent on experiencing a nature retreat—which might be tolerable if D. Gene didn't have a chronic fear of anything in a habit. Add to this the presence of Jock McNair, a nationally known relationship guru whose colossal ego threatens everyone's sanity; a shy retiree anxious to cut loose and embrace his "inner caveman" and a couple of wild women who may or may not be who they claim to be. Throw in the storm of the century that's fast bearing down on Mayhew, Arkansas, and D. Gene has no prayer of baiting a hook any time soon. Oh, and did we mention there's an axe murderer on the loose? If you enjoy gloriously preposterous hilarity, then laughing your way through the take-no-prisoners lunacy of a Jones Hope Wooten comedy is one habit you'll never want to break!

Also by Jones, Hope, Wooten
ALWAYS A BRIDESMAID
FARCE OF NATURE
THE SAVANNAH SIPPING SOCIETY
and others

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