



THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE

BY WENDY MACLEOD



DRAMATISTS
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THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I once read the advice of a monk suggesting that when we listen to a sermon, rather than evaluating it or the person who's giving it, we should evaluate our own ability to extract meaning from it.

When we meet people we tend (or, at least, I tend) to categorize them, to judge them, to draw them in broad strokes. But what if, instead of judging *them*, we judged our own ability to perceive them?

When Bill first meets his divorced neighbor Jack, Jack appears to be a sitcom character — intrusive, needy, boorish — but gradually Bill's perception of his new “friend” deepens. Bill discovers that Jack, while wildly imperfect, at least has the self-awareness to understand that he's played a part in his own predicament. And while it's true that Jack lost his wife's trust and his children's love, it's also true that Jack was and is wrestling with circumstances that would challenge the best of us.

In creating Bill, I wanted to write the kind of man I've been fortunate to have in my own life — in my father, my husband, and my sons: a good man ready to make a commitment and honor that commitment; a man who, unlike Jack who brought about his own divorce, is afraid that divorce might be thrust upon him.

We all hope for romantic love, to find “the one” and make it work forever. But there are other kinds of love that can comfort us and keep us company along the way. Although these two men spend the entire play trying to make sense of romantic love, their shared sadness and their kindness to each other is the real story of the play. To return to my earlier ministerial language: When we come to understand each other, to really *see* each other, it's easier to overlook each other's trespasses.

— *Wendy MacLeod*

THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE was originally produced by Seattle Repertory Theatre (Sharon Ott, Artistic Director; Benjamin Moore, Managing Director) in Seattle, Washington, on April 7, 2003. It was directed by Kurt Beattie; the set design was by Don Yanik; the costume design was by Carolyn Keim; the lighting design was by Greg Sullivan; and the sound design was by Dominic Cody Kramers. The cast was as follows:

BILL R. Hamilton Wright
JACK Jeff Steitzer

THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE was subsequently produced at Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, Illinois, opening on June 1, 2003. It was directed by Rick Snyder; the set design was by Julie Ruscitti; the costume design was by Brooke Schaffner; and the sound design was by Tina Louise Mead. The cast was as follows:

BILL Keith Kupferer
JACK Timothy Gregory

THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE was also produced at Bay Street Theater (Sybil Christopher, Founder/Co-Artistic Director; Murphy Davis, Co-Artistic Director; Stephen Hamilton, Founder/Executive Director; Emma Walton, Founder/Director of Education) in Sag Harbor, New York, opening on May 22, 2007. It was directed by Leonard Foglia; the set design was by Michael McGarty; the costume design was by Rebecca Lustig; the lighting design was by Brian Nason; the sound design was by Tony Melfa; and the production stage manager was Chris Clark. The cast was as follows:

BILL Brian D’Arcy James
JACK Tom McGowan

CHARACTERS

BILL — 30s, a junior executive at Seagram's, a wonderful guy.

JACK — 40s, his neighbor, an accountant.

PLACE

The living room of a condo.

TIME

The recent past.

NOTE: Productions are free to substitute years in [brackets] with the years of their choice.

THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE

ACT ONE

A bare living room. Bill and Adele's new condo.

JACK. Anybody home?

BILL. Hello?

JACK. Hey, neighbor. Jack Foster. Jack. Next door.

BILL. Bill.

JACK. Bill Bill?

BILL. Bill McGinnis.

JACK. Irish.

BILL. Yes.

JACK. Green beer, all that.

BILL. Well ... no.

JACK. No?

BILL. That's just St. Patrick's Day.

JACK. They drink it hot, right?

BILL. Who?

JACK. The Irish.

BILL. Warm. I think. I've never been there.

JACK. (*Craning his neck to look around.*) So, what? You're saving up for a trip to the old country?

BILL. Well ... no.

JACK. Love it or leave it, huh?

BILL. I guess.

JACK. Nice place.

BILL. Thanks.

JACK. Just like mine. Same layout, everything.

BILL. Uh-huh.

JACK. Fixtures. I've been *very* happy here.

BILL. Oh?

JACK. *Very* happy.

BILL. You been here long?

JACK. Six months.

BILL. Alone?

JACK. Divorced. Get the kids on weekends.

BILL. That's nice.

JACK. It is and it isn't. They're testing you. They know you feel guilty so they're thinking, "What, he's gonna move outta the house *and* whap me upside the head? No way." You divorced?

BILL. No.

JACK. Single?

BILL. No. Married.

JACK. Well, that's the only one left. Except for (*He wiggles his wrist.*) huh?

BILL. How did you know I wasn't?

JACK. I saw the power mower.

BILL. Oh.

What power mower?

JACK. The one out back.

BILL. That's not mine.

JACK. You don't got a power mower?

BILL. Well, I do.

JACK. See there.

So where's the wife?

BILL. At her folks'.

JACK. So you're left, what, waiting for the furniture?

BILL. Bingo.

JACK. Stay at my place.

BILL. I couldn't.

JACK. Yeah you could.

BILL. I'm all right. I got a sleeping bag, some pots.

JACK. That's not living, that's camping.

BILL. I like camping.

JACK. Some people do. I guess I'm supposed to take my son camping. That's what sons are for, right?

BILL. I don't know what sons are for.

JACK. That makes two of us! I never cared for children, did not

care for children. “Cute baby,” what is that? Can *you* tell one baby from another?

BILL. No.

JACK. Me neither. But they told me when they’re your *own*, it’s different.

BILL. Who told you?

JACK. People. But when Benny was born, that’s my oldest, he looked like every other baby in the world to me. I looked through the glass, I knew him only by the tape on his wrist and the chart on his crib. I did not *know* him in any kind of primal sense.

BILL. What about after you brought him home?

JACK. I began to see him as science fiction, an alien, an intruder, a nightmare of a roommate — not only did he not do his own dishes, he didn’t clean up his own crap. I mean, what is that? Kittens, you show them the litter box, boom, they get the hang of it. Puppies, they head for the newspaper, six weeks tops — are we or are we not the most intelligent species?

BILL. We are.

JACK. I question it.

 Been married long?

BILL. Ten years. Together fifteen.

JACK. So let’s see, that’s fifteen years altogether?

BILL. Right.

JACK. A long time.

BILL. Doesn’t seem long.

JACK. That’s a good sign.

BILL. I guess.

JACK. You must have one of *those* relationships.

BILL. Those?

JACK. Ideal, perfect, makes you puke.

BILL. No.

JACK. Honesty, trust, blah blah blah.

BILL. We try.

JACK. I’m losing my lunch.

BILL. We *try*.

JACK. What am I hearing? Trouble in paradise?

BILL. We’ve been through hard times. Like everybody else.

JACK. You fooled around, did ya?

BILL. *No*.

JACK. Who am I to judge? Look at me. I’m a bachelor at forty-two!

BILL. You're not really a bachelor, you're a divorcée.

JACK. A divorcée is a woman. Men get to wipe the slate clean.

BILL. That doesn't seem fair.

JACK. Don't talk to me about fair! I'm doing people's taxes at night to meet the child support payments. Does that seem fair to you?

BILL. Well ... yes.

JACK. *Yes?*

BILL. They are your children.

JACK. What do you know about it? Mister Married for Ten, Together for Fifteen!

BILL. Not a lot I guess.

JACK. And I pray you never do.

BILL. Thank you.

JACK. I pray that. But I gotta tell you, I'm a little disappointed you're a married man. I seen you coming and going. I thought you were one of us.

BILL. Not yet.

JACK. And I pray you never are.

You got a picture?

BILL. Of what?

JACK. Your wife.

BILL. I do, yes. Would you like to see it?

JACK. I asked, didn't I? (*Bill takes a picture from his wallet and hands it to Jack.*) Oh, lookit there. She is a honey. Bedroom eyes. (*Bill snatches the picture back.*) What's her name?

BILL. Adele.

JACK. *Adele?* She a movie star or something?

BILL. No, but she's an actress.

JACK. No kidding?

BILL. She's on a Pine-Sol commercial.

JACK. I *seen* that. She breathes in.

BILL. She's smelling the pine.

JACK. That's good money.

BILL. When you're making it. It's been hard on Adele's career, the moving around.

JACK. So stay put.

BILL. My job.

JACK. Well, I guess your job's gotta take priority ...

BILL. I didn't say *that*. There were other considerations.

JACK. Like what?

BILL. (*Changing the subject.*) So you're an accountant?

JACK. Guilty as charged.

BILL. In business for yourself?

JACK. No, thank God. You know what they say? A man who works for himself has a fool for a boss.

BILL. I never heard that one.

JACK. It's probably translated from the Japanese or something. No, I work for a corporate concern.

BILL. Uh-huh.

JACK. In the retail sector. Nothing flashy. It's not Goldman Sachs.

BILL. Would I know it?

JACK. You ever heard of Sears and Roebuck?

BILL. Of course.

JACK. Old, faithful Sears.

BILL. Well, that's, you know, no fly-by-night company.

JACK. You have kids?

BILL. No.

JACK. She's still got her figure.

BILL. Yes.

JACK. My wife, she was pregnant with Benny, she's got carry-out menus pinned by the phone — Indian, Chinese, pizza, *whatever* — if it delivers, she eats it.

BILL. She put on weight?

JACK. She was a *truck*.

BILL. Did she try to lose the weight?

JACK. She tried everything once. Weight Watchers, SlimFast, Overeaters Anonymous — how anonymous can it be when you're *fat*?

BILL. She can't look eighteen again.

JACK. I wasn't asking for eighteen, I was asking for a slim thirty-five. Was that so much to ask?

BILL. I don't know.

JACK. Between you and me, I don't think she gave a fuck. She figured she'd snagged herself a husband, why did she need to keep herself up? You know why?

BILL. Why?

JACK. To keep me.

BILL. Uh-huh.

JACK. The bitch of it is, *now* she's losing weight.

BILL. Uh-huh.

JACK. She looks terrific. Just to punish me.

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As Bill anxiously waits for his unfaithful wife and his furniture, he is visited by Jack, a divorced neighbor who suggests the loneliness of life after marriage. At first Jack appears to be a nightmare neighbor — intrusive, needy, boorish — but gradually Bill's perception of his new "friend" deepens. While it's true that Jack managed to lose his wife's trust and his children's love, Bill discovers that Jack is wrestling with circumstances that would challenge the best of us. A funny and wistful exploration of love, loss, masculinity, and the needs that bring people together and drive them apart.

"Despite (or maybe it's because of) its origin in a female mind, this funny, charming, and rather moving little sleeper of a play from Wendy MacLeod probes the vulnerabilities of heterosexual, middle-class, decaying maleness with ... good humor, affection and incisive accuracy."
—**The Chicago Tribune**

"Middle-aged male angst isn't a new subject for contemporary drama, but it's handled with refreshing subtlety and wit in this serious comedy ... Sophisticated, with wry observations and literary references ... [but] doesn't lose its black wit." —**Variety**

"MacLeod's script is by turns acid and tender, and funny in a way that ... proceeds powerfully from character and context."
—**The Chicago Reader**

"Wendy MacLeod is an expert at whipping moods, characters and events around in all sorts of intriguing ways."
—**The Seattle Post-Intelligencer**

"... truly funny and finally tragic ... This is a wonderfully intimate play that doesn't pummel audiences with emotion, but rather, serves it up subtly through the veil of youthful dreams derailed."
—**The Sag Harbor Express (NY)**

"[Wendy MacLeod has] not only written a probing exploration of the things that matter, but created a marvelously complex and satisfying tour de force for two actors."
—**The Southampton Press (NY)**

Also by Wendy MacLeod

THE HOUSE OF YES

SIN

THE WATER CHILDREN

and others

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