

EITHER OR

A short play

by

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EITHER OR

CHARACTERS

RENEE, a woman  
JOHN, her husband  
DAVEY, a woman

TIME

The present

SETTING

The living room of an apartment

EITHER OR

The living room of an apartment. Two exits: one leads to a bedroom, the other to the front door. JOHN, naked from the waist up, stands in front of a mirror putting on a shirt and tie. RENEE sits at a table doing a crossword puzzle from the newspaper. She sips coffee. Also on the table are his coffee cup and a piece of half-eaten toast on a plate. A pause.

JOHN

What is it?  
(A slight pause.)  
What?

She still doesn't respond. He starts to sneak a peek over her shoulder.

RENEE

(Covering the crossword with her hands.)  
No.

JOHN backs off, but sidles up behind her again without her noticing.

(Again trying to cover up)  
NO!

It's too late: he's seen what he needs to see. He returns to the mirror, and completes tying his tie.

JOHN

(Pondering)  
Urban....Idiot.

RENEE

(Still focused on the puzzle)  
You need to get going.

JOHN

Four letters. It is four, right?

RENEE  
You'll miss your train.

JOHN  
Putz!

RENEE  
Putz? Why Putz?

JOHN  
Joe Putz. The Mets. He played first base.

RENEE  
No way.

JOHN  
It's obvious.

RENEE  
It's too literal. Anyway, it's Pootz.

JOHN  
What?

RENEE  
His name was Pootz.

JOHN  
Putz, Pootz, what's the difference?

RENEE  
He pronounced it Pootz.

JOHN  
So would you if you had a name like that.

RENEE  
And he played third base, and he was not an idiot.

JOHN  
Putz means idiot.

RENEE  
It also means prick.

(Beat. JOHN gives her a look but restrains himself.)

It fits. JOHN

Go on, get out of here. RENEE

Tell me it doesn't fit. JOHN

Go! RENEE

He feints going to the bedroom, swoops, grabs the paper, and quickly scans the crossword.

Jesus!

She lunges at him and grabs it back.

Why did you have to do that? You know it's my day.

(Overlapping) JOHN  
Fifteen across is—

(Overlapping) RENEE  
Don't!

(Overlapping) JOHN  
Periwinkle! Which means Putz is right.

RENEE  
Pootz.

JOHN  
Putz.

RENEE  
His name is Pootz.

JOHN  
Eyether way.

RENEE

Eether way you're going to be late for your meeting.

JOHN

They postponed.

RENEE

They did?

JOHN

Just as well. Give me some time to catch up.

JOHN exits to the bedroom. RENEE pulls out her cell phone as if to make a call, then thinks better of it. She hastily puts it away and refocuses on the puzzle as JOHN re-enters with his jacket and a laptop bag.

JOHN

Why can't you just admit you're stuck?

RENEE

I'm not stuck. You're the one who's stuck.

JOHN

Of course.

RENEE

You know what your problem is?

JOHN

Is it something new?

RENEE

You have no concept of possibility. No, no, interest—you have no interest in whether things could be different.

JOHN

Christ.

RENEE

Chrissed.

JOHN

What?

RENEE

Why does it have to be Christ? It could be Chrissed or Chreased. It's just a linguistic construction. Someone said Christ, and that was it.

JOHN

Of course, all those historians and religious scholars, they are so dumb—

RENEE

The possibility. That's all I'm saying. Whatever we're told, whatever we've been led to expect, might not be the way it is. The world is not flat. People are not cured with leeches.

JOHN

Leeches?

She gets up and exits to the bedroom.

Renee?

(No response)

Renee!

RENEE returns pulling a roll-on suitcase.

Where are you going?

RENEE

N'awlins.

JOHN

Where?

RENEE

N'awlins. That's what they call it there.

JOHN

Of course, silly me. And why are you going to New Orleans?

RENEE

Why don't you read your e-mail.

JOHN

Why don't you tell me—

RENEE  
I gotta go.

JOHN  
(Overlapping)  
—What you are going to New Orleans for.  
(Beat.)

RENEE  
A conference.

JOHN  
What kind of conference?

RENEE  
Mediation.

JOHN  
Mediation. Who are you mediating with?

RENEE  
Human resources people.

JOHN  
Now there's a clue.

RENEE  
It's about mediation in the workplace. Look, I'll—

JOHN  
Seven letters beginning with F.

RENEE  
I'll see you Sunday night.

JOHN  
Last letter G.

RENEE  
(Starting to leave)  
I'll call you when I get there.

JOHN  
Fucking.

RENEE ignores him and keeps going.

JOHN (CONT.)

FUCKING!

She stops, slowly turns and looks at him.

I do read my e-mail. I also read yours.

RENEE

The hobgoblin of little minds.

JOHN

Who is Davey? (*He pronounces it "Dayvee".*)

(Beat. She looks at him and doesn't respond.)

Are you flying down together? Or do you have a rendezvous in some romantic little auberge in the French Quarter?

RENEE

It's not what you think.

JOHN

Who is he?

(Beat.)

What's his last name?

RENEE

Does it matter?

She moves to exit. He blocks her.

JOHN

Of course it matters.

RENEE

I never asked you.

JOHN

Well, I want to know.

RENEE

You always have to compete, don't you? Dueling pinuses. Only I don't have one. It used to make me sad, you know, your insecurity. Now, well...

JOHN

Just tell me who this Davey is, and what he does, and where he lives.  
That's all.

RENEE

I will say this. It was quite unexpected.

The doorbell rings.

JOHN

Well, I wonder who that is.

He exits to answer the door. RENEE  
looks nervous.

DAVEY

(Off)

Hi. You must be John. I'm Barbara.

JOHN

(Off)

Hi.

DAVEY

(Off)

I'm a friend of Renee's. Is she—?

JOHN

(Off)

We're actually on our way out right now. She's got a plane to catch, and  
I'm late for work—

DAVEY

(Off)

My mother has cancer.

JOHN

(Beat, off)

Oh. I'm so sorry.

DAVEY

(Off)

I need Renee's advice. It'll only take a moment.

JOHN

(Off)  
Of course. Come on in, please.

DAVEY enters followed by JOHN.

RENEE

(To DAVEY)  
Hi. What's going on? Is she...?

DAVEY hugs RENEE and starts to cry.

JOHN

(To DAVEY)  
Can I get you something?

DAVEY

(Recovering)  
No. Thanks.  
(To RENEE)  
We got the results.

RENEE

What did they say? I mean, is the chemo working?

JOHN

(To DAVEY)  
I have to go. I'm sorry, I hope...

JOHN exits.

RENEE

*Barbara?*

DAVEY

I once had a male snake called Barbara.

RENEE

How appropriate. And cancer.

DAVEY

Never fails.

RENEE

Oh my God, your Mom, she is still in remission?

DAVEY

Oh yeah.

RENEE

Thank God for that.

(Taking her in her arms)

Oh, Davee! (*Short "a", as in Dam*)

They kiss.

DAVEY

We're going to miss our plane.

RENEE

(Grabbing her suitcase)

N'awlins here we come!

DAVEY

You mean, New Orleans?

RENEE

Whatever.

They laugh and rush out joyfully.

END OF PLAY