

To Pull The Wool Over Her Eyes
A Ten Minute Play With Exactly One Joke

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Performance History:

2018 Brisbane Short + Sweet Festival, directed by Taylor Davidson,
produced by Will Toft in association with Black Cloud Theatrical.
Performed by Kell Andersen, Sophie Jackson and Geena Schwartz.

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RED

It was going to be a night that I remembered forever—and it was, but not for the reasons I'd intended. My dad told me once, "Son, it's a woman's prerogative to be late to the wedding, and it's a man's prerogative to walk around for as long as he wants with a ring in his pocket." I've never been a patient guy. I'm twitchy. I'd had the ring for just over ninety minutes when it happened.

NEVE

...and then Jan said "Neve, you have to speak to Carol about this", which is ridiculous because she's meant to be the ward supervisor, and—

Neve pauses, because Red has taken a knee in the middle of the living room.

NEVE

..hello?

RED

Hi.

Red pulls a small box out of his pocket and opens it to show an engagement ring. Neve freezes. A moment passes.

NEVE

..what is that?

RED

Well, it's—

NEVE

What is that?

RED

It's—

We hear bellowing from offstage.

JOANNE

SURPRISE!

RED

What the fu—

Joanne comes barreling onto stage, trips over Red and goes face first through the coffee table. We go to black, and come back to Joanne sitting on the couch, with Neve finishing applying a large white cotton dressing to her eye. Red is sweeping up the remains of the table.

JOANNE

That... that's good. I'm so sorry guys, again, it's just crazy how much the floors in this building look exactly the same.

Neve laughs.

RED

(muttering)

Don't worry, it's not you, it's just my luck.

NEVE

Hush. Now, Joanne, come back and see me in three days time and I'll change that dressing.

JOANNE

Oh, you're a doll. Thanks for the excuse to come back.

An awkward pause as Neve glances at Red, who stops sweeping for the briefest second and then resumes.

JOANNE

So... I'll be on my way. Sorry again. Good night.

NEVE

Well, what a crazy random happenstance.

A beat as Red doesn't reply.

NEVE

What was that box you had before?

RED

...nothing. Forget about it. Just a joke.

NEVE

Red?

RED

I'm going out.

Time passes. Neve is sitting on the couch reading as Red enters, flustered, and crosses offstage taking his jacket off.

NEVE

Oh, Red, Joanne is taking me to Cirque du Soleil tonight, you know, as a thank you for the first aid.

Red comes back on stage.

RED

When are we going? I've got a lot of work to get done.

NEVE

Oh, its... no, she only had the one ticket spare, and I knew you were crazy busy, so...

RED

So you're going to go out on the town with a random lunatic who smashed into the apartment and ruined... do you even know her name?

NEVE

I told you, it's Joanne. And she's not just a random lunatic, she's really nice, and she lives in our building.

RED

I'm going out.

He moves off stage, and comes back on with his coat.

NEVE

Red, please don't be angry with me. You know I don't get out much, I really just need-

RED

What?

NEVE

I just need-

RED

What do you need, Neve?

NEVE

Please don't be like this, Red, not again.

Red stalks out through the front door. Frustrated, Neve moves offstage out of the living room. Time passes. Joanne enters, chattering excitedly.

JOANNE

I just couldn't get over to him the idea that yeah, Iambic pentameter is meant to mimic human speech patterns, so maybe
(in terrible iambic pentameter)
don't-speak like-it's a-ro bot-that's bro-ken.

Red enters the living room followed by Joanne, who has clearly been talking for some time. Red moves through the room, very pointedly not paying attention.

JOANNE

People want to come to a show and see authenticity, not people who can't even act like humans.. so I murdered them and replaced them with a stack of tiny dogs in overcoats pretending to be people.

Red doesn't react. He's not listening.

JOANNE

Hey, so, how'd a guy like you get a girl like Neve?

Red starts.

RED

..wait, what? Why can't a guy like me get a girl like Neve?

JOANNE

Oh, no no no, I'm not saying... I'm just saying that, you know, it's not easy, getting someone like Neve.

RED

Oh... well, yeah. Let me tell you, it hasn't been easy. Sometimes, let me tell you... it's been a rough road.

JOANNE

...really? Uh... I just thought, she's so generous, and talented.

RED

Look, I don't want to... every relationship has it's problems, right?

JOANNE

Oh definitely. I mean, I'm sure she'd say the same thing about you, right?

RED

...what do you mean? What did she say to you?

JOANNE

(Too quickly)

Nothing, nothing man, I was just saying, relationships are hard work.

RED

Right.

Red and Joanne exit. Time passes, and Red comes back into the living room with an umbrella, which he closes. He absentmindedly sits on the couch, and removes a water bottle from his backpack, which he takes a sip out of, before replacing it's cap and putting it on the coffee table, which is still broken, so the water bottle clatters to the ground. We hear laughter as Neve and Joanne enter the apartment, Neve carrying fairy floss, and Joanne still with the dressing over her eye.

JOANNE

...I will say one thing about Mabel, he's got great aim.

RED

Who's Mabel?

Joanne and Neve stop dead in their tracks; clearly, they haven't expected Red to be home. Joanne steps in front of Neve, protectively.

NEVE

Oh, I didn't know you were going to be home... I ran into Joanne down at the boardwalk.

RED

Uh-huh. How's the eye, Joe?

JOANNE

Uh... still healing, Red. Well, here you are, Neve.

Another awkward three-way pause.
Neve doesn't want Joanne to
leave, and Joanne doesn't want to
leave Neve here.

RED

Good evening, Joanne.

Hesitantly, Joanne exits.

RED

...just ran into her, eh?

NEVE

Stop it.

RED

It's the third time this week. I think you're seeing more of
her than me.

NEVE

Can you just stop it? She's a friend.

RED

A friend? Really? You expect me to—

NEVE

Please, can't you just—

They move offstage in a blazing
row. Time passes. Neve enters the
living room carrying a suitcase,
Joanne with her. She pulls her
phone out and dials, taking
Joanne's hand who sympathetically
squeezes it back.

NEVE

...it's his voicemail. Red, I've gotten my things, I'm leaving
the keys in the letterbox downstairs. Please, please don't
call me, don't... I'm sorry. I can't do this anymore.

Neve and Joanne exit. Red enters.

RED

And they were just gone. The whirlwind that was Joanne had blown into my life and taken Neve away from me forever. I was angry about it for a really long time, and anger is what it took, along with depression and a healthy dose of cognitive behavioural therapy, for me to realise that the problem hadn't been Neve, and it hadn't even been Joanne. My own life was so fractured, so torn, that I was just reaching out for anything I could to fix my own self-image. I wasn't even treating Neve like the partner, the future wife that she was, and should have been. I was treating her more like the cotton patch that Joanne wore on her eye—like a disposable dressing, protecting my wounds from the world, and so it wasn't Joanne that took her away from me—rather, it was me who threw her away. Joanne was just a catalyst, an important catalyst, that led to a series of events that made me the man I am today. I still think about her, because like I said, really, it was the most important night in my life, and in many ways, Jo is a towering figure in my life, even if she's still on that couch with the dressing on her face in my memory. I mean, If it hadn't been for Cotton-eye Jo, I'd have been married a long time ago. Where did you come from? Where did you go? Where did you come from, Cotton-eye Jo?

Blackout.