

Taking Place in Tennessee

*A new play for Lisa Clair and
Andrew Lush*

Female (Maggie): Forty to fifty (possibly older). Dark haired. Raspy at times.

Male (Joe): Twenty to thirty (possibly younger). Dark haired. Conventional at times.

There are no lights on stage. The audience enters, is seated, waits. The sound of an old film projector is heard. The beam of light cuts through the aisle. This should be an intimate setting. On the screen is beautiful black and white images flutter in and out. The stage is slightly illuminated now. Seen in the haze: a cradle, a bed frame, a rocking chair. Next to the rocking chair sits a bottle of whiskey. A woman in a tattered work dress, house slippers, knotted hair, and enormous purse enters. She carries a two liter bottle of Diet Coke. She takes a small tape player out of her purse and places it in the cradle. Cher's cover of "Walking in Memphis" blares. She begins to lip-sync as she cakes on deep red lipstick. Joe walks on. She notices him out of the corner of her eye and quickly turns off the music.

Joe

Sixty miles is nothing. You could make it by morning.

Maggie

Whiskey and Coke? I only have diet. I hope that isn't a problem.

Joe

Saccharine causes cancer.

Maggie

Oh, I stopped doing drugs a while ago.

Joe

I'll pass.

Maggie

Are you sure? I just live for a nice nightcap. Helps me sleep.

Joe

There's an eleven-thirty bus out of Judy's filling station.

Maggie

I never wake up before noon. Need my beauty sleep, you know. I also promised to sing at the bar tonight. Late nights and early mornings don't mix too well with me.

Joe

Didn't you sing last night?

Maggie

No—slipped my mind I guess. Sure you don't want one?

Joe

No. I can wake you up in the morning.

Maggie

No, but thank you.

Joe

Maybe I could drive you myself.

Maggie

Wouldn't want you to go out of your way.

Joe

There's always the freight train.

Maggie

Look, kid. I didn't travel all the way from Virginia to have some ho-bunk boy tell me what to do.

Joe

I don't mind giving you my allowance so you could buy a ticket to Memphis.

Maggie

I don't want your money.

Joe

Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you.

Maggie

You want a bus ticket?

Joe

No.

Maggie

Good. Don't have any cash at the moment. (pause) You don't have to wait around. You're more than welcome to leave.

Joe

No, I'll stay for a minute.

Maggie

Suit yourself. (pause) I know what you're waiting for. I can see it in your eyes. Fine. I'll give it to you too. Everyone else has gotten a piece of it. Maybe it will help you loosen up a little. (She waits for response) You can probably picture it all too well. Me. Busty. Young. A real "go-getter." Drugs, sex, protests, all my cares to the wind. Big hair, old jeans. I had this big purse filled with: condoms, Emily Dickinson poems, an old flask, all the essentials for a gypsy and on the front—this was my favorite—big ole buttons of John Lennon, Ralph Nader—you know, all the greats. Boy, would I have sat on their faces if they had asked. I did a lot of face sitting. It was my form of protest. Anyway—oh, and buried in there I had my cow prod for all the protests. Didn't no one mess with Maggie. Then I met this guy. He had these great hazel eyes. He would just look at me and I'd melt all over my kimono. I got pregnant in the end. I thought—this is it. I would have that great family that broke all the rules and existed on pure true love. I got fat. Bought all these old polka dotted dresses and kicked the habits. I went into the hospital at nine in the morning. He had been out all night so I left a post-it on the ice-box. I waited. I refused to push until he got there. The doctors fought with me. "Push!" "Push, for Christ's Sake!" I just sat there smiling saying "I ain't doing nothing I don't want to." Twenty hours later I had to let go. This beautiful little boy came sliding out. He was blue. They handed him to me and he smiled and died. I didn't have any money to bury him so they put him in a plastic bag and slid him down to the incinerator. I don't remember much after that. I didn't have either in the end. There was just this faint voice telling me to go to Memphis. I got louder and here I am.

Joe

I don't know what to say—I'm sorry.

Maggie

You just gotta pack it up and throw it out. Move on. (giggles) Move on to Memphis I guess.

Joe

You're not in Memphis.

Maggie

Close enough—I ran out of cash and this shed just looked so nice from the road.

Joe

I don't think my landlord is going to like it when he finds you out here.

Maggie

You gotta lighten up Joe. He ain't using this thing. But that's not the point! Didn't you hear my story? Just pack it up and throw it out—to the wind. You got one chance to live. You better do it right.

Joe

Yes. Well. I lost a child once.

Maggie

Oh, Joe.

She goes to comfort him. He refuses.

Maggie

Tell me about it.

Joe

No.

Maggie

Well, are you hungry? I have some spaghetti with red sauce around here somewhere.

She pulls a plate out of the cradle.

Maggie

I only ate half. There's still a lot left.

Joe

No—thank you though, that's very kind.

Maggie

I might have a little.

She begins to eat.

Maggie

How did you lose a child?

Joe

I really don't feel like it.

Maggie

We could help each oth—oh (the most fragile oh uttered). I got red sauce on myself. Would you look at that. That's me. (She is breaking. She takes a sponge out of her purse and wipes the spot. Now there is a gigantic water make smeared with red.) Isn't

that just—fine—I'm sorry. I'm—god for sake—I just—look at this—look at this. This is my only (she tears up) my only. I'm—FUCK! I'm sorry, Joe. I just, I don't—I'm a mess. (a frightened giggle).

Joe

I don't think you're a mess at all.

Maggie

Yes you do. You're ashamed of me.

Joe

I was thirteen. My parents had asked me to watch my three year old sister. Across the street from our one and a half aluminum sided house was a playground. I gave in and brought her over. I was going to meet my friend there to trade a Game Boy game for the week-end. He had this soccer game I loved and I had Tetris. For some reason or another he had never bought it and it was the Holy Grail of escapism at the time. She was playing on these horses on springs when I left her. I didn't notice that my parents' yellow Volvo was puling into our driveway or that someone had left the gate open. I did notice her blonde hair bobbing into the street, my parents closing the front door as she called, and the UPS truck. By the time I made it to the fence the air was thick with blood.

Maggie

(choking up) Joe. Oh, Joe. I'm so sorry.

Joe

I stared at the walls, played Game Boy and cried quietly every now and again.

Maggie

Let it out.

Joe

(partially glaring) And I think about her every day. I have a very strict motto—you only live life once.

Maggie

I feel so close to you now.

Joe

Your dress is drying.

Maggie

This old thing—who cares. If only I had known.

Joe

Uh. I suppose you should head out to the bar.

Maggie

I think I might stay home.

Joe

Well, I'll bring you food. I'll even bring you a new dress tomorrow. I think I might have an old sleeping bag.

Maggie

Why don't you stay for a drink?

Joe

No, thank you.

Maggie

Please—just one drink. Let's be together.

Joe

No—I have dinner plans.

Maggie

Thank you, Joe. (cheerfully) You can wake me up in the morning.

Joe

I better not. Sixty miles is a long way.

He leaves. She mixes a drink and tries to apply make-up. Beautiful black and white images fill the screen behind her. She fails to notice. She begins to cry. Lights.