

My House

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A full-length play by Selah DeGering

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My House  
by Selah DeGering  
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A full-length play  
4 women

SAMPLE

## Cast of Characters

WOMAN The protagonist, the artist, the dreamer.

FRIEND The friend.

ELSE The one we think we know.

STRANGER The one we know too well.

Alternatively, the women can be cast according to race.

Neighbor, step-grandmother, and biological grandmother are black.

Mother, first youth counselor Joanna, Courtney, Edith and maternal grandmother are white.

Race, while a topic in the play, is not necessarily relevant with exception to WOMAN and STRANGER looking very, very different. How the actors dress, speak, and carry themselves is more important.

Can be performed at any scale or budget.

A dark empty stage, save for WOMAN, FRIEND,  
and ELSE. As they speak and describe locations,  
events, and experiences, the stage becomes set after  
set. There is an illusionary quality, the sense of a  
mirage playing tricks on the eye- but we want it to  
be real.

WOMAN

I am made up of a menagerie of faces.

FRIEND

When I look in the mirror, who I see at any given time never looks like me.

ELSE

When people ask me where I'm from, they're surprised.

WOMAN

I don't sound like I'm from the South.

FRIEND

I don't sound like I'm from anywhere in particular.

ELSE

When I think of my happy place...

WOMAN

I think of the sun spilling over the trees.

FRIEND

I think of the green swirling on the bayou.

ELSE

I think of the moon beaming down on the water.

WOMAN

I think of the fireflies flitting in the tall grass.

FRIEND

I think of a hundred thousand stars peeking from a canopy of yellow pine.

I think of frogs.

WOMAN

And slugs.

ELSE

And snakes.

WOMAN

I think of the river.

FRIEND

I think of the sandy bank.

ELSE

I think of sunshowers and barefeet on the stones and I think-

WOMAN

Of nothing in particular.

ALL

And everything at once.

WOMAN

I don't like to think of what I look like.

FRIEND

What I sound like.

ELSE

This, this is an old cabin in the woods in Louisiana.

WOMAN

I don't know if it's out there somewhere. I don't care.

FRIEND

It's made of cypress and has strong floors.

ELSE

It's up on stilts.  
WOMAN

For the flooding season.  
ALL

There's a rocking chair on the front porch.  
FRIEND

And a mosquito net.  
ELSE

And gold green light filters through the trees.  
WOMAN

Cicadas.  
FRIEND

Bullfrogs and toads.  
ELSE

Clicking things rustling unseen. The knees of the cypress are stepping stones for jumping.  
WOMAN

Hopscotch.  
FRIEND

Don't fall in!  
ELSE

There are gators in there.  
ALL

But not too nearby.  
WOMAN

Never stopped me.  
FRIEND

ELSE

The house is empty.

FRIEND

Everyone is outside.

WOMAN

Or gone.

ELSE

This is an abandoned place.

FRIEND

I live here now.

WOMAN

I can imagine I always did.

ELSE

And every day is a spring morning in April.

FRIEND

And every night, if it rains, the roof leaks.

WOMAN

And I find beauty in that even if it's objectively a bad thing.

FRIEND

Because this house won't last the next hurricane.

ELSE

But I don't have to think about that.

WOMAN

Because I'm hanging glass bottles in the trees to catch bad spirits.

FRIEND

And I'm painting my door frame blue.

ELSE

And I have a dreamcatcher above my bed.

And I have dried sage on my wall.  
WOMAN

And I have salt on my windowsills.  
FRIEND

And I'm not superstitious.  
ALL

I wasn't raised to be.  
WOMAN

But the glass glitters so pretty up there.  
FRIEND

And that pop of color on my porch makes me smile.  
ELSE

And that dreamcatcher is from my grandfather, when I was little girl.  
WOMAN

And that sage smells something fine-  
FRIEND

It's good for soup.  
ALL

And the salt-  
WOMAN

...I don't have much excuse for that.  
FRIEND

I saw it in a movie.  
ELSE

And nothing bad happens here, in this house, or outside it.  
WOMAN



FRIEND

Because the only one here to mess it up is me.

ELSE

And I put all these precautions in place, so-

ALL

It's not possible.

Exit FRIEND and ELSE.

WOMAN

When I'm not in my peeling-paint shack in the woods, I'm not...anywhere. I'm somewhere strange, and dark, and God's not here. If you're looking for a story, you should know that I don't have one. I can't spin tales anymore, I just wander. But I can show you something beautiful. I can try.

See, what I really need to talk about is abandonment. Why my little house is in such disrepair, and why I only feel safe taking up space no one else wants. Why my little glass bottles are meant to ward off people, too. Because I'm lonely, see? And I read something about loneliness breeding misery and keeping people away from you because- because you're just plain unpleasant to be around. But I'm not unpleasant! I try not to be, I- when people visit me in my little place here, I welcome them in and I feed them and- and I've been told I keep them hostage, but that's...an exaggeration.

Enter FRIEND, in a sweater and a long skirt, from  
inside the house.

FRIEND

I been here some 20-odd year. I been seepin' int' the walls like an old stain, I been here since a'fore this'un was born.

WOMAN

I think she lived in the apartment down the hall when I was nine.

FRIEND

I had her readin' prayer books. Makin' lil sandwiches outta marshmallow fluff an' cheese crackers.

WOMAN

I could eat whatever I wanted.

FRIEND

Didn't like my apartment none. Too dark, she'd say.

WOMAN

I never!

FRIEND

Didn't have to. Kept your pretty mouth shut, but that scowl when you walked in?

WOMAN

And now she's squatting. My mother said she wanted me to have more...exposure. To "my people", as it were. I don't know that I forgot her name. I just never knew it.

FRIEND

I had her readin' prayer books offa my table.

WOMAN

She left me alone in her front room for hours, to entertain myself. She haunts me now. This woman I remember but never knew.

FRIEND sits in the rocking chair. Enter ELSE from inside the house, limping in a hobble. She is dressed in bold prints and colors, swathes of draping fabric.

ELSE

Baby!

ELSE throws her arms around WOMAN's neck. She checks WOMAN's face, pinches her cheeks, pets her hair, sways as she hugs her. WOMAN smiles with discomfort.

WOMAN

My grandmother. Step grandmother? Step grandmother once-removed by adoption and, well. Racism, I guess.

FRIEND

Put off that scowl, chile.

WOMAN smiles more intentionally.

ELSE

Your house might be empty, but my house is full. Your papa been out back fixin' the yard, he's- you wanna talk to him? I can get him, he's just-

WOMAN

He never has anything to say to me but I always agree when she offers.

ELSE

You feelin' okay, honey? You oughta lay down, you let me take care of you now.

ELSE heaves herself up the stairs again and into the house. FRIEND scowls at both of them.

WOMAN

And then I don't hear from her for awhile. When she talks about her house, she means- she means it's full of...stuff. Art and statues and momentos. It's beautiful, her house. But it's huge. It's always been huge, and full of- of history. A monument to black America, she's *African* American. At least, that's how I was taught to interpret her. I don't know that I see her that way anymore, she just...likes to see herself in the world, and the world in herself. She carries it with her everywhere. And when she comes to my house, I feel- ...Well, she's never been to my house really. I don't know what she'd think of it. Or want to change.

Enter ELSE, she shoos FRIEND out of the rocking chair and takes her seat. ELSE heaves a great sigh and closes her eyes, rocking slowly in the sun.  
FRIEND huffs and exits.

WOMAN

I don't think she knows what to do with me. Or for me. She's- waiting for me to ask. I don't know. ...I'm not...related. To her. I don't know how I'm supposed to feel about her. I've been taught to hate the entire side of the family she's supposed to be from anyway, so how do I...

Enter FRIEND, a different woman, in a blouse and jeans; she wears glasses. She walks out of the house with ease and sits on the steps. She rolls her eyes at ELSE, but smiles and waves when she notices WOMAN watching.

## WOMAN

My biological grandmother. She and my...second? Grandmother? Married the same man. Her, the one I'm related to, she was married to him twice. I've heard a lot of crazy stories about her, but when I talk to her in person- I do not mention the stories, first of all, but it's hard for me to piece them together with the way she is now. ...She's nice, though. Plays video games and minds her own business- she took World of Warcraft *very* seriously. She sends me money on my birthday.

There are people, you know, that don't...fit in my house. It's empty, like I said, these people don't...live here. It's just the idea of them, hanging out. You know, or maybe I don't really live here and they do. When I think of what's on the walls in that shack there, I don't really know. I have an idea on some things, but the details are fuzzy. We all just kind of...meander about and bump into each other every now and again. But there are people that don't fit here that don't belong. There are people that aren't welcome, people that, when I look in the mirror...

On one side of the stage, the house, FRIEND and ELSE. In the middle, WOMAN. Enter STRANGER from offstage dragging luggage, at the far end. She is dressed in jewel tones and rhinestones, bleached blonde. She's a large woman. Imposing.

## WOMAN

...I hope I don't see.

STRANGER opens her arms for a hug. WOMAN does not move. STRANGER drops her arms.

## STRANGER

Found you.

## ELSE

'S that the old witch?

## FRIEND

Younger than you.

## ELSE

"Old" is an attitude.

## STRANGER

Are you just gonna look at me or do I have to do everything myself?

When WOMAN fails to respond, STRANGER  
picks up her bags and starts again toward the house.  
WOMAN doesn't move out of the path.  
STRANGER stops right in front of her.

Excuse me. STRANGER

It's not- ready. For you. WOMAN

It's good enough for them. STRANGER

You won't- you're not...you won't like it. WOMAN

I don't like it. Let me by. STRANGER

...No. Thank you. WOMAN

Skylar. STRANGER

The WOMEN all look at each other.

That's not my name. WOMAN

You're being silly, you think I'm going to hurt you? I- STRANGER

STRANGER raises a hand to touch WOMAN,  
WOMAN flinches as though about to be hit.  
STRANGER is affronted.

STRANGER

Now you're just being dramatic. I've never laid a hand on you a day in my life. I'm your mom, I love you. I'd never hurt you on purpose.

We don't believe her.

WOMAN

I'm not ready for you here.

STRANGER

So what, you're going to send me packing?

ELSE

You're already packed!

ELSE and FRIEND laugh.

STRANGER

Gonna turn your back on your poor, ailing mother? You know how hard it is for me to walk long distances, especially on uneven ground. And the weather, it's beating down, and it's humid, and I could die right here, collapse in the mud, and you'd be happy so long as I didn't set foot in your precious little garbage heap over there. You're half white, too, you know. And this little fantasy you've got going, this isn't even your history. You borrowed it. Made it up.

ELSE and FRIEND have stood up, waiting for an opportunity to intervene.

WOMAN

I didn't make it up.

STRANGER

You don't even know these people, not like I know them. You've only seen them, what, ten odd times in your whole life?

WOMAN

Whose decision was that?

STRANGER

I know who they really are and I know who you are and this? This is delusional.

STRANGER starts to walk away but circles back.

STRANGER

...And another thing, you think this is what poverty looks like? Sunny skies and an old house and a full stomach? You think it's so nice to be poor and look poor and- what, live out this...slave-house dream land? That's what this looks like, you realize that. You all look like a bunch of slaves, it's- it's bizarre. To romanticize that. It's gross, actually.

WOMAN swallows.

STRANGER

Alright, you know what?

STRANGER takes WOMAN by the arm and drags her downstage. The house and the swamp, along with FRIEND and ELSE, fade into the background.

STRANGER

Let's go back to *my* house. A place I can't run from, and if I could, it certainly wouldn't be to some hole in the ground in the most diseased corner of America.

WOMAN takes her arm back.

STRANGER

I take that back. The alleyway down the road from my school was probably worse. And my dad's house was worse than that, mmkay?

WOMAN

You're stalling.

STRANGER

St. Paul, Minnesota. It's gray, it's winter, and the snow is coming soon. There're used needles and cigarette buds frozen into the ice. I dressed in rage from the department store- Wallyworld and Target, and they're stained. I cover up with a puffer jacket that's too small for me. Everything is too small for me, because they didn't make clothes in my size. I'm cold, I'm uncomfortable, and I don't know where I'm going to sleep tonight because my dad probably has hookers at his place doing coke and some of them are probably men.

STRANGER turns to WOMAN.

STRANGER

Nothing to say to that?

WOMAN shrugs, closed off.

STRANGER

Fine. We're in my grandparent's house, then. Grandpa built it himself. They have a garden out back, they're farming people, but Grandma got cheated out of the Land O'Lakes will because she had a twin brother, and now they live in the city. Or around the city, anyway, down the road from the Mall of America. My mom works three jobs and she's always bringing boyfriends home, she can't stand being alone, but when she's gone, *I'm* alone with *them*, and they like little girls. Get the picture?

WOMAN shifts her weight.

STRANGER

I've had a hard life. I still have a hard life, I've spent most of it in the hospital, drugged up worse than a stripper. If I can take you here, somewhere real, you can take me to your little dream world, poor person land. It looks like a movie over there, it's ridiculous.

WOMAN mumbles.

STRANGER

Excuse me?

WOMAN

I was trying to make something beautiful.

STRANGER

You made something ignorant. You wanna see beautiful? ...Look, honey, your self esteem is so low that the most fabulous life for yourself you can think of is in a hut in the dirt. Look at yourself. No makeup. Your hair's tied up, you're dressed in clothes that don't fit you right. You're not even wearing a bra. You're depressed.

WOMAN shrugs.

STRANGER

Let's go somewhere nice, just you and me.

STRANGER offers her hand.