

# END OF EVENING (NAUTICAL TWILIGHT)

By Jo Johnson

NAME: Jo Johnson

I AM FROM: Philadelphia, PA

BIO: Jo Johnson is making her way back into the theater after a long hiatus. In Philadelphia she has been seen in the *One Act Bonanza* at Old Academy Players and *Stop Kiss* at Allen's Lane. (In normal times you would have seen her in *Our Town* at Drama Group and *Noises Off* at Pulley and Buttonhole, but they were postponed due to COVID-19.) Her first career was as a props artisan and stage manager. Her credits can be found in the archives of: Studio Arena Theater, Mill Mountain Playhouse, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Trinity Repertory Theater, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She holds an MFA in Stage Management from the Professional Theater Training Program at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

EMAIL: justjo1002@mac.com

What's keeping me positive? Finding playwriting as a creative outlet during the pandemic. I can explore the world outside while maintaining social distance! I also take bike rides with my husband to get out of the house and blow out the cobwebs.

Yes, you can publish this.

## **CHARACTERS**

ADDIE JOHNSON: Female. Black. Age 46.  
JAMES JOHNSON: Addie's son. Male. Black. Age 20.  
ELIZA STANLEY: Female. White. Age 46.

## **TIME**

August 1990. Early evening.

## **PLACE**

Scene: Rural North Carolina. The home of Malcolm and Addie Johnson. We mostly see the porch. It is a southern porch that is meant for socializing. There are some rocking chairs and end tables. The yard has a large tree for shade. There is a beautiful garden. Perhaps some vegetables mixed in with flowers.

Sound: In the dark we hear a single trumpet play *Taps*.

Lights rise. We see ADDIE, wearing a dark, simple, summer dress, fanning herself while rocking in a chair. JAMES, dressed in shirt and trousers, as if the coat and tie have come off, enters from the house and offers her a drink.

JAMES  
Lemonade?

ADDIE  
Anything in it?

JAMES  
Bourbon.

ADDIE  
Good boy.

JAMES  
Whoo whee it's a warm one tonight.

ADDIE  
Sure is.

JAMES  
Nice service today.

ADDIE  
Yeah.

JAMES  
Dad would have liked it.

ADDIE  
Really?

JAMES  
Sure.

ADDIE  
I think he would have liked it more if he weren't the main event.

JAMES

Good point.

JAMES picks up a trumpet and starts to clean it.

ADDIE

You played well today. Your Daddy would have been proud.

JAMES

It was my honor.

Sound of a car driving up. Car door slam.

JAMES

You recognize that car?

ADDIE

(Under her breath.) Oh, my.

ELIZA enters. She's dressed in a practical linen outfit.

ELIZA

Would this be the home of Malcolm Johnson?

ADDIE

It would be.

ELIZA

I've come to pay my respects.

ADDIE

Have ya now.

ELIZA

It's the least I can do for that lousy son of a bitch.

ADDIE comes face to face with ELIZA. There is a moment and then a joyful embrace.

ADDIE

My oh my. You are a beautiful site.

ELIZA

Oh, Addie.

ADDIE

Come on up. (Leads ELIZA to the porch. JAMES stands.) I'd like you to meet Eliza Stanley. Eliza, this is our son James.

ELIZA

It's a pleasure to meet you.

JAMES

Likewise.

ADDIE

James, can you get our guest a lemonade please? Same as mine?

JAMES

Sure. (JAMES exits into the house.)

ADDIE

Sit, sit, sit!

ELIZA sits. They look at each other while they collect their thoughts. It's a comfortable silence.

ELIZA

How are you doing? Give it to me straight, now.

ADDIE

I'm okay. It's been a tough year, but at the end it was peaceful.

ELIZA

Good.

ADDIE

Dare I admit that I'm quite relieved it's over?

ELIZA

(She reaches out and takes ADDIE'S hand) It's okay to be relieved.

ADDIE

I guess there's still some anger . . .

ELIZA

That's expected.

ADDIE

Fuck agent orange

ELIZA

Yep. Fuck it.

ADDIE

I thought you weren't going to come.

ELIZA

I said I wasn't coming to the funeral.

ADDIE

Right. Funerals aren't your thing.

ELIZA

Good turnout?

ADDIE

Small. Mostly family. Friends have been paying their respects and saying good-bye over the past month or so. No need to do it twice.

ELIZA

Agreed.

ADDIE

So, did you ask the V.A. for bereavement leave or did they push you out the door to get rid of you for a time?

ELIZA

A little of both.

ADDIE

Well, sometimes they get it right.

JAMES enters with the lemonade and gives it to ELIZA.

ELIZA

Thank you. (Takes a sip) Oooh! It's been a long time since this taste has passed my lips.  
Mm-mmm.

ADDIE

Now it's with real Bourbon. (They both laugh.)

JAMES

What did I miss?

ADDIE

Twenty-one years. (ADDIE and ELIZA laugh)

JAMES

How do you know each other?

ELIZA

Where to start?

ADDIE

Nursing school, James.

ELIZA

We were in school when we decided to take an adventure.

ADDIE

Is that what you call it now?

JAMES

Were you in Vietnam with my dad too?

ELIZA

I was.

JAMES

Wow! Tell me about it.

ADDIE

Ha! Your turn to tell stories.

JAMES

What do you mean? You never tell stories. Dad didn't either.

ADDIE

They aren't worth the remembering much less the telling.

JAMES

Come on. What do you remember the most?

ELIZA

The bugs. Big enough and mean enough to carry away the rodents.

ADDIE

The sweltering heat of the jungle. So oppressive you felt like you were wrapped in wet cotton wool.

ELIZA & ADDIE

The pineapples!!

ADDIE

Lord! Those pineapples. So sweet! Mmmmm.

ELIZA

And nobody cared that the juice would run down your chin, into your shirt, and down (ADDIE gives her a sharp look) and would make a right mess of yourself.

ADDIE

One picture that sticks in my head was a night we were taking on mortar fire. It was getting really close and you and I had to leave our hootch and head to a bunker. Girl I will never forget you trying to hold your helmet on top of those ridiculous pink sponge rollers and the expression on your face!

ELIZA

It hurt to push the helmet down and I didn't want to lose any more rollers!

ADDIE

The one time I wish I had had a camera!

ELISA

Oh, you want to tell stories now. What about trying to get you off the beach to go water skiing. James. Picture this. Your mother, arms and legs stretched straight out perfectly rigid and she's got her heels dug into the sand so deep it was like an emergency brake. Three GI's couldn't get her to move. And the language coming from her! The devil himself would have blushed.

ADDIE

There were sharks in that water!

ELIZA

They came out in the afternoon. It was perfectly safe before noon. . ish.

JAMES

Geeze it sounds like stories from summer camp.

ADDIE

(Quickly) It wasn't summer camp. (Beat) We laughed when we could as a means of survival. Never glamorize war, son. Never.

ELIZA

She's right.

JAMES

Well, I'm guessing you have a lot to catch up on. I'm going to go in and clean up. It was nice meeting you, Miss Eliza.

ELIZA

You too, James. I hope to see more of you.

JAMES

'Night mom. (He gives her a kiss and heads into the house.)

ADDIE

James, can you turn on some music for us? The crickets are getting a little annoying.

JAMES

(From inside the house.) Sure.

ELIZA

He's a lovely young man. You did well in that department.

ADDIE

That was mostly Malcolm.

Music is heard from inside the house.

ELIZA

I don't believe that. He has your eyes. I see the same kindness there.

ADDIE

I'm glad you came.

ELIZA

Me too. (Pause) Addie, I'm not here just because of Malcolm.

ADDIE

Really?

ELIZA

I wanted to come and share some news with you in person.

ADDIE

Good news, I hope? Don't think I'm ready for any bad news right now.

ELIZA

Very good news. I'm writing a book. A memoir.

ADDIE

You're what?

ELIZA

I'm writing a book.

ADDIE

What's in it?

ELIZA

It's about those years. Our tours.

ADDIE

You telling stories? Our stories?

ELIZA

I am.

ADDIE

I don't think this is good news.

ELIZA

It is. (She pulls out a check and hands it to ADDIE). I was given an advance. And I'm going to split it with you.

ADDIE

Lordy this is a lot of money, Eliza! What stories are you telling?

ELIZA

You know the stories, Addie.

ADDIE

I don't think I want those stories told.

ELIZA

Why not?

ADDIE

Eliza. I have a son to protect. I'm a teacher now.

ELIZA

Addie, it's time to let it out.

ADDIE

You go ahead and write what you need to write then put it in a shredder! Who needs to know these things?

ELIZA

It can be helpful to other people.

ADDIE

How?

ELIZA

So the world knows that we existed and what we had meant something.

ADDIE

I can't accept this. (She hands the check to ELIZA and walks off the porch to the tree.)

ELIZA

(Follows) Please. It's your story too.

ADDIE

I don't know. . . I just don't know about this.

ELIZA

Addie. We'll write it together. You and me against the world.

ADDIE

I believe that's what you said when we left for our last adventure.

Music changes. It is Roberta Flack *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*

ELIZA

Then maybe it's time for the next one.

ADDIE

Does this mean you forgive me?

ELIZA

There is nothing to forgive.

ADDIE turns to ELIZA. After a moment ADDIE opens her arms to ELIZA. ELIZA accepts and they begin a slow dance.

ADDIE

Oh, I have missed you.

ELIZA

Me too.

ADDIE

You are in my dreams every night.

ELIZA

You are with me every day.

ADDIE

We shouldn't.

ELIZA

We should.

ADDIE

We can't.

ELIZA

Why? Why can't we?

ADDIE

Because the world won't accept us.

ELIZA

The world is changing.

ADDIE

James? My family? They would never understand.

ELIZA

A wise person used to tell me, "be the change you wish to see in the world."

ADDIE

I don't know if I have the strength.

ELIZA

I do. I have it for both of us.

They continue to dance as lights fade to black.

**END OF PLAY**