

Fable

by Doug DeVita

FABLE

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FABLE

NOTES ON MUSIC

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FABLE

*For June, with whom I once had
an impassioned but charming conversation
which I will never forget.*

FABLE

CHARACTERS

OLDER JUNE Retired Actress, Bedridden, Age 90+, Female

MIDDLE AGED JUNE Working Actress, Former Child Star, Age 40+, Female

BABY JUNE Child Star, Age 7, Female

GYPSY/NURSE Burlesque Star/Older June's Nurse, Age 40+, Female

ETHEL/ROSE Broadway Star/June's Mother, Age 40+, Female

ARTHUR/EMCEE A Writer/A Marathon Bandleader, Age 40+, Male

JERRY/FLOOR MANAGER A Director/A Marathon Employee, Age 40+, Male

LOG LINE

A Fable. About A Musical Fable.

SET REQUIREMENTS

A bare stage, a red velour traveler curtain, a ghost light, some chairs, and a hospital bed.

RECOGNITION

SEMI-FINALIST: Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, 2021

Listed as one of the Top Ten Plays on Ken Davenport's 2019 Producer's Pick List

FABLE

FABLE was given a reading by SOAR Productions in October 2020, directed by Dennis Corsi, with the following cast:

Older June..... Carole Monferdini

June..... Haley Swindal

Rose / Ethel..... Jana Robbins

Nurse / Gypsy..... Aisha Jackson

Emcee / Arthur..... Rob Maitner

Floor Manager / Jerry..... Sorab Wadia

FABLE

FABLE

A crumbling Proscenium Arch frames the stage, Vaudeville-style placards on either side. A red traveler hangs between upstage and downstage, the panels able to cross in front and/or behind each other to reveal a new setup as they open and close. A few lighting instruments in full view, as well as a strip of footlights. Ropes, sandbags, and a ghost light populate the otherwise bare stage. At present, the travelers are closed, the ghost light is on, and the illuminated placards read: FABLE. A FABLE ABOUT A MUSICAL FABLE. The placards remain illuminated as the houselights dim and the ghost light flickers out. In the dark, the ghostly figure of a tiny little girl – the 7-year-old Dainty BABY JUNE HOVICK – peeps out from behind one of the curtains. A moment, then her mother, ROSE HOVICK, appears and whispers in her ear. Throughout the play, she is always in a light that drains her of as much color as possible, since she is a ghost constantly haunting the Older June. (Rose later plays Ethel, in different, more colorful light.) Although Older June does address Dainty Baby June directly, the child is always a memory and never responds directly to her. The EMCEE (he later plays Arthur) bursts onto the stage.

EMCEE. Hey, hey, hey, Ladies and Gents, Gents and Ladies! (*Directing the next few questions to various other audience members.*) Ya'll have a good dinner [or lunch]? Satiated, huh? Ya'll enjoy that final smoke before comin' in here? Ya'll relaxed now? Ya'll are anxious to get started, ain't ya? Yeah, I can tell yer a real go-getter! Especially after... how many bourbons did yer wife have to pour into ya to get ya here? (*Addressing the entire house.*) Y'all feel refreshed and ready? Good, good, goodie! 'Cause here at the [NAME OF THEATRE] we hope y'all are champing at the bit to let us entertain you for an all-night [or all afternoon] marathon of memories: (*Gesturing to the placards.*) FABLE! A FABLE ABOUT A MUSICAL FABLE. With THREE! COUNT 'EM! THREE Miss June Havocs! Watch as she thrills and chills and spills her guts sharing her stories with y'all in a marathon to end all marathons! (*The placards change. Placard stage right reads: 802,200 HOURS. Placard stage left reads: (THAT'S 95 YEARS, FOLKS!)*)

FABLE

EMCEE. Here we are at hour 802,200 – that’s 95 years, folks – of June’s life, an endurance test of greasepaint, grit, and grandeur. So, sit back, settle in, and LET THE FABLE BEGIN! (*Rose, who has been brushing Dainty Baby June’s hair until it wings out wildly from either side of her head, now pinches her cheeks until she whimpers.*)

ROSE. Shhhh, darling. Bite your lips! Bite your lips! And smile, baby!

EMCEE. (*Pulling a conductor’s baton from a pocket, he starts a vaudeville style fanfare.*) Here she is boys! Here she is girls! THE POCKET-SIZED PAVLOVA! THE DARLING OF VAUDEVILLE! DAINTY BABY JUNE HOVICK!

(Dainty Baby June expertly bites her lips to make them redder, then smiles brightly. Rose pulls the curtains open with one hand and shoves Dainty Baby June out onto the stage with the other. She dances en pointe to the footlights, does a split, smiles, and raises her arms. She sings in a high, pure, strong voice. (Period song TBD.) She does a little dance, then bows as Rose beams. The Emcee leads the applause as Dainty Baby June goes to sit by the ghost light. (NOTE: Every time she performs a song or dance, it should be obvious that this kid has presence and talent; her material is sharp and polished, and there is nothing even remotely amateurish or “kiddie show” about her performance.)

EMCEE. TADA!

ROSE. That’s my little trouper. No one would ever guess looking at you that you have a temperature of 103. (*Making sure Dainty Baby June is settled comfortably, Rose goes to the traveler curtains as the placards change. Placard stage right reads: ON THE FARM WITH MISS JUNE HAVOC. Placard stage left reads: WILTON, CONNECTICUT. MARCH 2008.*)

EMCEE. (*Gesturing to the placards.*) On the farm with Miss June Havoc. Wilton, Connecticut. March 2008. (*The Emcee disappears. Rose pulls the curtains open to reveal the 95-YEAR-OLD JUNE in bed, a food tray on her lap. Rose hovers in the background as the bed moves downstage; we see that June is asleep. Throughout the play – whether seated, standing, or in bed (even when she is asleep) – Older June is always moving at least one foot, if not both. A nurse (she later plays Gypsy) is opening the blinds, and a blast of bright sunlight hits June, waking her. (This can be a light and sound effect – there is no need for practical blinds.) Both Older June and Dainty Baby June react to the light the same way, as if they were both hit with an unexpectedly bright spotlight.*)

FABLE

OLDER JUNE. Oh, that spotlight is bright tonight!

NURSE. I only opened the blinds, June. It's the afternoon sun.

OLDER JUNE. Dear God, that can't possibly have been eleven minutes already!

NURSE. You've been asleep for two hours.

OLDER JUNE. *(Still slightly groggy.)* That's all we get for rest during these marathons, you know. Eleven minutes. I must keep moving. I have to stay awake...

NURSE. *(Fluffing the pillows. She's heard this all before, many times.)* You haven't finished your lunch, June dear. Arthur Laurents called again. *(June pushes the food tray away. She's now fully awake and angry.)*

OLDER JUNE. I am not going to that opening night. I do not want to see everyone staring at the ancient baby with the walker... Oh, that musical again. Must they keep reviving it? And with that woman, this time? She may be talented, she may even be a *star*, *(To the ghost of Rose.)* But she is not you, mother. She's even less you than Ethel was. *(Rose floats forward.)*

NURSE. That isn't why he called this time, dear.

OLDER JUNE. *(To the Nurse.)* I adapted my book into a show, too.

NURSE. Yes, dear. I know. *Marathon '33.*

OLDER JUNE. Now why don't they revive that?

ROSE. Because no one cares, baby.

OLDER JUNE. *(To Dainty Baby June.)* You're too young to know about this, darling, but there is a musical about us. A big Broadway musical about mother, our sister Louise, and us. And that musical is all a bunch of lies. Big, fat, Broadway musical lies.

NURSE. *(Shaking her head and smiling; she's been here before.)* I know all about it, June.

OLDER JUNE. *(Pointing to Rose and Dainty Baby June.)* Shhhh. I'm talking to them.

NURSE. June, you're still half-asleep.

OLDER JUNE. *(To the Nurse.)* I am completely awake. *(To Rose.)* Lies about you, mother, lies about Louise... *(To Dainty Baby June.)* And especially, lies about you. About me. About us. Everything is a lie. She calls it her legacy, our sister does. *Gypsy, A Musical Fable.* And I get thrown under the bus every 15 years so they can trot it out for a big enough star desperate to play mother.

FABLE

ROSE. I've never thought any of those women were right.

OLDER JUNE. *(To Rose.)* This isn't about you, mother.

ROSE. Of course, it's about me. It's always been about me, baby. It hasn't been about you since you ran away, and that still drives you crazy.

OLDER JUNE. *(To Dainty Baby June.)* You're too young to care about what I'm telling you, aren't you? It's all so far off in your future. And so far back in my past...

ROSE. *(To Older June.)* I don't know why you keep talking to her, June dear. She can't hear you. She's only what's left of your memory of you.

OLDER JUNE. But she hears you. *(Rose makes a sweeping gesture to indicate both Older June and Dainty Baby June.)*

ROSE. Of course, she does. She's you. And I'm your mother. I may be dead, but I'm still your mother. *(We hear the strains of '30s style music from a small band, and shadows of sluggishly moving bodies are projected.)*

OLDER JUNE. I am so tired. *(Older June stops moving a foot. The FLOOR MANAGER appears. (He later plays Jerry.) He snaps the air with a heavy wooden ruler.)*

FLOOR MANAGER. Keep moving, girly, or you'll be disqualified. Done. Finished. Out on your ass. Forgotten like all of yesterday's losers.

(Older June jumps as if she'd been hit, and immediately starts moving her feet again. The Floor Manager and the shadows disappear as the music fades.)

OLDER JUNE. *(To the Nurse.)* So tired. But I must keep moving. Or I'm out.

NURSE. / June, you haven't danced in a marathon in over 75 years.

ROSE. / Baby, you haven't danced in a marathon in over 75 years.

OLDER JUNE. What do you think my whole life has been, if not a marathon?

NURSE. June dear, there's something we need to discuss. It's about this revival.

OLDER JUNE. I told Arthur. I am not going.

NURSE. Yes, dear. Arthur tells me they want you to renegotiate your royalty. *(Rose starts to laugh, softly.)*

OLDER JUNE. Every single time, they want to renegotiate my royalty. I never should have signed that release. I ask my sister about future productions; she tells me not to worry. I ask my lawyer about adding a provision for future productions; he tells me not to worry.

FABLE

NURSE. Well, dear, at the time no one thought / it would have

OLDER JUNE. / Everyone always lies to me. My sister. My lawyers. Everyone. *(To Rose.)* Even you, mother. Especially you. My whole life. *(Rose's voice takes on a ghostly sound, and her color may brighten a bit as she's now in Older June's memory.)*

ROSE. *(To Dainty Baby June.)* June, darling? Baby, I'm sorry, but your little dog Nee-Nee was hit by a car on Hollywood Boulevard. He's dead. *(Offstage, we hear a male voice yell "ACTION!" Dainty Baby June cries on cue. During the following, Rose crosses over to Dainty Baby June, fixes her costume, and pulls her thumb out of her mouth.)*

OLDER JUNE. *(To Rose, pointing at Dainty Baby June.)* Look at me. Five years old and in every movie I make, I cry my eyes out. Every take. After the first couple of times, of course, I know you're making it all up and Nee-Nee is back in our hotel room, perfectly fine. *(Rose and Dainty Baby June repeat the lie about the dog.)*

ROSE. *(To Dainty Baby June.)* June, baby, I'm afraid your little Nee-Nee is dead. Run over. Dead. *(Dainty Baby June again bursts into tears.)*

OLDER JUNE. *(To Rose.)* That's what you wanted. That's what I was paid to do. That's what I gave them. Every single time.

ROSE. *(To Older June.)* You were a pro.

OLDER JUNE. *(To Dainty Baby June.)* How old are we? 95? 98? 102? Who cares? Most people, if they remember us at all, think we kicked the bucket a long time ago... *(To the Nurse.)* I danced in seven marathons during the depression, you know. *(The music starts, and the dancing shadows appear again as the Marathon Emcee enters.)*

EMCEE. Welcome back, everyone. I hope y'all enjoyed your eleven-minute sleep break, also known as The Exposition Eleven! Now let's start hour 802,201 of Miss June Havoc's life with an old favorite and get y'all jumpin' again! *(He raises his baton and more loud marathon dance music blasts through Older June's memory. The dancing shadows pick up the pace and dance frantically. Perhaps one or two fall.)*

NURSE. Yes, dear, I know. Let me brush your hair. *(As she brushes June's wispy white hair.)* I told Arthur to talk to your lawyer about the royalty, but he wants to talk to you personally.

FABLE

OLDER JUNE. So he can try to charm me out of my money? I know Arthur. I know Arthur very well.

NURSE. (*Finishing her brushing.*) There. Don't you look pretty?

OLDER JUNE. Seven marathons. Thousands of hours on my feet, just to have a roof over my head and food to eat. I've built up so much endurance, I am what they call a horse.

NURSE. Yes, dear.

OLDER JUNE. It's a badge of honor to be called a horse. It's probably why I'm still alive. (*The Nurse takes her pulse.*) And my sister, the "star?" She was nothing more than a cheap, vulgar burlesque dancer. Some star. Does she ever do Shakespeare? I do. (*A phone rings. The nurse answers it. The third June appears. She is in her 40s, also on a phone and visibly upset. The conversations take place both in the present (the Nurse) and in the past (June.)*)

NURSE. No, I'm afraid she can't come to the phone right now. She's taking a nap.

JUNE. Your book, Gyps? They're making *your* book into a musical? What about my book?

NURSE. Her signature? ... I'm afraid that's something her lawyer will have to discuss with her.

JUNE. I am not signing anything until I've read a script! (*June slams down her phone and stands, quietly fuming. The nurse hangs up her phone a bit more delicately. During the following, the bed moves upstage as Dainty Baby June, en pointe, and Rose draw the travelers closed just enough to frame Older June. We see her watching everything from the shadows. Rose moves to the side, also watching from the shadows. Meanwhile the music has segued to a burlesque style bump and grind, and the Nurse begins a striptease, taking off her uniform to reveal the stylishly dressed 48-year-old GYPSY ROSE LEE.*)

NURSE. (*Taking off her nurse's cap.*) You're getting excited again, dear.

OLDER JUNE. Everyone thinks I'm rich as Croesus from that musical.

GYPSY. (*Taking off her nurse's shoes and stockings.*) She's a famous actress, my sister.

OLDER JUNE. They get around me by calling it a "Fable," you know, and they all delude themselves that everything is true, but in the end it's all lies.

FABLE

GYPSY. *(Taking off her nurse's uniform to reveal a stylish suit underneath.)* She prides herself on telling the truth, because...

OLDER JUNE. I tell them everything was a lie, but they don't care. "Fable." I hate that word...

GYPSY. *(She puts on a chic pair of stockings.)* As she is fond of saying, "you must know your truth. Only that is what will make the work respectable. "The work." How very Actors Studio. And me, well...

OLDER JUNE. She calls herself an ecdysiast, but that's just one of her fancy excuses for dancing naked five times a day.

GYPSY. I am never naked. I am completely covered by a blue spotlight.

OLDER JUNE. Oh, she tries to disguise it with witty, pseudo-intellectual banter, but she's nothing more than a cheap, vulgar burlesque dancer.

GYPSY. *(She steps into an elegant pair of shoes.)* I may not be a Shakespearean actress, but I am not a cheap, vulgar burlesque dancer. *(She drapes a mink stole over her shoulders.)* I am an ecdysiast. *(Gypsy and June face each other. June looks at Gypsy's mink. She holds out her hand. Gypsy reluctantly takes off her mink and gives it to her. Placard stage right reads: SISTERS, SISTERS, WERE THERE EVER SUCH DEVOTED SISTERS? Placard stage left reads: GYPSY'S TOWNHOUSE ON MANHATTAN'S SMART EAST SIDE. JANUARY 1959.)*

GYPSY. *(Indicating the SR placard.)* Sisters,

JUNE. *(Indicating the SR placard)* Sisters,

BOTH. *(Indicating the SR placard.)* Were there ever such devoted sisters?

GYPSY. *(Indicating SL placard.)* My townhouse on Manhattan's smart east side.

BOTH. *(Indicating SL placard.)* January 1959. *(Gypsy lights a cigarette and stares intently at June, the mink now draped over her shoulder, reading a document. Dainty Baby June sits cross legged under the dimly glowing ghost light, Rose behind her. As we head into deeper memories, Older June mouths every word June says from this point on.)*

JUNE. I wish you wouldn't smoke. It will kill you, you know. *(Gypsy reluctantly stubs out her cigarette as June goes back to reading the document. Gypsy pours herself a scotch. June looks up at her.)*

GYPSY. What?

JUNE. Another scotch, Gyps? Didn't your physician tell you / not

FABLE

GYPSY. / Please, June, I have so few vices left to enjoy.

JUNE. (*Handing Gypsy the document.*) I am not signing this until I've seen and approved a script.

GYPSY. Why are you doing this, June?

JUNE. This is a lousy deal for me, and you know it. You've sold your story, but you can't sell mine. And I am not selling myself so cheaply.

GYPSY. If I can get you 20 grand...

JUNE. And script / approval

GYPSY. / And script approval, will you sign the release?

JUNE. We'll see. Arthur and Jerry are coming to see my show tomorrow night.

GYPSY. I'm surprised Jerry has the balls to face you after that Bells... tour fiasco.

JUNE. What balls? (*She and Gypsy giggle.*) He's going to have to kiss my ass big time if he wants me to sign anything now. They both are.

GYPSY. Arthur and Jerry are only the writer and director, June. It's the producer, David Merrick, you need to convince.

JUNE. Jerome Robbins and Arthur Laurents are two of the biggest names on Broadway right now. Mr. Merrick won't listen to me. But he will listen to them, and if their job isn't made easy, he's not going to want to listen to them bitching about me.

GYPSY. Don't underestimate Merrick; he's a slippery one. I'm meeting Arthur for lunch on Wednesday at Sardi's. I'll see what I can do, at least about letting you see the script.

JUNE. I want to be there too.

GYPSY. You have a matinee, don't you? And you know you can't eat right before a performance.

JUNE. Then I shall arrange to have tea with Arthur after my show. I'll be voracious by then.

GYPSY. Go ahead, dear. Be my guest. Take him to the Plaza. Put it on my tab.

JUNE. You're being awfully generous.

GYPSY. I'm trying awfully hard. (*The placards change. Placard stage right reads: GYPSY. HERSELF. HAVING "LUNCH" AT SARDI'S WITH ARTHUR THE AUTHOR. JANUARY 1959. Placard stage left reads: JUNE. HERSELF. HAVING*

FABLE

TEA AT THE PLAZA HOTEL WITH ARTHUR THE AUTHOR. JANUARY 1959. A large caricature of Gypsy flies in stage right, as a potted palm or two roll on stage left.)

GYPSY. (*Gesturing to the SR placard.*) Me. Having “Lunch” at Sardi’s with Arthur the author. (*Gesturing to the caricature.*) And that’s my caricature. Fun, isn’t it?

JUNE. (*Gesturing to the SL placard.*) Me. Having tea at the Plaza Hotel with Arthur the author.

BOTH. January 1959. (*June in the Plaza Hotel Palm Court, seated at a table set with tea things and pastries. Gypsy in Sardi’s, seated in front of her caricature, with a bottle of Scotch and packet or two of cigarettes. She has at least two, sometimes three going at the same time. Scotch and cigarettes. ARTHUR is seated in between, like the ball in an out-of-control tennis match, taking notes, barely able to keep up as the sisters each talk to him separately.*)

JUNE. You were both late last night. I could see you and Jerry slinking into your seats. But then you weren’t really there to see my performance, were you? You just came to get my name on a piece of paper.

ARTHUR. (*As he lights a cigarette.*) That’s not entirely true, June. You know I want to hear your story, too.

JUNE. Of course, it doesn’t surprise me Jerry snuck in and out. After his dirty double cross with that *Bells Are Ringing* national tour last month, he can’t face me.

ARTHUR. He might not have had a choice. You know Judy’s made quite a splash with that role. (*To Gypsy, cigarette in hand.*) So, tell me, Gyps, how did you really get into stripping?

GYPSY. Oh, darling, I’ve given so many versions of that story, why don’t you make up your own? Just call the show *Gypsy*, and I won’t care about the rest. If you’re after the “truth,” and I use that term as loosely as I make my costumes, talk to June.

JUNE. You’re supposed to be a playwright, Arthur, aren’t you? How could you lend yourself to adapting my sister’s book? It’s vulgar. She’s vulgar. (*Stubbing out Arthur’s cigarette.*) And I do wish you wouldn’t smoke. (*June takes a tiny dog from her large purse and sits it on her lap.*) This is Qui Qui (*pronounced Kee Kee*). Say “Hello” to Arthur, Qui Qui. (*She feeds the dog a pastry or two, watching as Arthur takes notes.*) Qui Qui just loves her pastry, don’t you Qui Qui wee-kee?

FABLE

ARTHUR. Well, the focus is really going to be on your mother, Rose.

JUNE. I know my mother's name, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Ethel Merman, after all, doesn't play second fiddle to anyone.

JUNE. Ethel Merman? As mother? I replaced her in *Sadie Thompson* years ago. She just couldn't handle the acting, you know. It was a serious part.

ARTHUR. She'll be swell, June. Relax.

GYPSY. My baby sister always forgets I replaced Ethel in a Broadway show first. *DuBarry Was A Lady*. That show was a hit. It kills her.

JUNE. Mother was a psychopath. Can Ethel *play* a psychopath?

GYPSY. You know, Arthur, June used to bang her head on the dressing room table when she didn't get what she wanted, and we'd all give in to her every whim because, as mother said, "The Baby can't be upset before going on, it will affect her performance." And with 5 or 6 performances a day, day in, day out, week after week, year after year, let me tell you, darling, that's a *lot* of head-banging.

JUNE. Are you planning to mention all the dance marathons I did?

ARTHUR. The dance marathons?

JUNE. Haven't you read my book? I had my lawyer send you the manuscript weeks ago.

ARTHUR. Well, actually...

JUNE. Of course, you haven't. I survived seven of them. Hour after hour, 500, 600, 2,000, 4,000, it's all about survival, that fierce determination to be the last one standing. Meanwhile, that no-talent sister / of mine becomes a runaway success.

GYPSY. / And, of course, darling, I become a runaway success. And then after leaving us flat broke in Kansas City to marry that queer hooper, she has the nerve to come back from years of dancing in those marathons, unmarried and pregnant, expecting mother and me to help her get back on her feet... (*They now begin speaking so fast, Arthur barely has time to take notes or to get a word in.*)

JUNE. Standing and moving, in a circus tent or community hall, always standing and moving after months and months of never knowing whether it was day or night or in-between

ARTHUR. Yes, well that's all very interesting, June

GYPSY. And everyone, June especially, looking down their noses at me because my runaway success comes from successfully navigating a runway.

FABLE

JUNE. Spending four or five months on blistered, bleeding feet in a circus tent is grueling, but at least it's honest. / Gypsy always works dirty...

GYPSY. / "Gypsy always works dirty", my high-minded actress sister likes to say, but until she got back on her feet my dirty money paid her rent, fed her, clothed her, and took care of her bastard daughter.

JUNE. She's so cheap, Arthur! She eats dog food right out of the can! (*Putting Qui Qui down, June daintily moves the teapot and with one deft move sweeps the remaining pastries – plates, silverware, and all – into that rather large purse.*)

GYPSY. Of course, darling, *I* was...

ARTHUR. (*Holding up his hand to stop them.*) WAIT! (*To himself as he writes a note.*) This is just too perfect! Have... Rose... steal... table... settings... in... restaurant... scene... (*Gesturing to them to continue.*) Okay, go on.

GYPSY. Of course, darling, *I* was supporting all of them: Mother. June. Her daughter April. My Aunt Belle. My Grandmama.

JUNE. And I danced in seven of them. "7 Marathons 7!" I won 6 of them, too! I did. I hold the record for the most hours danced, ever. Did you know that?

GYPSY. And as long as they all get what they want, everyone is all much too happy to take my dirty money. I paid then, and I'm paying now. Just remember that later today when you see that little furry number my baby sister is sporting. She wants my mink, she gets my mink.

JUNE. And would I trade it all for her "20 Girls 20?" Not on your life. Those marathons made me a survivor. A very strong survivor. I get what I want, Arthur. (*The sisters finally stop to draw breath.*)

ARTHUR. (*To June.*) Yes, well, that's all fascinating. I'm not sure how much I can use, of course...

JUNE. Don't underestimate me, Mr. Laurents. Without my approval, you don't get my signature. / And without my signature, you don't have a show.

GYPSY. / And without her signature, we don't have a show.

JUNE. So how much of it you can or can't use really doesn't matter until I see a script and sign that precious release, now does it?

GYPSY. I'll do what I can, but she is headstrong, you know. All that banging on the dressing room tables, darling.

ARTHUR. (*To both.*) Can we start rehearsals, at least?

FABLE

GYPSY. / Possibly. If you let her see the script.

JUNE. / Possibly. If you let me see the script.

ARTHUR. *(To June. Exhausted.)* Okay June, you win this round. I'll have a copy sent to you tomorrow. *(To Gypsy. Firmly.)* But there's no way in hell I'm giving her script approval, Gyps.

GYPSY. That will be for Mr. Merrick to decide, now won't it, Arthur?
(Arthur exits.)

ROSE. *(To Older June.)* That's fascinating, June dear. Now just how the hell do you remember what Louise and Arthur talked about if you weren't there?

JUNE. Why can't you stay dead?

ROSE. I'm your mother, dear. You'll never get away from me. *(The placards change. Placard stage right reads: GYPSY'S TOWNHOUSE, STILL ON MANHATTAN'S SMART EAST SIDE. Placard stage left reads: STILL JANUARY 1959. June, Gypsy, with Rose in the background, Older and Dainty Baby June watching from the shadows. Older June continues mouthing June's words.)*

GYPSY. My townhouse, still on Manhattan's smart east side.

JUNE. Still January 1959. *(To Gypsy.)* Arthur sent me the script this morning.

GYPSY. And?

JUNE. My lawyer advises me to allow the show to start rehearsals.

GYPSY. I suppose I should thank you for that.

JUNE. BUT... my lawyer also agrees with me there's no reason to have my childhood exploited by strangers for someone else's gain.

GYPSY. Bottom line, June?

JUNE. Bottom line? I will not allow myself to be portrayed on stage unless Arthur makes substantial changes to the script. And David Merrick gives me a substantial royalty.

GYPSY. On top of the twenty grand?

JUNE. Yes.

GYPSY. And if Merrick refuses?

JUNE. How can he? Without me, there is no first act. Without me, Gypsy Rose Lee doesn't even exist.

FABLE

GYPSY. Look, darling, can we please not have this argument again? I've written a book. You've written a book. They're turning mine into a musical. Isn't that what this is all about?

ROSE. (*Chuckling.*) Yes, isn't that what it was all about?

OLDER JUNE. Shut up, mother. (*To Dainty Baby June.*) Mother isn't really dead, you know. She is always with us, one way or another, always ready to give us both that kick in the pants she promised us on her deathbed.

GYPSY. (*To June.*) Thank God mother is dead. We couldn't have written our books if she were still alive, she'd sue us for everything we've got, which isn't much. I do believe she'd be rather thrilled with all of this, though.

JUNE. Mother? Thrilled with Ethel Merman?

GYPSY. You know, June, I do wonder about you. You are rather un-bright sometimes.

JUNE. I'm bright enough to realize you need my signature if you want your, what do you call it?

GYPSY. My legacy.

JUNE. Your legacy to open in New York.

ROSE. (*To Older June.*) Oh, those teeth. Louise never did get them properly straightened, did she? All that money, just swirling down the dentist's drain. And you're right. I wasn't terribly thrilled with Ethel at first. I'd rather it had been someone softer. June Allyson, perhaps? No! Judy Garland! Oh, yes, she'd have been a marvelous me!

GYPSY. Ethel Merman is the most bankable star on Broadway. Her name alone guarantees a hit.

JUNE. She has been in a flop, you know.

GYPSY. Only the one she quit in rehearsals, dear. You remember, you took over for her? I replaced her in a hit.

JUNE. Which closed promptly after you took over.

GYPSY. June, please? I need this show. I need the money.

JUNE. It's always about the money with you.

GYPSY. When you don't have it...

JUNE. When you spend it the way you do...

FABLE

GYPSY. I don't have a rich husband, like you, dear.

JUNE. When we were kids, did you ever feel like you didn't have a sister?

GYPSY. Sometimes, I still do.

JUNE. That's mother's doing. She kept us apart. She's still trying to keep us apart.

GYPSY. Look, darling, why don't you go through the script, mark up what you want changed, and then we can all meet to discuss how to proceed to everyone's satisfaction.

JUNE. We'll see.

GYPSY. Don't you trust me?

JUNE. Not any further than you can toss a glove.

GYPSY. I can toss a glove pretty far, June. *(In the background, Rose laughs and mimes kicking them both in the pants. Arthur and Jerry enter as the placards change. Placard stage right reads: ARTHUR, THE ASSHOLE AUTHOR, AND JERRY, THE JERK DIRECTOR. Placard stage left reads: GYPSY REHEARSALS. NEW AMSTERDAM THEATRE, NEW YORK. FEBRUARY 1959.)*

JERRY. *(Gesturing to the SR placard, and chuckling.)* Arthur, the asshole.

ARTHUR. *(Also gesturing to the SR placard and chuckling louder.)* And Jerry, the jerk.

JERRY. *(Gesturing to the SL placard.)* Gypsy rehearsals.

ARTHUR. *(Gesturing to the SL placard.)* New Amsterdam Theatre, New York.

BOTH. February 1959. *(Jerry and Arthur move into the scene with Gypsy and June. June, with Qui Qui firmly nestled under one arm, is holding a heavily dog-eared, marked script.)*

JUNE. *(To Arthur.)* I never stole my sister's boyfriend, Arthur. You must change that!

GYPSY. That's true, Arthur, I couldn't have cared less for any of the boys in the act.

JUNE. And, you know, Mother did try to shoot the boy with whom I eloped.

GYPSY. Also true, Arthur. We both remember that.

JUNE. Isn't that a thrilling way to end the first act? Ethel pointing a gun at him?

ARTHUR. A gun? You actually want the first act curtain to come down on Ethel pointing a gun? At a chorus boy?

FABLE

JUNE. That's what really happened.

GYPSY. In a police station in Kansas City.

ARTHUR. Really, Gyps? You're siding with her on this?

GYPSY. (*Shrugging.*) She's my sister, Arthur.

JERRY. Have you heard that song? Jule (*pronounced Julie*) wrote it in a four-beat triplet!

JUNE. So?

JERRY. I'm going to have a hard enough time getting Ethel to sing the damn thing without snapping out the rhythm. And you want me to stage her waving a gun around at the same time?

JUNE. Jule can write a new song, you know. Isn't that why you're going out of town? (*We hear a familiar, strident voice.*)

ETHEL. (*Offstage.*) Hey Robbins! He's driving me crazy in there.

JERRY. (*To Arthur.*) Good God, what is it now? (*The lights on Rose brighten as she becomes Ethel Merman and enters the scene, full of boisterous indignation. Every time Rose becomes Ethel, the lights will brighten and add more color to her. Also, she never looks anyone in the eye, only at their foreheads.*)

ETHEL. Whaddya want me to do with this number at the end of the show?

JERRY. Ethel...

ETHEL. I can't get a straight answer from that Sondheim kid, he keeps talking fucking mumbo jumbo about Blanche DuBois.

JERRY. Ethel...

ETHEL. Who the hell is Blanche DuBois!?!

JERRY. ETHEL!

ETHEL. WHAT!?!

JERRY. Ethel, look at me, not my forehead. (*Taking two fingers and pointing at his eyes.*) Look me in the eyes.

ETHEL. (*Somewhat disconcerted. She's not used to connecting like this.*) Oh.

JERRY. (*Putting his arm around her.*) Now, tell me: are you talking about the song? Or the scene after it with, what's her name, that "actress" playing Gypsy?

ETHEL. (*Back to normal.*) I am talking about that fucking "aria!"

JERRY. Eyes, Ethel, eyes!

FABLE

ETHEL. (*Staring directly at Jerry, defiantly.*) All I want to know is if I come in on the upbeat or the downbeat, and he keeps telling me to “connect” with my memories! WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT EVEN MEAN?

JUNE. “Connect” is a term serious actors use, Ethel. I could work with you.

ETHEL. Who the hell is that? Oh, yeah, the sister. The one who replaced me in that piece of crap flopola. (*To June. Looking at her forehead.*) Listen, are you gonna sign that damn release or not? (*To Jerry and Arthur.*) Why the hell should I be busting my hump over fucking Blanche DuBois if we’re not even gonna have a Goddam show?

GYPSY. She’ll sign, Ethel dear. She just wants a few changes made first.

ETHEL. CHANGES? Who the hell is she to demand changes?

ARTHUR. Nothing major, Ethel. Nothing to do with your character.

(*Gypsy takes June aside.*)

ETHEL. (*To Jerry.*) NOW! What about this Goddam “M... M... M... Momma” shit? Do I come in on the upbeat, or the downbeat?

JERRY. What does Jule say? He wrote the damn song. (*To Arthur.*) Didn’t he?

ETHEL. He’s too busy staring at those stripper’s tits! You’re the director, you tell me! This M... M... Momma shit: what the hell does it mean?

JERRY. The song is a nervous breakdown, right?

ETHEL. Yeah.

JERRY. And she’s reliving her life, right?

ETHEL. Yeah.

JERRY. And she’s remembering that her own mother abandoned her, right?

ETHEL. Yeah.

JERRY. So, she’s calling out for her mother, wondering where she is, like a lost child.

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