

Harper and the Hoarder

A full-length play

by
John Glass

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Student Plays consists of **John Glass, Jackie Jernigan, and Dominic Torres**. We are a group of playwrights and directors that have written scripts for elementary school through college. *Student Plays* is proud of the variety of ages that our scripts serve.

We are particularly proud of our “creepy” plays, and also our *Latino-themed* plays. These are scripts that focus on Latino youths and the Latino experience. Any school can perform a Latino-themed play: it just requires a general introduction and basic exposure to the Spanish language, something that most schools and students already have.

To contact *Student Plays* or to communicate with one of the playwrights, simply email us at john@studentplays.org.

☆ Characters ☆

FAYE (in 2003) Seventies. Snippy. Agitated.

FAYE (in 1973) Forties. Angry. Agitated.

CHANEL Forty. Kind, helpful.

JOHNNY Seventies. Funny, gregarious.

**PRISON GUARD/
DETECTIVE** Any age. These are very
brief roles at the end of
the play, and may be
doubled by JOHNNY.

HARPER LEE (in 1973) The writer herself,
in her mid-forties.

HARPER LEE (in 2003) The writer herself,
in her mid-seventies.

Most of the play is set in **2003**, in Faye's old apartment in downtown Mobile, Alabama. The apartment is chock full of stacks of boxes,

books, clothing, and so forth. FAYE is a hoarder, and throughout the entire play she, CHANEL, and JOHNNY pick through the boxes, in search of a book.

👉 **Scenes One and Three:** 2003, the living room of FAYE'S house.

👉 **Scenes Two and Four:** 1973, a small sitting area in HARPER's house.

👉 **Scene Five:** 2003, the visiting room of a prison in Alabama.

The final mini-scene—only a few minutes— is also 2003, set in HARPER'S home. This is the only present-day appearance of HARPER.

SCENE ONE

At RISE: *The living room of FAYE's apartment. Tuesday night, late. FAYE is standing downstage, facing the audience, and she opens the play with a brief soliloquy. JOHNNY stands at a small table with two glasses and a bottle of champagne. Everybody is very, very tired.*

FAYE Yes, I know. I have things. Lots of things. Papers. Boxes. Keepsakes from New York and Guatemala. My poetry. All kinds of books.

(Pause.)

But there's one book that I desperately need.

(Tosses a small box to the side.)

I really need it.

(Pause.)

And I really need it *now*.

(She walks over to Johnny, who 'comes to life' and looks at her.)

JOHNNY Come on, a toast.

FAYE Are you still on that?

JOHNNY We've been in here working for hours so what's a little toast? Right?

FAYE What about Chanel?

JOHNNY Ahh, she's busy, in the back. Come on.

FAYE (*Reluctantly.*) All right.

JOHNNY A toast . . . to two neighbors. To 29 years of hoarding—oops!—to 29 years of *collecting*. A toast to friendship!

FAYE Lord.

(*They clink glasses and drink. Pause.*)

JOHNNY I can't believe you're just gonna walk away from all this, Faye.

FAYE I can't believe that you brought my glasses from Sylvester's out here! You know what these things cost?

JOHNNY Hell, I had to use something.

FAYE Well . . .

(*She puts the glass down. Beat.*)

Yeah, it's time, Johnny. Time to move on. It's *been* time.

JOHNNY Hmmph.

FAYE And what is this? Is this *my* champagne? It's vile.

JOHNNY You didn't have anything else. I looked for that Blackbird stuff you used to have but couldn't find any. *That* champagne was tasty!

FAYE I had a bottle of Blackbird only once.

JOHNNY Well. It was good. And you're right, this stuff *is* vile.

FAYE Okay, well, that's that. Back to work.

JOHNNY Just one more drink, Faye. Here. (*He starts to pour.*)

FAYE Johnny, I don't have time.

JOHNNY Awww!

FAYE Look, you wanted to help, right? So, come on. Let's get a move-on.

JOHNNY Okay, suit yourself.

FAYE Can you finish going through that stack?

JOHNNY Yes.

FAYE Chanel should be about done with the closet in the bedroom.

(Pause. They resume working.)

JOHNNY You're breaking her heart by moving outta here, you know.

FAYE Please. You keep saying that. Chanel's a grown woman. She can still visit me.

JOHNNY But way up to Creola? That's far.

FAYE It's just north Mobile, Johnny.

JOHNNY But it's still far. Might as well be moving back to Nebraska or New York. Chanel's used to hanging out here. Hell, we both are.

(Enter CHANEL, excited.)

FAYE I don't know what to tell you. Nothing remains the same forever.

CHANEL Faye, I remember that poem now! I think it was one of Harper's!

FAYE Oh honey, I told you. Harper was a *lot* of things. But never a poet.

CHANEL But didn't she send you some poetry to read years ago?

FAYE No. Ha. She was definitely a goodie-goodie. A little miss softie. But poetry wasn't her thing. What did you remember? How did it go?

CHANEL (*Remembering.*) That faint, forgotten lipstick . . . became the firefly of a lightning strike . . .

FAYE & CHANEL . . . off a black beach of the Nicaraguan coast.

(They laugh.)

JOHNNY You two and your poetry.

FAYE No, Chanel. *I* wrote that!

CHANEL Did you?

FAYE Yeah. I don't know where I put that little poem.

CHANEL Oh. Well, it just came to me when I was in the back.

FAYE We read that when you were living downstairs, right?

CHANEL Yep.

FAYE Hmmm. Yeah, I wrote that. Harper may have dabbled in poetry later in life but not while we were at Alabama.

(Beat.)

See, Chanel? You recite fine.

JOHNNY I know. That's what I say.

CHANEL You know that it's easier here with you two. In public, it's different.

FAYE Oh, quit. That doesn't diminish your gift at all. Come on. Keep moving. There's work to do.

CHANEL Faye, what are you holding? What is all that?

FAYE My transcript from Alabama. Some old pictures.

CHANEL Let me see. Any of you and what's-his-face? Frankie?

JOHNNY Where??

FAYE No, no. Hell no.

JOHNNY Aww.

FAYE And would you two please get off *Frankie*? They're just some old pictures. There's my old apartment in Brooklyn.

CHANEL (*Pointing to one of the pictures.*) What is that church?

FAYE It's a cathedral in Guatemala. I lived right behind that. (*Tosses the pictures into a small box, hands it to CHANEL.*) Honey, put this over there, out of the way.

CHANEL Sure.

FAYE Closet all done?

CHANEL Almost.

FAYE Good. Can you check that brown file cabinet in the hallway? After you finish in there?

CHANEL Okay. Uh, yeah. (*Checks her watch. Yawns.*) I actually was going to stop after I finished the closet.

FAYE I need you to stay a little longer if you can.

JOHNNY Faye, I can do it.

FAYE No, you stay put. I need you to finish what you're doing.

CHANEL And I was going to stop for a bite while heading home. I've got to work on some details for the festival tonight.

FAYE I have some lasagna here I can heat up.

CHANEL Well . . .

FAYE Please?

CHANEL I guess I can work a bit more.

FAYE Good!

JOHNNY Hey, what day is the inspection?

FAYE Next Monday. Five more days before I need to be out of here.

CHANEL Ughh. There's *so* much to do.

FAYE Don't remind me.

CHANEL And there's so much that *I* have to do for my reading.

FAYE I'm sorry that I can't help you do more with that.

CHANEL Don't apologize. You done more than enough as it is.

(Pause.)

We just need to . . . we need to *find* this thing. I mean . . . we've barely touched the bedrooms.

(Overwhelmed.)

And . . . wow. What if you haven't found it by the inspection? Are you sure I can't just stay and continue looking while Harry's here, inspecting?

FAYE Nope, nope. I told you. I want to get what I need and get out. By Sunday I'll be long gone.

CHANEL Okay. I know.

FAYE I'm done with this place. Finished.

(Bumps into the table with glasses. Beat.)

Lord, Johnny, can you put these glasses back in the kitchen?

JOHNNY Sure.

FAYE Might as well wrap them up. Use that paper behind the coffeepot.

JOHNNY Yes, your highness.

(He exits.)

FAYE I might actually take those glasses with me.

(Beat.)

Here, Chanel, never mind that closet. Go though these bags. They're mostly magazines, I think.

CHANEL Okay.

FAYE *(Continuing on with earlier thoughts.)* Yep. I'm finished. I could spend the next ten years going through this stuff.

CHANEL But that's what I don't understand! All the cool things you've done! The memories! The secrets!

FAYE Well, the memories, *yeah*. That's why this book is so important to me. But there *are* no secrets.

CHANEL I look down and I see this old thing!

(Reaches down, picks it up.)

A calendar from 1972! Nebraska! Look at this!

FAYE Take it. The only thing left is that book. Everything else, I just don't care.

(Pause. Takes a breath.)

You and Johnny just pretend that you two are Indiana Jones and that your mission is to find that novel.

CHANEL Raiders of the Lost Novel!

FAYE No, Raiders of the Lost *Mockingbird!*

CHANEL That's right!

(They laugh briefly, and continue working.)

CHANEL Ohhh . . . good one, Faye.

FAYE Oh, rats, I forgot about these shoe boxes down here.

CHANEL (*Still in amusement.*) Raiders of the Lost Mockingbird . . . wow. When was the last time you talked to her?

FAYE Long time.

CHANEL How long? Thirty years?

FAYE Give or take, yeah.

CHANEL Well, either way, I know that book means a lot to you.

FAYE It's what *inside* the book that's important to me.

CHANEL I wish you would tell us what's inside it.

FAYE Nope.

CHANEL It's not just mementos from the old days, is it?

FAYE Well, sort of. Maybe. Ha, the old days. (*Beat. Sits down while CHANEL continues working.*) A minute ago you mentioned 1972.

Exactly thirty-one years ago. But 1973, wow. Now *that* was a doozy of a year.

CHANEL You were still in Omaha, right?

FAYE No. I had just moved back to Alabama, away from Frankie and all that. Turbulent time. You have no idea.

CHANEL It was rough. You told me.

FAYE And even though Harper and I kind of went our own ways, for a few months she really was there for me. She put me up, and, well, she helped me.

CHANEL Your mentor.

FAYE Well. At one time.

(Beat. Hands her a bag.)

Here, go through this bag too.

CHANEL *(Taking it.)* Well. I absolutely know the feeling.

FAYE Oh, come on.

CHANEL No, really. I'm serious. Dr. Faye: my neighbor *and* my professor.

FAYE How does it go?

(Reciting.)

. . .that doo wop harmony hit you with the force of a slap . . .

CHANEL & FAYE . . it opened lost days, a dash of perfume, laced across dandelions, a road trip at noon.

FAYE See there? You recite fine. You always do.
(Stands up, returns to work.)

CHANEL Whatever. You should hear these young poets at the university. They just rattle right through their readings, with such eloquence.

FAYE Please. If they can recite well, then you can.

CHANEL But they're in their mid-twenties, and here I am, pushing forty!

FAYE Don't start all that!

CHANEL Stammering and sputtering my way through every reading the university has.

(Enter JOHNNY, carrying small stack of papers in one hand.)

FAYE You'll do fine at your reading. Borges said that when he spoke in public, he was facing just *us*,

just one person. That's all you have to do: remind yourself that your audience is only *one* individual.

CHANEL I like that.

FAYE All done, Johnny?

JOHNNY Mission accomplished. Here, these looked important.

FAYE What are those?

JOHNNY I think they're old deposit slips.

FAYE Deposit slips?? From a bank?? Let me see.

(She snatches them quickly, thumbs through them.)

JOHNNY Faye, I've been thinking about something. What if the landlord tries to sue you?

FAYE *(Sticks them into her pocket, resumes working.)* Hmm?

JOHNNY I mean, *he'll* be the one cleaning everything up.

FAYE Harry? Please. Harry can sue the blouse off my back. By the time they file those papers I'll be

so far gone. Besides, I'm 74 years old, and I've been a model tenant for years.

(Notices mess on floor. Beat.)

Johnny! What is this?

JOHNNY What?

FAYE You spilled ice, or champagne, on the floor!

JOHNNY Oh man.

FAYE Lord. Chanel, do you see a towel or anything?

CHANEL No.

JOHNNY Here, there are some paper towels in this box. *(Bending down with towels, cleaning it up.)* I'll take care of it.

FAYE Sheesh . . .

JOHNNY It's just a little bit, Faye.

FAYE Look out! You don't have to get the *rest* of the floor wet!

JOHNNY Huh? I'm just making sure I get it all.

FAYE Goodness. Be careful!

JOHNNY Boy. Talk about deja-vu. I once did this very thing at one of your readings.

FAYE My what?

JOHNNY At one of your poetry readings.

CHANEL Johnny, you attended those?

JOHNNY Well, when I was invited, yes. *Somebody* had to pour the drinks for all the guests and be the responsible one around here. Clean up spills like this!

FAYE Button it, pops. You about done?

JOHNNY Yep. I'm done.

(Standing. Takes a breath.)

Hell, at one time, Faye had every poet in Mobile in this little apartment! All those idiots from the university in here, driving me nuts. Bunch of hoarders and a bunch of poets! Lord! What was that one guy's name??

CHANEL I wish I'd lived here then.

FAYE Here, give me those wet towels.

JOHNNY *(Passing them to her.)* Chanel, no you don't. Faye was a different animal in those days.

What *was* his name? Oh, right, John Bell. The *master poet*.

FAYE That was a million years ago.

JOHNNY Ol John Bell was notorious. One for the books.

CHANEL Was he as notorious as her so-called gangster boyfriend?

FAYE Excuse me??

JOHNNY Oh, Frankie Moneybags? Ha!

(Miming a man with a machine-gun.)

Who knows? Crazy hoot's probably still on the run.

FAYE You two need to QUIT! RIGHT THIS MINUTE!!

(Pause. They stare at her, floored. FAYE is furious.)

FAYE OKAY??

CHANEL Faye, um, we're just kidding around.

FAYE But there's still work to be done!

JOHNNY We'll quit.

CHANEL Yeah, sorry.

FAYE There's an ENORMOUS amount of work to be done! And you two know it!! So can we cut all of the chit-chat and continue searching? PLEASE?

JOHNNY Sorry. I'll continue with these bags.

FAYE Damn . . . ! This search is going to put me under!

CHANEL Sorry, Faye.

(Beat.)

Oh, hang on, ya'll. I need to get my phone from the kitchen. It should be finished charging by now.

FAYE Hurry!

JOHNNY Good luck finding that thing.

(She exits. Pause.)

FAYE When you finish those you can start over there. In the corner.

JOHNNY Okay. As long as my medication doesn't start blurring my vision.

FAYE You're fine.

(Beat. They resume working.)

JOHNNY Geez, Faye. At least you didn't get up on the wrong side of the bed this morning.

FAYE I've gotten up on the wrong side of the bed all week, Johnny.

JOHNNY Why this week?

FAYE You know why. Harry and all his baloney.

JOHNNY Oh. Right.

FAYE This silly inspection.

JOHNNY Well, Harry's got a mountain of work to do if he's doing the inspection himself.

(Digging through a bag.)

Wow. The collected memories of a traveling poet.

Postcards from Guatemala, or *somewhere*. Kleenex.

What is this? Hotel stationery from Sioux Falls? Ha.

A box of chocolates? Who gave you these?

FAYE What kind of a question is that? I don't know where half this stuff came from.

JOHNNY Faye, what if Harry stops by and starts snooping around?

(Enter CHANEL, reading her phone.

Stressed.)

FAYE Like I told Chanel, he can do whatever he pleases. I'm done with that jackass of a landlord. Gone too far this time.

CHANEL I don't believe this.

FAYE Now what?

CHANEL Faye, I have to go.

FAYE What? Why?

CHANEL Joel can't meet me tomorrow like we had planned. He can only do it tonight.

FAYE That writer in Atmore?

CHANEL Yes. He and his wife.

(Aggravated.)

Ahhh! I don't feel like driving out there right now.

FAYE You're going now? It's already past nine.

CHANEL Apparently this is the only chance I can meet them. He wants to rehearse the poetry before the reading.

(Pause.)

I'm sorry. I don't like it any more than you do. But he's a key part of the festival.

(Pause. FAYE is disgusted.)

CHANEL I know you need me. But look, we have five days, right?

FAYE Yes, but you have that festival this weekend! And you know that I want to get out of here as soon as possible!

JOHNNY I can help! What am I? Chopped liver?

FAYE You really want me to answer that question?

CHANEL I don't want you to worry. We'll find it. We will. I've just got to go and do this. They can only meet now. I'm going to be reading some pieces with them.

FAYE Well . . . I can't make you stay.

CHANEL It'll be fine. Alright? We'll find that book.

(Pause. FAYE is aggravated but she gives in.)

FAYE Well. Don't let me down, you ol' poet, you.

JOHNNY Old poet? Have you looked in the mirror?

CHANEL Johnny!

JOHNNY Wait a minute, sorry. Isn't that what they call ageism?

CHANEL Johnny, quit. You can stay here and help Faye, can't you?

JOHNNY Uh, yeah. If you-know-who lets me.

CHANEL Okay. I have to go.

(Stressed.)

Ahh! It's late, and I *hate* driving to Atmore.

(Beat.)

Faye? Are you going to be angry with me?

FAYE Does it matter?

CHANEL I don't want you to be upset. You know that I would help you do more tonight.

FAYE Honey, just go. I'm not happy. But I understand.

CHANEL Okay.

(Pause.)

Well. Bye, ya'll. Faye, I'll see you tomorrow.

FAYE I'll be waiting.

(Exits. Long pause. JOHNNY and FAYE stare at each other. She is still disgusted. They gradually get back to work.)

JOHNNY You really mean a lot to the ol' girl, you know.

FAYE Whatever.

JOHNNY It's true. You know you do. You're like the mother that was never around for her.

FAYE Are you going to continue looking or what?

JOHNNY Yes, your majesty!

FAYE And be careful with that box! It's fragile. Here, start over there, with these. You know what it looks like, don't you?

JOHNNY Yep. Dark red leather binder. Stuffed with a bunch of papers. This isn't the first time you've looked for this book.

(Pause.)

So . . . why *this* book? Why a book by Harper?

FAYE What are you talking about?

JOHNNY Didn't you and her have a big disagreement? When you were staying with her up in Monroeville?

FAYE You're treading on thin ice, grandpa.

JOHNNY Well, sorry. But it just seems weird. You once told me that she really ticked you off. When ya'll were raising a little middle-aged hell.

FAYE Hmmpf. Harper always walked to the beat of her own drum, if that's what you mean; but no, she didn't have the guts to raise any so-called 'hell'. Far from it.

(Beat.)

Watch out. The bottom of that box is about to collapse!

JOHNNY I see it.

FAYE You need to be careful!

JOHNNY *(Securing the box.)* I am!

FAYE All this blabbering . . . !

JOHNNY I've got it. It's fine. Sheesh. *(Pause. Resumes his earlier thoughts)* But Faye, seriously . . . why *this* book? Did she sign it?

FAYE No. That's not important.

JOHNNY Not important?

FAYE No. I'm not looking to make money or anything like that. I just *need* it. I told you, it's the only thing she ever gave me. It's special.

JOHNNY Hmmph. You didn't keep the things that *I* gave you.

FAYE Johnny!

JOHNNY I know . . .

FAYE Don't start all that.

JOHNNY Sorry.

FAYE And how do you know what I've kept or haven't kept?

JOHNNY Well . . .

FAYE Focus. You're making me more stressed.

JOHNNY You and Harry haven't gotten along in years. When are you going to tell me what *really* happened?

FAYE You don't listen. He wants to evict me. This inspection he's doing is just a reason to get in here and create an excuse to get rid of me. He's an imbecile. Says my boxes *smell*. Claims there are cockroaches from my hoarding that have crept through the walls into the other apartments.

JOHNNY Faye, that's probably true. My kitchen is on the other side of yours and—

FAYE Are we working or blabbering?

JOHNNY All right, all right . . .

(Pause.)

So . . . since you brought it up. *Did* you keep any of the things that I gave you?

FAYE Excuse me?

JOHNNY You know. Any of the things—

FAYE Johnny, I kept those candles. And I still have that glass ashtray you gave me. That good enough for you?

(The phone rings)

JOHNNY What about the wind chimes?

FAYE Excuse me?

(Beat.)

That DAMN phone!

JOHNNY Aren't you going to get that?

FAYE No! I don't even know where it is.

JOHNNY Well, maybe it's—

FAYE Johnny, we are talking in circles here! Now, please! Help me look!

JOHNNY What do you think I've been doing??

FAYE You've been RUNNING YOUR MOUTH is what you've been doing! And I'm stressed. Trying to help Chanel with her poetry. Trying to get the hell OUTTA HERE! There's only a few days left!

(Pause. The ringing stops. She collects herself.)

JOHNNY Faye. I can keep my mouth shut, you know. If that's what you're worried about.

(Beat. She stares at him.)

You know, if Harry tries to make a big stink out of all this, I can be quiet.

FAYE The hell are you talking about?

JOHNNY I'm talking about Harry! If he tries to track you down I'm not gonna—

FAYE I'm not worried about Harry!

JOHNNY Okay.

FAYE Are *you*?

JOHNNY No. What do you mean? Of course I'm not worried about Harry.

FAYE He's been paid through the end of the month. He's the one that wants me out, so he can deal with all this. I don't know what you mean by 'keeping your mouth shut.'

JOHNNY Well, I just meant that if he tries to find out where you've moved to, then I won't—

FAYE But you don't exactly know where I'm moving to. Do you?

(Pause.)

JOHNNY I suppose that I don't, no.

FAYE And here we are again, talking in circles. Wasting TIME!!

(Angrily tossing a small box to him.)

Here. When you're done with that, look through this box.

JOHNNY Goodness. Who rattled your cage?

FAYE Well, I don't see anyone *else* in here but a house painter named Johnny!

JOHNNY What did I say?

FAYE It's your whole . . . *presence*. You talk and talk! And you bring things up.

(Beat. She puts hands to temples.)

Um, Johnny. This isn't going to work. I need to rest.

JOHNNY I thought you wanted me to help you find the novel. *(Sarcastically.)* The great *masterpiece* from the great *Harper Lee!*

FAYE You'll have to come back tomorrow, Johnny. Good-bye.

JOHNNY What just *happened* here?

FAYE I don't know. I'm tired. You'll have to come back later.

JOHNNY Okay, fine. I knew that you letting me help go through this stuff was too good to be true.

FAYE I'll talk to you later. I have to rest. Good night.

JOHNNY Suit yourself. Bye.

(He exits. FAYE looks around, exhausted. She walks over and looks out the window, gradually exits to her bedroom. Lights fade. End of Scene One.)