

Our Beautiful Home

By Elijah Vasquez

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...*

Next up, is Our Beautiful Home, a play about trouble in domiciliary paradise by the circumspect Elijah Vazquez. On the surface, Insanus and Procida are a nice couple (with fabulous names that sound like prescription drugs) living in the house of their dreams, but it doesn't take long to realize that something off about the relationship and that the home is loaded with idiosyncrasies of its own. Nothing works as expected and the closest thing there is to wine is a juice box in a dark fridge. Moreover, amidst and between raves of their good fortune, there are signals of domestic violence. With dialogue and interplay that's reminiscent of Albee, this play resonates with the familiar, the absurd, and the ugly. Oh – and the ending is perfection. You'll see why we give it ...

5 stars.

Prodica: *(Not looking away from the screen)* You want to know something?

Isanus: Mmm?

Prodica: Being on top is nice. Being the boss of your own life is remarkable. We are smooth sailing, traveling through the sea of no worries. Flying through the stress-free air of happiness. Nothing can bring us down.

(Spacing is playwright's own.)

Our Beautiful Home

By

Elijah Vazquez

Insanus, and Procida have a studio apartment together. It's very nice. In one single room, there is a bedroom, kitchen, and living space. Pause. They look around analyzing their furniture with curious sways and side shuffles. Beat. Breaking away from their analysis, Insanus goes to the refrigerator and Procida gets out a newspaper.

Note: Any time Isanus looks in the fridge or bends down it should be evident that she has some sort of back/shoulder/neck pain.

Prodica: *(Reading the newspaper)*
Hiring...hiring...hiring...hiring...hiring...

Isanus: What do you want for dinner dear?

Prodica: Cook...waiter...dishwasher...cook...waiter...
dishwasher...

Isanus: Dear, love of my life, what do you want for dinner?

Prodica: Starting wage 12 dollars...signing bonus...free
iphone...blah blah blah.

Isanus: Dear?

Prodica: Yes?

Isanus: Dinner?

Prodica: *(Small pause)* Oh, yes, dinner. My apologies. You know me, just checking out the daily hubbub.

Isanus: *(Strolling to Procida, taking the newspaper away)* Well, that dailey hubbub can wait. It's time to eat, in our beautiful home.

Prodica: Yes, our beautiful home. *(Beat)* Do we still have that tomato puree filled with the nine cheeses left?

Isanus: Yes, yes we do! *(They trot over to the refrigerator, open it and pull out a tray of pizza rolls. No light is emitting out from the fridge. Beat. They place the plate on the table Procida is sitting at)*

Prodica: Delicious.

Isanus: *(Opening the microwave, but no light emits as well)*
Micro-

Prodica: Cold is good.

Isanus: *(Closing the microwave)* Fork?

Prodica: Nope, let's not burden the maid with more dirty dishes.

Isanus: *(Beat)* Oh, why yes, how silly of me to think that. I shall give you a drink then.

(Isanus grabs a glass from inside a cabinet and tries to run the faucet. No water comes out)

Isanus: Oh phooey, I forgot, I have to call the plumber to fix this. It's been happening for a while now. Do you want something other than water?

Prodica: Do we still have that Chateau Ausone from the yacht party last night?

Isanus: Yes, yes we do! *(Isanus trots to the refrigerator once more, opens it, grabs an apple juice box, closes it, and gives it to Procida)*

Prodica: Magnificent.

Isanus: Of course. Anything for you.

Prodica: *(With their mouth stuff)* Whet eh liffve weeliffve.

Isanus: *(Smiling)* I know, it's everything we wanted.

(Pause. They automatically stop what they are doing and resume analyzing the furniture with curious sways and side shuffles. Beat. At times they smile a little out towards the audience then continue analyzing. After a minute or so, they go back to their previous activity as if nothing happened)

Prodica: Mmm I swear, this tomato puree is so good!

Insanus: *(Excited)* What, do you really think so?!

Prodica: Compared to your old ways, you have progressed.

Insanus: *(Beat)* Were...were my old ways bad?

Prodica: I wouldn't say bad. But, I wouldn't say good. I'll say...uh..doable.

Insanus: Right.

Prodica: It's okay, beautiful home, beautiful meals now, am I right?

Insanus: Yes, yes dear you are correct. I'm glad you are enjoying it.

(Pause. Insanus just happily watches Prodica eat. When Prodica finishes, they just leave their mess on the table and sit on the living room couch, playing with a handheld video game console. Beat. Insanus just looks at it)

Insanus: Love.

Prodica: *(Not answering)*

Insanus: Sweetie dearest.

Prodica: *(Still not answering)*

Insanus: Prodica!

Prodica: Huh, what? What happened?

Isanus: *(Small pause)* Are you...are you at ease?

Prodica: Pardon?

Isanus: Are. You. At. Ease?

Prodica: How can I not be?

Isanus: *(Beat)* Just making sure. Let me clean up here and I'll join you in a jiff.

Prodica: No, no, no just leave that for the maid.

Isanus: I insist. It's really not much.

Prodica: *(Back to their game; not really paying attention anymore to the conversation)* Okay, uh huh, yup, you do that then.

(Isanus cleans really quickly and tosses the scraps into a trash can that doesn't have a trash bag in it. They then join Prodica. Pause. They both just sit for a while, only hearing the button clicking of Prodica's game)

Prodica: *(Not looking away from the screen)* You want to know something?

Isanus: Mmm?

Prodica: Being on top is nice. Being the boss of your own life is remarkable. We are smooth sailing, traveling through the sea of no worries. Flying through the stress-free air of happiness. Nothing can bring us down.

Isanus: That's very preachy dear, did something good happen at work?

Prodica: Good? Good? Yes, always! Always good! Video game sales are skyrocketing! My development team is rising up the global ranks, and I couldn't be any happier. We are smooth sailing.

Isanus: Wonderful!

Prodica: Yes, very! I'm not a part of the daily hubbub.

Isanus: Nope! You're thriving my love!

Prodica: Correct! No worries at all. I'm only drinking the liquid of serenity.

Isanus: Hah, is that from one of your games?

Prodica: What?

Isanus: "Liquid of serenity." It sounds, I don't know, really embellished.

Prodica: Probably.

Isanus: Okay...well...you deserve that nonetheless!

Prodica: Yes I do.

(Awkward pause. Prodica is still locked in on their video game)

Prodica: Oh come on! Seriously?!

Isanus: You losing?

Prodica: No.

Isanus: Okay.

Prodica: *(They punch the couch, getting aggravated)* Garbage. Total garbage. This game is-ugh!

Isanus: *(Trying, but failing at counseling)* It'll...uh...be okay dear.

Prodica: No it won't. I'm running out of health potions, and these dumb giant torpedo snails won't leave me alone.

Isanus: What do they do?

Prodica: They stick to you and drain your life force, until, well, you are dead.

Isanus: *(Beat)* Sounds awful.

Prodica: It is.

(Another awkward pause)

Isanus: Maybe I can help.

Prodica: Help?

Isanus: Yeah. *(Beat)* Can I play with you?

Prodica: Mmm?

Isanus: Can I join in on your game?

Prodica: Uh...why?

Isanus: I just said, to help.

Prodica: I don't need it.

Isanus: Well, can we just play normal two-player or something?

Prodica: You want to play? This is new.

Isanus: It's not that I never wanted to, it's just I never had the time. In this beautiful home, I have all the time now.

Prodica: Right. *(They don't offer)*

Isanus: Come on, you have two remotes on the side.

Prodica: I know.

Isanus: *(Small pause. Getting into Prodica's face now, trying to get the video game remotes and play)* Please, please just this/one time.

Prodica: What are you doing? No, I have to beat this level.

Isanus: It can wait. Come on.

(Simultaneously)

Prodica: This is very important right now, I have to beat this level or else-

Isanus: Come on, I never get to play with you. Just this once and I'll leave you alone-

(Tugging for the video game, they both lose grip of it and it falls and breaks on the floor. Pause)

Isanus: Oh my gosh, I am so sorry...

Prodica: It's fine-

Isanus: No, it's not. That was your only-

Prodica: I can buy another-

Isanus: Yeah, but-

Prodica: I said I'll buy another! We are smooth sailing, remember? No worries in our beautiful home.

(Isanus silently gets the broken video game console and tries to fix it. Prodica looks at their phone)

Isanus: *(Whispering to themselves)* I'm sorry...

Prodica: Mmm?

Isanus: I didn't mean it, I know how-

Prodica: It's not a problem, I said I'll buy-

Isanus: *(Explosive, then catching themselves)* With what!-...yes, you're right dear.

(Pause. Prodica leaves the game alone)

Isanus: How can I-

Prodica: Shh.

Isanus: But-

Prodica: Shh. Don't do anything. Just be.

(Silence. Beat. They once again get up and analyze their furniture with curious sways and side shuffles. After a while, they again return to the positions they once were as if nothing happened)

Isanus: *(Scooching closer to Prodica. Putting a hand on their shoulder)* I really am sorry...

Prodica: I heard.

Isanus: *(Pause)*

Prodica: *(Messing with their neck shoulder area)* Whew, looking down at all of these online deals have been messing with my-

Isanus: Would you like a massage dear?

Prodica: Mmm yeah, yeah, that actually sounds pretty great.

Isanus: Lovely! Just sit back and relax.

Prodica: Not too hard like you did last time. It's very tender back there.

Isanus: Gotcha.

(Prodica sits back and relaxes as Isanus massages them. Silent)

Prodica: Ouch.

Isanus: What? I'm being gentle.

Prodica: More gentle.

(Isanus continues)

Prodica: Ouch! What are you doing?

Isanus: I'm...I'm being gentle...

Prodica: Well, it feels like you are strangling me. *(Beat)* Just do the chop and I'll be done.

Isanus: Okay.

(They karate chop their shoulders and upper back. Once they are done Prodica goes back to their phone)

Prodica: *(To themselves reading off their phone)* Unemployment ending...eviction moratorium...no rent relief/ what a bunch of daily hubbub.

Isanus: Love-

Prodica: Fret, fret, fret, fret, fret/ that's what it all is.

Isanus: Hey love...

Prodica: We have it made, isn't that right-

Isanus: Love?

Prodica: *(Small beat)* What's up?

Isanus: Can...can...I get a massage too?

Prodica: Really?

Isanus: Yeah.

Prodica: *(Pause)* Uh, yeah, sure. Come here.

Isanus: *(Very excitedly)* Okay!

(Isanus scoots over to Prodica and offers them their back)

Isanus: Wow, I know we have this beautiful home, but I haven't had a massage in a while. It's like around my neck and shoulders that is bothering me.

Prodica: Yup.

(With very little effort, Prodica barely does anything remotely close to a sufficient massage)

Prodica: Okay, you good?

Isanus: *(Pause)* Yes...

Prodica: Great, I'm going to go back to my investments now. Have to keep thriving.

Isanus: Of course.

(Isanus cellphone's alarm goes off)

Isanus: Oh look at that, it's time get ready for wor-

(Prodica gives Isanus a funny look)

Isanus: Nevermind.

Prodica: Whatever it is, like I said, the maid can handle it, okay? We are easy going.

Isanus: Mhm.

(Isanus turns off the alarm. Beat. Proдика proceeds to take off their shoes and gets even more cosier. Their shoes are dirty and worn out. Isanus get's up, turns on some music on their phone, gets a cloth, and a water bottle, and sits back down. She pours some water on the cloth and starts cleaning their shoes)

Proдика: What do you think you are doing?

Isanus: What are you talking about?

Proдика: What is this, what is all this?

Isanus: I'm cleaning your shoes.

Proдика: Okay, whatever, forget that. Why the music?

Isanus: Uh, I like music.

Proдика: Okay, but it's distracting me. I'm in the middle of an important business deal with one of the top video game developers in the world. I cannot think with this racket.

Isanus: But, it calms me down.

Proдика: But, it doesn't calm me down.

Isanus: I'll just turn it/ down.

Proдика: Off.

Isanus: I don't understand, it's just music. It never bothered you before-

Proдика: Turn it off now.

Isanus: I like it. I never get to listen to it out loud much.

Proдика: Well, when I'm around you don't listen.

Isanus: *(Pause)*

Prodica: My work requires my full utmost attention and energy. I am the boss. The top dog. And I cannot afford to tarnish that status by any minor slip ups. Slip ups are a no no. We are not walking on thin ice. We are walking on a sturdy, unshakeable bridge of freedom and joy. And I will not sacrifice this, because you decided you wanted to play music. That is not how it works. No, I work too hard to crumble. People who crumble are weak, and I am not weak. I am unbreakable and have all the control. You see, this beautiful home would not have happened if I was distracted constantly; burdened by the tiny turmoils of life. Uh uh, I conquer life. I eat it and spit in its face. Do you understand? My passion, my sweat, my whole enterprise, will not bring me to the bottom. Because life eats the bottom. Life gnaws and consumes the bottom into spiritual suicide. But not me, because I am the big enchilada, and I eat life until it's no more. And I plan to keep it like that. So please, for the love of God, turn off that music.

Isanus: *(Heavy pause)* Yes, dear.

(They turn off the music. Silent)

Prodica: Man, that got me worked up.

Isanus: I bet.

Prodica: Passion baby. When you are passionate like that, you get worked up sometimes.

Isanus: Yeah, passion.

Prodica: Mmm.

Isnaus: What?

Prodica: I'm hungry again. *(Beat)* Do we still have some of that foriegn Camembert cheese?

Isanus: Mhm.

(Isanus walks to the refrigerator, opens it up, grabs one single slice of American Craft's Cheese, and closes it. They walk back and give it to Prodica)

Prodica: Amazing.

Isanus: Anything for you.

(Prodica unwraps and eats the slice of cheese. Beat. When finished, they toss the wrapper on the floor. Isanus bends down and picks it up gingerly. Once they do, they look at it, and crush it into their palms, and just place it into their pocket. Another alarm goes off on Insaus's phone)

Prodica: What is that?

Isanus: It's just my other alarm telling me I have to go to wor-

Prodica: No, no such thing. In this beautiful home, you don't work, got it? No chores or anything. That's why we are here, remember? The pains of labor are no more for you. That's what I provided for you. That's what I gave you. A chance for unlimited happiness.

Isanus: What you provided?

Prodica: Yes.

Isanus: And, what have you given me?

Prodica: I just said.

Isanus: No, what have you given me?

Prodica: Can you not hear?

Isanus: Yes, I heard perfectly.

Prodica: Okay so I don't have to repeat myself.

Isanus: *(Small pause)*

Prodica: Now turn off that alarm.

Isanus: *(Silent)*

Prodica: I said, turn it off!

Isanus: *(Isanus, with all their might, launches the phone against the wall. It shatters into pieces)*

Prodica: Wh-why did you do that-

Isanus: *(Mocking)* Don't worry, we can buy another one.

Prodica: But, that was a Christmas gift-

Isanus: That I got myself. With my money.

Prodica: *(Pause)* Go. Clean. It. up.

Isanus: Oh, no worries dear, I'll just get the maid to do it.

Prodica: *(Standing up to Insanus)* The maid, yes, they will clean it up. If they like it or not.

Insanus:

Prodica:

Isanus:

Prodica: *(Like a vipers bite, Prodica slaps Isanus)* Now, go.

(With utter shock, Insanus slowly goes and sweeps up the broken phone and tosses it into the trash. Beat. They both jump up then analyze the furniture once more. This time, more upbeat, and saying things out-in-the-open like, " Hi...hello...How about Mercury's Retrograde, huh?... We're fine...Just playing around, you know?...Everything's fine." They do that for a little while, then return back to their emotional states from before. Isanus

*then sits on a lounge chair, as Prodica returns to the couch.
Silence)*

Prodica: *(Putting down their phone, while casually slouching on
the couch)*

Isanus: *(Montoned)* You done?

Prodica: Yeah, I think so.

Isanus: Okay.

Prodica:

Isanus:

Prodica:

Isanus: Do you want to talk?

Prodica: Talk? About What?

Isanus: I don't know. That slap.

Prodica: It happened. Now it's over.

Isanus: *(Small pause)* Maybe we can talk about married couple
stuff.

Prodica: Don't we do that already?

Isanus: Do we?

Prodica: I guess.

Isanus: You guess?

Prodica Yeah.

Isanus: What things do we talk about?

Prodica: Love stuff.

Isanus: Like?

Prodica: Like-

Isanus: Divorce?

Prodica: We never talk about that!

Isanus: *(Under their breath)* Unfortunately.

Prodica: What did you say?

Isanus: Nothing. I said nothing.

Prodica: Whatever. *(Beat. Playing with their fingers. Very preoccupied)*

Isanus: You know I love you, right?

Prodica: Huh?

Isanus: *(Small pause)* Nevermind. *(Beat)* Want to watch a movie or something before we go to bed?

Prodica: A movie? After all this, what I need is a drink.

(They pull out a flask bottle from their pocket and start drinking)

Isanus: I...I thought you quit since-

Prodica: I did, but I had a hard day of work. I deserve this.

Isanus: But-

Prodica: Uh uh, it's drink time.

Isanus: We made a promise though...

Prodica: Didn't you hear me? I had a hard day of work. Let me be.

Isanus: Prodica-

Prodica: For fucks sake, why are you still talking?! That is all you've been doing. You've never done this. You never talked this much and...and...fucking plead for attention. I don't understand. I really don't. I do so much for our beautiful home, and this is how you repay me? Ungrateful. Simply ungrateful.
(Small beat) Just...just start the movie.

(Chugging the flask)

Isanus: *(Pause)* No.

Prodica: What?

Isanus: I said no.

Prodica: Fine, I'll just leave and go to a movie theater.

(Expecting Isanus to give them their shoes and coat. It doesn't happen. They put it on themselves)

Isanus: Leave? Where are you going to go?

Prodica: Somewhere.

Isanus: Please, tell me where are you going to go?

Prodica: I said somewhere! *(They prepare to leave, but refrain. Beat. They don't move)*

Isanus: That's what I thought. You have nowhere to go. You have nothing.

Prodica: Shut up.

Isanus: Oh, want me to keep going. Okay. YOU. HAVE. NOWHERE. TO. GO!

Prodica: I said shut up!

Isanus: No! I'm done shutting up! I'm finished! *(Beat)* Like I said, you have nothing. You're not top dog. You're not the head honcho. You're a broke-wannabe-pebble. You are nothing. The government is done babying you. I'm done babying you. Without me, our beautiful home wouldn't exist-

Prodica: What are you talking about?

Isanus: You know what I'm talking about! *(Small beat)* Can't you see? Can't you see that I'm killing myself here? Even before this, I was killing myself everyday to keep a roof over our heads. I was the one carrying the workload. I was the one working two jobs, buying everything, paying bills, cleaning like hell, and making sure we didn't starve to death. And I was so tired. So so so so so tired, living in a body that was perpetually dead inside. And I still am. I am still dying and re-dying from exhaustion, trying to scrape by and make sure your world is stress free and perfect, so you can sleep soundly at night. And I do it because I love you. I understand your situation. I understand the cruelty of this world. It's all anxiety ridden, it all hurts, I know, I get it, but you never met me halfway. I was so patient and gave you chance after chance after chance to get your act together, to feel comfortable enough to make a change, and find a job at your own pace. But, you didn't budge. You stayed at home all day, laying on the couch sloppy drunk playing video games, never once picking up a broom to sweep or do anything. You stayed home and leeches off of me, sucking away at my generosity and kindness; sticking to me and draining my life force away like a giant torpedo snail! *(Small beat)* Like, you didn't bother applying or even looking, knowing your wife (Or husband) is struggling, knowing we are struggling. Jobs are not everything, money isn't everything, but it is something if you want to survive. And unfortunately the more you have, the better your chances of survival, and you didn't even shutter an eyelash to help me.

Prodica: Stop, what are you talking-

Isanus: Quit it. Just quit. We got kicked out and now we are here. I was hoping with this new life, the life I thought we wanted, you would have appreciated me more. Since I, "did not work" and you were, "The top dog", I thought we would have been...you know...actually happy. I thought you would be at ease, and actually try to bond with me, and connect with me. I thought our beautiful home, with our beautiful meals and things, would fix all of our problems. But... I...I thought wrong. Even if you had "made it" and we were "smooth sailing", you would have always put your interests before our relationship. Before our future. I know you want to escape like in your video games, to the land of dreams, riches, and fantasies, believe me I want it to, so much, but, at what cost is escaping if it's destroying your reality right before your eyes. *(Beat)* I love you, but you can escape oh so much. Until you learn this, and learn to love and support me, I think we need to...need to take a break.

Prodica: You're kidding right?

Isanus: No.

Prodica: *(Approaching them affectionately)* Isanus, I'm sorry, I really didn't-

Isanus: Don't you dare touch me. If you lay a hand on me again I swear to God I'll call the cops in a heartbeat. Until further notice, your apologies mean nothing to me. I'm sorry Prodica, but I am going to need you to go.

Prodica: Where...where would I go?

Isanus: *(Small pause. With the smallest remorse)* Where would you go? *(Beat)* You can stay on the couch. But, only for tonight. Once the morning comes you leave. If you truly love me, and have any backbone, you would respect my decision. If not, you leave now.

Prodica: I'll...uh...do the couch. *(Small beat)* Thank you...

Isanus: No, it's too late for that now.

(Beat. They again break away and analyze their furniture. This time it's less active. No sways. No shuffles. They both are leaning on a furniture piece for support, with tears running down both of their cheeks. They look at the audience, trying to crack smiles, mumbling things like, " Long night...just tired...It happens...Furniture just makes me so happy...tears of joy...Mercury, what can I say right?" Beat. They soon break away from their mumbles and return to their previous positions and state of being. Beat. Isanus goes into a hamper, and pulls out a blanket and hands it to Prodica. Prodica accepts it)

Isanus: Goodnight.

Prodica: Sweet dreams my love.

Isanus: *(Small pause. Isanus shakes their head "no")* This is something you actually have to earn. All you have to do is try. *(They look at their watch)* Three...two...one.

(Right when they say "one" the lights turn off in the whole studio) Just put the blanket back in the hamper when you leave. Good-

Prodica: Bye...

Isanus: Yeah, that.

(Isanus, with a long sad face, walks to their bed. Once they are in bed, a small dim pool of light is shown above them, as they try to fix Prodica's game console. Beat. Prodica covers their body with the blanket and lays down, still with heavy tears running down their cheeks. Silence. After a while, an overhead speaker makes an announcement saying, "Attention shoppers, IKEA is now closed." Beat.)

Prodica: *(Mumbling to themselves)* I am not the top dog...I am not in control of my life...we are not smooth sailing...I am broke, and got evicted...I ignored the dailey hubbub...I ignored the dailey hubbub and got evicted...The beautiful house is no more...The beautiful house is no more... *(They repeat this like prayer until the lights dim to black)*

End

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS...

I went to Ikea with my wife, and automatically had a brain blast. I told her, verbatim, “Okay, how about this. A play that takes place in one of the Ikea home displays, and the audience doesn't know the characters are in Ikea until the end of the play, so it seems like a regular living room play throughout. Sounds good?”

Focusing on shopping, barely paying any attention to me, she gave me a weak thumbs up.

And we are.

AUTHOR BIO: Elijah Vazquez is an Orlando based playwright who graduated from Niagara University with a B.F.A in Theatre Performance. Some previous experience with playwriting includes several readings, publications, productions and completing an advanced playwriting independent study course focused on the dramatic form, the Theatre of the Absurd. He has taken many philosophy classes that influenced his writing as well, along with a theatre criticism classes which he analyzed and commented on many theoretical manifestos from Brecht to Grotowowkis to Hugo to Esslin, which helped shape his thoughts about the essence of theatre and the manner on how to construct plays. All he wants is to provide glimmers of hope, wherever it may be.

