

Snug, The ... Joiner

By

Michael Towers

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Snug the Joiner by Michael Towers is a fifteen-minute slice of life that unfolds with filmic twists and emotional turns creating a beautifully descriptive play about the heartaches of growing up. Set in the fall when the weather is changing and the kids have gone back to school, the play explores themes of loss and friendship with some unexpected discoveries. The two characters in the play, FIRST and SECOND (roles that are open to any gender, race, or ethnicity), are tweens or teens of the same age who have recently become neighbors but not fast friends. A third character, Snug, does not appear in the play, although his presence is palpable in much of the scene – as is his absence. Snug is named after Snug the Joiner of the Bard’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. As the FIRST character explains:*

FIRST

Definitely.

Snug was this guy. “A rude mechanical.” Whatever that means. Basically, he’s a carpenter. A “joiner.” You know? Because they put stuff together? Wood. Windows. Doors. Stuff like that. Anyway, they put on a play in the woods and...Snug plays the lion. He doesn’t really have any lines but he’s okay with it because he doesn’t really want to memorize them. I mean Snug has lines but the lion doesn’t. You know? He just roars.

In the detailed world of Towers’ play, Snug’s roar is an element we hear without hearing, underscoring the interactions of the characters, the natural dialogue, and the moments without assigned dialogue as well. The playwright states his intentions for the actors in these in-between moments, which could also serve as a lesson in audience engagement.

They must always be present, active, connected and listening. Make certain that these moments are *full*.

SNUG, THE JOINER

A Ten-Minute Play

by

Michael Towers

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people of the play

FIRST a young teen or tween (10-16)

SECOND a young teen or tween of the same age as the first

The characters are deliberately unnamed to encourage the production team to envision and realize their interpretation of the characters. I urge you to explore how gender plays a role in your production and informs, shapes and challenges the power dynamic between the two characters. In addition, casting with color consciousness will invite your team (and your audiences) to discuss additional ways power is assigned and earned and overcome. Please allow your casting to reflect the many beautiful hues and tones and colors of the faces of our world.

setting

The curb at the end of a driveway where it meets the street in the neighborhood of a northeastern city or town. For the SECOND, it is possible that this is their *whole world* (or close to it.) Perhaps they haven't seen much more. For the FIRST however, this place is new and they have certainly experienced more of the "world" than the second.

time

Fall. Because school has recently begun, and it's starting to get cold.

After school.

Present day.

note

When a character's name is presented with no assigned dialogue, it is not to suggest that the character is inactive. Rather, they are unable or unwilling to respond with spoken language. They must always be present, active, connected and listening. Make certain that these moments are *full*.

SETTING: The curb at the end of a driveway where it meets the street in the neighborhood of a northeastern city or town. There stands a single mail box. It is Fall.

AT RISE: A FIRST young teen or tween walks down the driveway from the house it serves and crosses to the mailbox. With their hand on the mailbox door, the FIRST routinely sighs before wishfully opening it and looking in. After finding nothing with their eyes, the FIRST sticks their hand in to double check. When their hand also becomes an unreliable tool, they look again and slam the door shut. The FIRST turns to the empty street, looks longingly in both directions and then obsessively checks the mailbox again. With the same inevitable results, they play with the mailbox flag: lifting it up and down out of frustration and ultimately they leave it up. After a moment perhaps of banging their head on the mailbox they slump to the curb.

A SECOND teen/tween of the same age approaches from 'down the street' and stops at a distance upon seeing the FIRST.

SECOND

I didn't see you...

The FIRST is startled initially. Their lack of *verbal* response is driven by embarrassment and anger.

SECOND

In school.

FIRST

SECOND

Were you sick?

FIRST

SECOND

My mom says there's something going around.
(searching for common ground)
You mailing something?

No.	FIRST
Oh.	SECOND
I'm waiting.	FIRST
Well//	SECOND
For a package.	FIRST
Okay. It's just that//your...	SECOND
From my father.	FIRST
Flag is up.	SECOND
	The FIRST looks at their zipper.
	SECOND
No. Not your... Your <u>flag</u> . Not... On the mailbox. That and. The mail already came.	
	The FIRST stands, walks to the mail box and angrily puts the flag down before sharply turning to the SECOND with:
Happy?	FIRST
	The FIRST exits up their driveway towards the house.
	SECOND
No... I... was just saying...that (calling after the FIRST)	
I'm really sorry. About your dog.	
	The FIRST freezes.
	SECOND
Was she...old?	

He. FIRST

Sorry: SECOND

No. FIRST
(re: old?)

He. SECOND

FIRST
Would that make you feel better? If he were old?

SECOND
No.

FIRST
Me neither.

The FIRST moves to exit again. The SECOND pursues.

SECOND
Moving must be hard. I mean I haven't but.... It must be. To a new place. With school already started and all.

Again, the FIRST slows or stops.

SECOND
Where did you...come from? Before here.

FIRST
My house.

SECOND
Before that.

FIRST
Mars.

SECOND
Never been there.

You wouldn't like it.	FIRST
Any good pizza places?	SECOND
	FIRST
So. Just the three of you? Moved? Out here.	SECOND
Yes.	FIRST
Out. Down. Whatever.	SECOND
Way down.	FIRST
You and your mom and...?	SECOND
Snug.	FIRST
Snug?	SECOND
The Joiner. Yes. That's his name.	FIRST
Yeah. Sorry. Snug.	SECOND
The Joiner.	FIRST
The Joiner. Got it.	SECOND
Yes.	FIRST
	SECOND

Is it much different? Than where you're from?

FIRST

It's warmer.

SECOND

On Mars?

FIRST

Arizona.

SECOND

Wow. Yeah. Mars might be closer.

FIRST

I'm going back anyway. I'm gonna live with my dad.

SECOND

Wow. Ok. That's...how come he's...? You know...sending stuff? If. You're moving back.

FIRST

SECOND

You know: the people at the place said that...

FIRST

What place?

SECOND

You know...the...

FIRST

Shelter?

SECOND

Yes.

FIRST

Where you sent him.

SECOND

I didn't send him... They said... He'd go to a loving home.

FIRST

He had a loving home.

I know but//
SECOND

Do you speak adult?
FIRST

What?
SECOND

Do you speak adult?
FIRST

I don't know what you mean.
SECOND

FIRST
I mean adults never tell you the truth and if they do, they don't tell you everything. Because it's in their best interests to keep secrets and your best interests to know nothing. So what do you think they mean when they say they're sending him to a loving home?

SECOND
I think it means that they're sending him to a loving home.

FIRST
It means no one will want an older dog.

SECOND
I thought//he wasn't...older

FIRST
It means no one will want a dog who bites.

SECOND
My mom said they specifically//said they'd find him

FIRST
Even if he doesn't! Even of the people that put him there lied and said he did!

SECOND
I didn't lie!

FIRST
It means he'll sit in a cage//

SECOND

I can show you the mark!

FIRST

Until no one shows up and when no one shows up//

SECOND

Your dog bit me!

FIRST

His name is Snug! The Joiner. Ok?! Get it straight. And you're an idiot if you don't know what they do in those shelters! No matter what they say//they do

SECOND

My mother//said...

FIRST

Your mother doesn't know!

SECOND

FIRST

Does everyone here talk like that? My mother this. My mother that.

SECOND

No.

FIRST

You got me fooled.

SECOND

I'm not trying to fool you.

FIRST

I'm gonna go get him anyway. And you can tell your mother that. When my father comes//we're gonna go get him.

SECOND

Your father's coming?

FIRST

Yes!! He's coming! All right?! He's coming! What's your problem?!

SECOND

I don't have a problem. I just asked//if he was...

FIRST

You know, you can go home now. Tell your mother you did exactly what she told you do. You apologized and I said thanks. Conscience cleared! All right? Thank you for caring!

SECOND

My mother didn't tell me to come over here.

FIRST

Liar.

SECOND

She didn't! She actually she told me not to. Because. She thought maybe...I'd make it worse.

FIRST

Mission accomplished.

SECOND

That wasn't my mission!

FIRST

Right. It was your mom's.

SECOND

I didn't even show her the mark. She just...saw it and then her and my step dad gave me the third degree until I told them. I'm sorry!

FIRST

You should be. If it wasn't for you, he'd still be here.

SECOND

What was I supposed to say?

FIRST

Why didn't you tell them the truth? You did it to yourself.

SECOND

Why would I do that?//Your dog bit me!

FIRST

I guess we'll never know.

SECOND

He broke the skin!

FIRST

He's never bitten anyone!

SECOND

You wanna see it?

The SECOND begins to unbuckle their belt, unbutton their pants and remove their shoes simultaneously to show the FIRST the bite mark on their thigh. (It is clumsy and yes, perhaps funny to the point that they might fall to the ground which only adds to the energy and commotion.)

FIRST

Don't. Stop it! Stop! I said NO! Jesus!

The SECOND stops.

FIRST

Keep your pants on. Plus. You'd probably get in trouble with your mother if she finds out you're taking off your clothes in the street.

SECOND

You're right. Thanks.

FIRST

No, thank you.

The SECOND puts themselves back together. They both laugh lightly for the first time, perhaps for different reasons. Perhaps not. There is silence for a few moments.

SECOND

Where'd you get the name anyway?

FIRST

It's a Shakespeare thing.

SECOND

Yeah. I figured.

FIRST

You know Shakespeare?

SECOND

No. I just figured it wasn't from Mars.

FIRST

Close enough. A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Never read it. SECOND

I figured. FIRST

Maybe I will. SECOND

You won't. FIRST

Probably not. SECOND

Definitely. FIRST

Snug was this guy. "A rude mechanical." Whatever that means. Basically, he's a carpenter. A "joiner." You know? Because they put stuff together? Wood. Windows. Doors. Stuff like that. Anyway, they put on a play in the woods and...Snug plays the lion. He doesn't really have any lines but he's okay with it because he doesn't really want to memorize them. I mean Snug has lines but the lion doesn't. You know? He just roars.

Figures. SECOND

FIRST
Yeah, so, Snug plays the lion and when my dad brought our Snug home, we kinda thought he looked like a lion so... My dad really likes Shakespeare.

Makes sense. SECOND

Yeah. FIRST

They divorced? SECOND

Something like that. FIRST

Mine too. SECOND

Yeah?
FIRST

Yeah. Few years now.
SECOND

Sucks.
FIRST

Yeah. And we had a dog...that...passed. So...I know//...
SECOND

It's not the same.
FIRST

I know.
SECOND

FIRST

SECOND

He did...bite me once.
FIRST

He did?
SECOND

FIRST

It was an accident. It just...happened. He was sleeping on my bed and when I moved him...so I could get in...he just...snapped. I must have startled him or something because I know...he would never do that. He would never hurt me. He wouldn't hurt anybody. I swear.

SECOND

Well. Like you said. When your dad comes, maybe you could, you know, go and get him. Right?

FIRST

He's not coming.

SECOND

Who?

FIRST

My dad.

SECOND

What? Why? How do you.../know?

FIRST

He doesn't even know where we are.

SECOND

Well maybe you can.... You must have his phone number?

The FIRST shakes his head.

FIRST

My mother has a phone but...she canceled our old one 'cause he was on it.

SECOND

Why?

FIRST

(fighting tears)

He wasn't very good to her. I mean. It wasn't a big deal. Everybody fights, right?

SECOND

FIRST

We just got in the car one day and left. It was a while before I figured out...we weren't going back. So. Now you know. Snug was like the only friend I had.

The FIRST breaks down. After a moment:

SECOND

You're wrong about that.

The SECOND stands, takes a small envelope out of his back pocket and offers it to the FIRST.

SECOND

I came over here to give you this. I was just gonna put it in your mailbox but...I'm glad I saw you. It's an invitation to my birthday party. It's next week. It'll be pretty good. Lots of people from our grade. And. It'll be a good for you to...you know. I didn't really want to do paper invitations but...my mom kinda made me.

They both laugh.

SECOND

You should come.

The SECOND is still holding the invitation.

SECOND

I can just drop it in your box if you want.

The SECOND moves to place it in the mailbox. The FIRST stands to intercept. There is an awkward moment of *'Can I have the invitation?' 'Oh yeah I forgot I haven't given it to you yet.'* They laugh awkwardly and exchange the invitation.

SECOND

Yeah, you really don't need that. To get in or anything. It's not like you need to//bring it...yeah.

FIRST

Got it.

The SECOND turns to leave but after a moment, stops and turns back.

SECOND

And I am really sorry. About...

FIRST

Snug.

SECOND

Right. The Joiner.

The FIRST nods out of appreciation and watches as the SECOND turns and exits. After a moment, the FIRST opens his invitation and begins to read it as he exits up the driveway and confidently towards his home.

FADE TO BLACK

END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

The inspiration to write Snug, the Joiner was the presence of both large and small mystical forces that moved me.

Small first. Actually, it doesn't feel small at all. In fact, very much not small. Perhaps I should qualify it as specific or personal. Versus the large as "universal." Therefore, I offer the personal and specific first. For those that have pets and love their pets as members of their family, you'll understand. We lost our Molly. A beautiful two-and-half-year-young Shetland Sheepdog. And we lost her to the road that borders our yard. We do have a fence, but on that day: Molly found the 'chink in the armor.' She survived the initial trauma but succumbed to the long process of recovery. The driver didn't stop. We never heard from then again. And we, of course, endured. Out of this tremendous loss, there were several unthinkable but beautiful outcomes.

And I began to write.

Years later, a dear friend lost his family dog. His name was Snug.

And my short play took on a slightly different direction.

On to the large. More aptly, the universal. We are living in a day and age where we are all being bombarded by loss and pain and confusion. The pandemic. The rampant Racial Inequities in the United States brought into clear focus (for white folks like me) by the murder of George Floyd. The growing political divide in our country that rears its head on days like January 6th. The invasion of the Ukraine. Loss. Pain. And confusion. And none of us are immune to it.

And yet, there are and can be beautiful outcomes. People find each other (and themselves) in the face of loss.

That has been my experience.

I am hopeful that there are more. Many, many more to come.

As for my influences, both stylistic and literary? Someone asked me once, what play was it exactly that I was trying to write. My answer: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Wrong answer. I get it. That's been done. But I thought that was the question!

I do think Albee's master piece is the greatest play ever written.

Needless to say, his work has had a significant influence on me. And so too (equally) has: Paula Vogel, Suzan-Lori Parks, Sarah Ruhl and of course, the works and teachings of my mentors and friends: Kate Snodgrass, Melinda Lopez and Ronan Noone.

AUTHOR BIO: Michael Towers is the Artistic Director of Westford Academy Theater Arts and the Summer School for the Performing Arts. He earned his MFA in Playwriting from Boston University under the direction of Kate Snodgrass, Melinda Lopez and Ronan Noone. In his twenty-seven year career as a theater educator, Michael has been blessed with the opportunity to play the roles of husband, father, director, actor and playwright. He is sincerely grateful to his wife Melissa and son Patrick for supporting his continued exploration of his craft.