

GUNS IN TREES

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Characters:**Animals:**

RONNIE: Female Beaver. Reggie's mate. Big orange front teeth.

REGGIE: Male Beaver. Ronnie's mate. Big orange front teeth.

THE DOE: A deer. A female deer.

People:

BILL: A Dad. 50s. Tough. Carhart coveralls. Nance's husband.

NANCE: A Mom. 50s. Sharp shooter. House shoes. Bills' wife.

MEEMAW: A Grandma. 70s. Darlene. Smoker. Dog Sweatshirts. Nance's mom.

AL: A woman. 30s. Allison. Has a dry-clean-only shirt or two. Nance's daughter from before Bill. From somewhere else but also from here.

BO: A guy. 20s. Bo. Big. Like tall, but also big. Carhart. Bill's son with Nance.

KEZZIE: A gal. 20s. Kezzlynn. Big talker. DIY tattoos. The baby of the family.

HANK: A man. 30s. The neighbor. Friends with Bill and also Bo. A man's man but also a ladies man.

REGGIE, THE DOE, and MEEMAW also play CHICKENS.

Where

The country. The north. Minnesota. Not too near a city, but close enough. Nobody's really a farmer but they have land. Couple of chickens. Some corn. Definitely a tractor. Everybody has some kind of job and nobody has a career. Livin' the dream.

When

Now.

Casting

All actors in this play are white. That might seem like a weird thing to say up front. But it's because the play is mostly about white people who totally don't think they're racist, plus some animals, who should also be played by white people, for reasons I hope are obvious.

Design

The animals don't need to be realistic, but should be recognizable.

Ideally the indoor and outdoor spaces exist onstage throughout the play. Especially the kitchen and the lodge, but it would be cool if the woods were always there, too. Outdoor and indoor can bleed into each other.

Transitions

Should be fast! But not feel rushed. Hopefully an unmoving set will help with that. Does Nance stay in the kitchen and Ronnie stay in the lodge the whole time? Maybe.

Two beavers, RONNIE and REGGIE, build a lodge out of sticks and twigs. Reggie gnaws a tree. He is working toward cutting it down, one sliver at a time.

RONNIE

Take your time, Reggie.

REGGIE

What's that supposed to mean?

RONNIE

I'm just saying take your time.

REGGIE

And I'm saying, what's that supposed to mean?

RONNIE

What do you mean, what's it mean?

REGGIE

If you're implying I'm going too slowly—

RONNIE

“implying—”?

REGGIE

Suggesting?

RONNIE

I'm saying what I'm saying.

REGGIE

But if what you're saying MEANS that you think I should go faster—

RONNIE

Did I say “go faster”?

REGGIE

No.

RONNIE
Well, then.

REGGIE
...I'm gnawing as fast as I can

RONNIE
Did I say you weren't?

REGGIE
...I guess not.

RONNIE
Take your time I said.

REGGIE
Yeah but there was clear implication—

RONNIE
“IMPLICATION”?
What kind of beaver ARE you?

REGGIE
A regular beaver, I'm just a beaver.

RONNIE
Who says a lotta strange shit, Reggie.

REGGIE
What's strange?

RONNIE
If my mother heard you talking about IMPLICATION—

REGGIE
I care about nuance.

RONNIE
Nuance.

REGGIE

Oh, never mind.

RONNIE

No, no, tell me about nuance.

Why don't you take a break from gnawing and tell me about nuance, instead.

REGGIE

I'm gnawing right now, Ronnie. Forget about nuance.

RONNIE

It's only frost every day now, plenty of time to finish building the lodge before the river freezes. Do rivers "nuance"?

REGGIE

No, rivers don't nuance. That makes no sense.

RONNIE

Well instead of gnawing, why don't you use your mouth to tell me ALL about why that is?

REGGIE

I'm GNAWING as FAST as I CAN!

RONNIE

Fine. You're gnawing as fast as you can.

Pause.

Ronnie builds the lodge. Reggie gnaws. He looks up. A breeze. Slowly, slowly, the tree trunk creaks and the tree cracks and falls down. Ronnie turns to look.

RONNIE

Nice work.

REGGIE

WHAT?

RONNIE

Nice work I said.

REGGIE

You said it with a tone.

RONNIE

There was no TONE, WHAT is a TONE?

I complimented your GNAWING.

REGGIE

Never mind. Never mind. Thanks. Thanks for the compliment.

RONNIE

You're welcome.

Reggie drags the tree over to the lodge to add to the construction. They take twigs and dirt and pack it into the lodge.

REGGIE (*dreamy*)

You think back when the beavers were bigger, the lodges were bigger, too?

Pause.

RONNIE

What, now?

REGGIE

Back when the beavers were giant, you know? D'you think they built bigger lodges? D'you think they used bigger trees?

RONNIE

What are you talking about?

REGGIE

Back in the—back in the—before the—you know, before highways. Before trucks? Before wire traps? When there were—like way more beavers? Like way more.

RONNIE

I'm just—I'm just having some trouble figuring out what the nut you're talking about, Reggie.

The frost is not going to wait for you to stop talking, ok, is it?

REGGIE

This is real.

There were giant beavers!

How could you not know that?!

RONNIE

...are there giant beavers NOW, Reggie?

REGGIE

Well, no.

RONNIE

then why are we talking about this?

REGGIE

I just think about it a lot.

Giant beavers.

Everywhere.

RONNIE

...And?

REGGIE

And what?

RONNIE

What else happens, when you're imagining the giant beavers?

REGGIE

They just...build dams.

And lodges with—LOTS of rooms inside. WAY more than two, like—three.

Or four. And they...they smell really good.

RONNIE

they smell good.

REGGIE

Yeah. Like—like your anal gland but more.

RONNIE (*Maybe that's kind of sweet?*)

OK.

That sounds.

(*Nah*)

Fake, that sounds very fake.

REGGIE

It's not!

RONNIE

Have you ever SEEN a giant beaver?

REGGIE

No.

RONNIE

Then...when you think about them...is that in your MIND?

REGGIE

No, it's...like a memory but. In my bones. And my teeth.

RONNIE

Uh huh.

REGGIE

Don't you...have that?

RONNIE

No!

REGGIE

Really? You don't...like this line of beavers going back to your mom and your grandma and the beaver before that and the beaver before that all gnawing trees and building dams in this long line all the way back to...the first beavers? The giant beavers?

RONNIE

...no.

Reggie looks at Ronnie like this is the saddest thing he's ever heard.

REGGIE

Oh.

RONNIE

Stop it!

REGGIE

What?

RONNIE

Stop looking at me like you looked at that muskrat that got hit by a truck last week.

REGGIE

I'm not looking at you like a muskrat!

RONNIE

Just gnaw. Faster.

REGGIE

Whatever happened to "take your time"?

RONNIE

Frost happened.

REGGIE

OK, OK.

Pause.

They gnaw.

Pause.

REGGIE

I'm going to go eat some cattails.

RONNIE

Right now?

REGGIE

I'm hungry.

RONNIE

Oh fine!

Reggie exits. Ronnie gnaws. Pause. Ronnie looks around furtively.

RONNIE

Giant beavers...

Giant beavers.

She stays still and closes her eyes and tries to feel a memory of the first beavers in her bones and in her teeth. She puffs up really big. Pause. She sighs. Opens her eyes. Shrugs. And back to gnawing.

*Al drags two heavy suitcases up a long driveway. Her clothing is not suitable for outdoorsy activities.
THE DOE walks by.*

THE DOE

What's wrong with your coat?

AL

...

THE DOE

You don't look comfortable.

AL

...

THE DOE

Rub your antlers on these trees. Get warm.

AL

A deer!

*The doe startles at Al's voice and runs away.
Al watches even after she is gone.*

In the kitchen. NANCE drinks coffee. She has multiple pots on the stove, canning pureed pumpkin. She keeps her hands busy. MEEMAW sits at the table and chain-smokes, drinks coffee spiked with whisky dropping ashes into a brown glass ashtray. She plays solitaire. KEZZIE on her phone.

NANCE

So I said *(whispers)* “fuck you,”
Bill, it’s your nephew’s only
graduation I’m gonna go myself

KEZZIE

Ma, Darlene was there

MEEMAW

Call me what, Kezzie?

Tell your MeeMaw
“Sorry”
Gotta respect
your elders

Sorry MeeMaw

I said sorry, Ma!

We were all there for that
conversation, Ma.

It’s fine,
Nance, tell your story

OK, OK, Lord I won’t tell it Gawd!

Enter BO and BILL, muddy and wet, coats thrown off on a chair, dripping everywhere.

BILL

Howdy, Darlene

BO

Hiya, MeeMaw

Bo goes to hug and kiss MeeMaw.

BILL

How’s my wife?

NANCE

Don’t you try to
butter me up,
mud all over my
clean floor—

BO

*(punches Kezzie in
the arm)*
Shut up, Kez

KEZZIE

Suck up.

MEEMAW

How’s my
grandson?

(shakes her head)
Bobo.

I could eat offa this
floor!

*(wetly kisses Nance,
ruffles her hair)*

*(likes it, pats her
hairdo)*

MeeMaw, you should
see the buck I took
down—got it hangin’
in the shed—

blah, blah

BILL

NANCE

BO

KEZZIE

MEEMAW

it's huge, eight
pointer—

Six points, Bo, come
on. And the fish was
eight feet long, too,
how about—

We'll make sausage,
jerky—have a feast!

We got room in the
freezer for alla that?

Well it was for sure
like—hunnerd fifty,
two-hunnerd pounds

such a fuckin' liar!

Oh yeah?
(*winks*) bet I never
seen bigger

Well I can't
wait to eat it.

*KEZZLYN,
LANGUAGE!*

Sorry, Mom.

I bet it's eight points,
hunnie.

It is.

A feast, huh?

It'll be a *fiesta!*

(*kisses Nance*)

It better be.
(*kisses Bill*)

Biggest deer you
ever shot was that
fawn off the front
porch last summer—

I didn't know it was
a baby.

Kezzie knows that,
hunnie, she's just
joshin' ya.

Baby killer.

(*punches Kezzie hard
in the arm.*)

Ow!

Watch it, Bo.

I don't wanna see
you hittin' women.

(*glares at Kezzie*)

Kez ain't a woman.
She's hardly a girl.

Fuck you!

BILL

NANCE

BO

KEZZIE

MEEMAW

You got acorn balls
'n a stubby dick!

A'rright if yer gonna
ACT LIKE RUDE
KIDS—

Fuck you!

Sorry, Ma.

Sorry, Ma.

Bo, go get yer stuff.

Bo exits.

BILL

NANCE

KEZZIE

MEEMAW

When you comin' out
again?

When I got the time.

You sure like pokin' that
bear.

(flirty) When's the last
time it was just you'n me
in that stand?

So?

(Mee maw shrugs, drinks)

(exasperated sigh)

(goes back to her phone)

'round the last time we
weren't tryin' ta get five
years a veggies canned
before the next election.

(kisses Nance)

(kisses Bill)

Bo re-enters.

BILL

NANCE

BO

MEEMAW

I got me a hard-workin'
woman.

Yes you do.

Gross.

*(smacks Bo on back of the
head)*

Shut yer pie hole.
We'll be back in a few.

Bo and Bill exit.

Boys...

Yeap.

Kezzie plays a game on her phone. Plays. She loses.

NANCE

Language!

You spend too much time with yer
father.

Sure he does.

KEZZIE

Fuck!

Sorry, Ma

Dad hardly ever swears.

...OK.

MEEMAW

Sure he does.

Al enters dragging the suitcases. She is cold but sweaty.

NANCE

(not turning around)

You boys make so much
noise, I swear—

(looks over)

(stares at Al)

AL

Hi.

(pause)

I'm here for a visit?

Oh my goodness—did you
call? You didn't call!

There's a buncha crap in
yer room I'll have ta get
the boys to haul it out
fer you, If we knew you

were comin' we
coulda—but—oh, it's
good ta see you, honey, hi!

(hugs Al)

Oh you must be freezing,
it's—don't you have
a hat?! Oh but yer hair
looks nice, is that—did
you dye it, or—maybe
just a different style?

Oh—that's nice—
it looks real nice,

Hi.

yeah, sorry, uh...

I'm fine.

No, I—well highlights,
like six months ago, but—

KEZZIE

(stares at Al)

'Sup sis.

(goes back to her game)

MEEMAW

(stares at Al)

Hiya, Sweetheart.

NANCE
looks real professional,
was it expensive?

(pause)

Kezzie, give Al a hand
with her bags.

You do what you're
told, missy—

(pause)

BILL *(offstage)*

Hey Nance! Whose car is that out there?

Bo and Bill enter, letting in the cold.

BILL

Oh.

Hiya, Sport.

(pause)

What do we owe for
the honor?

Kezzie snorts with laughter.

BILL

AL

It's ok, Mom, I can.
I got it.

NANCE

Look who's here! For a
visit! Bo's gonna have
to haul all that shit down
from her room—
like I said, we weren't
really expecting, uh, but—

NANCE

Bo, honey, can you take
Al's bags upstairs?
They're blocking the—the
door—

KEZZIE

Ma, I'm busy.

See?

AL

It's a rental.

Hi, Bill.

Oh—I just.
Missed you guys.

AL

MEEMAW

Nance,
give the girl a breath.

BO

I bet.

BO

Bo takes the bags, one in each hand like it's nothing, and exits. Pause.

BILL	NANCE	AL	MEEMAW	KEZZIE
	I'll make some coffee. Sit! <i>(makes coffee)</i>			
		<i>(sits)</i>	That boy break up with you?	
		Boy?		
			Wasn't there a boy?	Ooooh.
	I thought so— honey—some boy? Wyatt—or? A, uh, a black boy?	Oh.		
A black boy?		<i>(wincing)</i> we broke up. A while ago.		No shit.
	Oh. Hm.			
			Was he...you know?	
		What?		
	Kezzie!	Um.	<i>(whacks Kezzie with the back of her hand)</i>	Big?
				Ow! OK, God.
	Al can date whoever.			
Sure, sure.		Yeah, well we're not. anymore, so.		
	but I'm sayin' we don't—you know— see color, so	It's not a big— Mom!	Yer cousin hadda kid with a black girl	
	What?	We don't— people don't say that	Jake.	Jason?
	say what?	anymore. <i>(pause)</i> Just.		Oh, yeah.

BILL	NANCE	AL	MEEMAW	KEZZIE
	What?	People can be black. “We don’t see color” is just...	obviously.	<i>(snorts with laughter)</i>
‘Course yer not.	I’m not a racist, Al.	I’m not saying that.		
	Well it sure sounds like—	It’s just outdated		
No, Ma’am!	Oh, so I’m old	No, Mom		Oh, everyone’s racist
	I just don’t see why—it’s true!	people just... OK, it’s not, though		
You callin’ yer ma a liar, Al?		Oh my god no!	She says it is	
	Everybody’s so politically correct these days.	Can we just talk about something else? Please.	Ain’t that the truth.	Seriously.
	<i>(Nance pouts)</i>			
Tree’s coming along.	<i>(pause)</i>			
Got ‘er down. Most’a the big branches off ...gonna have to run into town fer more gas fer the chainsaw but we can do the small branches with the ax an’ be up to about two years’ worth once that’s done. Got another one I’m scopin’ out		...uh <i>(Al shrugs)</i>	Oh, yeah? <i>(to Al)</i> Did’ya lose weight? Gain weight?	
			You look differn’t...	

BILL

(cont'd)

little farther on—top
branches'r dead
looks like. If the
beavers don't get to
it first a'course—

Don't you worry.
He'll be here all
week fer supper'n
I'm tradin' him ten
pounds a jerky,
twenty cans'a yer
peaches, n' a coupla
MREs

You think yer
cookin' ain't worth
anythin' woman?

Best cook this
county'n you
know it.

He's takin' some a
the wood, too.

'N he'll be here
tonight for supper
(looking at Al)
If we have room

NANCE

You got Hank comin'
ta help haul that, I
hope yer payin' him.

He realize yer gettin'
him ta do all that
work for nearly free?

Oh, it's alright

You know what I'm
sayin' William
McMasters

Alright.

AL

I'm OK.

Um...

Oh I don't...
I can go out.

MEEMAW

Wanta cigarette?

Whiskey?

KEZZIE

*(not looking up
from her phone)*
Yer great, Ma.

BILL

NANCE

AL

MEEMAW

KEZZIE

Don't be ridiculous,
you know I always
make too much. But
babe can ya get a
coupla folding chairs
from the shed fer
me?

You got it.

Thanks, Baby.

I'll bring 'em in soon

Bill kicks off his shoes and sprawls on a kitchen chair.

Bo re-enters.

BILL

NANCE

AL

MEEMAW

KEZZIE

BO

Took ya long
enough

Shut up.

(to Al)

There's hunting
gear in your room.

Don't touch it.

Uh. OK.

Can you get that
stuff outta there
fer your sister
please?

You said I could
have that room
fer organizing' my
supplies

She can sleep in
my bed

Ma. No.

(to Bo)

It's just while Al
visits—how long
ya staying,
Allison? Honey?

You said I could
have it

Do what yer told.

I don't...I can
sleep on the couch
or something

But Dad—

I ain't askin'

Come on!

BILL

Put it out in the bunker, get it organized out there it's where we'll be keepin' it anyway.
(pause)

Yep.

We. As a family. are prepared.

Watch it, Kid.

NANCE

Now don't be silly!

(pause)

What do you want for dinner? You still vegetarian or whatever? Ya mind pot roast?

You oughta see it—bunker holds ten, twelve people, got enough food fer a year down there—soon it'll be two!

Bo...

Bo! Language!

AL

Bunker?

Did you say Bunker?

What'r you like a doomsday prepper now, Bill?

I bet.

wow.

Right...
Cool, Mom.

No, I—

MEEMAW

(to Kezzie) Hush.

Cool it, Bo

Now is that any kinda language, Bobo?

KEZZIE

Get ready for it.

Shots fired!

BO

(groans)

Got a problem?

You gotta problem with all that? Think you're better than us? You some kinda city bitch now?

(pause)
Sorry, Meemaw.

BILL

NANCE

AL

MEEMAW

KEZZIE

BO

I didn't mean to
be ...Bo, you're
my brother.

Half-brother.

(pulls on shoes)

I'll get them chairs.

Bo come on.

OK...

Bill exits. Bo follows.

Pause.

NANCE

AL

MEEMAW

KEZZIE

You sure you don't want
some whiskey, honey?

I'm...taking a break from
drinking, Meemaw.

Really?

You an alcoholic or
something?

No, I—

Runs in the family.

No it doesn't.

I knew this guy used to be
able to drink like
a fifth of Gordon's and
not even get drunk.

Really? Dave?

(counting)
Uncle Al, Uncle Rich,
Uncle Dave,
Antie Judy—

He was Mexican.
He OD'd like a year ago
but he was real cool...

I'm *JUST TRYING TO*
be HEALTHY.

(pause)

OK, Honey.

Got kinda sensitive up in
New York City, huh?

I'm not sensitive.

That's what happens...

Uh-Huh

I'm *NOT* sensitive.

*"I'm just trying to be
healthy"*

Alright, Kezz.

NANCE

AL

MEEMAW

KEZZIE

You run out of money
up there? That why
you're back?

You still at that same
place? The—with the
law firm?

No.

Yeah I took some...
vacation
I'm a receptionist.

Oh you a lawyer now?

you like it?

Not really.

Oh. Cool.

(back to her phone)

Oh...

You quit?

you dating someone new?

No! I No, I mean it's fine.

(pours herself whiskey)

...No.

Men aren't so great.

Yeah.

(snorts)

You just think that cuz
you're old.

That why you're back?

Boy trouble?

You'll see.

But did something
happen?

I just...missed you guys?

No, No...I just...wanted
to come home.

But you never come home.

Not *NEVER*...

Just not fer Christmas.

Or Thanksgiving.

Or New Years. Or Easter.

Ok...

Bout ta break yer mother's
heart.

Ma!
Sweetie it's fine.

I'm pretty busy with work
over the holidays, so...

Just admit you hate us.

No I don't.

Let her alone, Kezzie.

NANCE
(*pause*)

AL

MEEMAW

KEZZIE

...so. A bunker.

Oh, Bill's just obsessed
with all that prepper stuff
just like Stephen and Paul
on that show? You know
the Doomsday Preppers
show?

(*hasn't seen it*)
I, um....

(*like, duh?*)
National Geographic?

We've got the generator
now, plenny'a dry goods,
'n I been canning
everything I can get my
hands on, so—Bill figures
after we get the Solar
panels in we might apply
to get featured.

Oh. Uh. Cool.

Ma, it's *cancelled*

Oh...really?

Yeah, we just watch reruns

Huh.

...So where *is* the bunker?

Out back. Underground.
Bill rented a machine to
dig out, we've been fillin'
it up with gear, ya know
all that food, rope, flint...

Cool.

Cool.
I'll maybe go unpack...it
was a long flight.

A'course, honey.

(*Al walks toward exit*)

Allie—it's good ta see ya.

You too, Mom.

Al exits up the stairs. Pause.

NANCE

Kezzie.

Nothin' sweetheart. Yer doin' fine.

MEEMAW

(whacks Kezzie on the back of the head)

Not everyone's as irresponsible as you.

KEZZIE

Ya think she's pregnant?

Ow!
What?

I'm not irresponsible. I got a job, I never been to prison, 'n I got no bastards! What do you want?

Hank, Bo, and Bill split firewood.

Chop. Chop. Chop.

They take large round logs and place them on their ends, then split them down the middle with an ax and stack their wood.

BILL

Nance's oldest is in town.

Chop. Chop. Chop.

HANK

The girl? Andrea?

BO

Al. Allison.

HANK

Huh.

Chop. Chop. Chop.

BILL

You'll meet her at dinner.

Chop. Chop.

HANK

Ain't possible she's perfect as her ma?

BILL

It sure aint.

HANK

Shame

Chop. Chop.

BILL

Don't you be tryin ta steal my wife

The men laugh. Chop. Chop.

BO
Al ain't shit.

BILL
C'mon now.

BO
Lives in New York City.
Thinks she's better than us.

Chop. Chop. Chop.

HANK
Ain't that the way it is.

BILL
Sure is.
I raised that girl.

Chop. Chop

HANK
That so.

BILL
Always differe'n't...
Distant.

Chop. Chop.

BILL
Raised'er like my own but she still calls me "Bill"

HANK
That's a shame

Chop. Chop.