

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

a one-act play
by Yingrui Sun (“Raina Sun”)
Northside College Prep High School
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PRODUCTION HISTORY

Where We Have Been received a production at Pegasus Theatre in Chicago as a part of the Young Playwrights Festival in January 2009 under the mentorship of playwright Mia McCullough. It was directed by Kimberly Baker, with set design by Jack Magaw, lighting design by Denise Karczewski, costume design by Laura Kollar, and sound design by Chris Krtiz. The cast included:

PERRY
LOUISA

John Stokvis
Victoria Caciopoli

CHARACTERS

PERRY and LOUISA, mismatched lovers.

Both are young but look older than they are, and have been living together for some time.

And there is also the girl Perry talks about in his monologues. You can give her a name if you like, but don't call her "Louisa".

PLACE

The present or recent past.

In a living room cluttered with mail, magazines, plants (some of which are dead), and kitschy junk. Suggestions include: the world's largest crossword puzzle, busts of Elvis, a Chia Pet garden, and neon signs.

MONOLOGUE ONE

PERRY

Spotlight on Perry. He speaks to us:

I only knew her for a few months, but when I did, I thought she was the eighth wonder of the world.

She was new to school—it was junior year—and it was obvious she was the most interesting thing to happen in a long time.

The type of girl I would have serenaded, if I knew how to sing, she talked loudly and laughed even louder. She would almost never say anything in class but when she did, she would always ask questions teachers wouldn't know how to answer.

And she walked with wide, easy steps in cowboy boots that
click
click
clicked
on linoleum floors and suburban sidewalks.
She told us she came from a family of real *vaqueros*, now turned car-mechanics.

She was full of surprises. She wore her hair long, but then cut it short one night because she “felt like it” and didn't seem to worry what her mother or all the guys would think the next day.

That was one surprise.

I also remember her talking to me—
that was another.

She sat down next to me one day at lunch and asked if I wanted to go smoke with her behind school.

I said yes.

She lit the first cigarette and held it for a moment like a stick of incense, then gave it to me, and laughed when I coughed a lot after I took the first drag. She lit hers, and we smoked together in the cold. Then she taught me Spanish curse words—*puta madre, cabrón*—and laughed at my bad accent. For a few weeks, we would sneak out to swear in Spanish and smoke—but I let most of my cigarette burn off, so she stopped giving them to me after a while—and we would talk.

We talked a lot. We talked about our depressed mothers and summer jobs, answers to the math test we got from people who had already taken it second period, her old house in the city. I asked her if she liked it here. She said no. She asked me if I wanted to run away with her.

That was the third surprise.

I said yes.

(Spotlight out.)

SCENE ONE

Lights up. Louisa wears a bathrobe and appears to be dozing on the couch with an open magazine covering her eyes and hair. Perry, dressed in layers of clothing and carrying a plastic bag, opens the door very slowly, and closes it quietly. He sees Louisa sleeping, and tries to sneak past her.

LOUISA

(suddenly, much to Perry's surprise)

Where
have you been.

PERRY

(to us, mockingly)

"Where
have you been."

Now, there are many things my lovely Louisa could have said, like:

LOUISA

(takes magazine off face, sits up, looks at Perry)

Oh darling, it's been too long. I've missed you so.
(lies back down and replaces magazine)

PERRY

or:

LOUISA

(again)

It's late! But I'm so glad you're back!
(same)

PERRY

or maybe even:

LOUISA

(and again)

I've waited all night for you, take me now!
(and same)

PERRY

But no! She chooses:

LOUISA

Where
have you been.

(Louisa tosses the magazine on the coffee table and sits up. Perry sets the plastic bag on the coffee table and begins to take off pounds of clothing, building a pile on the easy chair.)

PERRY

Oh, Louisa,
you're awake.

LOUISA

Sure, I'm a big girl.

PERRY

I mean, you, uh, you've been sleeping a lot,
lately.

LOUISA

I had a lot of sleep debt.

PERRY

Yeah. Definitely. You work hard. You must've.
Well, it looks like you're all caught up now.
That's wonderful.

(He leans in to kiss her on the cheek. She accepts it coolly.)

Um, well, I brought you something.

(He reaches into the plastic bag, takes out an electric blanket, and stands up to open it, holding it proudly like a banner. It has an outrageous print.)

Like it?

LOUISA

Oh, it's a...blanket.

PERRY

(He sits and covers their laps with it.)

Not just any blanket, it's an electric blanket.

LOUISA

Perry, our electric bill's enough high as it is.

PERRY

No, no—it'll be great. We could turn down the thermostat and just cuddle up under here—just you and me, not a worry in the world.

LOUISA

Perry—

PERRY

(taking a section of the blanket and covering his head with it)

And I know your hairdryer's broken, so you could also wrap it around your head instead.

(She laughs.)

You could wear it like a turban.

(Another laugh.)

LOUISA

Thank you, Perry.

(She adjusts the blanket and sits closer to Perry. They enjoy this moment.)

PERRY

How was your day?

LOUISA

It was nice.

PERRY

Good.

LOUISA

Mmm-hmm.

PERRY

Yeah.

LOUISA

And yours?

PERRY

Oooh, y'know.

The same. What can you expect when you're—when you're...

Well, I should go to bed now. It's, as you say, past midnight.

Good night my lovely Louisa.

(He leans in to kiss her again, on the corner of her mouth, and she accepts it a little bit more warmly than before.)

LOUISA

(softly)

Perry.

PERRY

(softly)

Louisa.

LOUISA

Where have you been?

(perhaps on the verge of tears)

I—I came home and you weren't here—and—and, I thought—well—I thought that you...
I don't know.

(quickly looks away from Perry)

PERRY

I'm sorry, Louisa.

But I'm here now.

And that's all that matters.

C'mon. Let's go to bed.

(leans in to kiss her, but she turns to him before he can)

LOUISA

(tartly)

Perry.

(a couple beats)

PERRY

Louisa?

LOUISA

Really, now.

Where
have you been.

(pause)

PERRY

Louisa, lovely Louisa, I have to tell you something. Today, I saw an old woman get on the bus. You know the type—short, hunched, floral dress. She was wearing those shoes that look like moon boots and her ankles were so swollen. Swollen, probably from a lifetime of standing at work, I dunno. And of course she also had that walker with those tennis balls on the bottom—you know what I'm talking about. Anyways, this old lady, she gets on and she looks at the people on the bus, she looks at us with this sort of helpless look. Like she was asking, could I sit? Will any of you ever offer me your seat? Or do I have to stand here the whole time and let more fluid flood my ankles? I was looking at a bus full of people who wouldn't look straight at us—who kept reading or texting or staring out the window, bent on—committed to not seeing us, to not getting up and giving us their seat.

And

and I was worried that that was going to be you when you get old. That you would have to take the bus with people who wouldn't let you sit. I was so scared that you would be that old lady. I don't want you to be her, Louisa.

(a kiss on her cheek)

I don't want you to be her.

LOUISA

Perry, I don't think that—

PERRY

So, tonight, I made sure that you would never have to take the bus again.

LOUISA

But I'm perfectly fine with—

PERRY

I bought you a car.

(Silence.)

LOUISA

A car?

PERRY

Yes, Louisa, dear.

LOUISA

Oh.my.god Perry, I can't believe you would you ever—

PERRY

Now, it's only a Ford, if you'll forgive me Louisa, it's the only thing I can afford. I will buy you the Mercedes, the black one, as soon as I can, I promise, but please, Louisa, please just know that I love you too much to let that happen to you. I want you to never get swollen ankles.

LOUISA

Oh. my. god.

PERRY

I know Louisa. Just let that excitement out!

LOUISA

I'm—I'm trying to decide if I should call someone and, and let them know the good news!

PERRY

I think that would be a wonderful idea.

LOUISA

(in a lower voice)

And, and I'm trying to decide if I should kiss you.

PERRY

(also in a lower voice)

I think that would be an even better idea.

LOUISA

Yeah, but you're biased.

(They laugh.)

But,

what I'm really trying to figure out, is where you would ever buy a car this late at night. Hm? I can't imagine car-dealers working past nine.

(Silence.)

PERRY

Well, there's this place on Western—

LOUISA

Perry, Perry, Perry, come on. A car? There is no car. We wouldn't have the money for one. Even a Ford. Really now.

(Louisa picks up a stack of mail and starts sorting through it. Perry gets up slowly and starts walking to the bedroom, but does not get far before she speaks again.)

I do want an answer.

Soon.

(Perry deflates and comes back. Louisa opens an envelope and reads the letter. He looks at her for a moment, then his knee, then at her again.)

PERRY

Louisa, I love you. I really do.

LOUISA

(still reading)

Good to know.

PERRY

And you know I always want what's best for us.

LOUISA

As opposed to what's worst for us.

PERRY

And I'm always looking for bigger and better things.

LOUISA

Like that jumbo calculator you bought yesterday.

PERRY

So, my lovely Louisa—oh! You noticed! How do you like it?

LOUISA

It's alright. Doesn't really fit anywhere though.

PERRY

Oh, that's too bad. Anyways, my lovely Louisa, tonight I made an important decision.

LOUISA

An important decision at twelve midnight.

PERRY

Well, I'm no slave to time.

LOUISA

Terrific.

PERRY

(to us)

Louisa was the only girl in a house full of boys. I think sometimes she forgets she isn't living with that many boys anymore. She's good with sarcasm, like:

LOUISA

No slave to time? Oh great! You were emancipated!

PERRY

(still to us)

or maybe:

LOUISA

I am *incredibly* proud of you.

PERRY

(still)

But this might have been nice:

LOUISA

That's completely fine, Perry. You know, in Argentina, they just say, Let's meet in
(waving her hand nonchalantly)

la mañana, which could mean nine, ten, eleven o'clock in the morning.

Time is just an invention.

(a peck)

A silly, bothersome invention.

PERRY

(still to us, smiling slightly)

Yeah, like that.

(A moment.)

(He looks at his knee then back at Louisa.)

You hate the winters here, right?

LOUISA

...yeah...

PERRY

All that snow and ice, dreadful, right?

LOUISA

...sure...

PERRY

Nothing grows anymore.

(dreamily)

And you've always talked about how you want to wake up some mornings a little happy that it's morning 'cause you're not freezing to death—

LOUISA

Well, I do have an electric blanket now.

PERRY

—that instead there is warmth radiating from every surface the sun kisses.

LOUISA

Oh Perry,
let's not personify what doesn't need it.

PERRY

So, I'm going to make your wildest dreams come true.

LOUISA

You mean the one where Jude Law shows up naked at our door?

PERRY

I bought a house in Cuba.

(Silence.)

LOUISA

A house?

PERRY

(with a didactic posture and index finger raised)

House. Noun. A dwelling where humans live.

LOUISA

In Cuba?

PERRY

(same)

Cuba: An island in the West Indies. Capital: Havana. Average year round temperature: 85 degrees Fahrenheit.

LOUISA

A house in Cuba?!

PERRY

Yeah! Wouldn't it be great!

Well...technically there's no house yet. We have to build it. Right now, it's just a plot of land.

LOUISA

Perry!

PERRY

Louisa!

LOUISA

(standing)

Perry!

PERRY

(following)
My lovely Louisa! You look thrilled!
(embraces Louisa, who does not return the embrace)

LOUISA

Perry! This is terrible!

PERRY

(breaking from hug)
What?

LOUISA

This is terrible!

PERRY

I don't understand. You know how to use a hammer.

LOUISA

(drops back down to the couch. Perry follows.)
It's not like we ever had the money for a house—

PERRY

—a plot of land—

LOUISA

—a plot of land—in Cuba.

PERRY

Oh that's fine, it's a just *small* plot of land.

LOUISA

And-and are we just supposed to pick up and leave our lives and our jobs and family and friends?
Just run away like that?

PERRY

Well...yeah. Just like that.
Start new.

LOUISA

(glazing over)
Start new.

PERRY

Your job, you could leave it.

Leave it. LOUISA

And we could drink piña coladas. PERRY

Piña coladas. LOUISA

And smoke cigars. PERRY

Cigars. LOUISA

It would be great. PERRY
(gesturing)

Forget this dump.
 And you could grow your flowers in the back.

My own garden. LOUISA

With your name on it. PERRY

(A moment.)

(sighing)
 Perry, Perry, Perry. LOUISA
 Really now.

(She falls to her side with her legs still in the sitting position. Perry lies down with her. He rests his head on her stomach. Louisa closes her eyes strokes his hair.)

You can tell me the truth in the morning.

PERRY
(sitting up)

The truth? You mean what I just told you?

LOUISA
(sitting up)
 No, the *truth*. No one buys a house—

PERRY

—a plot of land—

LOUISA

—a plot of land—in Cuba in the middle of the night. Besides, of all places, you had to pick Cuba, the country we have an embargo on. That was a good try, though.

(lies back down)

PERRY

Well, allow me to explain—

LOUISA

(mumbling)

Good night Perry.

(Perry sighs and lies back down. Louisa rests her hand on his head.)

PERRY

Good night my lovely Louisa.

(Louisa falls asleep with her hand still on Perry's head. Lights dim. A moment passes. Perry gently plucks her hand off, sits up, and rests it down again. For a few beats, he sits with his hands clasped and elbows resting on his knees and looks at the floor. Lights fade out.)

MONOLOGUE TWO

PERRY

Spotlight on Perry. He speaks to us:

Friday morning, I left a note for my mother saying that I loved her but was never going to come home again. And Friday afternoon, I rode the train into the city to keep my promise.

She took the window seat and held my hand hard.

Someone new was living in her house now, but that's alright, she said, before they left, she buried a key in the backyard and we could wait till dark, dig it up and slip inside. We could find someplace warm to sleep, maybe in the basement, and leave early so they'd never know, climb up to the asphalt roof and watch the sun rise.

"No, wait," she said. "Forget that. Let's never sleep again."

"Let's steal a car and rob a bank, stay out all night and go dancing. Just you and me, too perfect to live.

Yes, I said, yes and yes and yes.

We saw a movie, ate at a deli, and then just walked around. By midnight I was really cold and tired. I said maybe we should go to sleep even though we'd just agreed not to. And she said, "Yeah maybe that's a good idea."

Her eyelids were drooping.

I asked her if we could go to her old house and dig up her key and sleep in her basement.

And she looked at me and didn't say anything for a long time.

Or maybe we could just ask the new owners nicely and they'd let us stay.

Then she looked away.

On the way back, she took the window seat again but turned away from me to watch as the city lights disappeared.

(Spotlight out.)

SCENE TWO

Lights up. Still at the apartment. The coffee table has a box of cereal, gallon of milk, and a bowl with a spoon balanced on the piles of mail and magazines. Louisa sits on the couch in her bathrobe and eats a bowl of cereal. Perry is sleeping on the couch next to her. He stirs, then sits up and rubs his eyes.

G'morning Louisa.

PERRY

Good morning Cuba.

LOUISA

What time is it?

PERRY

It's about...

LOUISA

(checks the clock)
it's about eight.

(Perry looks out the window and squints.)

Oh, I missed the sunrise.

PERRY

Were you planning to watch it?

LOUISA

Yeah.

PERRY

Pretty ambitious of you.

LOUISA

PERRY

It's just that it's been so long since I've seen it, y'know?

(He reaches for the nail clipper on the coffee table and starts trimming his toe nails.)

Lately, I've been sleeping so late, I kind of miss the way the early morning feels, when only a few people are up. You kind of feel a type of companionship with them, y'know? Like you have a secret understanding with everyone that the morning is like nothing else. It's so clean, and full of hope, so much potential for the day.

LOUISA
 Could you not do that right now?

PERRY
 Do what?

LOUISA
 Do that. Cut your nails.

PERRY
 Oh, sorry.

(He stops and puts the clippers down.)

LOUISA
 It's just kind of gross to imagine all those nail clippings in my food. Shouldn't you be doing that in the bathroom?

PERRY
(to us)
 Oh, she just did it again. She makes her point in her first sentence, and then it's just the second one that makes you feel even worse. Like:

LOUISA
 It's just kind of gross to imagine all those nail clippings in my food.

PERRY
 —would have done 'cause I don't want my lovely Louisa to loose her appetite—she's thin enough as it is—but then she added:

LOUISA
 Shouldn't you be doing that in the bathroom?

PERRY
 —which just makes me feel awful. I guess it's her tone.

LOUISA
 Shouldn't you be doing that in the bathroom?

(worse)

Shouldn't you be doing that in the bathroom?

(Perry cringes.)

PERRY
(to us)
 I wish she had said:

LOUISA

Perry, darling, not that cutting your toe nails while I'm eating bothers me at all in any way, shape or form, but could you do that some other time? Thank you, dear.

PERRY

(to us)

That would have been nice.

PERRY CONT'D

Sorry, love.

(Louisa eats more cereal.)

(Silence.)

LOUISA

(nudging the box of cereal over)

Hungry?

PERRY

Yeah, a little.

(He pours cereal, then milk into the bowl, and starts eating. Louisa looks at Perry, waiting. He keeps eating. Then she sets her bowl down and gets up to water the flowers.)

LOUISA

Oh look, these are dead.

PERRY

Well, surely can't be because you don't water them enough.

LOUISA

I think I used too much plant food.

PERRY

Too much?

LOUISA

Yeah, I just really wanted nice flowers.

PERRY

Nice flowers? Like those big, blossoms—those big, meaty blossoms that cover the sidewalk outside flower shops in the summer? The kind that come in all those royal colors—purple and gold and red, each with too many petals, which is just the right number. Nice flowers? Those?

LOUISA

Yeah, those.

PERRY

(tossing his head back)

Oh, Louisa. You are a woman after my own heart.

(She laughs and comes back to the couch. He smiles and eats some more. Silence.)

LOUISA

Perry.

PERRY

Louisa.

LOUISA

I believe I need to be enlightened.

PERRY

Oh? About what? Aren't you already a Christian?

(continues eating)

LOUISA

I want to know your whereabouts last night.

(Silence, no chewing.)

PERRY

(with food in his mouth)

This is good cereal.

LOUISA

Your whereabouts. What you were doing.

PERRY

It's crunchy but doesn't scrape my gums—I have sensitive gums y'know.

LOUISA

Last night.

PERRY

And it's sweet too. Kind of like a berry-flavored sweetness to it.

LOUISA

From nine to twelve.

PERRY

And there are bits of almonds in here too! Oh—don't get me started!

(takes the bowl to his lips and tilts it to drink the last of the milk)

My lovely Louisa,

(wipes his mouth with the back of his hand)

be sure to buy this cereal again.

(He sets his bowl down and gets up to leave. Louisa crosses her arms, speaks before Perry can get very far.)

LOUISA

Perry.

Perry.

Perry.

LET'S NOT PLAY GAMES HERE.

(Perry sits again. He turns to say something to Louisa, changes his mind, and instead turns to us.)

PERRY

You see, Louisa's had a few guys who hadn't been too great. So she's always on guard even with me.

(He turns again to say something to Louisa, changes his mind, and turns to us once more.)

I don't always understand why.

(Finally, he is back to Louisa. He holds her, looks at her, his knee, then her.)

Louisa, you know that I love you very, very much.

LOUISA

Still.

PERRY

And that I care about you deeply.

LOUISA

Deep as the Grand Canyon, right.

PERRY

And I think our relationship is strong enough to endure anything.

LOUISA

It's like a rock.

PERRY

And also, I have to tell you, you deserve better than this.
(gestures to the apartment)

LOUISA

(without seeing Perry gesture)
 Thanks for noticing.

PERRY

Every morning I wake up and my heart hurts a little 'cause you don't have a nice car or a fancy house—

LOUISA

—or a plot of land in Cuba.

PERRY

So, last night, I got you something that could maybe make up for everything.

LOUISA

The suspense
 is killing me.

PERRY

I bought you a diamond ring, Louisa.
 The diamond is one carat.

LOUISA

A ring.
 A diamond ring.

PERRY

A diamond ring. Just for you.

(Silence.)

LOUISA

Wha—does this—does this mean that you're...proposing?

(A wrenching silence.)

PERRY

No!—I mean, wait, *yes!*—I mean, *no*—that's not—well, you *could*—no no no—not like thissssss—uh, let me just thfff...

(a breath, and with complete composure)

It's not one carat.

It's two.

(Longer silence.)

Is it here?

LOUISA

Is
what here?

PERRY

The ring.
I would like to see it.

LOUISA

Oooh...

PERRY

(Louisa looks around.)

umm...

(Then she checks under the couch)

yesss...?

(and in the cereal box)

Nnnnoooo. No, not yet,
my lovely Louisa. I'm—I'm picking it up today.

You're picking it up today?

LOUISA

Yes, I had to buy it last night.

PERRY

At midnight.

LOUISA

Y-yeah. And today, I am picking it up.

PERRY

Perry...

LOUISA

PERRY

(to us)

I've always been struck by how beautiful Louisa is in the mornings.

LOUISA

Perry...

PERRY

(to us)

I've never told her that though. Maybe I should.

LOUISA

Perry...

(For the next few lines, Louisa speaks rather dryly, putting very little effort into the exclamation marks.)

this is *amazing*. This is the best thing you have ever done for me.

PERRY

(to us)

Or I could just tell her some other time.

(to Louisa)

My lovely Louisa—

LOUISA

In fact, I think I'll leave work a little early so I can rush home to see it.

PERRY

Oh, really? Maybe you should—

LOUISA

No, actually, I can't even wait that long. The excitement would just drive me off the *wall*.

PERRY

Oh
uh
sure.

LOUISA

You know, I think I'll have to come back on my lunch break to see the ring. That way, I won't die from all the waiting!

PERRY

No, no, wouldn't want that happening.

LOUISA

Yes, that's what I'll do. That way, I can wear it back to work and show it off to everyone!
(stands, turns to Perry who also stands, and throws her arms around his neck)
 You bought me a ring! A real one-carat—

PERRY

—two-carat—

LOUISA

—two-carat diamond ring! You're fantastic Perry!
(She embraces Perry, who hugs her back—a delayed reaction—and gives him a kiss, then checks the clock.)
 Oh! Look at the time. I can't be late!
(She leaves to change clothes with Perry staring after her.)

PERRY

(to us)

You see, Louisa sometimes has fits of depression, like the past few days. Oh, those are bad. She cries up a storm and doesn't really talk to anyone, not to her friends, not even to me. It's not like she tries to do anything about it either, no anti-depressants, doesn't even want to talk to me about how she feels. Maybe that's when I need to get out, find somebody else to talk to, someone who understands.

(Louisa returns dressed in a collared shirt and a pair of dress pants. She almost looks business-casual, but misses it by a bit.)

(still to us)

But days Louisa is happy are beautiful days.
 Beautiful, beautiful days.

LOUISA

Well, shouldn't you be getting ready?

PERRY

Getting ready? For what?

LOUISA

To get the ring of course.

PERRY

Oh, right.
 Absolutely.

(He stands, runs his hand through his hair, and starts straightening himself out a little.)

LOUISA

Give me a kiss.

(They kiss. Louisa is making it a very sexy kiss.)

Bye Perry.

PERRY

Good bye my lovely Louisa.

(Lights out.)

MONOLOGUE THREE

PERRY

Spotlight on Perry. He speaks to us:

When we got off the train, she said sorry.
I didn't hear her at first.
So she said it again. Softly but clearly.

Sorry, she said.
That's fine, I said.
I didn't mean it to...
That's fine.

Will you walk me home? she asked.
Yes, I said. Yes.
And we stepped off the platform into the dark.

(Spotlight out.)

SCENE THREE

Lights up. Again at the apartment. A vase with an impressive bouquet of flowers sits on the coffee table. Louisa enters.

LOUISA

(in a sing-song voice)

Perryyyy...

(seeing that he is not there)

Perry?

(and checks the other rooms. She returns and sees the flowers.)

Perry.

(Lights out. End of play.)