

Wood-May Joseph

The Customer

Characters:

Joe
Stanley
Mr. Hatch
Customer 1
Customer 2
Customer 3
Detective Sight
Detective Booken

Setting: This entire play takes place inside of a small, local grocery store. The dairy section is in the center of the stage. The manager's office is on stage right. When a scene is taking place in the dairy section, there should be customers shopping in the background.

Scene I

(Two men are standing on a ladder while removing a "WHITES ONLY" sign. When they are done, one man carries the ladder and the other carries the sign. They exit from stage left. *Blackout*)

Scene II

(Stanley knocks on the manager's door. No one answers, He knocks even harder this time, still no one opens the door. In frustration, he kicks the door, and starts to walk away. As he was walking away, he heard the squeaky sound of the door being opened. He turns around and sees Mr. Hatch.)

STANLEY

Did I wake you?

MR. HATCH

Yes, from a very good dream. An old man needs his sleep.

Stanley

You need another pair of ears too.

(They laugh and shake each other's hand)

MR. HATCH

Come in you bastard.

(Stanley walks in the office and Mr. Hatch follows. They have a seat.)

MR. HATCH

So what brings you to my office? It's not like you to come kicking at my door when you don't see me in the store.

STANLEY

Well, I am used to seeing you out there, on the floor, stocking the shelves. Nowadays, I would be lucky to catch you awake. What happened?

MR. HATCH

Time happened my friend. I can't even lift a crate of milk up any more. My back is not the same. Every time I bend over to pick up something, I'm not entirely sure if I'll get back up. And don't even get me started on my knees. So you see, I can't be out there stocking the shelves like I used to back in the day. I have to rely on my younger employees for that.

STANLEY

By employees, you mean that negro boy? Why would you hire him? Don't you know you're losing customers because of him? Couldn't you find someone else? Is he really worth it?

Mr. HATCH

Well, my brother hired him. And my brother is an owner of the store just as much as I am. And beside the boy has proven himself to be a good worker.

STANLEY

I get that, but can't you have him do some work in the back so that people don't have to see him when they are doing their shopping?

MR. HATCH

He does work in the back, as well as stocking the shelves. He does both, that's how good he is.

STANLEY

Still, you should consider, letting him go.

MR. HATCH

No, I won't fire the boy.

STANLEY

Why?

MR. HATCH

Because I can't afford to lose a good worker right now, especially at this time. You say that I'm losing business, but the numbers say otherwise.

STANLEY

If you're worried about not having enough workers, you can hire me. I'll replace him.

MR. HATCH

I'm afraid I can't do that.

STANLEY

You would pick him over me?

MR. HATCH

Only because I can get away with paying him less for his labor.

(Mr. Hatch writes a number on a piece of paper)

MR. HATCH

Would you be willing to work for this number?

STANLEY

What? Of course not.

MR. HATCH

The boy works for less than that. I'll tell you what, I don't think he's here for long. These days, they all seem to be going North. If and when he leaves, you'll be the first one I reach out to.

STANLEY

Fair enough. I have to head out, I'll see you later my friend.

(They shake hands. Stanley walks out of the office. He is now in the dairy section. The light is on Stanley. He stares in the direction of a young black man stocking the shelves.)

STANLEY

For my children, For my wife, I will do what needs to be done. I need a job to take care of them, and right now you are in the way. I must remove you. I must make you leave. (*Blackout*)

Scene III

(Joe, is a young black man. He is a stock clerk. As he is putting eggs on the shelf, Stanley approaches him.)

JOE

Oh, Hello, am I in your way?

STANLEY

Not exactly, I was wondering if you could tell me where I can find sugar.

JOE

It should be in aisle two, on the bottom shelf.

STANLEY

Which way is aisle two?

JOE

Towards the exit.

(He points stage left, and Stanley exits the stage. Joe continues to put eggs up on the shelf.

Customers walk back and forth. Stanley returns, he is holding a bag of sugar.)

STANLEY

How about horseradish?

JOE

Excuse me?

STANLEY

Horseradish! Do you know where I can find it?

JOE

Horseradish?... huh, I'm not sure what that is. What do you do with it?

STANLEY

What do I do with it? What kind of question is that, my wife's the one who does the cooking not me.

JOE

Oh, okay, umm let's check in aisle four.

STANLEY

forget it. I don't want to be here all day. Just hand me two cases of eggs.

(Joe takes two cases of eggs from the shelf and places them in Stanley's hand. Stantley purposely drops the eggs. The eggs immediately break once they make contact with the ground.)

STANLEY

Look what you did!

JOE

What I Did?

STANLEY

You're gonna have to pay for those eggs. You break, you pay. That's the store's policy.

JOE

Yo, don't even work here. Just because you know Mr. Hatch, it doesn't mean anything.

STANLEY

I know that you have to pay for the shits you break, and you broke the eggs.

JOE

And Who's gonna make me pay, you? I'll like to see you try.

(Stanley grabs Joe by the collar. Joe pushes him)

JOE

Put your hands on me again, I dare you.

(Stanley throws the bag of sugar at Joe. The sugar splashes all over Joe's face. Joe then picks a gallon of milk, and smashes it on Stanley's head. Stanley falls to the ground, and Mr. Hatch comes out of the office.)

MR. HATCH

What the hell is going on here?

STANLEY

Your boy, he dropped the eggs, and then tried to make me pay for them. When I said no, he pushed me and slammed a gallon of milk on my head.

JOE

Bullshit! All this broken shit on the floor, he is responsible for them, and I ain't paying for anything.

STANLEY

You need to fire him! He is violent and rude! Doesn't even know where anything is in the store.

MR. HATCH

Stanley, go wait inside of my office.

(Stanley goes in the office)

MR. HATCH

Just clean this up Joe. Don't worry, I know you didn't do this.

(Mr. Hatch goes to the office. Stanley is sitting down. Mr. Hatch slaps him in the face)

MR. HATCH

Are you out your mother fucking mind? How dare you come into my store, and break my shit. And then have the audacity to lie to me like I wasn't watching y'all the entire time.

STANLEY

But Mr. Hatch, he hit me with a gallon of milk. Why does he still have a job. Fire h..

MR. HATCH

Shut your fucking mouth! (*Takes a deep breath*) Don't talk. I know things are hard for you financially right now. I know that you lost your farm, and I am sorry for you, but it doesn't mean you can go around doing whatever you want. I still consider you a friend because I've known you and your family for a very long time. So here (*he gives Stanley money*).

STANLEY

Thank you

MR.HATCH

Give it to the cashier. It's enough to cover everything that you broke.

STANLEY

You're really gonna make me pay for those things?

MR. HATCH

You break, you pay. store policy. Now I will keep my promise. If and When the boy leaves, I will hire you next.

(They shake hands, and Stanley leaves the office. Stanley stares into the direction Joe who is cleaning the floor)

STANLEY

I must remove you. I must make you leave. (He exit stage left, *Blackout*)

SCENE IV

(Joe is blocking the dairy section meaning that he is pulling the items forward on the shelves and making everything look nice and neat. A customer approaches him.)

CUSTOMER 1

Excuse me, where is the ice?

(The lights fade away from the customer, and is place solely on Joe)

JOE

Where is the ice? Why don't you go look in the frozen section you moron. Where is the sugar? How bout you read the fucking sign. I hate these stupid ass white people. My job is not to do your shopping. I hate this town. I hate this store. Shit, I hate Mr. Hatch. He probably thinks I'm loyal to him. I'm not. As soon as I have enough saved up, I'm heading to Newark. Me and my mother. We've been saving up for quite sometime now. My mom works for Mr. Hatch's brother, on the other side of town. But in two weeks, we will be gone. Springfield is not for us. Besides,

I'm not sure if I could continue to work in this store for more than two weeks without killing one of these customers. I...

CUSTOMER 1

The ice?

JOE

It's in the frozen section m'am.

CUSTOMER 2

Umm where is the sugar?

JOE

It's in aisle two.

CUSTOMER 2

Oh, you mean by the sign that says sugar, silly me.

JOE

Yeah

CUSTOMER 3

Excuse me, (*He hands Joe a piece of paper*) My wife gave me this list. I don't even know what half of these things look like. If it's not too much trouble, you think you can help me find them?

JOE

Sure.

(They begin to walk towards stage left. Joe stops walking, and customer 3 exists. Joe looks at the audience.)

JOE

See what I mean? (*BLACKOUT*)

SCENE V

(Joe is stocking the shelves. Mr. Hatch approaches him)

MR. HATCH

Hey Joe, Can I see you in my office?

(Joe follows him into the office. There are two detectives in the office)

DETECTIVE SIGHT

You must be Joe. I'm detective Sight, and this is my partner, Detective Booken.

(They shake hands)

JOE

Hello. Is something wrong?

DETECTIVE BOOKEN

I'm afraid so. Your mother was found dead this afternoon in your home.

JOE

Dead? That's not possible, she was completely healthy when I left her this morning.

DETECTIVE SIGHT

That's the thing Joe, it would appear that she was murdered. Your aunt found the body and called the police immediately.

DETECTIVE BOOKEN

When we got to the house, there was water all over the kitchen, there were broken plates on the floor, blood in the sink.

DETECTIVE SIGHT

Your mother's dead body was laying on the table. There's gunshot wounds on her right leg and right shoulder, and multiple stab wounds on her stomach and chest.

JOE

My mom was the nicest woman in town. Even you white folks didn't mind her.
(tears begin to slowly run on Joe's face)

DETECTIVE BOOKEN

I know this is hard for you right now, but we will get to the bottom of this.

DETECTIVE SIGHT

Would you be willing to come with us to our office Joe? It won't take long.

JOE

Ahh okay.

(Joe and the detectives exit the office, *(BLACKOUT)*)

SCENE VI

(In Mr. Hatch's office)

MR. HATCH

Heavenly father, I come to you as your humble servant. The devil has entered the soul of my poor, idiot friend.

STANLEY

Lord of all, I am the poor, idiot friend who was deceived by the great deceiver to commit a crime against my heart. A crime against your commandments.

MR. HATCH

"Father, [he] have sinned against you, and [he] is not worthy to be called your son, be merciful on [him], a sinner"

STANLEY

A sinner, I am my lord. I killed her. The great deceiver manipulated me into killing that poor woman. He filled my head with malicious ideas. "If you killed his mother, he will surely leave town." Every night he whispered that to me. "Kill her, and that job is yours"

MR. HATCH

Oh God Almighty, he tried to fight the temptations. He tried to resist, but he is weak.

STANLEY

I tried to resist father God. I shot her in the leg instead of her head.

MR. HATCH

Be merciful O Lord.

STANLEY

I shot her in the shoulder, instead of her heart.

MR. HATCH

Be merciful O Lord.

STANLEY

I threw the gun out the window.

MR. HATCH

Be merciful O Lord

STANLEY

I tried to drown her in the sink.

MR. HATCH

Be merciful O Lord

STANLEY

I stabbed her in the chest. I stabbed her in the stomach until there was no more life left in her body.

MR. HATCH

Be merciful O Lord

STANLEY

Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight. Be merciful O Lord for [I] have sinned. What must I do to earn your forgiveness?

MR. HATCH

You must confess your sins

STANLEY

Confess, is that your wish father God?

MR. HATCH

Indeed it is.

STANLEY

Then I will go to a priest immediately.

MR. HATCH

NO, you must confess to Joe first.

STANLEY

But Father...

MR. HATCH

Confess to Joe! He is the key to your forgiveness.

STANLEY

Let it be done according to your will (*BLACKOUT*).

SCENE VII

(In Mr. Hatch's office)

STANLEY

You really think it's a good idea for me to tell Joe? Cause I'm a little nervous. What if he tells the police, or worse, tries to kill me?

Mr. HATCH

Look it's been two weeks since he's had the funeral for his mother. I'm sure he's much calmer now. Don't worry about him calling the police, it's not his style. And I'll be right here to make sure things don't get out of hand.

STANLEY

I still don't think this is a good idea.

MR.HATCH

Don't you want to be able to sleep in peace again? Ever since, you told me about what you did, you've looked like horse shit. Your wife tells me you barely eat. You looked worse than the day you lost your farm... you were wrong for killing that boy's mother, but it doesn't look like the police are going to catch up with you anytime soon. I'm just trying to prevent you from self-destructing. The only way for you to ease your guilt is by telling the boy about what you did.

STANLEY

It's still a bad idea, but I think you're right.

MR.HATCH

Joe should be here by anytime now to pick up his final check. You're gonna tell him what you did, and I'mma gonna give him his check, and he's gonna take it and head for Newark with some closure.

STANLEY

I'm not sure if that's the closure he wants.

MR.HATCH

Well, he will leave and you'll get a job. That's what *you* wanted.

(Joe knocks on the office door. Mr. Hatch opens it and lets Joe in)

MR.HATCH

Heyyy, Joe! How the hell are you?

JOE

I'm doing well

MR.HATCH

We've been waiting for you

JOE

We?

MR.HATCH

Me and umm... Stanley. You know Stanley right?

JOE

I don't know him, but I've had unpleasant interactions with him, yes.

MR. HATCH

He's my friend, and he was hoping to tell you something before you leave.

STANLEY

What could I possibly have to say to someone I do not know. This boy is just a former stock clerk to me.

JOE

It's probably not in your best interest to refer to me as a boy in front of my face.

MR.HATCH

Stanley, what are you doing? I thought we had an agreement.

STANLEY

I changed my mind, I don't want to talk to him anymore.

JOE

Can I just have my check so I can get out of here.

MR.HATCH

Joe, please just hang on for a moment.

STANLEY

Stop wasting his time, and give him his check

MR.HATCH

I strongly suggest you reconsider your decision.

STANLEY

I've made up my mind, I will not talk to him.

JOE

There's nothing that I want to hear from this man, now can I have my check?

MR. HATCH

This is your final chance Stanley.

STANLEY

I won't do it.

MR.HATCH

Then you leave me no choice. Joe, he did it. He killed your mother.

JOE

What? He doesn't even my mother.

MR.HATCH

He wanted me to fire you so I could hire him. When I told him I would hire him if and when you leave. So he figured if he killed your mother, it would cause you to fear the people in Springfield which would cause you to flee.

JOE

No, he didn't kill my mother for a fucking job. A low paying ass job!

STANLEY

Mr. Hatch is right, I did kill your mother, I did and I'm....

(Joe lunges at Stanley. He punches him in the face. Stanley falls to the ground, and Joe gets on top of him and begins to choke him. Mr. Hatch quickly pulls Joe off of Stanley. They are breathing heavily)

JOE

You kill my mom for a job at a fucking grocery store?!

STANLEY

I did, and it was wrong. But I'm realizing now that I'm not the one responsible for your mother's death. He is. (*points at Mr. Hatch who is holding Joe*) You watched me lose my farm. You knew I was going to bed hungry at night, and you did nothing. What kind of friend are you? You knew I was suffering, and when I asked for a job, what did you do? What did you do?!

MR. HATCH

Lower your voice Stanley.

STANLEY

You refused me because you didn't want to let him go. "I can get away with paying him less" That's what you told me. You made me so desperate that I killed a poor woman. I killed her because of you.

(Mr. Hatch frees Joe from his grasp. Gives him his check)

Mr. HATCH

Sta...

(Stanley pushes Joe to the side and pushes Mr. Hatch to the ground. Mr.Hatch falls and Stanley gets on top of him and starts to punch in the face many times over. Joe does not interfere)

MR.HATCH

Sto.... St..opp

(Stanley places his hands on Mr. Hatch's neck and chokes him until Mr.Hatch's body is empty of life. Stanley breathes heavily. *BLACKOUT*)

SCENE VIII

The shelves are completely empty. Two officers are surrounding the area with yellow tapes.

(To be continued...)

