

# You May Go Now

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"Without a child...one might as well be dead."

In the remarkable *You May Go Now*, terrifying consequences are played out within the darkly funny, oddly pre-Betty Friedan world of Dottie, the ultimate housewife. Now, any mother-daughter relationship can provide some startlingly dark territory to explore, but the ground covered in this new play by Bekah Brunstetter goes way past the expected to rip through the gut while you're laughing. Babel Theater Project's well-thought-out production has a cast that serves up this play in a way that is tasty and intriguing.

What starts as a sunny cooking lesson quickly reveals all is not as it should be in this happy home, and just how far it spirals from ideal can sometimes be appalling but retains humor through the determined direction of Geordie Broadwater. A perfect mother raising her daughter with the skills to be the perfect helpmate, Dottie is oddly intent on expelling her daughter Betty into the world to find that man—whether she is ready or not. It seems as if the ideal mother is having a rebellion, but then exactly what kind of mother is she? After Betty is literally shoved out into the cold, the ghost of Dottie's husband comes in and it becomes apparent that this house never was the home of Ward and June Cleaver. When daughter Betty comes back, outraged at the real state of the world, and followed by what seems to be the perfect Flannery O'Connor nightmare of a true love, Phillip, things careen even further off any traditional track.

*You May Go Now* is a very funny piece about some truly terrible things and almost always succeeds at its marvelously perverse humor. At its best, the production moves briskly through the developments with excellent character work by all, especially the stellar comic performance of Melinda Helfrich as Betty. Her completely committed, bouffon-level work is a joy to watch. She makes emotional leaps in the character that completely convey the naivete of an excessively sheltered girl, while also being astonishingly brave. Her Betty has a glorious resiliency that makes her humiliations bearable to watch.

As the mother, Ginger Eckert balances nicely the many alternately comic and menacing moments in the role. Dottie has a fascinating nature, oddly compelled in many directions and yet not able to examine any of them. This is a woman who does and does not have a child, does and does not have emotional and sexual drives; she is a collection of potent, identifiable needs—not all of which are comprehended here. She feels like the center of the play's concerns and yet is slightly overwhelmed by the full weight given to everything else in this production. The ghost of her dead husband is hanging around the house, and yet these scenes, while well-acted, carry the same feel and emotional weight as the scenes with the living.

As the ghost of her husband Robert, Ben Vershobow does some lovely work but does seem to be working more off his own agenda than being connected to Dottie or a product of her psyche. He almost seems to find her irrelevant and is a bit lost in his own concerns. Dottie's clashes with the eerie yet appealing young stranger, Phillip (Justin Blanchard), have an animal nature of threat and the power shifts are interesting, although not always comprehensible. At one point, Phillip seemed so frightened of Dottie specifically it seemed as if they had an extensive past history. Interestingly, Phillip's history starts off more threateningly than anyone's. As the threat dissipates, he remains intriguing as a young man so disconnected from feeling and bereft for such a long time, that when the feeling he finally receives is intense physical pain, his gratitude for that is believable. *You May Go Now* is full of such quirky contradictions, rich to experience and to consider after.

The strength of this cast and overall intelligence of the directing work beyond these caveats and the production make this well worth seeing. Babel Theater Project has lovingly produced this play with skilled direction, a smartly detailed set by Tristan Jeffers, and fine lighting by Tim Cryan; and judging by this play, a writer with the skill and smarts of Bekah Brunstetter well deserves such fine treatment.