

OPEN SEASON

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CHARACTERS

MARGE

RAFE

THE HUNTER

DEER-BOY

SETTING

The Garden, The Woods, The Highway should occupy difference areas of the stage and should in no way be represented realistically, just roughly, sketchily. Action should be able to flow smoothly.

THE GARDEN

(In blackness we hear a faint unwavering buzz that grows into full sound and intensity.)

Lights up on MARGE, of unrecognizable age, standing at the back yard of her house on the edge of the woods.

RAFE lies in a hammock hung from the porch rail to a tree. A magazine covers his face.)

MARGE

Deer got into the garden again.

(pause. She looks at him)

We won't be having salad tonight.

(Pause. His breathing is steady under the magazine. She picks up a clump of dirt and with deadly aim, slams it right at the magazine cover yelling -)

No salad!

(He starts. Pulls the magazine off of his face. She shrugs)

No greens left.

RAFE

Can't you go to the store?

(She contemplates before shaking her head no)

I need my roughage.

MARGE

I built that fence. I put up floodlights. I pulled strands of my hair from my brush and hung them from the hedges. I set traps. Nothing keeps the fuckers out.

Pick up some milk while you're at the market.

(She turns and goes into the house)

THE WOODS

(The HUNTER rises from where he squats against the side of a tree. He pulls up his pants from down around his ankles. He kicks dirt over the hole. He wears the orange vest, carries a rifle.)

The HUNTER snaps to attention, lifts his rifle and looks down the sight as he pans over the area.

He laughs.)

HUNTER

I can wait.

I can wait a long time.

THE GARDEN

(Rafe enters with two shopping bags teeming with leafy green vegetables.

Marge sits in the middle of a torn up patch of corn.

She holds up one ear of corn)

MARGE

This one's been shucked.

Bite marks.

RAFE

I forgot the milk.

MARGE

This doesn't look like animal teeth to me. Does it look like animal teeth to you?

(She shoves the corn cob at him)

RAFE

Looks human. Missing an incisor or two maybe. Probably forgot to floss.

MARGE

Maybe...

RAFE

What?

MARGE

You'll hate me.

RAFE

Nothing you say will change the way things already are.

MARGE

Maybe it's him.

(He stares at her a beat)

RAFE

You're fucked in the head Marge. I knew it the day I married you but I married you anyway. My mother told me - in case I couldn't figure it out myself.

MARGE

She said that?

RAFE

She said you'd saddle me grief and a strange queer longing for something I'd never be able to put my finger on but would be enough to keep me stuck to you hoping someday I'd find it so I could leave.

(Marge begins to crawl on the ground, looking for something)

MARGE

I wish you'd told me that. I might have actually liked her if you'd told me that before.

RAFE

Michael is dead. I want to leave this place. After seventeen years his bones don't need a proper burial. After seventeen years his flesh is gone, his skin vanished, he doesn't have blue eyes or red hair or a young man's body. He's scattered among plane wreckage. He's ashes among the others. He had his grandmother with him. He couldn't have been too scared-

(Marge shoots him a withering look and continues crawling, searching)

The point is...you don't go into the woods anymore because you're scared you might find him. You don't go into town, on vacation, to the store because somehow that's too far away. In case of his return. Maybe living here doesn't work for me anymore. Maybe I want an adventure. Get out. Go places. Maybe I'm bored!

MARGE

Is that why you forgot the milk?

(She rips a slate from the garden path out of the ground)

Look!

(She holds up the slate - a man's bare footprint is left in mud on the stone)

Proof!

THE WOODS

(The HUNTER lies asleep against the tree, rifle cradled in his hand.

DEER-BOY stands at the edge of the woods. His body is covered with mud and grass stains. He is very still, eyes wide, his head moving only to attenuate to any strange sounds. Antlers grow from his head. He moves quietly, graceful, to inspect the HUNTER.

The HUNTER lets out a loud SNORE.

DEER-BOY starts and runs away.

The HUNTER wakes out of a dream)

HUNTER

Uhh. Samson. Boy. That's me. Eight. Sighting out of the tree. Orange vests everywhere. Through the trees. Through the woods. Through the leaves. Got my daddy's gun. He's peeing. Off behind me. See the doe and her fawn. Think. Daddy'll love this one. Daddy'll love me for this. I'll be his little man. Raise the gun. Hold steady. She's looking at me with her big brown eyes. BAM!...and the fawn. It's not a fawn. It's some creature. It's some thing. It's a child.

(The HUNTER starts and raises his gun, panning slowly, ready to shoot)

I'm ready.

THE HIGHWAY

(Deer-boy skulks in near darkness right by a deer-crossing sign at the edge of the highway, a particular grace that is not human, that would be animal if he were an animal.

High beams land on his face. He freezes. A car screeches to a halt.

A car door SLAMS. RAFE's voice comes from offstage -)

RAFE

Holy Mary Mother of God.

(At that DEER-BOY runs. RAFE chases him onto the stage)

RAFE

Wait! Michael? Wait!!

(He stands trapped in his own headlights.)

RAFE

Michael!!

THE GARDEN

(The sound of RIFLE SHOTS off in the woods. MARGE stands listening intently to each one and cheering)

MARGE

That's it. That's it. Go. Yeah. Venison tonight. Yes! Come on. Another one bites the dust. Yeah. Go. Go. Go!

(RAFE enters and watches her)

You won't be eating my corn anymore. You won't be scarfing my lettuce. Thieves all of you. *(Gunfire)* Thataboy! Shoot to kill.

Hunters came by this morning. I filled every last one of their thermoses with strong-brewed coffee. Guaranteed to net you this season's meat. If they can hold a gun straight and pull a trigger they'll be deer carcasses across the back of every rifle rack driving down Route 17.

RAFE

It goes in cycles. Conservationists get into the action. Vegetarians. Animal lovers. There's a kill limit of one a season. Doesn't make much of a difference anyway. Most of them are such piss-poor shots. Real men on the weekends. Suits the rest of the week. Getting in touch with their inner wildness, the primal hunter wearing neoprene and gortex so the cold won't permeate, shooting with sophisticated equipment. You would think the deer wouldn't have a fuck's worth of chance yet they outsmart even the best. But then they multiply and it gets so you couldn't miss one with your eyes closed. One early freeze, they've lost their feed, they raid the garden, waltz down Main Street, cause highway accidents. They're starving. It's inconvenient. Open season is declared.

(MARGE looks at him)

MARGE

I'm waiting for you to tell me something I don't know.

RAFE

I saw him Marge. I saw Michael.

THE WOODS

DEER-BOY

(Imitating the sound of the bullets)

popzzzzup. popzzzzuuuup. popzzzzuuuup!

(Silence)

sssssss.

Keep to brush away from fire-color two-footers kill stick sour smell

Mama licked salt close little two-foot popzzzzup BAM blood carry I carry hold her her
slick red soaking me less breath less breath less breath gone no answer

Stay away two-foot! I keep you gone I keep you gone

I've been above ground high in clouds in orange day ball's light yellows screaming

Gramma's lap. We fall. We fall. We take orange day ball's fire into trees, into ground,
into her! Gramma? Gramma?

Mama run me. Mama run me hard out of orange fire. I'm no two-foot.

I'm deer. Antlers grow. I'm stag.

THE WOODS

(MARGE and RAFE plead with HUNTER)

MARGE

You don't understand. I'm talking about my son.

HUNTER

Lady, these woods are no place for you.

MARGE

You can't shoot anything with antlers.

HUNTER

Because it might be your kid?

RAFE

Yes.

HUNTER

Your kid has antlers.

MARGE

Yes.

HUNTER

I'm sorry.

MARGE

You'll have to tell all your friends.

HUNTER

I'm sure that I will.

Look, I'd appreciate if you'd keep it down. I've got to be back in the office bright and early Monday morning and if I don't get back early Sunday my wife gives me hell. She hates spending all night skinning. And she'll make me pay for it if you know what I mean.

MARGE

You're not stopping.

HUNTER

Fuck no.

MARGE

But...but I made you coffee!

HUNTER

Gave me the runs.

RAFE

We're just asking you for-

HUNTER

Listen guy and listen good. These are hunting grounds. This is the last space to roam free, to let out my hunter within, to crack the facade, rely on instinct only, let testosterone reign. I'm not giving that up.

RAFE

I suppose your daddy taught you that.

HUNTER

Didn't yours?

RAFE

What about my son? What do I get to teach my son?

*(The sound of a TRAP closing. The pained SCREAM of DEER BOY.
A horrified look on Maggie's face)*

FOUR POOLS OF LIGHT

(one each - Deer-boy lying with his leg caught in the trap, the Hunter, Marge, Rafe)

MARGE

RAFE

DEER-BOY

HUNTER

He looks so
like a man

...red covering Her doe eyes

my son ...flesh tearing Antler-head
boy can he

Where's his clean
baby skin his
precious baby

What do I
teach my Hurts... speak? can he

eyes

son?
What can I
Teach my son? hurts..
How can I love think? this is no
my son?
How can I love don't touch
that me two foot
thing? blessing

Where's my
baby?

this
is no happy reunion

mama?

DEER-BOY

Mama?

(Lights up full. They are in the garden

They stare at Deer-boy as he cries out)

Mama?

THE GARDEN

(Rafe dresses Deer-boy in a suit and tie as Marge holds up silverware in front of his face. He is attached to a stake in the ground by a long chain attached to one foot)

MARGE

Napkin. Napkin. Naaap-kin.
Fork. Fork. Fooorck.

DEER-BOY

Fuck.

(Rafe lets out a sharp laugh)

MARGE

Spoon. Spooooon. Spoon.

(Deer-boy limps to the end of the chain and legs still cycling attempts to walk to the woods)

DEER-BOY

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

MARGE

Somehow, this isn't how I pictured this at all.

(Deer-boy pointless keeps trying to walk in the same direction)

DEER-BOY

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

RAFE

Can't wait to see what kind of girls he brings home.

(They watch him, saddened)

Marge?

MARGE

Yes.

RAFE

That strange queer longing my mother told me about?

MARGE

Yeah?

RAFE

It's gone. My bags are packed.

MARGE

I saw.

RAFE

You could say don't go.

MARGE

Don't.

RAFE

I have to. It's not about love. I'm just missing, missing. And somehow you need me now. It's just not as fulfilling.

DEER-BOY

Fuck.

RAFE

It's not about love.

MARGE

I'm not taking it personally. I refuse. Go then. Go on. Go. Go.

(RAFE leaves. MARGE picks up at plate)

Plate. Plaaate. Plate.

(She throws it and it smashes to pieces. RAFE returns to the porch, holding his suitcase. She doesn't see him. DEER-BOY looks straight at her)

DEER-BOY

Go?

Go?

Please?

*(MARGE goes to DEER-BOY and unties him.
He doesn't look back as he limps to the woods
RAFE and MARGE watch until he's gone,
a suit-wearing-antlered-animal-man
MARGE walks past RAFE into the house.
He puts down his suitcase and follows her in.)*

END PLAY