

77 U-TURN

A solo play
By Julie Fitzpatrick

77-UTURN

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The playwright would like to acknowledge and thank the following people: David Fitzpatrick, Keely Baisden-Knudsen, and her cherished husband & sons: Pete, Fitz & Gracen.

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

77 U-TURN was first produced at The Guilford Performing Arts Festival 2019 in Guilford, CT. The production was directed by Keely Baisden-Knudsen and the music was played by Bill Speed.

In October 2019, 77 U-TURN was presented at Quinnipiac University.

In February 2020, 77 U-Turn was presented at Columbia University Graduate School of Social Work.

In October 2021, 77 U-Turn was presented at Madison Arts Barn in Madison, CT in conjunction with NAMI Shoreline (National Alliance on Mental Illness.)

In July 2022, 77 U-TURN was produced at Legacy Theatre in Branford, CT. The production was directed by Keely Baisden Knudsen, stage managed by Sarah Pero, and lighting designed by Kevin Michael-Reed.

In the above productions the cast was as follows:

JULIE & OTHER CHARACTERS Julie Fitzpatrick

CAST:

JULIE: Mid 30s: quirky, kind, hurt, funny. Actress plays multiple characters and has command of several accents and voices.

Note on Multiple Characters:

All roles in the script are played by the same actress. When speaking to someone or something other than the audience, Julie's dialogue is in quotation marks.

Note on songs:

The lyrics in the script are written by the author and each production is encouraged to compose fresh melodies for them.

Note on Shakespearean text:

The Shakespeare monologue is Ophelia's from Hamlet: Act 3, Scene 1.

Note on setting:

The play takes place in Guilford, CT in the winter of 2017 and in the 1980s and 1990s in flashbacks.

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At rise, JULIE is singing a lullaby to her unseen toddler son. They are sitting on a bed, or a suggestion of one.

JULIE. *Singing.*

Fine time to dream, no need to weep - breathe deep
Sleep my baby, sleep my darling
You can trust this, no more fussin
Put your hand in mine, we will be just fine
Let's start counting sheep and softly go to sleep
Now my baby, now my darling
Sleep my baby, sleep my darling
Time to wind it down, no more loud sounds
I'm turning out the light, let's give in to night...

(End of lullaby. After Julie trusts the hush in the room, she begins speaking to the audience. Her tone is light and the pace moves at a nice clip. Julie has humor in her voice which allows the play to emotionally travel as it unfolds – there is frustration with her boy's sleeplessness here, but it isn't morbid - just dryly humorous.) Don't let him hear me. Don't let him sense me stirring so he thinks I'm still there to referee his recurrent wrestling match with sleep. Little Guy tries to kick it, fight it, defy it – tosses, turns, hollers. Since he was days old, these nightly face-offs with sleep. I ride waves of claustrophobia lying there, feeling trapped. Clenched jaw, pulsing calves, breath held. Singing softly sometimes helps - and then finally, finally, finally a deep inhalation in out, in out. I heard it... I think, didn't I? It's like a sleep-whale watch – *(She sees the whales in her imagination here – points them out.)* Brother Den yelling 'saw one!' Me yelling 'saw one!' But really, it's just a wave - not a whale, right? With Little Guy, it's just a breath – not slumber, right? Watching his belly rise and fall, though, his hands soften and open, I think, yes! Sleep! Saw one! Kiss him, bless him, sing a little more and then tiptoe out into the cold air... *(She wraps herself in a sweater and crosses downstage, passing through "a*

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door” to the outside world. Throughout the next section she carries a few boxes from the trunk into the apartment.) The crisp, cool air, the fresh bracing, air. Pop the trunk. Unload another boxful. I’ve been moving, moving, moving again. *(She looks up at the “roofline” above. This is a peaceful, quiet moment.)* Snowflakes fall on the roof of our sweet apartment upstairs with the high ceilings and lots of light - little ice crystals blessing the space. So quiet here - this quiet night - this quiet town. New York City is like another planet – here, there are no sirens, no honking, no rushing masses, no yelling outside... or inside. We are no longer there. We are in stillness now. *(She turns and hears something across the lot.)* And then shoveling, shoveling, shoveling. I look out across the lot to the walkway over there... The shoveling stops. *(She sees SHOVELING GUY and begins the dialogue with him, shifting her focus as she plays the two roles - a device the actress will continue to utilize as she speaks with, and as, other characters in the play. Shoveling Guy has a rough, mysterious voice laced with emotion and gravelly warmth, which is revealed as they connect.)*

SHOVELING GUY. Moving in?

JULIE. Cigarette dangling, earflaps hanging down to keep him warm. He’s gruff, but not unkind-looking. We take each other in through the flakes, which seem to be getting heavier. I nod “hello.”

SHOVELING GUY. Lotta stuff there,

JULIE. He says. “Yeah,” I say, resigned, embarrassed, so very aware of how true that is.

SHOVELING GUY. Loooootta stuff. More there than is there,

JULIE. He says. I didn’t hear him right. “Sorry?”

SHOVELING GUY. A lot there,

JULIE. He says. Did he mean a lot in my boxes? I’m wiped.

I’m not thinking clearly. I turn away - not rudely, but I have to keep going - make progress.

SHOVELING GUY. Why Guilford?

JULIE. He calls out from across the lot. He’s leaning on his shovel now and looking at me like he knows me, but I don’t know him, do I?

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Did he grow up here too? I'm terrible with names - and faces. "I'm from here," I say unsure. "I just haven't lived here in a long time."

SHOVELING GUY. Here, here?

JULIE. He's gesturing at our apartment building. "No, no - about 3 miles that way - on U-Turn - that's where I grew up."

SHOVELING GUY. Your family still there?

JULIE. "Yeah, pretty much," I say. "I mean not on U-Turn but here in Guilford. They're on Upper now down by the water."

SHOVELING GUY. Ya been back?

JULIE. "Where?"

SHOVELING GUY. U-Turn.

JULIE. "No, no. That's the first house - my folks made a great move a while back. Upper is lovely - lots of big windows and natural light. They needed that - all the natural light."

SHOVELING GUY. Yeah - who did? Who needed the light?

JULIE. "My folks, my folks," I say. "That first house on U-Turn - it was too dark, lots of trees..." I stop talking - there's no way to describe that dark.

SHOVELING GUY. You oughta go back.

JULIE. *(She is thrown by this suggestion and deflects the attention to him.)* "I'm sorry - who are you?" I say finally.

SHOVELING GUY. I'm nobody - I'm just the Shoveling Guy.

JULIE. He puffs on his cigarette and keeps talking. We're the only two people out and I don't hear his words as much as breathe in his mix of gravitas and harmlessness and clovey cigarette smoke that's wafting over me, reminding me of post-show bars and theater people. It's comforting somehow - this winter banter. "What are you doing out here?" I ask him.

SHOVELING GUY. I'm shoveling all the walkways around this little complex,

JULIE. He says all proud suddenly straightening up-

SHOVELING GUY. I like to make 'em neat and safe so when everybody wakes up in the morning the only thing their feet might stumble on is a grain of the salt I sprinkled. Nobody is taking a tumble on my winter watch.

JULIE. He puffs and looks up at the sky.

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SHOVELING GUY. *(He is emotional here – sharing himself)* I lost a brother in a snowstorm and whenever the flakes start, I come outside and get to shoveling. I'm lazy usually - I wish that weren't the case but it is - that said, when the snow starts, I'm a new man. "Let's get to shoveling!" "Let's clear the walkways!" "Let's do this!" I hear Ted's voice in my head. He had more energy than 10 of me put together. He's up there in the stars behind those clouds.

JULIE. *(She looks at the sky, blinking through the flakes)* He's so certain. I find myself blinking through the flakes to find Ted too. "I'm sorry," I say, but I'm not sure he hears me. "I lost a brother too," I say - surprising myself.

SHOVELING GUY. Yeah - when did he die?

JULIE. "Oh, um, he didn't - I mean he didn't die - he's still alive – he just got sick."

SHOVELING GUY. You oughta go home, kid.

JULIE. "I am," I say.

SHOVELING GUY. Nah, you oughta go to U-Turn.

JULIE. *(Frustrated)* "I am home! This is our new home. No more New York City, no more miserable marriage, no more choking for air." I lose my grip on the box and it drops. "Shit, I could use some of your salt on my hands," I say hoping to share a chuckle, but I look up and the Shoveling Guy is gone... I look down at the broken box - my wedding album has come loose, splayed open, flakes on our faces crinkling the pages...what happened? *(Quiet for a moment.)* I gather the broken box, stumble inside, and somehow meet sleep... *(Julie sits on the edge of the bed to suggest brief sleep and the passage of time. Then the lights come brightly up on morning. She gestures as if to take Little Guy's hand and walk him across the space for pre-school drop off. The mood is determined – Julie aims to start the day on a fresh, high note.)* The next morning, we find ourselves in the bright lights of Cribs to Crayolas. I kiss Little Guy goodbye-for-the-day, dodging strollers and backpacks and binkies and bottles, sneezes and sniffles and wailing and waves. *(She waves back at Little Guy and crosses to another area where she sits in the car – or a suggestion of one - and drives... she is surprised by where*

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she finds herself.) I'm in the car and it takes me down Route 146 not 95 like I'd planned. I should be on the highway, but I keep hearing Shoveling Guy in my head.

SHOVELING GUY. Ya been back?

JULIE. I drive past cattails and marshes wearing snow hats, I take in the morning sky streaked with scarves of pinks and yellows and pale grayish-blues - a canvas that is wintery and rugged. Painting after painting here. I had forgotten that. This landscape takes my breath away - I know it like the back of my hand. I'm drinking it, eating it: the colors, the branches, the stones, the surface of the sound glittering: "Hello again!" And then I'm on U-Turn... My God, I'm on U-Turn. (*She becomes shaky as she sees the landscape and narrates to herself.*) My mouth is dry, my breath labored. The mossy pond at the bottom of the street, the house that looks like a conch shell - which I never understood. Jesse, the blind girl, lived up there with the soft hands and the strong voice. My own hands are shaking on the steering wheel now, gripping the leather like it's holding me in place, holding me together. I should turn around. No, just drive past the house and do the loop - it's a horseshoe for goodness sakes: U-Turn, duh. I'm panicking now - my heart beating in my clammy chest - everything feels soppy. (*She acts out the following as it is happening.*) Foot on the gas, but then the brake. I pull over and park. Damn. I keep my eyes on my hands though. Shaking less, but splotchy from tension. I sit and sit there. And then, my body gets out of the car. I see the Big Oak at the bottom of the drive. (*Crossing to a tree, or a suggestion of one.*) "Hello, honey," I say. "You're bigger now: thick and wide and hard and sturdy." I lean into it - trace the raised roads of its rough bark. (*To the tree:*) "Hi. Hi. Hi." Footsteps. Footsteps. Footsteps. (*The character of SARAH appears and Julie again plays both parts in turn - Sarah speaks with a high, breathy tone and has a buoyant, welcoming air.*)

SARAH. Can I help you?

JULIE. Her face is open and kind, her ponytail swinging back and forth, back and forth.

SARAH. I didn't mean to startle you! I was just out for my jog.

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JULIE. Her eyes search me... I search for words.

SARAH. Can I help you?

JULIE. “This is my house,” I say - gesturing toward the saltbox, which only now do I actually see.

SARAH. I’m sorry?

JULIE. She says and I hear myself back in my head. “I mean it was my house – was – was. I grew up in this house. 77.”

SARAH. Oh my goodness, how neat!

JULIE. She says.

SARAH. Would you like to come in?!

JULIE. She is so light. So unencumbered.

SARAH. Come in and look around?

JULIE. My bones then vacate my body. I’m jello, jelly, jiggly. I feel a stutter coming on. “No- no- no- I - I - don’t need to come in. I - I - I don’t want to put you out. Thank you, thank you, though.”

SARAH. Oh, please! I would be happy to show you around!

JULIE. My bones return somehow, and we walk up the driveway. We actually walk up the driveway. Same curve in it, same crack in the asphalt. *(She demonstrates these actions as she describes them – bringing us back there too. She has adrenaline and nerves coursing through her during this early scene with Sarah so she is almost giddy.)* I run my toe along its jagged path just like I used to. Same bushes. “Does the forsyth-”

SARAH. Forsythia still blooms, yes!

JULIE. She finishes my sentence. How did she know?

SARAH. Yes, for that little window in the spring - yes!

JULIE. “Yes, I love that,” I say! “So bright and yellow.”

SARAH. Yellow, yes.

JULIE. “And the honeysuckle?” I’m babbling now, bubbling over for some reason, instantaneously injected with her verve. “Do you see the honeysuckle as you walk up U-Turn? Do you pick it and pull it apart and taste its sweet honey?” She murmurs:

SARAH. Hmhmhmhmhm.

JULIE. I don’t think she heard me. Why am I talking about honeysuckle? But I’m not gonna stop now. “We had a neighbor Matt Barrett across the way. Don’t suppose they’re still there?”

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He taught me how to eat the honeysuckle and then we'd have Breyer's Ice Cream and Entenmann's Coffee Cake up on his counter noshing away - do you know them...?" I trail off - she's bopping ahead and I'm not sure I'm even talking out loud... I slow down and see the house. Stop and stare at it. (*She's shocked by the color.*) "It's RED!" I call to her loudly - too loudly, I think. All my levels feel off.

SARAH. It is - yes! The people before us, but after you, I suppose - they made it that way and I just think it is THE perfect color against the trees!

JULIE. She keeps talking and walking and I send it a telepathic message: (*Addressing the house*) "She doesn't know - she doesn't know your history. I'm so sorry. It's really not your color." Gravel, gravel, gravel. I shlush on it up to the great granite front step from Stony Creek Quarry. Same corral color, same massive block of stone, same ridges. I want to hunch down and finger touch its speckled grooves. How could it still be here I wonder? I feel disoriented, lightheaded.

SARAH. Come in-

JULIE. She says, turning to me and then:

SARAH. Are you alright? You look a little pale.

JULIE. "Oh yes. I'm fine" - I lie.

SARAH. Would you like some water?

JULIE. "Oh, sure thank you," I say, and I hope I stop talking then because I want to say, "I'm so thirsty I could drink your sink. My mouth is sandpaper and I'm fairly certain I'm panting. Am I panting? I might fall over and vomit but don't mind me, I'm very neat. I'll clean it up. You just step over me and I'll get out of your hair asap."

SARAH. Here you go, (*A cup of water is gracefully handed over, received, and sipped.*)

JULIE. She says, and I drink and drink and drink... We walk in. (*Improbably, Julie walks back into the home to which she never expected to return and takes in its improvements.*) New furniture, open space, fresh paint. (*Addressing the house - she is delighted by its transformations.*) "Oh, I'm so glad there's a fresh coat or two or three on you - no more clipper-ship peeling

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wallpaper!” Staircase, hallway, lighter colors - all lighter colors. Everything is cleared out. I exhale. Life goes on, doesn't it? There are new chapters - even for walls. There is function and order here – there are “minds at work” as they sing in Hamilton.

SARAH. We're thinking of adding solar-

JULIE. She says.

SARAH. That's why some of those trees are wrapped in ribbon – we'll cut those back and let in the sun!

(Talking to the ceiling - thrilled:)

JULIE. “You're going to get solar! You're going to get energy from the sun! Think of how that will be for you!” Do houses benefit from Vitamin D? Of course they do - what the heck.

SARAH. And the kitchen-

JULIE. She says, and something drops like a box in my belly.

(Julie loses her internal balance here – her flashbacks will begin coming now and we will see where her spirit broke in this house.) It catches my eye - the space where the, the, the-

“There used to be a microwave there,” I say. And my body is leaning on what is still a counter where I remember there being a counter – it is holding me up, holding me together. *(Julie enters a flashback and we travel back in time - this can be explored with lighting and sound changes or another element that captures a shift in time and place. Within the world of the flashbacks and throughout the play, Julie is literally 3-10 years old but what's most essential is to capture the sense of a young old soul for whom the prolonged experience of her brother's drawn-out, dramatic, cyclical mental illness both stunts and ages her... At this juncture, though, she is elated that D is home.)* The doorbell rings and I'm 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 all at once. It's D! It's D! It's Brother D! I'm jumping up and down. *(The character of D enters and greets his younger sister and then gets down on the floor - laying on his back as she “flies on him” - and then they “flip” so that Julie is flying on D and Julie is Wonder Woman imagining her “cape” billowing in the wind behind her. Here, he is healthy, lucid and fun.)*

D. Hey Pal, hey Pal, hey Pal!

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JULIE. He gets to me in a flash and he's on his back with his arms straight up and I'm flying on him – his palms on my belly. *(Singing the theme song of Wonder Woman.)* “Wonder Woman! All the world is waiting for you!” We sing and my cape catches the wind. I'm soaring with my power bracelets and my best Linda Carter saving-the-day look on. *(Singing again.)* “Wonder Woman! All the world is waiting for you!” I make a great landing and he gets up.

D. Tell me everything, Pal, what is new?

JULIE. “Oh, D! I heard Mom laughing when you were coming in. What did you say to her? You always make her laugh. How do you do that? How? Did you forget your jacket again or were you out jogging? Are you thirsty? You want some water or an orange? ‘Member the day you had 10 in a row?!... Oh - I want to color with you – you color every line so finely filled in. Look - I always scribble, mess - hate that! Oh D - I know what's new! I'm in that musical I was telling you about - Babes in Arms. It's going to be so fun. Think you can come? ... What book is that? Catcher in the Rye again. I love when he says, ‘I damn near gave my kid sister Phoebe a buzz, though.’ Cause Phoebe makes you think of me, right? Well, you can damn near call me anytime ‘cause I know Holden's itching to make a telephone call but doesn't want to wake their parents. Well, I am fast when I hear the phone... I want to go back to Skidmore so I can hold your hand and leap between the gaps in the brick walls that go all around campus and then we can make spin art on Parents' Weekend!... Oh, D... *(A tonal shift here – the palette starts to turn darker. Somehow, she suspects D had something to do with her destroyed table.)* Did you see my table? What happened to my table? I was walking up to Top Rock after school. Matt didn't want to go, but I went anyway, and I looked down over the edge to where the train tracks are and I know you were having friends over Saturday. They're so cool - your friends - and you were going to Top Rock. One of 'em mustn't have been thinking or been playing a joke, but do you know what happened? My table, my sweet table went over the edge and it's down at the bottom now, it's upside down and

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it's broken. It looks really sad. The legs are going in different directions and my dolly is gone too - my sweet dolly. Is she down there, do you think?... Are you alright, D? You're leaning on the counter. Did you want to heat something up? Here I'll open the new microwave for you. I love this thing - it does everything! *(She now sees his severely cut hands for the first time and it stops her in her tracks.)* Oh. What happened to your-? What happened to your-? What happened to your-? Hands?" Time stops. Silence. Slow motion. I look at the hands - the handsome hands with the long fingers, pale skin and freckles here and there, but now they have lines on them. Red jagged lines. Red rips. Red tears in the skin. From wrist to middle finger, from middle finger to pointer, from pointer to pinky, from pinky to ring. From wrist to middle finger, from middle finger to pointer, from pointer to pinky, from pinky to ring. Over and over, the way I color - messy tic tac toe, bloody tic tac toe. No x's and o's - just slash, scratch, slash, scratch. One is coming open now - a red tear drop forming.

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