

**KEEPING OUT**

**THE JONESES**



SCENE ONE

Scrim w/projection: September 1965 *St. Louis Dispatch* newspaper ad for Paddock Woods housing development featuring “The Contemporary” model, including photo of open concept mid-century modern kitchen, dining and living room staged with bright, friendly décor.

Scrim rises revealing the rooms depicted photo. There’s a sales area with desk, site map on easel, brochures, etc.

*(MR. RACINE, a hyper-vigilant realtor ushers client his client BARBARA JO JONES inside. She’s 31 years old, high energy & jocular. He remains in foyer as she tours)*

BARBARA JO

Would you look at this.

MR. RACINE

Normally, yes.

BARBARA JO

You’re getting sassy.

MR. RACINE

I apologize.

BARBARA JO

It was a compliment. Look at that fireplace.

MR. RACINE

Would you like to see the features?

BARBARA JO

I would think the wood goes in here and the smoke goes up there.

*(MR. RACINE smother irritation, takes a worn copy of Sales Smarts from his briefcase & reads. It’s a standoff. BARBARA JO gives up and exits to rear of house)*

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* Oh my!

*(MR. RACINE doesn't take the bait)*

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* Land sakes. You didn't tell me there was a powder bath!

MR. RACINE

I did. When you told me about the hotel in San Francisco-

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* I know. I just wanted to make sure you were listening. They called it a Water Closet, but I prefer Powder room, don't you?

MR. RACINE

I've never thought about it.

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* Well isn't that what you're doing now? I'd rather say I'm powdering my nose than using water in a closet. Everyone knows what you're using the water for. I suppose men prefer Water Closet since they don't powder their noses. Speaking of closets!

MR. RACINE

Which ones?

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* Exactly!

MR. RACINE

That- that was an actual question.

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* You know what you should put on the flyers?

MR. RACINE

Do tell.

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* Critter-free storage!

MR. RACINE

*(Beat)* I would think “critter-free” is an expectation, not a selling point, Mrs. Jones.

*(BARBARA JO enters at some point during:)*

BARBARA JO

I’m telling you. Women need storage, and that’s who chooses the house, even if men pretend otherwise. I’m sure your book says so. But storage is lackluster. So you humanize the mundane with a quirky specific like ‘mice free Christmas decorations.’ Or, oh God... ‘*spider* free Christmas decorations’... now *that* will catch a woman’s eye. Then underneath: ample indoor storage. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had to shake mouse droppings out of my garland or wait for Joseph Lee to de-spider a box.

MR. RACINE

That’s actually very interesting.

BARBARA JO

When someone says actually with the compliment it means they’re surprised that the idea came from you. You know that, right?

MR. RACINE

I didn’t.

BARBARA JO

Mean it or know it?

MR. RACINE

Both.

BARBARA JO

You did mean it. But it’s okay. You didn’t know you meant it. I’m out of bounds anyways. My job is to choose a house.

MR. RACINE

How’s that going?

BARBARA JO

Getting there. *(Begins to exit)*

MR. RACINE

*(Casts line)* It’s on the left.

BARBARA JO

*(Fish on)* Really.

MR. RACINE

We had an issue.

BARBARA JO

The me part of we thinks I'm doing great. And the client is always right.

MR. RACINE

Unless the master is on the left.

BARBARA JO

A laundry room doesn't need to be the size of a bingo hall and you can tell your architecty people I said so.

MR. RACINE

Alright. But Taj Mahal would be 'architectier' than bingo hall.

BARBARA JO

Well where has fun you been all afternoon?

MR. RACINE

Waiting in foyers.

BARBARA JO

And it's been a nice break, hasn't it?

*(She realizes teasing crossed line into taunting. She's playful, but never cruel)*

BARBARA JO

I don't mean to be difficult.

MR. RACINE

There are no difficult clients, only challenges and solutions.

BARBARA JO

Good gravy. If that book of yours denies the existence of difficult people, I suggest we burn it in the fireplace I don't know how to use and make s'mores.

MR. RACINE

You aren't.

BARBARA JO

Difficult?

MR. RACINE

The only client to make the request.

BARBARA JO

Oh. So it's common?

MR. RACINE

One other client. A woman last year would only tour with her husband.

BARBARA JO

That's kind of sweet.

MR. RACINE

Yes, except that her husband had passed and she was referring to his ghost.

BARBARA JO

Goodness gracious. How heartbreaking. A real live Mrs. Muirhead.

MR. RACINE

Yes. I was happy to accommodate. But I knew the reason.

BARBARA JO

Just come on out ask. I'm an open book.

MR. RACINE

I thought I just did. My job is to help my clients.

BARBARA JO

I never said I didn't want your help.

MR. RACINE

What am I missing?

BARBARA JO

I've never don't this before, but aren't there a few more steps in the process?

MR. RACINE

Yes.

BARBARA JO

That's where you come in. I found my way around just fine. Kitchen. Dining. Living.

MR. RACINE

There's a little more to it than that.

BARBARA JO

Alright. Tell me .

MR. RACINE

This is a cutting edge post-war design inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright that replaces formality with flexibility and combines living and dining areas into one space to optimize for the casual atmosphere of daily life.

BARBARA JO

I like that. Eat wherever you like. Bath mat. Place mat. Same thing.

MR. RACINE

I don't think that's what the architect had in mind.

BARBARA JO

Well it would be fine with me. Do you want to know what I see?

MR. RACINE

Of course.

BARBARA JO

The house where we could finally host Thanksgiving. Our apartment doesn't even hold the cousins. There's enough room for two tables here. We could have both families. If that's what Frank Lloyd What's-His-Name had in mind, then he hit the mark. I suppose we'll have to invite squeaky aunt Martha and her horrible husbands.

MR. RACINE

Husbands?

BARBARA JO

Only one of them is current. I'd serve two turkeys. And two stuffings. Two Jell-O molds. And oyster stuffing. No one'll eat it, but I'd use every inch of this counter space.

MR. RACINE

Julia Child has competition.

BARBARA JO

Oh I take bird day very seriously. *(Beat)* I don't mean to belittle your expertise, Mr. Racine. But people often tell me what to think. I'm guessing you don't experience that.

MR. RACINE

Would you like to sit down?

BARBARA JO

What I'd like is a turkey sandwich and a Nesbitts. I'm sorry we've kept you past lunch.

MR. RACINE

How about some cookies and coffee?

BARBARA JO

Now you're talking. *(White flag)* Won't you come in?

*(MR. RACINE enters kitchen, sets book on counter, opens cupboard)*

MR. RACINE

Chocolate chip or Nilla Wafers?

BARBARA JO

Yes.

*(BARBARA JO looks through his book)*

MR. RACINE

Good choice. And yes, you may read my book

BARBARA JO

I'm so sorry. My mother taught me better. I've just been so curious.

MR. RACINE

When someone says "just" with an apology, they're trying to minimize their transgression. You know that, right?

BARBARA JO

Touché , Mr. Racine. But I *have* to ask why someone as bright as you trusts a book that uses a dollar sign for an S?

MR. RACINE

It's gotten me this far.

BARBARA JO

Your legs have gotten you this far.

MR. RACINE

That's probably true.

BARBARA JO

Well there's an oxymoron. Something is either true or its not.

MR. RACINE

That's definitely true. This is supplemental. I like to stay sharp.

*(MR. RACINE preps coffee pot)*

BARBARA JO

Look at you. You've got a leg up on rocket scientists, do you know that?

MR. RACINE

How's that?

BARBARA JO

My sister works at NASA, and she said not one of the men who launch rockets into space can operate a coffee maker. Can you imagine that?

MR. RACINE

Well there's can't and there's won't.

BARBARA JO

Now isn't that the truth. Those panels with hundreds of buttons, and a coffee maker. *(Pushes invisible button)* Power. We have liftoff. You've liberated me, Mr. Racine. From now on, I'm going to tell the men who pull me out of meetings to make coffee.

*(MR. RACINE serves coffee & cookies)*

BARBARA JO

Ohhh thank you. This makes two major food groups today. Waffles and cookies.

*(BARBARA JO pours significant amount of sugar in her coffee, takes mound of cookies, munches & sips liberally as MR. RACINE adjusts easel, lays out paperwork)*

MR. RACINE

I'm sorry?

BARBARA JO

Nothing. I'll stop being a distraction.

*(BARBARA JO imbibes continuously throughout this scene, refilling cookie plate and drinking many cups of coffee. MR. RACINE finishes prepping and sits)*

BARBARA JO

Please don't say "let's get down to business."

MR. RACINE

I wasn't going to.

BARBARA JO

Good. I'm sorry. It reminds me of a car salesman. I should know that you wouldn't say that. What were you going to say?

MR. RACINE

That we're going to run out of cookies.

BARBARA JO

You'd better get in quick.

MR. RACINE

What I was going to say is that we aren't in any hurry. That you're in charge. And I'm here to help however I can.

BARBARA JO

I've got goosebumps. I'm serious. Look.

MR. RACINE

It's probably the sugar.

BARBARA JO

Or nerves.

MR. RACINE

Would you prefer to wait?

BARBARA JO

No. Let's get started or I'm just going to zing straight to the ceiling.

MR. RACINE

Alright. Let's start with model. Are you leaning towards any one in particular?

BARBARA JO

This one. As long as he likes it. He will. He'll be making birdhouses in the garage until the cows come home.

MR. RACINE

I think that's a good choice. The way you talked about game nights. And family.

*(One word prayer)*

BARBARA JO

Someday.

*(MR. RACINE writes)*

MR. RACINE

The Contemporary.

BARBARA JO

Maybe we should wait.

MR. RACINE

Easy to make changes. Just getting our ducks in a row.

*(BARBARA JO gets more cookies from the cupboard and replenishes plate during:)*

BARBARA JO

Goodness. Look at me. My hands are shaking like Miss Cantrell. She was my high school music teacher. Her little hands shook like leaves in the wind. Poor thing couldn't conduct to save her life. I don't know what made me mention her. When I graduated, I gave her little porcelain poodle figurine because she wore a gold poodle brooch all the time. And as soon as it bobbed in her palm I thought, "for God's sake, Barbara Jo, the last thing you give someone who can't hold still is porcelain." It was the thought that counts, I suppose. *(Beat)* I'm sorry to run on.

MR. RACINE

No need to be nervous.

BARBARA JO

That's easy for you to say. I draw up contracts all day, and don't give it another thought. When its your name at the signature lines and dollar signs, it's something else all together.

MR. RACINE

I remember.

BARBARA JO

When was your first house?

MR. RACINE

Three years ago. I surprised my wife.

BARBARA JO

That's quite a gift.

MR. RACINE

It was more of a honey-do. But I caught her off guard. She'd been eyeing a house on our walks. It went on the market during her third trimester and we weren't walking that far anymore. I pretended to take her on a drive, pulled up in front of the SOLD sign and handed her the key.

BARBARA JO

What did she do?

MR. RACINE

Went into labor. Our daughter was born five hours later.

BARBARA JO

You're kidding.

MR. RACINE

No, ma'am. Three of us crossed the threshold for the first time together.

BARBARA JO

You're a romantic, Mr. Racine.

MR. RACINE

Don't tell anyone. It'll ruin my austere reputation.

BARBARA JO

My mouth is too full to tell. You'd better get in on these.

MR. RACINE

Shall we move on?

BARBARA JO

Yes. Let's line up some more ducks.

MR. RACINE

Lot selection.

BARBARA JO

Oh. I liked the street with all the trees.

MR. RACINE

Hyde Park Drive. The yellow dots are available.

*(BARBARA JO peruses site map)*

BARBARA JO

What about 17? Corners are good, right? It feels open.

MR. RACINE

Good choice. That's a premium lot.

BARBARA JO

Premium meaning what?

MR. RACINE

Since its on the corner, it's 8 feet deeper than every lot on the street. You'd get sun exposure on both sides and sunsets from the backyard.

BARBARA JO

See? Your expertise is kicking in. Is it a premium price too?

MR. RACINE

In fact it is not. The 8 feet are in the city setback area, so it doesn't affect the per square foot price. It's taxable, but doesn't impact our up front cost. You happened on the best lot of Hyde Park Drive.

BARBARA JO

Then why hasn't anyone chosen it yet?

MR. RACINE

One thing I've learned is to never question what someone believes to be a treasure.

BARBARA JO

I'm telling you. Print t-shirts, Mr. Racine. Lot 17 it is.

*(She stress eats, he writes)*

MR. RACINE

Lot... 17.

*(MR. RACINE affixes a red dot on site map)*

BARBARA JO

Just like that.

MR. RACINE

Just like that. You're a few pen swipes away.

BARBARA JO

Three days ago we were eating eggs and looking at a photo of this room in the newspaper. Now we're a dot. The queen will have her castle.

MR. RACINE

Serving tureens of stuffing to her subjects.

BARBARA JO

Oh I like that. But the queen will be serving with a *wooden* spoon. I don't own a piece of silver.

MR. RACINE

There's time.

BARBARA JO

Its by choice, thanks to Grandma Dean.

MR. RACINE

Family scuffle?

BARBARA JO

More like a Stalinist regime collapse. I'd like you to imagine a raisin soaked in lemon juice. That was Grandma Dean. I called her Grandma Mean.

MR. RACINE

To her face?

BARBARA JO

Oh no. I smiled and nodded through all of her nonsense. But I retaliated with frosting.

MR. RACINE

Well now you've got my attention.

BARBARA JO

I won't take it personally that I didn't have your attention before. There's only so long you can listen to someone blather on like I do. Mother used to set a card on the dinner table: green meant I could talk, orange meant keep it closed.

MR. RACINE

Did it work?

BARBARA JO

I tried, Mr. Racine. I swear I did. But trying isn't doing, is it?

MR. RACINE

No. It's not.

BARBARA JO

And of course I stepped in it when father's biggest client was over for dinner. His wife asked me to hold a dish of carrots and I said that I was already holding my tongue like the card next to mama's wine glass told me to.

MR. RACINE

No dessert for you.

BARBARA JO

Actually, she laughed. Everyone did. But I could hardly swallow my supper for the shame. I donated my twirly dresses as penance. And now here I am running my mouth about running my mouth. But I caught myself, so that's something. What was I saying before?

MR. RACINE

Frosting.

BARBARA JO

Oh yes. Well, she made my brother and I polish her silver every single Sunday and afterwards she'd serve cake at her precious Louis the Eighth dining table. And it was always the same awful cake: this yellow, dry-as-a-bone concoction that tasted like an old almond you found in your pocket. You didn't dare drop a crumb on that table, and she took every opportunity to remind us how much it cost.

MR. RACINE

Which was?

BARBARA JO

I'm embarrassed to say. Now her frosting was a different story. It was *heaven*. Thick, and pink; just the right amount of sweet. I told her it would've won at the state fair but she said she refused to serve food in the same building where pigs and cows did their business. Anyways, I choked every crumb down every Sunday... but I left every ounce of frosting on my plate. How my mouth would water, Mr. Racine. It was a sacrifice of gargantuan proportion for a child, let me tell you. And when we were finished, I'd stray behind and wipe all of my frosting under her beloved table.

MR. RACINE

You didn't.

BARBARA JO

Oh yes I did. There must've been a pound of it muddled up like a pink hornet's nest. I knew she'd be on her bony knees one day and find it.

MR. RACINE

Stealthy.

BARBARA JO

When she passed, the first thing I checked was under that table.

MR. RACINE

And?

BARBARA JO

The nest was gone. I'm sure she knew it was me. We sold the table at her estate sale and I donated every penny to the soup kitchen and she would've hated it, if that tells you anything.

MR. RACINE

She certainly sounds like a challenge.

BARBARA JO

Challenging is interesting. That woman was just plain constipated. *(Beat)* Goodness gracious. Joseph would've tapped my knee by now. That's our sign if I'm about to fall off a cliff. But I've splattered all over the ground in his absence, haven't I?

MR. RACINE

Not at all. And if you had, the plush carpets would break your fall.

BARBARA JO

You're smooth, Mr. Racine.

MR. RACINE

We can wait on the rest of this. Why don't you give the Pantone wheel a whirl?

BARBARA JO

Are you getting me out of your hair?

MR. RACINE

You're hard on yourself, Mrs. Jones. The more decisions you make, the faster we get to the finish line. Go pick out some colors. It helps to see them in the space; the light's different in every room.

*(MR. RACINE gives BARBARA JO the wheel of paint colors, continues paperwork)*

BARBARA JO

Any color, any room?

MR. RACINE

Any color.

*(She peruses, MR. RACINE works)*

BARBARA JO

So many choices.

Ogling Olive. Stratosphere Blue. I wonder who names these? What a job.

MR. RACINE

Mmm hmmm.

BARBARA JO

What do you think Stratosphere Blue?

MR. RACINE

Honestly?

BARBARA JO

Always.

MR. RACINE

Its a little traditional for this architecture. Go bold. Keep in mind the colors will inform each other in an open space like this.

BARBARA JO

Look at you knowing our paint colors will be pen pals.

Hold the banana. That's what we say for phone. Cantaloupe Dream. Isn't it friendly?

MR. RACINE

Very pretty.

BARBARA JO

I wouldn't have thought orange. But its a 'sherbetty' orange, isn't it? Not too much.

MR. RACINE

Mmm hmmm.

BARBARA JO

I'm bothering you, aren't I?

MR. RACINE

It'll go faster if I focus.

BARBARA JO

I'll start in the bedrooms.

*(BARBARA JO pours coffee)*

MR. RACINE

Maybe its time we switch over to water.

BARBARA JO

You mean me.

MR. RACINE

I do. You were true to your word about the cookies.

BARBARA JO

Being true to your word is important. The first box was nerves. The second was excitement. I call that growth. And I left you two.

MR. RACINE

Accentuate the positive.

BARBARA JO

*(Sings)* "Don't mess with mister in-between..." Ok I'm going.

*(BARBARA JO begins to exit, returns to plate and takes a cookie)*

BARBARA JO

One.

*(BARBARA JO exits to back of house with Pantone swatches. MR. RACINE works)*

*(JOSEPH LEE JONES, 33 years-old,  
introvert with keen intellect, knocks & enters  
simultaneously. He's wearing a suit)*

JOSEPH LEE

Hello?... Oh. Hello. The receptionist said to let myself in--

MR. RACINE

Check-in's next door.

JOSEPH LEE

Excuse me?

MR. RACINE

For laborers. There are signs.

BARBARA JO

*(Offstage)* Joseph Lee? That you honey?

*(BARBARA JO enters, greets him warmly)*

JOSEPH LEE

Sorry I'm late.

BARBARA JO

Mr. Thomas?

JOSEPH LEE

Yes.

BARBARA JO

We should have known. Oh well, Mr. Racine and I have been lining up ducks, haven't we? Mr. Racine, this is Joseph Lee .

*(Tide turns; an elephant fills the room)*

MR. RACINE

Hello.

*(MR.RACINE wields passivity like a weapon.)*

*BARBARA JO pushes on with subdued purpose, JOSEPH LEE is well-versed & weary)*

BARBARA JO  
Would you like some coffee?

JOSEPH LEE  
I'm fine.

BARBARA JO  
Where do we start?

MR. RACINE  
Up to you.

BARBARA JO  
I can show him around.

MR. RACINE  
Yes, you can.

BARBARA JO  
We toured all of the models, but if you like this one as much as I do... we got the paperwork ready. No pressure.

*(Amused despite himself & the situation)*

JOSEPH LEE  
None at all.

BARBARA JO  
Look at this kitchen. Can you believe it?

JOSEPH LEE  
It's spacious.

BARBARA JO

Time to get our turkey platter out of the box at long last. Wait 'til you see the garage.

*(BARBARA JO & JOSEPH LEE exit to the rear of the house. MR. RACINE doesn't move. It's silent. JONESES re-enter)*

BARBARA JO

This is it.

MR. RACINE

It?

BARBARA JO

It's the model we'd like.

MR. RACINE

It's rather late, so if you leave your address I'll have the office mail the papers when they're ready.

BARBARA JO

I saw them.

JOSEPH LEE

Honey.

MR. RACINE

There's more to this than what you think you saw, Mrs. Jones. You've never done this before.

BARBARA JO

So, not just a pen swipe?

MR. RACINE

It can be.

BARBARA JO

What's the next step?

MR. RACINE

There are questions to be answered.

BARBARA JO

Such as?

MR. RACINE

Where might your financing come from?

JOSEPH LEE

We're paying cash.

MR. RACINE

Lots are filling up quickly. There may not be any available.

BARBARA JO

Since an hour ago?

MR. RACINE

By the time your papers are processed.

BARBARA JO

And when will that be?

MR. RACINE

When we get through the others.

BARBARA JO

Well, thank goodness your job is to help clients however you can.

MR. RACINE

I have a lot of clients.

BARBARA JO

We'd like to sign the offer today.

MR. RACINE

That's not going to be possible.

BARBARA JO

Both purchasing parties are here, in good faith, and we've made our selections.  
How much would this model cost on lot 17?

*(Papers turn like molasses)*

MR. RACINE

\$28,195. If its available.

JOSEPH LEE

That's our offer. \$28,195 cash.

*(BARBARA JO fills in forms, JONESES sign)*

BARBARA JO

There's no financing paperwork, so this is everything, isn't it?

MR. RACINE

It'll be in line with the others.

BARBARA JO

We look forward to hearing from you.

*(BARBARA JO extends her hand)*

MR. RACINE

Mmm hmmm.

BARBARA JO

I didn't wipe frosting under Grandma Mean's table because I minded polishing her silver, Mr. Racine. I knew why she didn't trust her help, as young as I was, and I can't abide people like that. Never will.

*(BARBARA JO & JOSEPH LEE EXIT)*