

SUMMER EVENING

A ten-minute play by Jake Lewis
Inspired by the painting "Summer Evening" by Edward Hopper



Summer Evening

CHARACTERS

Bianca -- 20s

Artie -- 20s

SETTING

The front porch of a house on a sweltering summer night
1946

Summer Evening

Lights rise on:

A front porch, late at night, in the summer of 1946. A single recessed light in the ceiling illuminates the porch, and not much else. Crickets can be heard in the background as well as bugs flying about.

ARTIE and BIANCA are standing next to each other; he is looking up at the porch light as though mesmerized. She is watching him.

She is in a tank and shorts, and he is in a blue T-shirt and slacks.

BIANCA: You keep staring at that thing like that and you'll go blind. *(Playfully)* Aren't I more interesting than that bulb up there?

ARTIE hesitates and then takes her in.

ARTIE: Yeah, of course. I just...

BIANCA: What?

ARTIE: I'm trying to remember something, something about the light...

BIANCA: *(Pointing up.)* My light?

ARTIE: Yeah. No. Maybe?

BIANCA: *(Jokingly.)* What's going on in that brain of yours?

ARTIE looks embarrassed and slightly hurt by her jest.

BIANCA: I'm sorry, Artie. I just meant that since you've been back, you haven't really...you don't look at me like you used to.

ARTIE: *(Thinking out loud.)* Your light...

Summer Evening

BIANCA: *(Trying to understand or help him.)* You can see it from all the way down the street. Ma says it keeps the riff-raff away, but Daddy says there is no riff-raff here, that's why they moved here in the first place! Mr. Bogner next door always complains it's too bright. "It's like I'm back livin' in the damn city!" *(She chuckles at her own joke, but it falls flat with ARTIE.)*

ARTIE: Oh, you can see it a lot farther than that.

BIANCA: Should I turn it off?

ARTIE: No! Don't touch it, or I'll...I'll...

BIANCA: Ok, ok! The light stays on. Sorry, Artie.

ARTIE: You ever wonder why they do it?

BIANCA: Why *who* do *what*?

ARTIE: The bugs. Why they fly up to that light like it's the most beautiful thing they've ever seen. It must be even brighter for them.

BIANCA: I dunno, Artie. It's probably something to do with science. I never did do too good in that class.

ARTIE: Because you couldn't take your eyes off of me!

BIANCA: I recall you doing some staring back, mister.

ARTIE: Well, maybe science wasn't our strong suit, but you've always been a good writer.

BIANCA: Writing is my escape.

ARTIE: All those letters you sent me...seemed like one every day, almost! The other fellas were pretty jealous.

BIANCA: Can you blame me? There's nothing to do in this town even when there isn't a war!

Summer Evening

ARTIE: I'm trying to say I liked them, and I wanted to write back, but every time I tried, I couldn't write the kind of pretty things you did.

She blushes, he nods. There's a brief, uncomfortable silence.

BIANCA: Boy, it's hot! And you in your long pants! Why don't you take something off too so I don't feel so exposed.

ARTIE: Aw, this? This ain't so bad compared to over there.
(*Realizing something.*) Operation Iceberg! (*Laughs.*)

BIANCA: What's so funny?

ARTIE: Oh, nothing. Just...the mission I was on one time over there, it was called Operation Iceberg. Funny, since the place was hotter than Hell.

BIANCA: Reverse psychology or something, trying to trick your mind, maybe.

ARTIE: It sure did something to my mind.

Beat.

BIANCA: Artie, do you remember the last time we stood on this porch together? It was a summer evening, just like this one.

ARTIE: Yeah, sure.

BIANCA: We had just come back from swimming down in the creek, and you was in those cute little trunks of yours.

ARTIE: Those I wish I didn't remember.

BIANCA: And you said, "If I come back in one piece--"

ARTIE: "I'm going to marry you."

BIANCA: And here you are.

Summer Evening

ARTIE: Bee...I'm...I'm not sure I'm in one piece.

BIANCA: (*Deflecting.*) What do you mean? You're standing there in front of me, having a conversation with me.

ARTIE: What about Howie?

BIANCA: (*Taken by surprise.*) Who told you?

ARTIE: It's a small town, Bee, and I'm like a returning hero to most folks...for some reason.

BIANCA: You are a hero. You're my hero.

ARTIE: It's ok, the thing with Howie, I mean. I don't blame ya. You didn't know if I would make it back. And he's a decent enough guy.

BIANCA: He was, until he wasn't.

ARTIE: What? Did he hurt you?

BIANCA: No, he never touched me, at least, not how you used to. That was the problem. So, we both called it quits, and here I am, a spinster back living with my parents at the ripe old age of 24, while he's off with Paula Marnier.

ARTIE: The two of us, old before our time. We make a pair, huh?

BIANCA: Yeah. We do.

The moment hangs in the air.

ARTIE: You think it blinds them? The light?

BIANCA: (*Frustrated.*) I don't know, Artie! Why would they intentionally blind themselves?

ARTIE: I remember this one summer evening in the war. It was a night like this one. The sky was completely dark, not a star in sight. All us fellas was laying out in this rice paddy, hidden

Summer Evening

in tall grass, and for the first time since I'd gotten there, it was the first peaceful moment I'd had. And I guess I dozed off, because, before I knew it, I heard an explosion. I mean, it was big, bigger than any you might hear in the pictures. I had seen some bombs go off, sure, but this was like...like...like that perfect black sky got ripped open with a light so bright, like none I'd never seen before. Anyway, as soon as I came to my senses I grabbed my gun like they taught us to, but then, all this...stuff...rained out of that once-perfect, black summer evening. Dirt and trees...and...and...

BIANCA: Oh, Artie...you don't need to tell me this.

ARTIE: No, I have to. Don't you see? This has to do with your light.

BIANCA nods.

ARTIE: Earlier that day, one of the other guys had been hurt pretty bad...the poor bastard's ear was clipped and part of his hand was gone. Two fingers left once all the blood was wiped away. He knew as good as anyone that his arm wouldn't last much longer if it got infected, no matter how good we wrapped it up. Not like the battlefield is the most hygienic place, y'know? No, you don't know. *(Beat)* Spoon. That was what we called him on account of him always carrying this one tiny spoon with him. No one knew why.

ARTIE gets lost in the thought for a moment.

BIANCA: What happened to Spoon?

ARTIE doesn't hear her at first. Instead, he looks at his own hands, then up, not sure if he's imagining something in the sky or looking at the light again.

BIANCA: Artie?

She gently taps his wrist, and rubs it. ARTIE comes out of his stupor.

Summer Evening

ARTIE: It was him, is what I'm trying to say.

BIANCA doesn't understand.

ARTIE: What I felt. After the explosion. Mixed in with the dirt and trees. It was Spoon. Parts of him.

BIANCA: Oh my God.

ARTIE: I don't think God had anything to do with it.

BIANCA: But...how...?

ARTIE: I was supposed to be watching him that shift. You know, changing the bandages, or talking to him to distract him from the pain, or whatever. But he hadn't made a noise in awhile, so I thought he mighta' finally fallen asleep, or even died. He wasn't so lucky. It was just so dark. And I was so tired.

BIANCA: Artie...please, stop...let's go back inside and lay down.

She moves to touch him, but he gets up and walks across the porch. He begins to well up with tears, voice choked.

ARTIE: God strike me down for saying this, but I was just glad to have the quiet, even for just a few minutes. So, I figured a quick rest wouldn't make a difference. But he must've gotten up to take a piss or something, and stepped on a landmine...and...

ARTIE makes an explosion gesture.

BIANCA: You don't blame yourself for that, do you? You shouldn't! I can only imagine what you were going through, how exhausted and scary it all was--

ARTIE: No, that's where you're wrong. You can't imagine it. I still can't, and I was there, Bee!

BIANCA appears a bit scolded.

Summer Evening

BIANCA: Yes. Of course. All I meant was--

ARTIE: You know, sometimes I wonder if he did it on purpose. Step on that landmine, I mean.

BIANCA: Kill himself? Why would he do that?

ARTIE: I dunno. Suppose he had a girl at home, and he didn't think she'd want him looking like that with half an ear and two fingers on one hand, and that was if he was lucky. I can't say I'd want you to see me like that if it happened to me.

BIANCA: I'd never-

ARTIE: But it wasn't just that, either. We'd seen some bad stuff already, real bad. Stuff that still haunts me and I won't ever be able to forget, as much as I might try. It might have been too much for Spoon to take. Maybe he was the stronger one for being able to do what he did.

BIANCA: Artie...you're strong...You survived!

ARTIE's gaze returns to the light.

ARTIE: Wanna know what I think? About the bugs and the light.

BIANCA: Of course I do.

ARTIE: I think it's like what Spoon must've felt in those final moments. All that darkness around you, and then you find this one, beautiful thing that blinds you to all the horrors. So, if you're strong enough, you step into it, and find your escape.

He looks at BIANCA.

ARTIE: You're my light, Bee. You were the bright, beautiful thing calling me home.

BIANCA: And you say you can't be romantic.

Summer Evening

ARTIE: I guess I'm scared to be part of your light. To be your husband, maybe even a father someday, with all the darkness that still surrounds me. Do you still want to marry me with all that?

BIANCA: More than ever.

ARTIE: You sure?

BIANCA thinks. A fleeting glance of uncertainty flitters across her face, then is gone. Then reaches for his hand.

BIANCA: Let's go inside, ok? We can wake up my parents with the good news.

ARTIE: Go ahead. I'll be right in.

After watching her go inside, he turns to the night, and then looks up once more at the light. He pulls a baby spoon out of his pocket, looks at it, and then puts it back in his pocket. Then he turns, and walks inside, closing the door behind him.

A moment later, the porch light goes off.

End of play