

# AS THE BEAVER

*Joel Drake Johnson*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel Drake Johnson is one of the newest members of Chicago's Victory Gardens Theater Playwrights Ensemble. The critically acclaimed, Jeff-nominated *FOUR PLACES* was produced by Victory Gardens in the spring of 2008. His earlier works at V G, *BEFORE MY EYES* and *THE END OF THE TOUR*, were also Jeff-nominated for Best New Play and all three plays were directed by Sandy Shinner, Victory Gardens' Associate Artistic Director.

Johnson has won three Illinois Arts Council grants including one for *A BLUE MOON*, which was first produced at Chicago Dramatists and also Jeff-nominated for best new work. He got his start as a writer at Chicago's critically acclaimed Econo-Art Theater, which (under the leadership of Lynn Baber, Barb Reeder and Marc Silvia) produced such plays as *BEAUTIFUL DREAMER*. His other plays include *AS THE BEAVER*, first produced by Zebra Crossing, and *THE FALL TO EARTH* which premiered at Steppenwolf Theater and featured Tony Award Winner Rondi Reed. It was subsequently produced at The Penguin Rep, directed by Joe Brancato and featuring Tony Award Winner, Michelle Pawk. Steppenwolf later produced *A BLAMELESS LIFE* and *TRANQUILLITY WOODS* as part of their 2005 and 2007 First Look Repertory.

He has taught playwriting at Northwestern University, DePaul University and Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire. He lives in Chicago and New Buffalo, Michigan where he is working on three new plays: THE FIRST GRADE which was produced by the Aurora Theater Company in the winter of 2010; A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED which will be produced by Victory Gardens in the summer of 2010 and will star Kevin Anderson and Fran Guinan; THE BOYS ROOM, first developed at Victory Gardens and later a part of Northlight Theater's Interplay and Steppenwolf Theater's First Look reading series.

Johnson is a member of The Dramatists Guild and Pen America.

*Plays:*

AS THE BEAVER, 1994, published by Broadway Play Publishing Inc

BEFORE MY EYES, 1998

A BLUE MOON, 2002

THE END OF THE TOUR, 2003, published by Broadway Play Publishing Inc

THE FALL TO EARTH, 2004, published by Broadway Play Publishing Inc

A BLAMELESS LIFE, 2005, Steppenwolf Theater commission

TRANQUILLITY WOODS, 2006, Steppenwolf Theater commission

THE FIRST GRADE, 2007, Steppenwolf Theater Commission and Aurora Theater GAP Playwrighting Award

FOUR PLACES, 2008, published by Northwestern University Press

A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED, 2008, Aurora Theater GAP Playwrighting Award

THE BOYS ROOM, 2009, Victory Gardens 2011

The first staged reading of AS THE BEAVER was on 31 October 1992 at Chicago Dramatists Workshop (Ross Tutterow, Artistic Director). The cast and creative contributor were:

THEODORE.....Rob Bundy  
JUNE..... Annabel Armour  
WARD .....John S Green  
WALLY..... Rick Delaney  
LITTLE RICKY..... David DeCastro  
LUCY RICARDO..... Rebecca Borter  
RICKY RICARDO ..... Robert Andrew White  
OPIE TAYLOR..... Randy Snyder  
EDDIE HASKELL .....Richard Marlatt  
MRS MAGILLCUTTY ..... Lynne DuFresne  
*Director* ..... Ross Tutterow

AS THE BEAVER premiered at Zebra Crossing Theater in Chicago, Illinois on 17 January 1994 (Artistic Director, Marlene Zuccaro; Producing Director, Bob Buckwinkler). The cast and creative contributors were:

THEODORE (THE BEAVER)..... Joel Sugerman  
JUNE ..... Ann James  
WARD ..... Michael Lomenick  
WALLY ..... Robin M MacDuffie  
LITTLE RICKY ..... John Bukovec  
RICKY RICCARDO ..... Russell Alan Rowe  
LUCY RICCARDO/MR ED ..... Tucker Brown  
MRS MAGILLCUTTY/REVEREND BEASLEY/  
JOHNNY JESSE RIVERS ..... Sherman Shoemaker  
OPIE TAYLOR.....Scott Olson  
EDDIE HASKELL ..... John Bukovec  
*Director* ..... Timber Weiss  
*Costume designer* ..... Michele Friedman Siler  
*Lighting designer* ..... Jeff Childs  
*Set designer* ..... Tim Morrison  
*Production manager* ..... Le-ah Griffith  
*Graphic designer* ..... Mark Guarino  
*Sound designer*..... Timber Weiss

On 16 March 1994, this production was extended and reopened at The Theater Building in Chicago.

## CHARACTERS & SETTING

JUNE  
WARD  
THEODORE, THE BEAVER  
WALLY  
LITTLE RICKY  
RICKY RICCARDO  
LUCY RICCARDO  
OPIE TAYLOR  
JOHNNY JESSE RIVERS  
REVEREND BEASLEY  
MR ED  
EDDIE HASKELL  
MRS MAGILLCUTTY

*Several roles may be double cast*

*The Cleaver home and surrounding area. Rerun Time. Check  
Local Listings*

Special thanks to Larry B Salzman

*(Halloween 1966. The kitchen of the Cleaver home. LUCY and JUNE are standing in the kitchen wearing their costumes. They are both dressed as pirates.)*

JUNE: Help me with this, Lucy. The boys will be here in a minute and I want the costume to look complete.

LUCY: *(As she helps JUNE)* Do you have any idea what they're wearing?

JUNE: I don't know, but they've been huddling secretly all day.

LUCY: I can't get a word out of Ricky.

JUNE: They think they're going to win first prize at the Country Club Halloween Ball, I know that.

LUCY: What do you suppose—

WARD: *(Offstage)* Alright girls, close your eyes.

RICCARDO: *(Off/thick Cuban accent)* You're about to see the animous decision of the judges!!!

LUCY: Come on, Ricky. Let us see.

RICCARDO: Close your eyes!

LUCY: Ricky!

RICCARDO: Better yet, shut off the lights!

LUCY: Oh, for heaven sake.

JUNE: Lets humor them, Lucy.

LUCY: Oh, all right.

*(JUNE turns off the light.)*

JUNE: You can come out now, boys!

*(In the dark, we can hear WARD and RICCARDO coming out, stumbling as they do.)*

RICCARDO: Hey, watch it, Cleaver.

WARD: You're the one who wanted the lights out.

LUCY: Like a couple of children.

JUNE: I guess.

RICCARDO: Okay, you can turn on the lights!

*(Lights go on and huge reaction from Lucy and June who laugh hysterically at the costumes of RICCARDO and WARD. RICCARDO is dressed as a Spanish princess and WARD is dressed as her duenna.)*

JUNE: Oh my gosh!!

LUCY: Ricky!

RICCARDO: *(Dancing)* La Cuccaracha! La Cuccaracha!

WARD: Who's going to win the first prize this year!

JUNE: *(Over RICCARDO's singing)* You are, dear!!!

*(WALLY and EDDIE come in.)*

EDDIE: Hey, Wally, your father's dressed like a woman.

WARD: How do you like my costume, Wally?

WALLY: Gee, Dad, I don't know.

RICCARDO: It will be the first prize in the contest tonight.

WALLY: Well, at least, you'll get something for it.

WARD: June, I don't think Wally approves of my costume.

LUCY: I think they're hilarious.

JUNE: Why don't I get the Beaver to see?

LUCY: And Little Ricky.

JUNE: Allright.

RICCARDO: We'll be singing out to the car. (*To LUCY*)  
Lets go you handsome devil!

LUCY: Oh Ricky!

*(They dance out the door as RICCARDO starts singing La Cuccaracha again and forces Lucy to dance with her. They all laugh and sing as lights fade to THEODORE's bedroom . THEODORE and RICKY lie on the bed.)*

THEODORE: You ever look at *Playboy* magazines?

RICKY: Sometimes.

THEODORE: You want to look at one now?

RICKY: You've got some?

THEODORE: Underneath the rug.

RICKY: Lets see.

*(THEODORE reaches under the bed.)*

THEODORE: I got Wally to buy this for me. Wait until you see.

*(He opens up to the centerfold.)*

RICKY: Wow! WOW!

THEODORE: Look at those tits.

RICKY: WOW!!

THEODORE: You know what I like to do?

RICKY: What?

THEODORE: Watch. *(He kisses the picture.)*

RICKY: WOW!

THEODORE: If I shut my eyes tight, I can feel them.

RICKY: You can't.

THEODORE: I can. Try it.

RICKY: Give me another page.

(THEODORE *turns the page.*)

THEODORE: Kiss that one.

(RICKY *does.*)

THEODORE: See what I mean?

RICKY: Wow, its great.

THEODORE: Are you getting a hard on?

RICKY: A what?

THEODORE: A boner.

RICKY: What's that?

THEODORE: Is your thing getting hard?

RICKY: What thing?

THEODORE: (*Indicating*) This thing!

RICKY: Oh, yeh. It is.

THEODORE: You want to take it out?

RICKY: Take it out?

THEODORE: And get it off.

RICKY: No.

THEODORE: Come on, it's fun.

RICKY: I don't want to.

THEODORE: We can lie here and jack each other off.

RICKY: I don't want to do that.

THEODORE: Do you even know what it is?

RICKY: I know what it is.

THEODORE: It feels great.

RICKY: I don't think I should.... What's it feel like anyway?

THEODORE: Like the best feeling in the world.

RICKY: It does?

THEODORE: Yeh.

RICKY: I think I hear my mom calling me.

THEODORE: Your mom's downstairs and she's not calling you.

RICKY: I'm going to go.

THEODORE: But you're supposed to spend the night with me.

RICKY: Listen, Beav. I don't think we ought to be talking this way. I don't feel right doing it.

THEODORE: Please.

RICKY: No.

THEODORE: I think I'm in love with you.

RICKY: You can't be.

THEODORE: I am. I think about you all the time. I think about us being naked—

RICKY: I'm getting out of here.

THEODORE: Kiss me and see if you don't like it.

RICKY: I won't.

THEODORE: Please. Just once.

RICKY: No way.

THEODORE: I think you'll like it.

RICKY: I don't—

THEODORE: Do you get excited when you see Little Joe on *Bonanza*?

RICKY: Well—

THEODORE: What about Paul McCartney of the Beatles?

RICKY: He's...

THEODORE: What about Mister Larocco, our gym teacher?

(RICKY *laughs.*)

RICKY: Or Marlon Brando?

THEODORE: Those arms!

RICKY: Those pecs!

(*Beat. They look at one another and then giggle. Beat*)

RICKY: Okay. Lets try it.

(RICKY *and* THEODORE *kiss.*)

THEODORE: What do you think?

RICKY: Lets try it again.

(RICKY *and* THEODORE *kiss again. This time, it is long and deep.*)

RICKY: Maybe I'm in love with you, too, Beav.

THEODORE: You think so?

RICKY: Maybe.

(RICKY *and* THEODORE *kiss again.*)

THEODORE: Oh Wow! Oh Wow! This is the best thing that's ever happened to me!

RICKY: Shhhhh.

(RICKY *and* THEODORE *kiss again. As* THEODORE *wraps his arms around* RICKY, JUNE —*in full costume—comes in.*)

JUNE: Beaver!!

(*Both* RICKY *and* THEODORE *stop.*)

RICKY: He made me!

JUNE: Ward! Get up here right away!

RICKY: He made me do it!

JUNE: You both stay right there.

RICKY: I gotta go. I hear my mom calling.

JUNE: (*Running to door*) WARD!

THEODORE: Mom—

JUNE: Go sit on the bed. And you, sit on Wally's bed.

THEODORE: We weren't doing anything.

JUNE: You were kissing.

RICKY: I wasn't kissing back.

THEODORE: Yes, you were.

JUNE: Boys do not kiss. Ward! Come upstairs please.

(WARD *comes in.*)

WARD: What is all the racket?

THEODORE: We weren't doing anything, Dad.

(WALLY and EDDIE *come in.*)

WALLY: What did you do, Beav?

JUNE: Wally, get downstairs.

WALLY: What are you yelling at me for?

WARD: What happened, June?

JUNE: When I opened the door, Theodore and Little Ricky were kissing.

EDDIE: Hey, Wally, your little brother is a fag.

WARD: Eddie, I think you'd better go home now.

EDDIE: Oh sure, Mister Cleaver. Do you want me to shut the door for you?

JUNE: Yes, Eddie. You can shut the door.

EDDIE: And don't worry, Mrs Cleaver. I won't tell anyone.

WARD: Wally, I think you had better leave as well.

WALLY: Boy, Beav, are you in trouble now.

(WALLY and EDDIE *leave.*)

WARD: I think, June, that maybe you should ask Lucy and Riccardo to come up.

RICKY: No! My parents will kill me.

WARD: Go ahead, June.

RICKY: (*Crying*) I didn't do anything. He made me.

(*JUNE opens the door. WALLY and EDDIE fall into the room.*)

JUNE: Wally!

WARD: (*Nearly losing his temper*) Wally, you get out of this house and take that dip you call a friend with you!

WALLY: Dad!

EDDIE: Dip?

WARD: (*Calmly*) Wally, leave the room.

WALLY: (*As he leaves*) Geez, it's not me that's queer.

EDDIE: (*Going with WALLY*) Yeh, and your father wears a dress.

JUNE: (*As they move to the kitchen*) Get down those stairs.

EDDIE: Yes, Mrs Cleaver. Sorry, Mrs Cleaver.

JUNE: (*In kitchen*) As soon as your father and I are through with the Beaver, you're to take some of your things out of the room and sleep in the study.

WALLY: Why—

JUNE: Don't argue with me, Wally. Just do it.

(*She goes out as crossfade to bedroom. Pause. WARD, THEODORE, and RICKY remain in the room.*)

WARD: So what were you doing, Theodore?

THEODORE: Nothing.

WARD: Your mother says you were kissing Little Ricky.

(*Beat*)

WARD: Were you kissing Little Ricky?

RICKY: He was, but I wasn't kissing back.

WARD: Why were you kissing Little Ricky?

(Beat)

RICKY: Because he said he loved me.

WARD: Is that true, Theodore?

THEODORE: Yes.

WARD: You love Little Ricky?

THEODORE: Yes.

WARD: Do you know it's wrong for you to love Little Ricky?

THEODORE: Yes, but I can't help it, Dad. Nothing I do makes me stop feeling the way I do. I look at *Playboy* magazines because I think that will help, but it doesn't.

WARD: Maybe you'd better go, Little Ricky.

RICKY: Okay.

(Much noise from hallway)

RICKY: It's Mom and Dad. They're going to kill me.

LUCY: (As the RICCARDOS enter.) Now Ricky! Now Ricky!

RICCARDO: Where is he? Little Ricky! Little Ricky!

WARD: He's under the bed.

LUCY: Now Ricky, what are you going to do?

RICCARDO: (Dragging RICKY) I am going to beat him until he is blue and black. Stand up there! Stand up!

RICKY: I didn't do anything, Dad.

RICCARDO: You were kissing a boy!

RICKY: I didn't kiss back!

THEODORE: Yes, you did.

(RICCARDO slaps RICKY across the face.)

LUCY: Ricky!

RICCARDO: You stay out of this! (*Shaking RICKY*) Why did you kiss him? Why would do that?

JUNE: Ward, do something!

WARD: Listen, Riccardo—

RICCARDO: And you can just stay out of this, too, Cleaver!! I've never liked you or your wife or sons—who is full homosexuality and a sissy like his father!

JUNE: WARD!

LUCY: Now calm down, Ricky!

RICCARDO: I won't calm down. (*To RICKY*) And when I get home—

(*RICCARDO grabs RICKY and starts hitting him again. LUCY jumps on top of RICCARDO and tries to stop him. There is much yelling and screaming and crying as all parties try to stop the melee. The I Love Lucy theme song plays during this as the lights fade and then black out. Lights come up on the kitchen. WALLY and EDDIE.*)

EDDIE: So what are you going to do, Wally?

WALLY: What do you mean?

EDDIE: Your brother's a queer.

WALLY: You really think he is?

EDDIE: I've thought so all along. He's always biting his nails.

WALLY: I didn't know that meant you were queer.

EDDIE: Boy, are you dumb.

WALLY: But a lot guys bite their nails.

EDDIE: So they got to have that right combination.

WALLY: What do you mean?

EDDIE: If they bite their nails, they gotta be good at sports and really dig up on the girls or something, or not read a lot of books. Otherwise, they're faggots.

WALLY: How do you know this stuff, Eddie?

EDDIE: I got queer radar. My dad taught it to me right off when I was a little kid. And he always said that if you spot a queer, you gotta be careful about bending over, because they always want to poke you when you bend over. You ever see me bend over in the showers when Lumby is in class?

WALLY: No.

EDDIE: That's because Lumby is queer.

WALLY: He is? But he's such a nice guy.

EDDIE: He'd poke you in the butt if you bent over. Faggots just can't help themselves.

WALLY: Wow.

*(Lots of noise as LUCY, RICKY and RICCARDO come through the kitchen.)*

RICCARDO: *(Pushing RICKY)* Get on home! Go!

LUCY: Don't do that, Ricky! Ricky!

RICCARDO: He goes to Cuba! To Cuba!

LUCY: No, Ricky!

RICCARDO: There will not be no faggots in my house! No faggots, Lucy! In Cuba, they teach him how to be a man or he stands before a firing squad!!

LUCY: Ricky!

*(They exit.)*

EDDIE: Wow, they're going to shoot their own son. My dad says all queers should be shot through the head. They should be rounded up like cattle with hoof and mouth disease, and then shot. Boy, would I like to see something like that! Hey! I've got an idea. Lets go look through the windows of the Riccardo house and see what they're going to do. Maybe we'll witness a

murder and then we can turn it in and be heroes or something.

WALLY: I don't want to witness a murder.

EDDIE: You a faggot like your brother?

*(WALLY grabs EDDIE as if to hit him.)*

WALLY: My brother is not a faggot.

EDDIE: Okay, alright. Then lets go watch Mister Riccardo murder his son. *(He starts to go.)* Come on.

*(EDDIE exits. Beat. Then WALLY follows. Cross-fade to bedroom. Silence. Then)*

WARD: Do you have anything to say, Beaver?

THEODORE: No.

*(Silence as JUNE whispers in WARD's ear.)*

WARD: Do you realize how serious this is?

THEODORE: Yes.

*(Silence as JUNE whispers in WARD's ear.)*

WARD: What would you like to do about it?

THEODORE: I don't know.

*(Silence as JUNE whispers in WARD's ear.)*

WARD: Do you know it's illegal for a boy to kiss another boy?

THEODORE: No.

WARD: *(To JUNE)* Are you sure...

*(JUNE whispers in WARD's ear.)*

WARD: You can't do that sort of thing, Beaver. It's not right.

*(Silence as JUNE whispers in WARD's ear—ever more rapidly.)*

WARD: People hate you when you do that sort of thing.

*(Silence as JUNE whispers in WARD's ear.)*

WARD: We don't understand you, Beaver.

*(Silence as JUNE whispers in WARD's ear.)*

WARD: And remember that as long as you are in our house, you do what we ask you to do.

*(They both exit and go downstairs. THEODORE sits up and looks around the room. He gets out of bed, takes off his clothes and then crawls under the covers, pulling the blanket over his head. Strains of the Leave it to Beaver theme plays. As the lights cross-fade to a spot on WALLY and EDDIE. In the background we can hear LUCY and RICCARDO talking in loud voices.)*

EDDIE: Oh wow, right to the kisser. Did you see that, Wally?

WALLY: Lets not do this anymore.

EDDIE: Now he's beating on Little Ricky and Little Ricky is just taking it! He's gotta be a fag. Now Mrs Riccardo is crying. She sure cries loud. Oh, wow, Mister and Mrs Brady just came in and Mister Brady is dragging Mister Riccardo off of Little Ricky. Oh my God, Mister Brady just ripped Mister Riccardo's dress and now Mister Riccardo is hysterical, pointing at the rip and crying and now beating on the floor! This is so much better than T V. This is even better than watching Annette take off her clothes in front of the window.

*(WALLY has left.)*

EDDIE: Hey, Wally! Wally! You're missing the action!!

*(Crossfade to kitchen. JUNE and WARD. She is busying herself with mindless cleaning. There is silence. Then)*

WARD: *(Good spiritedly as JUNE listens.)* You know this reminds me of the time when I was a teenager. You remember Andy Hardy, Judge Hardy's son? Well, a bunch of us guys went to the dance after a football

game and we saw ole' Andy Hardy out there in the middle of the gym floor jitter bugging up a storm with his cousin Judy and so we all sort of dared one another to go up to ole' Andy, who we always thought was sort of that way, and so each of one of us goes up to ole' Andy and says "Hey, Andy, you wanna dance?" and then we'd move back and all start laughing and then the next guy would go up and do the same thing and this kept up for, oh I don't know, awhile anyway. And Andy would look at us real shamed-faced and all until finally, Judy steps out and goes into this tirade about how we should all grow up and if we were half as decent a person as Andy Hardy the world would be a better place to live and everybody in the gym applauded her. And then she and Andy got out on the floor and did this incredible jitter bug number that just knocked everybody out, it's so great. I guess we all do stupid things when we're kids. (*He laughs to himself.*) He got killed in World War Two. (*He stops laughing.*) Andrew Hardy killed in action. I remember that. Killed in action. (*Beat*) What a bunch of creeps we were.

(MISTER ED *pops his head in the window.*)

WARD: Hello, Mister Ed.

MISTER ED: Hey, those are some costumes. I bet you win the Country Club prize tonight! What do you think of my costume?

WARD: Who are you, anyway?

MISTER ED: Elizabeth Taylor in *National Velvet*.

JUNE: That's a very nice riding hat, Mister Ed.

MISTER ED: Thank you. So what's this I hear flying all over town like a flock of horseflies.

JUNE: What are you hearing?

MISTER ED: That there's some sort of trouble between Beaver and the Riccardo boy.

JUNE: Don't believe half of what you hear, Mister Ed.

MISTER ED: I just wanted to check the old rumor mill.  
So it's not true?

WARD: There's been some—

JUNE: No, it's not true.

MISTER ED: Well, that's good to hear. When I was just a  
colt—

JUNE: We're very busy right now, Mister Ed.

MISTER ED: I can't tell you one story?

JUNE: Not right now.

MISTER ED: Well, then, maybe I'll just drop by the  
Riccardo house—

JUNE: That's a good idea.

MISTER ED: Well, you tell the Beav that I'm thinking of  
him and that I hope everything gets straighten out.

JUNE: Mister Ed?

MISTER ED: Yes?

JUNE: I want you to remember that there are children  
involved in this.

MISTER ED: I never speak unless I have something to  
say.

JUNE: You've got the biggest mouth in town and if I  
hear that you've told one person this story, I swear to  
God you'll be dog food for Lassie.

MISTER ED: Just because I'm a talking horse, doesn't  
make me the cause of all the problems around this  
town!!!

JUNE: I'm warning you!

WARD: She's very upset right now, Mister Ed.

MISTER ED: I can see that, but I've got one thing to say about that and then I'll leave. Your son didn't kill anybody, Mrs Cleaver. He didn't rob a store! He didn't hurt a soul! And that's about all I'm going to say!

(MISTER ED *leaves.*)