

Life Is Funny



A Riveting Tale
of Comedy
Hairdressing and
Texas Politics

by Leigh Anne Jasheway-Bryant

Author of *Bedtime Stories for Dogs* and *I'm Not Getting Older, I'm Getting Better at Denial*

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Comedy, Hairdressing and
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To

Jody, you know who you are,
but who knows where you are.
And if you're thinking of running for office,
please read this book first.

Nancy for creative editing and being able to take
(and improve) a joke.

Brad, Maddy Lou, Justin Time, and Penny for being funny
and silly and unlike the voices in my head,
at least partially real.

Anyone who has ever encouraged me, even by laughing at
me while waiting in line at the ATM. This is all your fault.

Also by Leigh Anne Jasheway-Bryant:

Are You Playing with Me?
Bedtime Stories for Dogs
Bedtime Stories for Cats
The Rules for Dogs
The Rules for Cats
Don't Get Mad, Get Funny
If I Was a Dog, I'd Be a Better Person
I'm Not Getting Older (I'm Getting Better at Denial)
Laugh Lines are Beautiful
Serious Side Effects
Yoga for Your Funny Bone

No Time for Trouble



You could say this about Judy – the girl could talk. She had once yammered on to a customer for a solid twenty minutes without realizing the woman was sound asleep. Judy did pause for a few seconds when the old broad's head rolled forward onto her chest and it seemed she might be dead, but Nan's electric clippers jolted them both back to life like a remote defibrillator. The woman's face was a little blue when she woke up, but that was just the reflection of her hair. And Judy picked up her story without missing a beat.

Today however, as the neon sign brashly proclaimed *Lone Star Cuts – Home of Texas' Biggest Hair*, Judy wasn't her usual chatty self. She grabbed a comb, ran her thumb over the edge, and looked around the shop. It was always a shame to waste her stories on the likes of Rae Ann, who wasn't a big laughter before the facelift. Now that she was apparently under doctor's orders never to display any kind of movement above the neck, it was a damned shame. Rae Ann had recently learned how to smile without smiling, frown without frowning, and look surprised simply by blinking rapidly. Judy might as well have tried to entertain the residents of Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum.

At least Judy wasn't alone in her bad mood. Everyone in the salon was about as perky as the half-dead Christmas tree in the corner next to the window. April, Lone Star's owner, kept promising to take the poor thing to the curb so it could be picked up by the Recycling Guys – sweaty

young men the staff and clients all loved watching through the front window. But it was Thursday and the Guys only showed up on Tuesdays between 10-ish and 1-ish, so the tree just sat there, as sad and unwanted as the hair that piled up beneath the stylists' chairs like little hair wreaths. It was all very festive in a *Week After the Grinch Stole Christmas* way.

April bore full responsibility for the comatose tree. It was she who insisted on putting up a fresh tree the day after Thanksgiving every year and then procrastinating about its removal until it was just a needle away from spontaneous combustion. April thought the longer the tree stayed up and decorated, the longer the holiday cheer would last. Although a dead tree could only be cheerful to people who had upped their meds in mid-December.

There was a definite feeling of "*I'm glad the holidays are over, but now what's there to look forward to besides bills I can't pay and New Year's Resolutions I'm already planning on breaking*" in the air today. The only one who was excited to be alive was Leon – Lone Star's only male stylist – for he was born with the football gene and couldn't help flashing a shit-eating grin whenever the Longhorns or the Aggies or the Cowboys were having a good year. He didn't care who won as long as they were Texas boys. Unless they were Texas boys playing for Oklahoma. That just wasn't right. Not to mention that football meant cheerleaders and cheerleaders made life worth living in Leon's not-so-humble opinion.

Judy especially hated the long slow days after the holidays, preferring the salon when it was buzzing with women getting ready for their holiday parties. Since Lone Star Cuts was only six blocks from the Capitol Building, most of the women who came in were well-heeled and well-connected. To the bank. As much as politics got Judy's dander up, she liked the women's stories and she

loved their tips. If every week were like the week before Christmas, Judy could retire in five years. Unfortunately, every week was more like today.

As Judy started to comb out Rae Ann's wet hair, she shot a glance at Donna sitting at the front desk. She could count on Donna to be quick with a nice round, boisterous laugh that should have come from a round, boisterous woman, not one so tiny she had to buy her clothes in the Preteen Department at JC Penney's. Watching that laugh come from Donna's tiny pursed mouth was like watching a Basset Hound bark coming from a Teacup Poodle, which on this day was exactly what Donna's hair reminded Judy of.

Even with Donna within earshot, Judy preferred a crowd, so for once, she worked in silence. Unfortunately, silence wasn't Judy's friend. Too much quiet in her overactive brain gave her time to think and thinking often lead to trouble. Today's troublesome thoughts were all about Juan. He had been popping into her mind a lot lately. It was the holidays – there was nothing like the whole *peace on earth goodwill to men* nonsense to conjure up the most depressing moments of one's life.

Transfixed, Judy stopped combing and watched as the three years of their relationship flashed by like outtakes from a bad movie. Juan yelling at her in Spanish even though he knew she only understood about one out of every five words. The whole relationship would have been better with subtitles. Cut. Judy telling Juan to get out of her life after he threatened to kill one of the cats because it had peed on the sofa. Cut. Juan jimmying open her trailer window and standing there watching her as she slept until she woke up, screamed, and threatened to call the cops. Whenever she replayed this scene, Judy could hear the theme song from *Jaws*. Cut. The voice on the other end of the phone, almost a year ago, telling her that

Juan had been killed in a car wreck on the highway to Tomball. Not surprisingly, there had been two empty six-packs on the floor. Cut. Sad ending and no popcorn. Cut.

Judy shook her head, trying to get the memories to fly back to wherever they'd come from. *When I'm famous*, she thought, I'll rewrite the ending. *Oh, hell, I'll rewrite the whole story. Make it funny. Juan ends up being swept up by a twister on his way to the Stop 'N Rob and finds himself plopped down on the roof of a halfway house. Antonio Banderas stars in the role...*

"Judy. Judy!"

It was Rae Ann's voice. The brain fog started to clear. Antonio's smiling face and suggestively-cocked eyebrow morphed into Rae Ann's impassive face and motionless brows.

"Are you gonna cut my hair or stare off into space all day?" Rae Ann demanded.

Called back to what passed for real life, Judy slowly began cutting Rae Ann's hair. Everyone knew Judy wasn't the fastest or the best hairdresser in town, but she was the funniest. Being funny was both a blessing and a curse: a blessing because it brought in customers, which meant that Judy didn't have to panhandle on Guadalupe Street near campus in order to survive. A curse because Judy had discovered early on that big girls who don't just sit back and let you make jokes about them, but who actually make better jokes back, were too much for most guys to handle. Except, apparently, choice specimens like cocaine addicts and cat-hating alcoholic stalkers who don't speak English.

Judy cut a little too much off the right side of Rae Ann's hair. "Oops!"

Rae Ann quickly turned her head towards the mirror to see if there was any noticeable damage. Not this time. "Dahling, one more 'Oops!' and I'm gonna have to find

another beautician or at least a good cardiologist," she said, catching Judy's over-mascaraed eyes with her own and holding them like an alpha bitch establishing her dominance. Judy didn't even squirm.

"That's what you always say, Rae Ann, but I know better." Judy broke eye contact first, calling it a draw, and went on snipping, taking another half inch off the left side to even things out. "You're such a bad liar," Judy said, "I bet you can't even fake an orgasm properly!"

Rae Ann rose a full two inches in her chair and looked as indignant as her recent plastic surgery would allow. It can be hard getting a good scowl going when your eyebrows won't move on their own.

From the desk, Donna caught her breath. *Not again*, she thought. Judy was always pushing clients to the edge. One of these days she was going to scare off someone really important. Someone like Rae Ann, who owned three car dealerships on the edge of town and could easily afford to go somewhere else to get her big hair fluffed and lifted twice a month. Somewhere they didn't employ stylists who brought up the word "orgasm" just for shock value.

"Honey, I could teach *Fakin' Orgasm 101* at Austin Community College!" Rae Ann sputtered indignantly, making sure her lips didn't actually move, like a ventriloquist with a dummy gone AWOL. Donna breathed a sigh of relief and stifled a giggle. Stifling wasn't in Judy's DNA, so she slapped her thigh and laughed until tears rolled down past her tarantula-like eyelashes and onto her cheeks. Thank God for waterproof mascara. If she could afford it, Judy would have bought the stuff in 55-gallon drums.

"That's one class I do not need to take!" Judy had not only faked orgasms, she'd faked interest. Lately, she'd been faking it by herself. Now that was sad.

“Don’t go assumin’ just cuz ah’m richer than God ah don’t know a few things about the world,” Rae Ann said, drawling for effect. “If memory serves, mah best friend taught me how to fake it the night ah had my comin’ out party.”

“I bet that was some party!” Judy laughed again. “Aren’t you just the little devil?”

“I’ve had my moments,” Rae Ann declared proudly.

Judy nodded at her client. “I’m sure you still do.” She took a final snip of hair, then started combing it out. You never could tell what was really going on under the big hair of a rich Texas woman. She handed Rae Ann a mirror.

Rae Ann grabbed the handle and circumnavigated her hair, looking for "don'ts" in her "do." She didn't find any. It looked fine. For a change.

"You done good, hon. 'Bout time. Ah was fixin' to start cuttin' it myself!"

Judy faked a gasp. "You wouldn't. You know what they say, 'The woman who cuts her own hair has friends who laugh behind her back.'" She crossed her purple-tipped fingers over her chest and looked at her client approvingly. Judy hoped she'd look as good as Rae Ann when she was in her 60s. Or was it 70s? It was hard to tell. Rae Ann had had so much plastic surgery, there was probably a recycling code behind her ear. Although Judy hadn't found it yet.

Rae Ann ran her fingers through her tresses. Suddenly overcome by an urge, Judy grabbed the scissors once again and made a final snip. Rae Ann just shrugged her shoulders and sighed. Down went the scissors again. “Remember,” Judy interjected, “Any time you want to adopt me, just give me a call. You know where I’ll be.”

This was Judy's running joke with all her rich clients. She figured she had a better chance of being adopted by a

millionaire client than winning the lottery (which was at \$144 million today. Judy had her usual one ticket with the numbers 7, 11, 12, 27, 33, 39, 45 – Nolan's age, Stevie Ray's age, the dress size she'd like to diet down to, the date her divorce became final, her age, her favorite number, and the number of calories in a bite of her favorite pecan pie – taped to her mirror.)

She loosened the smock from Rae Ann's neck and whipped it off with a flourish, almost yanking out one of her client's diamond snowman earrings in the process. As Rae Ann rubbed her ear between her fingers, Judy fastened and unfastened the Velcro strip that held the smock together at the neck. Judy had a thing for Velcro. In high school, she'd sneak in after the skinny girls had finished gymnastics practice and un-Velcro the tumbling mats. There was something about that ripping noise that just got to her. Last year for her birthday, the girls at the salon had given her an anatomically-correct, life size replica of her ex-husband, with all his body parts velcroed on. When she was feeling depressed, she pulled them off one at a time, saving, of course, the best for last.

"Are you sure you don't want me to blow it dry?" Judy inquired tauntingly, picking up a blow dryer in each hand, like she was challenging Rae Ann to a showdown at a few minutes past high noon.

Rae Ann stood up, brushed a few stray hairs off her ample chest – which was real, judging from the way it sagged, one side slightly lower than the other, like an undescended testicle – and placed one heavily ringed hand on her bony hip. "How long have I been coming in here?"

"Four, five years?" Judy guessed. She looked over at Donna, who shrugged. That was before her time.

"Five years in March," Rae Ann interjected. "And how many times have I let you blow my hair dry?"

"One." Judy had no trouble remembering. It was Rae Ann's first visit and the blow dryer had shorted out. There had been a little fire, but Judy had been able to put it out by spritzing it with water before it jumped from the top of Rae Ann's head to the sides and back. "But didn't I get those flames out before they damaged your perfect eyebrows?" Judy whined. She holstered the blow dryers.

Rae Ann smiled, her lips turning up almost unnoticeably. "I'll let it air dry, thanks."

"Okay, but if you catch pneumonia and die, don't blame me!" Judy said in mock horror. "Just make sure you put me in the will first."

Rae Ann handed Judy a \$20 bill, all the cash she had on her. She didn't like to carry cash because Lord knows where it had been. She carried plastic. Platinum plastic. "Don't spend it all at Nieman Marcus."

"I wouldn't dare. I couldn't disappoint the clerks down at Goodwill. Besides, after buying my boys video games and that damned Habitrail for Christmas, I won't be spending any money for eight, nine years." When it came to disposable income, Judy's was permanently indisposed. She took the twenty and tucked it away in her tip jar, where it stood out among three ones, two quarters and a note that said "Never accept a ride from a stranger wearing nothing but a trench coat."

Rae Ann walked over to the front desk and settled her bill with Donna. "Give yourself five dollars, dear," Rae Ann said generously. Donna unhesitatingly did. Rae Ann was one of a few customers who tipped for just adding up the bill. Donna liked that about her.

Judy began sweeping up her station. Rae Ann snapped her purse shut and sashayed towards the door, her fragile-looking ankles holding up remarkably well in her high, pointed heels. Her doctor had tried to talk her into wearing orthopedic shoes the last time he removed a

bunion, but she told him she'd rather die. A woman has to do what a woman has to do.

The phone rang. Donna picked it up just as Rae Ann opened the door and the chimes began their incessant rendition of "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You." Sometimes Donna could barely hear the person on the other end of the phone. She'd been begging April for weeks to turn down the volume. Maybe she'd just have to get a screw driver and fix that damn chimes herself.

"See ya'll in a month," Rae Ann shouted above the chimes. "And Judy, you stay out of trouble."

Judy smiled. "Me, trouble? I don't have time for trouble."

"Can't you get this doorbell to play something else?" Rae Ann yelled over her shoulder as the door closed slowly behind her. "Yellow Rose of Texas, Ah Want to Go Home With the Armadillo?"

"I've been lobbying for 'Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Bald Guys,' but April likes this little ditty," Judy yelled back. By that time, however, Rae Ann was already in the parking lot, standing at the door to her gold Beemer, drumming her impatient but perfect nails on the roof as she decided whether to go directly to her massage therapist or make her semi-weekly unannounced visit to Garrett's office to make sure he wasn't up to anything. Ever since last year's affair with that young law clerk, she'd decided he deserved a little more anxiety in his life.

Inside, Judy checked the appointment calendar over Donna's shoulder. *A break*, she thought as she plopped down in her chair, exhausted and desperately in need of another cup of coffee. Unfortunately, she was trying to cut back. Her doctor had told her it might be coffee that was making her breasts lumpier than usual.

Judy looked over at Donna, who was erasing something from the schedule and blowing eraser crumbs on the floor.

"What do you have planned for New Year's Eve?" Judy asked with a yawn.

"Oh, nothing exciting. Think I might re-paper the bathroom."

Judy picked up the hand-held mirror and stared at her face. In this light, her pores were the size of potholes. "Just the traditional celebration, huh?" She put the mirror down with disgust. "You've been saying you're gonna re-paper that bathroom for months now. Your cat could have done the job quicker."

"Well, I tried to get him to do it, but George Walker kept shredding the strips when he was applying the glue. Damn cat!"

They both laughed. "That's what happens when your cat is named after a lying scumbag. You're lucky he hasn't declared war on the downstairs neighbors."

Donna, a lifelong Democrat and proud of it, had had the misfortune of adopting a cat that had come with a name. It was on his collar at the Humane Society. She'd tried calling him dozens of other names – Fluffy, Smoky, Tinkerbelle, etc. – but he'd only come when she yelled George Walker.

"You got any plans?" Donna asked, hoping maybe Judy would invite her to tag along to a movie or something, or at least give her an idea of something to do besides sit home and de-flea the cat on the biggest party night of the year.

"The ex has got the boys 'til Sunday, so Mark and I will probably go dancing." Judy hadn't told Mark about the dancing yet. "Then we'll go home and I'll see if I can get him to feed me grapes one at a time while massaging my feet."

"Mark? The one with the tattoo?"

Judy glared at her. "No, that was Mike. I kicked him and his 'Giddy Up' tattoo out ages ago. Keep up!"

"Sorry!"

"This one is Mark. I've been seeing him for three weeks... no, almost a month. No tattoo, at least that I've noticed. But I haven't looked everywhere."

Judy liked Mark. She liked them all in the beginning, although Mark did seem different. For one thing, he had a real job. He was a research analyst for a polling firm. Judy wasn't even sure what that meant. But she knew it meant he wasn't collecting unemployment and he didn't have time to spend all day at a bar. And unlike most of the guys she had dated, who didn't want anything to do with Nolan and Stevie Ray because they wanted to be boys themselves and couldn't stand the competition, Mark took to her sons right away. He'd even bought them a Christmas present, although another rat wasn't Judy's idea of the ideal holiday gift. Rats made Judy anxious, perhaps because they reminded her of her choices in men. They had beady little eyes and pooped everywhere. The rats and the men. But a rat is what her sons wanted and a rat is what Mark got them. And now she'd encouraged their rat habit with the Habitrail. Oh well, it was better than letting the rodents run loose in the trailer. If only they made a Habitrail for preteen boys.

Mark was a good guy. He might even be Mr. Right. But Judy wasn't looking for Mr. Anybody. She hadn't really ever gotten over her ex-husband, Mr. Have You Seen My Blue Shirt, The One With the Cocaine in the Pocket? His friends called him Clay. He called her to bring him bail money. Thank God that was over. And she'd probably never get over Juan. Fear, anger and guilt tend to stick with a person. Especially when you get

called in to the morgue to identify the body before the ink on the restraining order is even dry.

"Where's Nan today?" Donna asked, bringing Judy back to the present.

"Walgreen's. Her meds were just about out," Judy replied, looking over at Nan's empty station, with hairbrushes and permanent rods strewn about like mobile homes after a tornado.

"Ooh. We wouldn't want that!" Donna rolled her eyes. Nan, who had worked at the station next to Judy's for almost three years, had multiple personalities. Not just voices in her head like most people. Official multiple personalities, each of whom had his or her own file at some therapist's office and would eventually make a fine movie on Lifetime. There were six of them – personalities, not therapists – at last count. Only two of them could do hair. The fun part was that no one was sure from one day to the next which ones would show up. It made life at Lone Star Cuts interesting for both the customers and the staff.

Except for Donna. *Poor Donna*, Judy thought. *I'd hate to have to reschedule Nan's clients all the time.* Donna always had eraser crumbs on her blouse, in her hair, and occasionally stuck between her teeth. Nan's clients would get scared by a bad appointment and cancel. But somehow, Nan convinced almost all of them to come back. And she kept bringing in new ones. Like magic. Judy thought maybe she recruited them from her group therapy sessions. Or prison. Who knew?

Donna rearranged the hair paraphernalia ("Hairaphernalia," Judy called them) on the front counter to while away the time. Purse-sized brushes. Travel sized conditioner. Hairspray bottles, arranged in order of size. *Big Hair*, *Bigger Hair*, and *Only in Texas Hair*. *Only in Texas Hair* sold the best, more than three to one over

Bigger Hair. Hell, you could get enough to hold up through two tornadoes and a sudden Texas downpour for \$3.99, which was quite a deal, considering it was also the only hairspray that held up in the Austin humidity.

Judy watched Donna lazily, still thinking about the missing Nan. "We wouldn't want Nan to run out of her medication," Judy whispered, making her eyes bulge out and stabbing the air with her scissors. "That'd be too scary even for this place."