

QUEEN OF THE BONACKERS

a full-length play

by Susan Kathryn Hefti

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*For all the ancestral spirits
watching over us each and every
day...*

Synopsis

When their entire way of life is threatened by a depleted fishing stock and an overheated real estate market on steroids, an ancient community of East End denizens discovers the true meaning of family, roots and loyalty while learning what it really means to be a *Bonacker*.

Cast of Characters

QUEENIE KING/TEENAGE SMOOCH/DUTCH - QUEENIE - FEMALE, 15, a tomboy, a Bonacker.

TAG/TEENAGE ALFIE - TAG - MALE, 17, Queenie's best friend, a local boy, but not a Bonacker.

SMOOCHE - also called DUTCH - FEMALE, 40s-50s, Queenie's mother, a Bonacker and a Montaukett.

AUNT RUBY - FEMALE, 40s-50s, Tag's aunt, a local, but not a Bonacker.

NATE BENSON - MALE, 40s-50s, a shifty New York City real estate developer.

ONE-EYED JACK/40s ALFIE - ONE-EYED JACK - MALE, 40s-50s, Queenie's uncle, a salty one-eyed fisherman, still ridiculously sexy despite the eye patch over his dead eye, or perhaps because of it, a Bonacker. 40s ALFIE is a younger, more innocent version of his brother, also very sexy.

Settings and Time of Action

The time is now, 1990 and 2014.

The action takes place in and around Springs; a hamlet that's home to an ancient community of fisherman - known locally as *Bonackers* - in the northern section of East Hampton on the eastern end of Long Island, New York.

Settings: 1.) A marsh, 2.) The front porch and yard of an old weather-beaten house and 3.) A rustic old farmhouse-style kitchen

SCENE 1

Early April in Springs, NY.

A bay and the marshland that surrounds it.

The time is now.

The sound of peepers fills the space.

A super moon hangs so low in the blackened sky, it looks like its about to splash right into its own incandescent reflection on the bay's surface.

A shooting star races at top speed across the sky, only to be swallowed up by the maw of the horizon, eager to ingest all traces of the night as it readies itself to spit back out the harsh light of day.

The explosive sound of a shotgun off-stage shatters the fragile serenity.

The sound of geese and ducks flapping their wings against the water as they hurriedly take flight.

Silhouette of the fast-gliding water fowl against the inky sky as they fly out of view.

QUEENIE, Female, 15, a Bonacker, dressed in orange vinyl fishing overalls and TAG, Male, 17, her best friend, ENTER, dragging a small boat behind them.

Queenie's wet rubber fishing boots jostle about in the boat.

With her long hair twisted up in a fisherman's cap - or maybe even a baseball cap - we don't yet know Queenie's gender.

Barefoot, she has one hand wrapped around the butt end of a .22 Long Rifle, slung over her shoulder, as they wade through the marsh muck with the boat in tow.

The back-end of a pick-up truck with the gate pulled down for loading and unloading.

QUEENIE

Stupid. Fuckin. Idiot. Fer christsakes, Tag! Ya coulda shot someone!

TAG

Maybe yew should be? Just a. Little more grateful? I mean. I was tryna save yer life.

QUEENIE

By grabbin my gun an randomly shootin into the sky? In the fuckin dark? When ya can't see. Three fuckin feet in front a yer face? An ya don't even know how the fuck. Ta shoot a gun? That was yew? Saving my life? *Really?*

TAG

I thought ya were drownin.

QUEENIE

So. What? Ya wanted ta put me outta my misery. With one quick shot ta the head?

TAG

No I. I shot it off like a. A flare. Ya know like. When yer car breaks down on the side a the road or. ...Sumpin. I dunno, Queenie. I jus got scared is all.

QUEENIE

Exactly. Yew don't. Know. Yew don't know. That a gun. Is not. A flare. An yew don't know. That ya never. Ever. Touch someone else's gun. An I mean like. Fuckin. Never.

TAG

I was jus tryna-

QUEENIE

Yeah, I know. Ya thought yew were savin my life.

He gestures off Queenie's boots.

TAG

Well yer boots floated up.

QUEENIE

Because that's what they're sposta do. It's why yer sposta take yer boots off. If ya wind up in the water. So yew can use em as a floating device. An so their weight doesn't drag ya down. Under the water.

TAG

See. So ya were drownin.

QUEENIE

I wasn't drownin, Tag. I jus lost my footin. There's a gully out there. A drop off. I know exactly where it is. Been there like. A million times but. I dunno. Somehow the supermoon made everything look different. Lost my bearings an... I jus lost my footing. That's all.

TAG

Well all I could see was yer boots floatin on the sur-

QUEENIE

So when ya can't see. An ya don't know what's goin on. Yer very first instinct. Is ta shoot off a gun? *Man*. They didn't teach ya much about survival down there in Baltimore, did they?

TAG

I didn't wantchya ta die, Queenie!

QUEENIE

I'm sure that must make some kinda. Pretzel-logic sense ta yew but. News flash. Shootin off a gun in the dark? Right over my head? When y've no fuckin idea. How ta even use a gun? Only *increases* the odds a me dyin.

TAG

Was jus tryna protect ya.

QUEENIE

Believe me, Tag. If my life is ever. *Really* in jeopardy. Yew will know.

Queenie unloads her .22, pockets the cartridge.

QUEENIE (CONT'D)

An if yer mom weren't such a. Fuckin bleeding heart? That she's never even let ya. Hold a gun? Much less. Shoot one? Yew'd also know. That ya never. Ever. Touch someone else's gun. Especially not. When ya haven't even had any gun safety training! At. Fucking. All.

TAG

I didn't mean ta-

QUEENIE

An it's not even jus the safety issue that's got me all pissed off.

Queenie slides the emptied rifle into the back of the pick-up truck, butt-end first.

TAG

I know. I scared off the fish. I'm sorry.

QUEENIE

Not even that.

Tag gives her a look.

Beat.

TAG

Yer dad.

Queenie gives him a look.

TAG (CONT'D)

It's jus. Whenever yer head explodes? Always got *sumpin* ta do with yer dad.

Beat.

QUEENIE (CONT'D)

Usta take me out here. Super early? Like this. Ya know. In the dark. Before sun up.

Beat.

QUEENIE (CONT'D)

So. I guess. When we come out fishin? Well. I mean. Especially when we're fishin round Gardiner's Island? I kinda feel like my dad's with us. Ya know like. He's guidin us? In the water, I mean. Toward the fish. Like he's pointing us ta where the fish are.

TAG

That's why they called him the King.

QUEENIE

Where the hell'djya get that from? They called my dad *The King of the Bonackers*. Because our last name is King an. We're *Bonackers*.

TAG

Right. But. I mean. I thought like? Like I always hear them say. Yer dad could smell an eel? From like. Ten miles away?

QUEENIE

Well. Yeah. They say that cuz. Cuz he could. That's what I mean. That's how my dad's guidin us. He's like a fuckin divining rod fer. Fish. Clams an...lobsters. Always finds em. Always could. Especially round Gardiner's Island. Cuz. Well. Cuz that's where he hangs out. Now I mean. It's why I like ta go there. Ta figure things out. Ask him stuff. Ya know.

Beat.

QUEENIE (CONT'D)

So. That's. Why I got so pissed. When ya shot the gun, I mean. Kinda broke the spell, ya know? Kinda. Shattered the whole. Communal. Spirit thing. I mean. Ya didn't scare him off or anything. He's never been afraid a anyone. Least of all. Some. Punk-ass teenage landlubber. Who doesn't even know the difference. Between the stock end. An the barrel of a gun. No. My dad's still out there but. When he doesn't trust a situation? He can be very stealth. But he's there, alright.

Tag stares at Queenie for a moment.

TAG

Hang on. They.

He thinks for a moment.

TAG (CONT'D)

...They never found yer dad's boat, right?

QUEENIE

That's right. Jus. ...Pieces of it.

TAG

So then. Sorry, Queenie. But I. I jus. I guess maybe I'm missing something here? I mean. If they never found yer dad's boat? What makes ya so sure. His body. Is anywhere near Gardiner's Island?

QUEENIE

Oh. I've no idea where my dad's *body* is. I'm not talkin bout his. *Corpus*. I'm talkin about my dad's *spirit*. Yer spirit's much stronger than yer body. An my dad's body? Was super strong.

TAG

His spirit.

QUEENIE

Yeah. Ya know. Like his soul? We all have one, Tag an. Well they're all out there.

TAG

Where now?

QUEENIE

Gardiner's Island.

TAG

An. *Who* all is out there?

QUEENIE

Oh. Bonackers. Montauketts. The souls of ol man Gardiner's freed slaves. Basically. Anyone with an axe ta grind.

TAG

An. Um. What exactly? Is this. Axe they're all grinding? An. If there really is a. *Gaggle* of angry ghosts out there? Shouldn't we be worried? I mean. I don't really wanna disappear. An my mom? She would like. *Totally* freak.

QUEENIE

We're not gonna disappear, Tag. They're not angry with us. We didn't have anything ta do with it.

TAG

With what now?

QUEENIE

The injustice. All they want is justice. For our people. For the land. The water. The fish. The farms. Ya know.

TAG

So this. Ghost. ...*Conference*? Is like. Some kinda. Demand? Fer like. Reparations or something?

QUEENIE

Not exactly. I mean. They're not lookin ta take something. They jus want everybody off Gardiner's Island.

Tag laughs.

TAG

Oh. Like that'll ever happen.

QUEENIE

They stole that fuckin island, Tag.

TAG

Um. They kinda stole most a New York. Didn't they? Or. Bought it fer like a. Dozen clam shells?

QUEENIE

Yup. That's what the bastards did alright.

TAG

So then. Why the focus on. *That* island?

QUEENIE

It's jus what the spirits want. They don't care any about the resta that stuff. It's ancient history. All's they want is. That one little island back.

TAG

An ya know this. How?

QUEENIE

Because I listen. I hear them. I hear what they're saying.

TAG

So ya can actually. Hear. These. Ghosts.

QUEENIE

They're not ghosts, Tag. They're jus. They're jus the unburied.

TAG

Like...Zombies?

QUEENIE

No! They're not undead. Jus. Unsettled. Ya know like...

TAG

Restless.

She nods.

QUEENIE

An' if ya listen. I mean. Really. Listen. Ya can hear 'em. Stirrin in the water an. Cryin in the wind. Can hear 'em goin on bout. What's got em so. Agitated. So. Far from peace.

TAG

An' these. Restless souls. They've told ya. They want Gardiner's island?

QUEENIE

It's never belonged ta Gardiner, Tag. Never belonged ta him or. Any a his batshit crazy family. Belongs t'our ancestors.

TAG

Yeah. Um. Weren't some a yawr ancestors. Gardiners?

QUEENIE

Maybe a. Couple a them were but. Those'd be the assholes. Who cheated the resta my ancestors. Tricked em inta handin over that island. An Montauk Point too. Shouldn't even be called Gardiner's Island. Doesn't belong ta that. Fuckin family. Never has. An never will.

TAG

So. What's the plan?

QUEENIE

The plan?

TAG

Yeah. Ya know. Ta take back the island. From that.
...*Family*. That stole it.

QUEENIE

Oh. Well. They've already got the whole the island surrounded.

TAG

The spirits do? Gardiner's Island? Ya mean. It's surrounded with ghosts like. Fer reals?

QUEENIE

Totally fer reals. It's kinda like a. Watery encampment. Fer. The spirits of. East Hampton's dark past.

Queenie makes the sign of the cross.

TAG

Why do y'always do that? Yer not even Catholic.

QUEENIE

So. Makes me feel better. An it's always a good idea ta show some respect fer the dead. Hedge yer bets, ya know. Anyways. Not like the Vatican has a monopoly on. God or sumpin. I mean, christ, Tag. After turnin a blind eye t'all that. Pedophilia shit? They can hardly claim the highgrou-

TAG

I'll be sure ta mention that ta the priest, next time I'm in church. Hey, Father. Queenie King says yer a dirty ol man. So now? Her Presbyterian ass.

He makes the sign of the cross.

TAG (CONT'D)

Makes the sign a the cross. Jus. Ta spite ya.

QUEENIE

Sometimes yer a real butt fart. Ya know that?

TAG

Hey. If yew smelled my butt farts? Yew'd wanna be one too.

QUEENIE

Ewww. That is so gross, Tag.

TAG

Oh. Like yew don't love the smella yer own farts? Everybody loves the smella their own farts. It's jus not the kinda thing people admit to.

QUEENIE

Yew are. Without a doubt. The *weirdest* dude. I have ever known.

TAG

An yew *love* me fer my weirdness. Oh sure. Ya make, like yer jus usin me fer my pick-up truck? But. I know. That deep down inside? Under all that seaweed cloggin up yer veins? Yew *love* my weird ass, Queenie King.

She tries to hide her face.

TAG (CONT'D)

It's alright. Ya don't have t'admit it. I know it's true.

QUEENIE

Yer crazy.

Queenie tries not to smile.

QUEENIE (CONT'D)

We better get back.

She yanks at the boat, sliding it along the ground toward the back end of the pick-up truck.

Tag sits on the edge of the boat, not quite ready to leave.

TAG

Yeah. Wouldn't wanna get marked late by Lady Fartalot.

Queenie laughs, let's go of the boat, sits next to him.

QUEENIE

She must be a Vegan.

They both laugh.

QUEENIE (CONT'D)

I've never known anyone. Who farted so much in public.

TAG

Me neither. Least. Not a woman. I've known some guys who could fart on cue though.

QUEENIE
 What? Nooo.

TAG
 No seriously.

QUEENIE
 Ya gotta be kiddin.

TAG
 Nope. Ya know how like. Some people can. Burp the alphabet?

QUEENIE
 Yeah.

TAG
 Well these guys could like. Fart on demand. I mean like.

Tag snaps his fingers, makes
 an aural fart noise.

TAG (CONT'D)
 An they used it. Like punctuation. Or like. Jus ta make ya
 laugh? Which. It always did, a course.

They both laugh.

QUEENIE
 Ya miss Baltimore?

TAG
 Not really. I mean. Miss my dad. Miss him a lot but. I like
 it here. Like bein. Closer ta the land? Ya know. Not all.
 Stuck in the city? An. Really like comin out here with yew.
 Even if ya have put me in jeopardy a bein swallowed up by.
 Ghost whales or. Whatever the fuck they are.

QUEENIE
 My dad. Is not a ghost whale, Tag.

TAG
 No. I know.

QUEENIE
 They're jus spirits. An they're not gonna swallow up either
 one of us. Cuz we're on their side.

TAG
 Hey. If that's what it takes. Ta keep me from becomin chum.
 Faw those. Sea ghosts? I am. Totally. On their side.

QUEENIE
 Yew really are a jerk.