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Grape Jelly

A One Act Comedy for One Man & One Woman

By J.C. Svec

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Grape Jelly
Based on a Story by Dakota Lyn Svec

Characters

JOE; a grape jelly person
JEAN; his grape jelly wife

Setting

Sometime in the near future; a table center stage
SCENE: Sometime in the near future. A table sits center stage. Its contents include large jars of both grape jelly and peanut butter plus knives, packages of white bread and several plates.

AT RISE: A man, JOE, and a woman, JEAN, methodically construct healthy peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. They are dressed in contemporary clothes which are protected by full length aprons. When decent piles of sandwiches have been constructed, they break the fourth wall and address the audience.

NOTE: JOE and JEAN continue to construct sandwiches throughout the play. They only address each other when specified; otherwise they break the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience.

JOE
We’re jelly people.

JEAN
Grape jelly... people.

JOE
Yes, grape jelly. (Beat) At a time, not long ago, we thought we might just be the last jelly people on earth.

JEAN
Grape jelly people on earth.

JOE
We thought we had become the last of a... a... a....

JEAN
Dying breed.

JOE
That’s it. The last of a dying breed.

JEAN
The last of a dying breed.

JOE
Until.
(To JOE) Until?

JEAN

We actually were the last of a dying breed.

JOE

Dead.

JEAN

Well... dying.

JOE

Okay.

JEAN

It was interesting how the situation unfolded.

JOE

Strange.

JEAN

That too.

(JEAN nods.)

JOE, Continued

A situation started to unfold.

JEAN

Nothing out of the ordinary, so it appeared.

JOE

We didn’t think much about it, at first.

JEAN

Not much at all.

JOE

It happens sometimes. The depletion of a particular grocery item in a popular supermarket of above average consumer traffic.

JEAN

It’s bound to happen, at some time, in almost every section, one would think.
It was a Sunday morning...

Sundays are when we do our weekly shopping.

We used to do it on Saturdays.

Saturdays are now for laundry.

(To JEAN) Oh, I like that new detergent.

(To JOE) Like a Fresh Meadow. (Beat) And so it does.

(To JEAN) And so it is. (Beat) Where was I?

(JOE and JEAN think.)

(To JOE) Sunday morning shopping.

(To JEAN) Yes. (To audience) But, that Sunday morning, as we were doing our weekly shopping...

I said that.

Please.

Sorry.

(To JEAN regroups by mouthing what he has just said.)

(Continues) We noticed something, that for us, was very...

Upsetting.
Distressing.

And upsetting.

Low stock.

Highly irregular for this particular item and in this particular store.

The grape jelly we were used to buying was no longer available.  *(Beat)*  The next week...

Even lower stock.  And in more than one brand of the item in question.

The next week.

Just the store brand.  One variety. One size. Just one choice.

The next week.

Nothing.

*(Exhales)*  The shelf space for grape jelly was now completely empty.

So we patiently waited... and waited.

For several weeks.

For much, much longer than the usual allotted time for any low stock, emptied shelf space situation.  *(To JOE)*  Did that make sense?

*(Under breath)*  That was fine.
JEAN

(To audience; demure) Thank you.

JOE

It wasn’t as if all jellies and jams were no longer being stocked.

JEAN

There were plenty of... others.

JOE

It wasn’t as if the store was out of particular brands.

JEAN

Or specific varieties.

JOE

Or jar sizes.

JEAN

There was product to be had.

JOE

If you wanted anything other than grape jelly.

JEAN

They were stocked.

JOE

Oh, they were stocked.

JEAN

Yes, they were stocked.

JOE

(To JEAN) I said that.

JEAN

(Shakes her head) I know. (To JOE) It was already out of my mouth when I realized. (Very upset) I’m sorry.

JOE

(To JEAN) Calm down... it’s okay.

JEAN

(To JOE) Thank you. (Beat) I love you.
(To JEAN) I love you, too.

(Silence.)

Stocked.

(Regroups) Yes, the shelves were stocked.

But...

There was that clear indication our type of spreadable delight was no longer desirable.

(To JOE) That was very poetic.

I try.

It had been a subtle, almost unrecognizable elimination at first.

First, the larger size jars.

Then the low sugar...

...the sugar free...

Finally they were down to Welch’s and Smuckers Grape Jelly.

Twelve ounce jars.

(JEAN forms the size of the jar with her hand. JOE adjusts her fingers slightly, faces the audience and nods. JEAN holds up a plate of sandwiches.)

(To audience) Is anyone hungry?
[*NOTE: If someone in the audience raises a hand, JEAN should deliver a sandwich, or two. If, or if not, she should bite into a sandwich of her own and continue.]

JEAN, Continued

The Flintstones.

JOE

Excuse me.

JEAN

(To JOE) The Flintstones. The cartoon.

JOE

(To JEAN) I know who the Flintstones are. Why...?

JEAN

(To JOE) Welch’s Jelly.

(JOE gestures that he is still lost.)

JEAN, Continued

When you emptied the jar it became a drinking glass.

JOE

(Acknowledges) I remember. I do remember.

JEAN

My family had a set of twelve. Passed down over the years, of course.

JOE

We only had a couple. One for me and one for my sister. (Beat) Then the glass broke.

JEAN

Yours?

JOE

No, my sister’s.

JEAN

Aww.

JOE

She took mine.
JEAN

Ohh.

JOE

(To JEAN) I hated my sister.

JEAN

(To JOE) Because she took your Flintstones glass?

JOE

(To JEAN) No, because she hated me. I couldn’t care less about the glass.

JEAN

Uh-huh.

JOE

(To JEAN) By the way, how’s your sister Sandy?

JEAN

(To JOE) Very well, thank you.

(Both JOE and JEAN relax with a sandwich. They then remember the audience and continue without missing a beat.)

JOE

Welch’s and Smuckers.

JEAN

Twelve ounce jars.

JOE

One grape jelly.

JEAN

One grape jam.

JOE

Meanwhile, all the other brands, varieties and flavors were there... available.

JEAN

Slowly taking over for... replacing...

JOE AND JEAN, Together

Grape jelly.
There were red raspberry preserves—

And jam.  

Peach preserves.  

Strawberry and blackberry preserves.  

Apricot preserves and jelly.  

Even pineapple preserves.  

Orange marmalade.  

Black cherry jelly.  

Blueberry jelly.  

All Fruit.  

Currant.  

And legion... langdon... legend...  

(To JEAN) What are you trying to say?  

JEAN  

(To JOE) You know, the preserves... from Sweden.  

JEAN  

Ah, lingonberry.
(Excited) That’s it.

But... preserves, not the jam.

Same thing.

No, not really.

Really? (To JOE) There’s a difference between jam, jelly and preserves?

(To JEAN) Not really so much between jelly and preserves, but between jelly and preserves and jam.

Hmmm. Really. Do tell.

Preserves and jelly refer to fruits, or vegetables, that have been prepared and canned for long term storage.

(JEAN is silent. She waits for JOE to continue.)

The use of pectin. As a gelling agent.

Jelly agent?

Gel-ling agent. You could use honey or sugar.

And jam is different?

Slightly. Theoretically, jam is a variation of preserves. The difference is a jam often has pieces of the actual fruit’s flesh. Some sources merely differentiate jam as cooked and gelled, that’s gelled, fruit puree.
Wow.

Jam usually refers to a product made with whole fruit, cut into pieces and crushed.

I didn’t know that.

Most times just one fruit rather than a combination.

One fruit?

Yes.

(To JOE) Do you know what fruit butter is?

Yes, I do. A larger fruit, your apple, plum, peach, is cooked until softened and then run through a sieve for a smooth consistency. Add sugar, and cook rapidly with a constant simmer.

How about conserves?

Fruit stewed in sugar.

And confit?

(Shakes his head) Preservation of meat. Nothing to do with fruit.

(To JOE) You amaze me.

I just know my jams and jellies. For us and... for them.

(JOE gestures to the audience.)
(To JOE) I love you.

JOE

(To JEAN) I know. (Beat) Back to the shelf space?

JEAN

Let’s.

JOE

The shrinking shelf space and diminished stock was, in our opinion, clearly, not a coincidence.

JEAN

So, we spoke to the store manager hoping for an answer.

JOE

We approached the store manager.

JEAN

Yes, we approached the store manager. Joe spoke to him.

JOE

‘We are good, regular customers,’ I said.

JEAN

I was standing behind Joe, nodding my head.

JOE

‘Mr. Tucker,’ I asked...

JEAN

We knew it was Mr. Tucker because of his picture over the Customer Services counter. Where we get our lottery tickets.

JOE

Remind me to get tickets for the next drawing.

JEAN

I will.

JOE

‘Mr. Tucker,’ I asked. ‘Why are you no longer stocking any brand or variety of grape jelly?’

JEAN

Or...
‘Or grape jam, for that matter?’

And he replied...

(In a deep voice) ‘We do stock grape jelly and jam. Twelve ounce jars. Welch’s Grape Jelly and Smucker’s Grape Jam. Aisle 13 with the peanut butter, Marshmallow Fluff and Nutella spread. The original creamy, chocolaty hazelnut spread.’

And then...

He walked away.

Just disappeared into the lines that had gathered at the checkouts.

We were looking for a bit more of an explanation.

Now...

It was up to us.

To find an answer.

The answer.

We left the store and on our way back to our car we plotted our next move.

Road trip.

Down the road to the A&P.
JOE
Then cross town to the Whole Foods and from there, Pathmark. Twenty minutes more to the Stop and Shop and finally—

JEAN
Lunch.

*(JEAN’S comment has put an immediate halt to the momentum of the scene.)*

JOE
*(To JEAN)* Not really relevant to our saga.

*(JEAN thinks hard.)*

JEAN
*(To JOE)* No, it isn’t, is it? Sorry. *(To audience)* Sorry.

JOE
Finally... King’s.

JEAN
But, we weren’t done.

JOE
Into the city.

JEAN
New York... City. And beyond.

JOE
We visited them all. Met Foods, D’Agostino’s, The Food Emporium, Walbaum’s, Gristedes, Key Food and King Kullen.

JEAN
And all the overpriced bodegas and deli’s in between.

JOE
The situation got worse by the day... by the hour, no, by the minute.

JEAN
With each visit there were less and less jars of grape jelly to be found.

JOE
They were disappearing overnight.
Our search had taken weeks. We slept on the street...

When we slept...

In the subways... in parks.

When we returned home we persevered.

Every minute of every day on the phone and searching the internet.

There were only more lies...

And less grape jelly availability.

Until...

Until...

It was gone.

From everywhere.

Our worst fears had come true.

Back at our Shop Rite...

The amount of shelf space once reserved for grape jelly and jam was now occupied, by of all things....

Mint jelly. That’s right. Mint jelly.
JOE

In jars of every shape and size. Original, regular, reduced fat, low fat, fat free—

JEAN

Seedless.

*(JOE is once again thrown by JEAN’S random comment.)*

JOE

They didn’t... there couldn’t be, seeds.

JEAN

Oh. No? *(To JOE)* Why not?

JOE

*(To JEAN)* Mint isn’t a fruit... it’s a leaf.

JEAN

*(To JOE)* They can make jelly from a leaf?

JOE

*(To JEAN)* And stems.

JEAN

*(To JOE)* The stems, too? *(Beat) You’re kidding.

JOE

*(To JEAN)* You can make it yourself.

JEAN

*(To JOE)* No?

JOE

One to one and half cups of fresh mint leaves and stems, four to six drops of green food coloring, two and a quarter cups of water, three and a half cups of sugar, two tablespoons of lemon juice, from the bottle, and a three ounce pouch of liquid pectin makes about four half-pint jars.

*(JEAN ponders the idea.)*

JEAN

They even had it in squeezable containers.

JOE

Produced by every major company you could think of. Worse yet was the seemingly total acceptance of the disappearance of an American food staple.
JEAN
It just didn’t seem to matter to anyone. No grape jelly, no big deal. Shoppers just selected something else.

JOE
Like robots.

(JOE pantomimes a zombie-like individual selecting any-old-jar of fruit spread.)

JEAN
Then one night, sitting in a dumbfounded state about the whole situation, we attempted to put the pieces to our mysterious puzzle together.

(Silence.)

JOE
We were playing Scrabble. I had the “J”.

JEAN
I hate it when I get the ‘J’.

JOE
I perused the letters on my rack and there they were. J-L-L-Y. Well, with the word grape running vertically on the board and the “E” available...

JEAN
It was a sign.

JOE
It was a triple word score.

JEAN
It was an omen.

JOE
We had to continue our...

JEAN
Quest.

JOE
Yes, quest. We were destined to find the reason behind the now extinct product we knew simply as... grape jelly.

(JEAN fights to hold back her emotions.)
JOE, Continued

(To JEAN) Are you all right?

JEAN

(To JOE) It just so overwhelming sometimes.

JOE

(To JEAN) I know, I know.

JEAN

(To JOE) Sorry, dear. Please continue.

JOE

(To JEAN) What a trooper.

JEAN

(To JOE) Thank you.

JOE

Our theory, brief and to the point, is what we thought was the sudden and unexpected disappearance of grape jelly was, in fact, a process that had been going on for some time prior, and right under our noses.

JEAN

Everyone’s noses.

JOE

Apparently we were the only one’s bothered by the situation. And aware of the circumstances at the end of the... extermination.

(JEAN quickly covers her mouth in fear.)

JEAN

The last thing we wanted to do was bring attention to ourselves...

JOE

By complaining, questioning, or even mentioning the subject.

(JEAN zips her mouth shut with her finger.)

JOE, Continued

We kept our mouths shut and our eyes and ears open.

(JEAN cups her ears.)
JOE, Continued

We spent every spare minute reading newspapers and magazines. We watched every news program and took shifts searching sites on the computer.

*(JEAN types on an “air keyboard.”)*

JEAN

Just for some hint, some remote bit of information.

JOE

After some time, it was clear. We were the last two people on earth who still liked, no, desired...

And wanted...

Grape jelly.

JEAN

It was a horrid realization.

JOE

Sad. Disconcerting and depressing.

Dreadful. Absolutely dreadful.

There was nothing more to do.

JEAN

We packed up whatever research materials we had accumulated over the months and tried to settle back into a normal routine.

JOE

Several days later, we were watching television.

Antiques Road Show.

JOE

A woman from Hartford, Connecticut had a collection of Civil War era military buttons.

JEAN

Regular jacket buttons.
What else would they be?

JEAN

Well, they could have been campaign buttons.

JOE

(To JEAN) You’re right. I stand corrected.

JEAN

No need.

JOE

(To JEAN) I love you.

JEAN

(To JOE) And I love you.

JOE

(To audience) One of the jacket buttons was manufactured for the Arkansas Militia.

JEAN

It was worth five thousand dollars.

JOE

The reason I’m telling you this story is that how the buttons were mounted in their display brought up a very fond memory...

JEAN

The array of buttons reminded us how we would serve snacks to guests in our home.

JOE

Platters of Ritz crackers topped with...

(JEAN takes JOE’S arm.)

JOE AND JEAN, Together

Grape jelly.

JOE

It was time to finish the last of the Welch’s we had been saving for a special occasion. It was about a half an hour later when something most unusual occurred.

JEAN

(To JOE) I always scraped the last of the grape jelly from the bottom of the jar... you just never saw me.
JOE
That’s not what I was referring to.

JEAN
No?

JOE
No. Of course not.

JEAN
Oh. (Beat) Maybe it would be best if I just...

(JEAN makes a shushing gesture. Just as JOE begins to speak...)

JEAN, Continued
I need to stop interfering, don’t I?

JOE
At times you...digress.

JEAN
Sorry.

JOE
I love you.

JEAN
I know. Me too.

(JOE ponders her response.)

JEAN, Continued
So, tell them what was so unusual.

JOE
We receive a phone call from an anonymous individual who wants to know if we were the individuals looking for grape jelly.

(JOE waits for JEAN to interject.)

JOE, Continued
It had been months since our last inquiries. I acknowledged we were and that we had.

(JOE nudges JEAN.)
(Smiles) Made inquiries.

I’m sorry.

I love you.

I love you. (Beat) I received a phone number from the mysterious voice.

(Serious) It was a number assigned within in our state.

After all we had been through... we knew—

Without discussion...

We had to call the number.

We huddled together... each with an ear to the receiver.

I dialed the number... slowly.

Of course, slowly, we still own a rotary phone.

(To JEAN) It still works.

(To JOE) Hello, sweetheart. The twentieth century.

Twenty-first.

Exactly!
JOE

You’ve...

*(JOE refers to the interruption. JEAN gasps.)*

JEAN

*(Embarrassed; to JOE)* So, so, sorry.

JOE

On the other end of the call was an automated message.

JEAN

Don’t give away too much.

JOE

It doesn’t matter now, does it?

JEAN

Well, out of respect.

JOE

*(To JEAN)* Good point. *(To audience)* The message provided an address and... *(To JEAN)* I can tell the time, can’t I?

JEAN

I’m sure that will be fine.

JOE

Friday night. Eight o’clock. We had three days to determine what we should do.

JEAN

Finally, we agreed to attend.

JOE

Why not. We had gone as far as we could on our quest for answers and...

JEAN

Grape jelly.

JOE

We had to follow through, no matter where the adventure would take us.

JEAN

Anyway, there’s nothing new on TV on Friday nights.

JOE

It’s movie night with Chinese take-out.
JEAN
To be honest, it was pizza. We had Chinese the week before.

JOE
It was pizza. (Beat) But we had already discussed what we were going to order come Friday night.

JEAN
Because it appeared you really wanted pizza.

JOE
And you were willing to skip Chinese? For pizza?

JEAN
I was willing to skip Chinese... for you.

JOE
(To JEAN) I love you so much.

JEAN
(To JOE) I love you just as much.

(Silence.)

JOE
(To JEAN) You want sub sandwiches this week.

JEAN
(Excited; to JOE) Sure.

JOE
So with directions and map in hand...

JEAN
(Whispers) I’m getting him a GPS for Christmas.

JOE
A what?

JEAN
Nothing.

JOE
We began our trek, not knowing where we would end up, or what we would find there.
It was a moonless, pitch black night. A slight breeze rustled the remaining leaves in the trees. It was chilly, but not cold. The kind of chill that goes through to your bones if—

JEAN

(Silence.)

JEAN

(Quickly) We had a rendezvous with destiny.

JOE

What it did turn out to be was a meeting. In the back room of a Perkins Pancake House.

JEAN

A secret meeting.

JOE

Under the guise of a book club meeting.

JEAN

(Recembers) That’s right. The hostess asked us if we were there for the book club meeting... and she winked at us.

JOE

We winked back.

(JEAN displays an over zealous wink.)

JEAN

Only there were no books.

JOE

Just a room full of people, just like us.

JEAN

Lovers of the jelly.

(JOE looks up and sighs, deeply.)

JOE

We all proceeded to introduce ourselves and over the course of the night shared our stories. We had all received the same phone call, listened to the same recorded directive and made our way to the same restaurant.
JEAN
It was good to meet people just like us. In the same predicament.

JOE
Just as the conversations concluded and it seemed as if the evening was over—

He walked into the room.

JOE
He was a tall, comely, gentleman.

JEAN
(To JOE) Comely?

JOE
(To JEAN) Good-looking. Handsome.

JEAN
(To audience) He was hot.

JOE
(To JEAN) Excuse me?

JEAN
(To JOE) I’m agreeing with you. He was an attractive man.

JOE
Yes. (To audience) He was better looking than the average man.

(JEAN agrees emphatically.)

JOE, Continued
Oh, go ahead and say it.

JEAN
He was really hot. (Beat) Thank you. (Beat) I love you.

JOE
I’m not threatened.

JEAN
Good.

JOE
His attire was impeccable. He spoke very little.
And, he refused to give us his name.

JEAN

Except to say... ‘It was up to us.’

JOE

‘It was up to us.’

JEAN

That was all. (Beat) We all remained silent. Slowly, one by one, we looked to each other. What was ‘up to us?’

JOE

He remained still.

JEAN

The room got quieter still—

JOE

If that was possible...

JEAN

As he walked amongst us.

JOE

When he settled in the center of the room...

JEAN

And we all had formed a circle around him...

JOE

He snapped his fingers.

JEAN

The loudest finger snap one could ever imagine.

JOE

The back door flew open and dozens of other men, women and children entered the room.

JEAN

Each person carried a case of grape jelly.

JOE

As quickly as they entered the room, they handed off their case of jelly to one of us and left...
Through the same back door.

As quiet as church mice.

They never uttered a word...

Not a sound...

They handed us a box, smiled, and were off. (Beat) We all stood there... amazed.

Some stared at each other...

Most at what they were holding in their arms.

He had been watching the proceedings with great concentration—

And delight.

Then, without warning or introduction or...

(JEAN looks to JOE.)

Fanfare.

Good. (To audience) He spoke.

‘Go forth and spread the jelly.’

I actually giggled, thinking it was a joke. Spread the jelly.

(JEAN pantomimes the directive.)
JEAN, Continued

You know... spread...jelly

JOE

In Jean’s defense, several people in the room were laughing.

JEAN

But...

JOE

It was no joke.

(JEAN shakes her head vigorously.)

JOE, Continued

In an instant, we all realized the severity of the situation. The responsibility we were being asked to assume and the undertaking on which we were about to embark.

JEAN

(Whispers to audience) F.Y.I., those of us who found humor in the initial situation apologized to whom we could as we were leaving.

JOE

(To JEAN) You needed to do that, didn’t you?

JEAN

(To JOE) Yes. Yes, I did.

JOE

(To JEAN) Feel better?

JEAN

(To JOE) Yes. Yes, I do.

JOE

He then pulled up a chair, told us to relax, and spoke to us for forty-five minutes.

JEAN

His voice was soothing... calm.

JOE

His name was Mr. Blue. He reviewed the time line of grape jelly’s demise. He explained when it began—

JEAN

(Cuts in) An ACME Supermarket in Jersey City, New Jersey.
JOE

— and why.

JEAN

When asked by her mother what brand grape jelly she wanted...

JOE

... a little girl in pigtails and a frilly pink dress responded through the gap produced by two missing front teeth...

JEAN

‘I’d prefer just a spoonful of peanut butter, thank you.’

JOE

It took nothing more than a simple lack of interest in a peanut butter and jelly sandwich by a youngsters to get the ball rolling.

JEAN

He explained everything.

JOE

Peanut butter’s rise to prominence in the pastry and candy world. Grandmothers’ failure to pass along their recipes for lindsor tortes.

JEAN

The whole low calorie, processed food craze.

JOE

He had statistics, names, memos, official documents.

JEAN

It was frightening.

JOE

His final words hit home. If it could happen to grape jelly, it could happen to anything.

JEAN

Imagine the world without... Macaroni and Cheese.

JOE

Ring Dings.

JEAN

Ketchup.
JOE

(To JEAN) Catsup.

(JEAN ignores JOE’S correction.)

JEAN

Mustard, French fries, spaghetti sauce... bread for God’s sake!

JOE

(To JEAN) You okay?

JEAN

I couldn’t live without bread.

JOE

Who could? (To audience) Now it was up to those of us in that room. We had received our charge. We were told groups such as ours were forming across the nation – around the world, that night.

JEAN

It wasn’t important how they got our name and phone number...

JOE

What was important was being part of the movement.

JEAN

Helping the cause.

JOE

Until our job was done, we would receive a phone call at the same time every Tuesday night. The message would tell us where and when to pick up our case of grape jelly. From there it was up to, on our own time and in our own way to...

JOE AND JEAN, Together

Go forth and spread the jelly.

(Silence... then JEAN giggles... but just a bit.)

JOE

Stop it.

JEAN

Sorry.
We started with samples at street fairs and flea markets. Shelters, parks, anywhere we could find a public gathering.

Location, location, location.

We were getting the word out, building a following again, just not getting the grass roots movement we had hoped for.

Groups around the world were experiencing the same problems.

That’s when, (To JEAN) what did you call it?

A miracle.

(To JOE) Like she has anything to confess.

(Serious; to JOE) I do.

Right.

You’d be surprised.
I would?

Yes.

(To JEAN) Anything I should be worried about?

(To JOE) What do you mean by that?

(To JEAN) Is there something I should be worried about?

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes