CUCKOO CLOCK

A Comedy in One Act

By Jenna Jane

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Summary

"Cuckoo Clock" is a one-act farce about a first date that goes horribly wrong, set inside a German restaurant. Hotshot college senior Grant, hellbent on getting his future in order, already has his whole life with Jill planned. Will Jill succumb to the fantasy and her people-pleaser tendencies? Will their waitress Wilma eliminate Jill as competition and finally attract Grant's attention? And what's up with that guy sitting in the corner? A cautionary tale for anyone who believes a relationship will save them, "Cuckoo Clock" explores what happens when people feel like they're running out of time.

Cast of characters

A note from the playwright on gender references, below: These are only suggestions. Gender is just a performative social construct, anyway. Do whatever feels right to you.

GRANT: Male, late teens to mid-20s. A college senior. Charismatic, driven, and direct. A planner who knows exactly what he wants.

JILL: Female, late teens to mid-20s. A freshman in her first week of college. Moved to a big city from a small town. Polite and proper. People pleaser. She'd rather be in an uncomfortable situation than hurt someone's feelings.

WILMA OSTERHAGE: Female, 20s-40s. Thick German accent. A waitress who yearns for more. Sees Grant as her ticket to a better life. Passionate, but has a jealous streak. Wears her heart on her sleeve.

HANS: Male, 20s-50s. A regular at the Osterhage Café. Thick German accent. Unsure of how to express his feelings.

PENNY: Female, late teens to mid-20s. She's gotta pee.

Setting

A German restaurant in a college town.

SET: A German restaurant with a black and white checkered tile floor and forest green walls. The walls are covered in cuckoo clocks and German beer advertisements featuring busty women and men in lederhosen. Various lawn gnomes, porcelain pigs, and ceramic roosters clutter every surface. There are restroom doors upstage right. A swinging door to the kitchen is upstage left.

AT RISE: Before lights up, we hear festive German music for about 15 seconds. Then a clock loudly ticking, followed by a cuckoo clock noise. Lights up. HANS, a large man wearing lederhosen sits at a table upstage right with a beer stein that's at least a foot tall. HANS gulps it throughout the play. GRANT and JILL enter stage right, GRANT ahead of JILL. GRANT carries a sleek messenger bag. GRANT leads JILL to a table downstage center.

GRANT
(Pulling out a chair for JILL and gesturing for her to sit.)
How does this table look?

JILL
(Sitting.)
Such a gentleman. This looks good to me.

(JILL starts perusing the menu. GRANT doesn't.)

GRANT
So, what do you think of college life so far?

(As JILL talks, WILMA enters from the swinging kitchen door upstage left. HANS sits up a little straighter and smooths his hair. WILMA has hulking blonde braided pigtails intertwined with green ribbon. She wears a mid-calf length brown skirt with a black apron over it and a white off-the-shoulder blouse with puffy sleeves under an olive green bustier. She sees GRANT and gasps. She pulls a mirror and lipstick out of her apron.

She applies the lipstick, puts it away, then pulls her sleeves down a little further off her shoulders.)

JILL

Well, obviously, it's only been about a week, but I feel like things are going well so far. Dorm living is going to take some getting used to. My roommate is nice. And, more importantly, she's tidy. I'm kind of a people pleaser, so I know I would've had a hard time speaking up if her messiness was making me uncomfortable. And living in a big city like this is a huge change from my tiny hometown in Vermont. There are more students in one lecture here than there were in my whole senior class! My course load seems pretty manageable. But, I'll be honest, I wasn't expecting--

(WILMA crosses to GRANT and JILL's table. She looks at JILL with disgust, then smiles at GRANT.)

WILMA

(In a thick, booming German accent.)

Velcome back to ze Osterhage Café, Grant. Eet ees so goot to see you again.

(Turning briefly to JILL.)

Und I see you have a friend vit you. I am Vilma Osterhage und I vill be taking your order for zis evening.

(Directing her attention back to GRANT.)

Our specials are wiener schnitzel, bratwurst, schnitzelgruben, und knockwurst. Our house beers on tap tonight are Becherovka Becker und Schladere Himbeergist. Vot can I get for you?

JILL

(Cheerful.)

Well, Wilma, I'll have—

WILMA

(Dryly.)

It's Vilma.

JILL

(Embarrassed, pronouncing it awkwardly.)

Vilma, I'll just have a glass of water and the soup of the day.

(WILMA frowns in disapproval. She turns to GRANT and smiles broadly, placing a hand on his shoulder.)

WILMA

Und how about you, daaaaahling?

GRANT

I'll have schnitzelgruben with sauerkraut and a pint of hefeweizen.

(GRANT holds out his menu toward WILMA.)

WILMA

(Seductively.)

My pleasure.

(WILMA tenderly takes GRANT's menu, conspicuously brushing his hand with hers, then snatches JILL's menu. She looks over her shoulder at HANS on her way to the kitchen.)

I'll get you another round.

(WILMA exits into the kitchen. HANS slumps and sips his beer.)

GRANT

What were you saying a moment ago? About not expecting something?

JILL

You're a really good listener. Most guys back home aren't like that.

(GRANT beams.)

I was saying I didn't expect to be on my first date after just a week of college. Especially with a senior.

GRANT

And captain of the lacrosse team.

JILL

Right.

GRANT

And president of the debate club.

JILL

Right.

GRANT

And president of my fraternity.

JILL

Right.

GRANT

The most popular fraternity on campus.

JILL

…Right.

GRANT

And I'm on track to graduate summa cum laude.

(GRANT pulls a piece of paper out of his messenger bag and presents it to JILL.)

Here's my resumé. Why don't you look it over?

(GRANT sits back confidently in his chair, crossing his arms. JILL eyes the resumé uncomfortably, then places it aside, smiling cheerfully.)

JILL

Well, that's all really impressive, Grant.

(WILMA enters from kitchen with three drinks on a tray.)

WILMA

Here ve are!

(HANS races to finish what's left of his beer. WILMA places GRANT's beer gingerly in front of him. She puts JILL's water sloppily in front of her, spilling about a third of it on the table. WILMA turns her back to JILL huffily and presents HANS with another stein of beer. HANS raises it

(HANS looks disappointed and sips the beer.)

JILL

I've never been to a German restaurant before. Do you come here often?

GRANT

Oh yeah, I come here all the time. Great food, wonderful atmosphere…

(HANS belches loudly, then continues drinking, letting some beer run down his chin.)

I always feel right at home here.

JILL

Oh, are you German?

GRANT

Nope.

(Awkward pause.)

JILL

(Pleasantly.)

Oh.

(Long pause. HANS hums a little to entertain himself. JILL looks over at HANS.)

GRANT

(Pronouncing "So" loudly. JILL jumps a little.)

So, you're an English major?

JILL

Yes, I've always been fascinated by language.

GRANT

I love English!

JILL

Really?

GRANT

Yeah, I speak it all the time!

JILL

Oh!

(GRANT takes JILL's hand from across the table.)

GRANT

I can tell we have so much in common. So, how did your family feel about you leaving their small town for the big city?

JILL

They're really supportive, thank goodness. I don't know if I could have made the move if they disapproved. Family is really important to me.

GRANT

I love that about you. I guess you could say I'm pretty family-oriented myself.

JILL

That's really nice. Not something I expected to hear from a college guy.

GRANT

I really want to have children, you know.

JILL

Yeah, that's really important to me, too.

GRANT

I'd really like to have children with you.

(HANS chokes on his beer and erupts into a coughing fit. We hear a loud bang from upstage left, like WILMA dropped a pan in the kitchen. We hear cursing in German.)

JILL

What?

GRANT

As soon as possible, actually.

JILL

Excuse me?

(We hear a clock ticking quietly.)

GRANT

Well, now that I'm a senior, it's time to get my whole life in order. So, I'd like to start a family as soon as possible.

JILL

(Like it's all a joke.)

Having children is such a big step, especially on a first date.

GRANT

I love you.

JILL

(A pause, then tentatively.)

I am highly enamored of you as well, Grant. But this seems so sudden.

GRANT

I think we should get married.

(WILMA peers out from behind the kitchen door, furious.)

JILL

What?

GRANT

Marry me, Jill!

JILL

I just met you on Thursday.

GRANT

I'm in love with you, Jill. I love everything about you. Why shouldn't we get married?

(WILMA retreats to the kitchen. We hear more German cursing and banging of pots.)

JILL

Look, I've never been on a date before. But I'm pretty sure this isn't how it's supposed to go. I barely know you.

GRANT

I feel as if I've known you for years.

JILL

(Slowly and diplomatically.)

Grant, you really are a catch. I've never met anyone like you. Your accomplishments on campus are quite impressive. And, of course, you're very handsome. I would love to get to know you better and see where this goes. But I simply cannot accept your proposal at this time.

(A pause. GRANT taps his foot.)

GRANT

How about now?

JILL

No, thank you.

(A pause. GRANT taps his foot.)

GRANT

Now?

JILL

No! No, Grant.

GRANT

OK, I think I know why you're upset.

JILL

(A relieved laugh.)

Oh, my goodness! This was all a joke! You were just kidding about--

GRANT

You're disappointed that I didn't formally propose to you.

JILL

(Laughing uncomfortably.)

You're just playing a prank on me, right?

(GRANT stands and speaks loudly, reminiscent of a circus ringmaster. His speech sounds oddly rehearsed.)

GRANT

My darling Jill, I have waited my whole life to meet someone as wonderful as you.

(GRANT gets down on one knee.)

And I implore you, with everyone present here as my witness…

(HANS looks around at the otherwise empty restaurant.)

Jill, my sweetheart, my one true love…

(GRANT reaches into his pocket and pulls out a ring with a diamond the size of a grape. WILMA enters from kitchen with JILL's soup, GRANT's schnitzelgruben and sauerkraut, and another beer stein for HANS on a serving tray. She slams the beer onto HANS's table, then stomps over to JILL and GRANT.)

GRANT

(Grandly.)

Will you marry me?

(WILMA intentionally spills the soup on JILL.)

WILMA

Voopsadaisy!

(JILL gasps.)

Oh no! I spilled soup all over your pretty sveater!

JILL

(Relieved for an excuse to get away.)

Oh, my goodness! I'd better go clean this up before it stains.

(Jill practically sprints to the bathroom. GRANT sits back down dejectedly. WILMA eyes GRANT hungrily. HANS starts gulping his beer.)

WILMA

Here is your schnitzelgruben, daaahling.

(WILMA extends the plate to GRANT with a flourish. He takes it.)

GRANT

(Pissed.)

Thanks a lot.

WILMA

I guess I'd better… clean zis up.

(WILMA slowly pulls a small towel out of her blouse and shakes it about in a manner that she thinks is very attractive. HANS loosens his collar. WILMA leans over GRANT'S table, thrusting out her cleavage awkwardly as she cleans. GRANT is oblivious. He takes a bite of schnitzelgruben. WILMA intentionally knocks a spoon off GRANT's table.)

Voopsadaisy…

(WILMA turns around and bends over to pick up the spoon. HANS leans to try to get a better view.)

How is your schnitzelgruben, Grant?

GRANT

It's fine, Wilma.

(WILMA places the dirty spoon in JILL's soup bowl. HANS tries to take another sip of beer, looks like he's going to be sick, tosses the remainder over his shoulder.)

WILMA

It's Vilma, daaahling.

GRANT

Weelma.

WILMA

Vilma.

GRANT

Vilhemina.

WILMA

Viiiiiiiiillllllmaaaaaaaa.

(JILL enters from bathroom, carrying a drenched sweater.)