

Yard Sale Signs

a comedy about mothers and daughters and other things
that imply some sort of responsibility

by Jennie Webb

Dialogue Sample

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Yard Sale Signs

CHARACTERS:

The Focused Woman - She concentrates on the task at hand and when she looks up, often gets angry because not everyone else does and she sees it's all on her shoulders. Somewhere in her thirties.

The Scattered Woman - She manages to keep it together by living in the largest, most haphazard way possible, and not recognizing walls or boundaries and sometimes herself. In her forties or beyond.

The Selfless Woman - She is trying very hard to fill the role she finds herself in, without ever admitting it might not be a good fit and she might get lost in it. Solidly in her forties.

The Awkward Girl - She is kind of a large lump of clay, and maybe only starting to look at who's molding her. Or maybe not. Twelve, going on.

The Only Man - He has pretty much learned to be comfortable in his own skin, but part of that is advertising the fact, maybe. Hard to tell, but wouldn't admit to being past forty.

The Woman With Children - She refuses to limit herself or allow herself to project less than the ideal image of herself, and succeeds to an almost fabulous degree. If you had to guess, barely forty, in good lighting.

SETTING:

The communal women's dressing room of a discount clothing store—think Loehmans, or Filene's Basement—which could be something more or quite different. The room is lined with full-length mirrors, and contains a single, small curtained dressing area.

The focused woman considers an entirely new outfit in the mirror.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

(to the only man) Okay. Would you hire me wearing this?

THE ONLY MAN:

Hire you? I'd marry you!

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Hah!

THE ONLY MAN:

That's not the goal?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

A job first. Then who knows. *(looking again in the mirror, to the scattered woman)*
You think?

SCATTERED WOMAN:

Definitely.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I feel really good.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

You look fantastic. You're comin' back, baby.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Oh, yeah?

SCATTERED WOMAN:

You'll be great.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Okay, okay. But *you!* You get to work. You said you wanted to get them all paid.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

I'll do it later.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

That wasn't our deal.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

Pleeeeeeease?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Not fair. You always make me the bad guy!

SCATTERED WOMAN:

But you're so good at it!

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Really not fair.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

I know.

She sits back down with her bag, joining the only man who's eating his lunch.

THE ONLY MAN:

Dare I ask?

SCATTERED WOMAN:

Bills. It helps to pay 'em while shopping.

THE ONLY MAN:

Of course.

The scattered woman pulls a piece of cardboard out of her bag.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

(to the focused woman) Oh! Look what I've got for you!

The cardboard has "Yard Sale" written on it, along with a location and date or day(s).

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Arrrrrgh. Why do people do that?

THE ONLY MAN:

Have yard sales?

SCATTERED WOMAN:

No, thank *jesus* for the sales...

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I mean the signs.

THE ONLY MAN:

(to the scattered woman) The signs...

SCATTERED WOMAN:

The people who leave up the signs. After the sale's over.

THE ONLY MAN:

What about them?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

They're irresponsible assholes who are spreading like a plague on this poor, beleaguered planet.

THE ONLY MAN:

Because of their signs?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Because they have no sense of where they end and the rest of the world begins, which leaves them with absolutely no compulsion to *consider* much less *do* the right thing.

THE ONLY MAN:

A sign tells you that?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

And then some! (*taking the sign*) These people: they plaster the neighborhood with notices about their belongings, their stuff, all the bits and pieces of their sad little lives which is now junk that's not good enough or meaningful enough for *them* anymore but someone else surely will value it because, after all, it was theirs, and this in itself makes it this irresistible hot ticket, right? And then they don't even try to hide their all-consuming narcissism because they don't have enough respect for anyone else to take the signs down afterwards. Because they're entitled to post what they consider to be an irrevokable license: it *is* all about me because everyone's buying it!

THE ONLY MAN:

I... never looked at it that way.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

No one does.

The woman with children comes out, looking attractive—and she knows it—in the cocktail dress. She can't find the only man and she needs more mirrors.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

(*to the focused woman*) Excuse me! Did you see where—

THE ONLY MAN:

(interrupting) Here, darling! *(looking at her outfit)* Hey! That's yummy!

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

I feel ridiculous.

THE ONLY MAN:

Well, just get over it. You're irresistible.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Ha ha. Right. *(to the women)* I normally just wear work-out clothes. I spend as much time as I can at the gym. That is, whenever I can manage to get rid of all my kids at the same time!

THE ONLY MAN:

Don't advertise that goal, baby. They'll throw you out of the PTA.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Oh, no they won't. I'm head of the healthy lunch committee.

THE ONLY MAN:

I was joking.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

(to the woman with children) You don't look like a mother of three.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Thanks! I try. Do you have kids?

SCATTERED WOMAN:

God, no. I mean, no.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

It's a lot of work getting your figure back. And just when you do, you're pregnant again.

THE ONLY MAN:

(to the scattered woman) Don't you just hate that?

SCATTERED WOMAN:

Actually, I've used it as an excuse. "Oh god, after I had the kids..."

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

But I thought you said—

SCATTERED WOMAN:

(interrupting) I was joking. Now I just say “Oh god, after I turned 40...”

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Ha ha ha!

SCATTERED WOMAN:

I’m serious.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Wait. You do or don’t have kids?

THE ONLY MAN:

She doesn’t.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

How do you know that?

THE ONLY MAN:

Please.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Hah!

THE ONLY MAN:

(to the focused woman) You, though...

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Me?

THE ONLY MAN:

The kid thing. It’s hard to tell. I’m thinking no, but then there is something... maternal. And you’re out job hunting, but I’m thinking it’s been awhile...

SCATTERED WOMAN:

You’re good.

THE ONLY MAN:

Haven’t we already established that?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

No kids, only a mom. I mean my mom—I’ve been taking care of *her*. But I think she’s okay now.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
She's definitely okay now.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
So I'm, well, "reclaiming my life."

THE ONLY MAN:
That means a job?

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Yeah, I guess. That's part of it, anyway.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
And you're having a yard sale?

FOCUSED WOMAN:
What?

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
(gesturing toward the sign the focused woman is holding) I used to love yard sales. Before the kids, I mean.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Oh, this is just a sign.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
It's not her sale.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
So why do you have the sign?

SCATTERED WOMAN:
I gave it to her.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
It's a long story.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
She collects them.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
I don't collect them.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
I thought you could start.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Why would I do that?

SCATTERED WOMAN:
Because you're always talking about them.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
That doesn't mean I want to collect them.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
But I thought you could do something with them. They make you angry, so make a statement. An artistic statement.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
You're the artist.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
A political statement!

FOCUSED WOMAN:
It's you who's political.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
Like any of us have a choice about that anymore?

FOCUSED WOMAN:
And how would I make a statement with yard sale signs?

SCATTERED WOMAN:
You just did! Our country's full of people who can't see beyond their own yard sales! You need to speak up and be counted, darling!

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
(to the focused woman) Is that my blouse you're wearing?

Pause.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Oh! I'm sorry...

SCATTERED WOMAN:
It's not like it was *yours*, really...

THE ONLY MAN:
My fault! But there's enough to share...

He gives a new dress to the woman with children.

Try this.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
(*to the focused woman*) It looks wonderful on you!

FOCUSED WOMAN:
I'm sorry—I forget who handed it to me...

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
It's fine.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
I think I did.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
(*to the scattered woman*) And isn't it "*stand* up and be counted?"

SCATTERED WOMAN:
What?

THE ONLY MAN:
Okay. I'm going out. (*to the woman with children*) I'll bring something new, smashing, and totally unique—just for you darling.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
If it makes you happy...

The only man hands the uneaten portion of his lunch back to the scattered woman.

THE ONLY MAN:
(*to the scattered woman*) Hang on to this for me, will you? (*to all*) Back in a flash!

SCATTERED WOMAN:
No problem.

She takes a surprisingly large cooler out of her bag and stores the lunch items as he leaves the room.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

(to the focused woman) What a great color on you! It's my husband's favorite. That's why I chose it.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

(starting to take off the blouse) Look, I feel terrible about this...

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

No! It's not your fault. And besides, it wouldn't look right on me. Not with my arm.

Pause.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Your arm?

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Yes. My left arm.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

What's wrong with your left arm?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

(to the scattered woman) You shouldn't ask her—!

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

(interrupting) It's okay! Lots of people don't notice. I lost my left arm. I've learned to compensate.

Pause.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I didn't—

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

(interrupting) I know. It was right after my first child was born. Rather a heavy load. Ha ha. No pun intended.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I guess.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

What I mean is that I *really* didn't intend to make a pun. I know people say that. But this was accidental.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I'm sorry.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

The pun was accidental. The arm was a conscious choice. A necessary choice. Not an accident, I mean.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Like I said. I never would have noticed. You just carry yourself so... so...

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Thanks.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

Huh.

The selfless woman comes out of the curtained dressing area with a pile of clothing, revealing the awkward girl in an atrocious and ill-fitting outfit.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

(to the awkward girl) No, sweetie. You stay in there. I'll bring you some more stuff and it'll be faster that way.

AWKWARD GIRL:

But get the right size! Eight!

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Okay! But remember that sizes are sometimes different. I mean, designer sizes are... So you have to try them on and we'll see what fits, can we do that?

AWKWARD GIRL:

As long as they're eights.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Okay.

Her arms full, she manages to close the curtain and turns to the women.

(greeting the woman with children) Hello, there! *(to the other women)* Well, here I go on another fruitless mission!

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
How old is your daughter?

SELFLESS WOMAN:
She's not my daughter.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
No?

SELFLESS WOMAN:
I'm the stepmother. But she's 12.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
My oldest is 10.

SELFLESS WOMAN:
This is what you've got to look forward to!

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:
Ha ha ha.

As the selfless woman struggles to leave with the pile of clothes, the scattered woman moves toward her.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
Can I help you with those?

SELFLESS WOMAN:
They're rejects. I'm taking them back out.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
(transferring some clothes) We can just put 'em on a rack in here.

SELFLESS WOMAN:
Oooh, I don't feel right about that.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
Really, it's fine! *(grabbing more clothes)* And if she's an 8, I'm a petite 4.

SELFLESS WOMAN:
Oh, they wear things so tight, these girls. Girls who shouldn't wear things tight.

SCATTERED WOMAN:
I know, it's frightening.

The scattered woman pulls an empty rack from her bag, and they hang the clothes on it. The woman with children considers the new dress she's been given.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

(holding it up for the focused woman's opinion) Was he serious?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I'm not the one to ask. Listen, are you sure about this blouse? I mean, if it's your husband's fav—

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

(interrupting) Absolutely.

Short pause, while the focused woman weighs absolutely.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Thanks. *(turning to admire herself in the mirror)* I really love it. And that's not, like, typical for me. But I'm kind of excited. About a piece of clothing, of all things, and I don't even hate how I look in it! I think it's a good sign that I'm—

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

(interrupting, holding the dress up in the mirror) So should I try this on? One thing's for sure: my mother certainly wouldn't approve!

FOCUSED WOMAN:

That's maybe *why* you should try it on!

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

She's dead, you know.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Oh! No. I didn't.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Well, you couldn't have.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I'm sorry.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

I am, too. For so many reasons.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I... My mother had a... brain thing.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Liver disease.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I mean, she didn't die. She's actually fine. Now.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Oh.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I'm sorry.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

But you said she's fine.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Yes! I mean, I'm not sorry about *that*. It was, well, very scary, and then took a long while, but I was able to take some time off and be with her and she's... I'm sorry. Was it very...?

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Very?

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Oh, I don't know. Your mother. Painful. Difficult. This is terrible. I'm sorry.

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Thank you. What I think about mostly is that my children won't have their grandmother.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Yes...

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

Well, that and I gave her my liver for nothing.

The awkward girl toddles out of the curtained area. In her search for the selfless woman, she trips on her extremely high heels.

AWKWARD GIRL:

Ahhhhhh!

FOCUSED WOMAN:

(moving to catch her) Ooooooh! You okay?

AWKWARD GIRL:

Uh, yeah...

She is set aright and the full horror of her new get up—she looks like a child prostitute—is revealed.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Boy! That's one hot dress!

THE WOMAN WITH CHILDREN:

I'll say...

The dress the awkward girl's wearing is the same one she's holding.

AWKWARD GIRL:

Uh, thanks.

The woman with children abandons her dress, and goes to search for another.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Do you have someplace special you're going?

AWKWARD GIRL:

Well, not really. But maybe the opera.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

The opera? Wow.

AWKWARD GIRL:

Yeah. My mother's an opera singer.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Really!

AWKWARD GIRL:

Uh, yeah.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Like, that's her job?

AWKWARD GIRL:

Uh huh. But she's a sheep farmer, too.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
A singing sheep farmer?

AWKWARD GIRL:
Ha ha. Yeah.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Wow.

AWKWARD GIRL:
Yeah. Now they're just lambs. Most of 'em. We have six and one is grown up and two are black, so when they all get to be sheep we're going to sell their wool at art fairs and things, 'cause my stepdad's an artist and he makes crosses, and I'm going to make things out of the wool, too. Maybe sell them on e-bay.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Goodness. You sound busy.

AWKWARD GIRL:
Yeah. I sing, too.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Opera?

AWKWARD GIRL:
Well, yeah. I've been in operas. But today's music, too.

FOCUSED WOMAN:
Of course.

SELFLESS WOMAN:
She actually does have a lovely voice.

The selfless woman has joined them, carrying new clothing.

AWKWARD GIRL:
What?

SELFLESS WOMAN:
I said you have a lovely voice!

AWKWARD GIRL:
Oh. I thought you were talking about my mother.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

No. I was talking about you.

AWKWARD GIRL:

Oh.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

You should tell her about your concert. About your solo.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

A solo—that's great!

AWKWARD GIRL:

Yeah.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

And about how your mother was late and missed it, but when she arrived had a baby lamb in her arms which bleated louder than the orchestra!

AWKWARD GIRL:

It was just born.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Quite the sight. Captivated the entire audience.

FOCUSED WOMAN:

I'll bet.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Honey, that dress may not be the most appropriate thing for you to wear to school. Why don't you try these on.

She hands some clothes to the awkward girl, who retreats behind the curtains.

(to the focused woman) Her relationship with her mother is very...

FOCUSED WOMAN:

Yeah, well, it all sounds very...

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Yes.

The scattered woman joins them.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

She sings to sheep? I've completely missed my calling.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Right, well... *(lowering her voice and moving away from the curtained area)*
She's a complete nut job. The kid spends weekends with her—when it's convenient—in a filthy trailer with no electricity and no running water...

SCATTERED WOMAN:

But plenty of sheep?

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Oh, yes. Sheep. And other barely-alive-stock. Because this woman does not even have basic 4-H training. Oh, no. She's a wanna-be actress whose claim to fame is a reality show where she talked about her many and varied plastic surgeries, and she and her christ-dripping husband decided to buy land in the middle of nowhere so they could be closer to god and, I don't know, photo-ops and pot-luck dinners. Certainly not to things like, oh, homework and school clothes shopping! It's unbelievable, absolutely mind-boggling. She's a horrible woman and a horrible mother who does nothing but sabotage her child at every opportunity and...

SCATTERED WOMAN:

Her daughter adores her.

The selfless woman tries valiantly but unsuccessfully to hold back her tears.

SELFLESS WOMAN:

Of course!

The scattered woman goes to comfort her, perhaps pulling a folding chair and a box of Kleenex out of her bag.

SCATTERED WOMAN:

Come here.

THE ONLY MAN:

Some women should not be allowed to have children.

The selfless woman catches her first glimpse of the only man, who has re-entered the room with an armful of clothes and some hat boxes.

THE SELFLESS WOMAN:

Oh! Hi...