

The title is presented in a playful, Halloween-themed font. The words "You're" and "a mean one" are in a light green, bubbly font with black outlines. The word "Mrs." is in a black, bold, sans-serif font, and "Finch" is in a black, bold, script-like font. The entire title is underlined with a thick, wavy red line. To the left of "You're" are two black bat silhouettes. To the right of "You're" is a jack-o'-lantern with a carved face, and a small skeleton is perched on top of it, waving.

You're a mean one Mrs. Finch

A Short Play
By Brendon Allen

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CASTING

Jane: A middle aged woman who runs her neighbourhood Facebook group.

Eden: Jane's teenage kid.

Mrs. Finch: An older woman who has lived in the neighbourhood for several decades.

You're a mean one, Mrs. Finch

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SCENE 1:

Sound of a recycling box getting flipped, cans and more cans. Then the sound of Jane struggling to use the upturned blue box as a stepping stool, there is not a lot of grace. It is 7:30 pm but due to the change in season it feels like 10 pm and the street is eerily quiet.

Eden: Be careful! I don't think it's gonna hold you.

Jane: *(offended)* What's that supposed to mean?

Eden: Exactly what I mean, you're using a blue bin as a stool, and you know... Should I film this for the Milk Crate Challenge?

Jane: *(annoyed)* Are you going to be helpful? Can you hold the light still?

Eden: I could go get a ladder. I think Mr. Bencze has one around back. He wouldn't mind.

Jane: Eden! We need to be quick, just shine your flashlight over here.

Eden: *(under her breath)* Tik Tok fame it is.

We hear a sound that indicates Eden's camera turning on to record.

Jane: *(commenting on the ding of Eden's phone as she starts recording)* What was that sound?

Eden: I just got a text, no biggie.

Jane: *(struggling to do the job with the scissors she brought)* Ugh! These things are all gunked up with sticky stuff. Have you been using my utility scissors to cut freezies?!

Eden: *(Low, speaking to her imagined audience of viewers)* No comment.

Jane: Is there a way you can get that security light to stop going off?

Eden: *(more to her viewers than her mom)* Seriously?

Jane: *(exacerbated)* I would really appreciate your help here Eden!

Eden: *(teen sass)* Like messing with someone's security light?! Like that kind of help?!

Jane: Eden, the light will disrupt the neighbourhood!

Eden: Isn't exactly what a security light is for?!

Jane: *(warning)* We have talked about that tone...

Eden: *(whispering to the video)* The tone of being right.

Jane: Eden! I don't want the whole neighbourhood to see! I'm doing it for everyone!

Sounds from inside the house are heard, the interior door opens, someone is getting a coat on perhaps.

Jane: I'm gonna have to be quick.

Eden: You're gonna fall and stab yourself with the freezie scissors. I'm still not even clear on what you're doing.

Jane: Someone has to put a stop to this and I feel responsible.

Mrs. Finch opens her front door, she waves a flashlight and does not clearly see what is going on.

Mrs. Finch: If you racoons are after my pumpkins already, I swear.

Jane: Shit!

Eden: Mom, we gotta go!

Mrs. Finch: What is going on out here?

Jane: *(making one last final effort to cut the rope)* Cut, scissors, Cut!

Eden: I think you're busted, Ma.

Mrs. Finch: Jane? Is that you? Is everything alright?

Jane falls from the recycling bin, the hanging skeleton she was trying to bring down gets swung to the side and briefly looks like it's dancing. We hear the sound of its plastic bones chattering. The scissors fly from Jane's hand as she lands belly and face first on the ground.

Jane: Uuph!

Eden: *(shocked and equally ecstatic that she caught this fail on video)* Woah!

Mrs. Finch: Oh, my gosh, Jane, are you alright? *(pause)* Was there another possum sighting up in the tree?

Jane: You can turn the light off Eden!

Eden: Hello, Mrs. Finch, how are you doing?

Mrs. Finch: Oh, hello Eden, what is going on?

Eden turns off the light on her device, but continues to film.

Eden: *(speaking to the video)* Hold tight, as I go into stealth mode. *(To Mrs. Finch)* I'm just here trying to help my mom-

Jane: -Quality control of neighbourhood decorations. It's standard procedure, Neighbourhood Watch kind of stuff.

Mrs. Finch: We still have Neighbourhood Watch? I thought that puffed up vigilante bullshit wasn't allowed anymore? *(remembering Eden is there)* Sorry, Eden, my language goes down the toilet when the sun goes down.

Eden gives a gesture that indicates she has no issues with the language.

Jane: Well, certain neighbourhoods like to maintain a little...prestige. You know, neighbourhood pride.

Eden: *(to the camera)* She says, as she is flat out on the front lawn of someone else's property.

Mrs. Finch: *(jokingly)* Well, do Jerry and George pass the test? They are Steve's pride and joy.

Jane: Jerry and George?

Mrs. Finch: The skeletons. *(indicating which is named which)* Jerry...and...George! Steve named them after the Seinfeld, you know, the program.

Jane: Right!

Mrs. Finch: I think there is a slight resemblance, don't you think? *(Mrs. Finch laughs a bit at her joke)*

Jane: *(dusting herself off)* Well, it's actually in a neighbourhood capacity that I'm here.

Mrs. Finch: Is this about the Facebook page? I'm sorry, I just can't keep up with all the conversations.

Jane: Well, your Community Agreement Contract Survey is still missing, but that isn't what I'm here for.

Eden: She doesn't bring the kitchen scissors out for just anything.

Jane: People have been complaining-

Mrs. Finch: -Complaining?

Jane: Yes, there is some uproar about-

Mrs. Finch: An uproar? I have caused an uproar. Well, well.

Jane: Your decorations are...bothering members of the community.

Mrs. Finch: What? My Halloween decorations are bothering people...where? In the Facebook Group? Well, I have not seen any posts and no one has spoken to me.

Jane: They might be intimidated or nervous to bring it up.

Mrs. Finch: They are basically the same decorations from last year. Although I did go out to the dollar store and get a few new elements. Did you see the bloody hands that stick so nicely to my bay window? Steve calls it *zombie-chic*. I just love the gory hits of colour, so much better than the caution tape I used last year.

Jane: Well, your zombie-chic is disturbing several residents and they need to come down!

Eden: *(to the video)* Hey, hey, ho, ho, Jerry and George have got to go, hey, hey, ho, ho!

Mrs. Finch: So, I assume that's what you have chosen to do during tea time without my permission? Steve is quite cranky on the inside. He talked about getting the hose. Well, that was

when he thought you were racoons, but now that you are talking about Jerry and George. He would definitely want to spray you.

Jane: (*intense*) Excuse me, Mrs. Finch, but this is serious! Enough. Your decorations have been declared offensive!

Mrs. Finch: Offensive?

Eden: Declared!

Jane: Eden, can you be helpful right now?!

Eden: (*sarcastic*) How on earth can I do that?

Mrs. Finch: I feel like I could use some more explanation before I encourage Steve to put away the hose and maybe call the police. I do believe you are trespassing and possibly doing something questionable with my recycling box.

Eden: (*aside to Mrs. Finch*) Definitely a destruction of private property.

Jane: Listen! Mrs. Finch, I know this might be hard to hear. But I'm here on behalf of the neighbourhood to let you know that there's talk going around. Talk about your Halloween display being offensive to...well, to many people. All kinds of people. And we will not stand for it!

Mrs. Finch: Oh.

Eden: (*to the video*) Bam!

Jane: We're in difficult times, you know. Nerves are very close to the surface. And then you, you go up and you string corpses on your trees! With gravestones on your lawn! And bloody hand prints on your windows! I mean, really. Think about how that looks. How it comes off. It's downright offensive!

Mrs. Finch: (*genuinely concerned*) Okay, so, my Halloween decorations have offended specific people in our neighbourhood? Who, exactly?

Eden: Well...

Jane: Eden! Enough! (*takes a breath*) Well, not quite.

Mrs. Finch: Right, because George and Jerry are disgraceful in comparison to, say, the butcher shop of limbs hanging in the Dubois' window or the blow up stabbing vampire waving a cleaver towards the school bus stop down at what's-his-name's?

Jane: I'm here to discuss your decorations, not everyone's.

Mrs. Finch: I believe you are actually here to trespass and steal my decorations...Can you tell me which families have complained? I am happy to have a discussion in a neighbourly way, but I think we can agree, this certainly does not count as neighbourly. Why hasn't anyone else said anything?

Jane: (*assertive*) I'm here and I'm saying we would like you to take down your Halloween display. Immediately.

Eden: (*to the camera*) Ohh, that's her angry voice.

Mrs. Finch: With all due respect Jane, I have lived in this neighbourhood significantly longer than you and I feel like you might be getting a bit carried away with your late night vigilante crap. (*frustrated with herself*) Shoot, sorry Eden!

Jane: Mrs. Finch, I am representing community concerns.

Eden: (*to the camera, melodramatic*) Do it for the children!

Mrs. Finch: Jane, you know I am hopeless when it comes to Facebook, but I do my best to talk to my neighbours and meet new neighbours who move in. Steve likes to take over a jar of his homemade habanero chilli sauce, he says (*impersonating Steve*) "If they can't stand the heat, they can spread it on their green bins to keep the racoons away."

Eden: That's so lovely.

Mrs. Finch: He even has this cute map in our pantry that has all the families of the neighbourhood written in and when a new baby is born or, you know, someone...

Eden makes a corny dying sound.

Mrs. Finch: Um, yes, well, exactly. Steve updates the neighbourhood map. I think we pretty much have everyone!

Eden: Like a chilli map of Toronto.

Mrs. Finch: *(enjoying the joke)* You could say that, yes. *(turning her laser focus to Jane)* Needless to say I have a pretty good sense of my community members. Part of me is saddened to hear that people may be offended and that they didn't come talk to me.

Jane: I told you, I'm here, talking to you about...George and Jerry?...right now.

Mrs. Finch: Oh. So it's you that is taking offense?

Jane: I'm not alone.

Mrs. Finch: Help me out then, because this is the exact display I had out last year, and no new families have moved in since last Halloween, well, except for the Ryskas, but they have quite the enthusiastic display with all sorts of ghouls, so I can't imagine they sent you here to problem-solve with scissors. I'm confused, Jane.

Jane: I think you're missing the point.

Mrs. Finch: I think the point is staring me in the face.

Jane: What are you suggesting?

Mrs. Finch: I think George and Jerry offend you, Jane. Not everyone. You. I think you are taking it upon yourself to champion for a cause that doesn't exist.

Eden: *(to the camera)* Yet. It doesn't exist yet.

Jane: I can't believe you! What are you insinuating?

Mrs. Finch: I think Martha Stewart here is upset because...I don't know, honestly, I have no idea! Did I beat you to the sale at the dollar store? Did I take an idea you had and now you feel you need to cut it down out of jealousy? It's Halloween decorations for goodness sake!

Jane: You think hanging corpses on your front lawn and blood soaked children's hand prints on your window is appropriate in the world we live in today?! You keep up with the news just like the rest of us! I knew the neighbourhood kids called you mean, but I'm seriously surprised we're having this argument Mrs. Finch!

Eden: *(to the camera)* Oh, snap! We're achieving full Karen status here folks!

Mrs. Finch: I think it is time you go home before you say something you regret.

Jane: I'm just trying to speak for those who are too scared to speak for themselves. Or those who have been silenced. I'm here on their behalf.

Mrs. Finch: Well, I don't appreciate this trick that you're playing on Steve and I right now. And I'm not sure anyone needs you to speak for them.

Jane: I'm not the one hanging bodies from trees. I mean, talk about tone deaf!

Mrs. Finch: Now, I may not be on the cutting edge of all the trends, but I do know that term is ableist and should not be used.

Eden: Bam! Nice one, Mrs. Finch.

Mrs. Finch: Perhaps you think my decor is out of touch, but there's a less offensive way to trash my Halloween spirit.

Eden: *(to the camera)* Points to Mrs. Finch for dropping the ableist knowledge!

Jane: *(raging)* Oh yeah! *(Grabs on to one of the hanging skeletons with all her weight)* How's this for offensive?!

Eden: Mom! This is getting a bit wild! And pointless, honestly. Let's go home.

Mrs. Finch: I agree. Go home, Jane. You're being ridiculous.

The skeleton slams to the ground with Jane included.

Eden: Oof! Was that Jerry or George?

Mrs. Finch: That's George. *(to Steve inside)* Steve, can you get the duct tape, George may be in need of some surgery.

Jane: *(quickly standing up, now with one of George's severed arms in her hand)* I know that the gravity of the current state of things may be a laughing matter for you and Steve but some of us really care!

Mrs. Finch: I'm still curious which of our neighbours asked you to take on this mission? Because the chilli map does not lie and I cannot imagine a household in this neighbourhood being offended by those two *(pointing to Goerge and Jerry)*.

Jane: *(still waving George's arm, now more gladiator-like)* Are you saying that you will not respect the will of the neighbourhood?!

Mrs. Finch: I love this neighbourhood and my husband and I respectfully celebrate any neighbour who chooses to call it home. I've even been patient with you on a night when you obviously hit the bottle too early.

Jane attacks Mrs. Finch with the plastic skeleton arm, it is a ridiculous moment.

Eden: I knew filming this would pay off.

Mrs. Finch: Would you get off of me!

Jane gets and dramatically kicks the body of George, pieces fly everywhere. Then she launches herself on to Jerry who suffers the same fate as George. A hub-bub of neighbours have now gathered around watching Jane's mele. Statements of concern for Mrs. Finch can be heard from the crowd.

Jane: Don't you worry about this nasty old witch! She'll be fine. What about me? I'm the one standing up against her effigy!

Sounds of general disagreement from the crowd.

Eden: You see, my mother seems to think that Mrs. Finch's decorations are offensive.

Jane: Stay out of this Eden!

Mrs. Finch: If my lawn design is offensive, then all of you (*pointing to the crowd*) are in the same boat.

General concern from the crowd.

Eden: There is only one way to solve this...a Facebook survey!

General agreement and disagreement all at the same time. Eden starts furiously typing and the crowd stands by.

Jane: Times have changed, Mrs. Finch! We need to be more accountable for our actions and bloody hand marks on windows are not appropriate.

Mrs. Finch: By what standards?! Yours?! Has anyone even approached you about my decorations? You have a graveyard in your garden with a large yellow sign saying “Night Crawler.” I’m sure if I wanted to find offense in that, I could. Maybe it’s offensive to creeps who roam at night, maybe you’re offending the raccoon population.

Eden: *(to the camera)* X-Men and Marvel fans most definitely.

Mrs. Finch: I think I would like to lodge a complaint about your display as it is promoting violence in our parks at night.

Jane: The neighbourhood kids are right, you are downright mean!

Eden: Alright, the survey is live! *(to the camera)* Let’s call together a bunch of folks in a gentrified neighbourhood to decide whether they’re offended by something or not.

Mrs. Finch: I get what this is all about. You are still frustrated about the 2020 Spring Wreath display event we did on the street-

Jane: -you shut your oppressive mouth!

Mrs. Finch: It wasn’t even a competition but I do remember a dramatic response in my favour from the street.

Jane: *(to the crowd)* Is this the kind of hatred we want spouted on our street?!

General confusion from the crowd.

Mrs. Finch: I may not have commented, but I thought your arrangement was gorgeous. It took me several tries with Steve’s help to even get my photo posted.

Jane: Oh, don’t play dumb!

Mrs. Finch: Truly! I think your crocus arrangement was gorgeous.

Jane: Asters and Camellias are summer blooms! You obviously intentionally went outside the rules to win, you bigot!

Mrs. Finch walks calmly over to Jane.

Mrs. Finch: Can I have Jerry's head back, please?

Eden: I know it's a bit early for the results, but the majority of people are thoroughly confused about what the hell this is all about. *(taking another look at the survey)* Oh, yeah, it's unanimous, profoundly confused.

Mrs. Finch pulls the plastic skull from Jane's hand.

Mrs. Finch: I guess I can shift my display to more of a skeleton graveyard, instead of ghostly skeletons in the trees. *(speaking to the skull)* Alas, poor Jerry, I knew him well.

Jane: *(moving towards Mrs. Finch, still aggressive)* You think this is a joke! I assure you that there are people who don't find-

Eden: Ok, ok *(holding her mom back)*. We're good here, mom. We're good. *(to Mrs. Finch)* I think George's forearm might have gotten tossed into the Chins' yard, just a heads up.

Mrs. Finch: Thank you Eden.

Eden leads Jane back home.

Eden: *(calling back)* Oh, and Mrs. Finch?

Mrs. Finch: Yes?

Eden: None of us think you're mean.

Mrs. Finch: Thank you, that means a lot.

Eden: ...but if I can give you some advice, you can't go wrong with avoiding those sesame treats on Halloween. Go with a full can of pop, you know? Guaranteed success!

Mrs. Finch: Thank you for your feedback, Eden. I'll let Steve know.

The End