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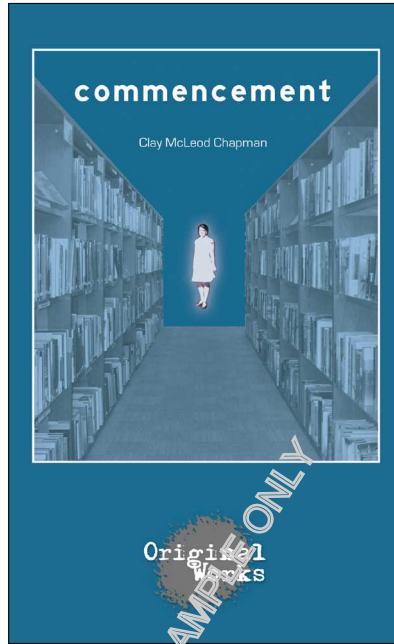
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Apples in Winter
© Jennifer Fawcett
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COMMENCEMENT

by Clay McLeod Chapman

Synopsis: One actress plays three women drawn together in the grim aftermath of a high school shooting - the mother of the shooter (staph infection), one of the shooter's victims (early release), and the mother of that victim (keynote speaker). It is a deep exploration of the lives of three women that, according to SEE Magazine "... will leave you wringing your hands in helpless empathy."

Cast Size: 1 Female

(may be produced with 3 Females)

Apples in Winter

by Jennifer Fawcett

SAMPLE ONLY

Apples in Winter was first produced as a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere by Riverside Theatre (Iowa), Centenary Stage (New Jersey), and Phoenix Theatre (Indiana). For more information, please visit nnpn.org.

Riverside Theatre

Artistic Director, Sean Lewis

March 2 - 18, 2018

MIRIAM—Marquetta Senters

DIRECTOR—Beth Wood

SCENIC DESIGN—Shawn Ketchum Johnson

LIGHT DESIGN—S. Benjamin Farrar

SOUND DESIGN—Sean Lewis

COSTUME DESIGN—Jennifer Fawcett

STAGE MANAGER—Lisa Kelly

Centenary Stage Company

Artistic Director, Carl Wallnau

November 8 -18, 2018

MIRIAM—Colleen Wallnau Smith

DIRECTOR—Mikaela Kafka

SCENIC DESIGN—Aaron Turetsky

LIGHT DESIGN—Ethan Newman

SOUND DESIGN—Kevin Semancik

COSTUME DESIGN—Ashleigh Poteat

STAGE MANAGER—Danielle Constance

Phoenix Theatre

Artistic Director, Bill Simmons

January 11- 27, 2019

MIRIAM—Jan Lucas

DIRECTOR—Jolene Mentink Moffatt

SCENIC DESIGN—Daniel Uhde

LIGHT DESIGN—Michael Moffatt

SOUND DESIGN—Jade Lynch

COSTUME DESIGN—Danielle Buckel

STAGE MANAGER—Delia Neylon

Apples in Winter was commissioned by a grant from the National New Play Network, with funding from the Smith Prize for New Plays.

The play was developed at the Banff Playwrights Lab (Director, Brian Quirt) and the Women Playwrights Series at Centenary Stage Company (Program Director, Catherine Rust).

CHARACTER

MIRIAM ... A mother and pie-maker. 60's +.

TIME & PLACE

A prison kitchen. Late winter.

There's no need for the kitchen to be realistic, however the stove and fridge must work. It's important that the smell of the pie come into the theatre as it is baking.

The knife must be attached to the table with airplane wire.

There needs to be a clock somewhere on stage.

Time is essential in this world.

PIE MAKING NOTE

Miriam should be making a 6-inch pie, which is much smaller than usual. This enables it to be baked in the time allowed in the play.

See the recipe at the end for a list of ingredients and kitchen items.

APPLES IN WINTER

(The stage is set up for baking: a long prep table with bowls, bags of flour, sugar, etc. Most important, three apples sit in a row on the downstage side of the table.)

MIRIAM enters. She goes to the table and looks at what is spread out on top of it.

She picks up an apple, looks at it carefully, sniffs it, sighs and puts it back on the table.

Silence.

She looks at the clock.

She looks away.

She looks at the clock.)

MIRIAM

Oh, for goodness' sake.

(She bursts into action and puts on an apron.)

Fourteen bags of apples from five different stores and these are the best I could get. It's not the

season.

He'll understand.

He'll have to.

(She goes to the fridge and pulls out butter then begins to cut it into 1-inch cubes, speaking while she cuts.)

Butter. That's the trick.

Not lard, not vegetable shortening, butter.

And keeping it cold. Keep everything cold.

I'd love to say that my mother or my grandmother taught me how to make a perfect pie crust.

That's how it's supposed to be.

Ha.

If my mother could buy it premade, she did, whether it was an apple pie or a sandwich. And my grandmother? Her idea of dessert was a cigarette and a bourbon.

(She measures the flour.)

But in my house, we had dessert. I like to end

with something sweet. The meal just doesn't feel like it's over without it. I tried them all: puddings, cookies, cakes, but pie, pie was the winner. Robert's favorite is pie.

Apple pie.

My apple pie.

You have to allow the proper time to make a pie.

There's no rushing, no skipping steps.

(She adds salt.)

Everything is done for a reason, in order, for a particular amount of time. If you follow the rules, you will get a perfect pie.

Well, maybe not perfect. There's still some skill involved. But decent, you will have a decent pie.

I like to think that my pies are more than decent.

(Mixing flour and salt.)

Maybe it's because they're made with love. Does that sound stupid? It's not.

I think it's an important part.

(She drops what she is doing and steps away.

Silence.

(She looks at the clock.)

Robert wants a piece of pie.

That's it.

My son asked me to make him an apple pie. So,

I'm going to make him one.

There's still something I can give him.

Even in here.

Even now.

He still needs me.

You know, when they're little they need you for everything but once they get older...

Once they stop asking...

They think they don't need you, but they do.

I'm still his mother.

When Robert eats my pie, he closes his eyes.

He closes his eyes and chews and swallows and opens his eyes again, takes another bite and closes

his eyes again...

Those flavors push everything else out. I've seen it.

Cinnamon, nutmeg, apples ...

They can do what words can't.

To watch your child eat is...

(A gesture.)

To watch him eat something I've made for him, made with love, that's...

It's... Right.

It's... Natural.

Natural.

That's a tricky word.

What we usually mean when we say natural is that it feels right, just like what feels wrong would be unnatural. But it's more than that.

(She dumps the butter into the flour.)

I think it is natural to want to feed your child but that doesn't mean every mother feels that way.

Mine didn't.

(Begins grinding the butter in slowly.)

It's not like she starved me – it wasn't on purpose, she would just... forget. That's how I learned to cook. Self-preservation!

My mother used to say she couldn't wait for me to grow up because then I'd be more interesting and I wouldn't need so much from her. She almost forgot me at the zoo and at the grocery store. She lost me at a parade for the better part of an afternoon. She spent the time at a bar. I spent it desperately looking for her, growing more hysterical by the hour. After, she told me she had just forgotten I was with her.

(Stops grinding.)

She was being true to her nature and I was being true to mine and those were not the same thing. They usually weren't for us.

I believe—my mother aside—I believe there is

nothing more natural than a mother and her child.

Robert and I are natural. We are good fit. We always have been, from the moment he was born.

It's ... It's symbiosis.

Surprised?

High school biology.

I may not remember much, but I remember that.

(She resumes grinding.)

I always liked that word. Symbiosis. Like a perfect circle.

I look after my child and in return, he loves me.

That's all I need.

Circle complete.

But if there isn't love then it's what?

A parasite.

(She stops grinding.)

What feels good, feels natural.

But is it natural to do what you feel like doing? Or is that just following your impulses?

Robert followed his impulses...

But that wasn't natural. That wasn't him, I mean.

That was the drugs.

(She looks at the clock.)

You just want to do it until it looks broken up, not mixed.

(She grinds the butter into the flour.)

The trick is chunks.

(Grind, grind, grind.)

Natural. Unnatural. Symbiotic...

(Grind, grind, grind.)

Maybe it doesn't matter.

(Adding water by small spoonfuls.)

I'm just talking to talk. That's what my husband, Larry, used to say. "You're just talking to hear yourself talk."

So? It's better than silence.

(Grind, grind, grind. Adding water if necessary.)

“Just talking to talk...”

*(Continue mixing and adding water as
necessary.)*

That looks right.

What I love about making a pie is how little you
need.

(Forming two dough balls.)

Flour, butter, water, sugar, salt, fruit, and a few
spices. That’s it. Ingredients you can find in any
kitchen. I like to think of women one hundred, two
hundred years ago—more even—doing exactly
what I’m doing. Like I’m part of something, part
of a tradition.

The last meal is a tradition too. Goes back
centuries.

I guess a long time ago, it was an act of
compassion.

Or maybe it was superstition.

It wasn’t about the prisoner—it was for the

executioner, like saying, “Please don’t haunt me.”

(Wrapping the dough in plastic.)

The corrections officers around here don’t strike me as the type to be worried about that sort of thing, but who am I to say? They certainly wouldn’t admit it.

(A bad impression.)

“Duh... Please don’t haunt me. Here’s a burger.”

Can you imagine? Some of them, I swear. Dumb as fence posts.

(Laughing.)

There’s this one, Marty. Thinks he’s real tough. Robert can do this impression that’s just... perfect. It’s just perfect.

(Doing a bad impression.)

You had to be there I guess.

I never knew, before I mean, but he can do the most perfect impressions of just about anyone. Famous people, the CO’s... I asked him to do me but he wouldn’t.

You got to get him when he's in the right mood
but boy oh boy...

It's the one good thing, with him being in here, I
mean. He's clean and sober.

He's thoughtful and funny and so smart. Well, he
was always smart. But for a while it was ...
cloudy.

I'm going to let these chill. Don't skip this step.
You will be tempted to. Don't.

(She puts the pastry in the fridge.

She disposes of the mixing bowl, spoons, etc.)

They told me not to wash these. Feels odd.

(Shrugs.)

Their kitchen, their rules.

(She checks the clock.

*She picks up the paring knife and realizes it is
attached to the table with airplane wire.*

*She adjusts, then begins peeling the first
apple.)*

This is a terrible knife.

I miss my knife.

At least it's a small pie.

I am very specific about what I cook when.

Apple pie is for September, apple-harvesting season.

Then pumpkin pie.

In December, it's gingerbread. I make shortbread too – you can just smell the butter. I make peppermint pinwheels and sugar cookies, but the most important is the gingerbread.

In the winter, I bake bread. Baked bread with soup, baked bread with stew.

Those smells fill the house.

(She peels the second apple.)

In April, more green is starting to show and by May it has come full bloom: asparagus, mint, pale green lettuces. Then the berries start.

Strawberries are first in June, then the raspberries.

Peaches in July.

Raspberry tarts, strawberry jam, and by the time we get to August, the blueberries are out. So much sweetness in the summer.

And then we are back to apples.

(She peels the third apple.)

To make a good pie, you need crisp apples – that mix of sharp and sweet they only have when they're just picked. These are ...

Well they're fine but they're not right.

He'll understand.

Of course he will. It's not the time for apples.

Our apples, well they went straight from the tree to the dough. They were perfect. Though they didn't start out that way.

(She cores and slices the apples.)

The year after Larry and I were married, we bought our house. We moved in in June. I was three months pregnant. There was no garden in

the backyard, but there was this little apple tree. It wasn't much more than a bunch of scraggly branches so I didn't pay much attention to it, but then later in the summer I saw that it was trying to grow a few small apples. They were lumpy and small and didn't look like any apple I'd seen before. I tried one but it was so sour I spat it out. I waited another month and picked another, but it had a worm in it. I decided to ignore it, but then the apples ripened and fell and began to rot around the base of the tree. The stink. And the waste. I cannot stand seeing food wasted.

Robert was born in December. We had so much snow that year. I went to the library and got a book about how to prune apple trees. I sat with him in my arms, reading that book...

For hours.

In the spring, I fertilized the tree and trimmed the branches and sprayed this vinegar concoction to

stop the worms. And lo and behold, these tiny buds of fruit appeared. I thinned them and I kept pruning all summer and that fall I ate the first apple from our little tree.

I kept trimming and fertilizing and fighting the damned worms, and the year Robert started school, the little tree produced its first full crop of apples.

I measure time in my kitchen.

Well, not here – this isn't my kitchen.

They wouldn't let me make this in my kitchen.

What if I put something in the pie and cheated the state of their ritual?

I've thought about it but...

Well. I can't, so...

So, I can't.

(She looks at the clock.)

But I've thought about it.

(Adding the sugar and spices to a bowl.)

Add sugar,
Flour,
A pinch of salt,
Cinnamon,
All spice,
Nutmeg.

Time changes on death row. There is just the time before, and now. And the monotony of the now makes it seem like time isn't passing at all. There are no landmarks. And then the summons comes and you realize that time has disappeared behind you.

At first, I tried to mark the different visits so Robert could distinguish one from another.

I wore something different each time. I'd say:

"Remember, I wore my blue sweater, the one with the buttons you like."

Or "That was the time I wore my new green pants."

But he never remembered.

And he told me to stop. Stop trying to mark time.

It doesn't work in here, he said. The only way to deal with it is to try to ignore it.

But I can't ignore it. I keep track. I need to keep track.

This is what I have now.

(She dumps the spice mixture on the apples and stirs.)

I'm going to let these sit for a little.

On our Christmas visit, we talked about whether it was better to have a green Christmas or a white one. Robert doesn't like the snow, I do. On our New Year's visit, we talked about something he'd heard in the news. The week after that was a tough one. He was... well, his mind was somewhere else. Then, the week after, we talked about Jared's new job. Jared is Robert's cousin, or his cousin Melanie's son, which makes him a

second cousin or cousin once removed or... I don't really know.

Mellie, that's what Robert called her when they were little. Mellie and Robbie. They were a pair, those two. They were born only a few weeks apart – people thought they were fraternal twins they were so close. It doesn't seem that long ago that I could hold them both in my lap.

Melanie didn't believe that he'd done it. Even after the trial, after all the details came out, she refused to believe. She said he couldn't have killed those kids because she still loved him and she could never love someone who'd done that...

I let her keep loving him.

And me.

It's better this way.

Melanie's a good girl and Jared's a good boy. He calls me Grandma Miriam, even though I'm his grandmother's sister. He says Great Aunt sounds

too fancy. Jared likes my pie too. I make him peach pie and strawberry rhubarb and cherry. He always asks about Robert. He wanted to come visit him but ...

When Jared was three, Melanie had to go away for work and she asked me if I would take him overnight. This was about a year after. I planned everything we would do. There was a new swing set in the park, so we'd go there first. I went and watched the kids use it and checked all of the swings and bars to make sure nothing was loose. You never know. He loved peanut butter so we would make peanut butter cookies and I would teach him how to press them with a fork. And for supper, I made sure I had all his favorites: ravioli from a can, watermelon, mint chocolate chip ice cream. I went to the library and got out books for bedtime stories and I bought him a pair of new pajamas with feet – Robert's favorite kind when he

was that age – and a new toothbrush that he could leave at my house if he came to stay again. It was all planned. It was going to be perfect. And half an hour before Melanie was to bring him over, my sister arrived.

“You can’t take him,” she said. “I won’t let you.”

It was the first time she’d talked to me since the trial. The only time.

(Silence.)

It was nice though. It felt so normal, planning what we would do.

Melanie felt so bad about that but she shouldn’t have.

And she’s stayed in touch. We’ve just been... more careful.

My pie will be served at 5pm —1700 hours — that’s what they use in here, military time. I guess it’s more accurate. Accuracy is very important in here.