

**YOU BETTER SIT DOWN:  
TALES FROM MY  
PARENTS' DIVORCE**

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**DRAMATISTS  
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Developed and Produced by The Civilians,  
Steven Cosson, Artistic Director; Marion Young, Managing Director,  
Conceived by Jennifer R. Morris.

YOU BETTER SIT DOWN: TALES FROM MY PARENTS' DIVORCE was presented by the Flea Theater and The Civilians at the Flea Theater in New York City, opening on April 12, 2012. It was directed by Anne Kauffman; the set design was by Mimi Lien; the costume design was by Sarah Beers; the lighting design was by Ben Stanton; the sound design was by Leah Gelpe; the projection design was by Caite Hevner; and the production stage manager was Megan Schwarz Dickert. The cast was as follows:

MARY ANNE ..... Caitlin Miller  
JANET ..... Robbie Collier Sublett  
BEVERLY ..... Jennifer R. Morris  
JOHN/FRINDE ..... Matthew Maher

## NOTES

This play is constructed from verbatim interviews between the writers and their parents.

Although two of the mothers are to be played by men, the actors should not be dressed as women or adopt a falsetto “woman’s voice.”

The quotes projected throughout, e.g., “She had a wall-eye?” are questions the writers asked their parents during the interviews.

Music: the original production used music from the ’60s, ’70s and ’80s to chart the passage of time from “How They Met” through “Now They’re Divorced.” The use of music in this play we leave to the discretion of each creative team.

## **CHARACTERS**

ACTOR 1 (woman): Caitlin VO, and her mother Mary Anne

ACTOR 2 (man): Robbie VO, and his mother Janet

ACTOR 3 (woman): Jennifer VO, and her mother Beverly

ACTOR 4 (man): Matthew VO, and his parents John and Frinde

## **SETTING**

The parents sit in chairs from their individual homes.

There is a Sheetrock wall upstage of the chairs with a horizontal break three-fourths of the way down. This is a projection surface that displays the title of each chapter on a wallpaper background and, at times, photographs of parts of rooms within a home. The photographs have the feel of being taken by a child, not yet coordinated enough to be let loose with a camera.

Throughout the play, the parents periodically get up to answer the phone, get something to drink, or retrieve a snack from a kitchen that may be in partial view slightly offstage left. Perhaps there is a partial view of a living room offstage right. Or perhaps we see nothing of the other rooms.

# YOU BETTER SIT DOWN

## THE LAMP

*At top of play: a voiceover of Caitlin Miller, one of the playwrights, attempting to interview her mother, Mary Anne, about her divorce.*

CAITLIN VO. “Okay, now we’re recording. Hello!” (*Sound of dial tone.*) “Mom?” (*Caitlin laughs, realizing her mother has hung up on her. Sound of dialing. Sound of phone ringing from vantage point of person making the call. During the above voiceover the following text is projected: [1st projection]: “tales from my parents’ divorce”; [2nd projection]: “this play is constructed from verbatim interviews between the writers and their parents.” Janet, Beverly and Mary Anne enter and sit in their chairs. We hear the sound of the line being picked up on the other end. A photo of the Tiffany lamp is projected on the back wall.*)

MARY ANNE. Okay, we’ll do five minutes and then I’m going to bed. Ughhh! What’s the question?

JANET. Well, no, there wasn’t anything to ask for because there was no money. So what was your dad gonna ask for?

BEVERLY. Absolutely. The Tiffany lamp and he still calls me to this day and I tell him that the Tiffany lamp was mine because I put my name on it.

MARY ANNE. Ummm ...

BEVERLY. When Marna passed away we were asked to put our names on things that we wanted. I put the Morris family name on this, B Morris. And he insists that, and by right, it is his grandmother’s, (*Increasingly agitated.*) but it would not have been in this family if it were not for me putting my name on that. And he called me and said I want the Tiffany lamp and I said I’m not giving you — *you* want the Tiffany lamp then you can go to Christie’s and we can auc-

tion it off and you can have the Tiffany lamp.

MARY ANNE. No, he didn't want anything.

BEVERLY. (*She can't let go of it.*) And to this day he *still* wants the Tiffany lamp and I'm not going to send a Tiffany lamp to California. Even if it's — even if they package it very carefully. Because I sent him other things too. There was a beautiful desk that he wanted. Early American desk, there was a chair that went with it. THEY lost it. THEY lost a chair. THEY lost a very valuable table. So I'm not going to be sending a Tiffany lamp off to California because he feels that in his last couple years he can, he wants to live with it.

MARY ANNE. He just wanted to pffft. Walk away.

BEVERLY. (*With dignity.*) Because I like the lamp, and it fits my decor. Also, I think it's much safer to be here.

MARY ANNE. He did take a hair dryer. (*Laughs.*) Jerk.

BEVERLY. He is not getting the lamp! And he said that he's going to — not sue me, but he'll send the police and I said go ahead send the police because there is a statute of limitations. He should have taken it in the very beginning. (*John enters, crosses to his chair with a coffee cup.*)

JOHN. You know, did she take the good hi-fi set, I can't recall.

BEVERLY. He decided to leave everything fine because he was desperate to get out, so you pay a consequence when you're desperate to get out. (*Beat.*) So that was one thing. Then he wants the *Indian* head. (*Actor 4 shifts from playing John to playing Frinde.*)

FRINDE. Whenever I go over there —

BEVERLY. An Aztec *Indian* head.

FRINDE. You know there are a lot of things in your dad's house when I go over there that give me a little shock of recognition.

BEVERLY. And also the Reuben Nakian.

FRINDE. But whenever I see those silver cups I feel a little pang.

BEVERLY. (*Eerie calm.*) I said is it better? Is it not better to give me what I want for me and my children and your children then to give it all to a lawyer because I want to tell you that I may be calm now but I don't know what's going to be happening a couple months from now. (*Lights. Music.*)

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by Anne Kauffman, Matthew Maher, Caitlin Miller,  
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Crafted from interviews between the cast and their own parents, *YOU BETTER SIT DOWN* is a heartbreaking and hilarious account of the parents' marriages and their subsequent divorces. These delicate parent-child conversations have yielded unique insights into falling in love, falling out of love, and rebuilding a life after the complex experience of dividing a family. The show explores each couple's first meeting, the ups and downs of their marriage, their split, and the surprising perspectives on life after divorce. This provocative show reveals the stories behind the statistics of one of the most prominent social phenomena of our time.

*"In YOU BETTER SIT DOWN the truth about these four defunct marriages is laid bare with simplicity and honesty."* —**The New York Times**

*"Relentlessly entertaining."* —**The New Yorker**

*"[An] uncompromising and funny documentary theater piece."* —**BackStage**

*"Wryly entertaining ... absorbingly candid."* —**The Village Voice**

*"Riveting confessional theater."* —**Variety**

*"A fascinating chronicle of relationships and families."* —**Flavorpill.com**

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