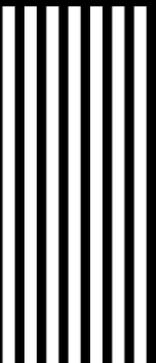




THINNER THAN WATER

BY MELISSA ROSS



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THINNER THAN WATER
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For Rubin

THINNER THAN WATER was originally produced by Labyrinth Theater Company (Stephen Adly Guirgis, Mimi O'Donnell, Yul Vázquez, Artistic Directors; Danny Feldman, Managing Director) in February 2011. It was directed by Mimi O'Donnell; the set design was by Lee Savage; the costume design was by Bobby Frederick Tilley II; the lighting design was by Japhy Weideman; the sound design was by Jeremy J. Lee; and the production stage manager was Pamela Salling. The cast was as follows:

RENEE Elizabeth Canavan
GARY Alfredo Narciso
CASSIE Lisa Joyce
GWEN Deirdre O'Connell
ANGELA Megan Mostyn-Brown
HENRY Aaron Roman Weiner
BENJY Stephen Ellis
MARK David Zayas

THINNER THAN WATER was presented at the Gift Theatre in Chicago, Illinois, opening on March 31, 2014. It was directed by John Gawlik; the scenic design was by Joe Schermoly; the lighting and projection design were by Michael Stanfill; the costume design was by Kate Murphy; and the original music and sound design were by Peter Storms. The cast was as follows:

RENEE Lynda Newton
GARY Michael Patrick Thornton
CASSIE Brittany Burch
GWEN Donna McGough
ANGELA Darci Nalepa
HENRY Jay Worthington
BENJY Gabriel Franken
MARK Paul D'Addario

CHARACTERS

The Family

RENEE — Early forties. Martin's oldest daughter.

GARY — Mid-thirties. Martin's only son.

CASSIE — Late twenties. Martin's youngest child.

GWEN — Early fifties. Quite possibly Martin's true love.

The Others

ANGELA — Mid-twenties. A really great mom of a really great kid.

HENRY — Mid-thirties. Cassie's boyfriend.

BENJY — Mid-twenties. Gary's coworker.

MARK — Mid-forties. Renee's husband.

PLACE

A suburb and an adjacent city.

TIME

Late March, 2010.

THE TEXT

A slash (/) in the middle of a line indicates overlapping dialogue.

Internal punctuation inside of a sentence should serve as a guide for emphasis and intention and not be considered true stops.

A beat is a quick shift in thought — a momentary breath — and should not be given *too* much significance. Pauses have a bit more weight. Silences should be allowed to linger.

THINNER THAN WATER

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Renee, Cassie, and Gary in a suburban living room. There is a birthday cake.

RENEE. I can't BELIEVE he called YOU!!!

CASSIE. You're overreacting!

RENEE. I am not / overreacting!

CASSIE. It's not that big a *deal!* You are *making* it into a / *bigger* deal than you.

RENEE. I am not *making* it into anything.

CASSIE. OK.

RENEE. It's *insulting*.

CASSIE. OK.

RENEE. It is *borderline* disrespectful.

CASSIE. OK.

RENEE. Stop it.

CASSIE. Stop *what?*

RENEE. That!

CASSIE. What did I say??? I said OK!! I'm *agreeing* / with you!

RENEE. It's your tone.

CASSIE. My *tone*??? My. Gary? Can you help / me please!

GARY. Not getting involved.

CASSIE. You *suck*.

GARY. Sorry. You're on your own with this one.

RENEE. I'll tell you why. It's because you had the hot mom.

CASSIE. *Excuse* me???

RENEE. Your mom was the hot mom. Gary's mom was the fat mom.
GARY. My mom's not *fat*!
RENEE. (*Dismissing him.*) Please. And my mom was the pain in the ass. (*Gary laughs.*) What?
GARY. Nothing.
CASSIE. My *mom* —
RENEE. Was hot. And is dead. Dead hot mom trumps fat mom and pain-in-the-ass mom.
CASSIE. Are we really having this conversation?
GARY. Unfortunately yes. / Yes we are.
RENEE. I'm just trying to find some *logic* here. Trying to find a little *sense* in the *insanity*.
CASSIE. Are you asking me to *apologize* because my mom's *dead*???
RENEE. Don't be ridiculous. (*Beat.*) Who *actually* called you?
CASSIE. The girlfriend.
RENEE. You *talked* to her? She *exists*?
CASSIE. She's not a Yeti.
RENEE. I *know* that. (*Beat.*) What's she like?
CASSIE. I donno. She's fine. / She's OK.
RENEE. She must be stupid.
CASSIE. Jesus! I knew you / were gonna.
RENEE. Knew what?
CASSIE. I *knew* you were gonna react / like this.
RENEE. You "knew"???. Gimme a / fucking break.
CASSIE. GOOD GOD! Could you let me finish a fucking *sentence*???
Could you let me *talk* for a minute for a *second* before *interrupting* me???
RENEE. Sorry. Go ahead. Talk it out. You have the conch shell.
CASSIE. (*Beat.*) Taking. A break.
RENEE. (*Pause.*) I can understand not calling *him*.
GARY. Excuse / me?
RENEE. He's over thirty and still lives with his fat mom.
GARY. He is also in the room.
RENEE. Whatever.
GARY. I'm saving!
RENEE. For what? A new bong?
GARY. How'd I get dragged into this???
RENEE. You date underage girls!!!
GARY. They are not *underage*!!!
RENEE. In *Georgia* maybe!!!
GARY. Why is this about me???

RENEE. *I am the one you call in case of an emergency! I'M THE ONE YOU CALL!!!*

GARY. OBVIOUSLY NOT ALL THE TIME!!!!

RENEE. (*Beat.*) I am a mom. (*Gary walks to the window, opens it, and lights a cigarette.*) When you are making an "In Case of Emergency" list. And you are choosing who goes first. Are you smoking?

GARY. Is that a real question?

RENEE. (????)

GARY. I mean. Do you really want me to answer you? Are you *genuinely* confused?

RENEE. Stop being an asshole. And you're choosing between a pothead who lives in a garage, a *temp*, and a MOM. You pick / THE FUCKING MOM!

CASSIE. Freelancer!

RENEE. *Excuse me?*

CASSIE. I'm not a *temp*. I'm a *freelancer*.

RENEE. Do you have *health insurance*?

CASSIE. *No.*

RENEE. Is it a *permanent* job?

CASSIE. It's freelancing. It's. I don't have to defend my career to you!

RENEE. (*A little laugh.*) Career?

CASSIE. They happen to love me at my job.

RENEE. Did I say they didn't?

CASSIE. It was your "*tone*."

RENEE. (*Beat.*) What does Henry think about this?

CASSIE. This isn't about Henry.

RENEE. Henry has a level head. Henry. I'm sure Henry thinks / this is ridiculous.

CASSIE. I don't want to talk about Henry!

RENEE. OK ...

CASSIE. He's not *family*. He's my *boyfriend*. He's not. I don't care what Henry / thinks. OK? OK?

RENEE. Fine. OK. OK! (*Pause.*) It's my fucking birthday.

CASSIE. I *know* ...

RENEE. You call me up. Tell me you and Gary wanna come by. I was so excited that someone remembered. (*Beat.*) I hadda get my own cake.

CASSIE. I know. / I'm really sorry.

RENEE. Mark's out of town. The kids're at school. I was gonna be spending my birthday alone / and then you called.

CASSIE. I said I'm sorry Renee. Do you want a kidney?

RENEE. Sure. Why not. *(Beat.)* You couldn't have waited a day?
(Pause.) What's wrong with him?

CASSIE. Cancer.

RENEE. What kind?

CASSIE. Lung.

RENEE. Ha! That's brilliant. *(Gary puts the cigarette out and throws it out the window.)* Did you just throw a cigarette butt out on my lawn?

GARY. Yup.

RENEE. That's lovely. Thank you, Gary.

GARY. You are very welcome Renee.

RENEE. So not only do I *not* get the call. But *then*. I get the honor of picking up the / pieces anyway.

CASSIE. Oh my god! LET IT FUCKING GO!!! *(To Gary.)* Can you *please* help me???

GARY. Don't look at me. I live in a garage.

RENEE. Why doesn't the girlfriend take care of him?

CASSIE. She is. She works. She needs help.

RENEE. So why doesn't she get him a nurse?

CASSIE. He doesn't want / a nurse.

RENEE. Doesn't want? Well wow. I don't always *want* to stick my finger up my husband's ass. But you know what? I do it anyway.

GARY. Unnecessary / visual.

CASSIE. He doesn't want a nurse!

RENEE. I DON'T CARE WHAT HE *WANTS*!! YOU TELL HIM HE EITHER GETS A FUCKING NURSE OR HE SITS IN HIS OWN STINKING PISS UNTIL HE *DIES*! *(Pause.)* He is *not* a good person. You are making him into something tragic. You're making him sad and old and sick and helpless. He's not. He's a shitty human being. And he's drowning. And there's a shark eating his leg. And he picked the weakest link out of the three of us to save him because *that* was his best shot and because if nothing else. The man has good survival skills. *That's* why he called you. Because he knew that if he called me? I'd've hung up on his ass.

CASSIE. Maybe you're right. / Maybe he's.

RENEE. No not maybe.

CASSIE. All right. *Fine*. Not maybe. He is a cockroach on a toilet. OK? OK? So. So *be* the better person Renee. *Win* the better person contest. Sit around and watch him smoke himself to death and then send him off to hell with a big fat debt to you. Kill him. With

fucking kindness. (*Pause.*) Look. I know you hate him. I get it. And you have good reasons to. But. (*Beat.*) This is something I need to do. And so. If you could / help me.

RENEE. It's always something.

CASSIE. This is the last time. This is the last time I will ask you for *anything*. I promise. I swear. This is it. You can hold me to it. OK? This is the last time.

RENEE. (*Pause.*) What would I have to do?

CASSIE. They need about fifteen hours a week. I figure we can each do five.

GARY. Wait. *I've* gotta do this too? I can't do this / right now.

RENEE. I need to be home by three when my kids come home from school.

CASSIE. Yeah OK. / That's fine.

GARY. Did you hear me??? I can't do this. I've got stuff going on.

RENEE. What kind of stuff.

GARY. (*Beat.*) Personal. Stuff.

RENEE. If we can do it — you can do it.

GARY. This / fucking sucks.

RENEE. (*To Cassie.*) You owe me. And if you. You know. Flake out? If you forget. If you lay this / all on me?

CASSIE. I promise I won't.

RENEE. You will not. You will not flake out, Cassie. / If you flake out?

CASSIE. I promise. I promise you / I'm not gonna.

RENEE. I have heard this before.

CASSIE. I mean it this time. I swear. I am getting my shit together.

RENEE. Your *shit*? Your *shit* is spread out over the *Interstate*.

CASSIE. I know.

RENEE. You are gonna need a *U-Haul* to get your / *shit* together.

CASSIE. I know!

RENEE. So. Good luck with that. (*Pause.*) I am doing this for *you*. Do you *understand*? I am compromising everything I believe in. / For *you*.

CASSIE. I know. (*Beat. And then sincerely.*) I know. (*Beat.*) Thank you Renee.

RENEE. Yeah well. Don't thank me yet. (*Beat.*) Who wants fucking cake.

THINNER THAN WATER

by Melissa Ross

4M, 4W

When their father falls ill, three estranged half-siblings reunite. As the world around them crumbles, they argue with each other and with everyone around them in a desperate struggle to do the right thing and mend their rapidly deteriorating lives. *THINNER THAN WATER* is a blood-raw, wicked comedy-drama about fighting through the thick and thin of family.

"... engaging ... intelligently wrought ... Shrewdly sidestepping the bog of exposition and instead allowing the audience to connect the dots of her characters' collective history, Ms. Ross opens midargument ... the writing is pithy yet sensitive ... In her debut, Ms. Ross shows a deft balance of generosity and toughness toward her characters, tempering the raw moments with humor." —**The New York Times**

"... beautifully written, funny, and very entertaining ... The neurotic yet sympathetic characters are all believable." —**The New Yorker**

"... throbs with the messiness of life. All of the characters, even the minor ones, feel vividly real, while the dialogue is acidly funny ... surprisingly cathartic." —**The New York Post**

"... unstinting, sometimes funny, yet pervasively melancholy ... what makes THINNER THAN WATER so compelling is the unflagging accuracy of the many confrontations that make up its story ... To her great credit, in the last few minutes Ross first makes you think she is going to reconcile all these lives, cable-drama style, only to throw us a loop. Whether it's a sunny interval or just a continuation of the downpour of life remains an open question." —**The Chicago Tribune**

Also by Melissa Ross

NICE GIRL
OF GOOD STOCK

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