

THE CHEATS

BY HAMISH LINKLATER



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THE CHEATS
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THE CHEATS received its premiere production in October 2015 at Steep Theatre Company (Peter Moore, Artistic Director; Kate Piatt-Eckert, Executive Director) in Chicago, Illinois. It was directed by Joanie Schultz, the set design was by Chelsea Warren, the lighting design was by Brandon Wardell, the sound design was by Matt Chapman, the costume design was by Izumi Inaba, and the stage manager was Jason Crutchfield. The cast was as follows:

ANNE Kendra Thulin
JOHN Peter Moore
JONATHAN Brad Akin
SUSIE Julia Siple

THE CHEATS was developed by the Cape Cod Theatre Project (Hal Brooks, Artistic Director).

CHARACTERS

ANNE: 40s, mother, actress, vibrant, caretaker; in a rut.

JOHN: 40s, Anne's husband, writer, dry drunk.

JONATHAN: 30s, their neighbor, gaffer, a little coarse; in turmoil, grief.

SUSIE: 30s.

BEAR: Large female dog.

SETTING

Morning, the last day in October 2012, Los Angeles.

The second-floor apartment of a two-story building. The playing space is the large living room of an apartment that you enter through French doors from an onstage balcony/porch, stage right. Offstage stairs descend from the balcony to the street below. There's a piano against one wall in the living room, other furniture, a laptop somewhere. There is a kitchen and a TV room just offstage. Bedrooms and a bathroom are further offstage. It's a big apartment, but not too fancy. The balcony has a sunblind that is pulled down at the top of the play, obscuring the view of the balcony from the audience. Cigarette smoke comes from behind the blind.

THE CHEATS

In the TV room, off, the TV plays muffled coverage of Hurricane Sandy's aftermath. Anne, past 40, calls from the TV room into the empty living room.

ANNE. (*Off.*) It's all over... It's done... Or it's winding down... Wow... Wow... Wow. Just tragic. A real tragedy, like—no, that sounds too tidy. This is real, this is *real*. This is nature and the world, and the ants, coming to an end, together, like... I can never understand his hair, Brian Williams. I always think he's balding, but it's really windy and he just *isn't*. He's got *a lot* of hair... It just starts farther back, I guess... Why haven't we made a donation? At least text-donated, we never, do you have your phone? It's \$10 and all you have to do is send a text. The number's on the screen right now, do you want to come—? Or I could read it off to you?... It's long though, the number... no?... They even canceled trick-or-treating! The governor did, the fat one, in New Jersey? I can never remember his name—they just said it two minutes ago, but it's so silly, his name, my brain's like, "That can't be real, that's too silly"... But it's petering out, it wasn't the end after all, just another... Why is that always so disappointing? Am I sick? I'm sick! It's sick, being disappointed... when it all settles down, when it's over, surviving... And we missed it! We were here. Again! We miss everything... We were there for the Blackout, pathetic. Remember? It was August? Why were we there? It was our first time back since before—wait, when was 9/11? Oh my God, did I just say that? I thought it was so tense, walking around, so hot. Everyone must have been over it, but I was so tense, watching the sky. Wishing it would happen again, just to, just to break the suspense. And then all we got was a frickin Blackout... Fun though. All those bars. (*John, past 40, having stubbed out his cigarette, walks in the French doors from the balcony. He carries an empty coffee cup. He listens to Anne a little, then heads*

off into the kitchen to make more coffee.) Peeing in the dark. I couldn't find the toilet in that pizza place, remember, the one with all the cold slices? Probably a Ray's right? I groped around and couldn't find the toilet and probably, right? Would I want to touch it if I found it? So I just squatted down in the dark. Peed on the floor. That was fun. Pathetic. All the big events. We miss everything. *(Pause.)*

JOHN. *(Off.)* What?

ANNE. *(Off.)* What?

JOHN. *(Off.)* What are you talking about?

ANNE. *(Off.)* What?

JOHN. *(Off.)* I came in you were talking.

ANNE. *(Off.)* Where were you?

JOHN. *(Off.)* On the balcony.

ANNE. *(Off.)* Smoking.

JOHN. *(Off.)* I'm making another pot. Do you want some? *(Anne comes in the living room. She has nowhere to go. She goes to her laptop, opens it.)*

ANNE. I'm fine. No sure, one cup. I thought you were in here.

JOHN. *(Off.)* I was. Then I went out there.

ANNE. So embarrassing. I thought I heard you answering me.

JOHN. *(Off.)* What did I say?

ANNE. Nothing. Just "wow," "uh huh?" / "yeah?"

JOHN. *(Off.)* Yeah?

ANNE. We have such terrible / communication, never mind.

JOHN. *(Off.)* What?

ANNE. Where was I? When you came back in?

JOHN. *(Off.)* You were talking about peeing on the floor.

ANNE. Great. How were they?

JOHN. *(Off.)* Charlie wanted to be dropped off, Frannie wanted to be walked in.

ANNE. That's your boy.

JOHN. *(Off.)* That's my boy. He's mine alright.

ANNE. Were they so excited for tonight?

JOHN. *(Off.)* Uh-huh.

ANNE. You're sure we don't need costumes?

JOHN. *(Off.)* I don't really think, if we're just walking around—

ANNE. 'Cause I found Piggy and Snowball—

JOHN. *(Off.)* Oh yeah?

ANNE. In a box marked "Important Files." Did you remember / to get the candy?

JOHN. (*Off, not yelling.*) I got the candy. You told me fifteen times—
ANNE. Alright, alright, please don't yell at me. (*Small pause.*)
JOHN. (*Off.*) Do you have something today? (*Tight pause.*)
ANNE. (*Terse.*) No, John, I do not.
JOHN. (*Off.*) Sorry, I thought you said.
ANNE. That thing's next week. If I decide to go in. What time is your meeting?
JOHN. (*Off.*) It's Wednesday?
ANNE. Wednesday.
JOHN. (*Off.*) Noon. Sandra's picking them up?
ANNE. It's Wednesday. (*Pause.*)
JOHN. (*Off.*) So what were you talking about?
ANNE. Oh just, you know, it's sick, missing out on all the big catastrophes.
JOHN. (*Off.*) It's winding down?
ANNE. Pretty much passed.
JOHN. (*Off.*) And that makes you sad?
ANNE. I just, sometimes, you want to be in the middle of things.
JOHN. (*Off.*) That's because you've never lost someone.
ANNE. Okay. I said it was sick.
JOHN. (*Off.*) We were there for the Blackout.
ANNE. Yeah, why were we?
JOHN. (*Off.*) Our engagement party.
ANNE. Oh, that's right. Such a long time. Not my favorite party. (*John comes back in the living room with a Rite Aid bag full of candy. He puts it down next to Anne.*) Ugh. Get it away from me. (*Pause. John stands uneasily.*) What?
JOHN. Nothing.
ANNE. What?
JOHN. I think something's going on...
ANNE. What is it?
JOHN. Across the street. Something's happening. With the neighbors.
ANNE. Again?
JOHN. I just saw Robert and his wife—it's Robert right?
ANNE. You have to stop spying on them.
JOHN. I'm not spying, I'm sitting on the balcony, my balcony—
ANNE. Smoking.
JOHN. I can sit on my balcony. It faces out. The chair faces out. I should turn my chair around so it's facing in? Facing the wall?
ANNE. You're right, you have every right to spy.

JOHN. Never mind.

ANNE. No, go on, Robert and his wife, what?

JOHN. Is it Robert? Richard maybe. Something with an R.

ANNE. I have no idea.

JOHN. I just saw this moment where Robert and his wife—What's *her* name?

ANNE. No idea. I don't know them, you know them—

JOHN. I don't know them—

ANNE. What happened.

JOHN. Nothing happened. It was just this moment, this silent moment, on their doorstep. She was going out. And he came out and stood with her on the doorstep... It wasn't a moment, it was like a pause. Like this pause I shouldn't have seen. It was awful. *(Pause.)*

ANNE. What are you talking about?

JOHN. Robert, he was just staring at his wife. He had on this "B" hat—

ANNE. A Red Sox hat?

JOHN. I don't think it was a Red Sox "B," it was orange, kind of cursive.

ANNE. That could be Chicago.

JOHN. Chicago's "C," isn't it?

ANNE. They do "B" now too, for "Bears."

JOHN. How do you know?

ANNE. From the game, Dad, Thanksgiving, / you were in the kitchen helping out—

JOHN. I spent most of Thanksgiving in the kitchen.

ANNE. Was the "B" cursive?

JOHN. I said it was cursive. Isn't Maggie from New York? Like Saugerties?

ANNE. There are Bears fans all over, they're popular. The Fridge?

JOHN. He's Maggie's what again?

ANNE. Robert, from across the street, is Maggie's uncle.

JOHN. Cousin. He has to be her cousin, they're the same age.

ANNE. That's why I remember he's her uncle because I remember it was so odd they were the same age seeming. And she said, "I know, but he's my uncle."

JOHN. Huh. I always think it's Robert's wife, whatsername, who's related to Maggie.

ANNE. That's because she looks like Steph.

JOHN. She looks like Owen's first wife?

ANNE. It doesn't matter. (*Recapping, deliberately.*) Your best friend Owen's second wife Maggie's uncle, who lives across the street...

JOHN. Why haven't we ever had them over?

ANNE. I don't know, we should.

JOHN. We've been here how long? We've known this whole time.

ANNE. We're not very sociable people, John.

JOHN. I'm not you mean.

ANNE. You have a thing with men. Or men in hats, it's fine. Go on. This guy from across the street was staring at his wife—?

JOHN. No, it's not right.

ANNE. Just... (*Pause.*)

JOHN. I don't know, he was just looking at her, staring at her. And she was just looking down.

ANNE. At her feet?

JOHN. At her feet? No. Just down. Away. And he was just staring at her from under the brim of that hat. His hat was like, like he'd put it on in a mirror, to go out, you know? Not pulled down low, not casual; straight ahead in the middle, just so, you know?

ANNE. I think so.

JOHN. But he wasn't going out; she was. She had her earphones in, her iPod, iPhone, white earbuds, but just in one ear, the other dangling. And they weren't talking; he was just looking at her and she was just looking down with her hair over her eyes... It was so private. It went on forever. And then she just walked away. No words spoken, without looking back. He watched her go. She got in the car. He went back in the house. And she drove off. (*Pause.*)

ANNE. How long was it, that they just stood there? Before she left?

JOHN. Like five seconds, maybe.

ANNE. Five seconds?

JOHN. You don't understand, it was stretched.

ANNE. Five seconds is nothing.

JOHN. It's forever.

ANNE. Come on.

JOHN. Stand over here.

ANNE. I'm sitting.

JOHN. Do as I say and stand over here right now.

ANNE. Fine.

JOHN. Close, alright. I'm going to look down, no, I'm the man, you stand here, you look down, and I'm going to stare at you, and

THE CHEATS

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2M, 2W

John and Anne have two children and a good marriage—they have sex, drive hybrids, and, recently, they cut out sugar. But John has been spying on the neighbors, frankly, for a while now, and at 9 A.M. Halloween morning, the neighbors drop by for a visit. *THE CHEATS* is a play about your marriage, and how it can get f*cked when you forget to lock the front door.

“... [a] wry new play... quietly hilarious... squirmingly astute...”

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