



HOUSEBREAKING

BY JAKOB HOLDER



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HOUSEBREAKING
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Original Showcase Production by Cherry Lane Theatre
(Angelina Fiordellisi, Artistic Director; James King, Managing Director).

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HOUSEBREAKING was originally presented in a showcase production as part of the Mentor Project at the Cherry Lane Theatre (Angelina Fiordellisi, Artistic Director; James King, Managing Director) in New York City on March 24, 2009. It was mentored by Charles Mee; directed by Daniella Topol; the scenic design was by Mimi Lien; the costume design was by Theresa Squire; the lighting design was by Nicole Pearce; the production manager was Janio Marrero; the stage manager was Paige van den Bergh; and the assistant stage manager was Mandi Cynkin. The cast was as follows:

CHAD Saxon Palmer
CARMINE Andy Powers
MAGDA Monique Vukovic
DAD Evan Thompson

HOUSEBREAKING received its world premiere production presented by Poison Apple Initiative at The Compound in Austin, Texas, on December 1, 2011. It was directed by Bastion Carboni; the scenic design was by Joshua Baker; the costume design was by Georgia Young and Jen Brown; the stage manager was Lindsey Greer Sikes; and the indispensable assistant was Jackie Buerger. The cast was as follows:

CHAD Juston Street
CARMINE Sam Mercer
MAGDA Elizabeth Bigger
DAD Al Bianchi

CHARACTERS

CHAD (M) — Mid-30s; untended handsome; pseudo-intellectual, dead-end job slave.

CARMINE (M) — Late 30s; homeless, reserved, mind unexercised — not unintelligent.

MAGDA (F) — Mid-20s; Chad's sister; tough; pretty; but she has joined life in being unkind to her.

DAD (M) — Mid-50s; televised-sports enthusiast; lost; mentally stressed.

PLACE

A mid-income suburb, equidistant from a major American city and a higher-class suburb. The kitchen of a house, with an entrance from the backyard. Hallway entrance USL, with the bottom of a staircase just visible beyond. A window above the sink, just large enough to badly fit a reasonably sized person with an unreasonably sized desire to climb through it.

TIME

Act One: a cold Saturday night in February. Uncared-for walls, floors and appliances. Lots of old, tattered, sad family accumulations — kitschy crap long since drained of sympathetic sincerity or winking irony — and barely considered decorations.

Act Two: another cold night in February, two years later. Modern furnishings, new paint job; not really stylish, but there is true, simple pride in whatever choices have been made. The unpretentious work of someone who knows to measure twice, fears not the complex angle and maintains an intimate relationship with joint compound.

Note on punctuation: The forward slash “ / ” indicates the precise moment in a line of dialogue when the next character to speak breaks in, creating a seamless flow of interruption.

HOUSEBREAKING

ACT ONE

Night. Chad enters the dark kitchen through the backyard door, tries to light a cigarette. After a few failed attempts, he walks to the fridge, gets a beer, drinks. Carmine steps in, cautiously, one hand on the open door — we can only just make him out.

CHAD. *(Calmly, gently.)* You're letting the heat out. *(Carmine steps further in, closes the door.)* On the right. *(Carmine hits the light switch. Lights fully up — harsh, mostly fluorescent, flaw-encouraging, anything but ambient. Chad is very obviously worn out, though stable, from a night of drinking, likely a lot of cold sweat. Carmine is obviously homeless.)* Welcome to our humble and happy home. *(Pause.)*

CARMINE. Nice.

CHAD. It's the shits. I'd burn it all down if the insurance was in my own name. *(Beat)* We can't actually afford insurance. *(Beat.)* Hardly afford the gasoline at that. Or a working lighter. *(Beat.)* Or an alibi. *(Beat.)* What?

CARMINE. What?

CHAD. You look nervous.

CARMINE. You said if I came here I could have a shower?

CHAD. I said at some point. I want to talk to you first.

CARMINE. What do you wanna talk about? *(Pause. Chad stares at him.)*

CHAD. What happened to you?

CARMINE. When? *(Beat.)* I dunno ... Got unlucky.

CHAD. What, that's it?

CARMINE. Pretty much.

CHAD. Oh. Okay. Fine, go take your shower.

CARMINE. Really?

CHAD. No. Have a seat. Beer? I wasn't gonna finish this anyway. I don't think you'll catch anything from me. So, what? You lose your job?

CARMINE. Can I maybe wash my hands up at least?

CHAD. (*Considers.*) Here, don't touch anything, let me help you. (*He turns on the tap, dumps half a can of detergent powder over Carmine's hands.*) Scrub hard. You're probably hungry?

CARMINE. Yeah.

CHAD. Cupboards, fridge, take whatever.

CARMINE. What you got? (*Reaching for a towel.*)

CHAD. Don't use that, there's paper — yeah, like that. Just go ahead and dig through the cabinets, have whatever you like, no one here really eats anyway.

CARMINE. Peanut butter?

CHAD. Whatever you like. If there's jelly, have jelly.

CARMINE. S'there bread or anything?

CHAD. Hunt. Forage. Finders keepers.

CARMINE. (*Holding his hand out.*) Carmine.

CHAD. What's that?

CARMINE. My name.

CHAD. You scrubbed?

CARMINE. Yeah.

CHAD. (*Regards the hand. Doesn't take it.*) Carmine. You don't meet a lot of those. How'd you get a name like that?

CARMINE. My mother. Her father's name.

CHAD. (*Oddly taken aback.*) Jesus Christ. A mother. You have a father, too?

CARMINE. Dead.

CHAD. Kids? No? Or you don't know?

CARMINE. Look, why'd you bring me here?

CHAD. You want to leave?

CARMINE. Just asking.

CHAD. I didn't like what I saw. If they did that to me... Anyway, I'm curious, too, that's why the questions. Curious cat. (*Beat.*) I guess curiosity killed the cat.

CARMINE. (*Thinks.*) Wonder what he did during those other eight lives. (*He smiles.*)

CHAD. (*Surprised.*) Carmine! That was funny. That was a funny thing. You've got a sense of humor in there. Sandwich any good?

CARMINE. Mmm.

CHAD. Peanut butter and beer, right? What else do you need?
You cold?

CARMINE. S' nice in here.

CHAD. Sometimes you can see your breath.

CARMINE. You cold?

CHAD. I'm drunk.

CARMINE. Anything else to drink?

CHAD. Probably. You from around here?

CARMINE. Just 'cross the river. Originally. Yeah.

CHAD. Originally. You left?

CARMINE. Little while.

CHAD. Why'd you come back?

CARMINE. (*Thinks.*) Familiar.

CHAD. Where'd you go?

CARMINE. South.

CHAD. How far?

CARMINE. Border.

CHAD. State?

CARMINE. Mexico.

CHAD. Yeah? Never across?

CARMINE. Nope.

CHAD. Not enough dough?

CARMINE. Got scared.

CHAD. Of what?

CARMINE. Wouldn't be let back in.

CHAD. Huh. You nibble. Me? I would've had it in three good-sized bites.

MAGDA. (*Entering from upstairs.*) Do you have to be so loud?
(*Beat. Notices Carmine.*) Hello.

CHAD. Maggie, this is ... Uncle Carmine. Uncle Carmine, you remember Magda?

MAGDA. Whose uncle?

CHAD. Your uncle. My — our uncle.

MAGDA. (*Dismissive.*) Shut up. (*Beat; suspicious.*) We don't have an Uncle Carmine.

CHAD. Yes, we do. He's right here.

MAGDA. (*To Carmine.*) Hello. (*To Chad.*) Quit yelling.

CHAD. I'm not yelling.

MAGDA. You're totally yelling, I could hear you from upstairs.

CHAD. Sound travels. Pull up a chair.
MAGDA. I'm sleeping.
CHAD. You're standing here and talking.
MAGDA. I was sleeping.
CHAD. So was Uncle Carmine. But now he's here, you're both awake, and you should be polite.
MAGDA. Fuck you. Who is this guy, really?
CHAD. Let's try this again. Carmine, you remember Magda. Maggie, this is our Uncle Carmine.
MAGDA. Okay, fine. Hello, Uncle Carmine.
CHAD. Why can't you be polite?
MAGDA. I've said hello to him, like, three times.
CARMINE. Hello.
CHAD. What are you doing home anyway?
MAGDA. Sleeping. Gimme a cigarette.
CHAD. I don't have any. Why weren't you at the bar?
MAGDA. Bull, I can smell it.
CHAD. It's Saturday. Why weren't you at Library?
MAGDA. Night off.
CHAD. You go there on your nights off.
MAGDA. I'm broke.
CHAD. Already?
MAGDA. Yes. All ... fucking ... ready.
CHAD. (*Beat.*) Check the freezer, there might be an old pack in there.
MAGDA. You were down there tonight?
CHAD. That's actually where I ran into Uncle Carmine.
MAGDA. (*Cool but cautious.*) Sorry I don't remember you, Carmine.
CARMINE. S'okay. I don't know / if we —
CHAD. Carmine's just back from — you said Europe *and* Asia, right? Or was it Eurasia and South America? They're calling it *Eurasia* these days, Mags. *Six* continents now, crazy, right? They strip away the continents, demote planets, everything you were taught to believe is a lie, you should sue all your old teachers. This guy knows the truth, though, 'cause he's seen the universe. Stared straight into it and didn't blink, right?
MAGDA. (*Ignoring him; to Carmine.*) That's pretty cool. You rich?
CHAD. Carmine was telling me how he won the lottery a few years ago. Blew it all at once, out seeing the world, isn't that right?

CARMINE. Some of it.

CHAD. Big world.

CARMINE. Pretty big. Small, too, though.

MAGDA. What?

CHAD. Last stop on his world tour, we bump into each other ...

Big world, small world.

MAGDA. Why are you narrating?

CHAD. Carmine's tired of telling it, right? Gabbled all evening about Paris this, Berlin that, Tokyo, Chile. Made me feel sorta bad about how far I've never gone. Dried his tongue out chewing on all those maps.

MAGDA. (*To Carmine.*) He make you buy all his drinks?

CARMINE. I don't go inside.

CHAD. You're not missing much. Couple of kitty-corner booths, sticky wooden bar, vinyl stool tops shredded into intricate slash patterns that'll cut you just as deep. The usual grimy hole. Only, this one's got, like, hieroglyphic wallpaper, and the bathroom doorways are manned by reproductions of Cleopatra's Needle or whatever. Get it? The *Library. Of Alexandria*. Clever, right? Unlike its namesake, though, the bar itself is totally fireproof, and the only books in there are full of matches. (*Prompting.*) We met outside.

CARMINE. We met outside.

MAGDA. Uh-huh.

CHAD. Hey, how much do you usually make in tips? On a good night? Average.

MAGDA. Lay off with the bullshit, Chad.

CHAD. Come on, how much?

MAGDA. A hundred, about? Depends.

CHAD. On what you wear?

MAGDA. Or whatever. Probably.

CHAD. She's figured out a scientific formula: The barer the threads, the thicker the kitty. More a wreck she looks at sea, the more she gets in salvage.

MAGDA. Whatever works.

CHAD. A hundred ... In tips! Plus — what? — six bucks an hour, roughly — what? ... ten hours a night, sixty bucks a night salary, one hundred in tips, is that weekends or weeknights?

MAGDA. Weeknights.

CHAD. Four nights a week, yeah? That's four hundred in tips plus over two hundred a check. You hear this? Six, seven hundred bucks

HOUSEBREAKING

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3M, 1W

Enter Chad, obviously worn out from a night of drinking. Enter Carmine, obviously homeless. Chad's tired of his job, his shipwreck of a sister, his shut-in father, his whole thirty-five-year-old life. Carmine is tired of life on the streets. Chad brings Carmine home, offering a drink, a shower, and a warm place to sleep, all the while forgetting that stray animals are wild and cunning survivors. *HOUSEBREAKING* is a slowly smoldering story that makes us wonder how we got to be who we are — and what happens when we attempt to change.

"HOUSEBREAKING left me in stunned silence, simultaneously repulsed and fascinated as I questioned my own identity." —**The Austin Chronicle**

"HOUSEBREAKING is a darker, more intimate, and highly socially relevant take on our morbid fascination with the less fortunate ... a slow-burning play: carefully crafted to keep us curious and engaged."

—**The Austin-American Statesman**

"HOUSEBREAKING is a disturbing, funny and frightening play; audiences will realize they have experienced theatre at its proper job."

—**Edward Albee**

"What an impressive piece of work. Its characters are solidly drawn with a depth of feeling and nuance that usually belongs to novels." —**John Guare**

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