



THE INSURGENTS

BY LUCY THURBER



DRAMATISTS
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THE INSURGENTS
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THE INSURGENTS was originally produced by Labyrinth Theater Company (Mimi O'Donnell, Artistic Director; Danny Feldman, Executive Director), in February 2015. It was directed by Jackson Gay; the set design was by Raul Abrego; the costume design was by Jessica Ford; the lighting design was by Paul Whitaker; the sound design was by Broken Chord; and the production manager was Dennis O'Leary-Gullo. The cast was as follows:

SALLY WRIGHT Cassie Beck
JOHN BROWN/PETER Dan Butler
NAT TURNER/JONATHAN Craig muMs Grant
HARRIET TUBMAN/COACH April Matthis
TIMOTHY McVEIGH/JIMMY Aaron Roman Weiner

THE INSURGENTS was originally commissioned by the Contemporary American Theatre Festival.

CHARACTERS

SALLY WRIGHT

PETER WRIGHT, also JOHN BROWN

JIMMY WRIGHT, also TIMOTHY McVEIGH

JONATHAN, also NAT TURNER

COACH, also HARRIET TUBMAN

Note: The dashes in the text represent a quickness, a little break in thought to speed you on to the next thought.

THE INSURGENTS

Sally enters while the house lights are still up, carrying a shotgun.

SALLY. Hi. Hi. Welcome. Welcome. Thanks for coming out. Yeah thanks. Hi. Hi again, yeah — my name is (*Name of actress playing Sally.*) and I'm playing the part of Sally Wright. Yeah, I'm playing Sally Wright in the play. Listen, sorry to have to start like this but they asked me to come out and talk to you 'cause of this — (*She holds out the gun towards the audience.*) They just wanted you all to know that it's a stage gun. It looks real though don't it? That's why they wanted me to talk to you, so you wouldn't get nervous or anything. I'm gonna be waving it around a lot. They don't want you to get nervous, like I said ... You all don't have to be afraid — I'm country born and bred. Like all good country girls I was trained early, how to handle a gun. (*She looks at the gun, opens it, checks the chamber, then snaps it shut.*) This is a Beretta 12-gauge — a fake Beretta semi-automatic. I've never shot a fully automatic gun. I've shot a muzzle-loader, a .22 rifle, a .44 — I've held a lot of handguns. Held 'um looked at 'um. I've never pulled the trigger on one though — I mean like I said — know plenty of people who have 'um for protection and whatnot ... but you know — folks in the country, at least — where I grew up — like rifles and shotguns — for hunting, shooting — you know, country stuff — We like a handgun, appreciate them, but the only thing a handgun is really good for is shooting another person. Or maybe that's not what they think, maybe that's what I think ... I been away a long time — from the country I mean — I've been away a long time ... Sorry, sorry, I really started to ramble here — Gosh sorry, you didn't come here to listen to me ramble on about myself — you came here to see a play — so let's start the play ... yeah totally here we go — we're starting. Oh damn — sorry, I forgot. One more thing — those little pieces of paper in your program — yeah they're song lyrics. I'm just giving you a

heads-up — Don't be frightened but they may ask you to sing later — I'm just saying ... OK, now — here we go. (*The actress playing Sally turns into Sally and then turns upstage, steps onto the dais. On the dais is a naturalistic kitchen set. It is a working-class kitchen in the rural north. There are no doors or windows. The dais sits in the middle of the stage, open space around it. There is a large stack of library books on the table. Sally sits at the table and looks through her books. The Insurgents enter: John Brown, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, and Timothy McVeigh. John Brown is singing. [Note: Once the Insurgents enter they never leave, they are always present, watching and reacting to the scenes being played out in front of them. They are sometimes themselves and sometimes Sally's friends or family.] Sally holds the gun up and out towards the Insurgents. Beat. The Insurgents look at Sally and Sally looks back. They circle the dais. John Brown starts singing "Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow." After a beat, Nat, Timothy, and Harriet join in. Sally looks up and watches them. They finish singing.*)

JOHN BROWN. Weakness. Cowardice. Fear. Surrounded by it. Drowning in it till you start to breathe it. Till it gets inside you Sally. (*Beat.*) I was 12. I ran cattle for my dad. During the war of 1812, I ran cattle for my dad to the army. So they could eat. So there was meat. Hundred miles, come rain, snow or sleet — or terrible sunshine, I'd run'um. He was 12 like me. He was like me, very active, intelligent — he had good feeling — he had good feeling — like me — he was like me, 12 like me. I was lodging with a landlord — he owned him — he owned him and 'cause he owned him — 'cause he owned him, he just picked up an iron shovel and started beating him. In the body. In the head. He didn't care. 'Cause he could. 'Cause he owned him. He was like me understand? And I couldn't stop it. Not then. Not then I couldn't stop it. But it changed me. It led me to war. An eternal war against slavery. You have to ask yourself Sally, when your countrymen do evil, are you evil? Can you ignore their wrongs? If you look away are you guilty? If you deny what you see, are you guilty? You are part of a whole. The tree of liberty is watered by blood. Your blood. My blood. There is blood in the ground. Our blood is in the ground. I love this country, my country. I died for her. I died for her. I died for her because I love her and I could not turn away. (*McVeigh has turned into Jimmy and steps into the kitchen. He looks at the books. He isn't happy to see them. He looks at the gun. The Insurgents watch.*)

JIMMY. Hey Sally, whatcha doin' with the gun?

SALLY. Nothing.

JIMMY. It's nice you finally got your ass out of bed. Dad and me were starting to wonder if maybe you died in your sleep.

SALLY. Real funny Jimmy.

JIMMY. It's funny me and Dad thought maybe you died in your sleep?

SALLY. Jimmy —

JIMMY. Sally —

SALLY. Jimmy —

JIMMY. Sally —

SALLY. I'm serious — don't start with your shit —

JIMMY. I gotta be me, Sally — I gotta be the one and only me! *(Sally laughs. Grinning at her:)* Got you. Made you smile. *(Sally leans against the sink and does the dishes or something.)*

SALLY. Where's Dad?

JIMMY. Probably down at the bar spreading some love around —

SALLY. Come on — be nice. He's having a rough time —

JIMMY. He brought it on himself.

SALLY. I know — still —

JIMMY. Goes through women like water. I don't know what he thought was gonna happen. Jeannie was a nice woman. A real nice woman.

SALLY. She's not dead.

JIMMY. She's dead to us. She's dead to us now — no more yummy dinners — no more home-baked bread —

SALLY. She never baked bread — *(He sees Sally's Bible. He picks it up.)*

JIMMY. Mom's Bible.

SALLY. Yeah.

JIMMY. I didn't know you had it —

SALLY. You did.

JIMMY. Yeah I did. I forgot I guess — I was looking for it the other day.

SALLY. Were you?

JIMMY. Yeah — you know how it is.

SALLY. I do. Makes you feel close to her.

JIMMY. Yeah. I don't believe like her. I never did. But I liked how she believed — you know — it's like she believed for me — for all of us — you know — ?

SALLY. Yeah.

JIMMY. I like seeing all her little —

SALLY. Notations.

JIMMY. She color-coded that shit. She was — she was —

SALLY. Perfect.

JIMMY. Yeah she was. Pretty perfect. So where you comin' from this time anyway? Give me your itinerary.

SALLY. I went down to New Orleans.

JIMMY. Shit — you actually went — ?

SALLY. Yup — I went and the music was amazing —

JIMMY. Damn — I bet — Good food?

SALLY. Excellent, amazing food, too — Then I went to Detroit.

JIMMY. Detroit? Ugh — Detroit — ? What would ever make you wanna go to a place like that — ?

SALLY. It was crazy. The city is almost empty. For real. Grass is growing knee-high out of a lot of the sidewalks. And a lot of it looks just like here. I mean here on steroids. Closed factories and around the factories neighborhoods that look just like ours — only like a hundred times bigger — the houses are boarded up and the windows are broken — An entire city abandoned. Abandoned an entire city — It was — it was — I've never seen anything like it — It looks like a movie — like post-apocalyptic — like a movie, you know? And I met some people — and some of them — some of them were kinda glorious.

JIMMY. That sounds scary and fucked up Sally — real scary and real fucked up — I don't know why you always gotta go putting yourself in that kind of danger — ? I mean, seriously Sally — ? Why you always gotta be fucked up like that? (*Sally doesn't answer. Jimmy picks up the rest of the books and looks through them. Reading titles.*) What's this shit? Nat Turner — “The Black Spartacus” — God you and all your liberal shit — Why don't you get something normal like a Louie L'Amour?

SALLY. I don't like westerns.

JIMMY. Who doesn't like westerns? Everyone likes westerns. (*Picks up another book, reads the title.*) *John Brown, Abolitionist*. Jesus, not this guy again. It's kinda weird, honestly, Sally. I mean, I know you like to read and everything but how many books can you read on like this one guy?

SALLY. He was a hero. He was a hero to me. I like reading about heroes.

JIMMY. (*Picks up another book.*) Harriet Tubman — she a hero too?

SALLY. Yes and she was a spy.

JIMMY. A spy huh?

SALLY. Yeah, in the Civil War. She wore disguises and everything, she was actually the first woman in America in the military — she led a raid and everything ...

JIMMY. (*Picks up another book, reading the title.*) *American Terrorist* — *Timothy McVeigh.* (*Opens the book and leafs through it.*) Oklahoma City bombing — What the fuck Sally? I mean what the fuck — ? What are you doing reading, shit like this?

SALLY. Don't get all excited — Jimmy, come on — the book is written by journalist — it's like —

JIMMY. Why are you reading about a guy who blew a bunch of innocent people up — ?

SALLY. I absolutely don't agree with what he did — not at all — but it's such a thin line between hero and terrorist, especially in America — and — in his mind he was at war — it was an act of war — and he was a veteran Jimmy — a war hero — decorated and everything — and when he came home, there's no support for soldiers — when they come home — You know that Jimmy —

JIMMY. Reading all these fucked up books. You get weirder every time I see you —

SALLY. I'm not weird —

JIMMY. You are, you're fucken weird with these books — You're gonna make Dad feel like shit.

SALLY. Don't —

JIMMY. You always do —

SALLY. I don't —

JIMMY. And now you're here, and you brought all this fucked up nonsense into the house —

SALLY. It's not nonsense —

JIMMY. It's fucken nonsense! Fuckin Detroit? We haven't heard from you in months —

SALLY. No, I called — I called —

JIMMY. You left a message — One message! We couldn't reach you — I mean — we couldn't reach you — You make me and Dad crazy with worry —

SALLY. Just say that instead of —

JIMMY. And now you just rolled in here like nothing happened and sleep for three days. (*Motions to the books.*) You don't got to read all this crazy shit about history and whatnot to find problems —

SALLY. I know —

JIMMY. We got problems in real life too — like paying the mortgage,

THE INSURGENTS

by Lucy Thurber

3M, 2W (doubling)

When Sally Wright returns to her dead-end rural northeast town after losing her athletic scholarship, she's forced to face her beer guzzling father, wayward brother, and the dearth of hope in her impoverished town. She starts carrying her shotgun wherever she goes and buries herself in books about Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, John Brown, and Timothy McVeigh. She begins escaping into an interior world where their spirits talk to her, telling stories of their resistance to injustice. Yet even as she immerses herself in the lives of American insurgents and clutches her shotgun to her chest, the bleak oppression of a life without opportunity threatens to poison her spirit.

"[A] small but mightily ambitious state-of-the-nation play ... THE INSURGENTS is about a rage that never stops simmering in the home of the free, brave and disenfranchised. And it is achingly, earnestly aware that, as Sally puts it, there's a fine line in this country between heroism and terrorism. ... And Ms. Thurber draws convincing and disturbing parallels among disparate people — black and white, past and present — who all feel they've been cheated and marginalized."

—The New York Times

"No playwright has a better handle on the decay of small-town America and the anxiety of the rural working class [than Lucy Thurber]. ... [In THE INSURGENTS] Thurber is telling the story of poor Americans of all tribes at each other's throats while the exploitative status quo persists. Yet when someone tries to destroy that system, we call them terrorists. ... [This] story is a vital one that's not told enough in the halls of our nation's cultural institutions."

—TheaterMania.com

Also by Lucy Thurber

ASHVILLE
KILLERS AND OTHER FAMILY
SCARCITY
and others

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