

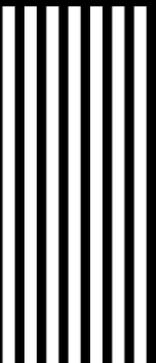


SMOKEFALL

BY NOAH HAIDLE



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



SMOKEFALL
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For Tanya, with love, as she lets another soul enter

SMOKEFALL was originally produced by South Coast Repertory (Marc Masterson, Artistic Director; Paula Tomei, Managing Director) and Goodman Theatre (Robert Falls, Artistic Director; Roche Schulfert, Executive Director) at the Segerstrom Stage at South Coast Repertory, on March 29, 2013. It was directed by Anne Kauffman, the scenic designer was Marsha Ginsberg, the costume designer was Melanie Watnick, the lighting designer was David Weiner, the original music and sound design were by Lindsay Jones, the dramaturg was John Glore, and the stage manager was Jamie A. Tucker. The cast was as follows:

VIOLET Heidi Dippold
FOOTNOTE/FETUS TWO/SAMUEL Leo Marks
COLONEL/JOHNNY Orson Bean
BEAUTY Carmela Corbett
DANIEL/FETUS ONE Corey Brill

SMOKEFALL was commissioned by the Goodman Theatre and opened there on September 20, 2014. It was directed by Anne Kauffman, the scenic designer was Kevin Depinet, the costume designer was Ana Kuzmanic, the lighting designer was David Weiner, the original music and sound design were by Lindsay Jones, the dramaturg was Tanya Palmer, and the production stage manager was Joseph Drummond. The cast was as follows:

VIOLET Katherine Keberlein
FOOTNOTE/FETUS TWO/SAMUEL Guy Massey
COLONEL/JOHNNY Mike Nussbaum
BEAUTY Catherine Combs
DANIEL/FETUS ONE Eric Slater

The New York premiere of SMOKEFALL was produced by the MCC Theater (Robert LuPone, Bernard Telsey, & William Cantler, Artistic Directors; Blake West, Executive Director) on February 22, 2016. It was directed by Anne Kauffman, the scenic designer was Mimi Lien, the lighting designer was David Weiner, the costume designer was Ásta Bennie Hostetter, and the original music and sound design was by Lindsay Jones. The cast was as follows:

VIOLET Robin Tunney
FOOTNOTE/FETUS TWO/SAMUEL Zachary Quinto
COLONEL/JOHNNY Tom Bloom
BEAUTY Taylor Richardson
DANIEL/FETUS ONE Brian Hutchison

WHO'S WHO

VIOLET: A housewife. Pregnant.

DANIEL: Her husband. Hollowed.

BEAUTY: Their daughter. Doesn't speak. The most beautiful sixteen-year-old girl in the world (not defined by cosmetic beauty, but inner).

COLONEL: Violet's father. Doesn't remember much.

FOOTNOTE: Our narrator.

FETUS ONE and FETUS TWO: The twins inside Violet. Played by actors playing Daniel and Footnote, respectively.

JOHNNY: Fetus Two all grown up. Grown up and grown old. Played by actor playing Colonel.

SAMUEL: Johnny's son. Played by actor playing Footnote.

I. HELP ME REMEMBER
II. WHERE WE'LL NEVER GROW OLD
III. THE ATTEMPT IS HOW WE LIVE

An intermission between Acts II and III.

*Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered*

—T.S. Eliot

SMOKEFALL

I. HELP ME REMEMBER

A house in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Lots of it.

Violet enters from the backyard carrying earth in a pail. She puts the pail down and makes coffee. She's very pregnant. Beauty enters upstairs looking perfect and the Colonel enters upstairs putting on his uniform. And Daniel goes from the bathroom to the bedroom upstairs with shaving cream on his face. Nobody says anything quite yet. There isn't much to say.

A man appears from the side of the stage or from through the audience. His name is Footnote.

The church bell tolls seven times.

Footnote speaks to the audience.

FOOTNOTE. Footnote number one.

The church bell tolls seven times. It is seven in the morning. The Grace Episcopal church is well over two hundred years old, making it the oldest building in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The bells themselves were imported from France. They toll the hours away and everybody hears them in the town. No matter how hard they try not to. They are the metronome of these citizens' lives. Hour by hour.

Violet talks to her twins in her belly.

VIOLET. Do you hear that boys? The newest day.

We're making breakfast for our family.

Do you know what a family is?

Pretty soon you will. Pretty soon you'll be part of this one.

FOOTNOTE. Footnote number two.

Violet is pregnant with twins. Due any day now. Two boys. The twins are mistakes and they suspect as much. For their part they are tired of hearing her explain the world. By now the twins know what church bells are and breakfast and families.

VIOLET. (*Singing.*)

Remember this space
Before light knows your name
Before my warm embrace
Before joy, before pain

FOOTNOTE. But they never get tired of hearing her sing the lullaby she wrote for them.

The twins fight each other to get closer to their song.

VIOLET.

Remember this wait
Before love, before hate
Your lives without time
Remember this song
I'm singing for you
It won't be long
Then you'll sing it too

FOOTNOTE. The twins applaud.

They would give a standing ovation if they could.

VIOLET. You two are the newest citizens of my heart. I hope you know that.

COLONEL. Get the medals just right, Beauty.

*Beauty attaches medals onto the Colonel's uniform.
Straightens.
Shines his shoes, maybe.
With spit and a rag.*

FOOTNOTE. Footnote number three.

The Colonel was, as his name suggests, a colonel in the United States Army. Every morning he still puts on his uniform, his medals. A distinguished officer, he and his wife finally settled in this house, where they raised their only daughter, Violet. Before moving here the Colonel had never spent more than three years in one place, and while the idea of stability was comforting, he found the patterns of routine numbing. The Colonel begged his wife to move. "I can't take this, I'm going out of my mind." But after thirty-four years of jumping from place to place, his wife said enough was enough. The

Colonel relented. He quieted. And finally, even in his dreams, he stopped longing for far-away places.

COLONEL. You don't have to talk, Beauty. I understand everything you do not say.

She smiles.

Beauty combs his hair with her hand and some spit.

FOOTNOTE. Footnote number four.

Beauty stopped speaking suddenly three years ago. The last thing she said, appropriately enough, was, "I have nothing more to say," and she began her silent life from which there has been no respite or pause.

COLONEL. I'm hungry.

Are you hungry?

She nods.

Good.

Let's make our entrance.

She helps him down the stairs.

He winces with each step.

FOOTNOTE. The Colonel needs help down the stairs. And up them for that matter. He can't remember a time when each step didn't hurt. But he keeps it to himself even through the winces. Lately, he has become convinced that his entire life is another person's dream.

COLONEL. Hi, honey.

VIOLET. Hi, Dad.

They kiss.

FOOTNOTE. They kiss like they do every morning. Such a simple gesture.

But such an act of devotion between a father and his only daughter. Violet grew up in this house, moved away when she got married, and moved back here seven years ago to care for her father. She is his constant friend, loves him when he wets his bed like a child, even when he can't remember her name. Even then she loves him.

VIOLET. How did everyone sleep?

COLONEL. I dreamt of your mother, so it was perfect.

VIOLET. Beauty?

Beauty thumbs up.

COLONEL. We're hungry.

What's on the menu this morning?

VIOLET. I've got eggs for you, Dad, and earth from the backyard for Beauty.

Is earth okay today?

Beauty nods.

FOOTNOTE. Footnote number seven.

Beauty eats impossible things like bark from trees, newspapers, shoes, rocks, lightbulbs, and earth. Nobody knows how she manages to survive on this diet, but nobody sees fit to mention it anymore. But they're embarrassed at restaurants when she eats the napkin, or at family weddings when she eats the bridal bouquet or the centerpiece. Like in most families, disturbing behavior that happens daily is ignored, and they do, every day, they choose to ignore it.

COLONEL. You're pregnant.

VIOLET. Twins.

Boys.

COLONEL. Can I say my hellos?

VIOLET. They would love it.

COLONEL. Hello, in there!

VIOLET. That is your grandfather, my father.

And your sister is here.

She's waiting for you, too.

Beauty waves.

We're all waiting.

We're all so excited to welcome you home.

Beauty, can I get you a cup of paint to drink?

Beauty nods.

Violet gets the paint. Sticks a straw in it. Beauty sips it.

COLONEL. What day is it today?

VIOLET. It's Monday. October 24th.

COLONEL. What time is it?

VIOLET. A little after seven.

COLONEL. It's not night.

VIOLET. Not even close.

COLONEL. How many hours until I get to go to sleep?

VIOLET. A lot.

COLONEL. How many exactly?

VIOLET. You go to bed at nine so you've got fourteen hours.

COLONEL. Fourteen. So many.

Maybe I'll take a walk after breakfast.

FOOTNOTE. She smiles. He says that every day like it was the first time. He takes a walk every morning after breakfast. Every day the exact same route. 146 steps to the corner. Turn left. Right at the hospital parking ramp, right at the house with the loud children, right at the embankment, cross over the river perpendicular to the expressway, curve around the public golf course, and walk through the gates of the cemetery. Time spent on the grounds left to personal discretion. Turn around. Repeat in backwards order. But last month the Colonel got lost, was missing for nine hours, knocked on every door in a twelve-block radius and asked, "Excuse me, do I live here?"

VIOLET. Your breakfast is getting cold, love!!

DANIEL. Coming!

FOOTNOTE. Footnote number nine.

Like many truly unhappy people, Daniel can be the most charismatic person in any room.

Lying in bed at night he makes lists of all of his reasons to be grateful, but they only temporarily relieve his general sense of dread and malaise. When Violet told him she was pregnant again he walked into the next room, closed the door, and didn't come out for three hours. When they found out they were having twins Daniel started to cry. He avoids his house and his family as much as possible. He's never felt at home here, never gotten used to pooping in his father-in-law's house, and still feels so self-conscious about the squeaky mattress during sex, which has gotten less and less frequent even before the pregnancy.

He's so tired. He's been tired for years. He survives each day through the smallest joys. A minor flirtation with a co-worker. A stolen cigarette in the loading dock. The first drink after finally making himself come home.

Along the way here Daniel has been upstairs shaving and changing. He wears a suit. Finally by now he is ready and his hair is the way he likes it and he comes down the stairs.

DANIEL. Good morning.

VIOLET. Good morning, love.

Are you hungry?

DANIEL. Starving.

How are you today, Colonel?

COLONEL. I don't complain.

SMOKEFALL

by Noah Haidle

3M, 2W (doubling)

Magical realism collides with manic vaudeville in a family drama unlike any you've ever seen. Fetuses swap philosophy while awaiting their birth, a daughter eats dirt and doesn't speak, a father is about to drive away and never return, and there's an apple tree growing through the walls of the house. Whipping from astonishing tenderness to profound humor and back again, SMOKEFALL explores the lives of a family in a lyrical treatise on the fragility of life and the power of love.

"... quixotic, gorgeous... [a] deeply moving family drama... [SMOKEFALL is] a very fine new American play... plays like this are rare and precious to an actor. [Noah Haidle] demonstrably has skin in the game instead of just stitching together a really clever ball, because there is compassion for ordinary people in the audience."

—Chicago Tribune

"[Noah Haidle's writing] is rich and nuanced... Haidle implies in SMOKEFALL that whatever individual family members do, and however our loved ones err, fail, and injure those closest to them, the notion of family, and a family's history and love, will persist."

—The Daily Beast

"SMOKEFALL is a glorious play... with a unique blend of sophistication and open-heartedness. It is a work that leaves you thinking about every human connection you have, whether on an intimate scale (with your family [and] romantic relationships), or the cosmic one (the whole grand cycle of life, love, loss, hope against hope, guilt, experience, inheritance and death). Haidle's genius is that along with the pain and wistfulness come great bursts of true comic brilliance, so you leave the theater in a strange state of tearful exuberance."

—Chicago Sun-Times

Also by Noah Haidle
KITTY KITTY KITTY
MR. MARMALADE
RAG AND BONE
and others

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