



OUR MOTHER'S BRIEF AFFAIR

BY
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DRAMATISTS
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I'd imagined the setting (the default setting) would be an abstraction of a vest-pocket playground.

A few benches in the foreground, maybe a couple recessed where actors can go when they're out of the scene for a stretch of time.

Other spaces—hospital, hotels, house, etcetera—can be achieved any number of ways: lights, slides...

Necessary props: they have to come from somewhere; happily, where is not for me to decide.

The play never pauses, unless a moment's punctuation is thought desirable.

No one changes costume, although, I suppose, accessories and outer garments can be played with.

Anna, of course, wears the "costume of sophisticated adultery" that's described in the play.

The play moves fluidly from presentational scenes to direct address; some of the direct address is prescribed in the stage directions; other instances seem pretty obvious.

Lover and Abe are played by the same actor; something blatant might be done to differentiate the two—hair or glasses or hat or something.

That's all I can think of for now...

OUR MOTHER'S BRIEF AFFAIR was originally produced in New York by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre, opening on December 28, 2015. It was directed by Lynne Meadow; the set design was by Santo Loquasto; the lighting design was by Peter Kaczorowski; the sound design was by Fitz Patton; the costume design was by Tom Broecker; the production stage manager was Diane Divita; and the stage manager was Jenna Woods. The cast was as follows:

ANNA Linda Lavin
SETH Greg Keller
ABBY Kate Arrington
LOVER/ABE John Procaccino

OUR MOTHER'S BRIEF AFFAIR was commissioned and first produced by South Coast Repertory (David Emmes, Producing Artistic Director; Martin Benson, Artistic Director), opening on April 3rd, 2009. It was directed by Pam MacKinnon; the set design was by Sibyl Wickersheimer; the lighting design was by Lap-Chi Chu; the sound design was by Michael K. Hooker; the costume design was by Rachel Myers; the dramaturg was John Gloré, the production manager was Joshua Marchesi; and the stage manager was Kathryn Davies. The cast was as follows:

ANNA Jenny O'Hara
SETH Arye Gross
ABBY Marin Hinkle
LOVER/ABE Matthew Arkin

CHARACTERS

ANNA

SETH

ABBY

LOVER

ABE

TIME

Fall of 2003

OUR MOTHER'S BRIEF AFFAIR

ACT ONE

Anna in her Burberry and scarf. Seth on another bench.

SETH. Who was she?

ANNA. I love the fall colors.

SETH. She looked good in Russian hats.

ANNA. Air-conditioning is the key to civilization.

SETH. She could be intensely absent.

ANNA. The houses in Great Neck with their manicured lawns!

SETH. She was an average situational liar but not at all a maker of fables.

ANNA. I barely bumped the fender, I bet there's not even a scratch, shut your mouth, and let's go!

SETH. She had a tendency to be still.

She had a tendency to pose.

ANNA. "Is there a mirror?"

SETH. she asked on her deathbed, on, it turned out, her long series of deathbeds. The heart was no longer charging, the lipstick was.

ANNA. The potato chip is nature's most perfect food.

SETH. As the one pleasing-looking member of a squat family, her beauty was never in doubt.

ANNA. In high school, I won a scholarship to attend any college in New York State; but we were poor, I had to work.

SETH. She was thinner than the other moms. And less able.

ANNA. As I sew, so shall I rip.

SETH. She said five or six witty things, then repeated them.

ANNA. My mother was a miserable woman. Your father is a miserable man.

SETH. She was nostalgic but not for anything that had ever happened.

ANNA. I was close to Sophie, but Miri and I were best friends.

SETH. By way of contrast to nobody, her life was seamed with tragic events.

ANNA. Miri died at twenty-one of lupus. Just like Flannery O'Connor twenty years later. When I found that out I took a book of Flannery O'Connor's out of the library.

SETH. She was a big reader.

ANNA. I didn't care for it.

SETH. She liked to read crap.

ANNA. I love literature!

SETH. As the senility ripened, you'd see the same acetate-wrapped library copy of Mary Higgins Clark over and over again. "But you've read this!" you'd say.

ANNA. *Did I?*

SETH. She never used endearments or nicknames. You were never called "sweetie" or "booger."

ANNA. Seth.

SETH. If your name was "Seth," you were called "Seth" because you can't diminish "Seth" except by extending it and who's gonna bother with the extra syllable?

ANNA. I love October.

SETH. She liked October.
Orange, the color
Shag rugs
Fudgsicles
Iceberg lettuce with bottled dressing. She
made excellent stews. She...
Um
No. That's all (*Lights flicker. People will think it's a mistake.*)

ANNA. Did I ever tell you about my affair? (*Pause.*)

SETH. As I think I mentioned, she was an average situational liar but not at all a maker of fables so when she asked:

ANNA. Did I ever tell you about my affair? (*Pause.*)

SETH. I could only think it was some kind of etherized fantasy, a bit of mental mayhem natural to someone who'd had too many operations, and way too much anesthesia, and was rising dotty to boot.

And of course, it was a surprise even as illusion.
Did I mention my mother was a cold woman? Well.
Warm-cold.
Think, I don't know: Julie Andrews: Tundra or hearth?
Impossible to tell
Nice to *us*, to the *kids*.
But... one imagined, *when* one imagined, which was *never*,
that when it came to...

Oh, well, *you* try talking this way about your mom.
ANNA. You must have been a teenager.

Back when you were about fifteen, were you a teenager then?
SETH. This was from her hospital room, which by that time we
were grimly referring to as her "pied-à-terre." So... Hospital psy-
chosis! Sure! Why not? I was, yes, a teenager at fifteen—but then I
was precocious.

ANNA. What?

SETH. Nothing

ANNA. You're a nutty.

SETH. Yes I am.

ANNA. What was that instrument?

SETH. U-u-u-um: stethoscope?

ANNA. What?

SETH. What?

ANNA. That you *played!*

SETH. Oh!

ANNA. (*Considers.*) Stethoscope?

No that's not right.

SETH. Viola.

ANNA. Trombone!

SETH. Viola.

ANNA. Or was it trumpet? Which has the slide?

SETH. Trombone.

ANNA. That's right: trombone.

SETH. Yes.

But I *played* viola.

ANNA. You played trombone.

SETH. No—well yes. But only for a year.

The band teacher was a psycho; he was exactly like Dad; I
switched to viola.

ANNA. That's right.

SETH. Thank you.

ANNA. The viola...

SETH. Yes?

ANNA. That's like the violin only nobody cares about it?

SETH. Right.

ANNA. Oh, we were so proud of you!

Why did you choose an instrument like that?

SETH. The orchestra teacher insisted. The section was short.

I didn't mind. I didn't have a passion either way, except to get away from Mr. Crowther, the bandmaster—Harold Hill by way of Bellevue.

ANNA. So you accommodated.

SETH. ... Yes.

ANNA. That's when it happened.

SETH. When I accommodated.

ANNA. At Juilliard.

SETH. I did not accommodate at Juilliard; I *failed* at Juilliard.

ANNA. We were so proud. A son at Juilliard pre-school.

SETH. It wasn't pre-school. I was, what, fifteen? It was pre-college.

ANNA. I would take you in, Saturday mornings.

Long Island Railroad to Penn Station. Then the subway to Sixty-sixth Street. Except when we were feeling fancy and we'd take a cab. I loved October.

SETH. It wasn't always October.

ANNA. It's always October when the school is expensive; don't you go to the movies?

SETH. No.

ANNA. Then you'll have to take my word for it. I wore my Burberry.

SETH. Oh God yes.

ANNA. And that scarf!

SETH. You certainly did wear that scarf.

ANNA. I had to. It was costly.

SETH. It was a nice scarf.

ANNA. Your father bought it for me but I wore it anyway. It was smart looking.

I was well put together.

My trench coat, my scarf.

SETH. Your absent gaze.

ANNA. And that's when I had my affair.

SETH. And that's when I summoned my sister. (*Lights flicker.*)

Abby's here.) How was the flight?

ABBY. Oh! Squashed, bumpy, endless. We were all buckled in, they announced from the terminal that takeoff would be delayed "at least two hours or less." I didn't know what to *make* of that! But finally, it started and went in the right direction so it was a *happy* thing. (*A moment. More serious.*) Is this it?

SETH. The last of her many deaths, you mean?

ABBY. (*Laughs loosely; regrets it.*) Oh, that's awful.

SETH. Probably not.

ABBY. Good I'm here, anyway; just in case. I mean I don't mind, even if it's a false alarm. I like being here, not where I was.

SETH. She looks like a breeze hung from a bone, but she's not even made of human material, really; she's galvanized.

ABBY. I miss her.

SETH. Do you?

ABBY. I don't know

Maybe

Don't ask these questions.

SETH. She misses you. A lot.

ABBY. Does she?

SETH. I have no idea.

She's...

Laguna?

ABBY. What about it?

SETH. How is

ABBY. Oh it's dreadful

It's worse than you can possibly

The weather is lovely; and the sunsets

Though *they're* suspect, the sunsets, they're part of something insidious, climate change

It's

You walk in the malls

One tour of any mall and you understand why they all *vote* that way

You know what they're missing there?

SETH. Tell me.

ABBY. A sense of apocalyptic intimacy.

SETH. Welcome to New York.

ABBY. Thank God or *oy vey* or something.

I've been reading about holocausts and cataclysms of the past.

OUR MOTHER'S BRIEF AFFAIR

by Richard Greenberg

2M, 2W

On the verge of death for the umpteenth time, Anna makes a shocking confession to her grown children: an affair from her past that just might have resonance beyond the family. But how much of what she says is true? While her children try to separate fact from fiction, Anna fights for a legacy she can be proud of. With razor-sharp wit and extraordinary insight, *OUR MOTHER'S BRIEF AFFAIR* considers the sweeping, surprising impact of indiscretions both large and small.

"OUR MOTHER'S BRIEF AFFAIR is the sort of everyday detective story in which the prolific Mr. Greenberg has long specialized... he juxtaposes a generational then and now to consider how little we know about the lives that impinge upon and shape our own. ... [It] provides an uncannily perceptive portrait of colliding reminiscences." —**The New York Times**

"Greenberg's writing is elegant and keenly epigrammatic, and the identity he assigns to Anna's lover at the end of Act I is a first-class punch line: a historical left hook..." —**Time Out (New York)**

"Richard Greenberg always amazes with his precise selection of words and images..." —**The Observer**

Also by Richard Greenberg
THE ASSEMBLED PARTIES
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