



HER REQUIEM

BY GREG PIERCE



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For John Kander

HER REQUIEM was commissioned and first presented by LCT3 | Lincoln Center Theater, premiering on February 6, 2016. It was directed by Kate Whoriskey, the sets were by Derek McLane, the costumes were by Jessica Pabst, the lighting was by Amith Chandrashaker, the sound was by Joshua Schmidt, and the stage manager was Donald Fried. The cast was as follows:

DEAN Peter Friedman
ALLISON Mare Winningham
GRAM Joyce Van Patten
TOMMY Robbie Collier Sublett
MIRTIS PAIMA Keilly McQuail
CAITLIN Naian González Norvind

CHARACTERS

DEAN: Caitlin's father, Allison's husband, late 40s.

ALLISON: Caitlin's mother, late 40s.

GRAM: Allison's mother, 70s.

TOMMY: Caitlin's composition teacher, early 30s.

MIRTIS PAIMA (*MEER-tis PAY-ma*): A woman in her early 20s.

CAITLIN: 17.

PLACE

The living room and kitchen of a country home in northern Vermont. It sits on the banks of Lake Champlain, looking up at the stately Adirondack Mountains. Antiques, wood, brick, tin, rust, quilts, corduroy, ceramics, books. Very little plastic or anything made in the last twenty years. It is a dark, warm, den-like atmosphere—at times cozy, at times claustrophobic. The backgammon board on the wooden coffee table is currently the center of the action. On a side table is a rusty piece of farm machinery that Gram found out in the field. It's an evocative shape but a little savage for a living room. The bookshelves are testaments to Dean's copious short-lived obsessions: tin soldiers, wood-burning, stamps, Abenaki culture, graphically interesting tea tins, Scandinavia, beer brewing, antique board games. The door to Caitlin's bedroom is as far away as possible. Off the other way is the dining room, which has been converted into Gram's bedroom. There is an unused barn on the property, as well as a free-standing garage and a clump of apple trees.

TIME

September through January. The present.

NOTES

... means the line trails off.

— means an interruption.

// means the point at which the following character begins speaking.

[] means unspoken dialogue.

Requiem music in the transitions:

Though I've suggested which movements of a requiem might be used in each transition (based on where Caitlin is in the writing of her requiem), finding the right tone for each transition is more important than adhering to my suggestions. So if a *Kyrie* would work better than, say, a *Lacrimosa*, so be it. It is crucial that the audience understands that the requiem music they're hearing in the transitions is not Caitlin's requiem.

In Scene 5, Allison's line "Mom was always sitting right there humming and making quilts..." may be changed to "Mom was always sitting right **here** humming and making quilts..." if that's more logical due to the staging.

HER REQUIEM

Scene 1

Mid-September. Tuesday. Early evening.

Dean and Allison have just started a game of backgammon in their living room. They have mugs of hot tea. Gram is sprawled out on the sofa, sound asleep under a quilt. Nearby is an unwieldy roll of foam soundproofing. Dean and Allison each roll one die.

DEAN. Lover's leap!

ALLISON. I never get lover's leap.

DEAN. You do too.

ALLISON. I've gotten lover's leap *once* since we started playing—

DEAN. —Ah, the story changes. Here... (*Grabbing her hand and his checker and making an exaggerated leap across eleven spaces.*) We're lovers, we'll leap together.

ALLISON. (*Freeing her hand.*) I don't *wanna* leap with you, I *wanna* take my own leap. (*Allison rolls and moves. Dean picks up his dice but instead of rolling, he examines them.*)

DEAN. Isn't it nuts, Al, how the six-sided die emerged all over the world in cultures that had never even *heard* of each other?

ALLISON. Yes, roll.

DEAN. I mean, think about it. Separated by the Himalayas or the Mediterranean or the Gobi they all thought up a die with six sides?

ALLISON. It's a logical shape for a die.

DEAN. Sure, but—

ALLISON. —A pyramid would just stop.

DEAN. Right.

ALLISON. Roll. (*He does. He moves.*) And if you have a more complex shape like, say, an octahedron, it'd just keep on rolling.

DEAN. Right! Tiny octahedrons rollin' into the Tigris—it'd be a mess. (*Allison chuckles. She rolls. Re: one of the checkers.*) This one's chipped— (*An electronic crackle/buzz from their daughter Caitlin's bedroom. Gram shifts slightly.*)

ALLISON. Why does that *happen*?

DEAN. It's fine—it's when she plugs her keyboard into her amp, I think? Not to worry.

ALLISON. But if that sound's coming through her headphones it must be deafening.

DEAN. It's fine, Al. Tommy knows that stuff inside-out. He's not gonna let her blow out her eardrums. (*Allison's having trouble focusing on the game now. She moves. Dean tries to lighten the mood.*) We're rolling bones, Al!—

ALLISON. (*We've been through this.*)—We're not rolling bones—

DEAN. —Which bones are we rolling? (*Rattling them off.*) Fibia? Tibia? Fibula? Tibula?—

ALLISON. —We're rolling wood: roll.

DEAN. But seriously, can you believe we're doing something the ancient Sumerians did?

ALLISON. Yes.

DEAN. The Hittites?

ALLISON. Dean.

DEAN. The Greeks, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Lydians—

ALLISON. (*Because Gram's sleeping.*)—A little quieter.

DEAN. (*As he rolls and moves.*) The Trojan War! Achilles and Patroclus have just finished up their fraternal cuddle or whatever you call it and they sit up so they can play *the same game* we're playing right now. Plus we're having lamb chops tonight—*Agnus chops!* (*Pron: AG-noose.*)—can you believe that? The Ancient Greeks played backgammon *and* had lamb chops? (*Allison smiles. Even when she's not in the mood, she finds Dean's geekiness charming. Gram shifts.*) She looks so comfy.

ALLISON. Yeah. (*Adjusting Gram's quilt.*) I think her left's hurting as bad as her right now.

DEAN. Really?

ALLISON. Yeah. She says it's not but I see her rubbing both.

DEAN. Yikes. Make her take her Vicodin.

ALLISON. I can't *make* her.

DEAN. Spike her tea!

ALLISON. (*Amused.*) I'm not gonna spike my mom's // tea.

DEAN. Spike it! Roll. (*Allison rolls. She's preoccupied. She looks over at Caitlin's door.*) Stop worrying.

ALLISON. Are we sure about this?

DEAN. Of course not.

ALLISON. Isn't it gonna affect her chances of getting in somewhere?

DEAN. (*Confidently.*) Yes.

ALLISON. ...When they're looking at thousands of transcripts and they see she took a year off *during* high school?

DEAN. (*The phrase irks him.*) It's not a year off—she's working harder than any of her classmates.

ALLISON. Right but aren't they looking for a range // of experience?

DEAN. I *guar-an-tee* they won't have a single other high school student who's written a requiem.

ALLISON. She hasn't written it yet.

DEAN. She will. Want some more tea?

ALLISON. Sure. (*Dean gets up, grabs her mug, and heads to the kitchen, humming the Introit of Fauré's Requiem.*) This blend is good, what is it?

DEAN. Blueberry-oolong with a scoop of lapsang souchong.

ALLISON. You should write it down.

DEAN. Never! Them's the rules, you know that.

ALLISON. (*Beat.*) I think Caity should be having dinner with us—

DEAN. —Yes, you were *crystal clear* on that point—

ALLISON. —Yes but that didn't seem to matter to either of you. Dinner's the only time when we can all be together. I kinda needed you to back me up on that one.

DEAN. It's temporary, Al. Like she said, if she's on a roll she doesn't want to be pulled away from her writing and forced to chit-chat with her parents.

ALLISON. Do we “chit-chat”? (*Dean's amused. He hands her the tea, bowing as though he is her humble servant. She takes it.*) Is this gonna keep me up all night?

DEAN. Yup. (*He kisses her. Gram shifts and makes a faint sound. Now Gram's mouth is open slightly. Quietly.*) Put your finger in. (*Allison looks at him, unsure what he means.*) Come on.

ALLISON. What, in my mother's *mouth*?

DEAN. I dare you. (*She ignores him.*) C'mon. I'll show you my willy?

ALLISON. Dean!

DEAN. Fine, I'll do it. (*He goes over to Gram and brings his finger slowly but confidently toward her open mouth. When he gets dangerously*

close, Allison swats his hand away. Gram shifts.) Oh! I told you they found a backgammon board in King Tut's grave, right? *(The door to Caitlin's bedroom opens and out comes Tommy, a dapper young man, impeccably dressed. Though he is American, his look suggests a bygone era of Dublin. He has a beat-up leather satchel that's jammed full of paper. He is always eager to impress Caitlin's parents.)* Tom Thumb!

ALLISON. Shh.

TOMMY. G'd evening, all.

DEAN. How goes in there?

TOMMY. Well! Progress has been made. *(Beat, unsure how much he should say. To Allison.)* How are you, ma'am?

ALLISON. Fine, Tommy. Can I get you something?

DEAN. Beer, tea, an aged narcoleptic?

TOMMY. No thanks. I wouldn't ALLISON. Tch.

want to interrupt your game.

DEAN. *(Waving that away.)* Ach. Do you play?

TOMMY. No, sadly.

DEAN. You should!

ALLISON. *(Anticipating Dean's comment.)* The Sumerians just loved it.

DEAN. I'll teach you sometime.

TOMMY. I'd like that, sir.

DEAN. So tell us!...Here, sit. *(Tommy does.)* What movement's she working on now?

TOMMY. She's just finishing up the *Kyrie*.

DEAN. *(Astonished.)* Finishing?

TOMMY. Yes, sir.

DEAN. Already? The *Kyrie*?

TOMMY. She's just attacking it—that's the wrong word, there's nothing violent about what she's doing. She just has this *focus*...

DEAN. *(Proudly.)* Takes after me.

TOMMY. ...It's like: Now's the time.

DEAN. Now *is* the time.

ALLISON. Yes, she's always had focus. *(Beat. Tommy's unsure how to respond to that.)*

TOMMY. *(To Dean.)* She'll go back over the *Kyrie* of course—

DEAN. —Of course—

TOMMY. —It's just sketched in—

DEAN. —Sure—

TOMMY. —But the core of it's there.

DEAN. And...?

TOMMY. And...?

DEAN. How would you describe it?

TOMMY. (*Thinking for a beat.*) Sublime. (*Dean claps twice loudly. This makes Gram flinch and shift.*)

DEAN. Did she already do the *Introit*?

TOMMY. She's gonna do the *Introit* last—

DEAN. —Ah—

TOMMY. —So she knows what thematic material she's working with. Then she'll go back to the beginning.

ALLISON. *Introit* as in “intro”?

(*Tommy nods to Allison.*)

DEAN. (*To Tommy.*) Is that how most composers do it?

TOMMY. (*To Dean.*) There's no standard method. Some combine the *Introit* and the *Kyrie*...Berlioz, Cherubini—

DEAN. (*Catching Allison up.*) —The *Introit*'s a procession. It's the music that gets us—well, not “us” but the priest and the monks and everyone involved in the mass from the back of the church up to the... (*To Tommy.*) sacristy?

TOMMY. From the sacristy to the altar.

DEAN. Right! (*Removing an index card from his shirt pocket and scribbling down this correction. To Allison.*) It's where we first hear “*Requiem aeternam dona eis.*”

TOMMY. That's right.

ALLISON. (*To Tommy.*) What's a sacristy?

TOMMY. It's the little room where the priest prepares the objects of worship.

DEAN. The vestments, the—

ALLISON. (*Pointedly.*) —We wouldn't know since we're not Catholic.

TOMMY. Of course.

DEAN. (*To Allison.*) We have sacristies, don't we?

ALLISON. (*Since we haven't been to church since our wedding.*) By “we” you mean...?

DEAN. But the *Introit*'s crucial, I mean: How are you walking us into your house? If you're Frank Lloyd Wright you start us off in an entryway that's so damned claustrophobic it makes you wanna slit your wrists so that when you step into the living room it feels like... ahhh (*Re: lots of space.*) Though maybe the entryway didn't feel so claustrophobic to Frank since he was, what, four-eight? (*To Tommy, re: the soundproofing.*) By the way, I picked up some more of this.

HER REQUIEM

by Greg Pierce

2M, 4W

When Caitlin takes a year off from high school to sequester herself in her bedroom to write a requiem, it inspires her father and alarms her mother. As their idyllic Vermont home transforms into an asylum for dark souls, Caitlin's creation threatens to undo her family.

"Mr. Pierce's characters are superbly drawn, his dialogue smooth and smart."
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"Pierce has shaped the play beautifully, and watching it wend its way from a quiet musing on the nature of creation to a surprisingly potent dissection of the types of abuse children and artists alike open themselves up to..."
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