

A GOOD FARMER

BY SHARYN
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INC.

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A GOOD FARMER was originally produced by 3Graces Theater Co. (Elizabeth Bunnell, Annie McGovern, Chelsea Silverman, and Kelli Lynn Harrison, Artistic Directors) at the Bank Street Theater in 2007. It was directed by Matthew Arbour; the set design was by Michael Kramer; the lighting design was by Greg Mitchell; the costume design was by Courtney McClain; the sound design was by John D. Ivy; the original music was written and performed by Chip Barrow; and the dramaturgs were Margot Avery and Patrick T. Cecala II. The cast was as follows:

BONNIE JOHNSON	Chelsea Silverman
CARLA GUTIERREZ	Jacqueline Duprey
ROSEMARY DEVLIN	Elizabeth Bunnell
GABE DuBAY	Andrew Giarolo
LU	Annie McGovern
DAVID JOHNSON	Gerald McCullouch
SHIRLEY SENDER	Sharon Eisman
RICH PARKS	Borden Hallowes

This published version of A GOOD FARMER was produced by American Theater Group (James Vagias, Producing Artistic Director) at the South Orange Performing Arts Center in 2018. It was directed by Kel Haney; the set design was by Lianne Arnold; the lighting design was by Daisy Long; the costume design was by Summer Lee Jack; the sound design was by Emily Auciello; and the production stage manager was Stephanie M. Holmes. The cast was as follows:

BONNIE JOHNSON	Ariel Woodiwiss
CARLA GUTIERREZ	Janice Amaya
ROSEMARY DEVLIN/LU/SENDER	Brenda Withers
GABE/DAVID/PARKS	Todd Lawson

CHARACTERS

BONNIE JOHNSON, 34 in Act One and 27 in Act Two; a farmer who owns her own cabbage and dairy farm.

CARLA GUTIERREZ, 30 in Act One and 23 in Act Two; an illegal immigrant from Mexico, a farmer—she is five months pregnant at the start of Act Two.

ROSEMARY DEVLIN, 30s, a PTA mom.

GABE DuBAY, 30s; a single father.

LU, 30s–50s; a nurse; a Christian.

DAVID JOHNSON, late 30s; Bonnie's husband; sick with terminal stomach cancer.

OFFICER SHIRLEY SENDER, an Immigration Control Enforcement officer.

RICH PARKS, a state-appointed defense lawyer.

The play is written to be played by 4 actors, with the actress who plays Rosemary also playing Lu and Shirley Sender. The actor playing Gabe will also play David and Rich Parks.

TIME and PLACE

Elba, New York

Act Two takes places seven years prior to Acts One & Three.

The play should be performed with a single intermission between Act One & Act Two.

*“In between the moon and you,
the angels get a better view
of the crumbling difference between wrong and right.”*

—Counting Crows

A GOOD FARMER

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Elba, New York

Soil. Over the stage and, if possible, down into the audience. The soil makes up the floor of Bonnie Johnson's farmhouse. In the house we see the kitchen. Artwork by a young boy, now 8, decorates the fridge.

Next to and behind the house we see rows of cabbage growing. The heads of the cabbage are bigger and stick out farther from the ground than would real cabbage. They are green, bulbous, leafy, almost ready to be picked.

In the distance we see the rest of Bonnie's farm and, farther out, the town of Elba. A welcome sign sticks out in the background. It reads:

WELCOME TO ELBA
POP. "JUST RIGHT"
ESTABLISHED 1884

An incomplete chain link fence separates dirt from sky.

It is before dawn.

Bonnie Johnson, 34, a strong woman with her hair pulled back, enters the field with two cups of coffee. She puts them down and kneels in the cabbage fields, weeding. She stops for a moment to stretch out her back. She examines the land, the sky, and finally, the audience.

BONNIE. Mick Jagger died.

The bull, not the rockstar.

Not sure where we're getting the money to replace a bull like that. You know all the ladies loved Mick Jagger.

Beat, she raises her eyebrows to the sky.

I've been doing my brain stretches, but nothing's coming. You don't have some money hidden away somewhere do you?

I mean somewhere I haven't already looked? Maybe you had some secret offshore bank account? One of those fancy tax shelters in Switzerland? One of those would be pretty great right now.

She waits for the answer. There is none.

Yeah, I didn't think so.

Bonnie returns to weeding.

News is they want to put up a new sign on the way into town. "Welcome to Elba, Onion Capital of the World." I told Rosemary it was a great idea. Nothing gets tourists like onions.

She said I was just sore 'cause we grow cabbage. She's probably right. Maybe they could add that to the sign: "Onion Capital of the World. Plus, Cabbage!"

They won't be able to keep people away.

She does a brain stretch again.

Nope. Still nothin'.

Carla Gutierrez, Mexican, 30, tired but still funny, enters the fields carrying a loaf of bread wrapped in tinfoil.

CARLA. Morning, Bonnie.

Bonnie hands Carla a mug of coffee.

BONNIE. You're early today.

CARLA. I have trouble sleeping. Finally I get up, I think: Oh, forget it. Let Miguel get the kids ready for school. He's the one who wanted two of them.

Carla leans down and takes a leaf from the cabbage head Bonnie cut. She chews it, then spits it out.

It's too soft.

BONNIE. I know. David and I used to come out here at night and use the soft ones as pillows.

CARLA. Yeah? I'll try it.

Carla cuts a cabbage and looks at it.

Maybe on dirt, I can sleep.

Carla and Bonnie place the cabbage under their heads and lie back, watching the first pink rays of sun find their way into the darkness. Beat.

Last night, I have this dream. I go to the window and I see men coming for us. But they don't come in cars, they come in trucks, and attached to the trucks: trailers for horses. I try to wake Miguel, but he won't move. I start screaming. I scream and scream, but no one will wake up. I look outside, more trucks, many trucks, a terrible parade. And I'm screaming. I'm the only one who sees them...and I don't know what to do.

Beat.

I wake up, I go to the window. There's nothing there. I can't go back to sleeping. Finally I think, just get up already Carla.

BONNIE. I heard about Lansing Farms.

CARLA. Plus three others in Byron, last week.

BONNIE. It's just politics is all. It'll peter out like it always does and the immigration people'll be back to doing what they do best: nothing.

Slight beat.

Besides, you've got nothing to worry about. You've got papers.

CARLA. The men have been talking. They say the papers won't work anymore.

BONNIE. It's worked up till now, hasn't it?

CARLA. Until now, no one was looking.

BONNIE. You think they're gonna waste their time looking here? They've got Kmart's bigger than this farm.

CARLA. The ones in Byron, they were small too.

BONNIE. Yeah. I heard that too.

Beat.

Listen, you just gotta quit worrying so much, that's all. You're making *me* worry.

And you know how much I hate thinkin' about anything other than my hairdo and manicure.

CARLA. You never have a manicure in your life.

BONNIE. (*Holding up her hands.*) What'd you call that? That's Sexy Mud with a top coat of Magic Manure. You should hear the men howl at me in the streets.

Carla laughs, but there's still worry in her eyes.

Hey look. I think I saw a shooting star.

CARLA. It's not a star. It's a crop duster.

BONNIE. Huh. You want a Toaster Strudel?

Bonnie and Carla get up. They head to the kitchen.

CARLA. No. I'm not hungry. I want to bring something for the bake sale. You're working there this afternoon, yes?

BONNIE. Rosemary'd kick me outta town if I didn't put in my "Mommy" hours. I told her: Rosemary, this isn't a Parent-Teacher Association, it's a dictatorship. But she told me if that's the way I felt I should move my son to some other school district where the parents are less involved and all the kids do drugs and commit suicide. What'd ya make?

CARLA. Cucumber bread. Can you believe me? I bake bread with cucumber in it. I saw the recipe on the Food Network.

BONNIE. Well give it here, babe. I've gotta try this.

Carla puts the bread on the table and the women dig in with their hands. Bonnie moans.

CARLA. It's good yeah?

BONNIE. Uh-huh. You should call it Carla's Divine Cucumber Bread and sell it at church. Tell people it cures migraines and bunions.

CARLA. Bunions?

BONNIE. Yeah, those big round things old people get on their feet.

CARLA. Oh, yes. My mother has them. Bunions. Sounds like onions.

Carla laughs.

My mother, she has more bunions than she has toes. I tell her, why don't you get that fixed? But she say to me, "Only God looks at my

feet, and He's the one who made them ugly, so let Him see ugly feet." What a bitch, my mother.

Bonnie laughs.

BONNIE. (*Re: the coffee.*) You want more?

CARLA. Later maybe. I get started now. Don't forget the cucumber bread.

Carla exits.

BONNIE. (*Calling.*) Jacob! Get your butt down here and do the dishes before school! And this time, put some underwear on first!

Bonnie puts her mug in the sink.

The phone rings. Bonnie picks it up.

Hello? Hi, Rosemary...Rosemary, you know you're calling me at five A.M. to remind me about a bake sale?... Alright, honey, I'll be there... Yes, I'll wear a bra this time. I promise.

Bonnie hangs up the phone. She takes off her bra under her shirt and throws it on the chair.

Oops.

As Bonnie exits the stage becomes...

Scene 2: Lasagna

The Elba Central School.

At a folding table adorned with glitter and streamers, Rosemary Devlin—30s, teased hair and over-whitened teeth, the kind of woman who has been on a perpetual diet for her entire life—mans the bake sale like a Navy admiral. Rosemary has spent most of her life being ignored, and as a result she has channeled all of her energies into the lives of people who cannot ignore her: children.

The table is covered with homemade treats—cookies, cupcakes, etc. Rosemary calls to someone offstage.

ROSEMARY. Thanks for the cupcakes, Sue! They're gonna be a

A GOOD FARMER

by Sharyn Rothstein

3 men, 5 women (flexible casting)

A moving drama, laced with humor and heartache, A GOOD FARMER is the story of two women—a farm owner and her unlikely best friend, an illegal Mexican immigrant—fighting to survive in a small town divided by America’s immigration battle. With rich, complicated roles for women, A GOOD FARMER is a play about love, friendship and finding the power to face what divides us.

“...outstanding... brings the much-needed sense of humanity to the issue of immigration and addresses many of the moral questions we face. ...This is an important piece of theatre. ...[a] gem of a show...”
—**BroadwayWorld.com**

“...more timely than ever. ...emotionally powerful...”
—**NJArts.net**

“Sharyn Rothstein has artfully managed to reveal the humanity behind some of today’s contentious political issues.”
—**BestThingsNJ.com**

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BY THE WATER
ALL THE DAYS

ISBN 978-0-8222-3910-9



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