



# TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS

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TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS was originally commissioned by McCarter Theatre Center (Emily Mann, Artistic Director; Timothy J. Shields, Managing Director) and the Roger S. Berlind Playwrights-in-Residence program at Princeton University's Lewis Center for the Arts, premiering at the McCarter on May 12, 2018. It was directed by Emily Mann; the set and projection designs were by Beowulf Boritt; the costume design was by Jennifer von Mayrhauser; the lighting design was by Jeff Croiter; original music and sound design was by Mark Bennett; and the production stage manager was Cheryl Mintz. The cast was as follows:

JIMMY .....	John Pankow
POLLY .....	Kristine Nielsen
TIMMY .....	Nicholas Podany
CLIFFORD .....	Robert Sella
SALENA .....	Rachel Nicks
ROSALIND .....	Jenn Harris

## **CHARACTERS**

JIMMY

POLLY

TIMMY

CLIFFORD

SALENA

ROSALIND

# TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS

## Scene 1

*A living room. Probably not a full kind of set, but just something that suggests a living room.*

*Jimmy enters. He is mid-40s probably. He seems troubled. He is maybe in jeans and plaid shirt or a dark shirt. Definitely not in a suit. He addresses the audience.*

JIMMY. I am feeling very depressed. I'm thinking of killing myself. Or maybe going to a nearby mall and killing other people, and then killing myself. Maybe I'll go to a theater and kill people there and then kill myself. You're lucky I'm in the play, and not in the audience. Talk to you again later.

*He goes back to where he came from—which is the kitchen.*

*A bit of a pause. His wife, Polly, comes out from the same place. She is carrying a rather large potted plant. She speaks to the audience.*

POLLY. Hello. I'm sorry about the wallpaper. My husband wouldn't let me change it. Do you like this plant? It needs water, I keep meaning to put water in it, but I'm not in the kitchen and there's not a sink here. So I'll have to try to remember when I get back to the kitchen to put water in this plant. Plus it's heavy. I'm going to put it down for a while.

*She puts the plant on the ground.*

Have you seen my husband? I thought I heard him speaking to you. He's such a sweet man. He's really lovely. But he's very sensitive, and thinks he's useless. Which is too bad. I tell him I think he's wonderful, but he thinks I'm stupid and I think everyone is wonderful. And

everyone is wonderful, don't you think so. Or even if they're not, you should tell them they're wonderful. My husband hasn't spoken to me for about three weeks. But then I talk so much he often screams at me to be quiet, but it's hard for me to be quiet.

I mean that's how God created Eve, she was very talkative and had a long discussion with the Serpent, and the Serpent realized Eve was chatty, and he talked and talked to her about all the knowledge she'd get if she ate from the apple, and how many more topics she could talk about in her conversations, and lo and behold once she ate part of the apple and then had her husband Adam eat the rest of the apple, well then, Eve created sickness, death, divorce, and murder at the local malls. And it's because God made Eve so chatty. It's really not my fault. Or rather it's her fault.

But I need to talk because I find life so overwhelming, I don't quite know how to live on the earth. I mean I've been in three car accidents, my husband was driving all three times, two times he drove off a bridge into a big river, but our windows were open both times, so we were able to swim out of the car. I'm a very good swimmer, I could have gone to the Olympics but I could never find the address of how to apply. And so my life hasn't amounted to too much, but I'm not bitter. I love God even though he made me chatty and had me be the one—or my ancestors—who caused death and sickness. But I think sickness makes you stronger. Or makes you dead. But then you go to heaven. And heaven, oh how I long to get to heaven. No sickness and death, and I get to talk as much as I want to.

Where is the potted plant do you know?

*It's right in front of her.*

I can't see it. Do you know where I put it? Maybe it's in the kitchen. I'll be back.

*She goes off to the kitchen.*

(*Offstage.*) Hello, darling. How are you today?

*The sound of gunshots. She screams a lot. Comes back in.*

Thank God he's a bad shot. (*Calls offstage.*) Please don't shoot your gun at me that way, it makes me upset. Have you taken your herbal thing for depression? Jimmy? Jimmy?

*(Singing suddenly, to herself.)* “Jimmy crack corn and I don’t care, Jimmy crack corn and I don’t care.”

*(Calls offstage.)* I don’t care, Jimmy. I want you to act more normal, okay? Promise?

*(To audience.)* Really he’s a lovely guy. He has his ups and downs, but everyone does, don’t you think.

Oh look, *there’s* the potted plant. Why didn’t you tell me where it was? You’re not very helpful. I have a difficult life, and you could at least try to help.

*Enter Timmy, her 13-year-old son. He is played by someone 16–23 who looks young. He is sensitive and shy. He is coming into the house from outside. Maybe he carries a book bag from school.*

Oh here’s Timmy, my son. He’s in the eighth grade. He’s very shy. Aren’t you, Timmy? I know he looks 17 or 18, but we didn’t want to cast a real 13-year-old. Or maybe he IS 13, and he just looks older.

How was school today, Timmy? Did you make any friends today?

*He shakes his head no.*

Oh too bad. Did you try? I just go up to people and I say, I’m Polly, what’s your name? Want to be my friend? Did you try that today?

TIMMY. Yes I said “My name is Polly” and then they all laughed at me.

POLLY. No, dear, Polly is *my* name, I meant for you to use YOUR name. Polly is a girl’s name.

TIMMY. I know. Everyone said he’s a girl, he’s a girl.

POLLY. Well it’s sort of your fault, you said your name was Polly.

TIMMY. I got scared.

POLLY. All right, dear. You’re just not very smart. *(Changes her response.)* I’m sorry. You’re very smart. And you’re Mommy’s little girl. I mean boy. Oh God. Why can’t I be a swimmer in the Olympics?

*Enter Jimmy.*

Oh you don’t have your gun. Good. Did you lock it up so you can’t get it?

JIMMY. I'm depressed.

POLLY. Have you taken your St. John's wort today?

JIMMY. I can't find it.

POLLY. Oh you're as bad as me with the potted plant.

JIMMY. I can either kill you and Timmy, and then myself. Or I can go to the mall and shoot strangers and then kill myself.

POLLY. Darling, don't do either. Just take a nap or something. Tomorrow is another day.

JIMMY. Make up your mind. You and Timmy, or strangers at the mall. Make up your mind.

POLLY. Neither.

JIMMY. WHICH ONE, WHICH ONE???

POLLY. Okay people at the mall!

JIMMY. Okay.

*Jimmy exits back into the kitchen.*

TIMMY. I'm scared.

POLLY. Well life is scary, what can I say?

*Jimmy comes back in. He is carrying two big assault rifles and multiple bullets around his waist. He is also wearing a pig head mask.\**

Oh, Timmy's Halloween mask. Are you feeling playful, darling?

JIMMY. Goodbye. You'll never see me again. And don't forget, you're the one who said go to the mall. You have ruined my life. Timmy's too. I could have been a famous author on Amazon. Or I could have been a senator or a governor or a clown in the circus.

*Jimmy starts to put his two guns inside a big black garbage bag.*

But everything I wanted to do, you ruined. Life has not been fair to me.

POLLY. Oh! (*Noticing the garbage bag.*) Are you throwing out your guns, I hope?

\* Note: I did "Google Image" for Halloween hat that covers head, and saw a very funny, non-scary pig head.



JIMMY. That's a stupid question. No, I'm just covering them up until I get there.

POLLY. Get where?

JIMMY. I deserved better! I deserved better!

*He exits in a fury. Timmy seems very scared. Polly takes it in stride.*

POLLY. Well your father is so unpredictable. I didn't know he wanted to write books, did you?

TIMMY. Shouldn't we call the police?

POLLY. You have to have an impulse to be a writer. You can't just say "I'm a writer" all of a sudden. Your father is so impractical. On the other hand, he's just super sensitive, we have to be patient.

TIMMY. Shouldn't we call the police?

POLLY. Goodness, why?

TIMMY. Well he's going to kill people at the mall.

POLLY. Darling, he had a Halloween mask on. So he's playing with us. If he was serious he wouldn't put such a silly thing on his head. Your father is many things, he's bipolar, he's a depressive, he sometimes ties me to the bed and drips candle wax on my body—I'm sorry, I shouldn't have told you that. Forget I said it.

TIMMY. How can I forget it?

POLLY. (*Very annoyed.*) Well, try to, darling, alright? Gosh, give your mother a little slack. Anyway my point is that your father isn't going to kill people, he knows better than that. So I don't want to involve the police in this. They have enough to do with people speeding and so on. You know I'm worried how you're doing in school. And you don't make friends, and I have a hundred friends. All of them named Mary. But you don't have any friends. Are you learning anything in school? I think I should homeschool you so you can get proper morals as well as accurate information about the world.

TIMMY. No, I don't want you to be my teacher. I need some outside opinions from other people. And what do you mean you have a hundred friends named Mary? I can only think of one.

POLLY. All right, well subtract ninety-nine from one hundred, and

# TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS

by Christopher Durang

3 men, 3 women

Cliff and Salena are happily living a nice, normal life in the suburbs. But their neighbors, Jimmy and Polly, threaten to disrupt their domestic bliss. They're sometimes a little strange—and sometimes completely unhinged. Equally unnerving and delightful, *TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS* takes hilarious aim at the absurdity of our modern world.

*"[A] brilliantly acerbic, absurdist comedy... Durang's mastery of the sabre-edged one-liner is in top form... The writing... keeps us laughing so hard that it's easy not to notice the seriousness beneath *TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS*. But make no mistake—this is one ballsy little play."* —**Philadelphia Magazine**

*"[*TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS*] mixes the crazy-funny and the mortally dark... At the end, my laugh muscles were tired... and I wanted very much to see the play again."* —**The Philadelphia Inquirer**

*"The best absurdist art has always been that which hews closer to the real than might seem comfortable, a standard by which... *TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS* shines... Durang has harnessed the absurd to offer a biting critique of the society that would be so quick to chuckle at his characters and their drives."* —**NJ.com**

*"This caustic comedy explores several of the playwright's evergreen topics—religion, fractured families, and the roiling pain that hides beneath the gloss of suburban conformity—with equal measures of angst and glee. ...*TURNING OFF THE MORNING NEWS*...unleash[es] a venom that's toxic and irresistible."* —**BroadStreetReview.com**

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MISS WITHERSPOON  
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AND SPIKE  
and others

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