

REALLY

BY
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DRURY



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PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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REALLY was originally produced by New York City Players' American Playwrights Division (Richard Maxwell, Artistic Director), at Abrons Arts Center in New York City, on March 16, 2016. It was directed by Richard Maxwell, the scenic and lighting designs were by Michael Schmelling, the costume design was by Linda Mancini, the sound design was by David Zuckerman, and the production stage manager was Regina Vorria. The cast was as follows:

MOTHER Elaine Davis
GIRLFRIEND Kaneza Schaal
CALVIN Tavish Miller

A NOTE

Photography is an effort to capture both eternity and transience in the same representation.

—Henry Talbot,
as quoted by Geoffrey Batchen
in *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*

This play is the architecture of a snapshot.

The Silences, Pauses, Unfinished Sentences, Interruptions, and the Sounds of Pictures Being Taken are key components to the structural integrity of the piece.

Speaking of: periods end, dashes interrupt, commas continue, line breaks indicate thoughts not rhythms, lines are for thinking on, and slashes are Churchillian.

A silence is much longer than a pause; a pause is longer than a space between lines.

I read at the same time: This will be and this has been. ... The photograph tells me death in the future. ... Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is a catastrophe.

—Roland Barthes,
Camera Lucida

I think that this photo session that these women participate in, if it were experienced realistically, might not take very long. Fifteen, twenty minutes. The play, however, should run about 60–70 minutes long.

Photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have the right to observe.

—Susan Sontag,
On Photography

Though photography is important, photo-realism is not the goal: I hope that the play (and moments in the play) can be framed and elevated, altered and enlarged. There should be no discernible breaks between the scenes; each should flow into the next, and the end of one scene should affect the beginning of the following. The women aren't ever confused about where they are, just as we aren't lost when our minds wander.

Within the wandering, there are possibilities for framing: for images and gestures to show us what is unsaid, for movements to be simultaneous, for connections, resonances, sensations, and different ways of seeing...and perhaps magic?

This space and time peculiar to the image is none other than the world of magic, a world in which everything is repeated and in which everything participates in a significant context. Such a world is structurally different from that of the linear world of history in which nothing is repeated and in which everything has causes and will have consequences. ... The magical nature of images must be taken into account when decoding them. Thus it is wrong to look for "frozen events" in images. Rather they replace events by states of things and translate them into scenes. The magical power of images lies in their superficial nature, and the dialectical inherent in them—the contradiction peculiar to them—must be seen in the light of this magic.

—Vilém Flusser,
Towards a Philosophy of Photography

CHARACTERS

MOTHER, 50–60s, lightly

The performer in this role is white. She should be able to relate to being a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant woman of a certain age; being charming, witty, attractive; being a woman who identifies herself as someone who can get along with anyone; being a woman who attended a Seven Sisters college, majored in art history, moved to a city, got married, and left the city to start a family; being the woman you want to get stuck with in a corner at a gala; being a woman who wouldn't consider herself wealthy, but has never worried about money.

GIRLFRIEND, 20s, lightly

The performer in this role is brown. She should be able to relate to being not-white, never passing as white or wanting to be white; being Caribbean or East African or West African or East Asian or South Asian or multi-ethnic; being attractive, serious, shy; being a first-generation-ish American—the child of immigrants; being a woman who grew up in an aspiring middle-class household somewhere on the East or West Coast; being a woman who has become very accustomed to a liberal urban way of life, a milieu where she is comfortable, where she has spent the entirety of her post-pubescence; being a woman who has had artistic aspirations since childhood, who probably picked up and put down brushes and pens and instruments and clay many times before picking up a camera.

CALVIN, 20s–30s, lightly

The performer in this role is white. He should be able to relate to being a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant young man; being an Artist; being Incredibly confident, with a boundless sense of his own promise; being attractive, exacting, unruffled; being a man who was star of his art-school cohort and has always been influential, at the top, or on the rise; being a man who would never be described as warm, but is not purposefully cruel; being a man who simply lacks pretense and doesn't value hospitality, compliments, or

making other people comfortable; being a man also who was raised to be adored and demands that adoration; a man who has always made art, always known he would be an artist, and never worried about money.

SETTING

The play takes place in Calvin and Girlfriend's apartment. It is a loft—a live/work space that is minimal, curated. It's a mostly empty place, except for archival boxes of thousands of photographs, perhaps.

I'd once imagined that some or all of the walls are push-board, so that photographs can be push-pinned into the walls, moved, adjusted, and that this would be happening throughout the play. But then, when we did it at Abrons, Richard Maxwell and Michael Schmelling and I came up with the idea to set the play (and the audience) inside a giant camera obscura. In many ways that worked better. We also discussed setting it entirely in the dark, which could have worked too. So...

You do you.

REALLY

Scene 1

Girlfriend sets up for a portrait.

Mother sits for a portrait.

As Mother talks, Girlfriend prepares: taking time to focus, making small adjustments to the light, arranging things around Mother.

Though Girlfriend is mostly silent, Mother remains chipper. Maybe she's used to talking to people who don't talk back.

MOTHER. Thank You so much for having me like this, it's been Ages since I've been here hasn't it?
Maybe not that long?
A while.

Silence.

But it's lovely in here. You've painted? Or—
Perhaps it's a bit cleaner in here, less cluttered, since it's just you—
It is just you, isn't it? Not that—
It would be fine if you needed to take in a roommate or something, to help with rent.
Subletting? Letting a room? You could put an ad in the paper, I see them all the time—room for rent—vacant occupancy—it's how people make money, how they subsidize themselves, artists too,
they find a building they like,
you know a place where they think they belong
and then invite other people to live with them so they can actually afford it.
It's amazing how you artists survive.

Silence.

Cre-a-tiv-i-ty.

Silence.

You pay rent at the beginning of the month, right? Not the fifteenth? If you're having trouble with your finances you should switch it to the fifteenth

if they'll let you do that.

When I rented, years ago, I had it set up so I paid on the fifteenth, because I knew

the end of the month can be, well, almost too much to bear.

You see it coming, you count up to it, knowing that once you get there.

Well.

Utilities.

When I was renting, I paid my rent in the middle of the month instead of at the end,

so that I could try to, oh I don't know

trick myself into believing that I was in control of.

Silence.

But that was years ago. Years.

Silence.

That was even before I met Calvin's father.

You met Calvin's father, didn't you? I'm sure you did, before he died?

I mean before Calvin's Father died, I mean, not—

I meant before Calvin's Father died, not—

GIRLFRIEND. We met.

MOTHER. Hmm?

Oh, Good.

Pause.

GIRLFRIEND. You. Must miss him.

MOTHER. I must.

Pause.

GIRLFRIEND. I'm sorry but would you mind shifting your feet towards me?

MOTHER. What?

GIRLFRIEND. I don't want to like pose you but, if you could just move your feet? Towards me?

MOTHER. I don't—

GIRLFRIEND. Don't move your shoulders, just your feet. Here, can I just?

Girlfriend kneels and moves Mother's feet into an unnatural position. And pushes Mother's shoulders back.

Is that ok?

MOTHER. Like this—

GIRLFRIEND. Yeah but don't move, for a—I mean you shouldn't be still, you can move, but don't like move move, if that's ok.

MOTHER. Oh—sure.

*Girlfriend waits for Mother to settle.
Maybe Girlfriend takes a picture: Shutter.
Silence.*

It is definitely cleaner in here.

You must be the neat one.

That's nice. Tidy space, tidy mind. They say that, don't they.

Although, clutter is a sign of genius.

And Calvin was such a mess, wasn't he? Papers all over the place, pictures on the walls on the ceiling, ever since he was little he ruined our walls: he was always painting or drawing with markers drawing with crayons drawing with pencils drawing with pens, even when we said no, oh, and taping things up everywhere, Scotch tape on the wallpaper, on my expensive wallpaper, you can just imagine, and eventually it got to the point where we just stopped even trying to repaint or repair because, and I have to say that *I* didn't mind, but Calvin's father, well, he worried about what other people *I'm* not like that, smile at me or spit at me I don't care, but Calvin's father was.

Silence.

I hope I look alright.

*She's expecting a compliment or at least an assurance from
Girlfriend. It doesn't come.*

I actually didn't even run a comb through my hair before I came.
Although I suppose it's better if I look horrible.
That's the difference between you and me.
I mean artist pictures and normal pictures.
You all like things—you like things to be. Interesting.
Ugly, even.

Sad.

Now, I don't mean that I want my pictures to be boring, of course not
but I don't take artistic pictures, I just take pictures,
so when I take a picture
I want to take a picture of what I'm looking at,
and that's all I'm expecting from it,
I don't mean for it to show me anything else.

I used to paint, and that was something different, I suppose, but.
Artistic temperament. You've either got it or you don't.

I always liked being nice.

Calvin had an artist's soul. Even when he was a baby,
he had that temperament.
I swear it, even as an infant he could go from hot to cold just like that.
I still remember when he was just in school, just a teenager,
he'd done a drawing,
and I made the unforgivable mistake of saying it was pretty.
And He Just. Well you know.

And I didn't mean to insult him, honestly I didn't mean it as some-
thing minimizing or condescending or however he took it, I meant
it in the best possible way and I'd say it again because I do believe
that there's nothing wrong with being pretty, wouldn't you say that?

Shutter.

There's nothing wrong with being pretty
or making something pretty, bringing some beauty to the world,
and Calvin obviously liked pretty things.

Boys will be boys, that's what they say.

Pause.

But how are you? Did I ask you that?

GIRLFRIEND. I'm fine.

MOTHER. Yes me too. Quite fine. I've been up to—this and that.
You know.

I've been going to the gym. Yes. A new gym.

Yes, that's right. Lifting weights.

A little treadmill.

Just walking mostly.

Because of my knees.

Do you take care of your knees?

Your—you should. When the knees go.

You should take care of them.

Long Silence.

What?

GIRLFRIEND. What?

MOTHER. Oh.

Pause.

I think of you sometimes. I do.

I hope you're well.

I wonder if you're dating other men because.

And once you start dating other men

then it would be strange for me to come here and see you
even though I never do, because we have nothing to talk about,
I feel strange here—this is strange isn't it?—but it will be very strange
to come here if some new boyfriend is moved in.

Even though this was Calvin's apartment before it was yours
and some of the things in this apartment are mine, actually, used to
belong to me or to my mother, Calvin's grandmother
and I'm sure you've grown accustomed to these things
living in here with these things because it's your home and how can
you not become accustomed to what has become your home?

REALLY

by Jackie Sibblies Drury

1 man, 2 women

When a grieving mother visits her late son's girlfriend, the two women look back at the man they both loved, each jockeying for a claim to his legacy as a son, lover, and artist. *REALLY* is a play about mourning, intimacy, and the conflict between goodness and greatness as seen through the lens of photography.

"...[REALLY] carves pain out of the negative space of conversation... Drury's beautifully refined language [creates] an unnerving study of art as pollution, distraction from a world fast evolving beyond aesthetics."

—**Time Out New York**

"...stylishly contemplative... Drury has created a work that focuses on fixed images culled from life's flux. REALLY is a play about photography. And it asks provocative questions about the value of what is seen in pictures that freeze fleeting moments for posterity. ...[REALLY] deftly uses the self-consciousness of its characters to create a more pervasive, self-examining consciousness about the artistic process..."

—**The New York Times**

"...REALLY's themes aren't immediately or even explicitly declared. Like prized negatives, they gradually develop in the darkroom of our mind. ...As the vacant niceties pile up, we come to realize that "polite" conversation... has been designed explicitly to silence the opinions and marginalize the experiences of women, African Americans, and especially African American women. ...As each truth-defying cliché lands, we are brought face to face, in the reversal of Arendt's dictum, with the evil of banality."

—**BOMB Magazine**

Also by Jackie Sibblies Drury
FAIRVIEW

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