



MORNING SUN

BY **SIMON
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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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For my sister, Jane.

And also for Stephen Jeffreys and Elyse Dodgson.

MORNING SUN was originally commissioned by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Director) with funds provided by Bank of America, and received its world premiere there on October 12, 2021. It was directed by Lila Neugebauer, the scenic design was by dots, the costume design was by Kaye Voyce, the lighting design was by Lap Chi Chu, the sound design was by Lee Kinney and Daniel Kluger, the original music was by Daniel Kluger, and the production stage manager was Laura Smith. The cast was as follows:

- 1 Edie Falco
- 2 Blair Brown
- 3 Marin Ireland

CHARACTERS

1

A woman in her fifties

plays

Charley McBride

2

A woman in her seventies

plays

Charley's mother (Claudette McBride) and other characters

3

A woman in her thirties

plays

Charley's daughter (Tessa McBride) and other characters

PLACE

A liminal space.

Defined more by light and sound than by objects.

2. It's okay.
1. Is it okay? Am I safe?
2. I've got you. Calm down.
1. Have you got me?
2. Ssshhh.
1. Have you got me?
2. I've got you. Calm down.
1. I can't calm down.
3. She calms down.
1. I can't calm down.
3. She can. She does.
2. Eventually.
3. Well at least you tell people she's calmed down.
2. Whether or not you could ever call anything calm again is an entirely different question altogether.
3. Calm to the point that things are manageable.
2. Things?
3. Routines? Schedules? Attempts to communicate? They become manageable.
2. For me.
3. For both of you.
2. For Harold too.
3. Harold McBride. Big hands and soft skin and an interest in radio communications. Born on Hudson and Perry in the West Village of New York City in nineteen hundred and twenty-five.
2. Two years before I was born.
3. In Nyack, in upstate New York.
2. Edward Hopper's hometown.
3. With its beautiful light and the strange sense of booze on the breath of every adult who surrounds you and the comedy and sadness of being a girl. You tolerate it until 1947.
2. When I'm twenty years old.

3. And one morning at the end of summer you take a train to Penn Station walk two blocks up 7th and get a job in the Macy's haberdashery department. That night you find a rent-controlled fifth floor walk-up on 11th Street in the West Village. Two bedrooms. A railroad apartment with a tub in the kitchen and a view of the courtyard to the south side of the building. And if you crane your neck you can see the Hudson.

2. I love it completely.

3. You grab it. It costs seventy-five dollars a month, a rent that you can manage on your Macy's wage.

2. And I never live anywhere else.

3. Never.

2. For the rest of my life.

3. And one night.

2. At Peter McManus on 19th and 7th. About 8:30.

3. Er. Excuse me. I don't mean to be rude. This is my brother Harold. He's very shy. He asked me to tell you he'd like to buy you a drink.

2. Why can't he ask me himself?

3. I'm sorry. You're right. This is embarrassing. He's right though. My name is Harold and I was wondering if you would mind if I bought you a drink.

2. That's very kind of you.

3. If you wanted to you could sit with us for a while.

1. I'll take a vodka and tonic water.

2. He's shy but he has these dark brown eyes and he's been back from Europe for—

3. Two years. I got back two years ago.

Can I tell you? I like your, your dress very much. I think it's very pretty. And the color. What color is that? I'm not so good with my colors.

2. It's lilac.

3. It's very pretty.

2. Thank you.

3. And your hair.

2. Excuse me.
3. I'm sorry. I'm not very experienced at this kind of thing. I like your hair. I like the style. I like the way it falls on your cheek. You were pregnant within the year.
2. But married after six months.
3. Which was a relief.
2. Nobody noticed.
3. Everyone knew. But the baby—
2. Who I called Elizabeth in my head.
3. The baby died when you were twenty weeks pregnant.
2. I never told Harold that I gave her a name. Nobody ever knew that until now. Until tonight. That's my secret. Can you keep that a secret for me?
1. Sure Mom.
3. But you like Harold.
2. He's kind. I like a man who's kind and he's a good dancer.
3. And so you go through with everything.
2. At St. Columba with the cool air and the strange statues and the nice piano music.
3. Harold moves into your place.
2. He is not ashamed of this in any way.
3. You leave the job at Macy's.
2. I never liked it.
1. You did.
2. I didn't.
3. And two years later Bobby Thomson hits a one-out, three-run home run in the bottom of the ninth inning to win the National League pennant for the New York Giants.
1. "The shot that rang around the world."
2. And so when Harold arrives at St. Vincent's he has a smile that fills my heart.
1. And when he sees me?
2. He cries. Which in those days was unusual for a man.

Two

1. I grow up in that place on 11th Street.
2. Fifth floor walk-up. With a stroller.
1. I think I remember the color of the wood on the side of my crib but that can't be right. Can that be right? From that age?
2. I find it difficult to believe.
1. I do remember some things.
2. I bet you do.
1. The smell of Daddy's shirts. I remember the clean smell of his shirts.
2. I cleaned them.
1. And the noise of the street and you warning me to be careful of the traffic.
2. You never listened to me.
1. I did.
2. Never.
1. I remember him taking me to work at PS 3.
2. He was a school janitor.
1. And drinking cold milk outside his office.
2. I remember cleaning the smell of poster paint and oil and grease off his collar.
1. And all the kids were big kids to me.
2. They were seven years old most of them.
1. And listening to him tell me about the buildings that were closing and the places that were closing and the city that was closing and the docks that were closing.
2. And never doing anything about it ever.
1. I hate the name Charlotte.
2. It's a beautiful name.
1. When I go to school I don't want to be called Charlotte.
2. It's a Princess's name.
1. I want to be called Charley. I want everybody to call me Charley.

2. Are you serious?
1. Charley McBride.
2. That's a boy's name.
1. It's not necessarily a boy's name. Not only a boy's name. It's not, Mom. You know what else what I want? Apart from being called Charley?
2. Don't say a brother or a sister.
1. Why?
- Why Mom?
- I wasn't going to say that anyway.
2. Good.
1. I wasn't.
- I want a dog.
2. A what?
1. I want a dog. I want a dog. I think Daddy would love it if we got a dog. He could take it to work with him.
2. We are not getting a dog.
1. I want one though.
2. Well we don't always get what we want in life Charlotte. Sometimes there are things in life we can't have.
1. I want a brown dog. And I want to call him Billy. And take him down to the river with Casey.
2. Casey? Who's Casey all of a sudden.
1. She's my friend and we can play with him and he can sleep on my bed. I wouldn't mind.
2. You can't have a dog in the city.
1. Why not? Lots of people have dogs in the city. Millions of them.
2. Not us.
3. You never do get a dog. Ever in your life.
1. I want a kite then.
2. Jesus.
1. If I can't get a dog. I want a kite.
2. Kites don't work in New York.

3. And you know what else is stupid?
 1. What?
3. Most girls.
 1. Yeah.
3. Not you. You're not.
 1. You're not either.
3. Who's your favorite teacher?
 1. Miss Jordan's nice. I like her stories. And she's not mean.
3. Miss Cochrane is mean.
 1. She's horrible.
3. I had a nightmare about her but I don't remember what happened in it but I woke up and I was crying.
 1. Casey!
3. Of all the boys who do you think is most stupid?
 1. Louis Steffano.
3. Definitely.
 1. Or Jacob Riley.
3. Yes.
 1. Or Patrick McNair.
3. Who do you think is least stupid?
 1. I'm not answering that!
 2. You just make sure you do your best.
 1. I *do* do my best.
 2. Stay out of trouble. Be good.
 1. I *do* stay out of trouble. I *am* good.
3. What's your favorite thing in class.
 1. I like handwriting.
3. Yeah.
 1. And drawing. I like to draw.
3. You're good at drawing.
 1. And I like going on trips.

3. I don't like that we have to hold hands in a crocodile. With boys. That's the worst thing ever. Or on the school bus. When we went to the Natural History Museum we had to sit boy-girl and that was horrible.

1. I liked it when they took us to the piers and they told us about the seashells and the oyster beds in the bottom of the river and we had our galoshes on. I hope we get to do that again.

3. There's a trip next week.

1. Where?

3. To the theatre on Cherry Lane.

1. The theatre?

3. Yeah.

1. Cool.

3. Yeah.

2. It's haunted you know.

1. What is Uncle Stanley? What's haunted?

2. The theatre on Cherry Lane.

1. It is not.

2. It is so.

1. There's no such thing as ghosts Uncle Stanley.

2. Don't you think?

1. No I don't. And there's no way of making me think otherwise. So don't try.

2. If there's no such thing as ghosts then why do they need a ghost light?

1. What's a ghost light?

2. It's a light they keep on in the theatre all night to keep the ghosts away.

1. They don't do that.

2. They do so.

1. They do not. Only an idiot would believe in ghosts Uncle Stanley and so that would make you an idiot and I don't think you're an idiot.

2. You just don't know what they are.

1. Ghosts? I know what a ghost is.
2. You honestly think they wear white sheets and go about moaning and saying “Whoa” and all that shit.
3. Stanley. Buddy. Please
2. That’s not a ghost.
3. Don’t listen to him munchkin.
2. You know what a ghost is?
3. I don’t think this is very—
2. Very what Harold?
3. Appropriate. I don’t think it’s very appropriate.
2. A ghost is an interruption.
3. Stanley you’re scaring the girl.
1. What does that mean?
2. You’ll see. You ask your mother. You ask Claudette.
1. What does Mom know about ghosts?
3. An interruption?
1. I don’t want to go now.
3. See.
2. What?
3. See what you’ve done here?
1. I don’t want to go on the school trip.
3. You got to go.
1. I don’t got to and I don’t want to. I’m not going.
3. You are so. It’s school.
1. So. School’s dumb.
3. Charley don’t say that.
1. It is. School’s dumb. You know it is. You see it all the time. I don’t like it. I don’t like the boys there. I don’t like the teachers. I don’t want to do the work. I’m going to stay here and read books and you can teach me and Uncle Stanley can teach me.
2. I could do that.
3. Stanley. Please.

1. And I'll just get a job at a store or get a job in a police station as a police officer with Casey we're both going to do it. We said. And then we just won't pay attention to the stupid, stupid things that people are saying.

2. What kind of things are people saying, kiddo?

1. I don't like it.

3. You're not supposed to like it. Who said anything about liking it?

2. What kind of things are people saying?

3. You go. Of course, you go. You get to go onstage. You feel horribly self-conscious. The tour guide tells you some ghost stories and they do show you the ghost light but you don't see any ghosts. And you do stay at school and you go to middle school and you go on to high school and everything is great and everything is normal and everything is exactly as it should be.

2. And then I die.

1. Uncle Stanley?

2. In the summer of 1965. The Beatles play Shea Stadium.

3. "Oh yeah I'll tell you something. I think you'll understand."

2. Casey gets you both a ticket.

3. George.

1. John.

3. Definitely George.

1. Definitely John.

3. George. Because of his eyes.

1. John because of his smile. And he's the best singer. And he writes all the songs. George just plays guitar.

2. You walk along 9th Avenue together. You don't join in with her when she's singing.

1. It's not that I don't love the songs. I just don't want to sing them.

2. And when you get back your mom tells you that I died of a brain aneurism while you were out. It was very sudden. It was extremely painful but only for a few seconds and the pain was so extreme that I kind of blacked out from it so that the pain wasn't the last thing I remembered. The last thing I remembered was wishing I'd spent

more time playing baseball and less time working and more time with you and more time with Claudette and less time drinking with your father. And noticing the color of the kitchen towel as I was lying on my back on her kitchen floor.

3. You know you can cry if you want to.

1. I don't want to.

3. People shouldn't be ashamed about crying.

1. I'm not ashamed. I just don't want to.

3. You can have a day off school tomorrow probably.

1. Cool.

3. He really—he loved you Charley.

1. I know that.

3. Are you sure you're okay honey?

1. I'm sure.

Do I get another day off for the funeral?

2. Yes you do. You wear a dark blue dress and your hair and your eyes in that shade of blue look like they're right out of a movie or something. I swear to God. I wish I could have seen them.

1. I remember looking at Mom at the funeral.

3. Why your mom? He was *my* brother.

1. For a few days after Stanley died and before the funeral Mom slept in the afternoon and I never did find out why.

3. Is this true?

1. I'd get home from school and Mom would be asleep.

3. Claudette is this true?

1. I watched her drinking vodka at the funeral.

3. Claudette. Why is Charley so worried about you?

1. I tried to figure out what she was thinking.

3. Stanley was my brother, not yours.

1. I couldn't. Not really.

3. Is there something you want to tell me about Stanley, Claudette?

1. The funeral was very strange. Everybody dressed well and nobody spoke. I took a bottle of vodka from the table at the funeral.

2. Goddamn Charley!

1. I didn't know what to do with it so I hid it in the underwear drawer in my room. I wondered if you'd find it Mom.

2. Of course I find it.

1. I wondered if you'd lose your shit.

2. This is vodka. You have a bottle of vodka in your underwear drawer. Why have you got a bottle of vodka in your underwear drawer? Have you been drinking vodka?

1. No.

2. You're fourteen years old.

1. I know that.

2. You're too young. You're too young. You're too young Charlotte. You're too young.

Three

3. And then there's fifteen years.

1. There's what?

3. Fifteen years.

1. Like that?

3. I mean. Pretty much.

1. That's. Er. That feels quick.

2. It doesn't feel quick at the time.

1. You're telling me.

3. Fifteen years defined by a desperate need to master a peculiar range of card tricks.

And something of an obsession with listening to the radio shows of Leonard Bernstein. And watching buildings get knocked down.

2. I remember that phase.

3. Standing watching Penn Station get taken away.

1. Smashed. Not taken away. Smashed.

2. That is a very peculiar thing for a teenage girl to concern herself with.

1. I don't think so.

2. It is.

1. I think it's a tragedy.

2. You may well think that but most girls your age have better things to be thinking about.

3. Your parents get the opportunity to buy the place on 11th from the landlord at a cost which is a stretch but which is manageable.

2. It is.

3. And they take it.

2. We do.

3. They get a mortgage from J.P. Morgan. And it's not easy.

2. It's not.

3. You watch your mother become infatuated with Jane Jacobs.

2. You meet her. On the campaign trail. In Washington Square.

1. I don't remember.

2. Do you know who this is?

1. No.

2. This is Jane Jacobs. Say hello Charlotte.

1. Charley. I prefer to be called Charley.

3. Hey Charley. How you doing?

1. I'm doing very well Miss Jacobs. It's lovely to meet you.

3. You don't really know who I am do you sweetheart?

1. My mom says you're the woman who's going to beat Robert Moses.

3. I hope so.

1. She says you're going to kick his ass.

2. I never used those words.

1. Not those words exactly. But your own words to say the same thing.

3. I will Charley. I will kick his ass from here to Coney Island and back again.

2. She does. It's the most amazing thing to be part of for a while.

3. You wish you could draw.

1. No I don't.

3. And paint. And recite poetry in a sexy accent. And sing.

1. Now that isn't true. I never had any interest in singing.

3. You so want to sing.

You hear Joni Mitchell sing "Song to a Seagull." A song about a working bird that flies above the city and the ocean looking for a place to call home. And your heart fills completely and you want more than anything to sing like that.

1. Well.

3. Or hold Pete Cabnet's hand out in public so that everybody can see. Or kiss David Parker's brown eyes. You want to do so well at school.

2. Really?

1. I'm trying Mom.

2. Well, you need to try harder.

1. That's not fair.

2. Fair has nothing to do with it. You could really do something with your life.

1. Jesus Mom.

2. What?

3. But no matter how much you want to do well you just can't. And after a while you decide to try not wanting so much. The thing you will remember most about those years, and actually remember in the last moments, is the time you spend on the way to high school with your father. You remember the stories you make up together about the people from your neighborhood that you pass every morning.

1. She's a spy. A brilliant spy. She works for the Russians.

3. And she keeps her husband in a locked closet in the basement.

1. And only feeds him peas.

3. And after you say goodbye to him, and you get to high school you keep on making up stories in your head and you kind of act them out and say the words out loud and sometimes do a little dance and all the other kids on the street think you're a fucking freak.

2. You are a fucking freak.

The play doesn't end here...

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