

THTR 331: PLAY DIRECTING II
MID-TERM EVALUATION

SARA BOGOMOLNY

The book looks very good, as expected. It's clear, clean, thoughtful, and well-prepared. The Thought page is good and complete and seems to be full of useful active thoughts and some solid analysis of each of your ideas. Nicely done.

The Dramaturgical information is excellent, and I think will provide good context for the themes that the playwright and you will explore.

The character pages are excellent. Well-fleshed out sketches of their motivations, etc. Just remember, of course, to keep flexible and let your actors contribute as well.

The script analysis work is good. One of the best Action Markers I've ever had!

The rehearsal schedule looks good as well, although I might consider, at least, adding another working rehearsal. You don't have a lot of time to explore as it is right now. It may be enough, but consider adding another rehearsal as you go.

Excellent work, Sara!

MID-TERM GRADE: A (40/40)

THTR 331: PLAY DIRECTING II
FINAL EVALUATION

SARA BOGOMOLNY

The project was very good. It's a challenging piece—liberating in its lack of specificity; limiting in its lack of specificity—but I think you mitigated its weaknesses and enhanced its strengths nicely. I thought your tactics of freeing up Paige through “bad acting” (Geoff Bullen calls it “naughty bedroom acting” which I personally like!) was an inspired choice to get her out of her head and into the moment. It worked well. I thought you capitalized on Natalie and Maggie's inherent abilities as well, and your staging was clear and lovely.

Congratulations! It's been a pleasure working with you all these years and on so many projects. I'll miss your presence and smile around the department, and your discipline and dedication to the work. Break legs in the future and stay in touch!

PROJECT GRADE: A (100/100)

Bread
By Margaret Hunt

Sara Bogomolny
Directing II/Capstone
Spring 2016

Thought Page

Bread by Margaret Hunt chronicles the acute breakdown of Joan Arnold and the efforts of her sister to put her back together. The characters are Joan, her sister Nellie, and Joan's daughter Abby. Abby is a rather peripheral character; most of the action occurs between Joan and Nellie. The challenge in constructing these characters lies in their innate oppositions. Joan is detached from reality, but is constantly trying to claw her way back to stable ground. Nellie has worked hard to create the stability in her life, but sacrifices some of that assuredness in order to help her sister.

As I begin work on the play, I want to explore Joan's sense of independence. Joan is territorial about her problems. She has created a system for herself with the notecards so that she can wade through her disorientation on her own. Nellie's presence threatens this independence. The relationship between Nellie and Joan needs to be explored in terms of interdependence. Their childhood relationship is referenced through Joan's monologues about making breadsticks as children. In those passages, she reminisces on the culture of their household after their father passed away as well as Nellie's preferences for breadsticks. This is the best snapshot we get of Joan taking care of Nellie, fulfilling the typical birth order power structure. However, for the bulk of the play, this power structure is inverted and Nellie, the little sister, takes care of her older sister.

I think that Joan's mental illness is a device for illuminating the extremes in the relationship between Joan and Nellie. I want the audience to walk away with a renewed sense of commitment to their familial relationships. Throughout the play, it becomes clear that Joan's situation would never have become so dire if she had had a stronger relationship with her sister throughout her marriage. In addition, I think that the play can help eliminate stigma related to mental illness because pre-play Joan is a very relatable, accessible figure.

Major Dramatic Question:

- Will Joan accept help?

Protagonist's Goal:

- To be present (emotionally, financially, physically) for Abby
 - To be the best mom she can be, because her mom failed.

Point of Attack:

- When Joe takes Abby away from Joan.
 - While I'm sure that Joan was unstable to begin with, I think that she measures herself as a person based on how well she does for Abby. When she loses that measuring stick, she loses herself. That is why Abby shows up in the play.

Inciting Incident:

- When Nellie arrives at Joan's apartment
 - While Joan's habits at the start of the play are unsustainable, Nellie's arrival shakes Joan's routine and forces her to confront the mess she is in.

Foreshadowing:

- Nellie's realization that Joan is cutting up her bills foreshadows the reveal that Joan has been cutting up her poems as well.

Dramaturgical Research:

- Below: A review of *Loon Woman* by Margaret Hunt. The review indicates that *Loon Woman* is basically a draft of *Bread*. The characters seem largely the same and deal with the same crises.

Loon Woman: Rhyme without reason

By Michael Gordon

A crew of men and women in white medical coats arrange the props to the tune of eerie violin music and histrionic laughter, preparing the opening scene of the Phoenix Ensemble's production of *Loon Woman*. The illuminated set reveals a disheveled woman, seated atop an easy chair, surrounded by old newspapers, stale cake, cheap booze, and a sea of orange and white index cards. As Joan Arnold (Patrice Donnell) barks irrationalities into the telephone, frantically waving her arms and raking her stringy hair, the literality of the play's unusual title becomes immediately apparent. Playwright Margaret Hunt's seriocomic portrait of mental illness is a presumptuous temper tantrum thrown with heartfelt sincerity, its lack of depth diminishing the erratic nature of the "suffering artist" to a tired cliché. It is interesting to note that *Loon Woman* is the winner of the 1986 Edward Albee Playwright's Residency. Much as Albee drew from a reservoir of personal experiences to create searing dramas like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Ms. Hunt presumably reaches into her own psyche to explore the emotional torment of a struggling playwright. Joan Arnold is a forty-one year old divorcee who quits her job and decides to devote all of her energies to her art. Although only one of her plays has actually been produced (lamentably "castrated by the director and whipped in public by Frank Rich"), she is still consumed with the desire for critical and commercial success. As the play opens, we see her mobilizing for an all-out war against writer's block, with her stuffy Times Square apartment as the battleground. Patrice Donnell manages to overcome the inherent awkwardness of stream-of-consciousness monologues that link the metaphysical ("Is it today?") with the purely absurd ("I don't do phones these days, you know!"). Her pale and contorted face conveys the unrelenting anxiety of a defeated artist and her wild gestures accentuate her escalating inability to cope with reality.

Joan uses her sister Maggie (Kate Coyle) not only as a sounding board for her psychological ailemmas but as a dart board for her pent-up fury. While Maggie attempts to put an end to her sister's self-destructive rampage, Joan insults her about her height as well as her career as a social worker. Just as we're forced to accept Joan's breakdown in its final stages without watching its metamorphosis, the love-hate relationship between Joan and Maggie is presented as a "given," or accepted truism, originating and developing in the world of the play's past. Consequently, we remain as spectators, rather than involved and informed participants, during the contrived screaming matches between Ms. Donnell and Ms. Coyle. While Patrice Donnell circumvents the prating melodrama of Ms. Hunt's script through her acutely sensitive portrayal of Joan, Kate Coyle falls prey to its mediocrity in her whiny attempt to convey indignation and despair. Joan begrudgingly agrees to seek psychiatric help, for she fears losing her thirteen year old daughter, Abby (Nicole Colangelo) to her ex-husband. In its psychoanalytic phase, *Loon*

Woman continues to evade the origins of Joan's psychosis while making a mockery of modern psychiatry. Much of the "humor" of *Loon Woman* lies in Ms. Hunt's exaggerated and irreverent assault on the effectiveness of psychiatric treatment. Joan's first psychiatrist, Dr. Stern (Diane Reynolds), is an indifferent robot seemingly programmed to speak one phrase: "Why did you come here?" She offers Joan almost no advice and can't even book a room in the local psych ward, despite her patient's extreme instability. Joan's second psychiatrist, Dr. Chin (Michael Varna), could easily be mistaken for Peter Sellers doing a bad impression of Dr. Fu Manchu. Although Ms. Hunt magnifies the flaws of therapeutic treatment to the extreme of this appalling parody, the Phoenix Ensemble is also to blame in failing to hire a Chinese actor to play the part (eyeliner just doesn't do the trick). As a result, Joan turns away from her incompetent doctors and towards her fellow psych ward patients: a bubbleheaded anorexic, played with comic finesse by Stacey Gladstone, and a catatonic depressive, played by Eric McGill. *Loon Woman* is filled with sappy "self discovery" scenes that literally bludgeon the audience with their psychoanalytic intent—none so more transparent than when Joan makes bread by candlelight while soliloquizing about her painful childhood. Ms. Hunt finally places Joan on the proverbial analyst's couch during this soul-searching incantation, forcing an obligatory Freudian foundation onto Joan's psychosis. One could conjecture that *Loon Woman* is the manifestation of Ms. Hunt's own therapeutic response to artistic alienation in the predatory entertainment world of New York. Despite her failure to articulate the progressive stages of mental illness, Ms. Hunt's poignant assertion that the road to recovery starts from within is the one true golden nugget of this play, lying beneath the many layers of fool's gold. • • *Loon Woman* premiered February 5 and will play until March 1 at the Stage Arts Theatre, 120 W. 28 St. between 6th and 7th Ave. Admission is \$10 for all seats at all times.

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How Birth Order Affects Your Personality

For decades the evidence has been inconclusive, but new studies show that family position may truly affect intelligence and personality

By Joshua K. Hartshorne on January 1, 2010

WHEN I TELL PEOPLE I study whether birth order affects personality, I usually get blank looks. It sounds like studying whether the sky is blue. Isn't it common sense? Popular books invoke birth order for self-discovery, relationship tips, business advice and parenting guidance in titles such as *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Revell, 2009). Newspapers and morning news shows debate the importance of the latest findings ("Latter-born children engage in more risky behavior; what should parents do?") while tossing in savory anecdotes ("Did you know that 21 of the first 23 astronauts into space were firstborns?").

But when scientists scrutinized the data, they found that the evidence just did not hold up. In fact, until very recently there were no convincing findings that linked birth order to personality or behavior. Our common perception that birth

order matters was written off as an example of our well-established tendency to remember and accept evidence that supports our pet theories while readily forgetting or overlooking that which does not. But two studies from the past three years finally found measurable effects: our position in the family does indeed affect both our IQ and our personality. It may be time to reconsider birth order as a real influence over whom we grow up to be.

Size Matters

Before discussing the new findings, it will help to explain why decades of research that seemed to show birth-order effects was, in fact, flawed. Put simply, birth order is intricately linked to family size. A child from a two-kid family has a 50 percent chance of being a firstborn, whereas a child from a five-kid family has only a 20 percent chance of being a firstborn. So the fact that astronauts are disproportionately firstborns, for example, could merely show that they come from smaller families—not that firstborns have any particularly astronautic qualities. (Of course, firstborns may indeed have astronautic qualities. The point is that with these data, we cannot tell.)

There are many reasons that family size could affect our predilections and personalities. More children mean that parental resources (money, time and attention) have to be spread more thinly. Perhaps more telling, family size is associated with many important social factors, such as ethnicity, education and wealth. For example, wealthier, better-educated parents typically have fewer children. If astronauts are more likely to have well-educated, comfortable parents, then they are also more likely to come from a smaller family and thus are more likely to be a firstborn.

Of the some 65,000 scholarly articles about birth order indexed by Google Scholar, the vast majority suffer from this problem, making the research difficult to interpret. Many of the few remaining studies fail to show significant effects of birth order. In 1983 psychiatrists Cecile Ernst and Jules Angst of the University of Zurich determined, after a thorough review of the literature, that

birth-order effects were not supported by the evidence. In 1998 psychologist Judith Rich Harris published another comprehensive attack on the concept in *The Nurture Assumption* (Free Press). By 2003 cognitive scientist Steven Pinker of Harvard University found it necessary to spend only two pages of his 439-page discussion of nature and nurture, *The Blank Slate* (Penguin), dismissing birth order as irrelevant.

New Evidence

Even so, the case in 2003 against birth-order effects was mainly an absence of good evidence, rather than evidence of an absence. In fact, the past few years have provided good news for the theory. In 2007 Norwegian epidemiologists Petter Kristensen and Tor Bjerkedal published work showing a small but reliable negative correlation between IQ and birth order: the more older siblings one has, the lower one's IQ. Whether birth order affects intelligence has been debated inconclusively since the late 1800s, although the sheer size of the study (about 250,000 Norwegian conscripts) and the rigorous controls for family size make this study especially convincing.

In 2009 my colleagues and I published evidence that birth order influences whom we choose as friends and spouses. Firstborns are more likely to associate with firstborns, middle-borns with middle-borns, last-borns with last-borns, and only children with only children. Because we were able to show the effect independent of family size, the finding is unlikely to be an artifact of class or ethnicity. The result is exactly what we should expect if birth order affects personality. Despite the adage that opposites attract, people tend to resemble their spouses in terms of personality. If spouses correlate on personality, and personality correlates with birth order, spouses should correlate on birth order.

Thus, the evidence seems to be shifting back in favor of our common intuition that our position in our family somehow affects who we become. The details, however, remain vague. The Norwegian study shows a slight effect on intelligence. The relationship study shows that oldest, middle, youngest and

only children differ in some way yet gives no indication as to how. Moreover, although these effects are reasonably sized by the standards of research, they are small enough that it would not make any sense to organize college admissions or dating pools around birth order, much less NASA applicants.

Still, I expect people—myself included—will continue to try to make sense of the world through the prism of birth order. It's fine for scientists to say "more study is needed," but we must find love, gain self-knowledge and parent children *now*. In that sense, a great deal about who we are and how we think *can* be learned reading those shelves of birth order–related self-help books, even if the actual content is not yet—or will never be—experimentally confirmed.

Note this story was originally published with the title "Ruled by Birth Order?"

This article was originally published with the title "Perspectives: Ruled by

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(Further Reading)

Explaining the Relation between Birth Order and Intelligence. Petter Kristensen and Tor Bjerkedal in *Science*, Vol. 316, page 1717; June 22, 2007.

Birth Order Effects in the Formation of Long-Term Relationships. Joshua K. Hartshorne, Nancy Salem-Hartshorne and Timothy S. Hartshorne in *Journal of Individual Psychology* (in press).

The National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

Bipolar Disorder

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. Symptoms of bipolar disorder are severe. They are different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through from time to time. Bipolar disorder symptoms can result in damaged relationships, poor job or school performance, and even suicide. But bipolar disorder can be treated, and people with this illness can lead full and productive lives.

Causes

Scientists are studying the possible causes of bipolar disorder. Most scientists agree that there is no single cause. Rather, many factors likely act together to produce the illness or increase risk.

Genetics

Bipolar disorder tends to run in families. Some research has suggested that people with certain genes are more likely to develop bipolar disorder than others. Children with a parent or sibling who has bipolar disorder are much more likely to develop the illness, compared with children who do not have a family history of bipolar disorder. However, most children with a family history of bipolar disorder will not develop the illness.

Brain structure and functioning

The connections between brain regions are important for shaping and coordinating functions such as forming memories, learning, and emotions, but scientists know little about how different parts of the human brain connect. Learning more about these connections, along with information gained from genetic studies, helps scientists better understand bipolar disorder. Scientists are working towards being able to predict which types of treatment will work most effectively.

Signs & Symptoms

People with bipolar disorder experience unusually intense emotional states that occur in distinct periods called "mood episodes." Each mood episode represents a drastic change from a person's usual mood and behavior. An overly joyful or overexcited state is called a manic episode, and an extremely sad or hopeless state is called a depressive episode. Sometimes, a mood episode includes symptoms of both mania and depression. This is called a mixed state. People with bipolar disorder also may be explosive and irritable during a mood episode.

Extreme changes in energy, activity, sleep, and behavior go along with these changes in mood. Symptoms of bipolar disorder are described below.

This table is scrollable by touch on mobile devices.

Symptoms of mania or a manic episode include:	Symptoms of depression or a depressive episode include:
Mood Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none">A long period of feeling "high," or an overly happy or outgoing moodExtreme irritability Behavioral Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none">Talking very fast, jumping from one idea to another, having racing thoughtsBeing easily distractedIncreasing activities, such as taking on new projectsBeing overly restlessSleeping little or not being tiredHaving an unrealistic belief in one's abilitiesBehaving impulsively and engaging in pleasurable, high-risk behaviors	Mood Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none">An overly long period of feeling sad or hopelessLoss of interest in activities once enjoyed, including sex. Behavioral Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none">Feeling tired or "slowed down"Having problems concentrating, remembering, and making decisionsBeing restless or irritableChanging eating, sleeping, or other habitsThinking of death or suicide, or attempting suicide.

Bipolar disorder can be present even when mood swings are less extreme. For example, some people with bipolar disorder experience hypomania, a less severe form of mania. During a hypomanic episode, you may feel very good, be highly productive, and function well. You may not feel that anything is wrong, but family and friends may recognize the mood swings as possible bipolar disorder. Without proper treatment, people with hypomania may develop severe mania or depression.

Bipolar disorder may also be present in a mixed state, in which you might experience both mania and depression at the same time. During a mixed state, you might feel very agitated, have trouble sleeping, experience major changes in appetite, and have suicidal thoughts. People in a mixed state may feel very sad or hopeless while at the same time feel extremely energized.

Sometimes, a person with severe episodes of mania or depression has psychotic symptoms too, such as hallucinations or delusions. The psychotic symptoms tend to reflect the person's extreme mood. For example, if you are having psychotic symptoms during a manic episode, you may believe you are a famous person, have a lot of money, or have special powers. If you are having psychotic symptoms during a depressive episode, you may believe you are ruined and penniless, or you have committed a crime. As a result, people with bipolar disorder who have psychotic symptoms are sometimes misdiagnosed with schizophrenia.

People with bipolar disorder may also abuse alcohol or substances, have relationship problems, or perform poorly in school or at work. It may be difficult to recognize these problems as signs of a major mental illness.

Bipolar disorder usually lasts a lifetime. Episodes of mania and depression typically come back over time. Between episodes, many people with bipolar disorder are free of symptoms, but some people may have lingering symptoms.

Character Analysis

Joan Arnold is a 41-year-old divorcée. Since her 41st birthday party, she has lost contact with her daughter, Abby. Much of Joan's identity is based in her motherhood. She measures herself as a person based on how she is able to provide for her daughter. This follows a pattern in her life. She also measured herself by her ability to care for her four siblings and, later, her husband. Joan is stressed because her ex-husband Joe is much wealthier than she is and can provide with more ease for their daughter. Although Joan had the opportunity to take more money from Joe during their divorce proceedings, she settled for a very low amount of money. Nellie says "a dollar," but it is unclear how hyperbolic she is being. Regardless, Joan decided to stand her moral ground and accept a stark drop in financial comfort following the divorce. There is no doubt that the divorce was a necessary step for Joan who felt underappreciated by her husband. However, she clearly did not have proper networks of support in place following the divorce. This is a large part of why she descends into the mental illness she displays during the action of the play.

It is also apparent that her sister Nellie means a lot to her, as evidenced by the long monologues which bookend the play. In those speeches, Joan shares a snapshot of their childhood. This small peek into their world alludes to how Joan used to take care of Nellie. This sense of responsibility for her younger sister informs her fierce attempts to take care of herself in front of Nellie during the play. The reversal of the birth order power structure definitely adds an element of discomfort to the action of the play. This is the first time Joan has been the dependent sister.

Finally, Joan expresses discontent with her work/home life balance. This was particularly displeasing to her during her marriage in which her husband demanded that she focus on menial household work and cooking. She received neither satisfaction nor validation from Joe. Throughout it all, she still considered herself a poet. However, the Joan that is presented in the play is one who is desperately grappling with her position as a poet in a society that severely undervalues her work. She feels as if poetry has become unnecessary. By extension, she has come to believe that her work is trivial. All of these crises compound during the play and create a hellish environment for Joan to grapple with.

Nellie Cavanaugh is Joan's younger sister. She is in her early thirties and has spent most of her life looking up to Joan as a role model. In fact, she states that Joan usually has everything together and totally organized. Nellie is shaken by this reversal of birth order authority, but quickly rises to the challenge. It is clear that she cares deeply about Joan and will make sacrifices, like calling in to work, in order to take care of her.

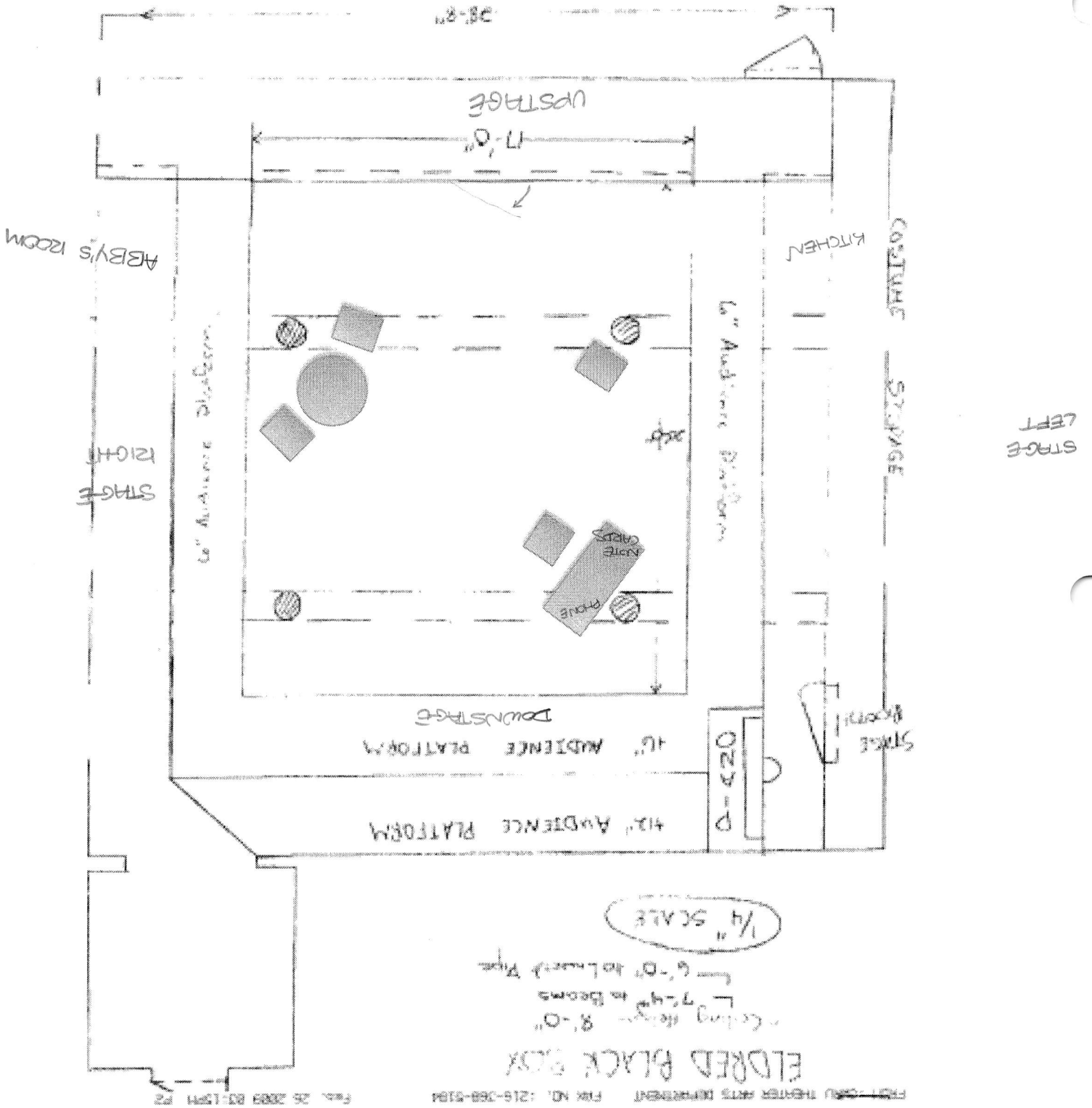
Nellie is a social worker that deals specifically with child abuse. She takes her job seriously. Anyone dealing with that kind of job would be susceptible to burn out, but Nellie is particularly at risk for such consequences. Although her childhood was not acutely abusive, her mother did not deal well with her father's death. This led to Joan taking a lot of responsibility for Nellie and their other siblings when they were young.

Nellie arrives at Joan's apartment with a fervor for being helpful because she feels like she owes Joan for everything she did for her as children.

The crux of their relationship is revealed when Nellie tells Joan "You are better than me in every way." Nellie has been jealous of Joan's life. Until this point, Joan rose out of the circumstances of their childhood and made something of herself, personally and professionally. Although Nellie has a job where she is doing good for society and can make a large difference in people's lives, she does not get much satisfaction. She is stressed from running from place to place and trying to help. Sometimes the situations are outside of her control, which makes her feel helpless and useless. This feeling of inadequacy is further compounded by her weak romantic life. She is still emotionally dependent on Joan and regrets that she has not evolved to a place of greater independence.

Abby Arnold is Joan's 14-year-old daughter. She is just about to embark on her first year of high school, which would be a big enough transition on its own let alone her parents' divorce and her mother's mental illness. Her affection and devotion to her mother is clear. Abby is special because she is very attuned to her mother's stressors even when Joan is detached from reality. Abby offers to get a job, help with money, and asserts that she does not need contact lenses. These gestures represent a closeness with her mother, but also a readiness to sacrifice her own time and dreams in order to fix her mom.

The divorce has drastically changed her lifestyle. When the family was relying on her father's income, she was accustomed to a pretty cushy life. They dined at nice restaurants, she was able to keep up with the latest fashion trends, and she was better travelled than most of her friends. Now, she is faced with the obvious reality of which parent facilitated that impressive social caché. She is definitely closer with her mother, but the relationship is strained as she is moving into a new high school and might feel like she needs the status symbols her father can provide.



Groundplan

Rehearsal Schedule

Sunday April 3, 2016; 3-4:30pm

Read through and character discussions, full cast

Wednesday April 6, 2016; 9-11pm

Block the whole show, call Abby later

Sunday April 10, 2016; 3-4:30pm

Work through whole show, call Abby later

Wednesday April 13, 2016; 9-11pm

Stumble through, off book

Scene work as necessary

Friday April 15, 2016; 3-4pm

Scene work as necessary

Sunday April 24, 2016; 3-4:30pm

Run show

Monday April 25, 2016; 7-8:30pm

Run show

Tuesday April 26, 2016; time TBD

Tech

Wednesday April 27, 2016; time TBD

PERFORMANCE!

Rehearsal Journal: *Bread*
Sara Bogomolny

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Tuesday	Rehearsal Number: 1
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 2:45-4pm	Date: 3/29/16

I planned on doing a read of the play during the first rehearsal. All actors, Maggie Kowalski, Natalie El Dabh, and Paige Klopfenstein, were present and on time. I was generally happy with the first read, though Paige took fewer risks than I expected. I talked with her about the difficulty of taking Joan's journey through its appropriate ups and downs without expending too much dramatic cache before it is necessary. Natalie identified the challenge of balancing Nellie's humor with her seriousness. I think that she demonstrated a pretty good balance in the first read. Maggie also expressed that she wants to find videos so that she can study the behavior of 14-year-old girls. The read ran 25 minutes and 30 seconds.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Friday	Rehearsal Number: 2
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 3:15-4:15pm	Date: 4/1/16

I planned on blocking the whole show today, but only got through half of it in our hour-long rehearsal. I struggled to balance letting my actors explore and enforcing the images I created in my pre-blocking. In future projects, I do not think I would pre-block so specifically because it's hard for me to throw it away and let the process happen naturally in the room. I feel stifled by my own planning and worry that I am therefore stifling my actors and their instincts. I tried really hard to be open-minded and in some cases changed what I had planned. In others, I decided that what I had planned would remain based on story-telling or picture issues.

Paige's choices are still not quite as bold as I would hope so I hope she gets off book quickly so that we can get to work on fleshing out Joan's mental illness. Natalie is doing a nice job. She is beginning to find the humor in Nellie, which is really excellent because the play is pretty heavy.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Tuesday	Rehearsal Number: 3
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 4:00-5pm	Date: 4/5/16

Today, we finished blocking the show. It was a pretty straightforward rehearsal. We didn't have much time and were more efficient in getting this half of the show staged. I feel uncomfortable dictating blocking because I don't want it to be a dictatorship. This early on in the process, I think it is very important for the actors to have a lot of input, but none of them were taking the bait. I even went so far as to ask them how they work best through this part of a rehearsal process and was met with the "a blocking rehearsal is a blocking rehearsal, it's not going to be fun no matter how you do it" attitude. I was disappointed because I feel as if the actors, particularly Paige, weren't thrilled with just straight blocking but I wanted to get the staging done and so just kind of powered through. Like the last time, I encouraged them to play and experiment outside of my suggestions if they have instincts that draw them in a different direction. Experimentation like that in this space is really difficult though because every stage picture is so fragile. An actor can move 6 inches in the wrong direction on a whim and the whole picture falls to pieces.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Friday	Rehearsal Number: 4
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 3:30-4:30pm	Date: 4/8/16

Building on the very technical blocking work that we have done up until this point, I decided that we needed to spend some time on character work. We were also missing Maggie, so it seemed better to do work outside of the script. Today, I had them put their scripts down and do the Michael Chekhov body sculpture exercise, in which the actors use their hands and the air to sculpt the body of their character. After they have completed that step, they enter the body and use it as an opportunity to explore the physicality of their characters. I was glad to see that both of my actors were pretty responsive to this exercise despite the fact that only Paige has gone through Cathy Alber's Chekhov training. I took another page out of Cathy's book in order to do a modified "circle" exercise. Here, I asked my actors a series of questions and requested that they answer in character. Paige committed fully to the exercise and learned a lot. Natalie was slightly less invested and kept breaking character in order to check in about how to do the exercise correctly. That said, both actors reported that the exercise was useful and that what they learned about their characters was directly applicable to their work on the script.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Saturday	Rehearsal Number: 5
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 11:30am	Date: 4/9/16

This rehearsal was mostly intended to be a brush up for the lab. I have been encouraging my actors to be off book by today, though I was not surprised when that didn't happen. Basically, we stumbled through the show and tried to work through a couple of blocking snafus that we have not yet had time to fix. I think the show is in a good place structurally, though am aware that my actors have a lot more room for growth in terms of their characterizations.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Tuesday	Rehearsal Number: 6 (LAB)
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 2:45-4pm	Date: 4/12/16

This was probably our roughest rehearsal so far. We caught the actors in an unfortunate spot in terms of line memorization because they were halfway between page dependent and off book. This, I think, caused a lot of confusion as they tried to walk that line. I think that the pressure of having external audience members view the project in a very rough form also threw them off. More than anything, this rehearsal revealed a surprising lack of technical instinct from my actors. They shy away from building stakes that are written into the text with extreme clarity. They are also hesitant to create obstacles for each other, which is something that Chris Bohan has drilled into each of us during our freshman years. In addition, the blocking fell to pieces in several spots despite having gone over it a few days ago. Here, their instincts also fail to guide them into appropriate pictures. They acted themselves into traffic jams over and over. Ultimately, I don't think that this run was indicative of the work that we have done to date, but is worrisome because we don't have time to keep reinforcing blocking and small but crucial technical things with such a challenging piece.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Friday	Rehearsal Number: 7
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 3:00-4:15pm	Date: 4/15/16

Being the first rehearsal after the lab, I decided to just call Natalie and Paige to work on developing their characters. The work with Maggie will hopefully come quickly as it is much simpler than the progress we need to make with Paige. I began rehearsal with a short discussion of Joan's symptoms/diagnosis. Though we had discussed it in the past, we hadn't quite pinned it down yet. In her nursing experience, Paige has gone through a psych rotation. Using that knowledge, she has decided that Joan's symptoms may be indicative of some kind of extreme anxiety. I also argued for bipolar disorder. Paige has definitively ruled out schizophrenia, which I agree with. Ultimately, neither of us are psychologists and I think that as long as we are specific about which symptoms plague Joan, her actual diagnosis is not helpful to the process.

In addition, we also discussed the trajectory of Joan's insanity/instability. We agreed that Joan is still drunk from the previous night in the first scene, but sobers up in the shower to reveal her sober, but unstable self in the second and third scenes.

I introduced the idea of a "bad acting" run and had Paige go in that direction, while instructing Natalie to approach the run as she normally would. This run really opened Paige up. It eliminated most of the technical deficiencies that she struggles with. A lot of her under- or de-voicing was solved. She built into moments with more energy. Her brain-body connection felt more immediate, and it felt like she was aware of having to live each moment as a new discovery. Unfortunately, Natalie did not respond to this in the way that I had hoped. She performed the role much as she has been over the past few weeks, which indicated to me that she was not receiving what Paige was bringing to the table. I brought this to her attention and encouraged her to continue to be constantly receiving from the other actors onstage.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Saturday	Rehearsal Number: 8
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 11:00-1pm	Date: 4/16/16

I feel like this weekend really invigorated the work, which was becoming stagnant. Most of this stemmed from comments from the lab, which helped jumpstart areas of difficulty. Today we worked on fixing a couple of blocking snafus. These were either instances where the actors had forgotten the given blocking or moments when the planned blocking was not appropriately serving the moments. These include the way that Nellie brings Joan to the table for dinner. Rather than carrying her across the room, Natalie discovered that she could push the rolling chair to the dinner table. This maintains the integrity of the first idea, while tempering it for realism. We also worked towards fixing the crowded blocking during the fight at the end between all three women. This play was largely written for a proscenium stage. In that section of the text, it dictates that all the women are close enough to each other to touch, but in our tiny black box, it looks clunky and staged. I encouraged Natalie to find a time to disengage from the confrontation. She problem-solved beautifully and opened up the picture dramatically.

I also worked with Maggie on developing the age for Abby. I encouraged her to find a "sense of ease" in the Michael Chekhov sense, and she responded really well. The next step with Maggie will be to find a way to keep her as loose and open while maintaining specificity and articulation.

This rehearsal, her speech and movements got a bit sloppy, but I let it slide because I wanted her to keep exploring the openness of this 14-year old character. Someone mentioned that I could work with her to lighten or raise the pitch of her voice in order to communicate the young age of the character. I think I will save this for a last resort. It seems like a little bit of an external fix. Once the physicality is more developed, I think that the voice will follow appropriately.

Finally, I used this rehearsal for a “bad acting” run. It is a technique I learned from David Vegh last semester and I have found that it is an easy way to coax specificity and moment-by-moment acting out of my actors. It definitely leads to a certain kind of sloppiness, but this is a result of actors taking big risks, which is currently more important than cleanliness.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Tuesday	Rehearsal Number: 9
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 4:00-5pm	Date: 4/19/16

Today, we ran the show. We didn’t have very much time so we didn’t do any work outside of the run and notes. I am getting frustrated because it feels like a lot of the work we have developed isn’t sticking. Some wonderful things that were discovered and developed in our “bad acting” runs and our character work sessions are just not present in every rehearsal. My notes today ended up focusing more on clarity of storytelling more than anything. I figured that even if the characterizations are not exactly where I want them to be, the story must be clear. Notes to this end encouraged Paige to bring more weight to passing references to her ex-husband and her marriage. Other notes were very technical, such as “I can’t hear the words in this sentence and they’re really important.” I’d also like to mention that I have worked with Paige on her French pronunciation in pretty much every rehearsal up to now and have decided that it is no longer worth the energy. While Joan probably would pronounce the French with more accuracy, the words are still recognizable and I do not think that this is an issue I need to continue to beat her up about.

Something we discovered during Natalie’s “circle” exercise a while back is that Nellie has a pretty close relationship with Abby. That has not been coming across at all in our scene work/runs, so I have asked them to find moments that indicate a love or closeness. They are still struggling to find something more than just argumentative attitudes toward each other but I can see that they are making progress.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Sunday	Rehearsal Number: 10
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 8-9pm	Date: 4/24/16

Between Tuesday and today’s rehearsal, we have scheduled, tweaked, and finally cancelled no fewer than three rehearsals. At one time or another, my entire cast agreed to the dates/times and slowly backed out due to a number of factors, some obviously more legitimate than others. I mention this because we were supposed to have our first off book rehearsal on Thursday to be followed by a “no more calling line” rehearsal on Saturday and neither of those happened. Instead, we compromised with a seated line-through. I had the actors sit facing each other while I sat on book for them. It was purely a rehearsal to reinforce memorization and to indicate where they are shaky on their lines. They were pretty weak, which made me mad because one of the conditions of me agreeing to reschedule rehearsals all week was that they would be solidly off

book when we returned to rehearsal. It is a short play and although they have a lot of other things taking up their attention, it has been over 3 weeks since our first rehearsal. It is also about a week and a half since I first requested they be off book. Despite the fact that we did not rehearse in situ, I think the rehearsal effectively scared them. They need to be scared. Our performance is in three days and they are not solidly off book.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Monday	Rehearsal Number: 11
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 5:30-6pm	Date: 4/25/16

Today, we were supposed to do a really quick run. We only had 30 minutes in the space together, so we agreed that the actors would set up the space and props and be ready to go right at 5:30. That obviously didn't happen. We got through about half of the play before we had to vacate the space for another rehearsal. The rehearsal was useful insofar as it revealed exactly how sloppy everything has become. Blocking had greatly deviated from what was established and lines were missing or slow to their tongues. The actors agreed that everything was a mess and that we needed to add another rehearsal before tech in order to feel confident in our product. I also noticed that all of the age work with Paige has really fallen apart. What had begun in the character sculpture exercise and developed through later rehearsals has just disappeared. I think that she is struggling to find Joan's age when her drunkenness/mental illness makes her so childlike. I encouraged her to find a balance. I think in many ways Joan is more hardened than she ever thought she would be. So, while her insanity can lean towards childlike, I think that her attitudes toward her marriage and her mistreatment can carry a lot more bitterness.

I came down on my actors today because it has consistently been a battle to get them to retain the progress we have made. Obviously, that is a larger challenge if you are not rehearsing every day, but things should not be slipping this much from rehearsal to rehearsal.

I won't bore you with all the details, conflicts, and run-arounds, but we agreed to rehearse again later tonight and after trekking out to Eldred at 10pm, that did not happen.

Production: <i>Bread</i>	Day: Tuesday	Rehearsal Number: 12
Director: Sara Bogomolny	Call: 10:00-12pm	Date: 4/26/16

Our solution to last night's conflict was to rehearse this morning before tech. I purposely scheduled a two hour block, which is longer than most of my other rehearsals. I began by having them sketch through their blocking with as many lines as were helpful. With their books in hand, we were able to reinstate most of the established blocking and adjust moments that were still awkward or ugly. After that, I had them do an Italian run off book. Finally, we did a full run of the play and I am SO glad to say that it was in fabulous shape. I think that the technical clean up really benefited them. The refresher on blocking actually let them focus less on blocking and more on their objectives/character work. I would have been satisfied with today's run had it been our performance and actually stopped taking notes after the first few minutes. The run timed in at ~33 minutes. It is running a little bit longer than I would like, but it held my attention and seemed to be moving at an appropriate pace, so I am choosing not to worry about the run time. There were still a couple of lines that were shaky. After our line-thru a couple days ago, I started to tell them that I was less concerned with word-perfection and more concerned with a story with

a through line. That said, there are still a couple spots that are shaky, though I know they know where they are and I'm not too worried.

BIOGRAPHY

Margaret Hunt has written eight full-length plays and five one-acts, in addition to *Bread*. She is the recipient of a Playwright's Fellowship from the Berrilla Kerr Foundation for her play *Loose Cannons*; two playwright's residencies from the Edward Albee Foundation; and a video-writing grant from the Philip Morris Foundation. A scene from her play *Loon Woman* was published in *Duo: Best Scenes from the 90s* by Applause Books. Monologues from short plays she has written or cowritten appear in *Monologues from the Road*, *Baseball Monologs*, and *The Elvis Book*, all from Heinemann Books. She is a member of the Women's Project and the Dramatists Guild.

ORIGINAL CAST

Bread was originally produced by Women's Project & Productions on April 29, 1995, at La Mama Galleria in New York City. It was directed by Elaine M. Smith, with the following cast:

Joan Arnold Caren Browning
Nellie Cavanaugh Kerry Metzler
Abby Arnold Heather Robinson

CHARACTERS

JOAN ARNOLD: A divorced poet and writer, forty-one.
NELLIE CAVANAUGH: Joan's sister, a social worker, early thirties.
ABBY ARNOLD: Joan's daughter, fourteen.

SETTING

The time is the early 1990s, late August. The place is a brownstone apartment in the West Forties, near Times Square, New York City.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

People seem to assume that women playwrights write autobiography — unless the play is a period piece or an obvious fantasy. If your main female character is infertile, people will talk to you after the play as if you are infertile. They will recommend a drug or a group. The first time I went to talk with a director about *Bread*, she said, "I have to ask you the obvious question." I didn't know what that was because I hadn't yet talked with any stranger about the play. She said, "Have you ever been in a mental hospital?" I wondered why she didn't ask me if I had a daughter or an ex-husband or an imagination.

BREAD



Joan's Infinite Loop of "Logic"

As the lights come up, we see the living room of a brownstone apartment, a Pullman kitchen upstage, two tall windows at right. The room looks like the scene of a war between chaos and order. Dominating it is a well-organized desk, which holds a giant Rolodex, a laptop computer, a cup of sharp pencils, stacks of files, legal pads, and a pile of unread New York Times.

The walls are dotted with 8 X 5 orange and white index cards arranged in an orderly fashion we cannot figure out. On the coffee table stands a paper cutter, blade up. Many surfaces are covered with piles of paper strips neatly organized by size and color. Only the dining table is clear. In contrast to the living room, the kitchen is chaotic. Draped across the kitchen cabinets is a hand-painted banner, "Still Tons o' Fun at Forty-One."

Joan Arnold enters carrying a breadboard with a stainless steel bowl on it covered with a cloth. She is sweating, trembling, and looks exhausted. She wears a clean chef's apron over a filthy bathrobe. She sets her board down on the table, lifts the cloth, holds the dough up to her nose and inhales deeply. Her hands stop trembling.

She seems to calm herself. She smiles.

(J) E UL to table

JOAN: In the winter, on Saturday mornings, Mama would make bread. And all of us would help. Even when we were really little. We'd make breadsticks. Mama called them "ghastlies" because the dough turned gray from our hands. We made them really long — like a foot long or longer — and she let us. She didn't even yell about their being grimy. We made braided bread with poppy seeds. Sometimes we made cinnamon rolls. They made the whole house smell spicy. All the windows fogged.

(The phone rings. Joan freezes. On the second ring, Joan puts down the bowl and covers it again.)

Pick up. (Ring.) Pick UP. (Ring.) Pick up, pick up, pick up!

(Ring. Then silence.)

God DAMN it! (J) X to desk

(She yanks the answering machine away from the phone and throws it out the window. Then she grabs an orange card and writes.)

STOMPS ON IT

Buy new machine.

(She stops writing, laughs.)

Yeah, right. With what?

(She tears up the orange card, takes another.)

Start small . . . Breathe.

(She thinks, then writes.)

Find out what day it is.

(Writes again.)

Don't ask anyone — underline that! Then how do I find — buy a newspaper! That's a very normal thing to do!

(Moves to front door.) J X US to door

People do that all the time. God, it's hot. → the door handle

(She unbolts and unlocks the door, then whirls around.)

Keys. Keys. Keys. Keys. Keys. Keys.

→ (She runs back into the room and picks up her purse.) J X off DES

Where do I buy newspapers? I know that. I'm sure I know that. I've bought millions of newspapers — No, be precise — I've bought thousands of —

(Sees herself in the mirror, drops purse, hurries back into room. Grabs a white card and writes.) L pole by chair(?)

Don't go out in bathrobe! Underline that and put it . . . on the front door.

(She does.) J X US to door

Oh, shit, that should be on an orange card!

(Tears it up.)

These are for work! Can't you remember anything?

(Begins to cry, stops, takes orange card, writes.)

Get . . . some . . . sleep. Okay, underline that and put it — No! Just do it. Go to bed . . . (Crying.) What for? I never sleep — I know! I'll have a drink. Is it after noon? I'll have a drink in bed. I know what I drink. I drink Scotch!

(Opens liquor cabinet and peers inside.) → drawer in desk

Well, hell, maybe I drink bourbon. Who gives a fuck.

(Doorbell rings long and loud. Joan freezes, then grabs the bowl and goes out the window. Nellie pushes the door open with a finger.)

JOAN: (Off.) Jesus, Nellie, stop right there.

NELLIE: You don't lock your door? In Times Square — N E US thru door

(Joan steps through window, without bowl.)

JOAN: I told you not to come!

NELLIE: You told me not to come yesterday. But when I got back from lunch today, there —

JOAN: Is it today? (Laughs.) That's a great question. No, it's yesterday, it's tomorrow, it's next week. It's always fucking today, it's never tomorrow.

(Joan begins to cry. She turns away from Nellie and dries her eyes on her apron.)

Nellie Undoes Joan's Principles



NELLIE: I had a message to call Joe —

(Nellie is stunned by the room's appearance.)

JOAN: Don't talk to my ex-husband behind my back!

J comes out a little

NELLIE: He was calling me because you —

JOAN: If he has to talk to me, he can call me himself. I don't need you to be his mouthpiece — What was I saying . . . I lost my train of — Oh, yeah, want some coffee? It's from yesterday. J moves slightly UL

NELLIE: Is that a joke? You don't drink old coffee.

JOAN: I'm economizing. Trying to save up money so Abby can get contact lenses —

NELLIE: Jesus Joan! Let Joe buy her contacts — N throws coat on chair

JOAN: Dancers do not wear glasses — I was going to take one of her dance

J sits at DES chair of table magazines and draw little glasses on all the dancers before she comes home. (Laughing.) But I'm afraid she wouldn't laugh. Milk? Wait — This is espresso. You can't put milk in espresso —

NELLIE: You have rules for drinking stale coffee?

JOAN: Without rules, we live in chaos.

NELLIE: No kidding.

JOAN: Joe already told her he'd buy her the lenses. He'd buy her the goddamn moon!

NELLIE: Is that so terrible?

JOAN: Yes! Cause I have to pay half!

NELLIE: Why? Joe makes a fortune.

JOAN: You don't understand.

NELLIE: Yes I do. You divorced a rich man for a dollar so —

JOAN: Don't start with me —

NELLIE: (Overlapping.) — so you could feel morally superior to him. You're morally superior to everybody —

JOAN: It's my daughter. It's my ex-husband. Shut up! Go take some other mother's kids away from her. That's your job!

NELLIE: That is *not* my job! And you know it! I don't take kids away from their mothers unless somebody's abusing them! You, of all people — (Nellie reads an index card.) What is all this? N moves toward the desk

JOAN: (Pleased.) You like the experiment? Looks messy, but it works.

NELLIE: It does?

J X to desk

JOAN: (Excited.) Yes, Miz Smarty Pants, it does. It's a *system*! I use orange cards to write down everything practical I have to remember and white ones for poems or ideas.

NELLIE: (Neutral.) Well, that's . . . terrific — that's just great.

Joan Defends Herself



JOAN: It is great! I know you're being sarcastic, Nellie, I'm not dense. I'm just . . . a bit disorganized. So I go through the cards and find out all the things I've been forgetting . . . Everything! It works.

(Joan notices her apron, takes it off, and drop-kicks it out the window.)

I'm doing okay with the old card system. I shoulda been a librarian. Hell, I still could be a —

NELLIE: I've never seen you . . . like this. This bathrobe is . . . stiff with —

JOAN: Pride. It's a new polyester fiber, Nellie. Repels soap and water and well-wishers and well water and well-meaning sisters and swell meaning —

NELLIE: STOP IT! Take a deep breath.

(Joan breathes deeply, then exhales at Nellie.)

My God! You smell like a gin factory.

JOAN: Scotch factory. I drank it to get to sleep. It worked — I passed out, but I had nightmares. Dreamed mother came to New York and started cleaning my apartment, and she did a great job, she threw out all my poems.

(Laughs.) So I bit her on the neck. J X to desk chair

NELLIE: Will you stop it? Joan! You look like death.

JOAN: So? You look like Mother. I think I'm ahead on that one —

(Nellie picks up a mound of paper strips.)

NELLIE: (Shocked.) You're cutting up your bills? on the table.

JOAN: Why not? I can't pay 'em. Why let them live?

NELLIE: Are you crazy?

JOAN: Am I? "YOU make the call!"

NELLIE: (Gently.) Joan, do you have any idea at all where Abby is?

JOAN: Of course I know where she. . . With her father. HAH! On . . . uh

Cape Cod! Joe takes her sailing on Cape Cod, I take her bowling at Port Authority. Oh, God! Abby made that. "Still tons o' fun at forty-one." Do I seem like tons o' fun to you, Nell? What was I — Oh, yeah, we celebrated my birthday the night she left. She wanted to — I was gonna take the banner down . . . Couldn't — God, I miss her . . . especially at night. If I can hear her breathing down the hall . . .

(She snorts.)

Like that, like a pig. She has hemorrhoids — not hemorrhoids — asteroids — No, I —

NELLIE: ADENOIDS!

JOAN: (Smiling.) Le mot juste! Thank you, Nellie. Adenoids. I think I have a short in my brain — Maybe I'm still drunk, from last night. Feel light-headed — J sits in arm chair

(Joan snorts again.)

Do You Know Where
Abby Is?

N → J

N X DIR to check out J's room

I love that sound . . . When I hear it? I know I'm not alone . . . Ummm. You cannot imagine how alone you can feel till you wake up in the middle of the night, in the middle of August, in the middle of Times Square. All you can hear are moans. Muffled. What was I — oh, the banner. I thought I'd leave it up till Abby comes home . . . next week or . . . I wrote it . . . somewhere.

(Joan flips through papers on the sofa and finds a rock-hard cake. She knocks on it.)

It's a birthday cake! Abby made it — a giant chocolate chip — we didn't have time to taste it. Joe came early — reminded me of our marriage. I'm saving it till she comes home . . . If she comes home —

NELLIE: Why wouldn't she come home? N re-enters DIR

JOAN: She's starting high school — Performing Arts yet — she needs all these dancer things . . . a thousand leotards, a million shoes . . . she wants to wear makeup, God help us . . . I mean if you had a choice between Park Avenue and Times Square, which one would you choose?

NELLIE: Joe doesn't live on Park Avenue.

JOAN: It's Park Avenue from here!

NELLIE: (Softly.) Do you know how long Abby's been gone, Joan?

JOAN: Why are you talking like that? Like I'm some sort of retarded client of yours?

NELLIE: Do you know how long Abby's been gone or not?

JOAN: (Confiding.) In days? . . . Well, I would know except — don't get mad, okay, Nellie? (Whispers.) I don't know what today is. Is it Thursday?

NELLIE: No, Joan, it's — J X to Nellie

JOAN: I MEANT MONDAY! I FELT it was Monday; I KNEW it was Monday, but I just didn't have enough faith in myself to go with my first instinct —

NELLIE: It's Tuesday. They meet CS

JOAN: Oh, God.

NELLIE: Have you gone outside since your birthday party?

JOAN: (Considering.) No . . . I don't think — Oh, yeah, I did — to the deli. Smiler's — where no one ever smiles — bought beer.

NELLIE: Do you remember if —

JOAN: (Very intense.) You ask so many questions. I just got up, Nell . . . don't even know what time it is . . . I hid my watch somewhere . . . maybe I wrote where on a card . . .

NELLIE: DON'T look for it! . . . Joan, something bad has happened to you. But if you don't tell me what it is —

JOAN: Nothing.

Joan's Desperation

J ← N

NELLIE: I don't believe that.

JOAN: That's what happened. Nothing. I have such a sense of it now. Nothing.

It fills the room. (J) X away from (N)

NELLIE: I do not understand a word you're —

JOAN: (Cheerily.) You know, Nell, there comes a time in everyone's wife — God,

* I think I'm still drunk. I don't mean everyone's wife . . . I mean — What do I mean?

NELLIE: Everyone's life — (J) sits US chair-table

JOAN: Yeah! When you have *had* it. I'm living in goddamn Times Square, teaching Rooskies how to maul the English language, working for RUBLES! So I can be free to write WHAT? (As a Russian.) "POEMS, Mrs? But vee already haf poems. Ve haf Poosh-keen!" It is totally unnecessary to write poetry. No one needs it. In fact, it just annoys people . . . more than you'd imagine, actually. So . . . (N) sits DS at desk
(Joan moves to paper cutter and holds up shredded paper.)

NELLIE: (Staggered.) You cut up your poems?

JOAN: I call it editing.

NELLIE: You *shredded* all your poems —

JOAN: I don't think they'll be missed. I need a new line of work. I'm thinking confetti. It's hot, but seasonal. Big on New Year's Eve, specially in this neighborhood — (N) stands

NELLIE: (Shaken.) Joan, you're scaring me —

JOAN: I *am* a poet! So what if nobody else knows it?

(Nellie moves to phone.)

I know it!

(Joan chops.)

I know it!

(She chops again.)

I know it!

(She chops. Nellie dials.) (N) paces in a large O on the phone

NELLIE: Hi, It's Nell . . . I won't be back today . . . A personal problem —

JOAN: (Still chopping.) SHE HAS TO SHRINK HER BIG SISTER'S HEAD.
(Nellie flips through her Filofax.)

NELLIE: I'm not really free — Right! I'll call you later, let you know — Oh will you cancel my four o'clock? . . . Mrs. Hernandez? Her number —

JOAN: Now's your chance, Mrs. Hernandez! Grab your kids before the Big Social Worker comes back. Pack the Doritos, Mrs. Hernandez! Get out of town!

NELLIE: One more wisecrack, and I'll hit you. I have to think!

JOAN: I can hear the wheels grinding . . . "exceeding small."

Nell calls for Back Up



(J) at bottom of DR pole

(Joan makes a fan with strips of paper and fans herself.)

NELLIE: Goddamit! Will you shut up!

JOAN: (In a child's voice.) We're not allowed to say shut up, Nellie.

NELLIE: (Panicky.) Joan, you're not like this!

JOAN: (Genuinely surprised.) I'm not?

NELLIE: No! Never. You're on top of things — everything — everyone.

JOAN: I liked you better when we were kids. You were afraid of me then —

NELLIE: I still am. Especially right now.

JOAN: You're getting hysterical.

NELLIE: Well, you *stink*!

JOAN: I take umbrage at that remark.

NELLIE: And you don't . . . make sense.

JOAN: You think Gertrude Stein doesn't make sense.

NELLIE: I'm not arguing. I admit it! You're older, you're smarter, you're taller than me. You're better than me in every way! You still need a doctor.

JOAN: Are you saying doctor so I won't think shrink? You treat me like a moron.

NELLIE: I want you to see Dr. Stern.

(Nellie dials.)

JOAN: Stern. Nice name for a shrink. Soooo nonthreatening —

NELLIE: I'm not *asking* you. (On phone.) Hello? . . . Dr. Stern, please . . . Yes, I'll hold. (To Joan.) Do you know that you forget the most basic things —

like locking your front door. Like — ugh — like taking a shower? (N) X to

JOAN: Wait'll you turn forty. You'll forget your name.

NELLIE: Dr. Stern? It's Nellie — No, I'm fine, it's my sister. The one I told you . . . Right, Joan!

JOAN: You talked about *me* in therapy? YOU SKUNK!

NELLIE: Yes, but today! . . . Or tomorrow, if we have to — just for observation. . . . Whichever one will take her . . . It's sort of an emergency, yes —

JOAN: I WON'T BE THERE, DR. STERNO!

NELLIE: So, you'll call when — Fine . . . Can I give her one of my trunks — Thanks. (Hangs up.) You have to get cleaned up, in case they have a bed —

JOAN: What?

NELLIE: He's gonna try to get you into a hospital tonight —

JOAN: WHAT?

NELLIE: Or tomorrow. Just for observation.

JOAN: Yeah. And they give me a cute little rubber dress.

NELLIE: You sign yourself in. Come out anytime you like!

JOAN: I'm not going! Therapy is crap. What the hell has it done for you? You've been paying that schmuck a fortune for three years, and what do you have

to show for it? You're afraid of waiters, for God's sake! You can't talk to mother on the phone; you get a facial tic. You can't even serve a meal without apologizing all over yourself —

NELLIE: You're right, Joan. I'm just a spineless jellyfish —

JOAN: Redundant!

NELLIE: — And you're superwoman!

JOAN: I don't need Freud! I read *Oedipus* — twice!

NELLIE: Do you need your daughter, Joan?

JOAN: What are you talking about? *

NELLIE: Joe called me this afternoon. He was supposed to bring Abby back this morning. Do you remember that?

(Joan shakes her head.)

But when they got here, the door was bolted — probably the one time you remembered to lock it. Did you hear someone pounding on the door this morning?

(Joan shakes her head.)

So they went to Joe's. They called all day, but nobody answered. Joe's furious. Abby's hysterical. Are you listening?

(Joan shakes her head.)

Fine. You just stay here and stink, and I'll tell Joe he can keep Abby, that you're giving him custody. Besides, if he saw you right now, he'd take you to court — and he'd win.

JOAN: You missed your calling, Nellie. You should've been a Nazi.

NELLIE: Just get into the shower.

JOAN: A typical Nazi line.

NELLIE: Joan, come on, get cleaned up. I'll help you.

JOAN: What if they call while I'm in the shower? I don't know what to wear. Everything I own makes me look crazy. . . . Do I have time to wash my hair?

NELLIE: Wash everything! Hospitals treat you better if you come clean.

JOAN: (Laughing.) Come clean, Nellie. Come clean. (Pulling on her sash.) GOD DAMMIT! I can't untie this stupid sash! I haven't taken it off in so long. it got stuck.

(Nellie takes Joan's sash.)

JOAN: DON'T! Don't touch me! I'm not helpless. I can take off my own clothes. thank you very much!

NELLIE/JOAN: Joan, let me — //Hand me those scissors. → on the desk

NELLIE/JOAN: Let me help you — //DON'T TOUCH ME!

JOAN: HAND EM OVER!

(Nellie hands Joan scissors. Joan cuts off her sash.)

JOAN: (Triumphant.) HAH! And you said I couldn't do it by myself!

NELLIE: Boy, is my face red. Here take this.

(She hands Joan a pill.)

JOAN: What is it? A chill pill? Good, I'm sweating like a pig.

(Joan seems to take the pill.)

Abby must be worried sick! She was supposed to come home — What day is it?

NELLIE: It's Tuesday. Call after you shower. And I'll pick out a very sane-looking outfit for you to wear.

JOAN: Okay. But not like yours. You definitely look like a nut.

(Joan exits. Lights fade for a beat. Lights up. Evening. Nellie cleans the kitchen.)

JOAN: (Off.) Was that Dr. Sterno on the phone?

NELLIE: Yes. They'll take you in the morning, at nine. (Under her breath.) Thank you, St. Jude, for doing the impossible.

JOAN: (Off.) Oh, great . . . Didn't they empty the loony bins in like 1970? Didn't I see a docu — Didn't they close all the — So why is this one still open? And why do I have to wait to be locked up in it?

(Joan enters, dressed, and carrying a quart of beer.)

NELLIE: You're not going to be locked up! . . . It's voluntary. You can come out any time you want to.

JOAN: I didn't ask you to clean my kitchen . . . Did I?

NELLIE: No. But I can't make dinner if it's this dirty.

JOAN: I don't remember asking you to make dinner, either. Why don't you go home and clean your own kitchen?

NELLIE: (Tensely.) Because Dr. Stern said I can't leave you alone.

JOAN: (Crying.) I'm sorry you hate taking care of me. Believe me, if I could take care of myself, I wouldn't ask you for a goddamn thing . . . I'm sorry I can't keep my mouth shut.

NELLIE: Don't cry now. You were going to call Joe, remember?

JOAN: (Panicky.) You called him, didn't you? You told him not to let Abby come here, didn't you? You said you'd —

NELLIE: I called him! But I said you'd call, too, talk to Abby. Try to sound more . . . up . . . when you call him.

JOAN: Up?

NELLIE: Okay, normal.

JOAN: To be normal, I need beer.

NELLIE: (Stunned.) You never drink beer.

Marital Problems
Revealed



JOAN: I do now.

(Joan holds up the bottle, showing it's empty.)

NELLIE: You drink it by the quart?

JOAN: Just like Grandma.

NELLIE: I'll get it. *(Sweetly.)* Why don't you call Joe now?

JOAN: *(Sweetly.)* Why don't you stop talking to me like I'm a borderline imbecile?

(Nellie hands Joan the beer.)

I'll do it! Just give me some privacy, okay?

(Nellie exits. Joan drinks fast and belches loudly.)

JOAN: *(As Hollywood Indian.)* Ah, evil spirit come out. Now you not crazy no more.

(She dials, then hangs up. She tries rehearsing, to sound normal.)

Hi, Joe! . . . The shrink said I need to . . . uh . . . go into the hospital for a few d — for a week, or maybe two.

(She suddenly seems to be talking to the real Joe.)

I did! . . . NO! I asked him about Abby — wait a minute! I wrote it down — Don't let Abby come here. Please don't let Abby . . . I don't want her to see me like this. Nooooo — *(Aware of the break.)* I don't want anyone to see me like this — I don't want to see me like this . . .

(She pulls the towel over her head and sits still.)

JOAN: *(Singing.)* They're coming to take me away, ha ha. They're coming to take me away, ha ha, ho-ho, hee-hee. . .

(Nellie enters, sees Joan, bangs her head on the wall.)

NELLIE: *(Sincerely.)* Please, God, please help me —

JOAN: I didn't know you still prayed.

NELLIE: Only in moments of desperation.

JOAN: Oh, God. A desperate woman cooking dinner —

(Nellie serves dinner.)

I'm not hungry.

NELLIE: I don't care. You're eating.

JOAN: If I eat, I'll throw up.

NELLIE: Fine. As long as you eat first. That's nature's way.

JOAN: I think I'd die if I ate anything.

NELLIE: Eat. You'll feel better. You're showing all the symptoms of a starving person . . . who just drank a lot of beer.

JOAN: I never liked beer. Never drank it in my life except when someone forced it on me, like at some goddamn barbecue. I hate barbecue. I hate beer. Except for right now. I used to be quite discriminating about wine, though

after Joe. Joe grew up with shoe trees, with little leather pouches for things.

Joe could speak French. Menu French.

(She gulps beer.)

Joe had a lot of class.

(She belches.)

NELLIE: Eat!

JOAN: I'll eat the rice, if I can.

(Joan eats one grain of rice.) → with her hands

Did I ever tell you how to make perfect rice?

NELLIE: A hundred times. Just eat it, okay?

JOAN: I can't. You've served the hamburger so that it's bleeding on the rice — very unappetizing. And you cooked the rice in plain water, when I told you I had a wonderful homemade chicken stock in the fridge —

NELLIE: Okay, *don't* eat. Drink. Throw up! PASS OUT. JUST SHUT UP!

JOAN: Don't get testy about it. If you'd ever listen, you'd be a fine cook. Anyone who can read, can cook —

NELLIE: *(Overlapping.)* CAN COOK! I know. When you're in the hospital, I hope they realize they've got Julia Child locked up in the psycho ward!

JOAN: *(Panicky.)* You said I wouldn't be locked up! You promised! You said I could come out anytime I —

NELLIE: You can, Joan. I'm sorry. I lost my temper.

JOAN: You want nothing but praise from me. Well, I cannot praise a meal that is an insult to the word *meal*.

NELLIE: Fine. I'll be in Abby's room eating my bloody rice.

(Nellie takes her plate and exits. Joan cuts up her food with care, then tosses it like a salad, throwing in any food from table — bread, butter, etc.)

JOAN: I spent ten years of my life, my entire marriage, letting cheeses come to room temperature, chilling champagne ninety minutes, serving hot food on hot plates. Joe knew all the rules. Bake plates at 225 for four minutes for medium/rare plates, right, Joe? You made me a wonderful cook. You made me . . . Everybody said so. Everybody but you. You always found the fly in the ointment. "Just a *soupçon* too much garlic, just a *soupçon* too much tarragon." I always wondered if I pissed into the beef bourgignon, what would you say? "Just a *soupçon* too much . . . *Je ne sais quoi*." What was wrong with me, Joe? Why was I the only one you didn't want to fuck? A *soupçon* too much blue collar? A *soupçon* too much brain? GODDAMIT, ANSWER ME!

(She stops, shivers, looks at mess of food she has made, and trembles.)

(Nellie enters.)

NELLIE: I just thought of something. You shouldn't be drinking. I gave you a tranquilizer —

JOAN: I didn't take it. I palmed it. I don't like drugs — *(J) X to purse at desk*
(Joan grabs her purse.)

It's in here. If you want it, Nellie, you can have it. You seem awfully nervous to me.

NELLIE: NO! Thanks, Joan. But you can't take it either now that you drank all that beer. We'll just have to hope you fall asleep on your own.

JOAN: I never sleep. When I get in bed, my mind races, repeating the same words over and over. If I ever get to sleep, I dream I'm word processing — in Latin — over and over the same words — full of mistakes —

(Abby enters. She wears glasses and carries a bag.)

ABBY: *(Laughing.)* Somebody left the front door open. I bet I know who it was, Mom.

(Joan freezes in her chair.)

Before you yell, wait one second. I brought you a present from Cape Cod that you need for the hospital.

JOAN: *(Trembling.)* Okay. Sure. Fine.

NELLIE: Does your dad know you're here?

ABBY: I left a note. He went running right after you called, Nellie.
(Silence. Abby seems puzzled.)

JOAN: *(Shaken.)* Well, hello, lovey.

(Abby and Joan embrace.) *(A) approaches (J)*
You look like you grew at least two inches. I think you're almost as tall as Nellie.**

NELLIE: In your dreams!

ABBY: Everyone in this family is obsessed with height.

JOAN: So where's this present, huh? Nellie, could you get me a beer? You can't stay long, you know, darling. *(J) sits @ desk*

ABBY: I know. I know. Wait until you open this. You will love this present!
(Hands paper bag to Joan, who opens it.) *(A) X to chair*

Lobster slippers! Are they the best, or what? *USL*

JOAN: Should I wear these to the hospital? They might move me to the criminally insane section.

ABBY: *(Laughing.)* No. See, you wear lobster slippers and everybody in the place — doctors and patients — will watch their step around you. They mess with you, you pinch 'em. *(J) sits at desk chair*
(Joan puts on slippers, furry red lobsters with feelers that bob up and down)

Abby to the Rescue?

JOAN: These are great, aren't they, Nellie? They are definitely a conversation starter . . . If the other patients are able to speak, that is . . .

(Joan begins to cry silently. She stands in her lobster slippers like a statue, tears rolling down her cheeks.)

ABBY: Mom! MOTHER! *(Abby hugs Joan.)* Don't cry, Mom, don't cry! It's okay. You don't hafta wear the slippers. *(A) goes to sit at (J) ft*

NELLIE: Abby, I think you should go now.

(Abby strokes Joan's face.)

ABBY: DON'T DO THIS, MOM. DON'T CRY LIKE THIS. *(Abby shakes Joan gently.)* PLEASE, MOM, MAKE NOISE!

NELLIE: Come on, it's late. Your dad will be worried.

(Nellie pulls Abby away from Joan, who remains stiff. Abby shoves Nellie away.) *(N) pulls (A) toward her room* *USL*

ABBY: I AM NOT LEAVING. DON'T YOU TOUCH ME. SHE'S MY MOTHER. SHE'S MINE.

(Abby leads Joan to a chair, and seats her gently.) *(A) brings (J) to table, (N) sits in chair* *USL*

It's okay, Mom. You don't hafta make noise if you don't want to. It's just when you cry like this without making any sounds, it scares me.

(Abby climbs into Joan's lap, her arms around Joan's neck, begins to pat Joan's face.) *(A) sits in (J)'s lap*

ABBY: I don't need contacts. I don't need anything. Don't worry about money.

I can get a job. You don't hafta go away. I can take care of you. I'll come home for lunch. I can make soup and brownies and . . . whip cream. I can vacuum! You don't hafta do anything, okay, Mom? *Okay?*

NELLIE: You have to go home now. *(N) stands up*

ABBY: DON'T TOUCH HER! *(A) stands up*

NELLIE: GO! NOW!

ABBY: You go! This is my house!

NELLIE: DAMmit, Abby, you're no help if —

ABBY: She's not your Mother! *(A) takes 2 steps to (N)*

NELLIE: Yes, SHE IS! . . . I mean, oh, hell . . . It doesn't matter, you have to leave right now!

ABBY: Shut up! Just shut up! *(A) retreats to sit on desk*

JOAN: *(Flatly.)* Don't say shut up to your aunt. It's rude.

ABBY: Are you okay, Mom? *(A) turns to face (J)*

JOAN: No, my love, I am not okay.

NELLIE: Will you tell her she has to leave, Joan?

JOAN: Does she have to leave, Nellie?

NELLIE: Yes. I think we should all go to bed.

JOAN: (Flatly.) Some of us have nothing to do there.

ABBY: You don't hafta go to the hospital, Mom —

JOAN: Yes, I do, Ab.

ABBY: (Wildly.) No, you don't! There are *crazy* people there!

NELLIE: (Flatly.) There are crazy people here, too.

ABBY: (To Nellie.) Don't you talk! (To Joan.) I didn't say shut up —

JOAN: I want to go to the hospital, Ab. I need them to take care of me. When

I come home, you can take care of me. Now go back to Daddy's. I want you to.

ABBY: Okay. But tomorrow, I'm coming to the hospital. I'm going to say I'm sixteen or however old I have to be. And if they don't let me in, I will throw a tantrum like you wouldn't believe.

NELLIE: I'll believe it.

JOAN: Go downstairs with her, okay, Nell? Put her in a cab.

ABBY: I don't need to take a cab —

JOAN: That's true. I need you to take a cab, okay? Nellie, please —

NELLIE: I'm coming. I'm coming.

ABBY: I'll see you tomorrow, Mom, no matter what!

(Abby hugs Joan and exits.) *A* X to *J*, E USC
NELLIE: Thank God. And I always say, "I just love kids." Get ready for bed,

okay, Joan? I'll be just a —

(Joan moves to the kitchen.) *J* X to *USL*

JOAN: I can't. I have bread rising. I have to bake it before I can go to the hospital.

NELLIE: What?

JOAN: I made the dough this afternoon. It won't be good by the time I get home again.

(Joan picks up the bowl.)

NELLIE: It's a hundred degrees in here. Are you crazy?

JOAN: Nellie, she's out there by herself — in the dark!

NELLIE: Fine. Do whatever you want! You always do.

(Nellie exits. Joan turns out lights and goes to kitchen. She lights candles and sets them at the edge of her table. She oils her hands and begins kneading the dough. As she speaks, she shapes the dough into loaves and other things.)

JOAN: In the winter, on Saturday mornings, Mama would make bread. And all of us would help . . . I don't usually make bread in summer. Or in the dark. But it's cooler now. I have to get it done before I go into the hospital tomorrow. You don't need a lot of light to make bread. You can feel your way. It's soft, smooth, rubbery. You can play with it if you want to.

~~It's okay. Not like pie dough. "DON'T PLAY WITH THE PIE DOUGH, YOU'LL MAKE IT TOUGH!"~~

Mama was always happy when we made bread. She didn't work on Saturdays. Or Sundays. Otherwise, she always worked, except when she had a baby. Nellie's the baby. I'm the oldest. I'm in charge here . . .

I'm gonna make some breadsticks for Nellie. Nellie likes to make breadsticks in circles. I like to make long, fat, thick, straight breadsticks. I should tell that to Dr. Stern. (Laughs.) I tried to tell him about making bread, but I don't think he understood. *(N) E USC*
(Nellie appears in the doorway, but Joan doesn't see her.)

I'm happy doing it. I don't know why it makes me cry. ~~Most women cry when they cook.~~ Women throughout history have cooked and cried at the same time. It isn't unusual, and it doesn't affect the taste of the food. My mother yelled when she cooked. Banged pans together. Broke things. But she never cried.

I don't want Mother to know I'm in the psycho ward. She thinks I'm perfect . . . I used to be . . . I used to be . . . perfect . . . won all the prizes . . . made the beds . . . the house was always chaotic . . . everybody's shoes on the stairs . . . I made order . . . I was the mother when the mother wasn't home . . . My mother would be ashamed to have a daughter who blubbered at everything . . . Just because she didn't cry when Daddy died didn't mean she wasn't sad. But she was afraid that if she let herself cry she'd never stop . . . And someone had to go to work and make money . . . to feed us, all five of us . . . buy shoes . . .

Making bread makes people happy, and it's simple to do. You can't make a mistake. Everyone will like it. No one will say homemade bread is bad or dumb or unoriginal . . . When I was in college, I worked in a bakery, ~~made pastry . . . eclairs . . . cream puffs — hundreds at a time . . .~~ But I always liked making bread best . . .

Maybe I should have stayed in the bakery . . . ~~given up pastry . . .~~ made bread.

(Joan scoops up flour in each hand and slowly rubs it all over her face.)

NELLIE: (Breaking down.) Oh, Jo-Jo — *(N) comes to (J) fr. behind*

JOAN: I need some holder. Hold me, Nellie. Please.

(Nellie wraps her arms around Joan from behind. Silence.)

Remember, we used to say, "Gimme some holder, Mom. I need some holder" . . . NELLIE! Don't let go!

(They remain still, Nellie's arms locked around Joan as the lights fade.)

END OF PLAY

Rehearsal Schedule

Sunday April 3, 2016; 3-4:30pm

Read through and character discussions, full cast

Wednesday April 6, 2016; 9-11pm

Block the whole show, call Abby later

Sunday April 10, 2016; 3-4:30pm

Work through whole show, call Abby later

Wednesday April 13, 2016; 9-11pm

Stumble through, off book

Scene work as necessary

Friday April 15, 2016; 3-4pm

Scene work as necessary

Sunday April 24, 2016; 3-4:30pm

Run show

Monday April 25, 2016; 7-8:30pm

Run show

Tuesday April 26, 2016; time TBD

Tech

Wednesday April 27, 2016; time TBD

PERFORMANCE!