

If You are Reading This

A play by Samuel Bernstein

In one afternoon, a family grapples with death, debt, taxes, and love—finding connection and insight that may or may not transform their future.

Eccentricity and outrage seem to rule the day as the Hoffman family meet to sell their late mother's Upper East Side brownstone and divide a houseful and lifetime of memories. It's a day of high emotion. The ancient dramas of childhood run smack into the fresh grief of mourning. Confusion about their mother's death and about each of their roles in her illness and demise threatens to escalate into an all-out war. But family dynamics turn on a dime, new alliances form, and unexpected humor, generosity of spirit, and love offer the hope of a different outcome.

What starts out as a day of endings, instead becomes a moment where the masks come off. What does it mean to be in midlife and fear you've made all the wrong choices? What does it mean to carry unbearable burdens? But also, what does it mean to find faith and beauty in everything that family is—as well as in everything it isn't and can never be...?

SYNOPSIS:

It is a week after the death of their mother, and oldest sister ANITA handles everything. She has always been “the responsible one” in the family, taking care of the others, including her sisters GUINEVERE and SALLY, and their brother TODD. Once upon a time, these four siblings had another sister, Sarah, but she died 25 years ago, and since then Anita has been like a mother to her child, NATHAN. His father's identity was never known.

This day, the one day set aside to decide what will become of their childhood home and all of its contents, has weighed heavily on everyone's shoulders. Anita, who took on the financial burden of their mother's long illness, feels she deserves to have her pick of the possessions that remain. Quick to the point and positive she's right, she feels used by her family—sometimes with good reason. Her resentment and anger drive her into something of a frenzy.

Her sister Guinevere is funny, bright and attractive, but beginning to realize her life isn't working. She is stuck in an unsatisfying marriage and has found herself without any allies. She has always been more afraid of things than she admits. During their mother's illness, Guinevere's fear kept her away from the hospital. Guilt sometimes tears into her dreams, and Anita takes full advantage of that when she is of a mind to. The friction between the two sisters has a long history, and will ultimately be at the very center of what threatens to be an all-out war.

Their sister Sally feels terrible about not having been able to spend much time with their mother during her illness. But the fact that she is almost nine months pregnant, and has four other children plus a husband at home, seemed like insurmountable obstacles. She is sunny, loyal, and always trying to care

for others. People often think she is joking when she talks, and she's used to people laughing. But she rarely means to be funny, she just has a very original way of looking at the world.

Everyone is used to disregarding baby brother Todd and his opinions. Though he recently married a very wealthy woman, his family was not only surprised (shocked even), but they still have trouble thinking of him as rich, let alone successful. But Todd isn't quite as passive as he may seem, he just doesn't know his mind very well. And he has become used to maintaining a silence about his thoughts when he is with his family.

Their nephew Nathan mourns his grandmother perhaps more than anyone. He spent the last couple of years staying home and caring for his "Granny." He was the one bathing her, holding her when she would awaken, terrified, in the middle of the night. Her death has left him feeling aimless and frightened of the outside world. His loyalties are split between Guinevere and Anita. Guinevere was always his buddy, but he feels badly let down by her, and by how little she helped during Granny's long illness. He is sensitive, trusting, and painfully aware of how much he has had to grow up and how much he has lost.

As tempers flare and feelings are hurt through the course of the play, Anita is hell-bent on doing just about anything to have things go her way. But when it seems that victory may be within her grasp, she is forlorn—she wonders not whether this family is going to come out intact, but whether they were ever really a family at all. In this highly charged atmosphere, the fight to retain some sense of themselves as a family takes all of the charm, intensity, humor, and insanity they can muster.

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