

THE DIVIDING TREE

A Play in Two Acts

by
Mark D. Ogle

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STORY OF THE PLAY

A unique and relevant holiday drama that tells the story of a newly formed, mixed-religion family and the sometimes humorous, sometimes tense conflicts that arise during the Christmas/Hanukkah season.

Sam, a Christian, and Michelle, a Jew, agreed when they married that, even though neither was especially religious, they would continue to celebrate the holidays the way their kids were used to. But it may not be that simple. Sam has a 13-year-old daughter, Marie, who is about to be confirmed, while Michelle has a 17-year-old son VJ, who rejects religion in favor of saving the environment, and 9-year-old daughter Alexis, who's much more interested in the Christmas tree than the new menorah her mother just bought.

Tensions rise when Michelle arrives home from work in a hurry to fix a Hanukkah dinner to find Sam putting up a Christmas tree. Normally a workaholic and currently in the middle of a defending a large chemical company, he's totally forgotten the dinner. As Sam and Michelle argue, the kids start arguing, until finally Marie pushes the Christmas over onto the floor and runs out of the house with the menorah. Their mixed beliefs are further emphasized by the arrival of Sam's mom and Michelle's dad.

The age-old question, if a tree falls will anyone hear it, can be answered, in this case, with a positive yes as ultimately they each learn bridge their differences and find common ground to become a loving family.

About 2 hours.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 2 w, 1 teen girl, 1 teen boy, 1 girl)

SAMUEL BARTON: 35-45, prominent lawyer, recently divorced and remarried.

MARIE BARTON: Sam's 13-year-old daughter, plain-looking, studying for confirmation in a liberal Christian congregation.

NORA BARTON: Sam's mother, 55-65.

SHEL (*Michelle*) BARTON: Sam's new wife, 35-45, starting in real estate, on her third marriage, first time married to a non-Jewish man.

VJ (*Victor Joseph*) MYERS: Shel's 17-year-old son from her first marriage. Rebellious, very much devoted to social and environmental issues, an atheist.

ALEXIS KLEIN: Shel's 9-year-old daughter from her second marriage. Pretty, socially advanced, and precocious, has had very little education in Judaism.

JERRY SOLOMON: Shel's father, 55-65.

SETTING

The setting is an interior and exterior portion of a typical American middle class suburban home, the home of Samuel Barton. The interior portion of the set includes a living, dining area with a large dining room table (*seats 6*) and a Christmas tree. Adjacent to the living/dining area is the kitchen, defined by a counter. There are two exits and entrances from this interior set to an outdoors environment; a front door of the house, and a side or back door, neither necessarily visible.

The exterior portion of the set represents a yard area of the Barton home. In one area of the stage is a flat section of the roof, which must be sat upon and stood upon safely. A ladder is present for access. There are three dream scenes in Act I, which are defined by changes in lighting. There are at least two chairs outside which are used as patio furniture, front seats of Shel's car in Act I, and nightclub chairs in one of the dream scenes.

ACT I

(AT RISE: Onstage SAM, standing next to a partially decorated Christmas tree, and SHEL, sitting in one of two downstage chairs, which are arranged to represent the front seat of her car. Sam is holding, and looking at, his favorite ornament with a sense of nostalgia. Shel is holding her new menorah, with an equivalent sense of nostalgia. The LIGHTS slowly rise across the entire stage. It is unusually warm for an early winter day. VJ is sitting on the roof, dressed in short sleeves and shorts, soaking up the rays, listening to music with headphones. He has a cordless phone near him. We hear a section of Bruce Cockburn's "If a Tree Falls...." from his "Big Circumstance" album. AUTHOR'S NOTE: With the exception of this song, all of the other tunes sung by VJ, may be substituted for, and replaced with a different modern song, preferably one with environmental or contextual connections.)

VJ: *(Sings.)* "If a tree falls in the forest, will anybody hear?"
(Sings louder.) "If a tree falls in the forest, will anybody hear?"

(SAM hears VJ and becomes annoyed. He is tense.)

SHEL: *(Hears the same song on the car radio.)* I can't believe that song is on the radio too. *(Mimes turning car radio off. Sound ends. SHEL looks at watch.)*

VJ: *(Continues singing.)* "Can anybody he-ear ... the forest falling."

SAM: *(Steps outside.)* Could you tone down the whale calls a little bit?

VJ: *(Takes headphones off.)* Was I singing too loud?

SAM: I'm sure the whole neighborhood enjoyed the concert.

VJ: What's going on anyway? You're never home this early in the afternoon.

SAM: *(Some sarcasm.)* I wanted to spend some quality time with my stepson.

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VJ: *(More sarcasm.)* Gee, I'm so overloaded with homework.

SAM: *(Looks around.)* I can't believe how warm it is. I think I'll hang some Christmas lights. *(Goes back inside.)*

VJ: Oh, joy.

(VJ picks up phone and dials, SAM exits offstage. LIGHTS shift to SHEL in car. She looks up and gets out of car.)

SHEL: *(Calls.)* ALEXIS!!! OVER HERE!

(ALEXIS runs on. She is wearing stylish clothes.)

ALEXIS: Mom? What are you doing here?

SHEL: I told you I'd pick you up from school. It's the first night of Hanukkah. Grandpa Jerry is coming over for dinner, and there's lots of work to do around the house.

ALEXIS: First night of presents?

SHEL: Yes, ma'am. Where's your sister? Doesn't she walk home with you?

ALEXIS: No. I walk home with my friends, and she's NOT my sister.

SHEL: You know what I --

ALEXIS: She's my STEPsister.

SHEL: I know she's not you fav—

ALEXIS: I HATE MARIE!!

(SHEL motions for ALEXIS to get into the car, and she does. LIGHTS shift to roof. VJ is talking on the phone. SAM walks outside, unseen, with some Christmas lights.)

VJ: Hey, Paul, did you hear? There's somebody speaking tomorrow afternoon at the college about the ozone layer. We can cut school after lunch and catch it. Can you drive? Sure ... great, bye.

SAM: *(Climbs ladder with lights.)* Exciting plans?

VJ: No ... just ... uh was comparing notes with Paul for a math exam Friday. *(Holding phone.)* Can you imagine what life would have been like before cordless phones?

SAM: I could live just fine without any phone calls today.

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(MARIE runs on, excited.)

MARIE: Dad?

SAM: *(Leaves lights on roof, and climbs down.)* Hi, Marie, how're you doing? *(Big embrace.)*

MARIE: Are you sick?

SAM: Trying to get an early start on those holiday rituals. The Morrisises already have their lights up.

MARIE: Your law office burnt down?

SAM: Sometimes I wish.

VJ: C'mon, we couldn't survive without those six figure paychecks.

SAM: We've survived this far without any.

MARIE: *(Can't believe he's home.)* What happened to the big hearing?

SAM: Hey, Marie, you wanna help me hang some lights?

MARIE: That's OK.

VJ: Miss Perfect Test Score is scared of heights also?

MARIE: Ladders.

SAM: No big deal, I'll hang them later. Can you believe how warm it is? It's 75 degrees in December?

MARIE: Tell me about it. Half the class wore shorts today.

SAM: So where's Alexis? I thought she walks home with you?

MARIE: She walks home with her 10,000 little friends.

SAM: Pretty popular, huh?

MARIE: Oh, Alexis, *she's so cool.* *(Makes gagging gesture with finger toward throat.)* Bleah!!

SAM: A little jealous?

MARIE: Jealous? Of that stupid --

SAM: Marie!

MARIE: I HATE ALEXIS!

SAM: *(Puts arm around HER shoulder.)* Cmon, we've all had to sacrifice.

(SAM walks with MARIE inside as the LIGHTS shift back to the car. SHEL is driving. ALEXIS is holding the menorah.)

End of Freeview

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