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SPLITS

THE CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

A Play in One Act
by
Jerome McDonough

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(SPLITS)

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Dedication

To R.M. for tireless, struggling help out of a bottomless pit.

And

**To Judy Collins, whose every note has touched my soul for
over thirty years. SPLITS' creation was accompanied by
your warm and loving voice on compact disk.**

And to SPLITS' first voices:

**Jeremy Hoffman, Jennifer Tamplen, Jennifer Hueber,
Nicholas Kachiros, James Pratt-Mullins,
Brian Harlan, Cathy Gonnering,
Christy Roberts, Marc King,
Brandy Dietz, Alexis Scott,
Dryller Hisel, and
Nathan Peña**

ABOUT THE PLAY

Like Jerome McDonough's other Young Adult Awareness Plays, this one should be seen by parents as well as the young adults.

The characters in *SPLITS* are COD-fish—"Children of Divorce." Everybody knows that the real losers in divorce are the children of the divorcing couple. This poignant play bares the souls of a typical group of codfish. Hopefully, it will help some of the codfish in the audience cope.

Will it have any effect on parents? Will it prevent some about-to-happen divorces? Probably not. Will it lead some young adults to think carefully before rushing into marriage? Possibly. Hopefully.

In our selfish society, where "My happiness is the only happiness that matters," there seems to be little that can be done to prevent divorce. But—who knows?—this play may help. At the very least it should help some codfish to heal. It deserves a showing on your stage.



The cast is variable; it may be fairly small or very large. It may be predominantly male or predominantly female. Playing time varies from about 30 minutes to 35 minutes, depending on whether the "optional section" is included.

About the optional section, Jerome McDonough stated: "As a playwright I wish to have all sections of the play included. On the other hand, I would rather see the rest of the play produced than to have much that is positive denied an audience because of one or two objectionable scenes." The optional section is noted in the text.



All characters depicted in *SPLITS* are entirely fictional. Any similarities between these characters and any person, persons, organizations, or any entity, living or dead, are entirely coincidental.

Characters

- BRIGITTE**—teen-age daughter living with her father
JORDAN—teen-age son living with his mother
EVAN—adjusting child of divorce*
DREW—child of multiple divorces*
CARY—teen-ager living with father*
JOEY—teen-ager living with mother*
BERNADETTE—teen-ager of a potentially divorced couple*
LEE—teen-ager living with mother*
IAN—a child of divorce who is still struggling*[Character may be cut if insufficient performers are available]
WALLACE—never-to-repeat runaway*[Character may be cut and his lines assigned to CASEY]
AUGUST—an opportunistic child of divorce*
PERRY—a child of divorce, then double successful re-marriage*
CASEY—a recovered rebellious teen-ager, now a peer advisor*

The following roles may be assigned to additional performers, or their lines may be assigned to above cast members; or, if necessary, omitted.

- FOSTER**—older teen-age brother of Joanna
JOANNA—younger teen-age sister of Foster
VIVIAN—older teen-age sister of Craig
CRAIG—younger teen-age brother of Vivian

Adult Figures

- CARROLL**—a female counselor
DAD—all male parents
MOM—all female parents
(One actor may play all Dad roles and another may play all Mom roles)

Optional Section

The scene involving Daryl will be suitable for some performing companies and not for others. Each production company and its administrators must decide if this sector of the play will be included or cut. Permission from the publisher to cut this character is not required.

- DARYL**—teen-ager living with mother*

*Characters which may easily be gender-switched. In some cases, name changes are necessary. Please correct gender references.

AFTERGLOW

It is highly recommended both here and in the script itself that counselors or social workers or other qualified adults be available to audience members after the presentation of **SPLITS**. Adolescent Children of Divorce will, hopefully, identify with one or more characters in the play and find comfort in that identification. But they may also want a forum in which to tell their own stories. Having professionals on hand to work with groups will bring the cycle of **SPLITS** full circle to audience members.

Printed programs must be available for all audience members. The program should include the phone numbers and addresses of local support groups, organizations, and individuals who specialize in this field.

Children of Divorce in the audience may want to talk to someone immediately and the combination of professionals in attendance and the phone numbers of local people and agencies in the program should cover all bases.

—Jerome McDonough

AUDIENCE SUITABILITY

Performances of the play for pre-adolescent children is probably not advisable. There are other plays which address the subject of divorce much more successfully for younger children. **SPLITS** is a play for adolescents, their parents, and other interested adults.

SPLITS

[At rise, there is a variety of mostly mismatched furniture and several stage levels formed by a variety of platforms and ramps and blocks. This is only one of an infinite number of possible sets. All that is required is the suggestion of an area where between 15 and 25 teenagers and their sponsor might comfortably gather as a loosely organized support group. Some kind of opening MUSIC accompanies the rising LIGHTS or opening curtain. Most of the CAST will move onto the set visiting ad-lib in character and finding places near friends, or, perhaps, an isolated spot for whatever reason. CARROLL, the moderator/counselor, finds a place, just off Center Stage, from which to "run" things. The MUSIC fades out as BERNADETTE, obviously new to the group, enters]

BERNADETTE. *[Hesitantly]* Is this... the class?

DREW. Nobody here's got class.

CARROLL. It's not exactly a class, but I think it's the place you're looking for.

CASEY. *[To Bernadette]* So, how long have you been a codfish?

BERNADETTE. Codfish?

CASEY. Child-of-divorce—C.O.D. We're all codfish.

BERNADETTE. I'm trying to not be a codfish. I thought a support group might help.

CARROLL. Welcome... *[slight pause, waiting for BERNADETTE to introduce herself]*

BERNADETTE. Bernadette.

CARROLL. Bernadette. *[Addressing the whole group]* We decided we'd each tell our stories today. And remember—whatever is said here stays here. Confidentiality is vital. *[ALL nod or make an affirmative statement]* Who'd like to begin? *[BRIGITTE raises her hand. CARROLL nods to her]* Brigitte.

BRIGITTE. My father's the best, really the best in the world. So how can he be so dense? Mom's been gone awhile. And that's, well, it's OK with me. I kind of like taking care of the younger kids. And we all cook and clean. It's not perfect but we get along. Dad keeps everything running... But sometimes it would be nice to have a woman around. There are things that just bounce all over inside a man's brain and never land. A couple of years ago, I told him I needed a training bra. He asked me:

DAD. What do you want to train?

BRIGITTE. The underwear question got so complicated that now he gives me, are you ready for this—a lingerie allowance. He'll say:

DAD. Just buy what you need and be sure it's decent.

BRIGITTE. I ask if he wants to see the stuff.

DAD. NO!

BRIGITTE. So communication in that area is closed. But I guess what I really need is—the chance to talk to somebody who's actually had the experiences. I try to find stand-ins—some teachers I feel close to, a few ladies at church. But I'm still looking for the perfect confidante. She's gotta be out there.

CARROLL. Suggestions, anybody?

*SOME PARTICIPANT. [**This "nameless character" device will be used throughout the script to parcel out individual, basically non-character-connected lines.*] Do you know Mrs. Siwel?

BRIGITTE. Siwel?

SAME PARTICIPANT. She's the counselor for Juniors.

BRIGITTE. I'm just a Sophomore.

SAME PARTICIPANT. Doesn't matter. It might take a few days to get in, but it's worth it.

BRIGITTE. [*Writing*] Siwel. Thanks.

CARROLL. Who now?

JORDAN. Me.

CARROLL. You're on, Jordan.

JORDAN. My situation's the opposite of Brigitte's. No dad at my place. I heard about this book. It said women were from one planet and men were from another. Now while I'm checking out the cheerleaders and the twirlers, I'm glad the book's not literally true. But when it comes to talking to my mother, I wonder if separate planets is enough distance. She's cool and it's not like we need anything. But communication ...AAAHHHH! Like, I told her, "Coach says I need a cup for athletics." She said:

MOM. Just take any one you like out of the kitchen cabinet.

JORDAN. So I explained it to her. Result? The two most embarrassed people in America. But the real problem isn't misunderstandings. The problem is: "Who do you talk to when something's really bothering you?"

CARROLL. Ideas?

SOME PARTICIPANT. [*To Jordan*] Coaches have helped me.

ANOTHER PARTICIPANT. And church youth ministers. They're trained for that.

BERNADETTE. None of this covers my problem. I'm doing all I can to get a divorce stopped.

EVAN. Maybe you can get it stopped. I hope so. But there are lots of things to consider. For my family it was the only answer. Getting the divorce, I mean. Everything Dad did drove Mom crazy and everything she did made him nuts. It's like waiting for a bomb to go off any second. It keeps every cell in your body ready to spring to avoid the explosion. One weird thing, though. We all loved Mom and we all loved Dad. But none of us could love THEM. The judge must have been down our road before. She awarded Mom and Dad joint custody of us—but they were never to BOTH keep any of us at the same time. Now part of us are with him and part are with her for awhile and then every couple of months we switch. There's not as much money either place so things are kind of tight but it's worth it. And we're all mending. But, best of all, if you've never felt it before, just being able to live in peace is great.

CARROLL. Let me drop in some pre-history. My family never had a divorce but we SHOULD have. First, everybody'd scream at everybody. Then it was a universal silent treatment. Then guilt trips. We should have been on the cover of DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY magazine. Our family counselor finally recommended a divorce—and he was a Catholic priest! But we hung on. And somehow we all turned out OK. I have no idea why. [*Back to the group*] So who's up?

DREW. Me.

CARROLL. [*Nodding*] Drew.

DREW. [*Paces as he speaks*] Remember this first. My parents have been married—a lot. And often. To a lot of different people. I thought about calling the Guinness Book to see if there was a slot for them, but I've been too busy going to weddings. Names of stepmothers and stepfathers? Forget it. I just use descriptions. There was the blonde with lots of hair on the outside of her head and nothing on the inside, or this macho type who sold stuff. One week he sold one thing, next week something else. He got fired every Friday. His real talent was smashing beer cans on his forehead. That beer smashing probably affected his job record. What worries ME is that I've lost all track of my half-sisters. “So what,” you say? Think about it. I figure probably half the girls within a hundred miles of here are related to me. That makes it fifty-fifty that I'll fall in love with my half-sister. Life is so complicated.

CARROLL. It can't be that bad. How many of you are related to Drew? *[As if on cue, EVERYONE raises his/her hand. Laughter]*

DREW. Thanks. That must be why they call these things “support” groups.

CARROLL. Drew's keeping us honest. Anybody have any “group-group” thing they want to let out?

[Names are assigned to the following four characters only to keep them straight. They may be played by other cast members unless a large casting pool is available. FOSTER and JOANNA are at Stage Left, VIVIAN and CRAIG at Stage Right. Each pair is from a separate family]

JOANNA. I'll bet that every girl everywhere has the same complaint. Why is it so difficult for the human male to remember to put the toilet seat down?

FOSTER. Why is it a bigger crime for us to leave it up than for you to leave it down?

CRAIG. Got you!

VIVIAN. No you didn't. It's just too stupid to respond to.

CRAIG. OK, since we're talking bathrooms—why is there always a jungle of girls' underwear in there?

JOANNA. Because we wash ours once in a while. Where are yours?

VIVIAN. They're still wearing them. Probably for the last three weeks.

FOSTER. Two weeks!!

CARROLL. As fascinating as this subject is, we'd better move on. Bernadette?

BERNADETTE. I am so scared. All the signs are there, everything that leads to a divorce. And I would do anything to get it stopped. I figured that if everything was just right around the house, the family would lock back together. I get up early and make breakfast for everybody—family-like, you know? Then while they're eating, I make the beds and straighten up the rest of the place. I put Mom and Dad's briefcases out, get the little kids on the bus, and head for school. At 3:45, I start up again. If everything's perfect, the family can't fall apart. A divorce can't tear us up if everything's right, can it? ...Can it?

SOME PARTICIPANT. I tried those things, too.

ANOTHER PARTICIPANT. So did I.

BERNADETTE. Did it help?

SOME PARTICIPANT. For awhile.

ANOTHER PARTICIPANT. Quite a while for me.

BERNADETTE. Well, I'm not giving up. This time it's going to work—permanently.

CARROLL. *[Checking her listing]* Cary...

[CARY and JOEY are on opposite sides of the performance space]

CARY. Dad got to feeling sick at work one day, so he came home early. He found Mom in bed with his business partner.

JOEY. Whoa. This sounds familiar.

CARROLL. So share the spotlight, Joey.

[JOEY and CARY take turns speaking but nearly give the impression that they are both speaking continuously]

JOEY. In my version, Mom was having dinner with a friend at a hotel restaurant when she saw Dad checking in with a woman from his office.

CARY. It's so weird. It was hard to imagine my parents even caring about sex.

JOEY. An interest in sex at their age seemed ridiculous—but an affair! It rearranged my whole head.

CARY. It took me a week to accept the fact of it.

JOEY. What he'd done seemed so hideous. But Mom was determined to save the marriage.

CARY. Dad's life had always been his family and his work. Being betrayed by both just hit him like a bullet.

JOEY. Mom fought so hard to save the family, it occurred to me that maybe this wasn't her first time to go through this with Dad. I never asked her, though. One pain at a time is enough.

CARY. Mom tried to put things right, but too much had been destroyed. She got an apartment downtown. She wanted us kids to come see her and the little ones went. Those of us who knew the score weren't ready yet.

JOEY. We were so angry that Dad had violated his wedding vows—but he'd also been our tee-ball coach and the guy that drove us to all those

soccer games and stood in the rain, cheering us on, while we were being massacred. We decided to let Mom take the lead.

CARY. The judge gave custody to Dad. Mom got visiting privileges—when we were ready. The little kids go over most week-ends and take summer trips with her. She and I had lunch once and we've taken a few shopping trips—where nobody bought anything. That's enough for now.

JOEY. Mom wanted to save the marriage, but she couldn't decide which way to turn. The judge suggested a ninety-day separation, so everyone could get some perspective. It's been a couple of months now. And I don't think one day has gone by that Mom wasn't delivered a rose or a box of candy. Dad definitely wants to come home. But I'll bet Mom makes him wait all ninety days—why pass up the roses? But mostly she wants to make sure he's ready to settle down.

CARROLL. Any reactions? Suggestions?

SOME PARTICIPANT. *[To Joey]* Your mom's got control. That's working.

ANOTHER PARTICIPANT. And you'll get close to your mom again, Cary. You'll want to.

CARY. Sure I will.

[NOTE: If optional section—Daryl—is used, insert that scene here]

[Some performance troupes may be able to include the "DARYL" section, while others may not. It may be cut without written permission. School directors are cautioned to be certain that they know how their school administration, board, and parent population feel regarding this issue. As I have often said, "Be certain everyone is informed. School administrations do NOT like surprises"—J. McDonough]

CARROLL. Daryl...

DARYL. Mom and Dad had been separated for a couple of months, but a reconciliation didn't seem out of the question. Then Dad showed up at the front door one night. Mom invited him in. Things got serious fast so they shooed me out of the room. But there's a heater vent in my room where I can hear everything.

DAD. Hanna, we... I want to go through with the divorce.

MOM. Why?

DAD. I'm sorry. I've... found someone else.

MOM. Who is she?

DAD. You've met Ben Clémentè, haven't you?

MOM. The golf pro at the municipal course. What about him?

DAD. The person I've found. It's Ben.

DARYL. My father in love with another man!?! I was not ready for that. Back in the living room, Mom was crying terribly. I can't imagine what all must have been going through her mind.

DAD. I'm so sorry. I really did love you all these years. I still do, but not in the same way.

MOM. [*Bitterly*] Undoubtedly. And you're willing to cast Daryl aside, just like that.

DAD. My love toward her hasn't changed at all. I hope she—I hope both of you can accept me, accept us.

MOM. This is going to take a lot of adjusting. I've done all I care to for one night.

DAD. Can't I see Daryl?

MOM. I don't know how or when to break this to her. But tonight is too soon.

DAD. [*Exiting*] Not very long, OK?

MOM. When it's time.

DARYL. Mom came to my room, but she could tell that I already knew. We cried and held each other until we both fell asleep. The divorce went through. Dad gave us everything, so between that and Mom's job plus the child support, we were doing fine. Except that Dad wasn't there. After about six more months, I decided I was ready to see him. Mom was worried, but she drove me over. I was shocked. Their apartment was beautiful—like something in a magazine. But what shocked me most was that Dad and Ben had the kind of warm atmosphere that makes any place a home. I was comfortable as soon as I walked in. And I go back a lot. Now I have two families and two homes. How many people can say that?

CARROLL. [*Shifting to the new focus*] Lee, you barely got rolling last week. Why don't you start over?

LEE. OK. In the first place, my family divorced so long ago, I was barely there for it. There must have been a huge fight during the wedding reception or the honeymoon or the proposal or something. Dad and I never met. As far as I knew, fathers were like the ones on TV comedies. They didn't seem very useful. But even if I didn't need one, maybe Mom did. So I started trying to fix her up. I'll bet I trotted twenty guys through here and Mom's best reaction was:

MOM. Well, he didn't smell too bad.

LEE. But I was determined. About that time, my Great Aunt died. Griselda. Or Grinelda. Or Granola. I didn't know her and everybody that did seemed glad she was gone. BUT there was this funeral parlor guy. And he looked good and he was single and he smelled perfect. So I set up a sort of date. They talked a long time and things looked promising—until I asked Mom how it went. She said:

MOM. Honey, believe me—the minute I need an undertaker, I'll let you know.

LEE. I don't matchmake any more.

CARROLL. [*Checking her notes. Cut this CARROLL line if IAN and/or WALLACE is omitted*] You didn't seem anxious to talk last week, Ian. Does today look any better?

IAN. Days all look alike, but I'll talk. I'm completely—what—it sounds too dramatic to say I'm lost. But I guess I am. Mom got custody. Dad gets visitation. I don't want to sound selfish but—what do I get? Let's see—I get a practically full-time mother who works forty-plus a week. I get a barely part-time father whose part-time I haven't seen yet. Did you ever notice how questions and problems fall into father-categories and mother-categories? So I have questions that may never have an answer time and problems that will have to fit into this week's work schedule. What else did I get? Maybe a little bitter.

CARROLL. Have you come up with any plans?

IAN. I don't know. Maybe someplace else would be better.

WALLACE. [*May be performed by CASEY if the WALLACE character is omitted*] Let me take a stab at that one. There's one thing which does NOT work—running away. No matter how crummy home is, it's better than what you're going to find out there. Here's a reality check. When's the last time you worried about getting your clothes cleaned? You figure

there's a butler out there waiting to starch your undies? You'll be lucky to find a way or a place to wash anything. The hustle's not worth it after a while. You're too busy trying to score enough cash for something to eat. Do you know what people smell like after they've been living on the streets for a month or so? You wouldn't believe it. And guess what. In another week you won't even care. Some of you may have noticed that I came back. Anybody have any idea why?

AUGUST. Lighten up, will you?! Why is nobody looking at the positive side of this thing? Your folks are divorced? Get all that emotional garbage out of the way and wake up. You're on the gravy train and don't even know it. Start by whining about how horrible everything is. And get the message to both parents. The parent that doesn't have custody is probably worth more in cash and goodies, but you never know. So play this game called one-upmanship—or one-upwomanship. Say you wrangle a set of in-line skates from one parent. You “wish” you had the pads and helmet and street hockey stuff—near the other parent. Bingo—you're Wayne Gretzky [*update when necessary with the name of a current hockey star*]. And none of this is for your birthday or Christmas—those are the REAL bonanzas. The little stuff is just from making them feel guilty day to day. And aim high. Vacations, motorcycles, even cars come to skillful one-uppers. OK, maybe we've got no integrity or sensitivity or conscience. Who cares? We've got a lot of great stuff!

CARROLL. A lovely attitude, August. [*Looking at notes, then at Perry, inviting her to speak*] Perry?

PERRY. I don't know if I even ought to speak. My story's such a switch from everybody else.

CARROLL. Take a chance.

PERRY. We had all the normal divorce stuff—the screaming, the blaming, the taking sides, the bracing for disaster... But when the dust cleared, we found that things were just... different—worse than when things were smooth but LOTS better than during those atomic confrontations. “Different” may not be perfect, but it clobbers “worse.” Then came the weirdest thing of all. There were two other people who'd been watching from a distance. The guy was somebody Mom had gone to high school with and the woman was Dad's assistant at his first job. Now, stop your dirty little minds. There wasn't any pre-divorce hanky panky. Mom and Dad were too busy making each other miserable to fool around. Two