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Dramatic Publishing





American Association of Community Theatre
AACT NewPlayFest Winning Plays:
Volume 1 (2014)

The Seamstress

By Cece Dwyer



American Association of Community Theatre AACT NewPlayFest Winning Plays: Volume 1 (2014)

Exit Laughing – Comedy. By Paul Elliott. When the biggest highlight in your life for the past 30 years has been your weekly bridge night out with the “girls,” what do you do when one of your foursome inconveniently dies? If you’re Connie, Leona and Millie, three southern ladies from Birmingham, you “borrow” the ashes from the funeral home for one last card game, and the wildest, most exciting night of your lives involves a police raid, a stripper and a whole new way of looking at all the fun you can have when you’re truly living.

The Seamstress – Drama. By Cece Dwyer. It is 1916, a time when women’s rights are far from equal. Cynthia McFarland, attractive and gracious wife of the extremely wealthy, albeit licentious and abusive, Richard McFarland, finds herself in a desperately compromising position. He wants the requisite wife in an attempt to enter politics. She wants to free herself from a brutal relationship. At Richard’s offhand suggestion, Cynthia hires Andorra Hamilton, a beautiful young seamstress, to be a working guest in their home and outfit her for the upcoming social season and political functions, initiating a series of events that unravel the secret lives of everyone in the McFarland mansion.

The Vanishing Point – Drama. By Nedra Pezold Roberts. How do you find your way home when the land, the culture and way of life, and even the relationships of your birth are vanishing all around you? That’s the problem that haunts Pierre, an environmental engineer recently returned to Point Critique to head an experimental program designed to halt the loss of Louisiana’s coastal wetlands. What he finds, in addition to a dangerously fragile ecosystem, is a brother (now engaged to Pierre’s former girlfriend) determined to break free of the trap he sees as Cajun culture, and a father, Paul, still smarting from the pain of his broken relationship with Pierre. When Paul’s shrimp boat sinks in a fiery wreck at sea, Pierre believes that replacing the vessel is the way to connect with his father and heal old wounds. But Paul wants more than a boat; he wants his son back. Gaining his lost son, however, won’t prevent Paul from losing the other one.

Jellofish – Drama/Comedy. By Jim Henry. Four World War II veterans have been playing a monthly game of poker and dragging 5% from every pot since 1945, and this “side pot” has grown to a sizable fortune. As the men compete, they struggle over what to do with their shared nest egg. As the debates escalate, their conflicting views on love, friendship, politics, death and taxes are exposed. The events of their lives are revealed as each player comes upon random “history chips,” created during the past 50 years by one of the players when a significant event occurred in their lives. While the significance of history chips such as Grand Slam, Raccoon and Jellofish are revealed, the deeper implications of a lifetime of friendship and competition are explored. The table is set. Shuffle up and deal.

End Papers – Drama. By Barry Weinberg. Kathy has to use all her ingenuity and intelligence if she is to avoid losing her home and all her possessions after her husband’s secret life is exposed. At the same time, she is forced to fend off unwelcome romantic overtures from the old boyfriend who reappears in her life. Kathy is convinced she can build a money-making business out of End Papers, the used bookstore where she works, and is encouraged by the store’s 80-year-old owner. But if she is to make her plan a reality, Kathy must use all her wiles to deal with her husband and ex-boyfriend, both of whom insist on dominating her affections and stifling her independence.

The Boatwright – Drama. By Bo Wilson. Ben Calloway can’t seem to get his bearings in his own home anymore. Fifty-seven years old, recently widowed, childless and retired from the Kansas Highway Patrol, he’s adrift—and even though he’s never seen the ocean, he decides he should build a boat and sail across the Atlantic, single-handedly. When he decides to let his troubled neighbor, film-school dropout Jaime Watson, make a movie about his project, the two men—generations apart and lonely in very different ways—force each other to confront the isolation in their own lives.

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INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Community Theatre (AACT) is proud to present the six winning scripts and playwrights of the first AACT NewPlayFest cycle. AACT NewPlayFest is an initiative by AACT to address the critical need for new, high-quality plays for community theatre audiences around the globe. It has been embraced by playwrights and theatres across the country, bringing exciting theatrical journeys to producing companies and joyful realization and anticipation to playwrights and their work.

AACT is pleased to partner with Dramatic Publishing Company for this program. AACT NewPlayFest is unparalleled in new play competitions, providing full productions of the winning scripts, plus publication and rights representation by a major theatrical publisher. Also thanks to Texas Nonprofit Theatres, Inc., for pioneering the way. Its TNT POPS! New Play Project served as the model for AACT NewPlayFest.

In this inaugural cycle, ending in 2014, scripts were submitted by more than 200 playwrights. From the two dozen-plus theatres that applied, six were selected from across the country to produce the world premieres of the winning scripts. The benefits of AACT NewPlayFest will grow as additional theatres produce these top-notch plays.

We hope you will consider one of these plays for your next season.

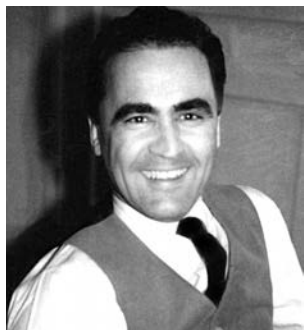
Break a leg,

Julie Crawford, Executive Director
American Association of Community Theatre

The American Association of Community Theatre is the resource connection for America's theatres. AACT represents the interests of more than 7,000 theatres across the United States and its territories, as well as theatre companies with the U.S. Armed Services overseas. To learn more about AACT NewPlayFest and AACT go to aact.org.

FOREWORD

AACT NewPlayFest is made possible in part by a grant from the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Fund.



Jack K. Ayre celebrated his 90th birthday before passing away in December 2011. At his birthday party he sang with a barbershop quartet—one of his favorite activities—and celebrated with his cousin and lifelong friend, Frank Ayre Lee. Though as adults they lived on opposite sides of the country, the cousins kept in touch through letters that displayed a love for the written word and an irreverent sense of humor. Jack had participated in theatre productions at Drew University in New Jersey and at a community theatre in Connecticut in his younger years and continued that interest when he moved to California. Frank was also an avid aficionado of theatre and had dabbled in playwriting, adapting Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* for a children's theatre production, and penning *McSteg*, a tongue-in-cheek discourse ribbing his cousin Jack and based on a scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Upon Jack's death, resources he left were used to create the Jack K. Ayre Foundation for the United States Coast Guard, of which he was a member during WWII, and the Jack K. and Agnes K. Ayre Foundation for Blind Children—his mother, Agnes, was a teacher and pioneer in educating the blind. In addition, the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation has been created by the family of Frank Ayre Lee as a legacy for the creative endeavors of Jack, who was an advertising executive and public relations director. The family is pleased to honor Jack K. Ayre and Frank A. Lee, who passed away in August 2012, through a lasting legacy promoting new works for theatre through AACT NewPlayFest.

Photo: Courtesy of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Fund.

The Seamstress

Drama by
CECE DWYER

The Seamstress was premiered by the Hickory Community Theatre in Hickory, N.C., on Jan.10, 2014, with the following cast:

Brigid Ryan Mary Moretz Howell
Cynthia McFarland Connie Bools
Patrick Ryan Steve Austin
Andorra HamiltonChristy Rhianna Branch
Richard McFarland John Koval
Steven Blackwell Joshua Propst

Production:
Artistic Director,
Hickory Community Theatre Pamlea Livingstone
Managing Director,
Hickory Community Theatre John Rambo
Technical Director John L. Smith
Costume DesignerChristy Rhianna Branch
Lighting Designer Rose Goodrich
Sound Manager Steven Thigpen
Stage Manager Matthew Dotson

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“*The Seamstress* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by the Hickory Community Theatre in Hickory, N.C.”

The Seamstress

CHARACTERS

ANDORRA HAMILTON: Seamstress, 20s, beautiful and eccentric; can be sweet, playful and flirtatious; likes to use antiquated speech and dresses flamboyantly.

CYNTHIA McFARLAND: Wife, 40s, attractive, pleasant, astute and gracious.

RICHARD McFARLAND: Husband, 50s, real estate mogul, aspiring politician; can be smooth and urbane but is obnoxious and abusive when drinking.

BRIGID RYAN: Housekeeper, 30s, cute, spunky; speaks with brogue.

PATRICK RYAN: Houseman, 30s, adores his wife, Brigid; speaks with brogue.

STEVEN BLACKWELL: Attorney, 30s, well-mannered, ladies man.

TIME & PLACE

A large city somewhere on the East Coast, circa 1916.

The Seamstress

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: *Living room of the McFarland mansion.*

AT RISE: *It is late morning. BRIGID RYAN is setting a silver coffee service with cookies, jam, etc., humming an Irish tune and glancing upstairs a bit. CYNTHIA McFARLAND enters down the staircase holding a small ice bag over one eye. She notices BRIGID and makes an effort to seem cheerful.*

CYNTHIA. Oh, good morning, Brigid! Did Patrick say when he might be home with our new houseguest?

BRIGID. Any minute now if the train's runnin' on time. Are you feelin' all right there, missus?

CYNTHIA. Yes ... of course. I just woke up with one of my ... headaches. Nothing to worry about.

It's been a hectic few weeks getting her room ready. I hope you and Patrick know how much I appreciate everything you've done.

BRIGID. For sure it was nothin', ma'am. I'm only happy everythin' got here before she did. Are you sure I can't be gettin' some more ice for your face there?

CYNTHIA. Oh, don't bother, Brigid. You have so much to tend to as it is.

BRIGID. Can't help but worry about you, ma'am. An old broom knows the dirty corners best. I'm hopin' they're not gettin' worse.

CYNTHIA. Nothing I can't handle, Brigid. But I do appreciate your concern.

BRIGID. Yes, ma'am.

CYNTHIA. Oh, would you mind checking the mail outside? And please let me know as soon as Miss Hamilton arrives. *(Exiting upstairs.)*

BRIGID. Of course, ma'am. As soon as she arrives. (*Exits out the front door.*)

(*PATRICK RYAN enters through an interior door with suitcases. ANDORRA HAMILTON follows, wearing a lavish red hat and carrying a purse and seamstress case.*)

ANDORRA. So Patrick, how *did* you find me so quickly at the station?

PATRICK. I was told to be lookin' for a young lass wearin' a lovely red hat.

ANDORRA. Of course! Actually, it's magenta.

PATRICK. I'm thinkin' it would surely make a Cardinal blush.

ANDORRA. It's a shame Mrs. McFarland wasn't able to meet me at the station.

PATRICK. Truth to tell, she was feelin' a bit ... poorly this mornin'. Havin' one of her, uh, headaches. They can be fierce sometimes.

ANDORRA. I'm sorry to hear that. She did mention them when she contacted me a few weeks ago.

PATRICK (*reaching for her case*). Here, I'll be takin' that upstairs for ya.

ANDORRA. No, thank you. I'll keep my seamstress case if you don't mind. It can't be replaced. My trunks should arrive tomorrow, so you'll have your hands full then.

PATRICK. My pleasure, miss. I'll be takin' these up to your room and let the missus know you're here.

ANDORRA. Thank you, Patrick.

(*PATRICK exits upstairs. ANDORRA walks around, taking in the entire room.*)

BRIGID (*enters quietly*). Excuse me.

ANDORRA. Ah! You must be Mrs. Ryan. I believe Mrs. McFarland is expecting me.

BRIGID. Indeed she is. And myself too, for that matter.

ANDORRA. Of course. Is there something wrong?

BRIGID. I'm a bit surprised is all. I was told you travel alone so ... I was lookin' for someone ... a wee bit older.

ANDORRA (*laughs*). I'm afraid there's nothing I can do about that now is there?

BRIGID. Of course not, miss! I guess my mind's eye was expectin' someone ...

ANDORRA. Someone who looked more experienced? I'm certain Mrs. McFarland would never hire anyone who wasn't first rate. Am I right?

BRIGID. Of course, miss! Mind you, age doesn't boil the pot like a talent from the almighty. (*Indicating the seamstress case.*) Here, let me take that for you.

ANDORRA. No, thank you. I can manage. Now, if you'll tell Mrs. McFarland I'm here ...

BRIGID. Heavens above! So sorry. I'll be tellin' the missus you've arrived.

Oh, I would be Mrs. Ryan, the housekeeper.

ANDORRA. And I would be Andorra Hamilton ... the seamstress.

BRIGID. Of course, miss. (*Exits upstairs.*)

(ANDORRA continues to examine the room and carefully sets her seamstress case by the couch. CYNTHIA enters.)

CYNTHIA. My housekeeper tells me that an extremely confident, if very *young*, woman has come to our home today. I believe her exact words were ... as sure of herself as a cat in the creamery.

ANDORRA. Your housekeeper has a delightful way with words.

CYNTHIA. Yes, she does. I'm Cynthia McFarland. Welcome to my home. So sorry I wasn't able to meet you at the train station.

ANDORRA. I understand completely. Patrick told me it was one of your headaches. I remember you telling me about them.

CYNTHIA. When I telephoned you two weeks ago, I wasn't expecting you for quite a while. I could hardly believe my good luck. I had been told you were booked months in advance.

ANDORRA. Yes. Unfortunately, before I even arrived at my last client's home, her husband was killed in an automobile accident. Changed her life completely. Needless to say, my services were no longer required.

CYNTHIA. Very sad. But I'm so happy you're here!

ANDORRA. What an entirely exquisite greeting room you have.
And your Mrs. Ryan was a most charming greeter.

CYNTHIA. I've found over the years that having the Ryans as allies makes life here much more comfortable.

ANDORRA. Patrick ... Mr. Ryan, couldn't have been more helpful.

CYNTHIA. He appreciates pretty, young women. As long as Brigid, Mrs. Ryan, doesn't notice.

ANDORRA. I have a feeling Mrs. Ryan notices most things.

CYNTHIA. Very perceptive. I hope that won't be a problem for you.

ANDORRA. Not at all! I think we're already friends.

CYNTHIA. Good!

ANDORRA. If I may ask, do you have other help in the house?

CYNTHIA. Just the Ryans live in, if that's what you mean. As I mentioned in our conversation, my daughter's away at school.

ANDORRA. And you miss her terribly.

CYNTHIA. More than I ever thought possible. She's the most important thing in the world to me. Unfortunately, her father knows that. He visits her sometimes when he's on business, and takes great joy in telling me about it.

ANDORRA. It's none of my business of course, but that sounds very cold-hearted. Cruel even.

CYNTHIA. Mrs. Ryan was right to put you in a very special category. You're not only confident but ... prescient. Very unusual qualities for such a young woman.

ANDORRA. Some of my clients swear I'm clairvoyant. Merely imaginative, I think.

CYNTHIA. By the way, the photographs you sent of your work were fascinating. Certainly like nothing I've seen at any social event here at least.

ANDORRA. I believe I have yet to displease any one of my clients. I assume you checked my references?

CYNTHIA. Your credentials are very impressive. My good friend Charlotte Webster recommended you highly, as did all the others.

ANDORRA. Mrs. Webster was my very first private client! A remarkable woman. I definitely wouldn't be here today without her.

CYNTHIA. All of your references were exceptional. Every single woman said they had never been more beautifully dressed, or felt better about themselves in years.

ANDORRA. My methods are quite unique. Some even say ... daring.

CYNTHIA. They all said you were meticulous and your results outstanding. I wouldn't have hired you otherwise. Have you been influenced by any particular ... designers?

ANDORRA. I assure you my ideas are entirely my own. Although, working with Madame Lucille in her Paris salon was truly inspirational. The only woman to have one, you know.

CYNTHIA. I'm happy we were able to work something out so quickly. (*Takes ANDORRA's hands.*) A service like yours isn't found so easily.

ANDORRA. And I'm finding it more and more difficult to keep up with the demands on my time.

CYNTHIA. Understandable! But then, what's more important than looking good and feeling even better! A woman in my position needs to be absolutely prepared for any and all occasions.

ANDORRA. I'm at your service exclusively.

CYNTHIA. I'm also told you work quickly but with an eye to detail.

ANDORRA (*laughs*). And that is where the devil comes in, as they say.

CYNTHIA. Yes ... of course.

BRIGID (*enters*). Excuse me, Mrs. McFarland. Might I be servin' the coffee now?

CYNTHIA. Yes, thanks Brigid. I see your shortbread and strawberry jam here. (*To ANDORRA.*) I thought you might need a bite to eat after your long trip.

ANDORRA. So thoughtful. They look scrumptious. Thank you, Brigid.

BRIGID. You're welcome, miss. (*Exits.*)

ANDORRA. My trunks will be arriving tomorrow. They're brimming over with some of the most remarkable fabrics I've ever seen in all my travels. Not to mention the latest designs from Paris.

CYNTHIA. I've asked Patrick to bring them up to your room as soon as they arrive. And Brigid is very anxious to help you unpack.

ANDORRA. Not surprising. By the way, I've found from past experience, they're wonderful for transporting the finished goods abroad or ... elsewhere if necessary.

CYNTHIA. I won't be needing to transfer anything. But I can see how that would be convenient.

If there was more than one residence of course.

ANDORRA. I think you'll be quite pleased with the selections I've chosen. I hope you have a dress form available with your measurements?

CYNTHIA. Just as you requested. It's in your room. I've followed all of the instructions you sent. I don't want anything to stand in the way of a successful outcome, Miss Hamilton.

ANDORRA. Please ... Andorra.

CYNTHIA. Yes, of course ... Andorra. A very unusual name.

ANDORRA. My mother was a romantic. She thought since my life had begun in such a beautiful place, it was only natural to give me its name!

CYNTHIA. Of course. If you don't mind my asking, how *did* you choose your ... profession?

ANDORRA. Choose? How I wish that were the case! (*Laughs.*) I'm afraid women have very little to say when it comes to choosing a profession, don't you agree?

CYNTHIA. I do. Hopefully things will change, for my daughter's sake anyway.

ANDORRA. How old did you say she was?

CYNTHIA. Katherine just turned 14, but she already has her mind set on the medical profession, and her heart set on becoming a doctor.

ANDORRA. An extremely sensitive age. She's very fortunate to have your support. She'll need it.

CYNTHIA. Mine, yes. Her father's another story. Richard's dead set against it. He's especially difficult where women are concerned.

ANDORRA. Do you think he'll begrudge paying for my services?

CYNTHIA. Heavens no! Why, hiring you was actually his suggestion. Not exactly of course, but he did suggest a new wardrobe for the season ... and his new political ambitions.

ANDORRA. How thoughtful. I'm especially pleased when the husbands of my clients are in agreement with my coming. You have told Mr. McFarland that I'll be here for a while?

CYNTHIA. Of course. And that your room is next to his sitting room. But you never answered my question. If you didn't choose to be a seamstress, how did it come about?

ANDORRA. You might say fate! My father was in the diplomatic service.

As a very young girl, we were stationed in various European capitals. Later, India and the Orient.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I was inhaling an exhilarating combination of trends.

CYNTHIA. Fascinating. You must have gotten quite an education. Travel can be the best of tutors.

ANDORRA. Of course my mother saw to it that I attended the very best schools. And she introduced me to some of the most prestigious couturiers in the world. The pain of losing my mother was overwhelming.

CYNTHIA. I'm sure. And your father?

ANDORRA. Both of my parents have passed.

CYNTHIA. So you have no one.

ANDORRA. That's right. But, as fate would have it, one of my mother's favorite fashion houses in Paris took me in as a design apprentice. There was money enough to finish my studies and travel a great deal more.

CYNTHIA. And you became a seamstress.

ANDORRA. After losing my parents, you might say that dressmaking was the one decent occupation open to me. I clearly couldn't be a shop girl, or a domestic.

And I certainly never even considered the stage.

CYNTHIA. Marriage wasn't an option?

ANDORRA. It never occurred to me.

Anyway, everything fell into place when I met your friend Mrs. Webster.

CYNTHIA. Oh, yes. You were sailing back to the states from India.

ANDORRA. I was mesmerized by her personal life, and her obsession for fashion. By the time we docked in Boston, I had my first full-fledged client.

CYNTHIA. I see.

ANDORRA. Wanderlust is a part of me now. I find staying in one place too long very ... unappealing.

As a traveling personal seamstress, I'm able to go where I wish, live with my customers and give them my full attention.

CYNTHIA. So your position suits you in a number of ways. Your fees should let you live very nicely.

ANDORRA. I admit my rates may seem high ... some even say exorbitant.

CYNTHIA. Not at all! Having a personal seamstress is priceless.

ANDORRA. And I guarantee complete satisfaction. You'll look quite handsome no matter what the occasion.

BRIGID (*enters with coffee pot*). Excuse me, ma'am.

CYNTHIA. Thank you, Brigid. The coffee smells wonderful.

ANDORRA (*nibbling a cookie*). Just as I suspected, Brigid, your talents are extraordinary.

BRIGID. Why, thank you, miss. Will there be anythin' else, ma'am?

CYNTHIA. Miss Hamilton?

ANDORRA. What more could I want?

CYNTHIA. That will be all, Brigid.

BRIGID. Yes, ma'am. (*Exits.*)

ANDORRA. Is there anything else I should know?

CYNTHIA. You have an extra large bed as you requested—for cutting and preparing your patterns, of course. Your sewing machine arrived just yesterday. The latest model.

ANDORRA. Very accommodating.

CYNTHIA. Your room has the best light available most of the day. And you'll be happy to know that we've added electric lighting to the gas fixtures throughout the house. So, you'll be able to work under any circumstances.

ANDORRA. Wonderful! Anything else?

CYNTHIA. Just that you'll be meeting Mr. McFarland this evening. (*Stands.*)

ANDORRA. Excellent! (*Stands.*) I'm always most anxious to meet the spouse of my employer as soon as possible. I like to know where their tastes run also, as it always makes my job much easier.

CYNTHIA. In that case, would you like to have dinner with us in the evenings? It's always served at 7.

ANDORRA. That would be very nice. I'll join you in a week or so after I'm completely settled in. Will I be seeing your daughter at all while I'm here?

CYNTHIA. I don't know yet. Mr. McFarland has seen to it that her visits home are few, and as brief as possible. But I have very high hopes of changing things in the future.

ANDORRA. Anything else I should know about your husband?

CYNTHIA. Yes, his itinerary can change on a whim. His political ambitions have taken over his regular schedule.

ANDORRA. Please let me know when he *is* home. I prefer to avoid any surprises. I'm sure you understand. (*Retrieves her case.*)

CYNTHIA. Completely. (*Ringling bell.*) I'll have Mrs. Ryan show you your room. I think you'll be very comfortable. Please let her know of anything you might need—anything at all.

BRIGID (*enters*). Yes, ma'am?

CYNTHIA. Brigid, please show Miss Hamilton to her room and see that she has absolutely everything she wants while she's our special guest.

BRIGID. Yes, ma'am.

ANDORRA. Together, I think we'll have an exquisitely satisfying experience.

CYNTHIA. A wonderful choice of words.

(*ANDORRA and BRIGID exit. Blackout.*)