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*Dramatic Publishing*

LISA DILLMAN

# FLUNG

A LAUGH-FILLED DRAMA ABOUT  
FAMILY, FIREWORKS, AND  
FINALLY GROWING UP.



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# FLUNG

*Drama/Comedy* by Lisa Dillman.

*Cast: 4m., 4w. (no doubling.)* The four adult Cotter siblings have gathered at the family summer cottage on Lake Michigan two years after their father's death to scatter his ashes from atop his favorite sand dune. Meryl is on the verge of a divorce from Jim. Win is nine months pregnant. Matthew is about to lose custody of his kids. And 20-year-old Jade just wants to get married to her boyfriend Devon—and quickly. During a wet, mosquito-ridden Fourth of July weekend at a childhood getaway that has wildly divergent implications for each of them, these estranged siblings, along with their assorted spouses and companions, attempt to cobble together the elusive and contradictory memories of growing up with (and without) their difficult patriarch. As they struggle to come to terms with their past and present lives, they gain insights about themselves, their father, and each other. *Flung* is a laugh-filled drama about family, fireworks, and finally growing up. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes*

*Photo: American Theater Company, Chicago, Ill., featuring Matthew Brumlow and Cheryl Graeff. Photo: Johnny Knight.*



*Code: FA 1*

*Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel*

13 ISBN: 978-1-58342-390-5

10 ISBN: 1-58342-390-7



www.dramaticpublishing.com



Printed on Recycled Paper



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A Play in Two Acts

by

LISA DILLMAN

This excerpt contains strong



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Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(FLUNG)

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Robert A. Freedman Dramatic Agency, 1501 Broadway, Suite 2310,  
New York NY 10036 • Phone (212) 840-5760 • Fax (212) 840-5776

ISBN: 1-58342-390-7

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FLUNG was originally commissioned and developed through Steppenwolf Theatre Company's New Plays Lab.

The play received its world premiere at Chicago's American Theatre Company (Brian Russell, Producing Artistic Director) in February/March 2002. The production was directed by Susan Nussbaum and featured the following cast:

MERYL . . . . . Cheryl Graeff  
WIN . . . . . Janelle Snow  
MATTHEW . . . . . David Pease  
JIM . . . . . Andrew Micheli  
DOUG . . . . . Bradley C. Woodard  
JADE . . . . . Carrie Layne  
GINNY . . . . . Maureen Gallagher  
DEVON . . . . . Matthew Brumlow

# FLUNG

A Play in Two Acts  
For 4 men and 4 women (no doubling)

## CHARACTERS

MERYL, 34.

WIN, 32.

MATTHEW, 37.

JIM, 36. Meryl's husband.

JADE, 20. Half-sister to Matthew, Win and Meryl.

DOUG, 33. Win's husband.

GINNY, 63. Stepmother to Meryl, Win and Matthew.  
Mother of Jade.

DEVON, 23. Jade's boyfriend.

SETTING: Except for the first scene, which takes place on a winter afternoon in the backyard of Lawrence Cotter's Muskegon, Michigan, home on the day of his funeral, all the action takes place two and a half years later at the family's Lake Michigan cottage over Fourth of July



weekend. There are multiple environments—a dune, a beach, a yard, the interior of a cottage—which should be suggested and enhanced with lighting and sound rather than presented realistically.

NOTE: The play's scenes are intended to flow into one another; therefore, blackouts should be avoided except where specifically noted at the end of Act I and the end of the play.

# ACT I

*(At rise, MERYL stands alone in light. She holds a small handful of ashes.)*

MERYL. On the screened porch at the old dunes cottage, my father is gazing out the window. Far away I can hear the waves. But here. In this room. It is quiet. This is Sad Time. When the light's begun to fade but night is still a ways off. Just this side of the gloaming. He's hunkered down on a distressed chair. I'm on the ottoman. No other kids around. Only the two of us in this small pocket of Sad Time. And even though I know he's not paying attention, I say what's been on my mind for days now. "Dad. I can't imagine the world without me in it." He cuts his eyes to me. Cocks his head. Smirks. "Truly, m'love, you're the axis upon which the whole mess spins." *(Beat.)* I'm a kid so I'm not supposed to know he's mocking me, but I do. And he knows I do and that's why *I'm* here instead of Win or Matthew. When I look at him again he's staring at some point in the middle distance. He cuts his eyes to me again. "You know, Meryl Ann. Your world—the one *you've* made and where *you* will always live—*wouldn't* exist without you. It's an excellent point. Say, how old are you getting to be anyway?"

*(Beat. She throws the ashes. The lights come up full, revealing MERYL standing in the backyard at her father's house, staring off. She is wearing a full-length winter coat, a hat, and mittens and nursing a drink in a plastic cup. She doesn't notice when WIN enters behind her. WIN stands watching MERYL's back for a moment or two.)*

WIN. I was wondering what happened to you.

MERYL. It's stultifying in there.

WIN. I saw you talking to that weird lady who used to come in and read to Dad.

MERYL. My *God*. She was so earnest I wanted to throttle her.

WIN. Want a cigarette?

MERYL. Checked your gene pool lately?

WIN. There's sharks in it. *(Holding out the pack.)* You sure?

MERYL. Oh, gimme one. *(They light up.)* How does Matthew know all these people? He didn't spend any time here. Or if he did it certainly wasn't a habit. Dad and Ginny must've thrown a party any time he got within the tri-state area. Invited all their friends. Hail the conquering hero. Our son the Yale man. I don't know *anybody*.

WIN. Me neither.

MERYL. I wonder how Matthew is *really*. God. That *eulogy*.

WIN. I know. Wasn't he great?

MERYL. Oh, he was great. Sure he was. Sort of reminded me of the way Jimmy Stewart might've done it. So folksy he practically squeaked. "My father was a man

with a tough mind. A soft heart. And a joke for every occasion.” God, do these have any tar or nicotine in them at all? They’re nasty.

WIN. You didn’t like the eulogy?

MERYL. I liked it fine. It’s just...God. Matthew. He’s wrapped himself in some kind of big doughy force field. That dopey grin in response to even the slightest bit of irony. And you know me. Lack of irony makes conversation virtually impossible. Oh, listen to me. Who cares?

WIN. Why didn’t you like the eulogy?

MERYL. It was about some guy I never met. There.

WIN. That’s not Matthew’s fault, though, is it? Jeez. I’m just lucky Ginny didn’t ask *me* to deliver the eulogy. I’d be like: “My father Gary Cotter—uhh—’scuse me, make that *Larry* Cotter.”

MERYL (*laughs, grinds out her cigarette under her foot*).

True. Every one of those people in there knew him better than we did.

WIN. Just think about who you’d *be* now if you’d grown up in Dad’s house instead of Mom’s, though.

MERYL. Oh, I know. It’s terrifying to even consider. Imagine me more fucked up than I already am. The mind boggles. (*Beat.*) Why do you suppose Matthew found it necessary to mention to the whole goddamn church that Jim didn’t come? (*Mimicking.*) “Hmm. Let’s see. Have I missed anyone? Oh. *That’s* right. *Meryl*. My sister...*Meryl* is here... Her husband Jim couldn’t make it.”

WIN. Why *didn’t* Jim come? (*Beat.*) Well, I mean, it was your father’s funeral—

MERYL. Hey, it’s not up to Matthew to judge Jim or to bring it to the attention of—

WIN. It wouldn't have killed Jim to come, that's all.

MERYL. I told Jim it was absolutely *fine* if he didn't come. (*Beat.*) That was really something the way Matthew praised the whole family except me. Every day he's more glad *you're* his sister. What do you talk to him, three times a year? That often? And he lauded all the stepkids. Praised Berta and her little yard apes—I thought I'd puke at that. Then he gets to me—practically strains to remember my name, for Chrissake—and all he can come up with is that Jim didn't make it. I felt like the whole congregation was looking me up and down and saying “rhubarb rhubarb.”

WIN. He did mention that John couldn't make it.

MERYL. John. *Berta's* John? He's a *felon*. He's in *jail*.

WIN (*laughing*). Oh, yeah.

MERYL. You're comparing John the felon with Jim?

WIN. No, I'm just saying that Jim wasn't the only husband Matthew pointed out as absent.

MERYL. It's so weird being here. Everybody seems to have really adored ol' Lar'.

WIN. It's easy to adore someone after he's dead. Especially if he had a hard death. And, girlie, Larry *did*. He had one mean bitch of a leave taking, if you ask me.

MERYL. These people *did* things with him. They hung out. They thought he was brilliant. Hilarious. Madcap. They're in there telling each other all his little *isms*. “I'm serious as a heart attack”—

WIN. “Sorrier than a one-legged man in an ass-kickin' contest.”

MERYL (*sniffing the air*). “Smells like a French whore in a mining town.” Yeah. All that crap.

WIN. Well, he *was* smart. And he had a...*developed* sense of humor.

MERYL. Did he? Do you remember him that way?

WIN. Listen, Meryl. I knew him even less than *you* did.  
(*Beat.*) We just didn't know him. He didn't let us. And that's going to have to be OK. (*MERYL laughs.*) What?

MERYL. *You*. Who let you be the little sister? I'm supposed to have these things in perspective and give *you* the big scoop, dammit.

WIN. You know about some stuff.

MERYL. Yeah? Like what?

WIN. Like...who's going to win an Oscar. Stuff like that.

(*They laugh.*)

MERYL. You're freezing. Go on back in.

WIN. You OK?

MERYL. I'm just waiting for you to leave so I can burst into great wrenching sobs.

WIN. All righty. I'll leave you to it.

(*She starts to exit.*)

MERYL. Win? Do you ever—? Don't you ever wonder what he actually *thought* about us?

WIN. You and me? I think it's pretty obvious he *didn't* think about us.

(*WIN exits. MERYL stands there a moment. The lights fade out on her and, as sound of pounding surf and seagulls fade in, rise on a scene more than two years later. MATTHEW stands center looking though the viewfinder*)

*of a small, high-quality video camera. He is tracking something offstage. Note: All characters are now dressed for a long weekend at the beach.)*

MATTHEW. And here they are. Approaching in their wheezing subcompact rental. The Chicago contingent. Here's the lovely and talented Meryl Anne, looking for the first time in Cotter reunion history the precise indeterminate age she actually is.

*(MERYL enters, swatting mosquitoes wildly. She is carrying a huge leather bag and a stack of books, but everything is in danger of falling.)*

MERYL. Jesus! Matthew, hello. Oh my God, it's like something fucking *Biblical*. How can you stand it?

MATTHEW *(low voice, still narrating for the camera)*. Meryl, deeply religious as ever, and with a salty profanity for every conceivable human circumstance, bemoans the profusion of insects—

MERYL. Will you look at this place? It's exactly the *same*. Gimme a hug, dammit. What's the matter with you?

MATTHEW. Hold it. *(MATTHEW hits the pause button on the camera and then hugs MERYL.)*

MERYL *(barely into the hug, calls back over her shoulder)*. Jim? What are you *doing*?

JIM *(off)*. Getting the stuff.

MERYL *(slapping wildly at herself)*. I can't believe these mosquitoes! God they're the size of pterodactyls! Has it been like this the whole time?

MATTHEW. They turned the whole park into a bird sanctuary. Twelve years ago. So they don't spray for bugs anymore. Naturally.

MERYL. Oh, for gawd's sake. Typical. There's a nuclear power plant just steps down the beach, but—ahh! eureka! We shall have a bird sanctuary. (*As he begins filming her again.*) Will you put that thing down?

(*JIM enters. He also is laden with bags and books. He puts everything down and shakes hands with MATTHEW.*)

JIM. Hey, Matt, good to see you.

MATTHEW. You too, you too, my man. How long can you guys stay?

MERYL. Gee, can't we just enjoy the moment?

JIM. Going back Sunday morning.

MATTHEW (*holds up the camera and begins narrating again*). The Chicago contingent has brought along plenty of reading fodder for the uncountable hours that will make up the next two days of the Harmonic Convergence of Cotters—

MERYL. Hey, we're on vacation. We like to *read*, OK? That's quite a gadget you got there. God, what a gross *consumer* you are. How much did *that* set you back?

MATTHEW. Six thousand smackers.

MERYL. *Really*. How many smackers to the dollar?

MATTHEW. OK, it was only six hundred. But I told Win it was six grand, so play along, all right?

MERYL. What'd you tell her that for? Oh, Christ! I gotta get out of this.



*(She exits, slapping blindly. MATTHEW hits the pause button and lets the camera dangle on his neck.)*

MATTHEW. You're looking good, Jim.

JIM. Am I? I feel like garbage.

MATTHEW. My sister been treating you OK?

JIM. She's the love of my life.

MATTHEW *(wryly, with a thumbs-up)*. Solid.

JIM. Listen, I was sorry to hear about you and Maya. And all the...

*(But MATTHEW is peering through his viewfinder again. JIM gives up easily. Lights shift over to the front room of the cottage: a few sticks of mix-and-match very rudimentary cottage furniture, funky dappled lighting through the windows from the surrounding trees. WIN, hugely pregnant, sits on a camp stool. She struggles to her feet as MERYL enters from outside.)*

WIN. Oh my God, shut the door good!

MERYL *(pulling the screen door closed behind her)*. Hey, girlie. *(The two women hug and MERYL leans over and puts her ear to WIN's belly.)* Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yep. That's what I say too. *(She straightens up.)* Little what's-his-face says he's ready to come out now.

WIN. Tell him for me I'm way ready.

MERYL. You guys finally decide on a name or what?

WIN. Not really. But I know what *I* want to name him. What do you think of Jack?

MERYL. Jack. Jack. Simple yet elegant. Slightly audacious with just the right whiff of Kennedyesque sex appeal. I like it, I like it a lot.

WIN. Tell Doug when he gets back.

MERYL. He doesn't like Jack?

WIN. He thinks it sounds like something you'd name your Labrador.

MERYL. So what name does he like?

WIN. You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

MERYL. My God, Matthew looks about a hundred. When'd he get so old? And how come nobody mentioned the frigging mosquitoes? Hey, how about that camera Matthew's got? Do you know how much those *cost*?

WIN. He told me! Can you believe that? Six thousand for a camera. That's more than my *car's* worth. And now Doug wants one just like it. For when the baby comes along.

MERYL. When the baby "comes along." Sounds like you're just waiting for little Jack to come toddling up to your doorstep one of these days.

WIN. Oh, right. I meant to say, Doug wants to get a video camera for when the baby is ripped from my gory, battered womb, screaming and covered with mucous and blood.

MERYL. Much better. Wow, check you out. You really got big all of a sudden.

WIN (*rubbing her belly*). I know, right? I'm amazed by the whole thing.

MERYL. Where's Doug?

WIN. Oh...with Jade no doubt. They're probably down fishing off the pier. I think it's nuclear smelt season or something. And Ginny's in Cold Haven scouting locations for Jade's wedding reception. You know. The one that will happen sometime *after* Devon finally pops the

flippin' question. Which I hope to God will be soon because I'm sick of hearing about it. Hey. Look at this. (*WIN moves to a small table and picks up a decorative canister.*) Know what I've got here?

MERYL. Not a clue.

WIN. Dad.

MERYL. Ewwww. How come he's still in a can?

WIN. We're supposed to scatter him this weekend. That's the big plan.

MERYL. Scatter—? I thought she did that ages ago.

WIN. No. Tomorrow. Each of us is supposed to say a few words. And then Ginny's going to pitch him from the top of the dunes.

MERYL. Oh, for God's sake.

WIN. I know, but she's totally fixated. You know how she gets. I asked if everybody had to say something and she said yeah.

MERYL. How come she didn't mention any of this when she invited us?

WIN. She probably didn't think you'd come. It's not really that big a deal, though, right? I mean, I don't necessarily have anything to say either, but, you know...? It can be easy or it can be hard. I'm rooting for easy.

MERYL. I just hate the *lie* of it, that's all.

*(JADE and DOUG enter laughing and pinching each other. JADE is dressed in shorts that have more holes than fabric and a bikini top. She is eating an enormous chocolate chip cookie. She stops dead in her tracks when she sees MERYL.)*

JADE. Meryl-go-round!