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Dramatic Publishing

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Family Matters



Drama by Sandra Fenichel Asher

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Family Matters

Drama. By Sandra Fenichel Asher. Cast: 4 adults (2m., 2w.) and 10 teenagers (4m., 6w.), playing a total of 35 roles. Further doublecasting is possible, as well as expansion of the cast with no doublecasting. What is a family? Playwright Sandra Fenichel Asher traveled the country running workshops in which teenagers and adults pondered that question and experimented with monologues and scenes based on significant events and interactions in their own families. The resulting script is a montage that gives every member of its large cast challenging opportunities for both solo and ensemble work. *Family Matters* presents the “full catastrophe” of family life, embracing its comic, dramatic, farcical and tragic realities. In the first section, “Talk,” the eldest son of the core family reveals to his mother that far from his model student image, he’s on the verge of flunking out of school; another mother regrets never telling her child the truth about his birth father; and the core family’s rebellious daughter and her dad find it difficult to communicate in even the most superficial way. “Secrets” dips into the private worlds that three teens can reveal to only their very best friends, worlds darkened by abuse, mental illness and sexual assault. “Stuff” deals with the impact of “a look, a touch, a word, a smile” on teens and other family members as they attempt to reach out to one another. *Family Matters* was commissioned by the award-winning Youth Theatre at the U (University of Utah) and premiered at the Babcock Theatre. It was selected for further development as part of the Open Eye Theater’s Bear Bones Series, funded in part by an Aurand Harris Grant from the Children’s Theatre Association of America. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: FA3.*

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FAMILY MATTERS

By

SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER



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(FAMILY MATTERS)

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For my brother, Bob Fenichel,
with love, always

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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Family Matters was commissioned by Youth Theatre at the U, University of Utah.

Most of the stories retold in this script are based on material gathered in workshops with Youth Theatre at the U, University of Utah, Salt Lake City; McCaskey East High School, Lancaster, Pa., arranged by the Lancaster Literary Guild; Fulton Opera House Youtheatre, Lancaster, Pa.; the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Theatre for Youth Program; The Open Eye Theater in partnership with Margaretville Central School, Margaretville, N.Y.

One of the pieces appeared earlier as "Our Little Secret" in *125 Original Audition Monologues* by Sandra Fenichel Asher, Kent R. Brown and Joseph Robinette (Dramatic Publishing Company). All are used with permission. However, the material has been reshaped and blended, so that the characters in this script are entirely fictional.

Family Matters premiered at Youth Theatre at the U, performing at the Babcock Theatre in Salt Lake City, July 12, 2006, with the following:

Director Joe Lauderdale
Scene Designer Tom George
Costume Designer Brenda VanderWeil
Lighting Designer Pilar I.
Sound Designer Jennifer Johnson
Prop Mistress Megan Parry
Stage Manager Devon Carter
Technical Director Marni Sears

CAST:

MEG. Olivia Vessel
BOBBY Stuart Ford
LISA Marin Kohler
KELLY Dylan Vessel
SARAH Lisa Morey
ROB Bill Morey

CHORUS:

Sean Abel
Tommy Barron
Jeff Black
Haley Boschert
Arianna Esqueda
Jo Friedman
Jordan Lewis
Annie Morey
Dan Morey
Geddy Moyle
Madison Niermeyer
Barbara TerraNova
Eva TerraNova

FAMILY MATTERS

CHARACTERS

MEG 17, a homebody, sentimental, visually artistic

LISA 16, Meg's sibling, moody, a drama queen

BOBBY (m) . 15, another sibling, rebellious, tenderhearted,
a percussionist

KELLY (m) 13, youngest sibling, the baby, bratty, a clown

ROB 40s, father, business owner, kindhearted,
a bit confused about his kids' emotions

SARAH. 40s, mother, nurse practitioner, warm,
understanding, fun

CHORUS, includes

WOMAN - plays MOM 1
MOM 2
MOM 3
MOM 4
MOM 5

MAN - plays DAD 1
DAD 2
DAD 3
DAD 4
DAD 5
DAD 6

TEEN GIRL 1
GIRL 2
GIRL 3
GIRL 4
SISTER (13, may be played by any TEEN GIRL)
TEEN BOY 1
BOY 2
TEEN GIRLS or TEEN BOYS above may double in
these roles:
FIRST ACTOR
SECOND ACTOR
THIRD ACTOR
FOURTH ACTOR
FIFTH ACTOR
SIXTH ACTOR
SEVENTH ACTOR
TEEN 1
TEEN 2
TEEN 3
TEEN 4

Note: SARAH, ROB, MEG, LISA, BOBBY and KELLY are one “core family” that remains constant throughout the play. When not actively involved in a core family scene, they become members of CHORUS and may play multiple roles. This script is arranged for 4 adults (2m, 2f) and 10 teenagers (4m, and 6f). For a larger cast, as many roles as desired may be played by additional actors. Tighter double-casting is also possible, and roles and lines assigned to WOMAN, MAN, TEEN GIRLS and TEEN BOYS may be reassigned for either of these purposes.

SCENES AND PLAYERS

The Family Room - Core Family

What Is a Family? - Core Family and Chorus

TALK:

Chant - Bobby and Chorus

2.3 Average - Bobby and Sarah

Chant - Mom 1 and Chorus

Birth Certificate - Teen 1, Mom 1, Dad 1

Chant - Sarah and Rob

Grandma's Quilt - Rob and Lisa

The Family Meeting - Core Family

SECRETS:

Chants - Chorus

Apricots - Teen 2, with Lisa, Mom 2, Dad 2

Baseball Bat - Teen 3, with Bobby, Dad 3, Mom 3,
Fourth Actor

Uncle Jeff - Girl 1 and Sister, with Meg and Kelly

The Family Photo - Core Family

STUFF:

Chants - Chorus

Cow Wall - Rob and Meg

Simon the Dog - Girl 2, Mom 4, Dad 4

Crayon Box - Kelly and Rob

I Walk Home - Girl 3, Mom 5, Dad 5; Boy 1, Dad 6;
Teen 4 and Chorus

Letters - Doug and Me - Girl 4
Sam on Drugs - Bobby and Sara
Dear Ms. Alcott - Boy 2
Thank you, Dad - Lisa and Rob

How Does Anyone Ever Get Through It? - Bobby, Meg,
Core Family and Chorus

The Family at Home - Core Family; Chorus

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Various common locations—family room, bedroom, etc.,—indicated by area staging and lighting, minimal props and abstract set pieces. Set pieces may hold props and costumes, as needed.

CHOICE OF MUSIC is at the discretion of the director.

FAMILY MATTERS

AT RISE: *MUSIC. LIGHTS* come up on a “conversational grouping” typical of a family room, but slightly askew. Items are scattered about haphazardly—a potato chip bag, soda can, backpack, hat, etc., as if several people had recently been there and left hurriedly. *MEG* enters, carrying a bouquet of flowers. She observes lack of order, takes a moment to find a vase for the flowers, then removes scattered items, straightens set pieces and tidies up to her liking. *MUSIC* fades as she sets vase of flowers in a prominent spot, takes a beat to admire the improved room, then proudly presents it to the audience—)

MEG. The Family Room.

(*MUSIC. MEG* exits. *SARAH* enters with a book, sits and reads, kicks off her shoes. *ROB* enters with the newspaper, exchanges a smile with *SARAH*, sits and reads paper, dropping sections as he goes. *BOBBY* enters, tapping his drumsticks against each other and anything else he can find to beat on. A nod toward *SARAH* and *ROB*, who smile and go on reading. *BOBBY* tosses a backpack and/or jacket across one of the set pieces while using the others to create an impromptu drum set, removing the flowers and drumming on the vase. He

goes on drumming while LISA enters, acknowledges the others with little more than a grunt, drapes her book bag, jacket and self around the set and begins homework. A beat, then KELLY enters, mimes turning on a TV with a remote, and settles in, scarfing a bag of chips. A beat. MEG enters, gasps at the mess, rescues the flowers. MUSIC fades as MEG shouts—)

MEG. Hey! *(No one hears her; BOBBY goes on drumming.)* HEY! *(BOBBY stops drumming, KELLY turns off TV, as ALL heads turn toward MEG.)* What happened to this family room?

BOBBY *(a glance at the mess and the family, all staring at one another wide-eyed, then—)*. Our family?

(BOBBY beats a flourish with his drumsticks. MUSIC. MEG throws her hands in the air, as CHORUS dances in and helps CORE FAMILY push set pieces upstage, and hide clutter. ALL then assume relaxed “listening positions.” MUSIC fades.)

CHORUS *(to audience)*. What is a family?

(ACTORS move to present CORE FAMILY in turn.)

FIRST ACTOR *(presenting SARAH to audience)*. A mother—

SARAH. —someone who loves you no matter what...

FIRST ACTOR. ...who gives you samples while she's cooking...

SARAH. ...who kisses your boo-boo even when she knows she can't heal it.

SECOND ACTOR (*strides forward; away from OTHERS, speaks to audience*). A mother is someone you get along with until you reach puberty.

CHORUS (*a loud exhale of surprise and recognition, as if punched in the stomach*). HUH!

THIRD ACTOR (*presenting ROB to audience*). A father—
ROB. ...someone who teaches you right from wrong...

THIRD ACTOR. ...who makes you laugh...

ROB. ...who prefers not to change diapers.

FOURTH ACTOR (*strides forward, stands away from OTHERS, and speaks to audience*). A father is someone who is not there.

CHORUS (*as before*). HUH!

FIFTH ACTOR (*presenting MEG and LISA*). A daughter—
MEG. ...someone who looks up to her parents...

FIFTH ACTOR. ...who dreams in fairy tales...

LISA. ...who wishes her dad would buy her a car...

KELLY (*quickly stepping into scene to taunt LISA*).
...who's scared of roaches and spiders, and bloooooood...

(MEG and FIFTH ACTOR step away, with exaggerated gestures of disgust.)

LISA (*to KELLY, defending herself*). ...who struggles with many emotional issues...

KELLY. ...who gets to be moody and laugh hysterically...

LISA. ...who respects her family, but has a mind of her own...

SIXTH & SEVENTH ACTORS (*rush in to break up argument and present KELLY and BOBBY to audience*). A son—

BOBBY. ...someone you can be yourself around and talk out tough issues...

SIXTH & SEVENTH ACTORS. ...someone who needs mentoring...

KELLY. ...someone who dreams in adventures...

LISA (*resentful—*). ...someone who can go anywhere without asking permission...

KELLY (*responding directly to her*). ...who has to take out the trash...

LISA (*and they're at it again—*). ...who stinks and burps...

ROB (*gingerly leading KELLY away from LISA*). A son is someone who loves his sister—

SARAH (*gingerly leading LISA away from KELLY*). —and loves to tease her!

KELLY & BOBBY. A son is someone who wishes his parents would *listen to him!*

LISA & MEG. A daughter is someone who wishes her parents would *listen to her!*

SARAH. A mother is someone who wishes we could all just *talk to one another.*

ROB. A father is someone who wishes somebody would please *tell him what's going on!*

CHORUS. What is a family?

(LISA and KELLY lunge toward each other and stick their tongues out. SARAH and ROB roll their eyes heavenward and pull LISA and KELLY apart.)

MEG (*in dismay, to audience—*). A family is a group of individuals who take turns *not* talking and *not* listening!

(MUSIC. CHORUS moves set pieces to represent BOBBY's desk and chair at left and his parents' bed at right. MUSIC fades.)

CHORUS *(returning to listening positions)*. Talk, talk, talk, talk! Talk, talk, talk, talk! Talk! Talk! Talk—!

BOBBY. *Or not! (Presents SARAH.)* My mom...and me.

(SARAH reclines on bed and reads. BOBBY goes to his desk, drums on it, tries to study, gives up.)

CHORUS *(to BOBBY)*. Talk to her.

BOBBY. Are you kidding?

CHORUS. Talk to her.

BOBBY. I can't!

CHORUS. Talk to her.

BOBBY. *No way!*

CHORUS. You *need* to talk to her.

BOBBY. Why?

CHORUS. You just *do*. You used to talk to her all the time.

BOBBY. I used to be ten years old!

CHORUS. *Talk to her.*

BOBBY *(drums on desk for a moment, then explodes, to audience—)*. Midnight. Two English essays. Forty-two geometry problems. Thirty-five Spanish conjugations. Ten pages of biology. All due by morning. *Or else.* *(Beat.)* Student #32015. Year: 10. Grade Point Average: Two-point-three. *(Beat.)* How is that possible? I'm a good kid! Band member. Sportswriter. Student council rep! When did it all start to slide? *(Stands.)* I try to drag myself away—from the work I've got to get done, the

work I'll *never* get done in time... (*Beat; begins crossing stage.*) Next thing I know, I'm moving down the hall... (*Beat; hesitates—*) I don't want my mom to see me like this. *I hate myself.*

(*BOBBY arrives at SARAH's "bedside." SARAH looks up, and puts down book.*)

SARAH. Bobby! (*Beat.*) What's wrong?

BOBBY (*to audience, as SARAH holds her position, looking concerned*). I have disappointed her beyond her worst nightmares, but she doesn't know that yet. I look toward the door. I command my legs to move, go back, get me out of here! (*A beat, then slowly turning toward SARAH—*) I don't know...what to do... (*Stops short, choking back tears.*)

SARAH (*swings around to a seated position at edge of bed; pats the place beside her; speaks gently*). Sit with me. (*BOBBY sits. SARAH touches his cheek and forehead, as if checking for fever. Gently—*) What's going on?

BOBBY (*to audience as SARAH listens*). I tell her...about the assignments I've put off or forgotten or faked. The schemes I've used to sneak my way through course after course. (*Beat.*) I tell her how it's all...falling apart. (*Beat; he stands and moves away from bed.*) Somewhere in the middle of all that, I disconnect. I float off, into the air. I watch myself talking. And for the first time in weeks, months, floating around up there, I feel...peaceful. (*Beat.*) Finally...my voice stops and my mom's cuts in.

SARAH (*stands and joins him, speaking gently*). Hey. We'll work this out. (*Beat.*) I love you.

(*BOBBY smiles. SARAH hugs him. MUSIC. BOBBY and SARAH walk upstage, arms around each other and resume their listening positions as CHORUS shifts set pieces to create a generic space in TEEN 1's home. MUSIC fades as CHORUS chants.*)

CHORUS (*softly, returning to listening positions*). Talk, talk, talk, talk! Talk, talk, talk, talk! Talk! Talk! Talk...!
TEEN 1 (*steps forward, speaks to audience*). Or not! (*Brings MOM 1 forward.*) My mom...and me.

(*TEEN 1 sits, reading a driver's ed manual. MOM 1 stands at a distance, worried.*)

CHORUS (*to MOM 1*). Talk to him (her).

MOM 1 (*speaks toward audience*). Are you kidding?

CHORUS. Talk to him (her).

MOM 1. I can't!

CHORUS. Talk to him (her).

MOM 1. *No way!*

CHORUS. *You need to talk to him (her).*

MOM 1. Why?

CHORUS. You just *do*. You used to talk to him (her) all the time.

MOM 1. He (She) used to be ten years old!

CHORUS. Talk to him (her).

(*MOM 1 glances at TEEN 1, shakes her head, looks away.*)

TEEN 1. Mom? When am I going to get my permit?

MOM 1 (*tries not to show it, but something about this request troubles her*). Soon.

TEEN 1. That's what you said last time! I *need* to start driving. I've got youth group, track, *and* drama club this year.

MOM 1 (*troubled rather than angry or impatient*). I know, I know. But I'm busy, too! (*She exits scene hurriedly.*)

TEEN 1 (*calling after her*). When will you ever *not* be busy? (*A beat, then to audience—*) It went on like that. And on. And *on*. I would've asked my dad, but he was supposed to teach my brother and *she* was supposed to teach *me*. *Their* decision! Why wasn't she sticking to it? (*Beat.*) Finally, she said, "I'll see what I can do," and we set a date to go for my permit. (*Beat; ruefully—*) Be careful what you wish for.

MOM 1 (*enters scene, holding papers*). Okay. Let's do it.

TEEN 1 (*reacts "in scene"*). Got everything we need?

MOM 1. Yeah.

TEEN 1. I can hold that stuff while you're driving. (*Gleefully.*) And then you can hold it while I'm driving! (*Holds hand out for papers; MOM 1 hesitates.*)

MOM 1. Wait. There's something...we need to talk about first.

TEEN 1 (*grabs papers and starts out, looking through them*). Come on! We can talk in the car!

MOM 1. Honey, wait—!

TEEN 1. *In the car!* (*He stops short, looking at his birth certificate. MOM 1 watches, drawing a deep breath and bracing herself as he reads.*) Mom, what is this?

MOM 1. It's your birth certificate.

TEEN 1. *My* birth certificate?

MOM 1. That's what I wanted to talk to you about—

TEEN 1. I don't see Dad's name on here. It says "James" something.

MOM 1. Yeah. (*Beat, a sigh.*) Yeah.

TEEN 1. *Yeah?* Is that all you can say? (*Beat; MOM 1 shakes her head helplessly.*) Do you mean to tell me the man I've been calling "Dad" all my life is not my father?

MOM 1. No. That's not true—

(MAN steps forward as DAD 1. He remains outside of scene, speaking toward audience. TEEN 1 and MOM 1 are not aware of his presence and go on speaking only to each other.)

DAD 1. You *are* my son (daughter).

TEEN 1. This is my birth certificate, isn't it?

MOM 1. Honey, please—

DAD 1. I love you.

TEEN 1. Has my whole life been a lie? (*MOM 1 struggles to reply, but says nothing.*)

DAD 1. I have always loved you. And I always will.

TEEN 1. It *has* been a lie!

MOM 1. Give me a chance to explain—!

TEEN 1. You know what? Don't talk to me.

MOM 1. Please don't do this—

TEEN 1 (*interrupting*). How am I supposed to believe anything you say?

MOM 1. But we *have* to talk.

TEEN 1. About what? My real dad? Why I've never met him? Why I've never even heard about him? What's the

deal? Doesn't he want to have anything to do with me?
Or with you?

MOM 1. No, no... Look, you wanted to go for your driver's permit—

TEEN 1. Forget that! How can I even think about that now? (*Beat.*) You're my *mother*. You're supposed to tell me the *truth*.

MOM 1. Do you think this is easy for me? I made a mistake—

TEEN 1. Yeah, well, you just made another one.

MOM 1. Okay, so I deserved that. But I love you and I know that “the man you've been calling ‘Dad’ all your life” loves you, too. He has loved you and raised you ever since you were three weeks old. He's the one who took you in. Who took us *both* in. He's the only father you've ever known, and the only father you ever *need* to know.

TEEN 1. But why didn't you tell me?

MOM 1. Because I was afraid you'd take it exactly this way.

TEEN 1. I would rather know the truth than a lie or nothing at all.

MOM 1. Well, I've told you the truth. Are you happier now?

TEEN 1. No.

MOM 1. This is what I've been dreading—since the day you were born and the man whose name is on your birth certificate did not care. But someone else *did* care, and that someone is your father.

DAD 1 (*outside of scene*). You are my son (daughter). I love you. I have always loved you. And I always will.

TEEN 1. I used to believe that.