

THE APPLE DON'T FALL

a comedy in three movements

by Brent Englar

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CHARACTERS

DAN, 30

GLENNE, 35; Dan's half-sister(?)

LEON, 24; visionary director and founder of Gestation Theatre

SUSAN, 30; aspiring playwright and Leon's wife

GESTATION THEATRE ENSEMBLE (ENACTORS): 2 men and 2 women in their 20s. Each "enactor" should have a distinct yet complementary physical style, so that when all four are together the effect is of interlocking pieces of a puzzle.

TIME

Approximately six months after the tragic deaths of Dan's known relations

PLACE

In front of Dan's house: a modest, two-story structure with a very large garage in a western Maryland college town. A path leads from the driveway through a bit of yard to the front door; sometime ago, an attempt was made to line the path with shrubs and flowers, but the effort was abandoned and the plants have died.

The garage, which remains open throughout the play, is empty except for a sheet that hangs in back to mask entrances and exits. On either side of the driveway and facing the garage are two spotlights clamped to poles, along with a picnic table and benches and several folding chairs. Hanging between the poles is a hand-painted banner proclaiming "2 DAYS UNTIL ..."; the "2" hangs separately and can be swapped for different numbers as needed.

I

(Lights up on GLENNE seated at the picnic table before DAN's house, a suitcase at her feet. Her costume is smartly professional and her posture is excellent. After a long moment, the front door opens and DAN enters, blinking in the morning sun. He wears jeans, a faded sweatshirt, and the unfocused expression of one who has only just awakened)

GLENNE  
(standing)  
Daniel Couch?

DAN  
Just Dan.

GLENNE  
I'm your half-sister, Glenne.

(She extends her hand. DAN stares, then turns and walks back inside. After a moment, he re-enters with a fire extinguisher)

GLENNE (Cont'd)  
I know this is unexpected—

DAN  
—Get off my property.

(He points the fire extinguisher at GLENNE)

GLENNE  
Are you threatening me?

DAN  
I'm warning you.

GLENNE  
With a fire extinguisher?

DAN  
You ever been sprayed with a fire extinguisher?

GLENNE  
No ...

DAN

Believe me, it stings.

GLENNE

If you'll let me explain—

DAN

—I could go for the chainsaw.

GLENNE

I think that's extreme.

DAN

What's extreme is posing as a half-sister for money. My family's dead.

GLENNE

I know that, Dan. That's why I'm here.

DAN

You're here to sponge off the bereaved!

GLENNE

Would you give me a chance?

(reaching for her suitcase)

Let me show you something—

DAN

—KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM!

GLENNE

IT'S A PHOTOGRAPH!

(Very slowly, GLENNE removes a manila envelope from her suitcase.  
She holds it out for DAN to take)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Open it. Please.

(DAN opens the envelope. Inside is a photograph. His expression  
changes)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Is that man your father?

(DAN nods)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Could you put down the fire extinguisher?

(DAN obeys. GLENNE crosses to his side. She points to the photograph)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

That's my mother. And that little baby right there is me.

(DAN peers at GLENNE, as though trying to find himself in her features. Suddenly he pulls her into a bear hug)

DAN

I thought I was alone!

GLENNE

You're not—

DAN

—I HAVE A SISTER!

GLENNE

Half-sister.

DAN

I never had any kind of sister. Am I your first brother?

GLENNE

I'm an only child, yes.

DAN

But where did you come from?

GLENNE

Geographically?

DAN

I want to know everything.

GLENNE

How old are you?

DAN

Thirty.

GLENNE

Well, Dan, five years before you were born, our father was a graduate student at the University of Chicago.

DAN

What did he study?

GLENNE

Theology.

DAN

That makes sense.

GLENNE

Was he a preacher?

DAN

Investment banker.

GLENNE

Then why does it make sense?

DAN

He wasn't a very good one. Not like Ma.

GLENNE

Ah ...

DAN

Who was your mother?

GLENNE

She was his postal worker.

DAN

He married his postal worker?

GLENNE

Not exactly.

DAN

Oh ...

GLENNE

Listen, Dan, I'm not here to slander your father.

DAN  
Our father.

GLENNE  
Ours. Right.

DAN  
Did you know him?

GLENNE  
Only from that photograph.

DAN  
I'm sorry. Didn't your mother ...?

GLENNE  
She raised me herself. She was a proud woman.

DAN  
She was certainly pretty.

GLENNE  
She was beautiful.

DAN  
She was. Beautiful. My mother too.

GLENNE  
He was a handsome man. Our father.

DAN  
I guess it skips a generation.

GLENNE  
What?

DAN  
Just a joke he liked to tell.

GLENNE  
Dan—

DAN  
—I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name.

Glenne. GLENNE

Glenn? DAN

With an “e.” GLENNE

How pretty! DAN

You think so? GLENNE

It’s like a man’s name, but for a woman. DAN

Yes. Thank you. GLENNE

Glenn ... e ... DAN

Dan ...<sup>1</sup> GLENNE

My very own half-sister. DAN

I can’t believe I’m here. GLENNE

You must be exhausted. DAN

I’ve been driving twelve hours. GLENNE

You drove from Chicago? DAN

(She nods)

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps she mimics him by saying “Danny”?



DAN (Cont'd)

Glenny, I'm touched. Let me get you some tea.

GLENNE

No thank you.

DAN

They just opened a Wegmans in town. You never saw so much tea in your life.

(crossing back to the house)

Maybe in Chicago.

GLENNE

Dan, please—

DAN

—Would you rather have orange juice?

GLENNE

Did they really die like that?

DAN

Yes.

GLENNE

But everyone? Your whole family?

DAN

All except you.

GLENNE

I wouldn't expect you get many tornadoes out here.

DAN

That's what made it so unexpected.

GLENNE

I can only imagine.

DAN

I couldn't. I've been camping these woods since I was a boy. My grandparents' farm was just a mile down the road. I used to come every summer to help with the crop.

GLENNE

What did they grow?

DAN

Kittens. They need so much love when they're small. So finally I moved here for good. We were a real family farm. Ma's the only one who ever left. She had greater expectations, she always said. I guess maybe she worried that maybe I didn't, because on my thirtieth birthday last spring, she and Pop flew their plane down from New York to stage an intervention.

GLENNE

What does that mean?

DAN

I didn't want to stick around to find out. There was a huge fight, and I took off for the woods. I think much better in the air, don't you? I couldn't have gone more than five minutes before the skies opened up and just plowed through my grandparents' farm. Took out every man, woman, and kitten inside.

GLENNE

I'm so sorry.

DAN

That was six months ago. For six months I was sure I was alone in the world. Today, Glenny ... today is my new birthday!

GLENNE

It's Glenne.

DAN

I'm sorry.

GLENNE

No, I'm—

DAN

—Glenne.

GLENNE

Right.

DAN

All right, Glenne. Tell me about yourself.

GLENNE

Well ... I grew up outside Chicago. I went to college in the city. I graduated.

DAN

Good, good.

GLENNE  
Are you sure you're okay?

DAN  
Sure I'm sure. And now?

GLENNE  
I'm an entrepreneur.

DAN  
That's fantastic! What do you mean?

GLENNE  
I started my own business.

DAN  
So you probably know all about marketing and branding and 501(c) status?

GLENNE  
My business is for-profit.

DAN  
That sounds really impressive. Can you wait right here?

GLENNE  
Where else would I—

DAN  
—Thanks!

(DAN hurries into his house)

GLENNE  
You're not going for the chainsaw?

(She glances at her watch, shrugs, and sits at the table. Two ENACTORS, a young man [1] and woman [2] wearing only black unitards, enter from behind the sheet in the garage. ENACTOR 2 crosses to sit opposite GLENNE)

GLENNE (Cont'd)  
(startled)  
Oh! Hello. Are you looking for Dan? He just went inside.

(ENACTOR 2 stares into GLENNE's eyes but says nothing)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Can I help you with something?

(Without breaking eye contact, ENACTOR 2 shifts her posture)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Should I know you from somewhere?

(ENACTOR 2 shifts her posture again)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Should I call a psychiatrist?

(ENACTOR 2 leans forward until her nose nearly touches GLENNE's)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

I'll tell you what—I'll come back later ...

(GLENNE grabs her suitcase and stands. As she turns to leave, she bumps into ENACTOR 1, who has crossed directly behind her)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Oh! It's another one ...

(ENACTOR 1, who is very tall, bends at the waist so that his eyes are level with GLENNE's. She steps backward. He steps forward. Meanwhile, ENACTOR 2 circles around the table behind GLENNE, who realizes she is trapped and screams. DAN races from the house, carrying a laptop)

DAN

What happened?

(Both ENACTORS turn to face DAN)

DAN (Cont'd)

Perfect timing! Per usual!

(DAN sets down the laptop and crosses to the ENACTORS, peppering them with questions. As before, they make no response other than to stare intensely into his eyes and shift posture. These postures are not representational—they are not attempts to convey literally through gesture what would ordinarily be spoken, nor are they sign language. They are spontaneous displays of movement for its own sake, and they may be as exaggerated or simple as the moment warrants.)

Nevertheless—and despite GLENNE's increasing bewilderment—  
DAN responds to each gesture as though it were another line in an  
otherwise unremarkable conversation)

DAN (Cont'd)

Martin—hey, Vanessa—is Leon still at breakfast? I was on my way to meet him ...

(responding to a gesture)

Don't I know it—useless without coffee. Where's he at?

(responding to a gesture)

You're kidding, right? That's not what he told me.

(responding to several gestures in succession)

Because—because—I know, that's what I told him, but—

(laughing)

Will you stop? You can't get salmonella from a Danish. Because—why would they  
make it on the same surface as the eggs?

(to GLENNE)

They wouldn't, would they?

GLENNE

My God, you're all insane.

DAN

Excuse me?

GLENNE

Do me a favor—pretend we never met.

(GLENNE moves to exit. DAN hurries to catch her)

DAN

You don't understand—there's a reason they don't speak.

GLENNE

Is the reason they're crazy?

DAN

Of course not. They're my friends.

GLENNE

I'm not sure that's comforting.

DAN

Martin, Vanessa, this is Glenne. My long-lost older sister.

(The ENACTORS bow deeply and solemnly. GLENNE does not  
reciprocate)

DAN (Cont'd)

Please don't be rude.

(GLENNE gives an awkward bow. The ENACTORS cross into the garage and begin stretching)

GLENNE

Long-lost older half-sister.

(The ENACTORS continue to stretch, oblivious now to everything but their own bodies. GLENNE turns to DAN)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Who the fuck are they?

DAN

Is that what passes for polite conversation in Chicago?

GLENNE

I thought they were going to attack me!

DAN

Don't be silly.

GLENNE

THEN WHY ARE THEY FREAKS?

(DAN stares at GLENNE, appalled by her rudeness. The ENACTORS balance themselves in a shared pose)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

I'm sorry. That was unfair. But you can understand my concern ...

(Still DAN says nothing. GLENNE sighs)

GLENNE (Cont'd)

Right. No excuses. I'm truly sorry, Dan.

DAN

Apology accepted.

GLENNE

Now who are they? Brother?

DAN

They're my theatre company.

GLENNE

You're not serious.

DAN

Okay, half a company. Call's not for another couple minutes.

GLENNE

Why do you have a theatre company?

DAN

Initially, at first I needed something to do with myself. After losing the farm and my family, you know? But lately, I can't tell you how excited I've been. Remember the name, Glenne—Gestation Theatre.

GLENNE

What kind of theatre?

DAN

It's us.

(gesturing toward the ENACTORS)

It's them. It's a totally new mode of performance.

GLENNE

It looks like stretching.

DAN

You've got to loosen your body, Glenne, before you re-make theatre.

GLENNE

Is that your tagline?

DAN

That's a great idea! Hang on ...

(He takes a digital recorder from his pocket and begins dictating)

DAN (Cont'd)

"You've got to loosen your body, Glenne, before you re-make theatre."

GLENNE

I think without the "Glenne."

DAN

(dictating again)

"No 'Glenne'."

(DAN turns off the recorder. Two more ENACTORS, another young man [3] and woman [4] in black unitards, enter and join their partners in the garage)

GLENNE

Who are they?

DAN

My other halves.

(calling to the ENACTORS)

Rudy, Shelby, please say hello to Glenne. We're family.

(The new ENACTORS bow to GLENNE)

DAN (Cont'd)

Rudy and Shelby are what you might call character enactors.

GLENNE

Why?

DAN

Because they play every part. Ergo: Old men ...

(ENACTOR 3 assumes a posture like an old man)

DAN (Cont'd)

Old women ...

(ENACTOR 4 assumes a posture like an old woman)

DAN (Cont'd)

Non-traditional gender casting ...

(ENACTOR 3 becomes the old woman and ENACTOR 4 the old man)

DAN (Cont'd)

Clowns ...

(ENACTORS 3 and 4 perform bits of clowning. GLENNE points to ENACTORS 1 and 2)

GLENNE

And them?

DAN

Our stars!



(ENACTORS 1 and 2 pose heroically. Then all four join hands and form a circle. As though responding to silent cues, they begin swaying in every direction, counterbalancing each other as they alternately rise and fall<sup>2</sup>)

GLENNE

They never speak?

DAN

In Gestation Theatre no one speaks. To speak is to distract, to proffer lies. We are a theatre of gesture.

GLENNE

Are there others?

DAN

I'm pretty sure we invented it. Truth is our guiding light. The voice is but a shadow of the body.

GLENNE

I'm not sure I understand ...

DAN

I might have misspoke. To be honest, Glenne, I'm not the one you should be talking to. This isn't my baby.

GLENNE

Whose baby is it?

DAN

Leon's.

GLENNE

The guy with salmonella?

DAN

Now don't you start with that. He's got a weak stomach is all.

GLENNE

Where is he?

DAN

He's coming.

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<sup>2</sup> Or they do something else.

(From both sides of the garage, the spotlights illuminate the swaying ENACTORS. The rest of the stage darkens, as though a cloud has blocked the sun. The ENACTORS tighten their circle, then open to reveal a tall figure wrapped in a cloak. This is LEON. The circle opens wider, and we see he is standing on a stool; in fact, he is rather squat)

DAN (Cont'd)

He's here.