

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

“Spine-tingling”

—*Backstage*

“[A] celebration of the power of storytelling.”

—*nytheatre.com*

Aunt Leaf



*Drama by
Barbara Wiechmann*

“Very cerebral, very deliberately arty theatre, dressed in shades of sepia both literally and figuratively. The play is a fable, written in lovely image-filled prose.” —*nytheatre.com*.

Aunt Leaf—**Drama.** *By Barbara Wiechmann.* *Cast: 3 actors, gender flexible. Expansion possible.* It is 1910. Annabelle, a quiet 11-year-old, and her depressed and lonely great-aunt Leaf develop a secret ritual of storytelling. Each night the old lady sends the child into the woods to look for the ghost of her dead husband. Each night the girl brings back stories—made-up “proof” of her uncle—to cheer up the old woman. Annabelle’s fibs grow into stories, and her stories grow into tall tales. As she wanders deeper into the forest each night, she soon comes to believe her own stories are true. The shared adventure, both dangerous and hopeful, serves as a dual passage for the child into adolescence and the old woman into a more peaceful death. A tale from the dark woods of the Hudson River Valley—and the darker woods of the imagination. “Spine-tingling ... Wiechmann chooses to tell her story without traditional characters or scenes ... [The actors] narrate the story, each taking turns portraying Annabelle, Aunt Leaf and the other family members. I wish as many [children] as possible could see *Aunt Leaf*, for then they would learn how a well-told tale and one’s own imagination are all that are required to chill the blood and fire the mind. That would truly be educational.” —*Backstage.* *Single set. Approximate running time: 40 minutes. Code: AF7.*

Developed and premiered at HERE in New York City.

Photo: istock. Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN 10: 1-58342-779-1

ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-779-8



9 781583 427798 >

www.dramaticpublishing.com



Dramatic Publishing

311 Washington Street,
Woodstock, Illinois 60098

Phone: 800-448-7469

815-338-7170



Printed on recycled paper

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

AUNT LEAF

By
BARBARA WIECHMANN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXII by
BARBARA WIECHMANN

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(AUNT LEAF)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-779-8

For my family

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play must give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author must also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and must appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. In all programs this notice must appear:

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

Aunt Leaf was produced in January 2010 in New York City at HERE and originally developed as part of the HERE Artist Residency Program HARP.

Director Jeffrey Mousseau
Dramaturg. Jeffrey Mousseau
Projection photographer / Designer Robert Flynt
Set Designer Sarah Edkins
Lighting Designer Ayumo “Poe” Sargusa
Costume Designer Amelia Dombrowski
Sound Designer / Composer J. Hagenbuckle
Stage Manager. Alison Carroll

It featured the following cast:

Voice 1 Rachel Richman
Voice 2 Pal Bernsein
Voice 3 Alan Benditt

Aunt Leaf was subsequently produced in Hudson, New York, December 2010 by the Hudson Opera House and Stageworks/Hudson. It featured the same cast, crew and designers as the original production.

A NOTE ABOUT CASTING AND PERFORMING

Aunt Leaf is a story about storytelling. Although on the page there are typical characters and scenes, I created it to be in performance an exploration of storytelling rather than the acting of a conventional play. It was never my intent to have one actor play one role, and in the original production, three performers “shared” the entire script, shared the story. These actors (two middle-aged men and a young woman) played the roles of three apparitions haunting an old house, each compelled to tell the story of Aunt Leaf. Each actor learned the whole script as if it were his/hers alone to tell, and then, through an organic rehearsal process of vocal improvisation, the three told the story together. From these rehearsals we marked the script in order to have a definitive breakdown of who said what when. Sometimes a monologue was shared by all three performers—each taking a chunk or alternating lines—sometimes a single line was broken into pieces, sometimes two people said the same line at once. There were often interruptions when one character felt compelled to “take over” the story and tell it his/her way. In any case, all performers played all roles. This, to me, is one of the beautiful things about storytelling—it is completely unbiased as to gender, race and age. In a conventional play you probably would not cast a middle-aged man to play a young girl, but a storyteller can play anything. Although admittedly it was challenging for the actors to memorize a script this way, the result was a highly connected and energized chamber piece for three masterful actors. For me, this is a great way to perform the script—my original intent—and I encourage any who wish to attempt it this way to do so. There is a

sample scene at the end of this book from our original stage manager's script that notes the particular breakdowns we used. This should give you a better indication of how it worked. That being said, if you as a director or performer envision the play as a solo performance or a storytelling play for 20, by all means give it a try. The only limit should truly be your imagination.

AUNT LEAF

CHARACTERS

VOICE 1 (woman 20-35)

VOICE 2 (man 35-55)

VOICE 3 (man 50-65)

AUNT LEAF

1.

(Blackness.

Slowly, sounds grow up out of the dark. [What is the sound of a story growing?]

A voice speaks—as it speaks, patterns of light/leaves multiply in the dark.)

VOICE.

Do you know this story?

Do you know this story?

Do you know the story of Aunt Leaf?

2.

VOICE. The story of Aunt Leaf is also the story of a little girl.

Annabelle Wood.

Annabelle lived exactly one hundred years ago in a house surrounded by trees on the banks of the Hudson River. In those days the river was just as wide and glit-

tering as it is today but the forests were thicker, wilder, more dangerous and more mysterious.

Annabelle did not worry about this. She was 11 years old...she fished along the riverbank, played in the rust and rubble of an old brickyard, climbed the branches of a big tulip tree and lived safe inside the house surrounded by trees with her cheerful and talkative family...

Annabelle's mother had attention-getting red hair and liked to talk about the good deeds she did for the neighbors.

Annabelle's father edited a newspaper and liked to talk about how they pulled limestone from the local cliffs to make cement.

Annabelle's sisters, Lucretia and Hortense, made ugly needlepoint pillows and liked to talk about the tiny dresses they sewed for their dolls.

Annabelle's rabbit Gideon ate quietly and only talked to other rabbits.

Annabelle rarely talked at all.

Annabelle's silence concerned her family.

They said things like:

FAMILY (*taking various lines*).

Do you think she finds us dull?

Have we given her a stimulating enough environment?

Remember when we dropped her as a baby?

Remember when Lucretia hit her with a hammer?

VOICE. But Annabelle was Annabelle and 11 years old—she did not want to talk about cement, and if she noticed their worry she never said so.

VOICE. One morning at breakfast Annabelle’s father made an unusual announcement:

FATHER. My Great-Aunt Leaf has slipped on an acorn in that crazy house of hers in the woods. It isn’t safe for her to live alone anymore! She’ll have to come live with us.

MOTHER. Won’t that be fun!

VOICE. Annabelle’s mother said.

And so Aunt Leaf came.

By mid-morning Annabelle’s father had motored out deep into the country in his new automobile.

By evening Annabelle and her sisters heard the sound of the engine and ran out to the darkening road to wait for the returning car.

Annabelle’s father waved and stopped the motor.

He opened the passenger-side door...

Slowly, slowly

Out came a gassy pile of blinking black rags—

What could anyone say?

Aunt Leaf could have been eight trillion years old...

Her face was as wrinkled as the bark of an old log.

Gnarled hands with long grey fingers stuck out of the sleeves of her stiff dress like twigs on a winter tree.

She smelled like a swamp.

What could anyone say?

FAMILY (*except for ANNABELLE, one at a time but in a sudden rush and overlapping*).

Hello, Aunt Leaf!

You must be tired?

Are you hungry?

Do you like pie?

Do you like dolls?

Do you know any riddles?

Do you want to pet a rabbit?

Do you want to go swimming?

AUNT LEAF. I want to go home!

VOICE. Said Aunt Leaf.

AUNT LEAF. Take me home! Take me home!

3.

(A depressing interlude.)

VOICE. All that June, Annabelle's mother tried her best to make Aunt Leaf happy:

She planned spontaneous family sing-a-longs

Stuffed Aunt Leaf in a canoe and paddled her downstream for a picnic.

Made exotic meals for Annabelle and her sisters to take up to her on decorative trays.

But Aunt Leaf did not want any of it.

What she wanted was to stay in her room staring out the window at the branches of the birch tree that knocked softly against the glass.

Day by day she grew thinner.
If she spoke at all it was to complain

AUNT LEAF.

The room is too hot!!
The house has too many doors!
My skin is just a bruise!

VOICE. One morning she just screamed.

Lucretia and Hortense stopped bringing up the trays.
Only Annabelle continued to go.
Every morning silently up up up the stairs to Aunt
Leaf's room
And every evening down down again with the un-
touched tray.
It was the same every day
Every day.
Just the same
Every day.

Till one night
something different happened.

4.

VOICE.

That night
Long after the moon was up
Long after the rest of the family had fallen into deep
sleep
Annabelle lay awake in her bed thinking her prayers:

ANNABELLE (*thinking*).

God bless and keep my family safe.

God bless Gideon and make sure he's happy.

And please, if possible, I'd like not to be chased by anything this summer—

AUNT LEAF (*calling far off*). Annabelle!

ANNABELLE (*not quite sure she heard anything*). Bats or raccoons—

AUNT LEAF. Annabelle!

ANNABELLE. Or a moose...

AUNT LEAF. ANNABELLE!

ANNABELLE. —anything with teeth

AUNT LEAF. ANNABELLE!

VOICE. And Annabelle at last hearing her calls jumped out of bed and ran to Aunt Leaf's room. Aunt Leaf met her at the door. Her twiggy fingers pinched Annabelle's wrist.

AUNT LEAF. Go! Quick Quick! Go—outside—see if you see! See if you see! Quick! Quick!

VOICE. So Annabelle ran—down the hall, past her sisters, past her mother, past her father, down the stairs, around the landing, out the back door, and into the dark of the lawn and the woods.

(ANNABELLE stands in the yard looking around in the dark. Night sounds come in. She stands a long time looking without speaking.)

What did she see? Out there in the night? Out there on the silky grass?

AUNT LEAF. What do you see? What do you see?!

(ANNABELLE says nothing.)

Anything? Anything!?

(ANNABELLE says nothing.)

What did you see!!!

ANNABELLE. Nothing.

VOICE. Aunt Leaf stared at Annabelle with her lamp-like eyes.

AUNT LEAF. I heard my husband. I heard your Great-uncle Greenleaf whistling on the lawn. Just the way he used to.

(ANNABELLE says nothing but stares at AUNT LEAF.)

My husband was outside on the lawn. Whistling to his dog. Did you hear?

(ANNABELLE shakes her head.)

He might come back... He'll come back.

(ANNABELLE continues to say nothing but stares at AUNT LEAF.)

AUNT LEAF. You'll see him next time.

(ANNABELLE still says nothing.)

If you move fast enough.

ANNABELLE. No.

AUNT LEAF. You'll see him.

ANNABELLE. I don't think so.

AUNT LEAF. You'll see his green shirt!

ANNABELLE. Aunt Leaf—

AUNT LEAF. You'll see the black dog!

ANNABELLE. I've been to the cemetery—

AUNT LEAF. If you don't waste any time—

ANNABELLE. Aunt Leaf, I've seen his grave!

AUNT LEAF (*pause*). People come back.

ANNABELLE. What?

AUNT LEAF. They can come back

ANNABELLE. That's not real.

AUNT LEAF. They do come back.

ANNABELLE. That's only in stories.

AUNT LEAF. This is a story. (*Beat.*) Everything is a story.

ANNABELLE. This isn't a story.

AUNT LEAF. Yes yes yes, it is!

Spiders, rocks, pine cones—living things are made of stories—filled with stories. How else would we know they are alive?

ANNABELLE. Rocks aren't ali—

AUNT LEAF. Don't you know!!?

When you sink you're toes in the mud you're sinking in stories.

When you lie breathing in the dark you're breathing stories...

I heard my husband last night.

ANNABELLE. I know.

AUNT LEAF. I heard him whistling on the lawn. Did you hear? Did you hear?

ANNABELLE (*pause*). No.

AUNT LEAF. And when you went out you saw—

ANNABELLE. Nothing. I didn't see anything.

AUNT LEAF (*pause*). He might be back.

ANNABELLE. Aunt Leaf—

AUNT LEAF. If you run fast enough you might see him.
If you're quicker...

ANNABELLE (*pauses, looks at AUNT LEAF*). I'll be quicker next time.

5.

VOICE. Later that night Annabelle lay in bed thinking and rethinking.

ANNABELLE. What could it hurt—

VOICE. She thought—

ANNABELLE. To tell one little story. (*Beat.*) If it makes someone happy...

What could it hurt to tell one tiny lie...