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**American Association of
Community Theatre AACT
NewPlayFest Winning Plays:
Volume 4 (2020)**

The Cayuga Canal Girls by
LAURA KING

Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY THEATRE AACT
NEWPLAYFEST WINNING PLAYS: VOLUME 4 [2020])

ISBN: 978-1-61959-268-1

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The Cayuga Canal Girls

By
LAURA KING

The Cayuga Canal Girls received its world premier production at Phoenix Stage Company in Oakville, Conn., on Oct. 2, 2021.

CAST:

MARTA Lori Poulin
LUCY Deborah Goodman
MARIANNE Cheyenne Walent
JANE KC Ross
ELIZA Teresa Alexandru

PRODUCTION:

Director Ed Bassett

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 Cayuga Canal Girls was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Phoenix Stage Company in Oakville, Conn.”

The Cayuga Canal Girls

CHARACTERS

MARTA (w): Late 40s or early 50s, pure, uptight, meticulous.

JANE (w): Late 40s or early 50s, loyal, self-sacrificing, tough.

MARIANNE (w): Late 40s or early 50s, racy, bawdy, mouthy.

LUCY (w): Late 40s or early 50s, controlling, pacifying, smart.

ELIZA (w): A few years younger than the others, broken, lost, angry.

SETTING: Emily's living room and a bridge along a canal bank.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This play would not have been possible without the support of some outstanding theatres and theatre artists. Special thanks Ed Bassett, artistic director of Phoenix Stage Company, and Kathy Pingel, AACT dramaturg. The play was also developed through readings at the Baltimore Playwrights Festival and Onion Man Productions (Atlanta), as well as in a workshop class with Roland Tec.

Sincere thanks also go to the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation and the AACT NewPlayFest for supporting new work.

The Cayuga Canal Girls

ACT I

(Seneca Falls, New York. Present day.

Lights up low on a bridge. Half of the bridge deck with a railing and one end of the bridge are seen. The end of the bridge leads down to a canal bank. The sound of a xylophone playing a slow version of "Far Above Cayuga's Waters." At the end of the song, the lights fade on the bridge, but the shadow of the bridge hovers over everything. Lights come up on a disheveled living room in front of the shadowed bridge. The living room can be realistic or suggestive but should project a claustrophobic feeling. Amid bags of trash and newspapers, the room contains old photographs, scrapbooks, yearbooks and other memorabilia [e.g., high-school letterman jacket, old corsages, graduation cap, etc].

MARTA is arranging the food brought in by neighbors. The doorbell rings.)

MARTA (*grumbling*). Who is it now?

(Another doorbell ring.)

MARTA (*cont'd, calling out*). I can't come to the door. Just leave the food. I'll get it soon.

LUCY (*offstage*). Marta, is that you?

MARTA. Lucy?

LUCY (*offstage*). Can I come in?

MARTA. Are you alone?

LUCY (*offstage*). Yes. You invited me, remember?

MARTA. Then come in. Quick.

(LUCY enters carrying an armful of flowers.)

LUCY. What's going on?

MARTA. I didn't want anyone to see the place like this.

(LUCY notices the mess.)

LUCY. What happened?

MARTA. I know. It's a disaster. I've been cleaning all morning, but I don't seem to be getting anywhere. I clean one pile and there's another one underneath.

LUCY. Don't knock yourself out. Everybody will be over at the church anyway.

MARTA. You're forgetting about the dish-to-pass.

LUCY. Are we still doing that?

MARTA. Service, burial, dish-to-pass dinner. That's how it goes.

LUCY. How can I help?

MARTA. You're here. That helps. I'm really glad to see you.

LUCY. Me, too. It's been too long.

(The women awkwardly move to hug, but the flowers are in the way.)

MARTA. Those are beautiful.

LUCY. Picked them up at Wegman's on the drive here.

MARTA. Did it take you long?

LUCY. Felt like forever.

MARTA *(taking the flowers from LUCY)*. Here. Let me take those. I'll try to find a vase. Have a seat. I got the couch cleared off anyway.

(LUCY sits, and MARTA puts the flowers on the table and looks for a vase.)

LUCY. Why don't we all go to Red's Place instead?

MARTA. You can't go to a funeral and then to a bar! You sound like Marianne.

LUCY *(smiling)*. I guess I do.

MARTA. Have you seen her yet?

LUCY. They're on the way. Jane got a sub to cover her classes for the day, so they left bright and early.

MARTA. I'm sure Marianne loved that.

LUCY. I texted them to come by here first. We could all go over together.

MARTA. Sounds good. Maybe they can help me clean up, too.

LUCY. Did you get in touch with Eliza? Is she coming over?

MARTA. I told her to go right to the church.

LUCY. Good idea. She doesn't need to see all this.

MARTA. That's what I thought.

(MARTA and LUCY are quiet for a moment.)

LUCY. Marta, what happened?

MARTA *(looking around the room)*. I guess Emily hadn't felt like cleaning lately.

LUCY. Not the room.

MARTA. I know.

LUCY. Did they tell you anything? I couldn't find out much online.

MARTA. No. Just that it was an accident.

LUCY. Is that what they said?

MARTA. Likely an accident.

LUCY. Was there a chance that she—

MARTA *(abruptly)*. No.

LUCY. I'm sorry.

MARTA *(changing the subject)*. Can I get you a drink? I think there's some soda in the fridge.

LUCY. Sounds good.

MARTA. Be right back.

(MARTA exits into the kitchen. LUCY looks around the room. She starts to go through the papers and trash, looking for something, although she's not sure what. MARTA re-enters carrying two glasses.)

MARTA *(cont'd)*. All she has is seltzer.

LUCY. That's fine.

(MARTA hands LUCY a drink. They sip their drinks.)

MARTA. I can't believe you're really here.

LUCY. Me either.

MARTA. And look at you. So professional. I usually look better than this but, you know, the cleaning.

LUCY. You look good.

(Awkward pause. More drink sipping.)

MARTA. So, how are things going?

LUCY. Fine. Good.

MARTA. Really?

LUCY. Of course. Why?

MARTA. Emily mentioned she was worried about you.

LUCY. She did? When?

MARTA. She called me two weeks ago. Said something about you sounding frazzled. She wanted me to check on you.

LUCY. She caught me at a weak moment per usual.

MARTA. Everything OK?

LUCY. Just growing pains with the practice.

MARTA. How is your practice?

LUCY. Fine. Great. I had to hire another therapist to handle the patient load.

MARTA. Who'd have thought so many people needed mental health care?

LUCY. Lucky me.

MARTA. I guess.

(More pausing and sipping.)

LUCY. I'll miss those middle-of-the-night Emily phone calls.

MARTA. She always knew right when to call to get you at your most vulnerable.

LUCY. I know! I would tell her things I hadn't even told myself yet.

MARTA. She said she could always smell when bad things were about to happen.

(MARIANNE and JANE are heard outside.)

MARIANNE *(offstage)*. Hey, is anybody home?

MARTA *(whispering)*. It's Marianne.

LUCY. They made good time.

MARIANNE *(offstage)*. Are you guys in there?

MARTA. Why is she bellowing like that?

LUCY. Are you gonna let her in?

MARTA. You do it.

LUCY. You invited her.

MARTA (*with a tinge of desperation*). Please.

MARIANNE (*offstage*). Hurry up, Jane.

JANE (*offstage*). I'm coming. Stop yelling.

MARIANNE (*offstage*). Hey, open the door.

LUCY. Come on in.

(JANE and MARIANNE enter carrying grocery bags.)

LUCY (*cont'd*). You made it!

MARIANNE. Finally. Jane refused to take 80 so we drove 17 forever.

JANE. I wanted to take the scenic route. It was only a half-hour longer.

MARIANNE. At least she let me stock up before we left the city.

JANE. Give us a hand.

(LUCY takes one of the bags from MARIANNE.)

LUCY. What is all this?

MARIANNE. Fortification.

JANE. We were afraid nothing would be—

MARIANNE. Open on Sunday so—

JANE. We came prepared.

(JANE and MARIANNE enter the room.)

MARIANNE (*looking around*). What the hell happened to this place?

JANE. That's the first thing you say?

MARIANNE. Well, seriously, what the hell?

LUCY. Put your stuff down first.

(LUCY takes a bag from MARIANNE and puts it on the table. JANE follows her and puts her bags on the table. MARTA and MARIANNE stare at each other.)

LUCY (*cont'd*). You've got enough food here to feed the whole town.

JANE. Don't crush the half-moon cookies. I've been jonesing for them ever since we left the city.

MARIANNE. She wouldn't eat one until we got here. Said they were hometown cookies.

LUCY. Oh, Jane. I've missed you and your chocolate cravings.

JANE. I've missed you too, Luce. You look great.

(LUCY and JANE hug.)

MARTA. Doesn't she?

MARIANNE. Like the centerfold to *Enterprising Woman* magazine.

LUCY. I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille.

MARIANNE. What about me? Hasn't anybody missed me? Don't I look good?

JANE. I see you every day.

LUCY. Well, I don't. Give me a hug, you gorgeous thing.

(LUCY and MARIANNE hug.)

MARTA. I can't believe you're all here.

JANE. It's sure been a long time.

(MARTA crosses to JANE and hugs her.)

MARTA. It's wonderful to see you again, Jane.

JANE. It's good to see you, too. It's great to be back home.

MARIANNE. Speak for yourself.

JANE. You said you *wanted* to come back.

MARIANNE. I said I *needed* to come back.

LUCY. Well, I for one am glad you're both back.

JANE. Me too.

MARTA. How have you been, Jane? Anything new?

MARIANNE *(teasingly)*. Anyone new?

JANE. That's your department.

MARIANNE. You don't tell me anything.

JANE. Oh, please. You know me better than anyone.

MARIANNE. I don't know anything about your love life.

JANE. And I know everything about yours.

MARIANNE. I admit it. I play the field.

JANE. And I'm still waiting for that one woman.

LUCY. Only a matter of time.

MARTA *(awkwardly)*. Yes, I'm sure that you'll find ...

MARIANNE, LUCY & JANE. *Her*.

MARTA. Of course, her.

JANE. From your lips.

MARIANNE. And what about you, Marta? Any torrid romances?
Any passionate affairs?

MARTA (*smiling shyly*). Not lately.

JANE. Well, you look good, Mart.

MARIANNE. Like the sweet little virgin we went to high school
with. You could still be a sophomore.

MARTA. Lord have mercy. Once was enough.

MARIANNE. What about me? How am I holding up?

MARTA. You look more beautiful than the last time I saw you.

MARIANNE. “There is flattery in friendship.”

JANE. Don’t get her started on Shakespeare. She’s writing a new book.

LUCY (*to JANE and MARIANNE*). Sit down. You must be tired after
your drive.

JANE. Once we got out of the city we were good. Made it in four—

MARIANNE. And a half—

JANE. Four and a half hours.

MARIANNE. Took us eighteen years to get out of the Falls and
only four and a half hours to get back.

LUCY. You know no one ever really gets out of the Falls.

MARTA. Especially me.

(LUCY, MARIANNE and JANE laugh.)

LUCY. One thing I haven’t missed is this heat.

JANE. I love summer in the Falls.

MARIANNE. Outside, where it belongs. Turn the air on, Marta.

MARTA. I’ve tried. It’s not working.

JANE. It’s supposed be a record breaker this summer.

MARTA. Highest temperatures and worst drought in seventy years.

MARIANNE. Maybe we should do our rain dance.

JANE. Oh, please. No!

(MARIANNE starts to sway and wave her arms.)

LUCY. Oh, Lord. I forgot about that.

MARTA. What are you doing?

MARIANNE. The Seasons in Song and Dance!

JANE. Sixth grade. Don't you remember?

MARIANNE. I was April showers. Thank you very much.

(MARIANNE curtsies.)

JANE. Lucy and I were clouds. Marta, you were a mayflower, I think.

MARTA. Yes!

MARIANNE. And Emily was the maple tree.

JANE. That's right! She was supposed to stand strong and still center stage.

MARIANNE. But the minute the rain dance started, she had to join in.

(The women laugh and then are silent for a moment.)

LUCY. So, what time do we have to be at the church?

MARTA *(checking the time)*. Oh, shoot. We only have an hour. I've got to get this place cleaned up.

MARIANNE. Why?

LUCY. Dish-to-pass.

MARIANNE. Shit.

MARTA *(to MARIANNE)*. You don't have to stay if you don't want.

MARIANNE. I wouldn't miss it. Make sure you sit me next to Debra Watson.

JANE. That ought to keep conversation lively.

MARTA. We'll all be sitting on stacks of newspaper if we don't get this place in order.

(MARTA distributes cleaning supplies to the women.)

JANE. I just don't get it.

LUCY. What?

MARTA. Somebody give me a hand.

JANE. Does this seem like Emily to you?

MARIANNE. When was the last time you saw her, Marta?

MARTA. I came by about a week before the accident.

LUCY. Did you sense anything was wrong?

MARTA. She wouldn't let me in. She said the place was a mess and she was on her way out.

MARIANNE *(muttering)*. True enough.

LUCY. Anything else?

MARTA. For Pete's sake, Lucy. What do you want me to say?

There's no big mystery.

LUCY. I didn't mean to upset you.

MARTA (*obviously upset*). I'm not upset!

JANE. Maybe we should head over to the church now.

MARTA. I've got to clean up first.

MARIANNE. Why don't we just go to Red's Place after?

(MARTA shoots LUCY a meaningful look.)

LUCY. That idea's already been vetoed.

MARTA. I have to clean this up sometime.

MARIANNE. And this is your job because ... ?

MARTA. Nobody else was here.

LUCY. We're here now. We'll help you.

MARIANNE. But first we're having a drink and catching up.

(MARIANNE rummages through the grocery bags.)

MARTA. There's no time!

LUCY. One drink and then we'll get to work. I promise.

(MARIANNE retrieves two bottles of scotch from the bags.)

MARIANNE. Ladies, meet my good friends Johnny Walker and Glen Livet.

MARTA. Isn't it a little early?

MARIANNE. Special circumstances. It's not every day one of your best friends shuffles off this mortal coil.

(MARIANNE retrieves plastic cups from the bags and pours drinks for all the women.)

JANE. How's Eliza?

LUCY. We haven't seen her yet.

MARTA. I've talked to her a few times since the accident.

LUCY. She's meeting us at the church.

MARTA. Did any of you talk to her?

JANE. I don't have her number.

LUCY. I sent her a card.

MARIANNE. I'm better in living color.

LUCY. We'll talk to her today.

(MARIANNE finishes pouring all the women drinks.)

MARIANNE. Shall we toast?

MARTA. I don't know if that's appropriate. It's not a party.

MARIANNE. It's a farewell party.

LUCY. I don't think it would hurt to toast.

MARIANNE *(holding out her glass)*. May we be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows we're dead.

MARTA. That's what you want to say?

LUCY *(raising her glass to interrupt)*. To absent friends.

(The women look at one another and then toast.)

ALL. To absent friends.

(They all drink except for MARTA. They are lost in thought for a moment.)

MARTA. I think it'll be a nice service. I gave Father John lots of stories about Emily.

MARIANNE. I hope you cleaned them up first.

JANE. That'll be at your funeral.

MARTA. I think the turnout will be good. I used the high-school alumni list to make sure everyone knew.

MARIANNE. You didn't write one of your ridiculous invites, did you? "It seems like yesterday we were teens, so young and hopeful and full of dreams. But thirty years have passed and now we're old. So come bury Emily before she turns to mold."

MARTA. Of course, I didn't. Besides we're not burying her. She was cremated.

JANE. Really?

MARIANNE. Aren't you worried about papal disapproval?

MARTA. It's what Eliza wanted.

MARIANNE. I guess there are worse things. She could have wanted her stuffed and put up in the parlor.

MARTA (*ignoring MARIANNE*). It won't feel like a real funeral without a coffin.

MARIANNE. Or bronzed and placed in the high-school trophy case.

MARTA (*ignoring MARIANNE*). What choice did I have? Eliza's next of kin.

MARIANNE. Or propped up on the front porch so people could wave to her as they go into town.

MARTA. This isn't funny!

MARIANNE. Come on, Mart. It doesn't matter what they do with you when you die because we all end up in the same place anyway.

MARTA. I wouldn't be so sure if I were you.

MARIANNE. Touché.

MARTA. I'm only saying none of us really knows where we'll end up.

MARIANNE. No, what you're saying is that while you're floating on a cloud playing the harp, I'll be chain smoking in the fiery pits of hell.

JANE. I thought you quit smoking.

LUCY. All right, enough. Let's remember why we're all together again.

MARTA. We're not all together.

(The women are quiet for a moment.)

JANE. I think what matters is that we're here today for Emily.

MARIANNE. What does Emily care if we're here or not?

LUCY. Then let's be here for Eliza.

JANE. She's going to need us.

MARIANNE. You're right.

MARTA. I'm sorry. It's just that ever since they found her, things have been a mess. None of you were here. Not even Eliza. I was the only one.

JANE. Who found her?

MARTA. Robert MacLean.

MARIANNE. Bobby Mac? What's he been up to?

MARTA. Compulsively checking water levels to see if he can fish yet.

MARIANNE. Must have been a hell of a shock when he found Emily floating in the canal.

MARTA. He went straight to the sheriff's office and told Cal what he'd found. Cal didn't know how to get in touch with Eliza, so he came to me. They needed someone to officially identify the body.