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Mockingbird

By

JULIE JENSEN

From the novel by

KATHRYN ERSKINE

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Based on the book *Mockingbird* by KATHRYN ERSKINE

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(MOCKINGBIRD)

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MOCKINGBIRD

by

Julie Jensen

Based on the book MOCKINGBIRD by Kathryn Erskine

Winner of The National Book Award

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“*Mockingbird* was commissioned by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and was first produced at the Kennedy Center during the 2014-2015 season.”

Mockingbird received its world premiere at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 17, 2015.

CAST:

CAITLIN..... Dylan Silver
DAD..... Maboud Ebrahimzadeh
MRS. BROOK..... Gabriela Fernandez Coffey
MRS. JOHNSON.....Susan Lynskey
JOSH, SCHOOL KID,
FUNERAL GUEST Thony Mena
EMMA, SCHOOL KID, FUNERAL GUEST,
CAITLIN UNDERSTUDY..... Tia Shearer
BRIANNA, SCHOOL KID,
FUNERAL GUEST Kathryn Tkel
SHANE, MR. SCHNEIDER,
SCHOOL KID, FUNERAL GUEST Rex Daugherty
MICHAEL, JOSE, WILLIAM H,
FUNERAL GUEST Aaron Bliden

PRODUCTION:

Director Tracy Callahan
Scenic Designer Misha Kachman
Costume Designer..... Deb Savigny
Lighting Designer Andrew Cissna
Sound Designer.....Christopher Baine
Production Designer..... Lauren Joy
Properties Artisan..... Tim Jones
Movement Consultant..... Elena Day
Original Music R. MacKenzie Lewis
Production Stage Manager.....Karen Currie
Casting Director Michelle Kozlak
Producing Director..... Kim Peter Kovac
Executive Producer Darrell M. Ayers

Mockingbird

CHARACTERS

CAITLIN: An 11-year-old girl, on the autistic spectrum. She may have a curious speech pattern, may speak too loudly, too precisely. Longer passages of her dialogue might be delivered quickly and mechanically. She hardly ever looks at people and avoids physical touch. She may also have physical tics and various routinized behaviors, like sucking her sleeve, rocking, moaning, shaking her hands and jumping in patterns.

DAD: Caitlin's father.

MRS. BROOK: Caitlin's school counselor.

MRS. JOHNSON: Caitlin's fifth-grade teacher.

ENSEMBLE (3m., 2w.) who play:

MICHAEL: Caitlin's friend, first-grader. May be missing his r's.

JOSH: School bully, fifth-grader.

EMMA: A leader, fifth-grader.

BRIANNA: Pretty, trendsetter, fifth-grader.

SHANE: Energetic boy, fifth-grader.

JOSE: A follower, fifth-grader.

WILLIAM H: A boy more extreme on the autism spectrum.

MR. SCHNEIDER: Michael's father.

FUNERAL GUESTS

FIRST-GRADERS

NOTE: The play can be performed by a company of nine actors. More actors might be useful, even advantageous.

SETTING

We are in a neutral space. The addition of the simplest of objects suggests several places: the living room of Caitlin's home (a sofa), her classroom at school (actor blocks), her counselor's office (two swivel chairs) and the schoolyard. The only constant on the stage is a wooden chest, the unfinished Eagle Scout project of Caitlin's brother, Devon. For much of the play it is covered with a gray sheet.

Movement from scene to scene, including rearrangement of set pieces, should occur as part of the action, part of the chaos and confusion that groups present to Caitlin. Please avoid blackouts.

A WORD ABOUT PRODUCTION

We are experiencing Caitlin's world from her point of view. Group scenes are frightening, chaotic, dangerous and noisy. These scenes should be carefully planned, the movement precise in its exaggeration, some of it in unison, some in slow motion, sometimes characters are frozen.

Projections of Caitlin's drawings might be used. Some of the words Caitlin defines or wonders about might also be projected.

A NOTE ABOUT THE TEXT:

Underlined passages indicate narration, perhaps to the audience, perhaps as an internal monologue from and to Caitlin herself. In general, the ensemble is frozen during Caitlin's narrative passages.

Stage directions are fairly detailed, based on the direction of Tracy Callahan, and meant to suggest how the group scenes in particular might look, the style, the physicality.

Mockingbird

1.

(The living room of CAITLIN's home.)

CAITLIN. It looks like a one-winged bird crouching in the corner of the living room. Hurt. Trying to fly. When the heat pump turns on and blows the sheet, it lifts up and flutters like it will take flight, and then it falls back down again. Still and dead.

Underneath the sheet is Devon's Eagle Scout project. It is a wooden chest, which is three feet two inches tall, four feet three inches wide, and two feet one inch deep. It weighs sixty-seven pounds and is hard on the outside and cavernous on the inside. Cavernous. "Cavernous" means "filled with cavities or hollow areas."

It is not sanded yet, so it can still give you slivers. But I do not know how it will ever be finished. Because Devon is gone. The bird will be trying to fly but never getting anywhere. Just floating and falling. Floating and falling. (Jumping in rhythm.) Floating and falling, floating and falling, floating and falling, floating and falling.

(Suddenly an influx of people, moving in unison using different postures of grief. CAITLIN runs to the sofa to hide. DAD tries to coax her out.)

2.

DAD. Caitlin. Caitlin. Caitlin, the whole town is upset by what happened.

(ENSEMBLE in unison beat their chests.)

CAITLIN. I don't care.

DAD. But they want to help.

(ENSEMBLE in unison beat their chests.)

CAITLIN. How?

DAD. They want to be with you now, after the funeral. Talk to you. Take you places.

CAITLIN. I don't want to be with them or talk to them or go to places with them.

DAD. They want to help you deal with life ... without Devon.

(ENSEMBLE gasps and freezes.)

CAITLIN. I don't know what that means.

(ENSEMBLE undulates around her, noisy and confusing, calling her name.)

DAD. You remember Sammy ...

(His face is suddenly next to hers.)

CAITLIN. No.

DAD. Look at the person, Caitlin.

(CAITLIN looks quickly, then away.)

CAITLIN. I still do not remember.

(A woman pops up next to her.)

FUNERAL GUEST #1. I am your second cousin, Caitlin. I don't think we've met. It was a NICE service, didn't you think it was NICE? Didn't you think it was NICE, all the NICE things they said about Devon?

(ENSEMBLE joins in repetition of "nice.")

CAITLIN. They did not know him.

(Another guest swoops in too close.)

FUNERAL GUEST #2. I love your drawings, Caitlin. You're a very talented artist. Will you draw something for me?

CAITLIN. I only draw for me.

(Another guest lunges toward her.)

FUNERAL GUEST #3. My, my, aren't you lucky to have so many relatives?

CAITLIN. I do not feel lucky.

(Another guest pops up from behind the couch, stepping over the back and standing on it.)

FUNERAL GUEST #4. Oh my dear, you POOR dear.

ENSEMBLE. POOR.

FUNERAL GUEST #5. You POOR, POOR dear.

ENSEMBLE. POOR, POOR dear.

FUNERAL GUEST #1. Left all alone.

CAITLIN. I'm not all alone.

FUNERAL GUEST #2. The tragedy that has struck our family, just unimaginable. First your dear mother. (*ENSEMBLE gasps.*) Now your dear brother. (*ENSEMBLE gasps.*) Oh, you POOR, POOR dear.

ENSEMBLE. Poor, poor dear.

CAITLIN. We are not poor. “Poor” means “having insufficient money to live at a standard that is considered comfortable.”

(CAITLIN pulls at her father’s coat. He is frozen.)

FUNERAL GUEST #3. And you, you POOR dear.

ENSEMBLE. Poor dear.

FUNERAL GUEST #4. With all your challenges. We must all remember, at a time like this, that the Lord never gives us more obstacles than we can overcome.

(FUNERAL GUEST #4 moves to embrace CAITLIN. DAD intercepts. When CAITLIN turns, MRS. BROOK and MRS. JOHNSON are there.)

MRS. BROOK. Hello, Caitlin.

CAITLIN. Hello.

(They hook pinkies, a shared gesture.)

MRS. BROOK. We’ll talk about all this at school in the next few days. Try not to feel overwhelmed.

CAITLIN. I do not know what that means. I know what is “over.” I do not know what is “whelmed.”

MRS. JOHNSON. Caitlin, if you ever want to talk about what happened, you just let me know.

(She tries unsuccessfully for the shared gesture.)

CAITLIN. That is what Mrs. Brook is for.

MRS. JOHNSON. Maybe we could all sit down together.

CAITLIN. Why?

MRS. JOHNSON. So we know where you're coming from.

CAITLIN. I come from here.

MRS. JOHNSON. I'm sorry. I meant so we all know how you're feeling.

CAITLIN. Mrs. Brook knows how I am feeling, so you can ask her. Otherwise it would be superfluous. Superfluous. "Superfluous" means "exceeding what is sufficient or necessary."

MRS. JOHNSON. I just thought it would be nice to take some time to sit and chat.

CAITLIN. "Superfluous" also means "marked by wastefulness."

MRS. JOHNSON. Well, OK, then. I suppose I can talk with Mrs. Brook.

(ENSEMBLE freezes.)

CAITLIN. That is Mrs. Johnson, my teacher. She does not move away. That means she is waiting for me to say something. I don't care for that. I almost start sucking my sleeve, but then I remember. And I say what I'm supposed to say.

Thank you.

ENSEMBLE. NO!

CAITLIN. I mean, you're welcome.

(CAITLIN runs to an imaginary chart DC and counts the stickers.)

CAITLIN *(cont'd)*. Four more and I get to watch a video.

FUNERAL GUEST #5. Well, won't that be nice?

CAITLIN. What will be nice?

FUNERAL GUEST #5. Your video.

(FUNERAL GUEST #5 approaches.)

CAITLIN. That lady in the puffy dress. She looks like a cloud.

FUNERAL GUEST #5. Would you like this piece of candy?

CAITLIN. I don't know.

FUNERAL GUEST #5. Sure you would ...

CAITLIN. I have never had your candy before, so I don't know if I would like it.

FUNERAL GUEST #5. Take it. Try it.

(She puts a piece of candy in CAITLIN's hand.)

FUNERAL GUEST #5 *(cont'd)*. Have another?

CAITLIN. No.

FUNERAL GUEST #5. Oh, go ahead. I won't tell. Heh-heh-heh. *(A shrill laugh.)*

CAITLIN. "Oh, go ahead. I won't tell. Heh-heh-heh. Oh, go ahead, I won't tell. Heh-heh-heh."

(She pulls away and circles as the ENSEMBLE circles and exits. She runs to DAD. He reaches out to touch her, then pulls back.)

DAD. It's OK, Caitlin. They're gone. It's just you and me now.

(CAITLIN picks up her bookbag and traces a circuitous route to MRS. BROOKS' office.)

3.

CAITLIN. I am back at school, but first I have to see Mrs. Brook. Her job is called school counselor. She explains how to do things. Sometimes I do not get it.

MRS. BROOK. Hi, Caitlin.

CAITLIN. I look at the chart and nod. Which means I am listening even if there is no eye contact. Not much has changed in this room since I've been gone, except the mad face on the "Facial Expressions" chart now has a mustache. I know because I have looked at that chart about a million times to figure out which emotion goes with each face. I'm not very good at it.

MRS. BROOK. So how are you? (*She reaches out for the pinky link.*) How are you feeling?

(*CAITLIN sucks on her sleeve and stares at the chart.*)

CAITLIN. I feel like TiVo.

MRS. BROOK. Say again?

CAITLIN. Tee-Voh.

MRS. BROOK. What's that?

CAITLIN. I fast-forward through the bad parts and all of a sudden I'm watching something and I'm not sure how I got there.

MRS. BROOK. I see.

CAITLIN (*looking around*). What do you see?

MRS. BROOK. I think you'd like to forget about the painful events you've been through.

CAITLIN. I want to tell her that I prefer TiVo on mute and I would like to mute her too. But if I say that, she will say, "Let's talk about that."

MRS. BROOK. The funeral must have been very difficult.

CAITLIN. No. Some of them looked at me, which I did not care for, and some of them touched me, which I also did not care for, but no one laughed like cracking glass and there were no lightning movements and no one appeared out of nowhere.

MRS. BROOK. Let's talk about that.

(CAITLIN turns around in her chair.)

MRS. BROOK *(cont'd)*. Did you cry at the funeral?

(CAITLIN shakes her head.)

CAITLIN. Dad cried.

MRS. BROOK. Did that upset you?

(CAITLIN grips her chair and begins to rock.)

CAITLIN. I did not care for it.

MRS. BROOK. Why not?

CAITLIN. I don't know.

MRS. BROOK. Were you sad for him?

CAITLIN. I don't know.

MRS. BROOK. Were you uncomfortable?

CAITLIN. I don't know.

(MRS. BROOK steadies CAITLIN's chair.)

MRS. BROOK. Can you try to answer the questions, please?

CAITLIN. I don't know what the question is.

MRS. BROOK. Did it make you uncomfortable?

CAITLIN. I don't know what is "uncomfortable." I only know what is "comfortable."

MRS. BROOK. Very well, then, what is "comfortable"?

CAITLIN. My head under the cushion, reading my dictionary, wrapped up in my purple fleece. I did not have any of those things at the funeral.

Yes.

MRS. BROOK. Yes, what?

CAITLIN. Yes, I was uncomfortable.

MRS. BROOK. Why?

CAITLIN. I don't know. Please stop asking me questions.

MRS. BROOK. You know, your father is sad.

(CAITLIN looks at the "Facial Expressions" chart.)

CAITLIN. Why?

MRS. BROOK. He misses Devon.

CAITLIN. Oh. Miss. "Miss" is an interesting word. For example, there is "miss" as in "Miss Harper is the principal." There is "miss" as in "You will miss your bus if you step on every crack." And there is "miss" like dead.

MRS. BROOK. Do you miss Devon?

CAITLIN. I don't know. "Miss" is not on the "Facial Expressions" chart.

MRS. BROOK. Maybe we'll have to think about what that looks like.

CAITLIN. Devon is not completely gone away.

MRS. BROOK. That's true. Because a part of Devon will always be with you.

CAITLIN. There are no parts of Devon left because he was cremated, which means burned up into ashes.

MRS. BROOK. You'll miss Devon, but he'll always be with you. Just in a different way.

CAITLIN. I don't want him in a different way. I want him in the same way. When he makes me popcorn and hot chocolate and when he tells me what to say and what clothes to wear so kids won't laugh at me and when he plays basketball and gives me a chance to win by going the wrong way when I do a fake. That's the Devon I want. Not the one floating around in the air.

(Sound of a cellphone.)

CAITLIN *(cont'd)*. If you do not answer the phone, you will “miss” your call.

MRS. BROOK *(answering her cellphone)*. Hello. I’m with a student right now. But if you check in the freezer, I’m sure you’ll find something ...

(CAITLIN ducks to the floor. She rubs a rough spot on the chair. MRS. BROOK hangs up.)

MRS. BROOK *(cont'd)*. Caitlin! Caitlin!

(CAITLIN rubs harder.)

CAITLIN. I can’t stop it! I can’t stop it! I can’t stop it.

(CAITLIN rubs harder.)

MRS. BROOK. Caitlin! I’m talking to you!

(CAITLIN looks at her hand and sees blood.)

CAITLIN. No! I have to erase the blood! No! I have to erase the blood. No! I have to erase the blood.

(She circles, wipes hands on her thighs, pounds her chest and head, totally out of control, a complete meltdown. Finally she picks up her book bag and runs out, anxiously arriving home. She plops down on the floor with her sketchbook. DAD enters.)