Commencement

A Play in One Act

by Tim Mogford

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It's Steph's high school graduation party. Her friends are all around, her family will be back shortly and she is supposed to be adding the final touches to the house. But this "commencement" is anything but easy or simple. She and her boyfriend Brandon have news that will devastate her father, has already caused an upheaval with her mother and sister, and will no doubt upset her best friend Gina's careful plans. Everyone has an opinion about what Steph should do, but naturally everyone tells her it's "her decision." As the news filters through her network of friends, however, it becomes clear that she is far from being the only one rethinking old assumptions in the light of new events.

Commencement is a fresh, honest exploration of the pervasive and perplexing issue of teenage pregnancy. The piece offers its actors pithy, well-developed characters, and its audience a startling array of challenges and ideas.

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

Commencement was first performed at Schuylkill Valley (PA) High School on December 21, 2009. The cast was as follows:

STEPH: Trisha Frazer; BRANDON: Josh McNeil; ANNIE: Morgan Agia; DAN: Ethan Fritz; GINA: Becky Potts; MATT: Noah Horst; TARA: Allison Leidy; WILL: Ian Moody

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 4 w)

STEPH MILLER: Normally warm and good-humored, today she is tense and unsure of herself.

ANNIE MILLER: Steph's older sister. Kindly, mature and a little smothering at times.

GINA: Steph's best friend. Strong-minded and fiercely loyal.

TARA: A friend. She is well-meaning and fun, but often unintentionally abrasive.

BRANDON: Steph's boyfriend. Thoughtful and engaging.

DAN: A friend. Gentle and good-natured.

MATT: A friend. Funny and outgoing, but often callous.

WILL: Annie's boyfriend. Strong, dependable and stubborn.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

The relationship between Steph, Brandon and Steph's father offers some possibilities to the director. In the original production Steph was played by a Caucasian actress and Brandon was played by an African-American actor. Though there is no need to follow any particular strategy in staging these roles, it might be a good idea to discuss with the cast some possible reasons for the obvious tension in the script, and how different ideas might affect how the situation is treated by the characters on stage.

Commencement

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up. The largest room in the MILLER home, with a long table US and chairs moved to the sides. It is being prepared for Steph Miller's high school graduation party. On the table sit the beginnings of decorations – plastic cups, some streamers, napkins, bowls of chips etc. STEPH enters SR. She is a warm, good–humored girl. She places the box she is carrying on the table and stops, looking out and lost in thought. Pause.)

ANNIE: *(Offstage.)* Steph!

(STEPH reacts, seems to gather herself.)

ANNIE: *(Cont'd.)* You dropped this! *(Enter ANNIE, older and more earnest than her sister.)* You dropped it! *(Holds up a decoration.)* You'd have gone crazy looking for it.
STEPH: What?
ANNIE: This! Duh! It was in all that mess at the bottom of the basement steps. I'm telling you, you'd have gone crazy!
STEPH: No – *you'd* have gone crazy: I wouldn't have noticed.
ANNIE: Exactly. Someone needs to keep track of what's going where.
STEPH: Hey – you want to help? Help. You don't? Fine. I can do it, you know. Gina will be here in a minute. She said she'd come.
ANNIE: No, it's OK. I want to help. It's *your* party. Just tell me what to do.
STEPH: Can we take a break?
ANNIE: *(Suddenly concerned.)* Are you all right?
STEPH: Of course I'm all right. I'm just bored of boxes. Jeeze, Annie.
ANNIE: You want me to take over for a while?
STEPH: If it makes you happy… *(SHE sits.)*

ANNIE: *(Moves over to the table and starts to take out decorations.)* When's Brandon getting here? We're going to need help with the boxes.
STEPH: He didn't say.
ANNIE: Oh, right.

(Pause.)

STEPH: OK, what does that mean?
ANNIE: What?
STEPH: The "oh right," Annie. The tone.
ANNIE: I just asked a question…
STEPH: And then judged the answer. You sound just like Mom.
ANNIE: Be nice to have his help with the heavy stuff. I was just asking.
STEPH: Yeah, well, he'll be here.
ANNIE: Right.

(Pause.)

STEPH: I don't – like – *own* him, you know. He has stuff to do. He has a *life*. *(Pause.)* He said he'd help.
ANNIE: All right – whatever you say. I just hope it'll be soon. It's not every day you graduate, and it's not just your friends coming. You know Grandpa: he gets the shakes if the hotdogs aren't ready the moment he enters the room.
STEPH: *(This makes her smile.)* Do you remember the time he couldn't wait for the chicken to cook through and spent the rest of the evening throwing up?
ANNIE: How could anyone forget? Raw meat and warm beer…
STEPH: *(Makes a face.)* Ew – stop!
ANNIE: *(Concerned.)* Sorry! You all right?
STEPH: I'm *fine*. Stop it. *(Pause.)* When are they getting back?
ANNIE: Mom and Dad just left. An hour or so, I'd guess.
STEPH: One *hour*?

ANNIE: That's why I asked about your boyfriend, Steph. It's got to be at least *half* done by the time Mom and Dad get back. If Brandon isn't going to…
STEPH: All right! *(Takes out her phone.)* All right – I'm texting him.
ANNIE: Things going OK?
STEPH: Why wouldn't they be?
ANNIE: *(Slightest pause.)* No reason. I'm your sister – I just like to know.
STEPH: Yeah.
ANNIE: *(Holds up a decoration.)* Where do you want this?
STEPH: *(Finishing up her text.)* I don't know – by the front door, I guess. What do you think?
ANNIE: Sounds good. Are you doing music?
STEPH: Gina's putting that together. She offered.
ANNIE: Did Mom get enough sodas?
STEPH: You know she did, Annie.
ANNIE: Right. *(Looks concerned.)*
STEPH: What?
ANNIE: I'm just worried about the sodas.
STEPH: You're not worried about the freakin' sodas.
ANNIE: All right, I'm not worried about the freakin' sodas. I'm worried that Brandon's got his crap together on this. Has he?
STEPH: Annie…
ANNIE: Have you talked?
STEPH: Yeah…
ANNIE: I mean, since the day you told him.
STEPH: Of course!
ANNIE: Like, really *talked*?
STEPH: Yeah! I mean, as much as Brandon *talks* about anything.
ANNIE: See? That's what I'm talking about.
STEPH: Wait – don't get all worked up about this, Annie. He's been great. Really.
ANNIE: I hope so. Did Mom talk to you much today?
STEPH: Yeah, it's better. I mean, mostly it was about soda. *(Smiles.)* But that's a start, right?
ANNIE: What about Dad?

End of Freeview

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