

AFTERSHOCK

By Michael Walker

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AFTERSHOCK

Cast

Jessica, 19. A bright and cheerful college student

Lisa, 40's. A confident professional woman and mother of Jessica

Tony, late 40's. A very handsome investigative reporter for a national magazine

Detective Howard, 45 - 55.

Setting

Given the genius of directors and design teams, AFTERSHOCK can be performed with as much realistic scenery as the producing company desires. While the script calls for doors and a perceived realism, the play develops into a very surreal world, which could exist on any stage and with any design. An example of a proscenium stage setting is listed below.

The play takes place in the present in what appears to be a modern, middle-class home in Upstate New York. The unit set includes the living/dining room and front entrance hall. The living room is furnished comfortably with a sofa, coffee table and some easy chairs. It is clean and well-decorated with modern artwork, interesting antique pieces and photographs, including a large photograph of snow-covered mountains in Afghanistan. A small, gift-wrapped Christmas gift is on the coffee table.

The dining area is serving as a home office. It is complete with a desk, bookshelves and various office machines. The table/desk is fairly neat, but clearly supports the books and papers of many projects.

Upstage of the dining area is a serving counter with a shuttered window opening to the kitchen. The shutters are closed and the counter holds more office materials. A telephone with an answering machine has been moved from the desk to the counter and the phone wire drapes back to the desk.

In the living room are the front entrance door (USR) and doors to a closet (DSR) and Jessica's bedroom (DSL). There is an upstage hallway to the kitchen and other rooms of the house.

AFTERSHOCK is a new script developed through readings at Boston Playwrights' Theatre. A previous version of the play was performed by Boerne Community Theatre (TX).

AFTERSHOCK

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

LOUD ROCK MUSIC can be heard and JESS MAXWELL is discovered dancing somewhat wildly to the music she hears through the headset of her iPod. She is a very pretty, athletic girl in her late teens, dressed in jeans and a college T-shirt with "State" printed on the front. As she dances, she picks up a winter coat from the sofa and dances with it. The coat's arms become those of an imaginary partner and soon she is slapping his roaming hands away from her backside.

During the music, the PHONE RINGS a number of times before the answering machine picks up. JESS hears the phone and takes her headset off to hear the message. When she takes off the headset, the volume of the MUSIC drops – the audience hears what Jess hears.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

(Lisa's voice) Hi, you've reached us; I hope you wanted to. You know what to do. BEEP. Mrs. Maxwell, this is Gary from Gary's Plowing returning your call. You don't owe me anything for that storm – hardly enough to plow – I appreciate your business. If you have any questions, give me a call. And I hope you and your family have a very merry Christmas.

(Somewhere in the middle of the message, JESS drops the coat back on the sofa, turns off her iPod, puts it in her backpack and exits into her bedroom through the door downstage of the office. LISA MAXWELL enters through the front door. She is a well-dressed, confident business woman in her forties. She carries some mail, a small bag of groceries and her briefcase. She puts everything down and brings the groceries into the kitchen. After opening the slatted window shutters at the counter, she returns to the living room, finds room in the closet for her coat and brings the mail to the coffee table. She sees the backpack and is puzzled briefly before smiling broadly.)

LISA

Jessica?!

(She goes to Jessica's bedroom door.)

Jessie? Are you in there?

(JESS opens the door and jumps into a big hug with LISA.)

JESS

Hi Mom!

LISA

Oh, Jess, I didn't expect you here today! How did you get here? Is everything okay?

JESS

Everything's fine. I just came back to switch some clothes. I got a ride with someone from school.

LISA

I was just thinking about you when I came up the walk, but I never thought... Let me look at you; stand over there.

JESS

Mom!

LISA

Come on! I want to look at my college girl.

(JESS crosses the room and strikes a pose for her mother.)

You look beautiful.

JESS

I look fat.

LISA

No you don't!

JESS

I do! Petunia Pig! I've put on the "freshman five" times three.

LISA

Well I can't see it and I'm your mother.

JESS

You can't see it because you're my mother! I'm a blimp! And what's up with the answering machine? It's like the stone ages!

LISA

My cell phone died...

JESS

Good. Now maybe you'll get a good one.

LISA

...AND it's being repaired – so until they do, I need the machine. Now get over here! I have a million questions!

(LISA sits on the sofa and JESS sits next to her.)

So. Tell me about school. How's your roommate? Sherry?

JESS

"Cher-IE." She's French and she's absolutely crazy. We have so much fun. I am definitely going to France next summer – she has a house out in the country – like a "chateau" – and like a condo or something in Paris, like right next to the Louvre.

LISA

The Louvre?!

JESS

The art museum.

LISA

(Amused.) Ohhh, “like” that Louvre.

JESS

Stop it. And for spring break we're going to St. Baart's – it's a French island in the Caribbean, very exclusive – and I'm going to speak French every day.

LISA

French!

JESS

I already know how to get boys, want to hear?

LISA

No!

JESS

(With a French accent) Voulez-vous “hook up,” bébé?

LISA

You're sure that's it?

JESS

Absolutely. You want to hear more?

LISA

No, I want to go to St. Baart's.

You can't. JESS
 Why not?! LISA
 You're too old. JESS
 I'm not! LISA
 And you can't keep up! JESS
 I can too! LISA
 And you can't hook up! JESS
 Okay, you got me there. LISA
 I love you, Mom. JESS
 I know you do. How's school? Any boys yet? LISA
 "Men," and no. At least not any worth talking about. School's fine. I'm really doing well in Biology – OHMYGODMOM! I'm going to be a doctor!! JESS
 A doctor! LISA
 I forgot to tell you! Oh my God, Mom, I can't believe I forgot! Are you ready? Next semester, Cherie and I are going to switch our majors to Pre-Med! You'll see. And I'm going to take French next semester and Spanish – so that way I'll be able to speak to everyone that's sick! JESS
 Everyone. LISA
 Open your present. JESS
 It's for Christmas! LISA

Open it! JESS

But isn't it for Christmas? LISA

I'm not telling! You found it, now you have to open it! JESS

What did you get me? LISA

You'll have to open it to see. JESS

(LISA carefully opens the gift-wrapped box and takes out a glass figurine.)

Ohh, Jessie, it's beautiful. LISA

It's a butterfly. JESS

LISA
(She wipes away a tear.)

I can see that. Jessie it's so beautiful. Why would you do this?

Because. JESS

I want to know! LISA

Too bad! Maybe I saw it in this way-cool glass shop and I thought of you and how much you've been through. JESS

Jessie! LISA

You're a butterfly, Mom. And you're beautiful! Even if you can't hook up. JESS

I could hook up if I wanted! LISA

JESS

Seriously, Mom, I'm proud of you. And I love you. Now stop crying.

LISA

Look at you! And now you're going to live in France and be a doctor, and speak French and Spanish... Oh! I got your winter coat out. You can take it back with you.

JESS

OHMYGOD, what time is it? I've got to get out of here! Terri's picking me up like five minutes ago.

(JESS jumps up and exits into her room, bringing her backpack.)

LISA

Where are you going?

JESS (O.S.)

School! I just came back for a few things because I had a ride. I didn't even think I'd see you.

LISA

You can't go! Jessie! Don't you want something to eat? I was in the grocery store and I was thinking of you – wishing you were home and...

(LISA stops talking and there is silence as JESS comes back in the room with a new, folded cheerleader sweater with a purple "A" on it, wrapped in a clear plastic bag.)

Oh. You weren't supposed to see that; I was going to wrap it.

JESS

Where did you get it?

LISA

I finally got around to unpacking those last boxes in the basement and I found your old one.

JESS

You kept it? It was a mess.

LISA

I know. Jessie, I know it doesn't mean much now, but I thought maybe later... I thought you might want to have one, so I wrote to the school. I know you can't wear it really – I just thought...I don't know. It was going to be for Christmas. I got everything – even the sneakers.

(Pause.)

JESS

(Pleased.) That is so cool.

It's not too weird?
LISA

No.
JESS

Do you like it?
LISA

I love it. Thank you.
JESS

(JESS hugs her mother.)

But I'm NOT taking it to school! That would be weird. Wrap it up and give it to me for Christmas.

(JESS brings the uniform back to her room.)

Are you being careful? How are you? You're running out the door and I haven't had any time to talk with you!
LISA

I'm fine, Mom. And I'm very careful.
JESS (O.S.)

I thought there weren't any boys.
LISA

Mom!
JESS (O.S.)

So who's Terry?
LISA

(Jess returns stuffing some clothes into her backpack.)

She's someone from school who lives around here; she's a junior. I put my name on the Ride Board and she called and said she'd give me a ride but we're going like right back.
JESS

I didn't know Terri was a girl. No drinking and driving.
LISA

I don't and I don't ride with anyone who does. I'm fine. And Terri's a "woman," like me.
JESS

(CAR HORN blows from outside.)

JESS (CONT'D)

And I'm late! I'll be back after exams. And I'll call you and...

(She stops in the doorway and faces her mother.)

Some nights I don't sleep very well. And I miss you every day. It's all new to me at school, but I'm fine, mom, and you're the best. And this year we're going to have a real Christmas, okay? Not like last year. You were a mess.

LISA

I don't know, Jess – Christmas is hard.

JESS

Not this year. Presents and lights and the tree and everything. Okay? For me?

LISA

Okay. (She sees the present.) Did you get this for me for Christmas? I found it under your bed.

JESS

What do you think?

(LISA and JESS embrace. CAR HORN.)

LISA

Goodbye, sweetie.

JESS

Gotta ride.

(JESS exits with her backpack. LISA closes the door and returns to the sofa, where she picks up the butterfly and looks at it again. Seeing the winter coat on the sofa, she picks it up and runs to the door and opens it, but JESS is gone. She takes a hanger with a cleaning bag on it out of the closet, puts the coat on it, covers it with the bag and manages to fit it into the closet. After hitting the "Play" button on the answering machine, she enters the kitchen and puts away her groceries.)

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

BEEP. Hi, Lisa, it's Susan. Cindy Barlow, from the Cultural Council, called and said she was sending her letter of support for the NEA grant today. Thought you'd want to know. See you tomorrow. BEEP. Message deleted.

(LISA deletes the message.)

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O. CONT'D)

Hi, this is Tony Mayfield and I'm trying to get in touch with Lisa and Jessica Maxwell. I'm a writer with *Home and Family* magazine and I'm hoping to get a few minutes of your time for an interview about how you two are doing. I'm based out of New York, but I'll be out your way in a day or two and I'll give you another call then. Thanks a lot. BEEP.

Mrs. Maxwell, this is Gary from Gary's Plowing returning your call. You don't owe me anything for that storm – hardly enough to plow – I appreciate your business. If you have any questions, give me a call. And I hope you and your family have a very merry Christmas. BEEP. Message deleted. End of messages. .

(She deletes the message and pauses the machine before she pours a glass of wine at the counter and brings the phone back to her desk, where she picks up the handset, presses a “speed dial” number and waits.)

LISA

Hi, Jess, it's Mom. Give me a call when you get this, honey. You just left; it's about six.

(She hangs up and rummages on her desk before finding two copies of *Home and Family* magazine, which she thumbs through as she turns on the machine again and brings her wine to a chair in the living room.)

ANSWERING MACHINE

You have one old message. Hi, this is Tony Mayfield and I'm trying to get in touch with Lisa and Jessica Maxwell. I'm a writer with *Home and Family* magazine and I'm hoping to get a few minutes of your time for an interview ...

(As she listens and reads, the lights fade to black.)

SCENE TWO

The room is the same as before except there are a selection of wine bottles and a tray with glasses on the serving bar. DOORBELL RINGS. After smoothing her clothes, Lisa opens the front door.

TONY

Mrs. Maxwell?

LISA

Lisa, yes. And you're Tony. Come in.

(TONY is a somewhat rugged and very good-looking man in his late forties or early fifties. He exudes charm and confidence. He is dressed in an overcoat, casual slacks and a sport coat. He carries a small notebook.)

TONY

Thank you. This is very nice.

(Looking around the room and seeing a painting.)

Where did you get that piece?

LISA

My husband and I found it in Portugal.

TONY

It's very nice.

LISA

Thank you.

TONY

It's not a Picasso, is it?

LISA

That's what my husband said; wouldn't that be nice? I thought we'd sit over here. Can I get you anything to drink? Some wine? I have a nice cabernet.

TONY

Oh no, no thank you.

(He sits on the sofa and LISA sits on one of the easy chairs.)

TONY

Mrs. Maxwell...

LISA

Before we begin Tony, do you have some identification? When you called I looked through a few copies of *Home and Family*, and didn't find your name. I thought I'd seen it in the past, but not now.

TONY

That's because I'm a free-lance writer and I contribute...

LISA

I know. I called New York but they told me you were in Massachusetts.

TONY

I was. Here you go.

(He hands her a press pass from his jacket. She handles it carefully.)

Oh!

LISA

Is something wrong?

TONY

No. I just didn't expect a press pass.

LISA

So it's not the picture?

TONY

No! I've seen press credentials, it's just that I didn't think a free-lance writer would have them; I expected some kind of business card.

LISA

Usually the picture frightens women. They say I look like a thug.

TONY

Hardly – I mean there's nothing wrong with the picture – the pass! I'm sorry. Are you sure you don't want a glass of wine?

LISA

I'm fine, really.

TONY

(She gives the pass back to him and gets a glass of wine for herself.)

LISA

It's really a very nice cab; are you sure?

TONY

I'm fine, thank you.

LISA

They said you were in Amherst?

TONY

Yes.

LISA

Did you like the town?

TONY

Yes, very nice people.

LISA

Yes. And you said on the phone this interview is in regard to Amherst?

TONY

It is to some extent, but I'm actually writing about how families and communities get on after a tragedy. It could be a flood or fire or, as in your case, a car accident.

LISA

So this isn't about the accident itself; I don't want to get into that.

TONY

It's more about the healing afterwards, the "getting on with life" aspect.

LISA

And there are other..."tragedies" in this article?

TONY

Two.

LISA

What were they?

TONY

It isn't all put together yet so I don't want to go into detail, but I can say all three involve the loss of young people: teenagers.

LISA

And you're finding that people are "getting on" with their lives?

TONY

Not all that well, really.

LISA

And what if I'd rather not participate in this story?

TONY

You have a reason for that?

LISA

A reason?

TONY

Something you don't want people to know, for instance?

LISA

(Amused.) That was nice. You're very good at this, you know. Not the best, but you're good.

TONY

You were saying that you don't want me to write...

LISA

I didn't say anything like that. I said "What if?" Why don't you tell me why you are writing this story?

TONY

I think people should know what others go through. Maybe, after reading this, someone will learn something from what these families and towns have done.

(Pause.)

LISA

All that sounds pretty rehearsed.

TONY

(A little flustered.) I know. It's just I've interviewed hundreds of people about this...

LISA

And you simply want me "to confirm what other people have said so you can get it right." Right?

TONY

Yes.

LISA

You are one of a breed, Mr. Mayfield. I'll have to give it to you: you are one hundred percent "Press."

TONY

I thought you'd understand.

LISA

Because in your "hundreds of interviews" you found out my husband was "one of the gang." A "fellow journalist."

TONY

I did.

LISA

He's dead.

TONY

I know. I'm sorry.

LISA

Me too. What do you want to know?

TONY

Are you sure you want to do this?

LISA

I'll be fine. "After the Accident." Ask away.

(End of "First Pages.")