

Acting Edition

The Moors

by Jen Silverman

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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“Huldey’s Power Ballad” & “Emilie’s Song”
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THE MOORS premiered at Yale Repertory Theatre in February 2016. It was directed by Jackson Gay, with set design by Alexander Woodward, costume design by Fabian Fidel Aguilar, lighting design by Andrew F. Griffin, sound design and song composition by Daniel Kluger, and fight choreography by Rick Sordelet. The production stage manager was Avery Trunko. The cast was as follows:

AGATHA Kelly McAndrew
HULDEY Birgit Huppuch
EMILIE..... Miriam Silverman
MARJORY Hannah Cabell
THE MASTIFF..... Jeff Biehl
A MOOR-HENJessica Love

THE MOORS received its New York premiere with The Playwrights Realm in February 2017. It was directed by Mike Donahue, with set design by Dane Laffrey, costume design by Anita Yavich, lighting design by Jen Schriever, sound design by M.L. Dogg, song composition by Daniel Kluger, and fight choreography by J. Allen Suddeth. The production stage manager was Hannah Woodward. The cast was as follows:

AGATHA Linda Powell
HULDEY Birgit Huppuch
EMILIE..... Chasten Harmon
MARJORY Hannah Cabell
THE MASTIFF.....Andrew Garman
A MOOR-HEN Teresa Avia Lim

CHARACTERS

AGATHA – Female. Elder spinster sister. Spidery. Dangerous. Powerful.

HULDEY – Female. Younger spinster sister. She has a diary. She wants to be famous.

EMILIE – Female. The governess. A romantic with a sweet face.

MARJORY – Female. The scullery maid. Down-trodden. Strategic.

THE MASTIFF – Male. The dog. A sad philosopher-king.

A MOOR-HEN – Female. A small chicken. Practical and very present-tense.

SETTING

The bleak moors...of England?

Think *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* and the Brontë sisters.

However: the characters all have American accents (or accents native to the country of production). Play the anachronisms. This play is about the present.

TIME

The 1840s...ish

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

Casting is best when very diverse. The sisters do not have to be played by actors of the same ethnicity. There is *no* version in which *only* the animals are played by actors of color.

[] is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.

() is spoken out loud but is a side-thought.

MUSIC NOTE

“Huldey’s Power Ballad”: The lead sheet included at the back of this Acting Edition is for rehearsal only. For performance, licensees are provided with a performance package that includes tracks and a full orchestration. The song can be performed with either tracked or live musical accompaniment.

“Emilie’s Song”: The Lute/Vocal Score included at the back of the Acting Edition is intended for both rehearsal and performance. This music is also included in a performance package provided to licensees. The song is intended to be performed with live musical accompaniment.

1.

(Thud!)

(The sound of a horrible impact that shakes our world – a bird-body hitting glass.)

(Lights up on the parlor of an elegant, ancient mansion on the English moors. 1840-ish, to a degree.)

*(**AGATHA** looms over **HULDEY**. She pulls at **HULDEY**'s clothes, adjusts her hair. **HULDEY** stands like a doll and lets herself be manipulated.)*

*(The maid, **MARJORY**, stands to the side, waiting to be useful. **MARJORY** is wearing a parlor maid hat, but when she is the scullery maid, she will put on a different hat. There is only one maid in this household.)*

*(The dog, a giant **MASTIFF**, stares despondently out the window and thinks about how meaningless everything always seems to be.)*

AGATHA. Something has to be done.

MARJORY. Yes ma'am.

AGATHA. Every time one sits in the parlor, one must endure a bird crashing into the window.

MARJORY. It's terrible, ma'am.

AGATHA. See that you do something about it.

MARJORY. What would you like me to do?

AGATHA. Fix it, of course. Why am I the only one around here who takes it upon myself to fix things?

*(Tugging **HULDEY**'s hair.)*

AGATHA. Do you think this is acceptable?

HULDEY. ...No?

AGATHA. No, sister, it is not.

Do you know why your hair is not acceptable?

HULDEY. ...No?

AGATHA. It looks like the location a particularly mangy bird might choose to nest. Do you think this is the sort of hair one wishes to have on the day the governess arrives?

HULDEY. *(She knows the answer to this one!)* No!

AGATHA. No, it is not that sort of hair.

What on earth have you been doing all morning?

HULDEY. *(A flash of hope, she definitely knows the answer.)*

Oh! Well –

AGATHA. Don't answer that.

(HULDEY subsides. To MARJORY:)

Is the extra room made up for the governess?

MARJORY. Yes ma'am.

AGATHA. And is there Moor-Hen for tonight?

MARJORY. *(Isn't sure.)* Well...uh...

AGATHA. Why don't you ask the scullery maid.

MARJORY. Yes ma'am.

(She is gone. The MASTIFF raises his head.)

(He looks at AGATHA.)

AGATHA. *(Steely.)* Down.

(The MASTIFF lowers his head again.)

HULDEY. Agatha...?

AGATHA. What is it.

HULDEY. Why is there a governess coming?

(A strict beat.)

AGATHA. Huldeyard.

HULDEY. Yes?

AGATHA. How is it possible that you haven't washed your face?

(She spit-polishes HULDEY's face.)

HULDEY. Well, this morning –

AGATHA. Don't answer that.

(MARJORY returns.)

MARJORY. The cook is making Moor-Hen, and also there are potatoes, and also the scullery maid has the typhus again.

AGATHA. Ask her if she has any sisters.

MARJORY. Sisters?

AGATHA. If she dies, perhaps one of her sisters might replace her.

MARJORY. Yes ma'am.

(MARJORY leaves.)

HULDEY. *(Faintly, but with daring.)* You see, this morning I didn't have time to wash my face.

AGATHA. You might as well be a wild animal.

HULDEY. I was writing in my diary, you see.

AGATHA. You might as well live out on the moors with the tiny smudgy weasels.

HULDEY. And I'd reached a good part.

AGATHA. A "good part."

HULDEY. *(Fainter.)* ...Of my...uh...diary?

AGATHA. If one is not writing sums and lists and possibly strategies, then I do not know what one is writing.

HULDEY. *(Brightly, taking this as an invitation.)* Oh, well, I was just writing about –

AGATHA. Don't answer that.

(A beat.)

I've been nourishing the hope that, since father's death, you might turn your attention to more pressing

matters. You are used to having everything done for you. Father spoiled you, Branwell spoiled you, but I have no intention of spoiling you, sister.

(**MARJORY** returns.)

MARJORY. Pardon me, Miss.

AGATHA. Yes, Mallory?

MARJORY. The scullery maid has five sisters, two of whom are quite homely, two of whom are feverish, one of whom is bilious, and also there is a carriage in the driveway, it has just arrived.

AGATHA. Ah.

HULDEY. (*Overwhelmed with excitement.*) The governess!

AGATHA. Show her in.

MARJORY. Yes ma'am.

(**MARJORY** leaves. **HULDEY**, somewhat downtrodden, is lifted by a new wave of excitement.)

HULDEY. Do you think she might be very pretty? And do you think she might like to read, perhaps she might keep a diary -?

AGATHA. If she does, we shall break her of that immediately.

(*The MASTIFF raises his head, also excited.*)

Down.

(*Both HULDEY and the MASTIFF sit down, eyes trained on the door. A beat of steely silence.*)

(**MARJORY** enters with **EMILIE** in tow. **EMILIE** wears a travelling cloak. She is on her best behavior and very much wants to be liked. She carries a case for a lute [or other string instrument].)

MARJORY. Miss Agatha, Miss Huldey, may I present the governess.

EMILIE. (*A little breathless.*) Why hello. I'm so pleased to make your acquaintance, you must be...? Mistress Agatha. Mistress... Huldey. Master Branwell...?

(Looks around, doesn't see him.)

Oh! Well. A dog! Very large dog! Nice doggy.

(The MASTIFF raises his head and looks at her hopefully.)

I love dogs.

AGATHA. *(Cold.)* It is dangerous.

EMILIE. Ah yes?

AGATHA. It is very large and very dangerous. You must never touch it.

(The MASTIFF looks at AGATHA dolefully. She hisses. He puts his head back down.)

EMILIE. Oh.

AGATHA. You, I presume, are Miss Vandergaard.

EMILIE. Oh! Manners! Pardon. Yes. Emilie Vandergaard, governess. In your service, I'm *so* pleased. What a long journey it's been, you must forgive me, I'm slightly scattered.

(She laughs, airy and delightful.)

(AGATHA sizes her up.)

HULDEY. *(Re: the instrument case.)* ...What's that?

EMILIE. This? Why, it's a lute.

HULDEY. Do you play music?

EMILIE. For the children, yes, I play lullabies sometimes.

HULDEY. *(Overawed.)* Nobody ever sang to me.

AGATHA. *(Breaking in, cool.)* How was your trip, Miss Vandergaard?

EMILIE. Oh, it was fine, no problems at all, a little long maybe but –

AGATHA. I'm delighted. We've been waiting for you.

EMILIE. I'm absolutely enchanted to be here.

HULDEY. Did you come from London?

EMILIE. Well, I passed through it.

HULDEY. How was it?

EMILIE. It was very big.

HULDEY. (*Soft, to EMILIE.*) I'd like to see London.

AGATHA. Miss Vandergaard has only just arrived, and I'm sure she has no time to discuss...*London.*

(*To EMILIE.*)

Sit.

(*HULDEY subsides. EMILIE sits.*)

(*EMILIE gives the MASTIFF a tentative smile. He stares at her, mournful, without moving.*)

It will devour your face.

EMILIE. Oh!

That's dreadful!

Has it always been so savage?

AGATHA. (*Decisively.*) Yes, always.

Things around here are savage things.

The moors are a savage place, and we who live here, despite our attempts to cling to a modicum of civilization, we find ourselves often forced to contend with savagery. Are you sure you're up for the task, Miss Vandergaard?

EMILIE. Oh, call me Emilie.

AGATHA. *Miss Vandergaard?*

EMILIE. I – well – I've been a governess many times before, if that's what you mean – I did send Master Branwell several references in my letter?

(*She glances around again.*)

Master Branwell must be out at the moment, I imagine?

AGATHA. He must be.

EMILIE. And children have always – well, I do like to think they have felt tender affections toward me – but most importantly, Miss Agatha, discipline has never been an issue.

(*AGATHA just stares at her. Sizing her up.*)

Perhaps if Master Branwell is out on a walk I might – or if he's with the horses I might just – an introduction, or a friendly hello, or –

AGATHA. I'm afraid that's not possible.

EMILIE. Not...? Oh. Of course.

(Pause.)

Master Branwell was kind in his letters, he spoke very highly of his sisters.

AGATHA. *(Decisively.)* Miss Vandergaard.

EMILIE. Yes?

AGATHA. Dinner is always served promptly at six. One hopes not to be late for dinner.

EMILIE. Will Master Branwell be at dinner?

(HULDEY looks at AGATHA. AGATHA does not even respond to the glance.)

AGATHA. Master Branwell has been unwell.

EMILIE. Oh I'm so sorry. That's terrible.

AGATHA. Master Branwell may not be at dinner.

EMILIE. And the child?

(HULDEY looks at AGATHA again.)

AGATHA. The child. Eats in the nursery. With a maid.

EMILIE. I'm so looking forward to meeting him.

AGATHA. It is also dangerous.

EMILIE. Pardon me?

AGATHA. It is undisciplined, I said. Children of the moors are undisciplined children.

The maid will show you to your room.

(MARJORY coughs. It's a wet, horrible cough.)

(She stares at EMILIE as she coughs.)

EMILIE. Oh!

HULDEY. *(Brightly, confiding.)* Marjory is the scullery maid. She has the typhus, you know.

EMILIE. Oh no!

HULDEY. And the parlor maid is Mallory. She's with child.

EMILIE. Oh my!

AGATHA. That will be all. Thank you.

EMILIE. (*Stands, curtseys.*) I'm so pleased. Really quite.
Grateful to be in the employ of such. Old and well-
bred. Ancestral home.

AGATHA. Yes yes. Until dinner.

MARJORY. This way.

(**MARJORY** leads **EMILIE** out. *A moment.*)

HULDEY. (*Wistful.*) This will all be such fun.

AGATHA. It will be many things, sister.

(**AGATHA** leaves the room. **HULDEY** follows.)

(*A moment. Then the MASTIFF raises his head.
He stares out the window at the moors.*)

MASTIFF. A bird drops from the sky

like a stone in the stomach

like all your happiness

fleeting, then gone.

The gorse extends

the sky extends

many things extend.

Happiness, I suppose, does not extend.

I was once upon a time, greatly satisfied.

I believe. I do not remember clearly.

I put my face against my mother's side.

There was milk.

I imagine this caused me satisfaction.

I would not presume to call it...“happiness.”

(*Beat - sadly.*)

There is nothing lasting in this world.

Birds drop and drop

there are always more

the sky keeps spitting out birds

and the birds keep dropping.

In that sense, you might say: birds are lasting, in this world.

To which I would reply: it is never the same bird.