

AMONG THE OATS: "Sex"

A one-act play

by
Jason Hall

[Note: this is the third play in a cycle of six one-acts.]

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CAL, ART and BRUCE sit among the oats.
A curved wall--like the inside of an
oatmeal cannister--surrounds them.

Bruce looks bored. Cal seems
interested. Art is thoroughly enjoying
the game.

ART

I spy with my little eye...something that's far away yet
somewhere nearby.

BRUCE

What?

ART

No! Guess! That's the whole point.

BRUCE

There is no point.

ART

Agnostic. Calvin?

CAL

What?

ART

I spy with my little eye something that's far away yet
somewhere nearby.

CAL

Is it under five foot nine?

ART

(Making progress)

Yes, Calvin, it is.

CAL

(To Bruce)

That rules you out then.

(To Art)

Is it under five foot ten?

ART

I just told you it was under five foot nine!

CAL

I thought perhaps there was...

ART

What?

CAL
...Well, some sort of exclusionary height rule.

BRUCE
Is it an oat?

ART
I'm just dealing with it! Exclusionary height rule? Calvin, I have no idea what you're talking about.

CAL
That's all right.

ART
Yes obviously.

BRUCE
It better not be an oat.

ART
Wait your turn!

CAL
Can this item fit into the palm of your hand?

ART
This particular item, yes. Yes it can.

CAL
And is this part of a very popular breakfast cereal?

ART
Yes, that's right, getting warmer...

CAL
And would this item by any chance be endorsed by quakers?

ART
Again, an emphatic yes.

CAL
It's an oat!

ART
An oat! Cal guesses correctly! Yay!

CAL
Yay! An oat!

ART
(Pointing to an oat in a far
pile)
That one over there in particular.

Bruce stands up, annoyed.

BRUCE

Brilliant! Apparently it doesn't matter to the contestants that the oat was chosen as the "I Spy" object three times already today.

ART

Huh-uh! Not that particular oat!

BRUCE

It hasn't occurred to you people that the objects to spy for the "I Spy" game are severely limited?

ART

Not so.

BRUCE

Yes so. You've also chosen the walls three times today, and me, you and Cal have all been "I Spy" objects. You have exhausted the "I Spy" roster. Time to put the game away.

CAL

I've got something!

BRUCE

Keep it to yourself.

ART

Shut up Bruce. Cal, you have to say the "I Spy" line.

CAL

I spy with my little eye something that's far away yet somehow nearby.

ART

"Somewhere nearby."

BRUCE

Is it an OAT??

CAL

No.

BRUCE

Is it the wall?? IS IT ART? IS IT ME? IS IT YOU?

CAL

No! NO NO NO!!

BRUCE

Then I'm impressed.

Bruce sits down.

Is it edible?
ART

Yes.
CAL

Oat!
BRUCE

I told you, it's not an oat.
CAL

Art looks around in confusion.

It's edible yet not an oat.
ART

Yes.
CAL

Oooh, it's a riddle.
ART

Is it?
CAL

Yes it is. Along the lines of "When is a duck not a duck?"
ART

Oh, ask me if it's got feathers.
CAL

Nothing in here has feathers.
ART

Ask me if it lays eggs.
CAL

Does it lay eggs?
BRUCE

Yes it does.
CAL

Nothing in here lays eggs!
ART

Is it a chicken?
BRUCE

CAL

Yes! You've solved it! It is a chicken!

BRUCE

Hooray!

ART

What're you talking about? Wait a minute!

CAL

Bruce guessed correctly. I was thinking of a chicken.

ART

You were thinking of a chicken? We're not playing "I Think," the game is called "I Spy." If it was called "I Think," it would have an entirely different set of rules. And you two would be outclassed.

CAL

I think "I Think" is more fun than "I Spy."

ART

What?

CAL

We could come up with a line that's a little catchier than the "I Spy" line. Something along the lines of "I think I think, with this thought on the brink..."

ART

No, absolutely not.

CAL

But the objects come from your mind, Art.

BRUCE

That's what he's afraid of.

ART

Quiet you.

CAL

It's much less limiting that way. You've got so many more objects to choose from. I could have chosen a dog or a cat or a horse or a pig. I could even have chose something that wasn't a barnyard animal! Next time I think I will. Next time I shall choose a household appliance.

ART

There won't be a next time for this bastardization of a perfectly legitimate game! From now on only physical visual objects qualify. And the game will always be referred to as "I Spy."

BRUCE

You know what I think?

ART

(Losing patience)

We're not playing that any more!

BRUCE

I think Cal's rules are more interesting.

ART

More interesting?! Where are the parameters? Where's the sense of fair play?

BRUCE

You just don't like anything that's not tangible.

ART

That's not true! There games are in two separate categories. "I Spy" is an honest game, relying on observation and detection. Cal's deceptively named "I Think," on the other hand, is fueled by whimsy and frivolity.

BRUCE

It's fueled by the imagination, and that's something you've always been afraid of. You don't have any creativity.

ART

I keep a diary!

BRUCE

What's a diary? It's a listing of things that happened to you. That's history, not creativity. And when was the last time you thought about a chicken?

ART

What?

BRUCE

It's been a long time since I've thought about a chicken, Art.

ART

You say that like it's a bad thing!

BRUCE

We've been living among the oats for so long that I've forgotten about things that I used to take for granted. I can't even remember what chicken tastes like.

CAL

Oh, that's especially bad. Not only will you not remember what chicken tastes like, but you won't have any reference for all those other foods that taste like chicken.

BRUCE

Don't you miss the outside world?

ART

Of course I do! Most of all I miss the ability to excuse myself from pointless conversations like this one.

CAL

I had a pet chicken once. His name was Clucky.

ART

But I'll try anyway. Excuse me.

Art walks to the back wall and stands facing it, trying to tune out the conversation. Cal and Bruce remain in the center.

CAL

(To Bruce)

Clucky had to stay outside, 'cause if you let him in the house the cat'd go after him.

BRUCE

Clucky was a her, not a him.

CAL

Really?

BRUCE

Was it a rooster?

CAL

No.

BRUCE

Then Clucky was a her, not a him.

CAL

Oh. Well I don't really pay attention to those things.

BRUCE

In your thoughts, can you remember your house?

CAL

Sure. Can't you?

BRUCE

No. I can't remember much of anything before the oats. I only get...kinds of blurred images. Every once in a while an image pops into my head. Right as I'm falling asleep or just as I'm waking up. An image of a woman, with blue eyes and brown curly hair.

CAL

Your lover?

BRUCE

I'm not sure. But I'm happy to see her. She makes me feel at peace.

CAL

Clucky makes me feel at peace.

BRUCE

I guess we've all got someone. The thing is, it's not just details I'm forgetting. Big experiences are slipping me by. I can't remember the pleasure of simple things like eating a hot fudge sundae...

CAL

Yeah, those are good.

BRUCE

...Or throwing a snowball or winning a football game. I can't even remember all the rules to football!

CAL

Well I think there's an offense and a defense...

BRUCE

Hell, I can't even remember the joy of sex.

CAL

The book?

BRUCE

No, the joy!

CAL

Of...

BRUCE

Sex! I can't remember the joy of sex!

Art turns around to address the duo.

ART

Hey hey hey hey hey! Leave that talk for the locker room, not the oatmeal cannister.

BRUCE

What's the matter with you?

ART

From a sociological perspective, nothing! I'm not the one engaging in smut talk.

BRUCE

And I am?

ART

I turn around and it's literally s-e-x this and s-e-x that.

BRUCE

You're taking this out of context. I just said to Cal I've been in here so long I don't remember certain things...

CAL

Like football...

BRUCE

...And snowballs...

CAL & BRUCE

...And sex.

Art jumps, overreacting.

ART

Now stop that, both of you!!

BRUCE

What's your problem?

ART

Don't drag me into your verbal gutter!

(Points to Cal)

Drag him. He looks ready to go.

CAL

I remember the joy of sex, Bruce.

ART

Oh, he's already there.

Art starts to climb a small mound of oats near the side wall.

ART

If anybody needs me, I'll be up here--

BRUCE

On your moral high ground?

ART

Precisely.

Art sits on top of the pile and faces the wall. He puts his hands over his ears.

BRUCE

Do you remember sex, Cal? Give me details.

CAL

But what you want to remember isn't really in the details. It's in the moment.

BRUCE

Give me the details anyway.

CAL

Bruce...

BRUCE

C'mon, c'mon, you're the only one of us who's got a clear idea of your life before the oats. So spill it. Come on. Details.

Cal takes a breath. He's reluctant, not out of shame but because his memories won't replace Bruce's missing ones.

CAL

I walk into a bright bedroom.

Art immediately starts HUMMING loudly to cover Cal's words. Bruce tosses some oats at Art, and the humming drops to a low murmur.

BRUCE

Don't make me come up there.

ART

You are not allowed on my moral high ground.

BRUCE

Go on, Cal.

CAL

There's a lot of sun. I like the sun, it makes me feel at peace. The window's open. Farm sounds filter in. Crickets chirp, even though it's daytime. A cow moos...

BRUCE

What're you giving me here, haikus?

CAL

These are details.

BRUCE

Get to the good stuff.

CAL

This is the good stuff, Bruce. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

BRUCE

In case you forgot, the subject was SEX, not farm animals.

On the word "sex," Art starts mooing. Bruce starts over to Art, but Cal touches his shoulder and stops him. As Cal continues, Art's mooing fades.

CAL

There's a curve that starts at the shoulder and travels up the neck to meet the jawline. I would follow that line on my lover with my fingertips, then with my lips. I love that curve. I love to just lay there and look at that curve. I was very happy then. For me, that's the good stuff. That's it.

A pause.

BRUCE

That's very nice.

CAL

I know.

BRUCE

But...

CAL

But what?

BRUCE

But that's not a story! I want a story.

CAL

Bruce...

BRUCE

Something like, "Dear Penthouse Forum, I am a shy college student from a small Midwestern university, and I never thought this would happen to me..."

CAL

You want stories, but I can't give you those. I have my own stories. You need to have your own.

BRUCE

I can't remember them, Cal! Can't you understand that?

Bruce moves away from Cal. Cal moves to Art. Art turns around on his mound.

ART

Hey down there. Are you still talking about s-e-x?

CAL

No. Bruce is frustrated.

ART

(Intrigued)

S-e-x-ually frustrated? I'm coming down.

Art climbs down.

BRUCE

What brings your decline and fall?

ART

I wanted to see how the other half lives.

(To Cal)

So what's this about Bruce and his frustration?

BRUCE

(To Cal)

What've you been telling him?

CAL

(To Art)

I think Bruce is angry because he can't remember much about life before the oats.

BRUCE

(To Cal, angry)

What's the big idea?!

ART

(To Cal)

Oh dear dear. He's just not fortunate like us.

BRUCE

Whaddya mean, fortunate like you? You can't remember anything about the past either.

ART

I can too!

BRUCE

You're a liar!

ART

(Shocked)

You're a liar for calling me a liar!

BRUCE

You'll have to prove it.

ART

I just might.

BRUCE

Then answer this: when was the last time you had sex?

Art freezes uncomfortably for a moment,
then runs back to his mound.

ART

Moral high ground!

Bruce grabs Art en route and spins him,
making him sit in the middle of the oat
floor.

BRUCE

No moral high ground for you until you answer the question.

Art slumps, defeated.

ART

(To Bruce)

If I'm going to answer your infantile question, you thug, I
demand you clear the courtroom.

BRUCE

What?

ART

I'm not spilling my innermost secrets in front of Cal.
Sequester him to the mound of silence.

BRUCE

Mound of silence? I thought it was the moral high ground.

ART

Just banish him.

BRUCE

No deal. You want me to take back calling you a liar, you
prove yourself in front of both of us.

CAL

(Sincere)

Don't worry. I won't laugh.

Art stands up, but there's nowhere to go. When re realizes it, he sits down again.

BRUCE

When was the first time you--

ART

Yes yes yes! All right already. Well. Okay. I seem to remember...ah yes, it's coming back to me now...that's right.

Art becomes pseudo-trance-like, as if in deep thought. Cal watches with interest, Bruce with suspicion.

ART

A vision is forming...I see a small logging community in the Pacific Northwest.

CAL

A what?

BRUCE

A small logging community?!?

ART

(Hurries through this)

That's right, I was a lumberjack and I wore these smart plaid flannel shirts and work pants and suspenders and I had a best friend named Jacques. Anyway, Jacques and I were out working in the forest, felling trees and what have you, when we heard what sounded like a woman calling for help. "Do you hear zat?" Jacques said, and he said it that way because he had an outrageous French accent. We moved toward the voice, and we found this beautiful woman lying helpless in the grass.

CAL

Oh dear.

ART

(Gaining confidence in his story)

She was beautiful and she had long brown hair pulled back under a tiara and she was clutching a riding crop in one of her dainty bejeweled hands and her name was Anya. She was the princess of a Czar who was vacationing in Canada. Anyway, she told Jacques and me that she had been thrown from her horse and sprained her dainty bejeweled ankle. So Jacques and I carried Anya to the sleepy lumbering village and then Jacques left with a resounding "Au Revoir!" And one of those French "Oh-oh-OOHHHs!" Shortly thereafter I proceeded to ravish her. And we ravished well into the night and throughout most of the morning.

CAL
Did you tend to her sprained ankle?

ART
I did, Calvin. Between ravishments.

CAL
Wow.

ART
Wow indeed.

CAL
What happened to Anya?

ART
A few days later she had to go back to Russia with her father. Last I heard the family was doing quite well overtaking small Baltic nations.

CAL
Art, that is unbelievable!

BRUCE
You got that right.

ART
(To Bruce)
Pardon? I missed that last comment.

BRUCE
There's not a speck of truth in that whole story, is there?

ART
There are several specks.

BRUCE
You made that whole thing up.

ART
(Standing)
Liar!

BRUCE
You're the liar!

ART
I categorically deny that.

BRUCE
I don't care. Nothing in that story has the smallest glimmer of truth attached to it.

You were never a lumberjack, you never had a zany French sidekick, you never rescued a Russian princess--

ART

A bejeweled Russian princess.

BRUCE

--And there was no ravishment. None. Your life has been, and will continue to be, ravishment-free.

ART

That's not true.

BRUCE

That is true, and it's very sad. It's sad that you don't have a real woman to remember, so you have to make one up! Then you choose someone so far out of the realm of reality that she belongs in a historical romance novel!

ART

I am not making this up! Anya is real!

CAL

I believe you, Art.

BRUCE

Admit it: you've never loved a woman. You've lost out on an incredible experience because you behaved the same way outside of the oats as you do in here with us. You're an insufferable, unlovable misfit who no one cares about!

Art is silent. This last part stings. Art walks to the side to be alone. Cal gives a concerned glance to Bruce and moves to Art.

CAL

Art. Don't listen to Bruce. You're a lovable misfit and you're very sufferable. Usually. And I care about you. And I bet Bruce cares about you too.

BRUCE

(From the other side)

Count me out.

CAL

And it doesn't really matter if you've been in love or had sex at this point anyway, because you've got the rest of your life to find someone.

ART

Who am I going to find? We're stuck in an oatmeal cannister, in case you forgot that point!

CAL

We won't be here forever.

ART

How do you know?

CAL

Intuition. Somehow I know I'm going to go back to the farm. I'll return to Clucky, and the cows and that curve on my lover.

ART

You're just dreaming.

CAL

Why not, if you can? But I think it's stronger than that. Because each time I think about returning, it strengthens my feeling that I will make it back. So I think you should think about Anya and your ravishments as much as you can.

ART

Yes, Calvin, about that scenario...

CAL

Because I believe you. I know it's true. It has to be.

ART

Well, let me explain something...

CAL

(To Bruce)

It has to be true, Bruce, don't you think?

BRUCE

What?

ART

Wait a minute...

CAL

Art's story about the princess has to be true, right?

BRUCE

How do you figure that?

CAL

Well, you keep saying Art has no creativity. And if that story was made up--which it wasn't--then Arthur must be the most creative person here. And that would make you a liar.

ART

(Understanding)

It would also make Bruce creatively inferior to me.

CAL

So it has to be true.

ART

It has to be true, therefore it is true! The princess lives!

CAL

Isn't that right, Bruce?

ART

Bruce?

CAL

Bruce?

Bruce is mentally weighing the situation. After a moment, he concedes.

BRUCE

I guess the story's true.

CAL & ART

Yay!

BRUCE

But it's all semantics!

ART

Yes, but for once they're working in my favor!

CAL

I think we should celebrate with a game of "I Think."

ART

(Clapping)

Yes, let's!

BRUCE

I'm not playing.

CAL

Come on, be a sport.

Bruce sits in the oats. Cal and Art follow suit, taking the positions of their earlier game.

CAL

Okay, here goes: I think I think, with this thought on the brink, that gives my heart and soul a link.

ART

Is this a person, Cal?

CAL
Yes Art.

ART
Is this person beautiful?

CAL
Yes.

ART
Yes I thought so.

CAL
(To Bruce)
Go ahead, Bruce. Go ahead and ask.

BRUCE
Does she have brown, curly hair?

CAL
For you, yes she does.

ART
Is she attracted to lumberjacks?

CAL
For you, yes.

BRUCE
And blue eyes?

ART
And a glimmering tiara?

CAL
Yes. And it's sunny there...

BRUCE
Yes, and you're happy...

ART
And she loves you...

CAL
...and you follow the curve...

ART
...and you love her...

CAL
...tracing it...

BRUCE
...and you're holding her...

ART
...and you're happy...

CAL
...and you're at peace. You've found it. And that's all you
need. You've found the curve. And you're at peace.

THE END