

SEPARATE LIVES

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT

By Robert Frankel

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 MEN, 6 WOMEN, 3 - 12 EITHER)

TOUR GUIDE (M/F).....The narrator of the play, the TOUR GUIDE both tells and participates in the overall story.
(39 lines)

NATALIA (F).....An angry girl who wants to run away from home. (22 lines)

HAILEY (F).....A girl trying to remain in control as her life falls apart. (12 lines)

EMMA (F).....Wants to believe her parents will get back together. (16 lines)

KAITLIN (F).....A girl who is accepting of the truth and learning to deal with it. (7 lines)

SARAH (F).....The youngest female character in the play, SARAH is innocent, forgiving, and accepting. (15 lines)

TYLER (M).....Believes it is his fault that his parents have split up. (11 lines)

MATTHEW (M).....SARAH's older brother, MATTHEW is withdrawn but learning to share his grief.
(12 lines)

JAMAAL (M).....An abused child, JAMAAL is afraid of loving anyone. (10 lines)

COACH (M/F).....A stern, but tender adult of either gender.
(11 lines)

HAILEY'S DAD (M)HAILEY's father. (6 lines)

STUDENTS (M/F).....Five STUDENT parts exist which can be cast anew, double as TEAM MEMBERS, or be played by the named cast. (16 lines)

TEAM MEMBERS (M/F)Four TEAM MEMBER parts exist which can be cast anew, double as STUDENTS, or be played by the named cast. (9 lines)

EMMA'S MOM (F).....If the TOUR GUIDE is female, she will play the part of EMMA's MOM. Otherwise, the part can be cast anew or the actor can double as a STUDENT or TEAM MEMBER. (2 lines)

EMMA'S DAD (M).....If the TOUR GUIDE is male, he will play the part of EMMA's DAD. Otherwise, the part can be cast anew or the actor can double as a STUDENT or TEAM MEMBER. (2 lines)

PARENTS (M/F)Three parts exist which can be cast anew or double as STUDENTS or TEAM MEMBERS. (1 line each)

SYNOPSIS

Divorce. A difficult subject, but one so prevalent that schools and theaters often look for ways to help further the discussion and help children cope. *Separate Lives* takes a touching one-act look at the lives of the children of divorce. Without being maudlin, it walks through the lives of eight different teenagers impacted by divorce. The whole gamut of emotions is explored, from anger to anxiety, denial to innocence, blame to acceptance. We smile as innocent young Sarah has a birthday party with her dolls and eventually draws her sullen older brother, Matthew, into her loving circle. We are moved when the stern coach talks angry Natalia into finding comfort in perseverance, in finding solace with her teammates. And we even laugh at

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the discussion of the language of divorce. In the end, *Separate Lives* will leave your audience with a better understanding of divorce - and a feeling of hopefulness in the resilience of children.

PROPS

- 1) A backpack filled with typical contents, i.e. books, notebooks, etc. for each student
- 2) Two dolls
- 3) A “Dear Santa” letter
- 4) Schedule on a piece of paper
- 5) Book of quotations

NOTES

Style: This play should flow quickly and easily. It would be easy to make this a “sad play,” but it’s not. *Ala Our Town*, this is merely a glimpse of life – some of it good, some bad, some funny. Ultimately, the play is hopeful.

Set: The set is meant to be as bare and movable as possible. Several cubes and/or chairs can be used for the basics. As such, it is an ideal traveling play.

Sound/Light Effects: Lighting changes and/or spotlights are helpful in picking out different characters and scenes, but not essential. Without these, characters may move in and out of a single light to create the same effect. Adding music is certainly an option, but I would warn against using melancholy music. Instead, look at flowing piano music or other classical music.

AT RISE:

Eight actors (JAMAAL, NATALIA, HAILEY, EMMA, TYLER, KAITLIN, SARAH, and MATTHEW) stand at various places around the stage. Each has a school backpack and/or books at their feet. If spotlights are used, a spotlight hits each as they first speak. TOUR GUIDE stands to one side, always in light.

TOUR GUIDE: Meet Jamaal.

JAMAAL: (*Hardened.*) Ain't no big thing. Dad yells at Mom. Mom yells at Dad. They split. That's marriage, man. It don't last. It's like...

EMMA: (*Believing that everything will be all right.*) ...like when they hugged yesterday. They hugged when they left. You don't hug and then...and then not wanna be married any more. Do you? I think...

TOUR GUIDE: That's Emma.

TYLER: (*Believing it's his fault.*) ...I think it's gonna be okay. I think they're just... Well, I mean, I came back with a C and a D on my report card. And they weren't too happy. Then they got separated. So if I just study harder, stop playing those stupid video games so much, they won't be so upset, and then...

TOUR GUIDE: And Tyler.

KAITLIN: (*Trying to make the best of it.*) ...then everything'll be okay. But I know that's not true. Heck, I don't even want it to be true. I hate to say it but there's so much yelling now, tension that maybe... Well, maybe it'd be better if they just, you know...got divorced. A lot of my friends have parents who are divorced, so...

TOUR GUIDE: There's Kaitlin.

SARAH: (*Younger, oblivious, playing with two dolls.*) ...so the princess says, "You're not right." And the prince says, "You're not right."

TOUR GUIDE: Sarah. She's the youngest we have here tonight.

SARAH: (*Speaking for her dolls.*) "No, you're wrong." "You're wrong." "You're dumb." "Well, You're dumb." "You're dumber." "No, you are." "You are." (*She stops and smiles, moving the two dolls together.*) "Let's make up." "Okay!" (*The dolls kiss.*) "So what do you wanna do?" "I dunno, what do you wanna do?" "I dunno..."

TOUR GUIDE: And Matthew. He's Sarah's older brother.

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MATTHEW: *(Withdrawn, very introverted, hurt but trying not to show it.)* I dunno... I mean, what do you want me to say? Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, I'm with Dad. Mondays, Wednesdays, and you know, the rest, I hang with Mom... What do you want me to say? I mean...

NATALIA: *(Angry, rebellious.)* ...I mean, it's not fair! I don't wanna move! Just because they can't work it out, doesn't mean I have to suffer! I've got friends here and a life. Maybe they should get a life, ya know? If Mom thinks I'm just going to move away, not be able to see Dad or my friends...or Dad...she's just... I'm not going! And she can't...

TOUR GUIDE: Meet Natalia.

HAILEY: *(Trying to keep all her ducks in a row.)* ...she can't live with Dad any more. She's explained that to me, to us. Of course, Adam didn't understand. He's only eight.

TOUR GUIDE: And Hailey.

HAILEY: I'm sixteen though, so this is going to be fine. We're going to be okay. Divorce is not the worst thing in the world. Lots of people go through it. So we're going to deal with it just fine.

TOUR GUIDE: So that's the whole gang.

JAMAAL: Ain't no big thing...

EMMA: I mean, they hugged!

TYLER: If I just study harder...

KAITLIN: It's better this way...

SARAH: "Let's kiss!" "Okay!" *(Her dolls kiss.)*

MATTHEW: What do you want me to say?

NATALIA: I'm not going!

HAILEY: It's going to be all right.

School bell rings. All actors pick up their books and backpacks and move through the "hallways" in various directions, eventually all disappearing off stage. TOUR GUIDE enters DSL, contemplating a piece of paper.

TOUR GUIDE: They asked me to be a sort of “tour guide” for you. “A tour of what?” I asked. Well, that was a good question. As it turns out, you could say this is a tour of dependence and independence. Even co-dependence, I guess. A tour of intertwined lives, of the pain of splitting them up through divorce. I guess it's a tour of coping. And change. For the good. For the bad. Sometimes, we don't even know whether it's good or bad until years later, if then. But we know as sure as anything that splitting branches from a family tree is the earthquake of change, with all of its many aftershocks. *(Reading from paper.)* “Dear Santa...” *(Pauses, looks at audience wryly.)* Or, for the politically correct, “Dear weight-challenged, non-secular male representing not religion, but merely the hopes and dreams of the innocents...” *(Clears throat, and continues reading.)* “I've never believed in you...until now. Forget toys, forget clothes, forget music, forget “stuff.” All I want is for my folks to realize what they have and not throw it away. Please help me. Love...”

EMMA enters with a chair and sits CS facing the audience. She is now in social studies class, book open in front of her, and very distracted. TOUR GUIDE indicates her, telling the audience.

TOUR GUIDE: Emma.

EMMA: I mean, they hugged!

TOUR GUIDE: Social Studies. Second hour.

School bell rings again. Several STUDENTS enter talking, with chairs, and seat themselves in a scattered way to the sides of EMMA. TOUR GUIDE becomes teacher.

TOUR GUIDE: All right, settle down everyone. Leave all that energy out in the halls. I just want your brains in here! Now, if memory serves me, we were discussing how societies form. Can anyone give me the three rules underlying most societies?

STUDENT 1: They have to, like, get something from each other. Like money, or something.

STUDENT 2: Like you get from your dad!

STUDENTS snicker.

STUDENT 1: Funny.

TOUR GUIDE: Okay, there has to be some mutually agreeable trade between them. Not bad for a Monday. How about rule number two?

STUDENT 3: They like to wear the same clothes!

TOUR GUIDE: Why don't we say they have to have something in common?

STUDENT 3: That's what I said!

TOUR GUIDE: Okay, good. And the third rule? Someone?

STUDENT 4: The, uh, okay... they have to, uh, like each other?

TOUR GUIDE: They have to want to be together, correct. Now, tell me this. Given those rules, what would you say is the most primitive form of a "society", hmm? What is the most basic, smallest society there is?

STUDENT 2: Uh, the, like, the Incas?

TOUR GUIDE: I'm not looking for a specific society. I'm looking for a basic kind of society.

STUDENT 5: Well, I don't... I mean my, like, my 4-H club... Is that...? That's kind of like a society.

STUDENT 4: A society of animals!

STUDENTS snicker.

TOUR GUIDE: Actually, she's on the right track. Anyone else? *(After a pause.)* How about a family? Let's see if they pass the test. So, rule number one, there has to be mutually agreeable trade. Is there mutually agreeable trade in a family?

STUDENT 3: Not in my family! My mom gives me money and all she gets from me is a hug!

There is laughter, and then EMMA speaks up, quietly.

EMMA: What's wrong with a hug?

STUDENT 3: Nothing. It's just not worth twenty bucks!

TOUR GUIDE: But you both raise a good point. Is the trade "worth it"? Twenty dollars for a hug?

STUDENT 1: Heck, I'd hug my great grandmother for twenty bucks!

TOUR GUIDE: All right, let's come back to that. So, rule number two, they need to have something in common.

STUDENT 5: Well, that's obvious. Families have the same genes.

STUDENT 2: Same DNA.

TOUR GUIDE: Okay, good. And what about the last one? Do they want to be together?

STUDENT 4: Duh. They're a family. Of course they wanna be together. They have to.

TOUR GUIDE: Do they?

EMMA: No.

STUDENTS look at EMMA a bit uncomfortably.

EMMA: They can get divorced.

STUDENT 4: Not a society if they get divorced.

TOUR GUIDE: Is that true?

EMMA: YES!

TOUR GUIDE: (*Startled.*) Emma?

Everyone freezes. EMMA rises and comes DSR, talking with a passion to the audience. STUDENTS behind her exit, quietly taking their chairs. TOUR GUIDE remains to play either DAD or MOM depending on sex of actor.

EMMA: YES, YES, IT'S TRUE! There is no society if they get divorced! There isn't. How can there be one if the mother and the father... I mean... How can there be?

MOM enters and goes to EMMA.

MOM: Of course there is, Emma. Even if Dad and I can't be together any more, you and me and your sister are still a team, a society.

DAD enters with EMMA's next line.

EMMA: But Dad...

DAD: And you and I and Jamie are still a...society. You don't lose us, kiddo.

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EMMA: Dad, I...I saw you and Mom hug. I saw you. You still love each other. So you, there's still time for you to... I mean...

DAD and MOM exchange a look.

DAD: I think that your mom and I will always love each other in a way, Emma. We just...

MOM: It takes more than that for a marriage. It takes patience and...and respect. And trust.

She looks pointedly at DAD, who looks away.

EMMA: But you...maybe if you went to talk to someone. A psychiatrist or something, maybe...

MOM and DAD freeze as JAMAAL enters DSL.

JAMAAL: Who are you, Little Orphan Annie or somethin'? Talking never cured the common cold and the sun ain't comin' out tomorrow. They're movin' on; they're movin' out. You're born alone, you die alone. Period. End of story.

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