

THE ATOMIC SUMMER

or

The Sacrament of Meatballs

a comedy by

Mark Steven Jensen

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ORRIN-- A bachelor farmer in his forties. His brother has recently passed away.

BOBBIE-- A seventeen year old girl. Daughter of a single mother. She is a devoted member of a small religious sect, the Church of the New Covenant.

SARAH-- A fifteen year old girl. Sister to BOBBIE. She is also a member of the Church of the New Covenant.

SCENE

A Midwestern hilltop farmhouse. ORRIN's kitchen/dining room, surrounding rooms, and yard.

TIME

The present. The duration of the play starts from early May to late August.

NOTE ON DIALECT

These characters (Especially ORRIN) speak with a Midwestern Scandinavian accent. This accent is common in northern and central Minnesota.

WORKSHOP READINGS

THE ATOMIC SUMMER (Original title, THE SACRAMENT OF MEATBALLS) was developed in February and July 1994 at the Playwrights' Center of San Francisco. The readings were directed by Miriam Eussebio.

A workshop reading was also conducted March 1994 at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

THE ATOMIC SUMMER (Original title, THE SACRAMENT OF MEATBALLS) was first performed by Onstage Theatre at the School House, Pleasant Hill, CA, on January 13 - February 11, 1995. The cast was:

ORRIN	John Allred/Randall Nott
BOBBIE	Sabrina Ryan
SARAH	Kimberly D. Scott

The play was directed by Randall Nott. The play produced by Helen Means, Artistic Director of Onstage Theatre.

READERS' THEATRE

THE ATOMIC SUMMER (Original title, THE SACRAMENT OF MEATBALLS) was also performed as readers' theatre at the Berkeley City Club in Berkeley, CA in November 1996.

STAGED READINGS

A staged reading of THE ATOMIC SUMMER (Original title, THE SACRAMENT OF MEATBALLS) was performed at the Utah Shakespearean Festival in Cedar City, UT as part of the New Plays-in-Progress readings. The performances were held on August 8,9, and 27, 1996. The reading had the following cast:

ORRIN	Charlie Bachman
BOBBIE	Brandy Zarle
SARAH	Sarah Dammann
"JOSHUA" BRAYING	John Waldron

The reading was directed by Tobin Atkinson. The Supervising Director of the reading was George Judy, and the Consulting Advisor was Jerry Crawford.

A second staged reading of THE ATOMIC SUMMER was performed at The Asylum Theatre in Las Vegas, NV as part of the theatre's fall PlayPen series. The play was performed on Oct. 28 and 29, 1999. The performance had the following cast:

ORRIN	Phil Hubbard
BOBBIE	Thomasina Mandolfo
SARAH	Amy Hunter
"JOSHUA" BRAYING	Maggie Winn-Jones

The reading was directed by Linsey Hamilton. The Stage Manager was Tiffany Burris. The House Manager was Leanna Bakken. Lights were run by Joe Kendall.

Maggie Winn-Jones, Artistic Director of the Asylum, produced and organized the festival.

PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTION

THE ATOMIC SUMMER was professionally produced by Theatre in the Square in Marietta, GA. The play was performed in their Alley Stage from April 2-21, 2002. The characters were played by the following cast:

ORRIN	Tony Falcitelli
BOBBIE	Monica Williamson
SARAH	Michelle Donovan

The production staff included:

Director	Shelly McCook
Production Manager	Brian Patterson
Set Design	David Jensen
Lighting Design	John Acton
Costume Design	Jamie Bullins
Properties	Kathleen Parish

The play was produced by:

Producing Director	Palmer Wells
Artistic Associate	Jessica Phelps West

ACT ONE

scene i.

SETTING: A farmhouse exterior wall and window cut away to reveal ORRIN's dining room/kitchen. A black cast iron wood burning stove sits in a corner, its soot clad door next to a pile of wood and kindling. Crude functional kitchen cupboards. A counter. The furniture is old, worn. A shelf with old pictures and an antique clock. An electronic clock sits next to the old clock. A yellowed door is closed, hiding stairs to the root cellar. An archway leads into the rest of the house. A snow blasted doorway is open, revealing a patched screen door. It is late spring.

AT RISE: Two teen-age girls, hair tied in tight buns and wearing severe dresses, approach. SARAH knocks.

SARAH

Should we look by the barn again?

BOBBIE

He's gotta be in here.

SARAH

(SARAH opens the door.)

Hello!

BOBBIE

Sarah, we can't just walk into somebody's house.

SARAH

He's not hearing us or something. He said to meet him at the place.

BOBBIE

I don't think we should go into someone's house...

(They are inside.)

SARAH

Hey, hello? Hello? You call him, you got a louder voice.

BOBBIE

Mister Hulverson! MISTER HULVERSON! He changed his mind. Looks like he's the same as all the other Gentiles.

SARAH

We gotta work for Mr. Hulverson, we're hardly hanging on as it is.

BOBBIE

Mama's going to scream if we don't get this job.

SARAH

She heard him right, didn't she?

BOBBIE

He was there after church last Sunday. He told Mama that we should come over.

SARAH

He may be outside. I'll walk around the yard. He must be somewhere. You stay here.

BOBBIE

No.

SARAH

One of us will find him then.

BOBBIE

I won't stay in his house by myself. He'll think I'm coveting his house. That's what he'll think. I do not covet other's people's houses.

SARAH

Bobbie, we'll find him faster looking in two places. Right?

BOBBIE

Just walk around once. Just once. Then come right back here and we'll do something else.

(SARAH exits. BOBBIE almost follows her outside, but instead, she starts snooping. She spies a mending pile and holds up a tattered pair of men's long underwear.)

(A calf cries loudly under the floor. This sounds as if it comes from two calves. The mooing sound is together--like an echo. BOBBIE listens at the root cellar. Work booted footsteps clomp up the stairs. BOBBIE panics and runs towards

the screen door. The calf warbles again as
ORRIN opens the basement door and enters.)

(BOBBIE freezes. Silence as ORRIN watches
her for a time.)

ORRIN

Thought there was two of you.

(He is a sturdy and coarse looking man. He
wears well-used bib overalls and a long sleeve
shirt. His face has been deepened by many hot
and cold days in the field.)

BOBBIE

Yes, she's, Sarah's outside. Looking for you.

(Realizing she's holding one of ORRIN's
possessions, she delicately sets it down.)

We couldn't find you anywhere, we've been all over the farm. You said eight, didn't you?

ORRIN

What time is it?

BOBBIE

I don't wear a watch, but I think it's past eight by now. I'm pretty sure.

(Brightly.)

Hello Mr. Hulverson!

ORRIN

(Looks at a fob watch tied to his coveralls with a
shoe lace.)

I got ten to eight.

BOBBIE

I'm pretty sure it's after eight.

ORRIN

Thought this watch was working' swell. Ten minutes behind schedule. Don't got time
this season to waste. Go ten minutes late a day you lose a work hour a week.

BOBBIE

Well, I could be wrong, who knows. I could be. I don't wear a watch. Sarah wears
a watch.

ORRIN

Call your sister in.

BOBBIE

Yes, all right.

ORRIN

She's Sarah. And you're Roberta.

BOBBIE

Uh-huh.

ORRIN

You're the one that cooks.

BOBBIE

I'm... I'm learning.

ORRIN

A young cook's better than no cook. Do you stare a lot too, Miss Roberta?

BOBBIE

No, no, not at all, no.

ORRIN

Then you quit staring and call in your sister. Does your mother have to ask you two times to do one thing?

BOBBIE

Never. Sarah, Sarah! Come on! Yes! He's in here!

ORRIN

(Listens to his watch.)

Still ticking. Funny.

(SARAH bounds up.)

ORRIN(CONT.)

Come in, now! I can't waste the whole morning getting you two situated! Sit down on these chairs. And if either of you fidgets, I'm sending you right down the hill back to your mother. I'm sure girls haven't changed much from when I was a pup in school, and I didn't think much of 'em then.

(They are on the chairs. ORRIN watches them a long, uncomfortable while--as if he's estimating the worth of some livestock.)

ORRIN(CONT.)

Your mother assured me, in our lengthy discussion last Sunday, that you are both disciplined. I hope I've no reason to disbelieve her recommendation. But I also know the bragging abilities of proud mothers.

BOBBIE

(With warmth.)

God teaches us to be hard workers and--

SARAH

Bobbie! Not now!

ORRIN

What do you know about this job?

BOBBIE

Well, that you would like someone to help clean and--

ORRIN

I've heard great plenty from you. Sarah, please pipe in.

(No response from SARAH.)

Miss Sarah?

SARAH

(Mumbling.)

You... you need some one to take care of your house and fix meals during the growing season.

ORRIN

I can hardly hear ya.

SARAH

You need some one to take care of your house!

ORRIN

Got space in her lungs after all. All right, lets get moving, got tilling to do and crop to plant. I expect to lay things clearly out once and only once.

(BOBBIE and SARAH nod.)

ORRIN(CONT.)

I'm forced for the first time to hire help. My brother passed on last winter, as I'm sure your mother's told you. His loss has made this farm... difficult. You will confine yourselves to the house, the well, and the outhouse. Does that need repeating?

BOBBIE

No, no we got it.

ORRIN

Carry out your tasks as quietly and as invisibly as possible. The duties are clear, and a strict timetable is to be observed. At eight work begins. Roberta!

BOBBIE

Present!

ORRIN

You will clean the main floor and have dinner ready by noon. After we have eaten and the dishes are done, prepare another meal which I will eat in the evening. Close out the day by cleaning my clothes, so I have fresh coveralls for morning chores. That clear?

BOBBIE

It is.

ORRIN

Your mother said you enjoy this work the most. But that was her and this is you. Will you be happy with this arrangement?

BOBBIE

Absolutely, I'm cooking better and better and--

ORRIN

Then that is set in stone. Sarah. Sarah, you will speak to me now.

SARAH

Uh-huh, yeah, yes!

(Silence as he stares at her.)

ORRIN

Even sturdier looking up close. Let's see your hands. C'mon, hold 'em up. Uh-huh. Stand up for me please.

(SARAH slowly stands.)

Turn around. Sturdy. Solid bones. Roll up your sleeve. Some flesh there too. Good, good. Much healthier than your sister. Sit again. And roll that sleeve down!

(SARAH sits.)

Your mother did say you had some muscle. That parent of yours is proving herself to be an honest woman. Sarah, you must get the morning water from the well. Your sister needs it for the cleaning. She will require at least three bucketfuls.

BOBBIE

There's no running water?

ORRIN

I do not believe in plumbing, nor ever shall. I've seen many a solid oak floor go to shambles from leaky pipes. Is this a problem, Miss Roberta?

(She indicates that it won't be.)

ORRIN(CONT.)

A pile of clothes is here that need patching, Sarah. I have purchased the materials for stitching up these clothes. When not helping your sister, you will devote yourself to these projects.

BOBBIE

She loves to sew.

ORRIN

Do you Sarah?

BOBBIE

She loves it!

ORRIN

Sarah?

SARAH
(Glowing at BOBBIE.)

I can do patches.

ORRIN

Your mother explained you two are both weaker in these skills, but unfortunately Sarah, this duty is yours. Agreed?

(SARAH nods.)

ORRIN(CONT.)

Hopefully your final task will be more in your interest. From what I understand you're somewhat of an animal liker.

(ORRIN opens the basement door. The calf wails weirdly.)

SARAH

Is that a calf downstairs? I'm, I'm taking care of it?

ORRIN

He's a spring bull calf, three weeks old. He is to be fed after you bring in the water and before you leave. His pen must be cleaned. Every night. And I mean every night.

SARAH

It will be. Can I see it?

ORRIN

Sit down, please.

(SARAH sits.)

ORRIN(CONT.)

One of these calves gets born every so often. He is worse than most, so more than likely he will die before the summer's out.

SARAH

I'm real good with sick animals.

ORRIN

This calf is not curable.

SARAH

What does he have?

ORRIN

Two heads, two tails, and three and a half snouts.

SARAH and BOBBIE

Two heads?

ORRIN

Yup. Calf's a mutant. Will that scare you?

BOBBIE

He's a what?

ORRIN

Been trying to shake these bum calves for twenty plus something years. But sooner or later a fool cow pops out one of these mutants. Defective genes in my herd. End up throwing 'em in the basement to keep them from the neighbors. Them neighbors certainly don't need to know my business.

SARAH

Can I see him?

ORRIN

No. Well, after we're through here we can. Enough on the calf. Are both your duties clear, or do we need a review?

BOBBIE

Of course not.

(SARAH shakes her head.)

ORRIN

All right. Whew! Longest discussion I've had for many seasons.

(Looking out the window ORRIN chooses his next words carefully.)

There will be rules here, very strictly observed. Both you girls are believing members of your church?

BOBBIE

(In ecstasy.)

Sarah and I live for our church. We are training missionaries for the Church of the New Covenant!

ORRIN

I'm sure you are. All rules of this... church are to be observed. Now I am not a believer nor ever plan to be, but I do support your church's meatball dinners.

BOBBIE

We've seen you there.

ORRIN

Tend to be noticed, but the meatballs are worth the stares. All church rules apply. You will both wear dresses, you will both tie your hair, and whatever else is required by your group. However, this job is not some summer missionary project. Even though, I'm sure, your mother has been priming you for that all week.

BOBBIE

(With guiding love as if to an ignorant child.)

We cannot agree to that at all. Our church requires we bear witness to all Gentiles.

ORRIN

That will not go on here.

BOBBIE

All Gentiles. Including you. We will not be unpleasant about it. It is the work of our Lord.

SARAH

Stop it, he doesn't want us to.

BOBBIE

Of course he doesn't.

SARAH

I want to take care of his calf!

BOBBIE

You would!

(SARAH sticks out her tongue.)

ORRIN

Silence the chatter!

(They do.)

ORRIN(CONT.)

I am as saved as I ever will be. Paying you both three hundred a month, and your mother would like my money. There will not be a penny spent, Miss Roberta, if you cannot abide by my rulings.

BOBBIE

We will cook and sew, and whatever you want. But do not ask we deny our faith.

ORRIN

THEN THERE'S THE DOOR!

BOBBIE

We will do everything! Gladly too.

ORRIN

Not everything.

SARAH

I can help your calf!

ORRIN

There are other girls around, and I'm sure they'd be more than willing to leave their Bibles at home.

BOBBIE

Our faith--

ORRIN

You got the whole deal and if that ain't good enough.... Well, I've already said what you can do. Decide before I put on my rubbers.

SARAH

Bobbie, the money.

BOBBIE

I don't know.

SARAH

Tell him you will. Then I will. I will!