

Adverse Effects

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By

Taylor Gruenloh

POLYCHORON PRESS

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to Amanda Mansfield,
who never says it wrong

PRODUCTION HISTORY

ADVERSE EFFECTS was first produced in Roanoke, Virginia at the Waldron Stage of Mill Mountain Theatre for the Hollins - Mill Mountain Winter Festival of New Works produced by Todd Ristau and Ernest Zulia. It opened on February 19th, 2016, with the following cast and creative contributors:

JESSICA Amanda Mansfield
PHIL Neil David Seibel
RICHARD Michael Mansfield
MAURICE James Wise, Jr.
ALLYSA Mary Ellen Apgar
ED Ed Sala
KIM Natalie Soucie

Director Katie Mack
Stage Manager Caycelynn Hoggard
Technical Director John Foresman

ADVERSE EFFECTS was produced in St. Louis, Missouri at the Tesseract Theatre Company in the Zack Theatre. It opened December 2nd, 2016, with the following cast and creative contributors:

JESSICA Musa Gurnis
PHIL Carl Overly, Jr.
RICHARD Phil Leveling
MAURICE Maurice Walters III
ALLYSA Julianne King
ED Donald McClendon
KIM Taleesha Caturah

Director Brittanie Gunn
Stage Manager Michelle Henley
Technical Director Kevin J. Bowman
Scenic Design Katie Palazzola

ADVERSE EFFECTS had its World Premiere in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina at the Atlantic Stage Company. It opened March 22nd, 2018, with the following cast and creative contributors:

JESSICA Mindi Penn
PHIL Thom Penn
RICHARD Steve Harley
MAURICE Mike Kane
ALLYSA Bernadette Diana
ED Scott Maxwell
KIM Cat Danger Sweeney

Director Ben Sota & Kevin Ferguson
Stage Manager Penny Langley
Technical Director Vincent Masterpaul

ADVERSE EFFECTS was recorded at Final Track Studios in Roanoke, Virginia as an audio performance by FrontEdge Perspective Productions in February 2021 directed by Katie Mack with the following cast:

JESSICA Amanda Mansfield
PHIL Mike Moran
RICHARD Michael Mansfield
MAURICE James Wise, Jr.
ALLYSA Michelle LoRicco
ED Michael Johnson
KIM Bonny Branch

Recording Engineer Skip Brown
Composer Kyle Wernke

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

JESSICA	A tired individual	Early 40's
PHIL	A grieving father	Early 40's
ALLYSA	Pharmaceutical rep	Early 30's
RICHARD	University scientist	Late 40's
MAURICE	Small town reporter	Mid 30's.
ED	Maurice's boss, widower.	Late 60's
KIM	Medical education company CEO.	Late 40's

NOTE FROM PLAYWRIGHT:

The progression of this play should be very fluid. It's intended to have almost zero blackouts, one scene bleeding into the next.

The text/dialogue is written in hyper-realism, but the aesthetic should still be very theatrical.

For the sake of the reader, director, and actor, I have very few stage directions written into the text.

“I’m not upset that you lied to me,
I’m upset that from now on I can’t believe you.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche

SCENE 1

(Phil enters the kitchen of his home. He goes to the counter and throws his keys, wallet, and other items from his pocket down.)

(After a moment Jessica enters, drying her hands with a small dirty towel.)

PHIL

Worked late.

JESSICA

I figured.

PHIL

How's the basement?

JESSICA

I sucked up all the water, but everything's still damp. I've done as much as I'm gonna do tonight.

PHIL

I'll get to the rest in the morning.

JESSICA

That couch down there is probably a goner. Should move it outside tomorrow.

PHIL

We got enough fans, you think?

JESSICA

I got six of 'em going. Wouldn't mind a few more near the laundry area, but I think it's fine. We shouldn't have to worry about anything smelling.

PHIL

Good.

JESSICA

They say the river's supposed to start receding, so, the flooding should stop.

PHIL

Good.

JESSICA

Look what I found.

(Jessica holds up a bottle of rum she's had at her side.)

PHIL

What's that?

JESSICA

Spiced rum. Found it stuffed behind some old boxes.

PHIL

It's not mine.

JESSICA

I didn't think it was.

PHIL

Samantha?

JESSICA

I think so...

PHIL

God. You think she...?

JESSICA

I was fourteen when I had my first drink. A bunch of girls at a sleep over.

PHIL

I was never much of a rum person.

JESSICA

I was.

PHIL

You should grab some glasses.

JESSICA

Stuff looks pretty cheap.

PHIL

Come on.

JESSICA

Alright.

(Jessica goes and grabs two glasses but doesn't bother with any ice. Then pours two drinks.)

PHIL

Ready?

(They each take a drink.)

PHIL

Ugh. Not a fan.

JESSICA

You don't like?

PHIL

Too sweet.

JESSICA

That's what I like about it.

PHIL

I never got the impression she was drinking.

JESSICA

Well. I don't blame her for trying to live a little...

PHIL

There's a girl in one of my classes. Looks just like her.

JESSICA

Phil.

PHIL

What?

JESSICA

You need to quit middle school. Go back to high school. Start coaching baseball again.

PHIL

I know what you want me to do.

JESSICA

Okay.

PHIL

You want another drink?

JESSICA

Sure.

(Phil pours again and they drink.)

PHIL

I think this is the year they finally fire me anyhow.

JESSICA

They aren't going to fire you.

PHIL

Why?

JESSICA

'Cause you're a good teacher.

PHIL

Being a good teacher is what gets you fired. And it's been seven years. Those looks've stopped.

JESSICA

Yeah... I stopped getting 'em a while ago, too, but that doesn't mean anything.

PHIL

Principal made it a point to talk to me. Privately.

JESSICA

About what?

PHIL

She told me, that if I don't move faster through the curriculum, the high school math teacher will make a formal motion to have me removed.

JESSICA

Move faster? What does that even mean?

PHIL

Principal says I'm not moving along to the next lesson fast enough, "therefore", not allowing the teacher to start freshman at the point they want to start 'em. Say they don't have the budget or time to teach different classes.

JESSICA

That's bullshit. They try to fire you for taking your time with these students? They won't hear the end of it.

PHIL

I thought you wanted me out of there.

JESSICA

On your own terms.

PHIL

Thanks. Another drink?

JESSICA

Yes.

(Phil pours again. They both drink.)

PHIL

Kind of ironic, uh?

JESSICA

What's that?

PHIL

Samantha woulda been twenty-one this year.

JESSICA

I already thought about that. The second I saw the bottle.

PHIL

I think I'm gonna need something to eat with this.

JESSICA

You feeling it already?

PHIL

Was never really much for drinking.

JESSICA

Just wanna, kind of, snack it out tonight?

PHIL

Yeah. That'd be nice, actually. We haven't done that in a while.

(Jessica goes to get some food but looks at the items that Phil has left on the counter. She's used to spotting and looking at receipts these days...)

JESSICA

Phil? What's this?

PHIL

What's what?

JESSICA

A receipt. From St. Louis.

PHIL

Jessica.

JESSICA

From today.

PHIL

I met with a new lawyer.

JESSICA

Phil--

PHIL

I was just asking some questions.

JESSICA

We don't have any more money for all these lawyers.

PHIL

I didn't pay him anything. It was just a consult.

JESSICA

I thought you were at work.

PHIL

I still got paid. I took a sick day.

JESSICA

To drive all the way to St. Louis?

PHIL

Jessica.

JESSICA

Don't. Don't "Jessica" me right now, okay? I have every right to be mad. You knew I was gonna be upset so you didn't tell me.

PHIL

Well, I wasn't gonna tell you knowin' you were gonna get pissed.

JESSICA

Spent all that gas money and used up your sick pay. On top of paying for the flood damage down in the basement.

PHIL

Would you quit with the money thing? We've been broke for so long it doesn't even register anymore, okay? The reason we're so broke is because of those damn hospitals and doctors and I want to do something about it.

JESSICA

We've tried that.

PHIL

And we've been bullied. Told to 'fuck off'. You know what? I

don't care about 'broke'.

JESSICA

One of us has to care. You don't look at the bank account every day. I should call my brother.

PHIL

No. We aren't calling your brother. I spent some gas money. And I'm sorry. But I didn't pay the lawyers anything.

JESSICA

And your sick time?

PHIL

I won't get sick this winter.

JESSICA

Oh, yeah?

PHIL

Or at least, I'll go into work when I am sick.

JESSICA

Fine. Whatever.

PHIL

Let's just have some dinner and relax.

JESSICA

I'm going back downstairs.

PHIL

You said there's nothing more to do down there. Let's just eat. Come on, don't let this ruin the night.

JESSICA

You came in here and told me you worked late. More and more lies, Phil.

PHIL

Jess.

(Jessica leaves Phil alone.)

SCENE 2

(Richard and Allysa in a hotel.)

ALLYSA

God. It's October.

RICHARD

And?

ALLYSA

It's still so humid. Just as humid as it was in May. I can't stop sweating.

RICHARD

The spring and fall pretty much don't exist around here anymore. Twenty-six weeks of summer, twenty-six weeks of winter.

ALLYSA

It's disgusting.

RICHARD

Should've seen it last spring. First day it was over sixty degrees outside? There was still some snow melting on the ground from the weekend before.

ALLYSA

I hate coming out here.

RICHARD

Thanks. That means a lot.

ALLYSA

My trips down to Miami or San Antonio are more enjoyable.

RICHARD

They don't have bad weather in San Antonio?

ALLYSA

They do. But at least I can go to a mall and do some shopping.
Go to a decent Italian restaurant.

RICHARD

Italian in San Antonio?

ALLYSA

And I don't have to fly into one of the worst airports in the country.

RICHARD

If I were there, you wouldn't have time to go find an Italian restaurant.

ALLYSA

Is that right?

RICHARD

That's right.

(Richard puts his arms around Allysa.)

ALLYSA

Get off me. You're all sweaty. God, I can't cool down...

RICHARD

Can we be done talking about the heat?

ALLYSA

Yes. We need to talk about the new material, anyway.

RICHARD

Allysa. No. Come here.

ALLYSA

I need to fill you in on this.

RICHARD

I haven't seen you in months. Leave that stuff for later.

ALLYSA

Let's get the actual work out of the way first. I need you to review everything in this packet.

RICHARD

I can read that on my own time.

ALLYSA

If there's no reason to go over this in person, then there's no reason for RexSci to send me out here. And that means no more fun. Is that the way you want it?

RICHARD

Seeing me isn't reason enough?

ALLYSA

You know what I mean.

RICHARD

I've been thinking... I wouldn't mind a weekend together sometime, without any business attached.

ALLYSA

That could happen. But right now? I'm on company time.

RICHARD

When?

ALLYSA

When what?

RICHARD

When can that weekend happen? With minimal company time.

ALLYSA

Richard. I want to be taken serious right now.

RICHARD

Fine. I'm sorry. Work first.

ALLYSA

Thank you. The new medication is called Nyaccille.

RICHARD

Nyaccille. And what is Nyaccille?

ALLYSA

A children's anti-psychotic.

RICHARD

Jesus, Allysa.

ALLYSA

Problem?

RICHARD

Children's anti-psychotic?

ALLYSA

It's not anything too different from what's already out there. But if we do this right, we can really sell it.

RICHARD

Yeah, but... It's just... You've always given me lighter stuff. Blood pressure medicine, antidepressants. Adult medication.

ALLYSA

You're always complaining about not getting enough press on your publications. This might help you get noticed by some bigger med schools.

RICHARD

I am with a big med school.

ALLYSA

Please. It's big compared to its surroundings. If you get a job out east... we could see each other a lot more often.

RICHARD

Is that what you want? Me out east?

ALLYSA

It would be a lot more convenient. No more mid-Missouri

hotel sex.

RICHARD

You told me you liked hotel sex. First night I met you.

ALLYSA

Until then, I never looked out across a prairie after getting off...

RICHARD

Must be worth it, since you keep coming back out...

ALLYSA

Can we put your need for validation on hold for a sec so we can get back to work, please?

RICHARD

What reason do I have to conduct a study on a children's anti-psychotic?

ALLYSA

Because. You're becoming a big name. All the education companies want a piece of you.

RICHARD

Wow. That almost sounded truthful.

ALLYSA

I get paid to be creative. Besides, we already have a medical journal lined up to publish.

RICHARD

We aren't even going to pretend to run the study?

ALLYSA

We already conducted the study, and the paper has been drafted.

RICHARD

Alright, let's slow down.

ALLYSA

What's the matter?

RICHARD

You've never come at me like this before.

ALLYSA

I've never come at you with one million dollars before either.

RICHARD

Excuse me?

ALLYSA

One million dollars for your consulting fee on the study of Nyaccille. Which you would see, is broken down into multiple payments throughout the year, if you would just open that packet.

RICHARD

Allysa. Stop.

ALLYSA

You'll be sharing the byline this time, too.

RICHARD

With who?

ALLYSA

A Dr. Catchens up in Iowa. He'll be listed with you on the study.

RICHARD

Jack Catchens? Jack is gonna do this?

ALLYSA

Do you know him?

RICHARD

I've run in to him enough times to know he's an asshole.

ALLYSA

Well, I talked to him last weekend.

RICHARD

Let me guess, in a nicer hotel near a "decent" Italian restaurant.

ALLYSA

Don't be a child. A shared byline is always better with these articles.

RICHARD

One million dollars?

ALLYSA

To do something that isn't illegal.

RICHARD

Why would you say that?

ALLYSA

Because it isn't.

RICHARD

Why would you have to remind me of that?

ALLYSA

Richard.

RICHARD

There are still some areas of legal that are unethical.

ALLYSA

There's nothing unethical here.

RICHARD

Then why am I getting a million dollars for doing nothing?

ALLYSA

You're not doing nothing. This drug will help lots of children. You're helping it get into the world sooner.

RICHARD

Don't patronize me.

ALLYSA

I'm not. It's just, the company wants to get this out quick. It can be a game changer, Richard. Something that really changes lives. For those taking it, and those helping get it out in the world.

RICHARD

You wrote the article?

ALLYSA

Yes.

RICHARD

Okay.

ALLYSA

Okay?

RICHARD

You asking me to trust you?

ALLYSA

I am.

RICHARD

Then of course.

ALLYSA

Thank you... Now... While this is technically an anti-psychotic for children, we've found a decent side effect to be that it does a fantastic job cleaning up acne. So, you'll see that during the study, they came up with a potential theoretical conclusion--

RICHARD

Potential theoretical conclusion?

ALLYSA

That's the term they'd like us to start using, yes.

RICHARD

You people are creative.

ALLYSA

And the conclusion is that this drug could be used to help teenagers clean up their skin without much worry to their mental state.

RICHARD

What medical journal is ready to publish?

ALLYSA

Well... sign this piece of paper and I'll tell you...

RICHARD

How much is the pharmaceutical company looking to make from Nyaccille?

ALLYSA

Sign this piece of paper... and I'll tell you...

RICHARD

Do you believe in this drug?

ALLYSA

I do.

RICHARD

Give it here.

(Richard signs the paper.)

RICHARD

There. I do trust you.

ALLYSA

I hope so.

RICHARD

I want to see you more.

ALLYSA

Come here.

(They kiss.)

RICHARD

Stay for a while this time. A couple of days. I'll take off work.
Show you a good time.

ALLYSA

I can't. But... I want to have a good time for the night I'm here.
I promise.

RICHARD

Yeah? What were you thinking?

ALLYSA

You don't want me to answer your questions, about the article
and the publisher?

RICHARD

Tell me what you want.

Taylor Gruenloh

ALLYSA

I want to lean back on the bed over there... and watch you do all the work...

RICHARD

Yes, ma'am.

SCENE 3

(Maurice is sitting on bleachers, taking notes on players at a high school football practice. After a moment, Phil enters with folder of documents in hand.)

PHIL

Hey, there.

MAURICE

Hey.

PHIL

You're with the Register, right? The online newspaper?

MAURICE

Who told you that?

PHIL

The coach down there. You're not the usual sports guy though.

MAURICE

The usual?

PHIL

I used to coach baseball at the high school. My name's Phil Junte. Umm, the guy from the Register would come and interview us when we had a good season.

MAURICE

Rod.

PHIL

Yeah, right. Rod. Where's he?

MAURICE

Boise.

PHIL

Boise?

MAURICE

Yup. Doing sports in Idaho, now.

PHIL

Don't think of sports much when I hear Idaho.

MAURICE

Give me a state without professional sports teams, I'll show you high school parents more cutthroat than inner city gangs.

MAURICE

You a parent?

PHIL

No. No, I teach over at the middle school now. Just watchin' practice is all.

MAURICE

I'm doing a write up on that McDonald kid.

PHIL

Derek or Steve?

MAURICE

Steve. The quarterback.

PHIL

Gotcha. Had him and his brother back in 8th grade. Good kids. For such a small town we've got a lot of twins.

MAURICE

Yeah? Kansas and Florida State are looking at Steve there.

PHIL

Really?

MAURICE

So my boss tells me. I'm Maurice.

PHIL

Good to meet you, Maurice.

MAURICE

Did you want to talk about something specific or...?

PHIL

Well... I was looking for Rod... I had a question... It might be dumb, but...

MAURICE

No dumb questions, right?

PHIL

Right.

MAURICE

Although, I really don't believe that.

PHIL

Don't believe what?

MAURICE

Dumb questions. People ask dumb questions all the time. If there's dumb people, there will be dumb questions.

PHIL

Okay...

MAURICE

I'm not saying you're gonna ask a dumb question.

PHIL

Right.

MAURICE

Although, you might.

PHIL

I'm trying to sue the doctors who killed my daughter.

MAURICE

Shit.

PHIL

I see where people get some media attention, and they get their case in the spotlight.

MAURICE

Okay. And your question is...? What?

PHIL

If you might have any advice about how to get that goin'? Getting attention on my story.

MAURICE

You have a court case going right now?

PHIL

We lost in court.

MAURICE

I mean... I'm not the most... We don't do much of that at the Register. You know what I mean? It's really just local high school sports and church events. Tornado and flood damage. Labor Day Balloon Derby.

PHIL

I know. But it's the internet, right? You can just add another story, couldn't you?

MAURICE

What'd she die from? Your daughter?

PHIL

She got hit by a train. Up by old highway one hundred.

MAURICE

I thought you said some doctors killed her.

PHIL

It was the medication she was on. It messed with her mind. It made her... suicidal.

MAURICE

What'd the courts say?

PHIL

That it wasn't the medication.

MAURICE

And you don't believe them?

PHIL

No. I've done a bunch of research. I have it all, you can read it. It's right here, I got it all documented. There's copies of everything in this folder if you want--

MAURICE

Ya know, I bet you got it all, but... I just don't see what I can do to help.

PHIL

You can help get some coverage on this. A lawyer down in St. Louis said that if I got some media backing, we might pressure the courts to look into it again.

MAURICE

Okay... Why don't you start your own web site then. A blog or something.

PHIL

A blog?

MAURICE

Yeah.

PHIL

What good is a blog gonna do? The Register could help get the word out.

MAURICE

The Register? What do you think the Register is? We're just a glorified blog. Around here? We all are. It's easy to start your own web site these days.

PHIL

What do you want me to call it? Mydeaddaughter.com?

MAURICE

Listen. That's a messed up story. But I wouldn't trust the Register to help you out.

PHIL

I'm just asking you to look into it.

MAURICE

My boss isn't gonna want anything to do with it.

PHIL

How do you know?

MAURICE

What you're talking about? A real investigative report? You need time and money. And support. There's nothing like that around here anymore. Not in local print.

PHIL

Where do I go then?

MAURICE

Listen, man. I worked in Kansas City for six years covering metro. There was a car plant, thought they could make more cars in less time if they didn't have to follow safety laws. Averaged about four workers a week, being sent to the emergency room. Three guys actually died in eighteen months. You know how many people read that story?

PHIL

No.

MAURICE

No one read that story 'cause it was never written. The car company was the biggest advertiser in the paper. Paper wasn't gonna run the story and risk losing money.

PHIL

That's the reason you won't help me?

MAURICE

I investigated that manufacturing plant. And then I was fired and sued. Now I write sports in Smallville because my wife doesn't want me at home all day. Listen, practice is over and I gotta go follow this kid home. Have dinner with his family. Quote 'em.

Try to get all their family and friends to click on the web site so I can keep doing this shit. Have a good night, man.

SCENE 4

*(Jessica and Richard are in her kitchen.
Jessica holds a check in her hands.)*

JESSICA

Should I report this... I mean... as income?

RICHARD

You'll probably have to.

JESSICA

That's a lot of money, Richard.

RICHARD

It's fine.

JESSICA

It's gonna make Phil uncomfortable.

RICHARD

All the better.

JESSICA

Stop it.

RICHARD

How bad is it?

JESSICA

We're about two months behind on the mortgage.

(Richard looks around the atmosphere.)