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Separated at Birth

A Short Comedy for Three Middle-Aged Women

By

Constance Humphrey Egan

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Separated at Birth

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

COCO; *a preppy, perky, housewife and mother. (The “baby” sister.)*

RICKI; *a college professor. (The middle sister.)*

BEA; *a successful executive in a Fortune 500 Company. (The oldest sister.)*

SETTING

TIME: PRESENT

PLACE: COCO’S LIVINGROOM

ETC

SEPARATED AT BIRTH was originally produced by the Hand to Mouth Players in Buchanan, NY in October 2010. Artistic producers were Anne Rodgers Pearl and Gary Simon. It was directed by Jim Petrillo; the lightening design was by Jim Petrillo; production manager was Gary Simon; the sound designer was Keith Whalen, and the stage manager was Tom Campbell.

The cast was as follows:

| | |
|--------|------------------|
| COCO | Christine Orchid |
| RICKIE | Kathleen Muldoon |
| BEA | Suzanne Ochs |

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THE PLAY

(AT RISE: A preppy living room; burgundy and green everywhere. A camera on a tripod D.C. RICKI sits on a wingback chair, scanning the room. She's been drinking and sitting in this position for quite some time.)

RICKI

(Calling) Have you redone this room? I don't remember it looking so, so "Ralph Lauren."
(Silence) Everything matches, and it's so clean. *(Muttering under her breath)* I bet your bra and underwear match. Most days my socks don't match.

(COCO enters. She definitely matches. She's in green and pink. She's very skinny and perky.)

COCO

Here's some Chex Mix. *(Handing RICKI a little bowl)* I know it's your faaaavorite. I won't touch it. It's too fattening. I'm soooooo tickled that you came. Bea said that you wouldn't, and I said "that's impossible." This is so important to Mommy. I said, "Let's ask. The worst she could do is say no." And here you are! I am just so tickled. You weren't pleased with our last session, five years ago. I thought that you would refuse to participate, but here you are.

RICKI

You made it sound like life and death.

COCO

Well, it is. This could be Mommy's last birthday. That's life and death.

RICKI

No, life and death is when it's THAT—life and death. If Mom's doctor calls, and says that she's had a stroke, her quality of life is nil, she's in a vegetable state, a zucchini really, she needs a feeding tube and diapers. He then suggests that we should consider disconnecting her. Now THAT is a life and death situation.

COCO

You are such a Debbie Downer. This is a special evening, and you're insisting on talking about diapers and feeding tubes.

RICKI

All I'm saying is that if a doctor, rhetorically speaking, called with fatal news, well ... then that would be a life and death situation.

COCO

Stop saying that. You keep bringing up depressing examples. Don't you ever give happy uplifting examples?

RICKI

We're talking about Mom here. Helloooo! Earth to CoCo. Mom is not a happy camper. A call from a doctor saying that she's slipping away would be a blessing.

COCO

I can't listen to your negativity. This is a nice occasion. Mommy is relatively healthy and happy, and this is our special "girls night out." I will not let you dampen my spirits. Such a Debbie Downer. You've always been that way.

RICKI

Debbie Downer? I'm a realist. You, on the other hand, live in La La Land. I see situations for what they are. I don't like to sugarcoat things. P.S. You misrepresented this little get together. You made it sound so urgent. It's just a god damn photo session.

COCO

It's not just a photo session. This is our five year wine and Chex party.

RICKI

(Poking at her) Sex?

COCO

What?

RICKI

Wine and sex. We're having a wine and sex party? Now you're talking.

COCO

Chex. Geez Louise. You have a filthy mind. Wine and Chex—your favorite, remember?

RICKI

Actually, wine and sex definitely is my favorite, but I'll settle for this. Wouldn't want to get too carried away, let loose, would you? Too much fun is a dangerous thing.

COCO

We're going to do this for Mommy. Can you lighten up? *(Pause)* I'm just thrilled that we can all be together. We never see each other anymore. I'm just over the moon that we can be together tonight.

RICKI

Speaking of—where's Bea?

COCO

She's coming. She's just running a little late. She had some board meeting-thingy. She said to go ahead without her.

RICKI

How can we possibly do that when it takes all three of us to get a photo? How can we just "go ahead without her?" That's ludicrous. She always keeps us waiting. It's just so self-centered. Ms. Capitalist.

COCO

She apologized in advance. You're just as hard to pin down. You have no room to complain. She assumed that we would have a glass of wine and chit-chat 'til she arrived. No biggie.

RICKI

It is no biggie, but it's so typical. She thinks her time is more important than ours.

COCO

This is social. This is our "girls' night out." This is not a business meeting.

RICKI

"Girls' . . . night . . . out." You actually say that?

COCO

Yeah. That's what this is, a "girls' night out." No men invited.

RICKI

We're not girls, we're women in our—. Ding-dong, anyone home? We're middle aged wo...men, having a glass of wine INSIDE your very neat, very put-together house. This is not a "girls' night out."

COCO

Why are you ruining this? You've been here for two minutes and already you're riding me. Can you just sit here and relax, for one moment? Can you just quietly sip your wine and try not to offend me? OK? Is that asking too much? I put together this evening, so please, would you just mind your Ps and Qs for five minutes. *(Silence)* Thank you.

(COCO stalks out.)

RICKI

(Muttering to herself) Mind your Ps and Qs? Who says Ps and Qs? Maybe third graders. *(In kiddie voice)* Mind your own bee's wax? I am rubber and you are glue. Whatever you say bounces off of me and sticks to you. *(Own voice)* Third grade. She's stuck in fucking third grade.

COCO, *O.S.*

(Calling) Are you talking to me? I can't hear a thing. I'm getting old—don't tell anyone.

RICKI

(Muttering again; sarcastically) No one can tell you're getting old. You have everyone fooled. They think you're 30. Maybe early 30s. *(Pause; then aloud to COCO in the kitchen)* Thank God I'm getting older. I would NEVER go back in time. Too much anxiety. Aging is a relief. You don't have to worry about your looks—nobody's looking. Yoohoo! No one cares what we look like anymore. Wake up and smell the coffee. The battle's over.

(COCO reenters with veggie sticks.)

RICKI, *Continued*

We can say and do anything we want. No one cares. We're liberated! We are invisible.

COCO

Maybe you're liberated. Maybe you're invisible. I'm still in the race. I care what I look like.

RICKI

That's a waste of time and energy.

COCO

Chet cares. He cares a lot.

RICKI

That's because he's un-evolved and annoying. He's a throwback to some other time period. Is he threatening to replace you with a younger second wife?

COCO

Don't say that.

RICKI

This is when it happens. You think you're exempt?

COCO

Don't get me started. He is a good provider. I'm happy as a clam.

RICKI

You better watch your pretty aerobicized backside. He could be looking for your replacement as we speak. That's how they think. They replace. Disposable families.

COCO

Speak for yourself.

RICKI

Been there. Done that.

(BEA enters room. She's very 'corporate' in comparison to her sisters.)

BEA

Sorry I'm late. I couldn't get away. I hope you started without me.

(BEA kisses her sisters.)

RICKI

How in God's name can we get started without you? We're here for a photo. A god damned family photo. We can't just take a photo and slip you in afterward.

BEA

And hello to you, too. Is that any way to greet me? We haven't all been together for almost ... when was that? Was that really a year ago? How can that be? You look fabulous, CoCo. Absolutely frozen in time. How do you do it? You simply don't age. Have you gotten a nip and tuck since I've seen you last?

COCO

Of course not, what a rude question. I exercise and eat right. It's a constant struggle, but I'm up to the task.

BEA

Are you sure? You would tell us if you got any work done, wouldn't you? Let me see behind your hairline. Show me the scars. I don't believe you.

COCO

Stop it, you noseey gooney bird. It's all au naturale.

BEA

Well, you never god damn age. I don't understand it. Here you are, looking like a perky 30-something year old, while we keep getting older and older.

RICKI

Gee. Thanks. That's heartwarming.

BEA

Really, you and I must have the same genes. She obviously has different DNA than us. That's not fair, god damn it.

RICKI

I've put on some weight. But what can you expect with menopause.

COCO

Don't say that.

RICKI

What?

COCO

Menopause. Don't say that. I hate that word.

RICKI

No, you hate menopause. Not the word. All women hate menopause. Personally, I think it's a total relief. The wrinkles suck, the thick midsection sucks, but who cares. I can finally stop sucking in my gut! Throw on a pair of Spanx and go eat whatever I want. The inventor of Spanx should win a MacArthur Genius Award.

COCO

You act like life is over. That's nuts. *(Exits to get wine for BEA)*

BEA

No one told her that men stopped looking at her years ago. She's still "putting on the Ritz." Sad really. They're looking at our teenagers, not us. Aging gracefully comes from accepting that we're getting old—not fighting it.

RICKI

How's Pete? The kids?

BEA

All's well. We live totally disjointed lives. That, too, is a relief, frankly. No more wrestling for attention. We all want our quiet solitary space. Fine with me. Our house is more like a dorm than a home. Dating anyone interesting?

RICKI

Are you kidding? Men our age want "girls," as CoCo would say, in their late 20s, early 30s at most. I can't, nor do I want to compete with that shit. It's all so unbecoming. I find it rather

RICKI, *Continued*

revolting, really. Surely they don't think those "girls" find them sexy? (*COCO enters with wine*) They're looking for Daddy figures with money.

COCO

Who's a Dad figure with money?

RICKI

Your Chet.

COCO

You stop that. We're fine. Really. Why would you say that? That's really not nice. I can't imagine my life without him, or the kids.

BEA

Heaven. It's heaven.

COCO

What?

BEA

It's heaven being an empty-nester. No one hanging on me, day in and day out—including Pete. I don't have to be the constant cheerleader. Building up egos, scraping smashed dreams off pavements. My job as a wife and mother was all about clean-up. The magic maid of family disasters. It starts with diapers and continues on into dealing with relationship crack-ups and job disappointments. It's never ending, and I'm tired of it. Furthermore, I'm totally unappreciated. In business I can go to a meeting, kick ass, get the job done, feel great, and move on. Kids and husbands are so unsatisfying. They don't even acknowledge everything that's done for them. I don't have to do it anymore, so I don't.

RICKI

Yeah, and later on in life. Wah!!! My life sucks because Mommy worked when I was little, or my life sucks because Mommy stayed home and suffocated me, or my life sucks because Mommy didn't breast-feed me long enough—wah! Give me a break. Grow up.

COCO

This is all so heavy. We're here to have fun tonight.

(COCO switches the quiet background music to an old R&B song. Something like BRICK HOUSE.)

COCO, *Continued*

Let's dance. We used to dance for hours when we were little.

BEA

This is really bad wedding DJ music. I haven't danced, particularly to this crap, in a lifetime.

COCO

Come on now, get up and dance.

(COCO does an old-school disco kind of dance by herself. RICKI addresses BEA as they watch COCO dance around the room alone.)

RICKI

I'm embarrassed for her. We need to either put a stop to this right now – put her out of her – misery, or suck it up and dance.

(COCO drags them to their feet. They dance until they are actually having fun. This goes on for awhile.)

RICKI AND BEA

Enough. Enough already.

(COCO turns down music. RICKI collapses on the couch.)

RICKI

Oh my God. I have to admit, that was fun. We must have looked like assholes.

COCO

Who's looking?

RICKI

You're right. Who's looking? Do you remember...we used to take the fireplace screens out and dance behind them, pretending that we were Go-Go dancers? We would dance for hours.

BEA

Go-Go dancers. That name alone is obsolete. They're strippers now. Maybe my kids spent their childhood playing "stripper." Who knows? It's a different world now. I don't have a clue what they do or don't do. I'm on a need-to-know basis. I don't even know if there are professional dancers in clubs anymore. It's been at least twenty years since I've been in a club.

COCO

Let's go sometime. The three of us! *(Silence)*

Why? RICKI

For fun. COCO

BEA
That wouldn't be fun.

RICKI
We're too old.

COCO
We're not too old. What's wrong with you guys?

RICKI
Have you looked in the mirror lately? We're old. We're beyond middle age. Middle age implies that we're going to live into our 100s. I refuse to live beyond 80. There's nothing good there.

COCO
Speak for yourself.

RICKI
You won't even eat Chex Mix because it's too fattening. What's the point of living forever if you're not going to enjoy it? I'd rather eat whatever I want and die early.

COCO
Quality of life. That's the point.

BEA
Dieting and exercising is "quality life"? Booring.

COCO
With our genes, we could have really long life spans.

RICKI
Like Mom? *(Long silence; they sip wine simultaneously)* She's going to live forever.

BEA
Eternal.

COCO
Like a vampire. *(The other two gasp; then laugh.)* Did I say that? I didn't mean to say that. It's the wine. That was sooo mean.

BEA

It's just us here. Relax.

RICKI

Really. That was mild. I'm the mean one. You're the sweet one. We have our roles. It's just shocking when we step out of them.

COCO

I don't have a "role."

BEA

Goodie Two Shoes? Of course you have a role. You play it perfectly, to a tee. That's the problem. We all play our parts. But who cast it?

RICKI

Mom.

COCO

We were born that way.

BEA

You always let her off the hook. That's so tiresome.

COCO

I don't defend her. I just don't blame her for everything. Enough about Mommy. I have a surprise. Close your eyes.

RICKI

Mommy? Do you really call her Mommy after all these years? You're not six, and she's no "Mommy." Mother, Mom, Ma, whatever. But Mommy?

COCO

Close your eyes and quit griping. *(RICKI and BEA close their eyes)* You're such a curmudgeon.

BEA

Touché! Now she's fighting back. I like that.

(COCO lays a dress on each of their laps. They are terrible old bridesmaid dresses—bright flower patterned. RICKI's is enormous.)

COCO

You can open your eyes now.

RICKI

What the . . .? What's this?

COCO

Our dresses, for the photo. Isn't this fabulous? I got them downtown at the consignment store—Creative Resale. Aren't they unbelievable?

BEA AND RICKI

Unbelievable.

RICKI

Is this a dress built for two? I haven't gained that much weight.

COCO

These were casual bridesmaid dresses, I think—they don't have to fit perfectly, we'll be sitting down.

BEA

I'm dumbfounded. Why would we want to wear these?

RICKI

Why would we want to dress alike at all? I don't understand. This is really bizarre. Have you gone over the edge? We're not six-year-olds. You can't just dress us up for a photo like we're your god damn Goodie-Two-Shoe kids. We have our own taste, our own style, we're individuals.

BEA

CoCo, I'm an executive, for God's sake, at a Fortune 500 Company. Why would you think that I would put on some Godforsaken dirty used bridesmaid dress for a photograph? What in the world were you thinking? This is ridiculous. You can't just go around dressing people up to your liking. We aren't props. We're adults. We have feelings. We have opinions, surely you know that. You've been a butt of our opinions since you were little. How could you be so presumptuous? Well? (*Silence*)

(*COCO bursts out crying.*)

COCO

I thought it would be fun. I thought you would think it was creative and whimsical. I was looking at photos of us when we were little, and Mommy would dress us up in matching dresses, and we would pose for the camera—twice a year—Once at Christmas, and then in Lily Pulitzer in the summer. It was a tradition. It was fun. We looked so happy then. Life was simple. I thought Mommy would like it. This might be her last birthday. She could look at that picture, because we never get together anymore, and she could remember the good

COCO, *Continued*

times—the simpler times. *(Pause; then to RICKI)* You were right. I've been replaced. You must have known before I did.

(COCO cries into the dress.)

RICKI

Oh my God. I was kidding. I had no idea. If I did know, the last thing I would do is tease you. I'm so sorry.

COCO

Out of the blue. I never saw it coming. They say there are signs. I swear, I never saw any. It was like a hit-and-run. I devoted my entire life to that man. I did *everything* for him. He can't tie his own shoes. I'm not exaggerating. He needs a GPS to find his own dick—excuse my French.

BEA

He had no trouble finding it for another woman. His GPS was working just fine then. *(Pause)* Sorry. Your hubby can be helpless in all the unimportant areas of his life, because you did it all for him. Sending out dry cleaning just isn't on his radar. But sex? I'm sure it's always on his radar. He's a man, after all. What kind of name is "Chet", anyway? The name alone should have sent up red flags.

COCO

It was a family name. It's really Chester, you know that.

RICKI

Yuck.

BEA

He never respected you. He talked to you like you didn't have a brain in your head. I hated him for that. What a pig.

COCO

He's not a pig. He got bored, I guess.

RICKI

There you go, as usual, defending him. Get pissed off, god damn it. You can go on, if you get pissed off. If you get depressed and stay that way, you'll be lost. It's paralyzing. Anger is a great motivator. Believe me. I've been there.

BEA

Me too.

RICKI AND COCO

What?

BEA

Why do you think I work so much? There's nothing for me at home, or maybe I worked too much, which caused everything at home to evaporate. I don't know—the chicken and the egg. You can't climb to the top of the heap *and* be a perfect Mom *and* a gourmet cook. Something's got to give.

COCO

You need a wife. We would have made a great team.

BEA

It's true! Successful women need a wife at home to do all the dirty work—no disrespect.

COCO

It's OK. I know what you're saying.

BEA

Chet wouldn't have moved up his corporate food chain if you weren't home doing every little thing that he has no time or interest to do. You enabled him to focus on one thing, and one thing alone. I bet he doesn't even know his own kids' birthdays.

COCO

That's very possible, I'm embarrassed to say. I even make him seem like an involved father. I cover for him at every turn. And now he wants to replace me? Throw me aside?

RICKI

We're all disposable. Younger, brighter ones climbing upside our Spanx, trying to shove us aside. Academia is no different. They enter the system with more impressive degrees, more published works, brighter résumés. Nobody's safe.

BEA

I deal with young women coming at me with multiple letters—MBAs, CPAs, PhDs. All that and stripper pole abilities. You have to be smart, gorgeous, and cutthroat these days. It's impossible. Men don't have to 'do it all.' It's a no-win situation.

COCO

I'm the underachiever in this family. At cocktail parties people turn their backs to me when anything of substance is discussed. They assume that I don't have an opinion. I'm the invisible one in the room—not you. It's not about age. It's about accomplishment. I took care of my kids, to the best of my ability. I supported my husband. I put my dreams and aspirations aside to raise what I hoped would be model citizens. I get ridiculed and ignored for that. Motherhood isn't an admired profession. Nothing is enough. It's one big

COCO, *Continued*

conspiracy. If you work outside the home, you're seen as a shitty mother. If you stay home, you're a useless airhead. Everyone feels like a failure. (*Takes a sip of wine*) It's not just men who make me feel this way—women like you look down their noses at me.

What?
RICKI

It's true. Admit it.
COCO

Admit what?
RICKI

You don't respect me. My life. Any of it.
COCO

We've never treated you disrespectfully.
BEA

But you thought it. I can smell it. You think that I'm less than you. That I'm stupid.
COCO

You never applied yourself.
RICKI

To what? I'm not a writer, or a teacher, or a business woman, but I have ideas and feelings. You act like I'm an imbecile. I'm sick of it. You're always condescending.
COCO

We're not condescending. You're just not interested in what we're interested in. You and I don't have a lot in common.
BEA

Like what?
COCO

Well, we (*Indicating RICKI*) occasionally do things like go to the Symphony, or the Carnegie Speaker Series, or The International.
BEA

OK, I see what you mean. But, if I did like those things, you would invite me, wouldn't you? Maybe?
COCO

RICKI

Of course. We wouldn't leave you out. You just wouldn't be interested, just like I have no interest in some of your hobbies...like...umm...garden club. You do that, don't you? What DOES a garden club do, anyway? Do you have tea parties and bridge games...do you wear those nubby, strange-colored lady suits?

BEA

Ricki, that's not helping.

RICKI

Sorry, I'm just kidding. Really, we all just live different lives. Bea and I barely see each other. It might feel to you like we're always getting together, but that isn't so. The last time we were together was months ago. Really.

BEA

It's true. I don't have time for my kids, let alone hobbies.

RICKI

You're the one with the real life. We have careers. You have the serious house and kids, and—

COCO

And what? Just say it. I have nothing. I have absolutely nothing.

RICKI

You have your kids, you have us, and if you move on quickly, you'll even have your dignity intact. Don't sit back and wait for him to call the shots.

COCO

I'll need a good lawyer.

RICKI AND BEA, *Together*

I have one. *(They laugh)*

RICKI

I can't believe that you expected us to wear these awful things tonight.

COCO

I still do. It's a great idea.

(COCO scans the room for the photo showing them as little girls in matching dresses. She picks up the photo and holds it in front of her sisters.)

COCO, *Continued*

Isn't this soooo sweet?

BEA

We were what, around six, eight and 11? Cute then isn't cute now.

COCO

Mommy would get a kick out of it.

RICKI

As you move forward into this new life of assertive independence, may I please make a suggestion? Start with the little things—cut out “Mommy,” and “Girls’ Night Out,” just cut that shit out of your vocabulary. You are not a child. Women shouldn’t use baby talk. They lose all credibility if they do. No wonder that pig walked all over you.

COCO

He didn't walk all over me, he stepped over me.

BEA

(Looking at a display of photos from over the years) These photos of us, taken at Mom’s milestone birthdays, are awful. Look, *(Reading inscription)*, “Mom’s 70th.” That’s around the time of my “mild” breakdown, I think. I look like shit. *(Looks at another photo)* “Mom’s 65th. *(To RICKI)* That was around the time of your messy divorce. You were REALLY heavy then. These are grave markers of our past tragedies. *(To COCO)* You see good times, I see disasters.

RICKI

I’m proud of mine, thank you very much. They gave me depth. *(Chuckles)* Isn't that what they say? They sure as hell gave me something of substance to write about.

COCO

I can do without trauma. I can't handle it. I'm not built for adversity.

RICKI

This “crack up” becomes you. Welcome to humanity. Nobody likes a perfect know-it-all. It’s annoying and it’s not real. This is the authentic you—boogies and all. Your kids need to see that you have troubles and problems. They can come to you now, with their issues. They couldn’t before. They didn’t want to disappoint you. *(Pause)* I couldn’t tell you anything. I knew that you would judge me. We can’t be perfect all the time. Shit happens! Now it’s happened to you. You’re one of us.

BEA

(Picking up a dress) I really can't believe that you want us to put on these God awful dresses. I need some more wine. This is worse than sex with the lights on. I need some courage.

(All three take a big sip)

RICKI

We could ALL fit into this one. *(Holds up enormous dress; to COCO)* I bet yours fits PERFECTLY.

COCO

Well yeah, I was there to try it on. That's no fair.

(All three have gone to different corners of the room. They've turned their backs on each other, and take off their dresses, pants, etc. All three are wearing various colors of Spanx and upper body "shapers.")

RICKI

Maybe we should have different music for the unveiling. Don't peak!

(They all peak around and begin to laugh when they catch sight of themselves in their Spanx.)

BEA

Now THIS is a photo opportunity. No wonder none of us are getting laid!

RICKI

Speak for yourself.

COCO AND BEA

What?

RICKI

I LOVE graduate students. Don't tell anyone. It's a secret. Couldn't do it without Spanx and candlelight, and LOTS of wine. The only problem is logistics. This stuff *(indicating the Spanx)* works so well you can't get it off. I have to call 911 and have them come with the Jaws of Life to release me from this expensive sausage casing. That tends to kill the mood. "Excuse me one moment, but these very nice Emergency Medical Technicians need to get these Spanx off my fat ass, then I have to apply a gallon of Astroglide. But lie there and look pretty, I'll be back in about 30 minutes." It really can kill the mood.

COCO

I thought you felt "liberated." I thought you were in touch with your Menopause.

RICKI

I feel liberated to do and say what I want. Am I thrilled with my ever-expanding mid-section? My wrinkles? My chinny-chin-chin boar bristles? Hell no. Will I let it slow me down, hell

RICKI, *Continued*

no again. Like I said—candles, spandex, and lube goes a long way. It's all smoke and mirrors. Can you believe that women in their 20's are getting plastic surgery? Boob jobs, eye work, whatever. Where do you go from there? Investing in a shrink would be money better spent.

BEA

There's not enough smoke and mirrors to make these dresses look good. They are awwwful! Admit it, Coco, they are completely awful.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes