

Chicken Shoot

a short comedy about crimes and validation

by Jennie Webb

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Characters:

**A DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN WHO HAS SOMETHING TO PROVE
HER OLDER HALF-SISTER**

Setting: Beside a desert highway

Time: Late afternoon

Multi-racial casting is encouraged. If only one character is played by an actor of color, it should be the younger woman. The women are probably somewhere in their 20s–30s, although they could be older and there could be many years between them.

Synopsis:

When two half-sisters visit an abandoned aerospace compound, absurd government secrets shed an unexpected light on toxic family truths. *Chicken Shoot* is a short comedy about crimes and validation.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Director Michelle Gillette, Hilary J. Schwartz & Lorianne Hill, The Road Theatre
Summer Playwrights Festival (2015).

Chicken Shoot

We see two women standing on the side of the road. The highway is in front of them but they're on a rise, so we can't see the cars going past. We can hear the noise of traffic, though. Big trucks. The women are looking out at something in the distance that's grand and impressive. Or was. One young woman, who is dressed casually, seems as if she's bursting with pride. Or maybe it's desperation. She holds a large file overflowing with papers and is clinging to the somewhat older woman beside her, who is clearly dressed up for another occasion.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Crazy, huh?

HALF-SISTER:

Uh huh. Pretty crazy.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

It's like, Atlantis or something. A forgotten civilization we've just discovered. These empty, abandoned shells, formerly fortified fences, guardless gates... they're the only artifacts to tell us that this was the birthplace of genius. Left to decay, at the mercy of the gods and the elements and the cruel hands of time.

HALF-SISTER:

It's an abandoned aerospace compound.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Cruel hands of fate. Which is it? Time or fate?

HALF-SISTER:

Does it matter?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

I guess both. The pre-drone defense industry, ravaged on both fronts.

HALF-SISTER:

In a world without pity. And now it's a hazardous waste site.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Exactly. How crazy, that's been allowed to happen!

HALF-SISTER:

That's what's crazy? Not that you dragged me out here, made me climb this hill in heels and we're gazing at a toxic dump of war machinery like it's Stonehenge?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Please. Extraordinary things happened here, (*pointing at the site*) happened there, and people driving by don't even know what this place is. Do you realize how long I've been looking? How much I've gone through, knowing in my heart that it exists but being treated like I'm on some mad quest?

HALF-SISTER:

Uh huh. So you've found it. Now what?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

I take pictures. Documentation. For the file. For the award.

HALF-SISTER:

The award...

Pause.

Oh! Of course. That's why we're here! Your dad! And his beyond-the-grave reach for the Nobel Prize!

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

He was nominated.

HALF-SISTER:

Well...

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

He was!

As she desperately looks through papers, we hear a truck pass in front of them.

HALF-SISTER:

Sweetie. We've been through this. He was my stepfather and we all know what a great guy he was—that he did great things, great secret things our small minds couldn't possibly comprehend—

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

(interrupting, holding out a letter she's retrieved) Here! It's his nomination letter.

HALF-SISTER:

But you know it's not really a "nomination"...

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

The letter says he's nominated.

HALF-SISTER:

But it's his letter.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Of course it's his letter, that's what I said!

HALF-SISTER:

But he wrote it! You can't nominate yourself for that kind of thing!

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

You don't know what you're talking about. Did you lose your father? Your brilliant, near-Laureate of a father before his time, when he still had so much left to give and be recognized and admired for?

HALF-SISTER:

No, I only lost my asshole, failure of a father after he stopped paying Mom child support and disappeared.

Short pause.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Sorry. That was insensitive of me.

HALF-SISTER:

Well, we can't all have godheads for dads, can we?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

And it's not like he's actually dead, is he? Not for sure.

HALF-SISTER:

I'm pretty sure. You were there. We all were, hanging onto his last breath.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

What? No, no, no, I know *my* father is... gone.

HALF-SISTER:

Good. Because for the last year you've acted like... I worry sometimes.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

I mean your dad. You don't know that he's dead.

HALF-SISTER:

Oh. Right.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Although he could be dead, right?! I mean, that's a definite possibility! That'd give you some nice closure!

Short pause.

HALF-SISTER:

Yeah.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

I'm so glad you're here with me. (*out front, re the site, again*) After all this time, it's hard to believe, isn't it?

HALF-SISTER:

It certainly is. Listen: When you said you were going to ditch your kids and let's go someplace special, I thought, wow! What a great idea. I don't see my sister enough, she obviously needs to unwind and lord knows I need to get away from Mom, so yay! Wherever the car takes us. I just kinda never dreamed it would be to the side of some god forsaken desert highway staring at a military industrial boneyard.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

I'll bet!

HALF-SISTER:

Okay. So if that's it, that's where he worked, take your pictures, already. Let's get out of here. Have some fun. Have a martini, on me.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

But it wasn't just "work!" You have to understand, this is where it all started!

HALF-SISTER:

Where what started?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Everything! Can't you feel it?

HALF-SISTER:

Wait. Does this mean you've finally figured out what he did? His stealth government project?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

I did! And I tell you, my mind was absolutely blown!

She sets down the file and hands over her phone, posing for a picture.

Here. Get that building in the background, the gray one.

HALF-SISTER:

The big scary silo thingy?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Yeah. That's where they would do it.

HALF-SISTER:

Good lord, what did they do? Was some kind of... radioactive torture involved?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Please. I'm talking about the chicken shoot.

Pause.

HALF-SISTER:
The what?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
Chicken shoot. The chicken shoot.

HALF-SISTER:
They shot chickens? Who's they?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
My father. And the people under him. That's what I found out! He was in charge of it! Head of the whole... department.

HALF-SISTER:
The chicken shoot department.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
Ha ha. The integrity design testing facility and bird impact range. The nomination's for his breakthrough ideas in configuring the Ballistic Range S-3.

Short pause.

The chicken gun.

HALF-SISTER:
Okay. Your father wanted an award for shooting chickens? I'm sorry. This is more than disturbing.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
But it was a big deal. A really big deal. You see, he developed this specialized gun. The military had been shooting chickens for years, but he made it more effective.

HALF-SISTER:
Are we talking more chickens or deader chickens?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
Please. That makes no sense.

She grabs her phone back and takes a selfie with the compound in the background.

HALF-SISTER:
What is the military doing shooting chickens, and why was your dad in charge? And what other bizarre animal experiments went on in there? Christ, don't tell me Mom knows any of this...

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Mom knew some stuff, but I only recently found out the whole story. The chicken gun wasn't to shoot chickens. It shot chickens. From this ceramic barrel he created, at jets, fighter planes. At their windshields. At incredibly high speeds to see if they could withstand a bird strike in flight.

HALF-SISTER:

Your father thought this up?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

No! That's what I was saying, they'd been— Flocks of birds flying into airplanes is a real problem. They do incredible damage. People have died.

HALF-SISTER:

Not to mention chickens.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Are you mocking me?

HALF-SISTER:

Oh, my god. You don't think this whole thing is mockable? If it weren't so horrifying, I mean.

The determined young woman retrieves her file of papers from the ground.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

All right. I don't know what I was thinking. I'm sorry I brought you out here. I'm sorry I decided to share this with you. I'm sorry I thought you, my only sister, would understand how important it is to be here, to find this, to validate my father's accomplishments.

HALF-SISTER:

Not that everything and everyone in our house didn't revolve around praising your father's every secretive move, but now you're asking me to validate dead poultry? Mass projectile executions for—

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

(interrupting) The safety of our servicemen! And civilians, too. The world needs to know about his contributions! Why is it so hard for you to support me in this?

HALF-SISTER:

Because it's insane, that's why. Your father is not going to be awarded the Nobel Prize for slaughtering chickens or doing anything else with them! As far as I'm concerned he should be put in jail but since he was cremated I'll let that go.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

How dare you! Your father was the criminal!

HALF-SISTER:

Thank you for the reminder.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

I'm sorry. But those are the facts.

HALF-SISTER:

Well, you know what? Even if killing fowl was sanctioned by the U.S. Government, here's what I consider a crime: The way your father treated you. He withheld everything, lorded the mysterious source of his impregnable self-importance over all of us, made you fly around in circles trying to please him, and you revered him for it!

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

He loved me!

HALF-SISTER:

Oh, I'm sure he did! You never ruffled a single one of his feathers!

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

You never appreciated him. He was an extraordinarily amazing, brilliant—

HALF-SISTER:

(interrupting) Jesus! You have to stop this. You are an amazing person, all on your own! No matter how much your dad loved you, there was no way you were ever going to get what you needed from him and you're not going to get it now. You gotta get a life! You have a husband who adores you. Mom. And me. And three of the sweetest kids! Imagine what would happen if they stopped hop-hop-hopping like little trained canaries and got some validation from *you!*

The determined young woman realizes she has been clutching her bulging file too tight. A truck speeds past.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

How is Mom?

HALF-SISTER:

Oh. She's fine. I was supposed to take her to the emergency room today.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

What? Why didn't you tell me? What happened?

HALF-SISTER:

Nothing. I told her I was spending the day with you. I'll take her on Friday

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

To the emergency room?

HALF-SISTER:

Yeah, that's what she does now. Goes to the hospital. It's like she's expecting to find him there.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Wow.

HALF-SISTER:

She has a file, too. I don't know what's in it, but she's always got it.

Short pause.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

The chickens were already dead, you know.

HALF-SISTER:

What?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

The chicken gun didn't shoot live chickens. They were already dead.

HALF-SISTER:

Oh. Okay. Dead chickens cradled in a ceramic barrel.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Right.

HALF-SISTER:

Then splattering against windshields. A much prettier picture.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Maybe it's because you're a vegetarian.

HALF-SISTER:

Maybe. Or maybe it's just the whole military secrets thing. Hard for me to warm up to, in the world we're living in.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Well...

HALF-SISTER:

I'm sorry. You know I love you, right? But some of us just aren't extraordinary. We live normal lives. Nothing remarkable happens. We do what needs to be done and we don't get awards. There's nothing wrong with that.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Shooting bullets, not chickens?

HALF-SISTER:

Not exactly what I meant...

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Oh, I don't know. Maybe you're right. My dad was... it wasn't always easy having him as a dad. I was sometimes jealous of you.

HALF-SISTER:

Of me?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

The bar was so low. There were absolutely no expectations.

HALF-SISTER:

Thanks. Yet again.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

What *are* we doing here? It *is* insane. (*looking at her files*) I guess I hoped there'd be some sort of... sign or something. That I was doing the right thing.

HALF-SISTER:

A stamp of approval from the great beyond?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

Or something. Answers?

HALF-SISTER:

Let's just get the hell away from this place. Who knows what really went on in there, but it doesn't matter and I'm still good for drinks.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

(*looking out front again*) Hey...

HALF-SISTER:

Hey what?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

(*straining to see something in the distance*) What's that?

HALF-SISTER:

(*also straining*) What's what?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:

That thing... glowing, there.

We begin to hear a strange clucking sound in the distance.

It's a chicken!

HALF-SISTER:
No. Where?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
Right there!

HALF-SISTER:
That can't— That's too big for a chicken.

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
But that's what it is. Right there, on the other side of the road.

The clucking is much louder now.

HALF-SISTER:
Well, that's one, huge chicken!

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
It is!

HALF-SISTER:
That chicken's—!

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
(interrupting) Crazy!

HALF-SISTER:
Wait. Hang on. Why did the chicken—?

DETERMINED YOUNG WOMAN:
(interrupting, to the chicken) No. No! Don't! Watch out for the—!

We hear a truck approaching and the clucks turn into the sound of a chicken screaming, then honking and a very loud splat. Followed by the sound of a passing big rig. The sisters look at one another as feathers—perhaps they're really big, glowing feathers—start to fall around them.

End of Play