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Love Alone, A Modern Tragedy

FEBRUARY 12, 2013 BY THE VIRGINIA ADVOCATE IN ON GROUNDS · 0 COMMENT

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Taking on the loss of a loved one, medical malpractice, relationships between mothers and daughters, and the rights of lesbian couples, *Love Alone* has a touching message that does not fade when the curtain falls. Although the play was given a small venue last week, the one-time performance presented modern issues powerfully in such a modest setting, moving the entire audience despite its lack of a complete stage production.

Written by Deborah Salem Smith (the playwright in residence of the Trinity Repertory Company) and directed by Colleen Kelly (Associate Professor and head of the MFA acting program), *Love Alone* begins in a hospital with the unexpected death of Susan Howe, who was in for a minor surgery. The narrative follows Clementine, Susan's biological daughter, and Helen, Susan's lesbian partner, as they try to find the "truth with a capital T" about Susan's passing. When their search comes to no avail, they commence legal action against Dr. Becca Neal, the anesthesiologist involved with the surgical procedure. Slowly, details surrounding Susan's death are revealed. The characters that had been in contact with Susan when she was alive develop onstage in tender, powerful ways: Becca's marriage suffers due to the impending litigation, Clementine finds herself distanced from Helen because of the lawsuit, and Helen herself reveals vignettes about her and Susan's loving twenty-year long relationship.

Salem Smith, in a lesbian relationship herself, shows the concerns present in the LGBT community without making them the focus of the entire play. For instance, before the case reaches trial, Helen is denied standing to sue the hospital because lesbian relationships are not recognized under the law. Thus it is twenty-year-old Clementine who must file the litigation and put her signature on the paperwork. The story is about a fight for equality, a statement that according to the system in place, there are those whose feelings and commitments do not matter legally, even in a society that values the ideals of true love and dedication. Regret and grief pulse out of the crisp, authentic dialogue when Clementine expresses a level of rage that Helen could not even bring into words. Helen and Clementine fight not only for Susan, but also for each other as they struggle to remain a family without Susan.

Salem Smith also uses the play to demonstrate the stresses of those in the medical community as well as the dirtier aspects to working in a hospital. A mature nurse becomes smoking buddies with Becca and delivers stunningly witty one-liners and observations throughout the production. These comedic moments underlie the obvious tragedy that is the focus of the play, balancing out tear-jerking turns within the writing.

Unfortunately *Love Alone* will not be coming to UVA as a fully-fledged production, but if there is an opportunity to see it, do not go to without a package of tissues and ice cream at home. The final scene is truly touching, with Clementine playing *Landslide* in the background as her mother finally accepts Susan's death. The description may come off heavy-handed, but there is a need for a depth of closure at the end of the play in order for the characters to stay in our minds afterwards.

The play is a poignant, sincere look into the ways in which different people heal after the passing of a loved one; whether they are a mother, a partner, or a patient. The monolithic acts of forgiveness shown are startling reminders of the ability of men and women to be kind even in the face of such a loss. It is a testament and a call to arms, a tragedy, a comedy and a startling reminder of the injustices that people face on a daily basis. It is an experience that sticks with the viewer, and I can only hope that it continues to be shown to a public that desperately needs to be reminded of the need for love and forgiveness in life.

By Linda Codega, *Contributor*

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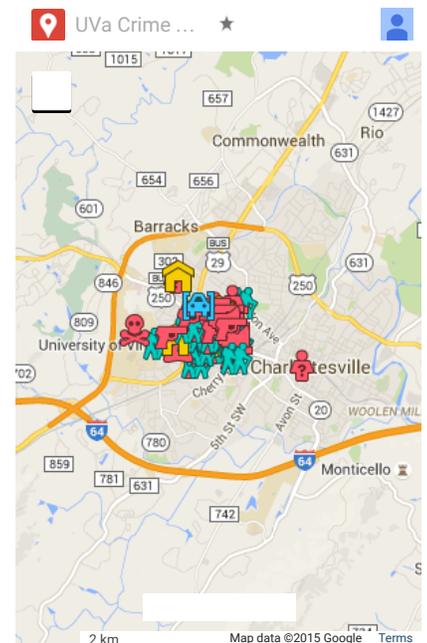
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