

... Has Such Small Hands

By Joseph Kenyon

***A PLAY THAT TOUCHES NO EDGES***

By Frank Rich – The New York Times

*Successful playwrights know that the stage is like a storefront window. The theatre-goer is drawn in by what is displayed, but the hints about what lies behind the window is what hooks the heart and the soul.*

*By that definition, newcomer Severin Stuart's *The Grail's Edge*, which opened at the Penn Theater on Wednesday night, is a great success.*

*This startlingly original tale of love and pain has such a common, mundane plot that some in the audience surely wondered why good money was paid for the privilege of watching what could be seen for free in any apartment building in the city. Astute viewers fell to Mr. Stuart's device earlier than others, but by the third act every member of the audience became aware of what wasn't happening on stage. That aspect, which will not be revealed here, transforms what was dull and commonplace into something stunning and all-consuming ...*

*Mr. Stuart demands that his audience push aside the love-story plot and watch the excellent cast manipulate and contort to not engage in the most common aspect of love, that most basic intimate gesture practiced so routinely by all mammals that its absence on the stage becomes the central focus of the play.*

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That New Year's Eve, 1961, I was fourteen and lurking in the darkest corner of the foyer, the one that shared a wall with the living room, hoping to go unnoticed. But when Uncle Duncan

came in, singing in a bellowing voice, he cornered me and picked me up, pressing my face into his red-checked, flannel shirt smelling of sweat and pine, before tossing me twice in the air. After putting my feet back on the wooden floor, he used two calloused fingers to scrape my chin.

“There’s some growth in that baby skin, eh? Good! Soon that face’ll be bursting with beard, and a finer, manly face you’ll have then, let me tell you! This Eve of the year, Uncle Duncan brought you something to help you bring out the man, as it were.’ He poked my chest and without turning away called, ‘Come on, Krista-Lynn.”

A face peeped out from behind the small of his back: round as a sucker, pale as mist, and serious as whiplash. I guessed she was a year younger than me with hair the color of Grandfather’s brandy and the biggest pair of hazel eyes I ever saw.

Uncle Duncan pulled her between us. “Krista-Lynn, this is Severin Stuart. He’ll show you about and keep you company this night.” He poked me again. “Treat her right, lad. A man’s measure can be judged by his turn with a lady.”

With that, he called out to grandfather, clumped into the living room and I was left with Krista-Lynn whose expression made me wonder if she ever met another living soul in her life. I brought her to the drawing room, but the sight of so many tall, loud people clearly daunted her. I took her to the kitchen and dining room, but we were shoed out of those rooms by mother and Auntie Claire. No one was allowed in the upper part of the house except to use the bathroom, but I took Krista-Lynn upstairs anyway and dragged the chest of toys out of my room and into Father’s study. It was a small room, with bookcases fronting each wall and a rectangular table in the middle of the floor. I wasn’t hopeful that I could find anything in that chest to entertain Krista-Lynn, but she crawled under the table and seemed content just to sit there, watching me. I started making a perfunctory review of the chest but the intensity of her gaze got to me.