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*Dramatic Publishing*

# The Color of Stars



Drama by Dwayne Hartford

# The Color of Stars

**Drama. By Dwayne Hartford.** Cast: 4m., 2w. Set in Maine during World War II, *The Color of Stars* is a story of family, patriotism, fear and prejudice. Eleven-year-old Eddie Winthrop has been sent to live with his grandparents on the family farm. Eddie's father is fighting in the Pacific. His mother works at a shipyard and is concerned that Eddie needs more adult supervision. Missing his parents and friends, Eddie struggles to adjust to life in a small town. His grandparents, Luke and Mable, live a simple life that has been disrupted by the war. They do their part for the war effort at home: organizing metal drives, adapting to mandated rationing and watching the skies for enemy planes. As with most families with a member in the war, a service banner with a blue star hangs in the Winthrops' window for their son. Mable dreads the possibility that she will have to change the color of the star to gold. Mable's sister Isabel and her husband, Alfred, are the Winthrops' neighbors. The two couples are very close, although the stresses of life during war cause some friction. When a stranger, Felix Stetler, arrives in town to survey the local woods for trees to use in building Navy mine-sweepers, events are set in motion that will challenge the ties of family and friendship and question the definitions of patriotism and civic duty. Eddie finds himself in the middle of it all and is faced with some difficult moral and ethical dilemmas. "*The Color of Stars* resonates with current events ... The play's exploration of fear and prejudice in a time of war ... should spark meaningful discussion between parents and kids." (*The Arizona Republic*) "Emotional and vibrant drama." (*Phoenix New Times*) Unit set. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: CP5.

Cover: Childsplay, Tempe Center for the Arts, Tempe, Ariz., featuring Sam Primack and Jon Gentry. Photo: Heather Hill.

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# The Color of Stars

A play in two acts by

DWAYNE HARTFORD



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“*The Color of Stars* was originally commissioned, developed and produced by Childsplay in Tempe, Arizona, David Saar, Artistic Director, Steve Martin, Managing Director.”

For my family.

*The Color of Stars* was originally commissioned by Childsplay in Tempe, Ariz., with Artistic Director David Saar and Managing Director Steve Martin. The play was developed in Childsplay's Whiteman New Plays Program. The company premiered the play at the Tempe Center for the Arts on April 28, 2012.

### *Cast*

Luke ..... Jon Gentry  
Eddie ..... Sam Primack, Aaron Zwieback  
Mabel ..... Debra K. Stevens  
Alfred ..... D. Scott Withers  
Isabel ..... Katie McFadzen  
Felix ..... Andrés Alcalá

### *Production*

Director ..... Graham Whitehead  
Scenic Design ..... Robert Klingelhoef  
Costume Design ..... Rebecca Akins  
Lighting Design ..... Paul Black  
Sound Design ..... Brian Jerome Peterson  
Original Music ..... Clare Broyles  
Dramaturg ..... Jenny Millinger  
Stage Manager ..... Samantha Monson



# The Color of Stars

## CHARACTERS

Eddie Winthrop: 11 years old. Raised in Portland, Maine. Sent to live with his grandparents.

Luke Winthrop: in his 50s. Eddie's grandfather. A dairy farmer and town leader.

Mabel Winthrop: in her 50s. Eddie's grandmother.

Isabel Perkins: in her late 40s. Mabel's younger sister.

Alfred Perkins: in his 50s. Isabel's husband. A World War I veteran. He owns a small garage.

Felix Stetler: in his 30s. A government worker from Pennsylvania.

## SETTING

A small town in central Maine during the autumn of 1943. The last scene takes place some six months later. The set should suggest a hill, a kitchen and the woods. The floor of the stage is covered with a large topographic map of an unspecified place, perhaps with contour lines or shading to designate elevation. A sky full of stars.

<p>This excerpt begins with Scene 2, in which all of the characters of the play are introduced, along with the groundwork for the play's main conflict.</p>
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## SCENE 2

*(The kitchen of LUKE and MABEL's farmhouse. A kitchen counter with sink and stove are at one side. LUKE and ALFRED PERKINS sit at a table eating breakfast, while MABEL is cleaning up from cooking. On the upstage wall is a world map. There is also an old-fashioned crank telephone. In a window hangs a banner with a blue star in a white field with a thick red border. MABEL calls up an unseen stairway.)*

MABEL. Eddie! You're goin' to be late for your first day of school!

EDDIE (*offstage*). I'm coming.

MABEL. If you were comin', you'd be down here by now!

ALFRED (*to LUKE*). You cuttin' corn today?

LUKE. Ayuh. The upper field. It's been so dry, it's not as tall as I'd like, but it's got to get done.

MABEL. What we need is a few days of good steady rain.

LUKE. Ayuh. Just not now that I'm cuttin'. Once I get the silage in, let her pour.

ALFRED. How's the horse?

LUKE. Her leg's almost healed.

ALFRED. Sometimes a horse just needs to walk it out.

LUKE. Ayuh.

ALFRED. Over in France, them military horses would just go and go. Even lame, you couldn't stop them. They was workers. Good horse people takin' care of them, too, you better believe it. You should have seen the way them horses was taken care of.

MABEL. You've got to take care of a horse. (*Calling off.*) Eddie!

EDDIE (*offstage*). Just a minute.

ALFRED. That's a fact. But these horses were treated better than us men. Did I ever tell you about the time when we was clearin' this field of debris, and it was rainin' so hard you couldn't see the feet you was standin' on? We're out there, frozen to the bone, mud up to our ankles ...

MABEL. Maybe that's why you couldn't see your feet.

ALFRED. Ayuh. Anyway, the sergeants wouldn't let us use the horses. They didn't want them to catch cold.

MABEL. You did tell us about that, Alfred. Do you want anymore eggs?

ALFRED. No, thank you, Mabel. But I will have a touch more coffee if you don't mind.

MABEL. Of course. We get an extra ration book now with Eddie here.

*(As MABEL pours the coffee, ISABEL PERKINS enters from outside.)*

ISABEL. Mornin'.

MABEL. Mornin', Isabel. Coffee?

ISABEL. Goodness, no. I had a cup at home. I'll have some tea though, if the water's hot.

MABEL. It is.

*(ISABEL follows MABEL to the counter and stove, where they prepare cups of tea for both of them. As in much of their actions, they work in sync with each other.)*

ISABEL. Where's that great-nephew of mine? He's not still asleep, is he? School starts in half an hour.

MABEL. He's up, but I think he's a little nervous.

ISABEL. First days can be hard, I s'pose. Did you talk with his mother last night?

MABEL. Luke did, briefly. Mostly she talked to Eddie, of course.

ISABEL. How is Alice holdin' up?

LUKE. She seemed fine.

ISABEL. I can't imagine what she must be goin' through. Workin' all them hours, weldin' ships, all the time scared to death 'bout George out there on some god-forsaken island, and then, on top of all that, her son starts actin' like some hooligan.

MABEL. She didn't say he was actin' like a hooligan. She said he needed a little more supervision, that's all.

ISABEL. That Alice has a good head on her shoulders. She was smart sendin' him here. He needs a good dose of farm livin'.

ALFRED. Put him to work. That'll straighten him out.

MABEL. He don't need straightenin'. Now stop this talk. He'll be down here in a minute.

ISABEL. She never said what happened?

MABEL. No, and we didn't ask. *(Calling off.)* Eddie, if you don't get down here, you're not goin' to have time for breakfast.

ISABEL. What do you mean, you didn't ask?

LUKE. None of our business.

ALFRED. It'll be your business when he starts torturin' the cat.

MABEL. You make him sound like some deranged criminal.

He's just a boy, and boy's need to be watched after.

ISABEL. I'd say it's time he was watched after right now.

*(Exits into the house.)*

MABEL. Isabel, you let that boy alone.

ISABEL *(from off)*. Edward Winthrop! Do you plan on goin' to school today or not?

MABEL. Well, I s'pose my method wasn't workin'.

*(LUKE gets up from the table. MABEL clears the men's dishes during the following.)*

LUKE. I've got a cornfield to cut. Thanks for the help this mornin', Alfred.

MABEL. Don't forget the man from the gov'nment is comin' today.

LUKE. Ayuh. If he needs me, you know where I'll be.

MABEL. You left all the maps out?

LUKE. Ayuh.

ALFRED. How long is he gonna be here?

MABEL. He said it could be up to two weeks.

ALFRED. I can't say I'd be very comfortable havin' a total stranger livin' under my roof.

LUKE. I guess it's a good thing he's not stayin' with you then.

ALFRED. I guess that's right.

*(ISABEL and EDDIE enter.)*

ISABEL. He was preenin' in the mirror.

EDDIE. I wasn't preenin'.

MABEL. You sit down here and eat your Cheerioats. You've got to be out the door in five minutes. Can't have you late for your first day of school.

*(EDDIE sits and starts to pour milk from a bottle.)*

ISABEL. You better shake that, unless you want all cream.

EDDIE *(shakes the milk then pours it on the cereal)*. It's weird that it does that.

ALFRED. You're used to that pasteurized stuff you get in the city. This is the real deal, right from your grampa's cows. And the cream floats to the top.

LUKE. Mind your teacher today.

EDDIE. I will.

LUKE *(moves to the door. Sees something outside)*. Well, he's here bright and early.

ISABEL. Who's that?

LUKE. If I was a bettin' man, I'd say it's the man from the gov'nment.

ISABEL. He comin' today?

ALFRED. Stayin' two weeks.

*(LUKE opens the door. FELIX STETLER enters. He carries a suitcase.)*

FELIX. Mr. Winthrop?

LUKE. Ayuh.

FELIX. Felix Stetler.

*(LUKE and FELIX shake hands.)*

LUKE. This here is my wife.

*(FELIX goes to MABEL and shakes her hand.)*

FELIX. Mrs. Winthrop.

MABEL. Nice to meet you, Mr. Stetler. This is my sister,  
Mrs. Perkins.

*(FELIX shakes ISABEL's hand.)*

FELIX. How do you do?

ISABEL. How do you do?

MABEL. And this is her husband.

FELIX. Mr. Perkins.

*(ALFRED nods. FELIX and ALFRED shake hands.)*

ISABEL. Where are you from, Mr. Stetler?

FELIX. Pennsylvania.

ISABEL. Pennsylvania. You're a long way from home.

FELIX. Yes.

ISABEL. Stetler is an interestin' name. What kind of name  
is that?

FELIX. I'm from Pennsylvania Dutch country.

ISABEL. Oh. Pennsylvania Dutch. I've heard of that, but I  
think you're the first one I've ever met.

FELIX. Don't judge the lot based on your opinion of me.

LUKE. Not much chance of that.

ISABEL. Luke, you hush.

MABEL. And this is our grandson, Eddie. He just arrived a  
few days ago hisself. He's goin' to be stayin' with us this  
winter. And he's goin' to be late for his first day of school  
if he don't hurry up.

FELIX. Hello.

EDDIE. Hi.

ISABEL. Eddie's father, George, is a Marine over in the Pacific.

FELIX. Is he?

ISABEL. Yes, pretty much all the young men 'round these parts have signed up to fight. How about you, Mr. Stetler?

MABEL. Isabel!

FELIX. They won't take me. I'm 4F. I've got something wrong with my heart.

ISABEL. Oh. I ... You wouldn't know it to look at you.

FELIX. So now I work for the War Department, but as a civilian.

ISABEL. And you're here because of our oak trees?

FELIX. When we got the letter from Mr. Winthrop saying that you had a lot of red oak here, we didn't believe it.

ALFRED. The man weren't lyin'. Just look for yourself.

FELIX. That's why I'm here. If it's true, your town is very unusual.

LUKE. You have no idea.

FELIX. It could be one of the last stands of oak in the whole state of Maine.

EDDIE. What do you need the trees for?

FELIX. To make minesweepers for the Navy.

EDDIE. Navy ships are made of metal. My mom makes Navy ships out of steel.

ALFRED. They wouldn't do much good for minesweepin', would they? Them mines is magnetic, and they would blow up them ships to Timbuktu. Don't they teach you nothin' at them city schools?

FELIX. Actually, some minesweepers are made out of steel, but some need to be wooden.

ISABEL. You're not going to be doin' the loggin' all by yourself—what with your bad heart and all.

FELIX. No. I'm not a logger. Like I said, I'm just here to look for the trees. If I find them, the loggers will get called in.

ALFRED. You'll find them.

MABEL. Oh, good Lord, look at the time. Excuse me, Mr. Stetler. Eddie, you've got to get going this minute.

*(EDDIE slurps the rest of his milk from his bowl.)*

ISABEL. He'll make it if he runs.

MABEL. Go on now.

*(EDDIE exits. MABEL cleans up the table.)*

LUKE. I've got to get goin' too. Mr. Stetler, my wife will get you settled.

*(LUKE nods and exits. MABEL calls after him.)*

MABEL. Be careful!

ALFRED. The man's cut that cornfield more than once.

MABEL. I know. It's just up back there where no one can see him. If one of the horses spooked or he tipped over ...

ALFRED. Don't go wishin' calamity on yourself. Now, I s'pose I better open the garage. You comin' or stayin', Isabel?

ISABEL. I'll be over in a minute. I'm goin' to finish my tea.

*(ALFRED nods at FELIX and exits.)*

MABEL. Now, Mr. Stetler, your room is just up the stairs and to the right, if you'd like to put your things down. My husband left the town property maps on the dresser for you.

FELIX. Thank you. *(Exits.)*

MABEL. He seems nice enough.

ISABEL. Don't look like he has a heart condition to me.

MABEL. Don't you start. If the man says he has heart trouble, why should we doubt it?

ISABEL. All I'm sayin' is, he looks healthy to me.

MABEL. Well, thank you, Doctor Perkins.

ISABEL. It wouldn't hurt you to be more careful, you know. We are at war after all ...

MABEL. I'm very aware of that fact.



ISABEL. And we're s'posed to be mindful. You never know about people.

MABEL. People like Tom and Anna Hoffman?

ISABEL. Well, yes. Just like them. I am glad they moved away.

MABEL. It's shameful. They was nice, decent folk.

ISABEL. They was Germans. Alfred says never trust a German. You know the gov'nment moved all them Japanese to those camps. It's the same thing. We can't take chances. We can't be blinded by big soft hearts like yours.

MABEL. I don't see how bein' charitable to people you've known for 20 years makes you blind. To think how those poor folks were driven out of their own home. Paintin' a swastika on their barn. That weren't right. It was cruel.

*(FELIX re-enters. He has a notebook and a map. The women do not notice him.)*

ISABEL. Well, people went too far—I agree with you. But, they're gone now, and I, for one, am relieved. We don't need no Germans here.

*(FELIX walks toward the door.)*

MABEL. You found the maps?

FELIX. Yes. All set.

MABEL. I make dinner at noon.

FELIX. I'll get my own lunch today.

MABEL. Are you sure? I can make up something quick to take with you. We are supposed to feed you.

FELIX. That's all right. I ... I'll see you tonight.

MABEL. Supper is at 6.

*(FELIX exits.)*

ISABEL. Well, what do you suppose that is all about?

MABEL. What?

ISABEL. Him refusin' to take your food.

MABEL. He prob'ly just didn't want to be a bother, havin' just got here and all.

ISABEL. But the gov'nment's payin' his room and board. Isn't he the odd one?

MABEL. Go home, Isabel. Unless you want to help me with my end of the garden relish.

ISABEL. Lord, no. I've got my own cannin' to do. I've got to finish those tomatoes today. We'll be eatin' stewed tomatoes all winter. And so will you. I've got plenty to share.

MABEL. You certainly had good luck with tomatoes this year.

ISABEL. I should say so. My victory garden was quite victorious.

*(ISABEL exits. MABEL crosses up to the sink. She notices the service banner in the window. She touches the star on the banner. Lights fade on the kitchen. ISABEL appears isolated in another area.)*

ISABEL *(cont'd)*. It's not that I didn't like him—at first. I just got this feelin' there was somethin' not quite right about the man. And I wasn't the only one. Ev'ryone in town could see that there was somethin' odd about him. Ev'ryone except my sister. Mabel is the most stubborn woman you ever want to meet. She wouldn't hear anything bad about that Mr. Stetler. But I had this feeling. I just did.