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Dramatic Publishing

Stardust



One-act drama
by
Joanne Koch

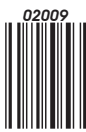
Stardust

Drama. By Joanne Koch. Cast: 1m., 1w. *Stardust* won the 2007 Nantucket Short Play Competition and was deemed by its literary manager as “one of the very best treatments of high-school age issues that I have read.” In *Stardust*, two young people—one trusting, introspective and blind, the other suspicious, defensive and sighted—share a moment of intimacy and conflict while awaiting signs of life in outer space. Luanne insists this is not a date with the handsome Arthur. Yet she is attracted to him and curious about his preoccupation with astronomy, even jealous of his constant monitoring for a possible radio signal that might come at any time indicating intelligent life light-years away. Arthur has loved the feisty Luanne all through senior year. He is overwhelmed being alone with her, even if it isn’t a date. Luanne, abandoned by her father as a baby, brought up by a hard-working waitress mother, has learned not to trust expressions of affection. She almost believes Arthur’s spare but heartfelt confession but feels she must put him to the test. *Stardust* is a coming-of-age love story, a subtly evocative look into the world of a person with an obvious physical handicap, an even more clever look into the world of someone with a far less-obvious emotional handicap, and a mystery as to whether hope and love are strong enough to overcome that baggage. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: SS1.*

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By
JOANNE KOCH



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Stardust was produced October 22–25, 2008 at the Pine Crest School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The production was directed by Jim Patrick with Pernell Myers playing Arthur and Samantha Frankel playing Luanne.

Stardust was developed at Southern Illinois University, Christian Moe, Theater Department Chair, director of a presentation at the American College Theater Festival in Carbondale, Ill., and through staged readings at Boxer Rebellion Theater in Chicago, Jeff Helgeson director, at the Writers’ Bloc New Play Festival, funded in part by grants from the Dramatists Guild Fund, Inc., and at Appetite Theatre’s Bruschetta Festival, Bill Brennan, director, with Ryan Martin playing Arthur and Via Osgood playing Luanne.

STARDUST

CHARACTERS

LUANNE. age 17, redheaded, curious

ARTHUR. age 18, blind, nice looking

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Stillwater, Oklahoma. Arthur's room, an added-on room with its own entrance.

STARDUST

(Twilight. In the shadows, LUANNE and ARTHUR enter a dark room, ARTHUR moving with confidence, LUANNE feeling her way. They each carry a graduation robe and mortarboard covered in plastic.)

LUANNE. It's not a date.

ARTHUR. No, 'course not. We'll just, just talk a little, and work on Memory Lane.

LUANNE. Memory Lane. You'd think they'd come up with something less corny for graduation than "memory lane." I don't know why you picked me to be your partner, anyway. My memories aren't so great.

ARTHUR. I picked you, because...I knew you'd tell it straight. You wouldn't sugarcoat everything.

LUANNE *(bumping into a chair)*. Damn. *(Trying to see if ARTHUR can find his way.)* Be careful, Arthur.

ARTHUR *(setting down his package)*. I'll turn on the light.

LUANNE. I shouldn't have told you to be careful. I'm real sorry. I mean, I was the one who bumped into...

(ARTHUR switches on the lights. Various radio equipment is revealed, including huge headphones, a TV monitor, CD player, CD collection. ARTHUR is relaxed and comfortable in his surroundings. LUANNE is a little uneasy.)

LUANNE. Jeez... Look at this stuff. It's Einstein's laboratory or something.

ARTHUR. Just some equipment I put together.

LUANNE (*setting down package and touching headphone*). What's this? I've never seen headphones like these.

ARTHUR. You can listen on them to a special frequency.

LUANNE. Why? Does it pick up alternative music?

ARTHUR. It's not music I'm waiting for. This is beamed beyond Oklahoma, beyond... Well, usually you don't get much, but, well, something could be out there.

LUANNE. Out there? Something in outer space? Oh Arthur, come on now. That's crazy.

ARTHUR. It's not crazy. It's perfectly logical. After the big bang...

LUANNE. I'm no "National Merit Scholar," so don't get fancy with me.

ARTHUR. OK. Think of it this way. There's lots of stars out there—like the sun. I mean lots of them, billions of them—as many as the grains of sand on the Biloxi Beach. And each one has its own planets, just like the sun does. So now we're talking about multi-billions of planets. Why should the earth be the only one that has the right ecosphere?

LUANNE (*impatiently*). "Ecosphere"?

ARTHUR. The right distance from their sun star—you know, not too hot, not too cold. Just...

LUANNE. Just right. I did read Goldilocks. So you believe there are lots of E.T. characters running around and they're all trying to get in touch with little ole Arthur Lyman in Stillwater, Oklahoma?

ARTHUR. They're not trying to get in touch with me, especially. But if there are beings—maybe not like E.T., maybe different—well, they would be very far—light years away, so radio would be the fastest way to communicate.

LUANNE. So you listen all day?

ARTHUR. Not all day... But *(he puts on the headphones and listens while he speaks)* I listen, while I do homework, or read...or dream. *(He rather reluctantly takes them off.)*

LUANNE. Do you wear these when you go to bed?

ARTHUR. I'd hate to miss them. How would you feel if you were out there trying to get through and no one ever answered?

LUANNE. Oh my Lord. Arthur, this is really crazy. We're talkin' *National Enquirer* crazy. I can't believe I came here.

ARTHUR. Don't you want to listen? They're sort of our relatives. We've all got a little stardust from the original big bang.

LUANNE. Hey, I'm related to my mom—and my dad—wherever the heck he is. And my Aunt Agnes in Normal. But I am not related to green things or brown guys with big heads and scaley bodies.

ARTHUR *(handing her the headphones)*. Just listen.

LUANNE *(puts on headphones)*. Oh all right... Never felt so silly in all my life...nothing...nothing... See...just nothing... I might as well be waiting to hear from my... *(She fiddles with an oversized ID bracelet she wears.)* Wait... Oh... Oh, I don't believe it. There is something.

That's not it, is it? Could that be them? Oh my Lord, I don't believe it.

ARTHUR. Are the headphones lit up?

LUANNE. No, but I heard them.

ARTHUR (*taking the earphones and listening*). Sorry. No. That's cosmic garbage.

LUANNE (*disappointed*). Oh. These guys have garbage? Like coffee grounds and cans and stuff?

ARTHUR. No—well, we wouldn't be picking up that. We're getting stuff that's accidentally gone into orbit. Ya know. Like when the astronauts first went to the moon and they maybe dropped a Teflon glove or a moonscooper. When it comes, I figure it will have a pattern. The guy who put this together told me when sound comes through this special frequency, the headphones will light up, but I can only hear the sound pattern. That's why I have to listen, as much as possible. (*He sneaks one more listen and then sets them aside.*)

LUANNE. You do believe it, don't you? Lord... (*She moves away from the headphones.*) I'm not going to waste my time listening to celestial garbage. No sir. (*A beat of silence.*)

ARTHUR. Do you want some lemonade? I can get some. It's no trouble.

LUANNE. No, thanks. I've got a mint, though. Here. (*She carefully places a mint in the palm of his hand.*) I'm putting it in your hand.

ARTHUR. Yes, I know. Thanks.

LUANNE. There I go again. I shouldn't be treating you different. And I don't think of you as different. Lord knows you're smarter than I am, maybe the smartest person I know. Well, different in a way, but not in a

freaky way. More like different with someone you can't ever...you know, like, like Arlo Turner. He's cute. He's nice, but he's one foot shorter than me. I wouldn't go out with him, because it would be, well, a dead end. Like Taft Street when it goes past the dump. Dead end. That's why this isn't a date.

ARTHUR. OK. OK, so it's not a date. I said it wasn't. (*He listens again to the headphones, then forces himself to set them aside. LUANNE watches him closely.*) We can work on the memory stuff. I guess we should start with freshman year, the most important memory of—

LUANNE. You are nice looking, though, much better looking than Arlo...and at least a foot taller. I mean, well, do you know how you look?

ARTHUR. Brown hair, brown eyes, Mom says. Five feet, ten and a half inches. I think I've stopped growing.

LUANNE. But do you know how it all fits together? You're better looking than most. Just a little thin, that's all.

ARTHUR. I know how you look.

LUANNE. How could you—

ARTHUR. I know you have red hair and—

LUANNE. How did you know that?

ARTHUR. I heard Bubba Stevens call you "Red" and he whistled, too, and then I heard you slap him.

LUANNE. I hate that Bubba Stevens. He is so crude.

ARTHUR. But you wouldn't have slapped him if you weren't pretty. You'd have been too shy, or too embarrassed.

LUANNE (*impressed*). Well, I'm not so ugly you'd have to put a paper bag over my head. But I'm not countin' on my looks. My mom did that, and look where she is. I'm

getting my nursing degree and I'm not depending on any guy. I'll never have a man see me cryin' over him like my mom cried over my— (*She nervously jiggles her bracelet.*) How did that...thing happen anyway?

ARTHUR. Well, there was a big bang, kind of a gigantic explosion, and...

LUANNE. No, I mean with you. Your eyes.

ARTHUR. Oh.

LUANNE. You don't have to tell. I'm just curious is all. Mom's always saying, "Curiosity killed the cat." Well, I see plenty of cats. I think curiosity saved the cat. But I guess you're not supposed to ask about stuff like that. Julie Presser said you were always that way, but she wasn't sure 'cause she moved here in fifth grade. And I didn't see you until high school... (*ARTHUR grabs a quick listen on the headphones.*) So... How'd it happen?

ARTHUR (*uncomfortable*). I was born, early, you know, premature. Only two pounds.

LUANNE. Lord. I weighed eight. Two. That's not any bigger than a couple of those Granny Smith apples. Did they have to put you in one of those incubator things?

ARTHUR. Uh-huh. My folks, well, they were scared. I was the last—a change-of-life baby. I'm not sure they expected to have me. And then, they thought I wouldn't make it.

LUANNE. Two pounds—and look at you now.

ARTHUR. They kept me in the incubator for—

LUANNE. Is that why you were blind—because you were so small? Sorry. It's none of my business, but I've never talked to a blind person—really blind—not like Otis who plays at O'Malley's, 'cause he got that way later

from cataracts, so that doesn't count... So did your eyes come out bad because you were born too soon?

ARTHUR. I guess my eyes—everything—was normal—just that I was so small.

LUANNE. So how'd it happen, I mean, if you don't mind telling me.

ARTHUR. They turned up the oxygen high, too high I guess. It burned my retinas.

LUANNE (*furious*). What dumb-ass fool did that? She should be fired and—

ARTHUR. It was the doctor's instructions, I suppose.

LUANNE. You suppose? Well didn't you sue? I mean, didn't your folks sue that stupid doctor for malpractice? They give big money for those things. I mean, well, eyes. Your sight. That could be worth a million dollars. Maybe more... Oooo, I'd like a million, wouldn't you?

ARTHUR. Well...

LUANNE. If I had a million, I wouldn't have to go to nursing school. I wouldn't have to work at the Kappa House... (*Imitating the sorority girls.*) "Get me some more chicken, Luanne." "I need the potatoes, Luanne, honey." "You forgot a fork, Luanne." "This cup is dirty, Luanne honey." "Get me a little ole napkin, darlin'." "Wipe my little ole butt, Luanne darlin'." I would sue. That's for damn sure! I mean, darn sure.

ARTHUR. My folks were glad I lived. They didn't want trouble. They're kinda quiet.

LUANNE. And you're not even bitter. I would be. Someone cheated me out of my eyes. Heck, I wouldn't let 'em forget it. I'd shout until they took my tongue. And then I'd jump up and down. And if they took my legs, I'd smack 'em across the face with my hands. And if

they took them, I'd bite 'em. Lord, I wouldn't let 'em get away with it. No sir. No way. Uh-uh. (*She fiddles with ID bracelet.*)

ARTHUR. We don't have to talk about it if it upsets you.

LUANNE. Who says it upsets me?

ARTHUR. Seems like when you're upset, you fiddle with your bracelet.

LUANNE. I should have let Mom throw it out, like she wanted to. Said it was the only thing my dad ever gave her—except me. I took it out of the garbage, started wearing it. Comes in handy. People see you wearin' a man's ID, they think you're going with someone.

ARTHUR. But you're not, are you? I mean... (*scrambling to change the subject*) you weren't, uh, you weren't a sick baby, right? You were a big, healthy baby. Eight pounds, right?

LUANNE. I wasn't in an incubator. I was just out there, I guess, with the other babies. You'd think he would have been curious. You'd think he would have come to see me, once at least. Mom says he didn't even come once. Mom says I was kind of a scrawny, homely baby. A few red hairs, she said, stickin' out of my baldy head, wrinkled, like an old man. You think maybe he came and saw me? You think he took one look and said, "That ugly thing couldn't be no child of mine." You think he could have just taken one look at my ugly face and then never came back? (*She fiddles with the bracelet.*) Nah. I bet he didn't come. He never came. He never did... When I get to be a nurse, I could snoop around the hospital for you. I could maybe check some records and find out who's responsible for—

ARTHUR. You don't have to do that.