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Dramatic Publishing



The Cay



Drama by
Gayle Cornelison

From the book by
Theodore Taylor

The Cay

Drama. By Dr. Gayle Cornelison. From the book by Theodore Taylor. Cast: 2m. (voices.). *The Cay* relates the compelling journey of 11-year-old Phillip Enright—a journey toward adulthood. Phillip is awakened on a February day in 1942 to learn that German submarines have attacked the neighboring island of Aruba. The whole world is at war! And now it has come to his island of Curacao in the warm, blue Caribbean. Phillip is excited but his mother, who never wanted to leave her home in Virginia, is very nervous about the war. She does not like Curacao and she certainly does not like the black people who inhabit it. “They are different from us,” she explains to Phillip. In spite of the danger of sea travel she insists that Phillip return with her to Virginia. Near Panama their ship is torpedoed, and Phillip is separated from his mother in the wreckage of the ship. He is rescued by a West Indian named Timothy and pulled onto a crude raft occupied by the man and an old cat. Timothy is different. He is huge, very old and black. Even though Phillip is quite frightened and has a terrible headache from being hit in the head, he feels certain that they will soon be rescued. Help does not come, and conditions seem almost hopeless when Phillip’s head injury causes him to lose his sight. Finally, they are cast up on a small barren island where Timothy helps the boy learn the skills he will need to survive even with his blindness. He teaches Phillip to fish, to weave palm fibers into sleeping mats, to climb the palm tree for coconuts and to know the geography of the island. During his ordeal, the boy also discovers that his companion is a wise and dignified man and that the color of one’s skin does not determine a person’s worth in the world. A thoughtful family play which speaks to all ages about survival, about compassion, about slowly growing older and also growing wiser. *Area staging.* *Approximate Running Time: 40 minutes. Code: C90.*

Cover: California Theatre Center’s world premiere with (l-r) Berwick Haynes and Kirk Pierron. Photo: Marcia Lepler.

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THE CAY

by
THEODORE TAYLOR

Adapted for the stage
by
GAYLE CORNELISON



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GAYLE CORNELISON

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THEODORE TAYLOR

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(THE CAY)

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I would sincerely like to thank Theodore Taylor for allowing me to bring Timothy and Phillip to the stage, and I would like to recognize the dedicated work of Susan Earle and Janice Erlendson whose support made this dramatization possible.

Gayle Cornelison

THE CAY premiered at the California Theatre Center in Sunnyvale, California, in November 1997. The production was directed by Janice Erlendson and included the following artists:

CAST

Phillip KIRK PIERRON
Timothy BERWICK HAYNES

PRODUCTION STAFF

Stage Manager CHARLIE SHOEMAKER
Assistant Stage Manager CHRISTOPHER MAHLE
Scene Design / Light Design PAUL G. VALLERGA
Costume Design JANE LAMBERT
Sound Design KIT WILDER

THE CAY

A Play in One Act
For 1 boy, 1 man, voices

CHARACTERS

PHILLIP 11 years old

TIMOTHY a large black man, 70+ years old

TIME: The year is 1942.

PLACE: The Dutch island of Curacao.

THE CAY

SCENE 1: *The Dutch island of Curacao. Lights fade up on PHILLIP ENRIGHT. He stands on a dock in a tight pool of light. Shadows beyond him fall on shapes of suitcases and large steamer trunks. It is April 1942.*

PHILLIP. Like silent, hungry sharks that swim in the darkness of the seas, the German submarines arrived in the middle of the night. I was asleep on the second floor of our narrow, gabled greenhouse in Willemstad, on the island of Curacao, the largest of the Dutch islands just off the coast of Venezuela. I remember on that moonless night in February 1942, they attacked the big Lago oil refinery on Aruba, the sister island west of us. Then they blew up six of our small lake tankers, and one German sub was even sighted off Willemstad at dawn. The whole world was at war, and now it had come to us in the warm, blue Caribbean. I'm only eleven but I'm not frightened, just terribly excited to be in the middle of a war.

MOM (voice). Phillip, wait there. It is almost time to board the ship.

PHILLIP. My mother is very nervous about the war. She never wanted to leave her home in Virginia in the first place. Moving to Curacao was father's idea, not hers. Royal Dutch Shell had borrowed him from his company

in Virginia to work here and increase the production of aviation gasoline.

DAD (voice). You know that I am needed for the war effort.

MOM (voice). I don't like this island or its people. If we were back in Virginia now, we would be nice and safe.

DAD (voice). There is not a nice safe place in the world right now. There's more danger in the trip back, unless you go by air, than there is in staying here.

MOM (voice). You know I won't fly.

DAD (voice). We'll talk about it later.

CREWMAN (voice-over). "All on board!"

(The steamer horn sounds. The pool of light increases to include what we now can see as luggage. PHILLIP finds a comfortable position on a suitcase and sits.)

PHILLIP. The submarine attacks continued. On February 21 they torpedoed a Norwegian tanker headed for Willemstad. Two days later we saw the S.S. Empire Tern, a big British tanker, leave Willemstad for England. Minutes later it vanished in a wall of red flames and black smoke. As we watched, someone screamed. "There it is." We looked off to one side of the flames, about a mile away, and saw a black shape in the water, very low. It was a German submarine, surfaced now to watch the tanker die.

MOM (voice). I have made up my mind. I'm taking Phillip back to Norfolk.

DAD (voice). Grace, I think you are making a mistake. You are both quite safe here.

MOM (voice). No. I won't stay here and I won't allow Phillip to be in harm's way any longer.

DAD (*voice*). All right, I will make the arrangements.

PHILLIP. Finally my mother said...

MOM (*voice*). Phillip, your father has finally secured passage for us to return to Virginia. I have packed our clothes, and tomorrow we leave aboard a ship for Miami. Then we'll take the train to Norfolk.

PHILLIP. Father can't leave his job.

MOM (*voice*). He isn't coming with us.

PHILLIP. No. I don't want to leave father. I love this island. I want to stay with you and play with my friend, Henrik van Boven. Henrik will think us cowardly to leave just because a few German submarines are off Curacao. (*He roughly begins to gather the belongings.*) I hate my mother for taking me back to Virginia, and my father, why didn't he stop her? (*Pause.*) I guess he just isn't that kind of man. (*The Hato whistle blasts three short times.*) Dad! Dad! (*He waves frantically.*) I'll keep my promise and take good care of mother. (*He reluctantly travels up a ramp. He shields his eyes from the sun to look back for his father.*) There's a tall man standing on the wall of Fort Amsterdam, waving at us. I know it's my father. I'll never forget that tall lonely figure standing on the sea wall.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2: *The sea. A great explosion. There are violent sounds of metal wrenching, and men shouting. The steamer's horn is blowing. There are cracking sounds as the ship begins to sink. Among the passengers and crew*

members screaming for help, PHILLIP is heard. Another great explosion.

PHILLIP (off). Mother, where are you? Mommy ... mommy.

(A crash and PHILLIP cries out in pain. Silence. The lapping of water. The whistling of wind. From a moonlit night to the early dawn. The wind subsides. TIMOTHY and PHILLIP and CAT are seen on a raft. PHILLIP is just regaining consciousness.)

TIMOTHY. Young bahss, how are you feelin'?

PHILLIP *(stares, and for a moment he cannot figure out where he is and who TIMOTHY is)*. You were on the deck gang of the ship?

TIMOTHY. Dat be true.

PHILLIP. My head...

TIMOTHY. You 'ad a mos' terrible crack on d'ead, bahss. A strong-back glanc' offen your 'ead, an' I harl you 'board dis raff.

PHILLIP. Where are we? Where is my mother?

TIMOTHY. I true believe you mut-thur is safe an' soun' on a raff like dis. Or mebbe dey harl 'er into d'lifboat. I true believe dat. As to our verree location, I mus' guess we are somewhar roun' d'cays, somewhar mebbe fifteen latitude an' eighty long. We should 'ave pas dem 'til dat mos' treacherous torpedo split d'veree hull. Two minute downg, at d'mos'. *(PHILLIP looks at the sea and back at TIMOTHY. He starts to cry.)* Now, young bahss, I mos' feel like dat my own self, Timothy, but 'twould be of no particular use to do dat, eh? *(PHILLIP likes TIMOTHY's soft and musical voice and he smiles.)* Hey look.

Dis is Stew, d'cook's cat. He climb on d'raff, an' I 'ad no heart to trow 'im off. 'E got oi-ll all ovah hisself from d'wattah. (*PHILLIP stares at TIMOTHY.*) Put your 'ead back downg, young bahss, an' rest awhile longer. Do not look direct at d'sun. 'Tis too powerful. (*PHILLIP is seasick and crawls to the side to vomit.*) Dis be good, dis be good. Tis mos' natural for you to do dis. 'Tis d'shock o' havin' all dis mos' terrible ting 'appen. (*TIMOTHY rips up boards from the outside edges of the raft to create a shelter. He strips off his shirt and demands PHILLIP's.*)

PHILLIP. Why?

TIMOTHY. For d'sun. (*Finishes the shelter over PHILLIP and crawls under—looks.*) Dere's a tin box downg in d'raff. We 'ave rare good luck, young bahss. D'wattah kag did not bus' when d'raff was launch, an' we 'ave a few biscuit, some choclade, an' d'matches in d'tin is dry. So we 'ave rare good luck. (*Grinning at PHILLIP.*)

PHILLIP. My luck isn't so good. My mother is on another raft and my father doesn't know what has happened to me.

TIMOTHY. Do not be despair, young bahss. Someone will fin' us. Many schooner go by dis way an' dis also be d'ship track to Jamaica, an' on.

PHILLIP. What is your name?

TIMOTHY. My own self? Timothy.

PHILLIP. Your last name?

TIMOTHY (*laughs*). I 'ave but one name. 'Tis Timothy.

PHILLIP. Mine is Phillip Enright, Timothy.

TIMOTHY. I knew a Phillip who feesh out of St. Jawn, but an outrageous mahn he was.

PHILLIP. I would like a drink of water.

TIMOTHY. D'sun do parch. (*Giving him a cup of water.*)

Careful not to spill a drop. 'Tis best to 'ave only an outrageous small amount. Jus' enough to wet d'tongue.

PHILLIP. Why? That is a large keg.

TIMOTHY. D'large kag 'ave a way o' losin' its verree size.

PHILLIP. You said we would be picked up soon.

TIMOTHY. Ah, yes, but we mus' be wise 'bout what we 'ave.

PHILLIP (*drinks*). More.

TIMOTHY. A verree lil' more, young bahss.

PHILLIP. My lips are parched and my throat is dry. Please fill it up. (*TIMOTHY gives him a little.*) That isn't enough. I must have water, Timothy. I'm hot, very hot.

TIMOTHY (*puts keg away*). Young bahss, mebbe before d'night, a schooner will pass dis way, an' if dat 'appens, you may drink d'whole kag. Mebbe d'schooner will not past dis way, so we mus' make our wattah last.

PHILLIP. A schooner will find us. And my father has ships out looking for us.

TIMOTHY. True, young bahss. (*He closes his eyes and won't speak. PHILLIP crawls as far away from TIMOTHY as he can and cries.*)

PHILLIP (*to CAT*). Mother was right about black people.

They're mean and stubborn. (*Pause.*) I'm so thirsty.

TIMOTHY. Wat's dat, young bahss?

PHILLIP (*loud*). You're saving all the water for yourself.

TIMOTHY (*gets up quickly and looks*). If luck be, d'flyin' feesh will flop on d'raff. We can save a few biscuit by eatin' d'feesh. Too, wattah is in d'feesh. (*A large flying fish slams into the raft.*) Luck be wit us. (*Grabbing fish and cutting it.*) 'Tis be good. (*Hands PHILLIP fish.*) Eat dem.

PHILLIP. Raw fish? No!

TIMOTHY. We will 'ave no other food tonight. You bes' eat dem, young bahss. (*He begins to eat.*)

PHILLIP. I wouldn't even be here with you if it wasn't for my mother!

TIMOTHY. She star'd dis terrible wahr, eh, young bahss?

BLACKOUT

SCENE 3: *Evening. Darkness surrounds the raft, except for the moonlit faint silhouettes of PHILLIP sitting and watching the fitful sleep of TIMOTHY. The wind has picked up and there is a chill in the air. As TIMOTHY wakes, he sees PHILLIP staring at him.*

TIMOTHY (*pause*). What you thinkin' dere, young bahss?

PHILLIP. I was thinking that it is very strange for me, a boy from Virginia, to be on a raft in the middle of the ocean with a giant black man. What were you thinking?

TIMOTHY (*laughing*). Much d' same thin', young bahss, much d'same thin'.

PHILLIP. Timothy, where is your home?

TIMOTHY. St. Thomas, Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas. 'Tis a Virgin Islan'.

PHILLIP. Then you are American. I remember from school that we bought the Virgins from Denmark.

TIMOTHY (*laughs*). I suppose, young bahss. I never gave it much thought. I sail all d'islan's, as well as Venezuela, Colombo, Panama... I jus' nevar gave it much thought I was American.

PHILLIP. Your parents were African, Timothy?

TIMOTHY (*laughs*). Young bahss, you want me to say I true come from Afre-ca?

PHILLIP. You say what you want, old man.

TIMOTHY. I 'ave no recollection o' anythin' 'cept dese islan's. 'Tis pure outrageous, but I do not remember anythin' 'bout a place called Afre-ca.

PHILLIP. What about your mother?

TIMOTHY. 'Tis even more outrageous I do not remember a fatha or my mut-thur. I was raise by a woman call Hannah Gumbs.

PHILLIP. Then you are an orphan.

TIMOTHY. I guess, young bahss, I guess. (*Chuckling to himself.*)

PHILLIP. How old are you, Timothy?

TIMOTHY. Dat fact is also verree mysterious. Litt' more dan sixty, 'cause d'muscle in my legs b'speakin' to me, complain all d'time. But to be true, I do not know exact.

PHILLIP (*amazed by his answer*). I want you to know that I'm almost twelve.

TIMOTHY. Dat is a verree important age. Now, you mus' get some natural sleep. Tomorrow might be a verree long day, an' we 'ave much to do.

PHILLIP (*laughs*). We are on a raft in the middle of the ocean. What do we have to do?

TIMOTHY. Stay alive, young bahss, stay alive. Dat's what we 'ave to do. Get some sleep.

PHILLIP. Yes. My head is aching.

TIMOTHY. Sleep.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4: *Day two. A pale band of light stretches across the eastern sky as PHILLIP is waking.*

TIMOTHY. You 'ad a verree long sleep. Dat be good.

PHILLIP. Yes.

TIMOTHY. How is d'ead?

PHILLIP. It still hurts.

TIMOTHY. A crack on d'ead takes a few days to go 'way.
(*He gets water, biscuits and chocolate squares.*)

PHILLIP. I'm feeling very dizzy.

TIMOTHY. Eat, young bahss.

PHILLIP (*eats*). The sun is hot.

TIMOTHY. Today, a schooner will pass. I'd bet a jum on dat.

PHILLIP. I hope so.

TIMOTHY. I do tink we are not too far from Providencia an' San Andres.

PHILLIP. Are they islands?

TIMOTHY. Fine islan's.

PHILLIP (*rubs his eyes*). I think there is something wrong with my eyes.

TIMOTHY. I warn you! You look direct at d'sun yestiddy.

PHILLIP. You're right! I looked at the sun too much.

TIMOTHY. Today, do not eben look at d'wattah. D'glare is bad too.

PHILLIP (*moans and cradles his head to relieve the excruciating pain*). The pain...the pain in my head...

TIMOTHY (*tears a piece of his shirt from the shelter roof, soaks it in fresh water and puts it over PHILLIP's eyes*).
How dat feel?

PHILLIP. It doesn't hurt as much.

TIMOTHY. Ah, see, it jus' takes time. (*PHILLIP sleeps within the shelter.*) Sleep be verree fine.

(*TIMOTHY puts the food and water away. Time passes as light shifts from morning eastern light to a brilliant, scorching light.*)

PHILLIP (*awakes suddenly, takes cloth from his eyes*).
What time is it?

TIMOTHY. 'Bout ten.

PHILLIP. At night?

TIMOTHY (*puzzled*). 'Tis day.

PHILLIP (*puts hand in front of his face, then screams*). I'm blind, Timothy, I'm blind.

TIMOTHY (*frightened*). What? Young bahss, you cannot be blin'. (*Moving his head.*) Look at d'sun.

PHILLIP. I cannot see anything!

TIMOTHY (*hollow*). Now, young bahss, you mus' lie downg an' rest. What 'as happen will go 'way. 'Tis all natural temporary.

PHILLIP (*touches his eyes*). I don't feel any pain, Timothy.
The pain has gone away.

TIMOTHY. Once, ovah roun' Barbados, a mahn 'ad an outrageous crack on d'ead when a sailin' boom shift. Dis mahn was blin' too. Tree whole day 'e saw d'night. Den it true went away.

PHILLIP. Do you think that is what will happen to me?

TIMOTHY. I tink dat be true, young bahss.

PHILLIP (*wild, panicked, crawling around the raft*). I'm blind and we're lost at sea. I want my mother and my father.

TIMOTHY (*holding him tight*). Young bahss, young bahss.
Young bahss, young bahss.

PHILLIP. No. (*Hysterical, hitting TIMOTHY.*) Why didn't you let me stay in the water with my mother!

TIMOTHY. If dat will make you bettah, go 'ead. (*PHILLIP collapses on the hot boards as the sun beats down on him.*)

BLACKOUT