

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

THE VELVET RUT

By
JAMES STILL



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

© Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois.

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMX by
JAMES STILL
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE VELVET RUT)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:
Creative Artists Agency, 162 Fifth Ave., 6th Floor,
New York NY 10010 • Phone: (212) 277-9000

ISBN: 978-1-58342-694-4

For L

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

Work on *The Velvet Rut* began at The New Harmony Project's 2006 Conference. I wish to thank the New Harmony Project for that support. And also The Poet's House—whose spirit and spirits kept me in great company.

Many thanks to Geva Theatre Center and their American Voices Reading Series.

And Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Development of *The Velvet Rut* was supported by the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center during a residency at the National Playwrights Conference of 2007.

The Velvet Rut premiered at the Unicorn Theatre, Cynthia Levin, producing artistic director and Jason Kralicek, managing director, in Kansas City, Missouri, on January 30, 2009. Direction was by Joseph Price, scenic design by Jason Coale, lighting design by Jeffrey Cady, sound design and composer was Jason Scheufler, and costume design by Jon Fulton Adams. The production stage manger was Jinni Pike. The cast was:

A GUY Jim Korinke
A YOUNGER GUY Matthew Jayson Weiss

In a revised script, *The Velvet Rut* opened at Illusion Theater, Bonnie Morris and Michael Robins, producing directors, in Minneapolis on April 17, 2009. Direction was by Michael Robins, set design by Dean Holzman, lighting design by Michael Wangen, sound design by Mike Hallenbeck, and costume design by Claire Brauch. The stage manager was Christine Nelson. The cast was:

A GUY Terry Hempleman
A YOUNGER GUY John Catron

THE VELVET RUT

CHARACTERS

A GUY / MR. SMITH

A YOUNGER GUY / BOY SCOUT / VIRGIL

SETTING

The United States.

TIME

Yesterday, last night and this morning.

THE VELVET RUT

(IN THE DARK: we hear the sound of SOBBING. A MAN sobbing.

Lights slowly come up, suspiciously, revealing A GUY sitting in a church pew. That's it. Nothing else adorns the stage, no crap, no walls, no kitchen sinks. A guy, a couple of church pews, space, and light. Light and darkness—both want what the other has.

THE GUY is probably in his late 40s, could be in his early 50s. The thing is, he's gotta be old enough to remember youth but young enough to still be scared of dying. His face is hiding something he'd like to unload but can't.

THE GUY stops crying, tries to pray. TRIES to pray. He gets impatient, pissed, stops, looks around. He's fighting back tears, starts sobbing again. He's no Gary Cooper but we shouldn't hold that against him.

THROUGH AN UNSEEN DOOR: a big bunch of autumn leaves blows into the church. THE GUY continues to sob, doesn't see:

A YOUNG MAN appears in the shadows, slowly approaching the church pews, drawn to the sobbing

sounds. In the half-dark he might be a soldier. But as he inches into the light, we see that he's dressed in a Boy Scout uniform which is filled with an impressive display of badges and honors. He also wears a sash across his torso that's packed with badges. He's a walking over-achievement. This is one serious Boy Scout. He's ageless, boyish. Otherworldly. Kind of like Peter Pan if Peter Pan had been a Boy Scout. He's looking around, searching for something.

THE GUY doesn't see the BOY SCOUT, continues to sob.

The BOY SCOUT waits, watches, unsure what to do. He begins to hum, softly, sweetly, absently. Probably a Van Morrison song. It isn't out of boredom.)

BOY SCOUT <HUMMING>

(THE GUY stops sobbing, listens to the HUMMING but doesn't look for its source. He just listens.

The BOY SCOUT continues to hum.)

BOY SCOUT (*cont'd*). <MORE HUMMING>

(Now THE GUY looks around and sees the BOY SCOUT for the first time. He does his best to wipe away his tears, to pretend he's not crying. It's a guy thing.

The BOY SCOUT gradually stops HUMMING.)

BOY SCOUT (*cont'd*). <HUMMING FADES AWAY, STOPS>

(The two men look at each other for a long time. Finally THE GUY looks away, pretends to pray.)

The BOY SCOUT STARTS HUMMING AGAIN.)

BOY SCOUT <HUMMING>

(THE GUY looks suddenly at the BOY SCOUT who abruptly STOPS HUMMING.)

BOY SCOUT. Sorry, sir. I'm—really. Sorry.

(THE GUY continues to look at him, then finally looks away. The BOY SCOUT doesn't move but his eyes are still on the hunt for something.)

THE GUY looks at him again, annoyed.)

THE GUY. You're sorry, I got it. I get it.

(They continue to stare at each other.)

THE GUY *(con't., sharp)*. What?

BOY SCOUT. I was wondering— *(Beat.)* I was wondering if—

(Beat.)

THE GUY. If what?

BOY SCOUT. Have you been here—I mean, how long have you been here, sitting here?

THE GUY. I don't know, a while. A while. I've been sitting here—a while, I guess.

BOY SCOUT. Oh.

(Beat.)

THE GUY. Why?

BOY SCOUT. Nothing.

(THE GUY looks away.)

Beat.

The BOY SCOUT inhales sharply as if he's going to talk—)

BOY SCOUT *(con'td)*. <LOUD INHALE>

(THE GUY looks at the BOY SCOUT who seems determined to say something—but then loses his nerve, changes his mind—and says nothing.)

Beat.

THE GUY looks away. Finally:)

BOY SCOUT *(cont'd)*. Did you find a book?

(THE GUY looks at the BOY SCOUT.)

BOY SCOUT *(cont'd)*. I lost my book, I think I left it here.

I mean I'm sure I left it here. I was sitting here—there—first. Before. Before you, I mean. I was sitting right there, right where you're sitting. *(Beat.)* I thought you might have found it. *(Beat.)* Sitting there. *(Beat.)* My

book. *(Beat.)* I was hoping. *(Beat.)* Did you find my book?

(THE GUY just looks at the BOY SCOUT. Finally:)

THE GUY. No.

(The BOY SCOUT sits in the same pew as THE GUY. He slumps down, dejected.)

BOY SCOUT <LOUD SIGH>. Rats.

(Beat.)

THE GUY. Did you have your name in it at least? In your book?

(The BOY SCOUT nods.)

THE GUY *(cont'd)*. That's good. Somebody finds it, maybe they'll return it.

BOY SCOUT. Doubt it. *(Beat.)* I wrote it in pencil.

(THE GUY looks at him, then looks away.)

BOY SCOUT *(cont'd)*. In case I change my mind.

THE GUY. About your name?

BOY SCOUT. About anything. I like to write in pencil.

THE GUY. I prefer pen.

BOY SCOUT. I figured.

THE GUY. What do you mean?

BOY SCOUT. You seem like the type.

THE GUY. The type?

BOY SCOUT. The type who hates to change his mind.

THE GUY. Well changing things is a little more complicated than writing with pencil or pen. Don't you think?

(The BOY SCOUT doesn't answer.

Beat.)

THE GUY *(cont'd)*. On my way over here I ran out of gas right below this huge billboard that said, "Change Is a Matter of Will." What do you think of that?

BOY SCOUT. Was it written in pencil?

THE GUY. What?

BOY SCOUT. "Change Is a Matter of Will."

THE GUY *(annoyed)*. It was on a billboard. *(Beat.)* Freaked me out.

(The BOY SCOUT absently begins to hum again.)

BOY SCOUT <SOFT HUMMING>

THE GUY *(direct, firm)*. Stop doing that.

(They sit in silence. Then:)

BOY SCOUT. Do you come here often?

THE GUY *(quickly)*. No. *(Beat.)* Never. *(Beat.)* Sometimes. *(Beat.)* A lot. Lately. *(Beat.)* More—lately. More. *(Beat.)* Well hell. *(Beat.)* I think people like to pray so much because God is so fucking polite, he never interrupts, he just lets you fucking talk and talk and talk and talk and talk and—

BOY SCOUT (*interrupting*). Sounds—lonely.

THE GUY (*shrugs*). Beats sitting at the computer googling myself all day. I did that for weeks after—googling deeper and deeper into infinity. Like sitting up in a tree: if you don't come down, pretty soon it turns out you're LIVING in that tree and you didn't even know it. Same with googling. The moment I finally blinked was when I googled my way to some page on the Internet that said the Irish consider themselves to be the happiest people in the world. Jesus! That depressed me so much I swore off of Google forever and started coming here instead. That was in the spring. That was—months ago. (*He looks around.*)

BOY SCOUT. What do you talk about? With God—what, what do you talk about?

THE GUY (*simple*). Stuff.

(*Beat.*)

BOY SCOUT (*earnest*). What did you do before you were a googler?

THE GUY (*laughing*). I was a teacher. Am. A teacher. (*Beat.*) I teach high school. English.

(*The BOY SCOUT stares at THE GUY. THE GUY looks away. They both look straight ahead.*)

BOY SCOUT. So do you come here to find God?

THE GUY (*laughing*). God no. I don't think people come to church to find God. You?

BOY SCOUT. I came here to find my book.

THE GUY. Right. (*Beat.*) I think people go to church to find themselves. Don't you? (*Looking around.*) Maybe God IS here, I don't know. But if he is—I think he's just hanging around to make introductions, to introduce us to ourselves...which makes God more of a good host, a matchmaker—an extrovert. (*Beat.*) Jesus was a rabbi, you know? (*Beat.*) Do you know what “rabbi” means in Hebrew?

BOY SCOUT. “Son of an extrovert”?

THE GUY (*laughing*). No. Rabbi means “the teacher.” Jesus was a teacher.

BOY SCOUT. Like you.

THE GUY. Like me. Only different.

BOY SCOUT. Because Jesus probably didn't teach high school, right?

THE GUY (*is this guy for real?*). Probably not. Probably not English, anyway. (*Can't resist:*) Jesus was the shop teacher. He taught carpentry.

(The BOY SCOUT LAUGHS.)

THE GUY (*cont'd., enjoying this*). Good ol' Nazareth High.

(THEY BOTH LAUGH—which surprises them.)

THE GUY (*cont'd.*). Go Virgins!

(THE BOY SCOUT STOPS LAUGHING. THE GUY seems to have crossed the line.)

THE GUY (*cont'd*). Anyway. (*Beat.*) My father was a teacher. My father's father was a teacher. Chalk, report cards, asbestos—all of that shit floating in my blood which, not surprisingly, is the color of red ink.

BOY SCOUT. What kind of English do you teach?

THE GUY. American Literature. Poetry.

BOY SCOUT. Do you know any poems?

THE GUY (*lying*). No. Do you?

BOY SCOUT (*lying, distracted*). No.

THE GUY. My father, he was encyclopedic—he could recite entire poems until the day he died. The poetry was the last thing to go, even outlived my mother. After he'd forgotten his own name he could still recite Whitman and Longfellow, Penn and Kunitz, Stevens, long passages of Faulkner even. Near the end, those last years, just to see if anyone was listening he'd recite Ginsberg's *Howl*—the entire thing, and then deny he ever heard of the guy.

(The BOY SCOUT doesn't know Ginsberg.)

THE GUY (*cont'd*). You had to know my father to know how funny it was to hear him spouting Ginsberg. (*In his father's voice:*) “...angel-headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the / starry dynamo in the machinery of night...” (*Beat. Back to his own voice.*) My father was very old-school, very white-shirt-and-tie kind of guy, slightly pretentious accent, very formal. Never called me by my first name, even when I was a little boy he called me “Mr. Smith.” For the longest time I thought “Mister” was my first name.

BOY SCOUT. What do your students call you?

THE GUY. To my face or behind my back?

(The BOY SCOUT shrugs.)

THE GUY *(cont'd)*. They used to call me Mr. Smith. That's what they call me. If you teach long enough you forget you ever had a first name.

BOY SCOUT. When I was a little kid I thought my teachers actually slept in the classroom at night, you know? I didn't know they had a life outside of the school.

MR. SMITH. Sometimes they don't. *(Beat.)* What's your name?

(BOY SCOUT holds out his left hand to MR. SMITH.)

BOY SCOUT. Virgil.

(MR. SMITH looks at VIRGIL as if he's seeing him for the first time. The moment passes between them, changes. MR. SMITH awkwardly reaches out with his left hand to shake VIRGIL's left hand.)

MR. SMITH. Nice to meet you. Virgil.

(VIRGIL grabs MR. SMITH's left hand in the Boy Scout handshake, holding on tight.)

VIRGIL. Nice to meet you too, Mister. *(VIRGIL doesn't let go of the handshake.)* We shake with our left hand, the hand nearest the heart. *(VIRGIL still doesn't let go.)* It's the Boy Scout handshake.