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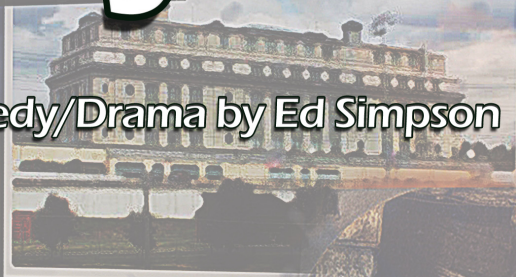
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Dramatic Publishing

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Electric City Suite

Comedy/Drama by Ed Simpson



Electric City Suite

Electric City Suite is a cycle of six one-act plays telling the story of a quirky Scranton, Pennsylvania, snack delivery man and his family from 1921 to the present. **The Amazing Goldin...and the Regeneration of the Punjabs** (5m., 2w.). It's 1921, and Danny McBride, the 12-year-old son of a coal miner, meets Horace Goldin, a mysterious magician, and makes an unusual but heartfelt request. **Orbiting Scranton** (2m., 1w.). It's 1962, and astronaut John Glenn is about to become the first American to orbit the earth. Dan McBride is now a grandfather. Today, he's watching the news coverage with his grandson, "Bolts," a chubby, lonely 12-year-old. As Colonel Glenn prepares for his adventure, Dan gives Bolts something which will help prepare him for his own life's "great adventure." **Mixed Nuts and Bolts** (4m., 1w.). Halloween, 1991, at Jimmy's, a neighborhood bar in Scranton. Don Polosky's wife has just left him and their young daughter. His brooding is shattered by the arrival of a loud, jovial stranger—snack delivery man Bolts Dennehy. **Paris of the Lackawanna** (2m., 1w.). Fifteen years later, best friends Bolts and Don enjoy an afternoon of fishing. Don is in a foul mood. His daughter, Maggie, is moving to Chicago to marry a man she's just met on the Internet. Bolts offers his friendship—and some typically colorful advice. **A Journey Standing Still** (3w.). At the airport awaiting the arrival of her estranged daughter, Maxine Stofko falls into conversation with Louise Carney, a world traveler and self-described blabbermouth. As the two strangers pass the time, Maxine confides her conflicted feelings for her new acquaintance—snack man Bolts Dennehy. **First Dance in Your Dreams** (3m., 1w.). Back at Jimmy's, part-time bartender Don is preparing for the lunch-time crowd when Bolts barrels in with a snack delivery and an unusual request—he needs Don to teach him to dance so he can impress his new girlfriend, Maxine. *Approximate running time: each play, 30 minutes. The plays may be done separately or as a full evening. All of the plays may also be fully staged. Code: E59.*

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ELECTRIC CITY SUITE

By
ED SIMPSON



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ED SIMPSON

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(ELECTRIC CITY SUITE)

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For
Duane Noch and Geoff Gould

The plays of *Electric City Suite* were commissioned
and originally produced by the
Electric Theatre Company,
David Zarko, Artistic Director.

Special thanks to David Zarko, Don Wildman,
the actors and staff at ETC,
Molly Simpson (for “Maggie”),
my students and colleagues at High Point University,
Kristin Curtis, David Tabish and Cyd.

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SOME THOUGHTS FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT...

First off, thanks for reading my plays!

As you'll see, *Electric City Suite* is a cycle of six plays set in Scranton, Pa., telling the story of working-class Scranton by centering on whimsical snack salesman “Bolts” Denehy. The action of the *Suite* starts in 1921 when Bolts' grandfather was just a boy and continues on to the present day.

The saga is told in an episodic manner with a variety of colorful, recurring characters and although the plays of the cycle enrich and inform one another, each play can “stand on its own.”

In fact, one of the fun things about *Electric City Suite* is its flexibility. Although each play can be performed separately, your theater might choose to produce the entire cycle, perhaps (as I've seen it done) breaking the collection into segments of one, two or three of the plays, performing them over a period of time, and culminating in a special event “marathon” performance of the entire *Suite*. (If you try this, I might suggest three two-part segments—Parts 1 and 2 seem to logically fit together as do Parts 3 and 4, and 5 and 6.)

As is the case with all “sagas,” the events of *Electric City Suite* take place over a span of time and in a variety of locations. However, try not to knock yourself out when staging these stories. The plays in the *Suite* can be simply

staged, using only selected furniture, scenic elements, props, lights and sound effects to indicate the various locations.

Use your imagination to create the world of the plays. Have fun with it! Past productions have run the gamut from a few chairs to realistically depicted locations. One of my favorites created very effective scenery by using “collages” created from street signs, mining implements, railroad memorabilia, assorted furniture pieces, and enlarged copies of old photographs of Scranton—easily obtained from a variety of public domain sources.

Again—be creative...and have as much fun working on *Electric City Suite* as I did writing it.

Orbiting Scranton

Part 2

* * *

Orbiting Scranton was first produced on May 4, 2007 by the Electric Theatre Company, David Zarko, artistic director, under the direction of Don Wildman and Peggy Scott, with sound effects performed by Richard Grunn, original music by Elizabeth Feller, and stage management by Laurie Camlet with the following cast:

Betsy Dennehy Maura Malloy
Patrick “Bolts” Dennehy Heather Stuart
Dan McBride. Duane Noch

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

BETSY DENNEHY 32. Warm, funny but with some hard edges. A telephone operator who's raising her son alone.

PATRICK "BOLTS" DENNEHY . . 12. A chubby, sensitive, lonely little boy. Called "Bolts" by his grandfather.

DAN MCBRIDE . . 55, but prematurely aged. Betsy's father and a former coal miner who's dying a slow, early death from black lung disease. Approaching his death with characteristic strength and good humor.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

A residential street in Scranton, Pa., Dan's living room and kitchen.

February 20, 1962. Morning.

A NOTE ON THE SETTING

Although there are three separate locations, whenever possible, scenery should be kept to a minimum. Each scene can be indicated as simply as possible—perhaps a bench for the bus stop; a couch and small 1960's-era TV for the living room; and a small kitchen table, chairs and refrigerator for the kitchen. Consider using lights and sound to help indicate the multiple locations.

It's the morning in Scranton, PA on February 20, 1962, the day Col. John Glenn will blast off to become the first American in orbit. Betsy Dennehy has just dropped off her 12 year-old son Patrick - who prefers to be called "Bolts" - at her father's apartment on her way to work. Dan McBride is a former coal-miner who is slowly dying from black lung.

BOLTS. Thanks! (*Quickly.*) Grandpa, can I watch cartoons?

DAN. Channel 9, *Tom and Jerry*.

(*BOLTS runs over to the TV to turn it on, then jumps on the couch to watch.*)

BOLTS. I know!

(*DAN walks over to BETSY who is standing in the kitchen door, watching.*)

DAN. Boy, you're right—he's pretty sick.

BETSY. He woke up this morning complaining about his stomach, he felt a little warm, I thought maybe he'd picked up a bug but...I don't know. I'm beginning to think he's got a case of "the hookies." He's havin' a rough time at school.

DAN. Sorta figured.

BETSY (*lowering her voice*). They're talkin' about holding him back, Pop. If things don't improve his teacher says they're gonna flunk him. I mean...she says he doesn't pay attention, he says reading "confuses" him and that he's stupid. His only friend in class moved to Jersey and

these little snots on the playground have been calling him “Fatty Patty.”

DAN. Jeez—that’s making *my* stomach hurt.

BETSY. God... On top of that, all the kids are teasing him about his daddy being a guest of the state of Pennsylvania.

DAN. Poor kid. How’d that get out?

BETSY. Who knows? You know kids, the snots—all it takes is one person to hear something and then... (*A worried beat, then she walks into the kitchen.*) Listen, you have anything I could grab? Toast? Bagel? Anything? I ran out without breakfast.

(*DAN points to the counter as he sits on a kitchen chair.*)

DAN. Got a bag of those little powdered doughnuts from Wegman’s yesterday. Help yourself.

(*BETSY grabs the bag and tears it open.*)

BETSY. I have maybe five minutes before I gotta hit the bricks and I’m starving! (*She takes a bite of doughnut and talks with her mouth full.*) By the time I got Paddy moving I didn’t have time to eat. (*Another bite.*) Bus pulls up, we’re not at the corner so he dudn’t even come to a stop... (*Another bite.*) Had to chase him halfway down the block. God these are good. (*Another bite.*) Don’t let Paddy near ’em.

DAN. Don’t think that’s gonna be a worry. You ate everything but the bag.

BETSY. Need some milk...

(DAN goes to the fridge.)

DAN. Look, sit, sit, sit. You got a coupla minutes. Let me get the milk. *(As DAN gets a milk from the fridge, BETSY sits on the other kitchen chair.)* So how's the telephone operator racket?

BETSY *(wryly)*. Picking up.

DAN. Har-dee-har. Good one. *(He heads for a cabinet.)*
You know, I called the operator the other day.

BETSY. That so?

DAN. Sounded a bit like you. *(He grabs a glass.)*

BETSY. How about that.

DAN. Was it?

BETSY. No.

(DAN pours the milk.)

DAN. Would you tell me if it was?

BETSY. No.

DAN. So it might've been you.

BETSY. It might've been.

(DAN brings the milk over to BETSY.)

DAN. Sounded like you.

BETSY. Pop. I told you—I can't talk to you when I'm at work even if you got through to me...which you didn't. They listen in sometimes, they'd know, I'd get fired.

DAN. Fine, fine. *(A beat as he crosses back to his seat.)*

BETSY. So why'd you call?

DAN. Just thought I'd give it a shot, call Information, maybe get my only daughter who I hadn't heard from in a while on the other end.

BETSY. Ah, for cryin' out loud—

DAN. I was feeling lucky—kinda like fishin'.

BETSY. You're not gonna guilt me. I don't have time.

DAN. You don't have time for guilt? Boy—some Catholic you turned out to be! Where did I go wrong?

(They laugh but DAN's laugh turns into a cough. A beat.)

BETSY. So, how do you feel?

DAN. Fit as a fiddle and ready for love.

BETSY. You look tired, Pop.

DAN. So? So do you.

BETSY. I'm beat but I got a twelve-year-old, no car, and a husband I only see on visiting days—what's *your* excuse?

DAN. Retirement! *(He coughs a deep, hacking cough. After a beat.)*

BETSY. You go to the doctor yesterday?

DAN. Yeah.

BETSY. What'd he say about that cough?

DAN. Ahhh... Let me tell you about young Dr. Snyder—

BETSY. Pop—

DAN. His name's "Skip." Did you know that? Dr. Skip Snyder? He hasn't even started to shave yet and he thinks he can tell me what I can and cannot do. I would like to know just when he got so smart.

BETSY. When he went to med school, c'mon! He's a good doctor.

DAN (*begrudgingly*). Yeah, yeah, right, so I hear.

BETSY. What did he say?

DAN. He said I've got the lungs of a newborn...who smokes four packs a day.

BETSY. Pop, please.

DAN. Ah, you know. No different. No worse, no better.

BETSY. What did he say? What's causing it?

DAN (*a beat. He sighs*). Bets, what's wrong with me is I'm a worn-out old man.

BETSY. You're only fifty-five!

DAN. Yeah, but coming from a family of coal miners, I'm like Methuselah!

BETSY. I'm not gonna listen to this—

DAN. I've lived longer than any man in the history of my family! Let me enjoy my achievement in peace.

BETSY. Quit joking.

DAN. Why? Look, we both know what this is. Even "Skippy the Doctor" knows. (*A beat as he takes BETSY's glass to the sink.*)

BETSY (*with a sigh*). Yeah.

(*DAN leans against the counter.*)

DAN. Bets, it's what you pay for the life. My grandpa, two uncles, they all had this. My old man—hell, my old man lost his arm and got this. It's like the family curse. You work in the mine, you breathe. You work enough and breathe enough? Your lungs get shot. That's it. It's the cost of doin' business, of puttin' food on the table, of makin' a life for you and your mother. (*A beat.*) Hey, look, today, I'm feelin' OK, OK? Besides, the doc tells

me I got maybe as much as another coupla years—maybe more if I eat my Wheaties.

(BETSY crosses to DAN.)

BETSY. Yeah, well...just don't give up, OK?

DAN. I'm not givin' up nothin'.

BETSY. 'Cause I hate it when you talk like you're giving up.

DAN. What did I just say?

BETSY. Well...don't!

DAN. You know, you remind me of your mother.

BETSY. I do, huh?

DAN. Yeah—she's used to try to push me around too.

(BETSY laughs and checks her watch.)

In the background, we become aware of the on-going TV news coverage of the impending launch of astronaut John Glenn.)

BETSY. Holy cow—don't want to chase another bus. Gotta go.

DAN. So go, go. Maybe I'll call Information again just to hear you say "Number plea-uhs."

BETSY. I told you—you can't guilt me! *(She kisses DAN and heads into the living room. DAN trails.)* Watch what he eats. And, listen—talk to him if you get the chance. Always makes him feel better to listen to your nonsense.

DAN. Always makes me feel better talking my nonsense.

(BETSY walks over to BOLTS and kisses him on the top of the head.)

BETSY. Gotta scoot, sweetie. Feel better, all right?

(BOLTS is watching the news coverage.)

BOLTS. Cartoons aren't on.

BETSY *(glancing at the TV)*. Oh. Right. John Glenn.

BOLTS. Boy...

BETSY. Well...you can watch the blastoff with Grandpa.

(DAN walks up to the sofa.)

DAN. Hey—there you go! Oh, s'gonna be some history, boy. I been looking forward to this for weeks. I mean, first by-God American to fly around the world in a spaceship? Holy cow! Big things, Bolts, big things. Something you'll remember—no kidding—the rest of your life.

BOLTS *(looking at the TV and pouting)*. Wanted to see *Tom and Jerry*.

DAN. Yeah, well—me too. But you can't stop progress!

BETSY *(under her breath)*. Good luck, Pop. *(She heads for the door. DAN follows her.)*

DAN. Ah, we'll be OK.

BETSY. Thanks again. I'll pick him up around six. *(Calling out.)* Be good!

DAN *(calling out)*. We will. *(He closes the door. He looks toward BOLTS for a moment. Then...)* OK! *(He claps his hands together.)* So now that your mom's outta the

way we'll break out the good stuff. Come with me! (*He heads for the kitchen.*)

BOLTS. Where?

DAN. Kitchen. (*BOLTS follows DAN into the kitchen.*)

Gonna be some magic in—what?—they're sayin' about thirty minutes. Gotta be up and at 'em! (*He brings out a jar of Ovaltine and a glass.*) Little Ovaltine—whaddy say?

BOLTS (*with a sigh*). No, thank you.

(*DAN opens fridge and gets milk.*)

DAN. Come on—pick you up, stand you straight.

BOLTS. All right.

(*Throughout the following, DAN mixes the Ovaltine in the milk.*)

DAN. Sure. Glass, little milk, here—hand me that spoon there, kiddo—and...one, two— (*He stirs the milk.*) Directions says one heaping spoonful but I double it up. Figure, you know, why not live a little? Huh?

BOLTS. Yeah.

DAN. Am I right?

BOLTS. Yeah. (*As DAN continues stirring, BOLTS leans on the counter and watches.*)

DAN. Besides, it tastes better that way, didn't it? Take a sip of *this* you know you got something on the other end.

BOLTS. Momma won't let me make it that way.

DAN. No—really?

BOLTS. Says it'll make me fatter.

DAN. Oh. Well, you know. I'm thinkin' every once in a while, right?

BOLTS. Right.

DAN. Right is right. *(As he stirs, in the background the TV newscaster continues to talk about Glenn's impending blastoff. After a moment, DAN nods toward the TV.)*

So...big things today, huh?

BOLTS *(shrugging)*. I don't know.

DAN. You don't know?

BOLTS. I mean, I guess. We've been talking about it in school so...

DAN. Then there you go!

BOLTS *(with a disappointed sigh)*. Miss Miller's bringing a TV in class today so we could watch the blastoff.

DAN *(surprised)*. TV in school?

BOLTS. Uh-huh.

DAN. Huh. Well, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity, that's for sure.

BOLTS *(disappointed)*. I know.

DAN. Well, you can still watch it here with me, y'know.

BOLTS. Yeah, but she was also gonna bring cookies.

DAN. Bet she didn't have Ovaltine though, does she?

BOLTS. No.

DAN. See? Count your blessings.

BOLTS. OK.

(DAN continues to stir.)

DAN. You ever hear that before? That saying? "Count your blessings"?

BOLTS. Uh-huh. I heard it at church. Father Bob.

DAN. Yeah?

BOLTS. I came up with four. Four blessings.

DAN. Four, huh? (*With a chuckle.*) Well, now you got five.

Ovaltine with your grandpa watching John Glenn. Number five! (*He finishes stirring and taps the spoon on the glass.*) Okey-doke... Double shot of Ovaltine. Drink up.

I won't squeal on you.

BOLTS. Thanks, Grandpa. (*He sips.*)

DAN. Good?

BOLTS. Uh-huh. (*A beat as he drinks.*)

DAN. Chasin' away that stomach bug, idn't it?

(*Busted. A beat as BOLTS puts his glass down.*)

BOLTS. I guess...

DAN. Thought it would.

BOLTS. Wish I didn't ever haveta go back to school.

DAN. Kids're givin' you the business, huh?

BOLTS (*a beat. Then he nods*). Yes, sir.

DAN. Why's that you suppose?

BOLTS. I'm fat.

DAN. Oh. You are?

BOLTS. Yes.

DAN. Huh. Well, you got some meat on you, no question of *that*.

BOLTS. I don't like being fat.

DAN. I don't like being old but... "I yam what I yam."

BOLTS (*with a laugh*). Popeye.

(*A beat as they both laugh.*)

DAN. Who's givin' you the business?

BOLTS. I don't know. Everybody. The big kids.

DAN. Big kids, huh?

BOLTS. The eighth-graders.

DAN. Oh, well, eighth-graders. Lemme tell you about eighth-graders. There are no worse human beings on the planet. Eighth-graders have been terrorizing little kids since probably, I'm thinkin', 1892.

BOLTS. Nuh-uh.

DAN. Absolutely! Ever since October 7, 1892. It was, I believe, a Thursday. They know this for a fact.

BOLTS. Grandpa—

DAN. Take it from me—I know whereof I speak.

BOLTS. How do *you* know?

DAN. Big kids used to give me the business all the time—only for me it was because I was small.

BOLTS. *You?*

DAN. Oh, I was a real runt. When I was maybe, I'm thinkin', ten, the big kids actually picked me up and hung me by my belt on a coat hook behind this closet door at school.

BOLTS (*enjoying himself*). Really?

DAN. Closed the door, left me in there, dangling in the dark.

BOLTS. How long did you stay in there?

DAN. Till I grew big enough to get myself down. Coupla years.

BOLTS (*with a laugh*). Come on, Grandpa. How long?

DAN. Long enough.

BOLTS. Boy. Bet you were mad.

DAN. Oh sure.

BOLTS. Did you get even?

DAN. Are you kidding? I was small and there was four of 'em... Of course I did.

BOLTS (*really interested*). What did you do?

DAN. Bit 'em on the knees!

BOLTS. Nuh-uh!

DAN. I was like a flea! I was so small and fast, they never knew what hit 'em.

(They laugh. Once again, DAN's laughter turns into coughing.)

BOLTS. Grandpa?

DAN. I'm all right. Just need to sit down for a second. (*He sits down on one of the kitchen chairs. BOLTS sits in the opposite chair. Finally, his coughing subsides.*) Whew... musta sucked something down the wrong pipe. I'll be all right. Just let me...

(A beat as DAN works to catch his breath and BOLTS watches, a bit scared.)

BOLTS. Are you sick, Grandpa?

DAN. Right now?

BOLTS. Are you?

(A beat as DAN looks closely at BOLTS.)

DAN. Why you askin' me that?

BOLTS. Mom says.

DAN. To you?

BOLTS. Un-uh. Heard her talking to Vicki.

DAN. Vicki, huh?

BOLTS. Yeah.

DAN. Who's Vicki?

BOLTS. She lives upstairs. She has big yellow hair and
momma says she smokes too much.

DAN. Oh—*that* Vicki.

BOLTS. She came down the other night to borrow the *TV Guide* and have some coffee. They were talking real low
but I could hear.

DAN. You got big ears.

BOLTS (*worried*). I do?

DAN (*with a laugh*). Just an expression. Don't worry. Your
ears are fine. What I mean is you need to be careful
listenin' to private conversations that don't concern you.

BOLTS. I know.

DAN. You hear me?

BOLTS. Yes, sir. (*A beat.*) So are you?

(*A beat. DAN walks to the counter.*)

DAN. Just got this cough s'all.

BOLTS. 'Cause of the mines? S'what Momma says.

(*DAN puts the milk back in the fridge.*)

DAN. Well—I spent a lotta years working down there a
mile or so, breathing in all that stuff so, yeah.

(*BOLTS nods a worried nod as he ponders this.*)

BOLTS. Hmmm...

(*DAN turns to face BOLTS.*)

DAN. Listen, OK? I want you to promise me something, all right?

BOLTS. I guess.

(DAN walks to BOLTS, still sitting at the table.)

DAN. I'm serious.

BOLTS. OK.

DAN. Stay outta the mines.

BOLTS. Oh.

DAN. Our whole family—every man goin' back probably forever, ever since the first McBride came over—we spent our lives hidden away, underground. Don't do like me, all right? Be the first from our family to work somewhere you can feel the sun and the wind. Stay outta the mines.

BOLTS *(in a miserable torrent)*. But Miss Miller told me in reading class that if I didn't do better in school the only place I could get a job is the mines. And when all the kids heard that, they said I'm too fat to work in a mine, that I'd just get stuck. And then one of the kids said that probably the only job I could get was making license plates with my daddy in the prison.

DAN *(softly)*. Oh.

BOLTS *(near tears)*. He's stupid! I hate him! I hate him so much. I don't know why he... *(DAN puts his hand on BOLTS' shoulder.)* Why did he have to do that, Grandpa?

DAN. I don't know, Bolts. I'm pretty mad at him too. *(Silence. He looks at BOLTS for a moment as the TV plays in the background. Finally...)* It's hard sometimes, idn't it?

BOLTS *(quietly)*. Yes, sir.

DAN (*a beat*). All right. (*He bends down and looks BOLTS in the eye.*) Desperate times calls for desperate measures.

BOLTS. What?

DAN (*conspiratorial*). Can I trust you?

BOLTS. I...I guess.

DAN. Good. Come with me—we haven't much time.