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Dramatic Publishing



INVENTING MONTANA

A Play in Two Acts

by

JEANNE MURRAY WALKER



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(INVENTING MONTANA)

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For Robert Turner
“And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche”

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Inventing Montana has been read at Pacific Theatre, the Manyunk Community Center, Hedgerow Theatre and the Centenary Stage. In the spring of 1996 it won the Lewis Prize at Brigham Young University, where it was given a reading. It was given a premiere at the Centenary Stage in Hackettstown, New Jersey, in February 2000, with Carl Wallnau directing, set and costume design by David Loveless, light design by Ed Matthews, sound design by Scott O'Brien, and the stage manager was Michelle Wargacki. The cast was as follows:

Montana	DAVID SITLER
Elaine/Mrs. Bigbottom/Lucy Graveborn/Madam Lovelock	KATRINA FERGUSON
Margaret/Chicago/Opal Spoonly	KRISTIN DABROWSKI
Charity Stryver	MELINA FLANAGAN
Adam Snossell	J.C. HOYT
Hosea Radlowe/Lord Songsby/Highwayman	NICK STANNARD
Damask Rigglesworth/Bailiff	EZRA MILCHMAN

Thanks to Ken Marini, Nancy King and the students in her Fall 1995 Honors Colloquium at the University of Delaware, Catherine Rust, Carl Wallnau, Peregrine Whittlesey, Penelope Reed, Bill Burrison, Ron Reed, Molly Walker and E. Daniel Larkin, all of whom had faith in this play and in their own ways left their marks on it. The Center for Advanced Study at the University of Delaware provided a year-long fellowship and a GUR grant, without which this play could not have been written and developed. For financial support, thanks also to the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pew Foundation.

NOTES

SETS

Montana's study needs a leather couch, several chairs and a large desk and, if the play is done at Christmas, a Christmas tree. A hall leading to the front door of the house is R. There is a door to Montana's and Elaine's bedroom through the back wall of the study. A door to a guest bedroom is L.

The 1855 scenes can be set in Montana's study. For example, Montana's desk becomes the shop counter, the dinner table, the post chaise. The actors portraying the Dickens characters invade the modern space, creating their own sets and props from whatever is there.

LIGHTS

Lighting should shade from warm yellow in the modern house in San Diego to misty, foggy grayish light in the English scenes.

THE DICKENS NOVEL

The novel in the style of Dickens is entirely invented by the playwright.

THE NARRATION OF THE NOVEL

Parts of the 1855 scenes are narrated. Actors should move smoothly between narrated lines and lines spoken by their characters. For clarity, narrated lines are printed in bold.

THE TONE OF THE TWO STORIES

Each of the two stories gains from contrast with the other. The Dickens should be big-hearted and broad. The Montana story is smart and understated.

INVENTING MONTANA

A Play in Two Acts

For 6m., 10 w. (or 3m., 3w. doubling)

CHARACTERS

The Novel

Lucy Graveborn millinery shop manager, 40
Charity Stryver shopgirl, 19
Adam Snosswell Irish servant, wooden leg, 60
Hosea Radlowe aristocrat who has lost his land, 41
Damask Rigglesworth barmaid at The Rose and Crown
Mrs. Bigbottom barmaid at The Rose and Crown
Opal Spoonly barmaid at The Rose and Crown
Madam Lovelock madam at The Establishment
Lord Songsby lord at The Establishment
Lady in the Hat, Woman of the Streets, Highwayman,
The Bailiff

The Play

Montana . . . professor at Univ. of California, San Diego, 49
Elaine a painter, late 30s
Rosella/Margaret/Chicago graduate student at Yale, 27

PLACE: England in 1855 and San Diego in the present.

TIME: The play occurs between 10 p.m. one evening and
early the next morning.

A NOTE ON DOUBLING

Three women and three men are needed to cast this play. A director might consider using the following doubling:

Played by the actor who plays Elaine

Lucy Graveborn
Woman of the Streets
Madam Lovelock
Damask Rigglesworth

Played by the actor who plays Montana

The Bailiff

Played by the actor who plays Hosea

Lord Songsby
Highwayman

Played by the actor who plays Charity

Mrs. Bigbottom

Played by the actor who plays Chicago

Lady in the Hat
Opal Spoonly

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

SCENE: *A late Wednesday evening in early January. On-stage is a living room furnished with leather chairs, a sofa, a couple of tables, lamps, and bookshelves crowded with books. A few books lie scattered on the floor. A hall leading to the front door of the house is R. There is a door to Montana and Elaine's bedroom through the back wall of the study and a door to a guest bedroom is L. Maybe there's also a bedraggled looking Christmas tree.*

AT RISE: *Lights up on ELAINE who lets herself in the front door. She is wearing clothes that are inexpensive and somewhat peculiar, but striking and tasteful. She carries a cardboard box. She stands for a minute looking around the room, then begins searching for something, pulling out drawers, nosing around. MONTANA strides in. He is middle-aged, self-deprecating, sexy and likable.*

MONTANA. It's you. You startled me.

ELAINE. I'm sorry.

MONTANA. You're back.

ELAINE. No. I mean, just to pick up some things. I haven't slept for three nights. I nod off and in twenty minutes, I wake up again. Finally last night I got up and turned all the pictures to the wall.

MONTANA. Pictures of what?

ELAINE. Hotel pictures, designed by computers. I wanted to slash them with the room key. I wanted to get out my brushes and smear them with orange.

MONTANA. What's wrong?

ELAINE. They're like children with no souls. You look into their eyes and nada, they're not home. I have nightmares.

MONTANA. Why don't you come back.

ELAINE. Because it's no better here.

MONTANA. You can't live in a Holiday Inn.

ELAINE. Janny will be back from Spain on Wednesday. I'll rent one of her rooms.

MONTANA. Where will you paint?

ELAINE. Where I did before. In her mudroom. It's sunny. I like it there.

MONTANA. It's so cold the paints get stiff. You can't go back to that.

ELAINE. I'm not talking to you about this, Montana. Do whatever you're supposed to be doing right now. Don't let me disturb you.

MONTANA. Who will you talk to?

ELAINE. There are plenty of people at the center. (*She resumes her search.*)

MONTANA. What did I do? I didn't do anything.

ELAINE. That's exactly what you did. Nothing. For years you've been gone three weeks out of four. You know what it's like? The house echoes. I'm here painting and I can hear myself breathe. Everywhere I look there's a Montana-sized hole. Inside me there's a Montana-sized hole.

MONTANA. You don't see enough of me. Therefore you're leaving me? Something's wrong with that algebra, Elaine.

ELAINE. I got tired of solving for the unknown.

MONTANA. What's unknown?

ELAINE. You. Chicago for a week, Boston, L.A., filming episodes.

MONTANA. You loved how busy I was when you married me.

ELAINE. I didn't realize you were possessed.

MONTANA. It won't go on forever.

ELAINE. That's what you said last year. And this year, it's worse. I understand now. You're addicted. You can't stop.

MONTANA. I could stop.

ELAINE. For what? Losing me apparently isn't enough incentive.

MONTANA. I don't know why I should have to choose between my wife and my career!

ELAINE. Because it's not a career. It's a monster driving you. You can't say no.

MONTANA. Suppose I made you choose between me and your painting?

ELAINE. I painted here, where you are.

MONTANA. You're leaving me because I finally wrote a book that made it to the bestseller list?

ELAINE. They call you. They invite you. They follow you around. And you choose them. And I'm left here at home.

MONTANA. You can come with me any time you want.

ELAINE. And sit in a hotel with those blank pictures staring down at me while you're gone all day? Who are these people, the ones who invite you? Why are they so powerful?

MONTANA. I don't care about them.

ELAINE. Are you having an affair?

MONTANA. When would I have time?

ELAINE. These young girls show up. Where you're giving lectures, whenever you're invited to speak.

MONTANA. Press secretaries. Reporters. You can't imagine how little I care about any of that!

ELAINE. What do you care about?

MONTANA. I came back after Cincinnati and you weren't here. I had forgotten. I called your name. And then I realized, you were gone. You know the shadows in the kitchen in the late afternoon. The shadows drove me crazy. I started shaking. I couldn't stop. I just went to bed.

ELAINE. Didn't you eat?

MONTANA. I bought soup on the way home from the airport. Some of those fancy cans. I opened one and dumped it into a pot. I turned on the stove. That's when I started shaking.

ELAINE. Did you turn the stove off?

MONTANA. I must have. The house didn't burn down.

ELAINE. From now on, you have to get take-out.

MONTANA. I don't like take-out. It's not about food, Elaine.

ELAINE. You've lost weight.

MONTANA. I am trying to tell you, I need you. I want you.

ELAINE. I talked to you. I begged you. I have a forest fire blazing away inside me. All the little animals are running for cover. The woods are burning. And you can't hear me. You're deaf.

MONTANA. I told you I'd stop.

ELAINE. Have you stopped?

MONTANA. There's a Poussin exhibit at the Huntingdon.
Let's go see it.

ELAINE. I'm sick of being alone.

MONTANA. You love looking at art.

ELAINE. I was alone on Christmas, Montana!

MONTANA. I got home at two the next morning.

ELAINE. I was alone on Thanksgiving. You want me to make an inventory of when I was alone? I don't like sounding like a beggar. There is something wrong with you, something broken. I can't fix it. I don't know who can. Where's the pin?

MONTANA. What pin?

ELAINE. Your mother's pin.

MONTANA. You mean the pin I gave my mother when I was little?

ELAINE. The cowboy pin you brought back after her funeral. I can't find it.

MONTANA. It's probably on one of your blouses. Or maybe on your other coat. I never understood why you like that pin so much. It's hideous.

ELAINE (*looking around for the pin*). I don't care, I love it.

MONTANA. You have such good taste. Everything you touch looks wonderful. That pin is so vulgar. Why do you want that pin?

ELAINE. I imagine you picking it out for your mother when you were—what was it—eleven? Before you were so driven. And she gave it to me when we got married. Ah. Here it is. (*She pins it onto her dress.*) I'll take just a few books now. Then I'm going. (*She moves from shelf to shelf, taking out a book here and there, putting it into the box.*)

MONTANA. You're going back to that commune?

ELAINE. It's not a commune. Three of us share a house. We paint... I have two commissions, Montana. I'm serious. I'm doing something new. In red. All red. And I'm

just beginning to imagine it. A new life. With people who talk to me, people who come home at night.

MONTANA. What am I supposed to do with this house?

ELAINE. Live here.

MONTANA. It's too sad.

ELAINE. Then sell it. All you need is a helipad where you can touch down.

MONTANA. Give me your hand.

ELAINE. What for?

MONTANA. Give it here.

(ELAINE gives him her hand. He kisses it, then writes in the palm with his finger.)

ELAINE. What are you doing?

MONTANA. Writing.

ELAINE. What?

MONTANA. What I can't say. What's in my heart.

ELAINE *(moved. She kisses him)*. Prince Charming.

MONTANA. Let's have an affair.

ELAINE. We're married.

MONTANA. I don't care. Will you have an affair with me?

ELAINE. Don't make me cry, Montana. I want you. But I can't have you. No one can have you but your work.

(She moves toward the door, carrying the box.) I have to go now.

MONTANA. How will you get back?

ELAINE. How I got here. By taxi.

MONTANA. They go on strike at ten.

(ELAINE looks at her watch.)

MONTANA. What time is it?

ELAINE. Ten-thirty. How stupid! Of course. I forgot. I'll take the bus.

MONTANA. It's too dangerous, Elaine. You promised you wouldn't.

ELAINE. Then you'll drop me off?

MONTANA. The car's in the shop.

ELAINE. It is not!

MONTANA. The clutch.

ELAINE. That old slipping problem?

MONTANA. Yes.

ELAINE. I don't believe it. It's too convenient.

MONTANA. Look in the garage.

ELAINE. I can't stay here with you.

MONTANA. I'll lay a sword in the bed between us.

ELAINE. I'll sleep in the guest room. Tonight. Tomorrow morning I'm out of here. *(She moves toward the guest room.)* Will you wake me up at seven-thirty tomorrow?

MONTANA. I'll be gone.

ELAINE. Where?

MONTANA. The keynote address. You remember. MLA.

ELAINE. How are you getting to the airport?

MONTANA. Paul's picking me up.

ELAINE. You would be wonderful, if you weren't running so fast that I can't touch you.

(She exits. MONTANA watches her exit, then stares mournfully after her. Lights fade.)

Lights up. MONTANA is sitting on a chair with a stack of books at his elbow, a pad of paper on his knee, revis-

ing his talk. A knock at the door. MONTANA continues to work. Another knock.)

MONTANA. Who is it?

(Again, a knock. MONTANA goes to the door at R. He opens it. A young woman comes in. It is difficult to tell what she looks like because she is bundled in a rather large and somewhat awkward coat and a rain hat. She carries a briefcase. She is breathing hard and appears agitated.)

MONTANA. Can I help you?

MARGARET. May I come in?

MONTANA. I'm sorry. Do I know you?

MARGARET. Please! Someone's following me.

MONTANA *(looking out)*. I don't see anyone.

MARGARET. For three or four blocks he's been following me! Please. Could I come in?

(He lets her in and shuts the door. She hurries into the house, looking around.)

MONTANA. Make yourself at home. Here. Sit down.
You're fine now.

MARGARET. Thank you.

MONTANA. I'll call the police.

MARGARET. It's all right.

MONTANA. What do you mean? I need to report it.

(MONTANA leaves the room for a minute. MARGARET looks anxiously after him for a beat, then walks around,

picking things up, looking at them. When MONTANA returns, MARGARET stands innocently waiting.)

MONTANA. They're sending a squad car.

MARGARET. Here?

MONTANA. To cruise the neighborhood, they said. They'll send someone for a report later.

MARGARET. Later when?

MONTANA. When they have a free officer. Busy night, apparently. How are you feeling?

MARGARET. Awful. That man behind me. For three or four blocks. I thought he might have a gun.

MONTANA. You're safe now. You can relax.

MARGARET (*assessing him*). Thank you.

MONTANA. Can I get you something? Some water?

MARGARET. No thanks. (*She looks around. Maybe she pulls off her scarf to reveal a beautiful face.*)

MONTANA. Coffee?

MARGARET. No thanks.

MONTANA. Why don't you sit down for a minute. You'll be all right.

MARGARET. Thank you. You're very calming. You know what I worried about? I worried that you'd think it was weird, someone just showing up at your door.

MONTANA. Glad to be able to help. (*Beat.*) Do you need me to take you somewhere?

MARGARET. I'm terrified to go back out there.

MONTANA. Why don't you stay for an hour or so. I should get back to work.

MARGARET. Oh, of course! I apologize.

MONTANA. I'm sorry about this mess. I'm trying to finish a lecture. Make yourself comfortable. Why don't you

read for a bit? Something to take your mind off what's happened. (*She doesn't pick up a book.*) It's gotten cold. Can I get you a blanket?

MARGARET. All these books! Are you a teacher?

MONTANA. Actually, yes. I'm a professor here at the university.

MARGARET. That's a coincidence. I was looking for a professor.

MONTANA. There are several in the neighborhood.

MARGARET. His name is Montana Winfield.

MONTANA. I'm Montana Winfield.

MARGARET. You are? You are?! I'm glad to meet you.

After all this time! (*She sticks out her hand to shake his.*)

MONTANA. I'm afraid I don't know you.

MARGARET. We've been on e-mail together.

MONTANA. I beg your pardon. I don't remember.

MARGARET. I use the name Broadworth.

MONTANA. Rosella Broadworth? From Yale?

MARGARET. Yes.

MONTANA. You're not Rosella Broadworth.

MARGARET. I use her e-mail.

MONTANA. Wait. I've been writing to Rosella Broadworth.

MARGARET. I know. I've been answering your messages.

MONTANA. How did you get her password?

MARGARET. I'm her graduate assistant.

MONTANA. Then she knows you're answering her messages?

MARGARET. She thinks it's awful the way machines are taking over.

MONTANA. So she doesn't use her e-mail address.

MARGARET. Right.

MONTANA. Does she know you've been sending out messages under her name?

MARGARET. Look, it's all right. I'm her graduate assistant. And I'm grateful for your help with the Dickens essay. You've been very kind.

MONTANA. Rosella is an old friend.

MARGARET. Your messages were witty. Intimate. That joke about the giraffe and the roller skates!

MONTANA. I'm sorry. Let me get this clear. You flew here from Yale?

MARGARET. Yes.

MONTANA. To see me?

MARGARET. Yes.

MONTANA. I'm sorry. You seem like a fine young woman and I'll be happy to take you back to wherever you're staying. Then I really need to get to work.

MARGARET. I have a Dickens manuscript.

MONTANA. I'm sorry?

MARGARET. I brought a Dickens manuscript.

MONTANA. What Dickens manuscript?

MARGARET. A new one.

MONTANA. I don't believe there are any new Dickens manuscripts. Forgive me. The idea is very interesting, but I happen to *know* there aren't any—

MARGARET. —I can show you. *(She takes a package from her briefcase. It is wrapped in brown paper and tied securely.)*

MONTANA. I'm afraid someone's pulled a hoax on you.

MARGARET. Oh, it isn't a hoax.

MONTANA. If there's a manuscript, why hasn't it been in the news?

MARGARET. I haven't gone to the press.

MONTANA. You think there is actually a Dickens novel no one knows about?

MARGARET. Yes. Right here.

MONTANA. That may be a *manuscript*. What makes you think it's a Dickens? (*He reaches toward it. She clutches it more tightly.*)

MARGARET. I took it to the rare-book librarian at Yale.

MONTANA. Ah. And his name?

MARGARET. Rexroth Kent.

MONTANA. Yes, well. Indeed.

MARGARET. You know him?

MONTANA. Professor Kent and I studied at Chicago together.

MARGARET. He thinks it's a Dickens.

MONTANA. I don't like to say so, but he tended to be hasty then, too.

MARGARET. He took a sample of paper. He's having it tested.

MONTANA. He's made mistakes. I assume you know about them.

MARGARET. He's the foremost expert in Victorian manuscripts—well, in the States, anyway. May I take my coat off?

MONTANA. Certainly. For a minute. (*She does.*) This is dated?

MARGARET. No. But it reads like a late novel.

MONTANA. How many pages?

MARGARET. Twenty-three and a half. Not every page is filled.

MONTANA. —Which part of the novel is it?

MARGARET. Fragments, chapters, unnumbered. Fragments, really.