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Eden Prairie, 1971

By

MAT SMART

Dramatic Publishing Company

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“*Eden Prairie, 1971* was first produced as a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere by Riverside Theatre (Iowa), Butterfly Effect Theatre of Colorado (Colorado) and New Jersey Repertory Company (New Jersey).
For more information, please visit NNPN.org.”

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Eden Prairie, 1971 was first produced as a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere by the Riverside Theatre (Iowa City, Iowa) from January to February 2022. Adam Knight, Producing Artistic Director; Irena Sarić, Managing Director.

CAST:

PETE Kyle Clark
RACHEL..... Christina Sullivan
MRS. THOMPSON..... Kristy Hartsgrove Mooers

PRODUCTION:

Director Adam Knight
Scenic Designer Benjamin Farrar
Costume Designer..... Zamora Simmons
Lighting Designer Jim Vogt
Sound Designer..... Chris Okiishi
Props Designer Stephen Polchert
Stage Manager Jared Kiebel
Assistant Director..... Sara Ashbaugh
Assistant Stage Manager..... Anna Novak
Board Operator..... Merric Bower
Technical Director..... Chris Rich

The play was then produced by the New Jersey Repertory Company (Long Branch, N.J.) from October to November 2022. SuzAnne Barabas, Artistic Director; Gabor Barabas, Executive Producer.

CAST:

PETE Emilio Cuesta
RACHEL..... Oriana Lada
MRS. THOMPSON..... Andrea Gallo

PRODUCTION:

DirectorEvan Bergman
Scenic Designer Jessica Parks
Costume Designer.....Patricia E. Doherty
Lighting DesignerJill Nagle
Sound Designer..... Nick Simone
Stage Manager Kristin Pfeifer
Assistant Director..... Janey Huber
Assistant Stage Manager..... Rachael Malloy
Technical Director..... Brian P. Snyder

It was also produced by Butterfly Effect Theatre of Colorado (Boulder, Colo.) in April 2023. Stephen Weitz, Producing Artistic Director; Rebecca Remaly, Managing Director.

CAST:

PETEJames Giordano
RACHEL..... Kate Hebert
MRS. THOMPSON..... Adrian Egolf

PRODUCTION:

Director Heather Beasley
Scenic Designer Tina Anderson
Costume Designer.....Sarah Zinn
Lighting Designer Jon Dunkle
Sound Designer.....Andrew Metzroth
Properties Designer & Stage Manager..... Katie Hopwood
Assistant Stage Manager.....Rowan Livengood

Special thanks to
Henry Wishcamper and Margot Bordelon.

*with gratitude to Adam Knight
for his friendship and artistry*

Eden Prairie, 1971

CHARACTERS

PETE: 20 years old.

RACHEL: 19 years old.

MRS. THOMPSON: 39 years old, Rachel's mother.

PLACE: Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

TIME: July 1971.

Eden Prairie, 1971

(The backyard of the Thompson house. Night. There is one light on inside the house. All of the curtains are drawn. The first quarter moon hangs in the night sky close to the horizon.

The sound of crickets comes and goes. Occasionally, a car passes out front or a dog barks in the distance.

PETE enters the yard. His clothes are worn, dirty. His beard is unkempt. He wears a backpack. His boots are muddy. He looks like he hasn't showered or slept. He goes up to the window. He's about to tap on it but loses the nerve. He paces.

He returns to the window. He's about to tap on it when the grandfather clock inside the house strikes midnight. There are twelve low, steady gongs.

As soon as the clock is silent, PETE taps on the window. He waits.

He taps on the window a bit louder. He waits. The curtain opens. Instinctively, PETE ducks away to the side.

RACHEL looks outside into the yard. She wears her work clothes—a button-down shirt, slacks and a green apron. Her hair is pulled up in a bun. She cups her hands around her eyes and peers through the window.

PETE watches RACHEL for a few moments. He doesn't move. She doesn't see him. She turns off the light. She returns to the window and looks out of it. She opens the window.)

RACHEL (quietly). Hello?

(Beat.)

RACHEL (*cont'd*). Is someone there?

PETE. Yes.

RACHEL. Well, who is it?

PETE. It's Pete Walcott.

(Long pause.)

RACHEL. There's a Spotted Sandpiper that sometimes pecks on the window for no good reason. But that sounded different.

(Pause.)

There's a few nests over by Purgatory Creek.

PETE. I just walked by Purgatory Creek.

RACHEL. You see the nests?

PETE. Yes.

(Beat.)

What is today?

(Beat.)

What's the date?

RACHEL. July thirtieth. No—it just turned Saturday the thirty-first.

PETE. I tried to keep track, but I got mixed up.

Did it happen? Did they land?

RACHEL. Yeah. A couple of hours ago.

PETE. Did everything go all right?

RACHEL. So far, yeah.

PETE. Hard to believe they're gonna drive a car on the moon this time. Can you imagine that?

I'm glad you're here. I figured you'd be home for the summer, but I wasn't sure.

How are you, Rachel?

RACHEL. What?

PETE. How are you?

RACHEL. What are you doing here?

PETE. How are you? How are your folks?

RACHEL. My dad's in Vietnam and my mom's passed out drunk on the sofa. How are your folks?

PETE. I wouldn't know. Do you?

(Beat.)

Do you know how they are?

RACHEL. I used to sometimes see your dad at the bank.

PETE. You don't anymore?

RACHEL. There's someone else in his office now.

PETE. Did he transfer to another branch?

RACHEL. I don't know.

What are you doing here?

PETE. Can you come outside?

RACHEL. Why are you here?

PETE. I need to tell you something.

RACHEL. Then why don't you come back in the morning when my mom and I are awake?

PETE. Because I'd rather not get arrested.

(Beat.)

RACHEL. Is Nathaniel with you?

PETE. No.

Will you come out here?

RACHEL. If my mom wakes up, there's no telling what she'll do.

PETE. I'll be quiet.

RACHEL. I—

PETE. Rachel Thompson, I just walked 330 miles, will you come out here for five lousy minutes?

(Beat.

RACHEL closes the window.

PETE paces. He smooths his hair and beard. He takes off his backpack.

The inside light by the back door turns on.

RACHEL opens the door and comes out onto the back step. She is taken aback by how PETE looks, but she tries not to show it.)

RACHEL. You walked here from Canada?

PETE. From Dance. It's in Ontario. Not far from Fort Frances and the border. I could get nineteen or twenty miles a night if I hoofed it. I only walked at night. But the nights are shorter in July, so.

RACHEL. How long have you been walking?

PETE. Either sixteen or seventeen nights. I lost track which.

RACHEL. ... It's called Dance?

PETE. Yeah, but that makes it sound more cheery than it is. Dance has a population of fifty and no one there dances. They farm. Sunup to sundown. It should be called Farm.

(Beat.)

I apologize if I smell. I haven't showered since I left.
Do I smell?

RACHEL. Yeah.

PETE. Sorry.

I was wearing my suit the last time we saw each other.

RACHEL. What?

PETE. At graduation.

RACHEL. We didn't talk at graduation.

PETE. Yeah, but that was the last time we were in the same place at the same time.

(PETE and RACHEL look at each other for a moment.)

PETE *(cont'd)*. Feels like a lot longer than two years ago, doesn't it?

RACHEL. Yeah.

PETE. You work at Lunds?—like at the checkout?

(RACHEL takes off her apron and rolls it up.)

PETE *(cont'd)*. I thought Lunds didn't hire for the summer.

RACHEL. They don't.

PETE. Then how are you—

RACHEL. That's where I work. Full time. Since I came back home.

PETE. What about Stanford?

RACHEL. Berkeley. It was Berkeley.

PETE. You dropped out?

RACHEL. I swear to God—if my mother sees you out here.

(She pulls PETE to a place less out in the open.)

She's terrified. We're all terrified. You tapping on the window almost gave me a heart attack.

PETE. I tried to be quiet.

RACHEL. It's not about being quiet. It's about being terrified of the messenger coming here.

(Beat.)

PETE. Where's your father stationed now?

RACHEL. I could get in trouble for talking to you. You're a criminal.

PETE. Is that what you think of me?

RACHEL. It's not what I think, it's what you are.

PETE. But what did you think?—when you found out?

RACHEL. How do you even remember where I live?

PETE. We grew up together.

RACHEL. No, we didn't. My dad got transferred here the summer before freshman year and you only came over once.

PETE. Yeah, but—

RACHEL. You shouldn't be here. I'm supposed to report this.

PETE. If you want to call the police, go ahead and call them. I'll run. I'll keep running and hiding. It's what I'm best at.

RACHEL. Say what you have to say and then go.

(Beat. PETE swallows, then speaks.)

PETE. Did you promise Aaron Wenzel that you'd go with him to the Twins home opener?

RACHEL. What?

PETE. He said he asked you to go to the 1970 home opener.

RACHEL. What does that have to do with anything?

PETE. Did he talk to you about going to a baseball game?

RACHEL. ... Once, I guess.

But it was winter. Two winters ago. I told him to ask me again when it got closer.

Why are we talking about Aaron Wenzel?

PETE. He was in love with you.

(Beat.)

And I know you two didn't know each other that well, but when we were right at the border—when me and Nathaniel and Aaron were about to cross and abandon everything we'd ever known, Aaron stopped. He couldn't do it.

He said he had to go back.

He said, "If, one day, Rachel Thompson and I get married and have kids,

I need to be able to look her in the eyes, right?

I need to be able to say
that when my country called me
I answered."

RACHEL. I'm gonna go inside now.

(She starts to go back inside, then turns.)

Here I thought—when I heard that Aaron died in Quang Tin—that he died for his country. I didn't know it was me who killed him.

Goodnight, Pete.

PETE. You saved him.

You saved him, Rachel.

He died whole. He's no coward.

You saved him.

And when I read his name in the newspaper, I—

Everything went blank—

I tried to get through the day—tried to do my work, but it felt—
Nothing around me was different. How could the world just go on? How could nothing be different?

It felt ... obscene. It didn't feel real up there.

I started walking that night—I had to. It wasn't real there.

(Beat.)

Is it real?

Is Aaron really gone? Is he?

RACHEL. Yes.

PETE. He's gone

and I am still here?

I can't breathe sometimes. I can't stop thinking about him.
It's like I have been—spinning—since I heard. Not able
to—to—to believe or—

Aaron is gone.

I am still here.

(Pause.)

If he would've come home alive, he would've told you how
he felt.

He would want you to know.

I thought you'd be honored.

RACHEL. Honored?

PETE. Yes—and I'm sorry if you're not—but I think you
should be.

(Beat.)

That's it. That's all. I didn't mean to upset you.

So long.

(PETE grabs his backpack and starts to leave.

He gets halfway through the yard before RACHEL speaks.)

RACHEL. Where are you going?

PETE. Gonna go back to Dance.

See what I mean about the name?

RACHEL. You're not going to see your parents?

(PETE stops. He doesn't answer.)

RACHEL *(cont'd)*. You came all this way and you're not going to see them?

PETE. My dad would spit in my face and then shoot me. He hates draft dodgers more than he hates the communists.

RACHEL. You have to at least see your mother.

PETE. There's no way for me to see her and not him.

RACHEL. So you came all this way to tell me that?

PETE. I came here for this to start—somehow—feeling real.

And yes—to tell you that.

RACHEL. Is that why you stopped talking to me?

(PETE doesn't answer.)

RACHEL *(cont'd)*. Aaron is lucky to have such a good friend to come all this way

to tell me something he was too afraid to tell me himself.

PETE. That's not fair.

RACHEL. You know what's not fair?

That there's a guy who had to go fight in Vietnam because you wouldn't.

(PETE meets RACHEL's stare. He doesn't look away. Beat.)

PETE. First drawn was September fourteenth—that's Nathaniel. My birthday was third—December thirtieth.

Aaron's was fifth. October eighteenth.

Out of 366 days pulled, how did the three of us end up in the first five draws?

How is that fair?

RACHEL. It was random.

PETE. It was *The Twilight Zone*.

(Throughout the following, PETE speaks with determination, but his pace keeps quickening as he comes unraveled. He doesn't recover until his line "I'm sorry. I haven't spoken to anyone in a long time.")

PETE (*cont'd*). Watching them pull birthdays out of a big glass jar and put them up on the board like—like—bingo. It was like Uncle Sam was daring us to leave.

And I knew things would be different in Canada, but there isn't a single thing in my life that's the same. No part of my day is the same. No one from here is there.

Nathaniel was only on the farm for a week before he said, "Fella, let's get to Toronto. Let's get somewhere we can protest." We had this big fight and he called me a—

(Beat.)

I haven't heard from him.

And I haven't written or called anyone because I don't want the F.B.I. to have anything to go on.

RACHEL. Shh.

PETE. I mean, all I do is shovel shit and feed the animals and shovel shit and dig postholes and cut wire. That's all I do—ten hours a day.

Margeaux and Phillipe bought out the Tremblay's plot and we're fencing it all in for the sheep. It's big news, and it means that every day, I—over and over and over again, I—
Look at my hands.

(He holds out his hands.)

Look how wrecked my hands are.

It hurts to make a fist. I can't write a letter. I don't know how much longer I can—

(Beat.)

But there are two men—two Americans—standing on the moon right now. And there is one in orbit around it. Right now. And that is a good thing. That is something this country is doing that we can be proud of.

(PETE looks up at the moon.)

PETE (*cont'd*). They can look down at Earth and cover it with their thumb.

(Without making a fist with his hand, PETE holds his thumb up to the moon.

He covers it. He uncovers it. He covers it.)

PETE (*cont'd*). Can you imagine being able to do that?

Can you imagine being somewhere where gravity doesn't have as strong of a pull as here?

(Beat.)

I thought I'd never see Minnesota again.

... When I walked by Purgatory Creek, I went through the reeds. They came up over my head. I had to watch where I stepped.

Why do Sandpipers build their nests on the ground? Why—in the world—do they do that?

RACHEL. It's not like they're in the middle of a field. The reeds hide the nests.

PETE. But why not up in a tree?

RACHEL. They're foragers.