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Dramatic Publishing

ONE LANE BRIDGE

By
STEPHEN GREGG



Dramatic Publishing

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One Lane Bridge was originally produced by Bakersfield High School, Bakersfield, Calif., on October 26, 2010.

The production was directed by Jacquelyn Thompson-Mercer. The technical director was Dale Olvera, the costumes were by Jo O'Meara and the stage manager was Emily Smith. Original music was composed and performed by Phillip Gonzales, Jonathon Holguin, Daniela Miramontes and Steven Whyte.

The cast was as follows. (Named roles were double cast.)

Eli Mark Adame
Brock Stone

Samantha. Briana Taylor
Alice Verderber

Male Narrator. Eric Dains
Ian Flowers

Narrators Antonio Aguilar
Norma G. Camorlinga
Chelsea Dakota Hatler
Justin Hinds
Nora Mansour
Jill Price
Emily Rizo
Sharila Stewart
Megan Taira
Rachel Washington

ONE LANE BRIDGE

CHARACTERS

ELI 16 years old

SAMANTHA. 28 years old

MALE NARRATOR

OTHER NARRATORS (2 to 10, or so)

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A canyon road in Colorado.

NOTES

Jacquie Thompson-Mercer and her students at Bakersfield High School did the excellent first production of this play on October 26 - 29, 2010.

Jacquie had four student musician/music theorists come up with a scary-sounding theme, and then play it intermittently, and at tense moments. The music really added to the feel of the play.

She used ten Narrators.

THE NARRATORS:

The overall note about the Narrators is that you can assign lines as you choose, depending on the number of Narrators you're using.

The Narrators in *One Lane Bridge* provide exposition, some of Eli's thoughts, reenactments of 911 calls, and the occasional reinforcement of certain words.

Ten Narrators worked well in Bakersfield, but in the script, the story that Samantha tells is in six voices. Feel free to divvy up the story into as many parts as you need. It's not necessary to get through the whole story.

At least some of the Narrators are trees, and they should probably suggest trees with as little artifice as possible. They look like people, which is helpful at the end of the

play, when neither Eli nor the audience can tell if the thing holding the cell phone is a person or a tree.

If a Narrator speaks two or more times in a row, it can be two or more Narrators, or just one.

If a Narrator has a symbol in the Character line, it's to indicate that the same Narrator reads all the lines with that symbol.

Play with the moments when a Narrator adds emphasis to words that Eli and Samantha speak. An actor in one reading said the words just behind when the characters said them, to good effect.

The Male Narrator is played by the same actor throughout the play and becomes Male Narrator as Samantha.

Both the car crash and the bridge collapse can be recorded sound effects or sound effects created live by the Narrators, or both.

SAMANTHA'S STORY ABOUT EZRA:

The audience won't be able to follow the story that Samantha tells. What you're going for is Eli's subjective, very scared, experience of it.

Early in 2010, the Bakersfield group and I spent a couple of hours together, during which we played around with scary ways to tell Samantha's story. What we found is this:

A minute of stage time is a long time. After that, the novelty is gone and it becomes tiresome not to be able to understand the story. Our Narrators whispered for about forty-five seconds, then got much louder, then got way WAY LOUDER WITH FIVE SECONDS TO GO. Then an instant silence.

Overlapping whispers are actually quite spooky, particularly if they come from all around. If you have microphones, or actors you can plant in your audience, it might be worth it.

The image of Samantha's mouth wide open is scary.

At about thirty seconds, our group started to add the occasional sound: rain sticks, shakers, triangles, dissonant guitar, etc.

The sections of Samantha's story that involve dialogue can be played by one Narrator or two.

Projections might be effective as well.

Huge thanks to the actors from the Twenty6 Writers Lab who read iterations of this play over the course of a year:

April Billingsley, Gary Frank, Jessica Goldapple, Barry Jenner, Nathaneal Johnson, Steve Longmuir, Maria McCann, Dawn McDaniel, Erik Passoja, John Reha, Amy Smallman and Sean Smith.

ONE LANE BRIDGE

Lights up on ELI, a sixteen-year-old boy, driving. He's driving slowly because it's snowing.

NARRATORS are scattered around the stage or enter as they speak, or some combination. At least some of the NARRATORS are trees. [See notes at back of book.]

A NARRATOR picks up the story in the middle.

NARRATOR. And, even though he'd made this trip before, twice, there was the anxiety that he'd miss a turn, that the snow would hide some landmark, and he'd have to backtrack along the canyon roads. Strange that his fear of being late should exceed his fear of getting lost.

ELI (*thinking out loud*). Which is ridiculous if you think about it. Nothing bad happens if I'm late.

NARRATOR. And now there's the house, at the edge of the hill. Only a porch light is on. Maybe he was early.

(SAMANTHA CAPTAIN enters to one side, carrying a gym bag.)

NARRATOR. But no. There she is.

NARRATOR. No, that's just a tree.

NARRATOR. No, it is her. Standing there, at the end of the driveway, as though she didn't mind the snow.

(ELI stops.)

SAMANTHA comes rushing to the car.

ELI opens the door. Their conversation is urgent. They need to get SAMANTHA out of the cold.)

ELI. Hi! You must be freezing!

SAMANTHA. Pretty cold! *(Her bag:)* I just need to set this in your trunk.

ELI. Oh, hang on! Let me find the latch! *(He can't find it.)*
Or you could just set it in the back.

SAMANTHA. Your seat'll get wet. *(She brushes snow from her bag.)*

ELI. It's fine!

SAMANTHA. You're sure?

ELI. Yeah, let's just get you into the car!

(She sets her bag in the backseat. Gets in the car, closes the door.)

ELI *(cont'd)*. Oh, man! You must be freezing.

SAMANTHA. A little bit.

ELI *(the heat)*. Let me turn this up.

SAMANTHA. Thank you. I do feel bad about your seat.

ELI. It's plastic. And it's my dad's old car anyway. *(Beat.)*
I'm Eli.

SAMANTHA. Samantha Captain.

ELI. Kep-tin?

SAMANTHA. Captain. Like a ship's captain.

ELI. Nice to meet you.

(They shake hands. Hers is cold.)

ELI (**ADD A NARRATOR, SOFTLY**). Didn't your mother ever tell you not to stand outside in a snow-storm? I hope you're not in a **rush**.

(NOTE: "rush," and bolded words like it, are almost subliminal: flickering auditory hallucinations that ELI registers, but barely.)

SAMANTHA. Oh...

ELI. Are you?

SAMANTHA. Well, Home Depot closes at nine so...I guess, a little bit, I am.

ELI (**ADD A NARRATOR, SOFTLY**). Thirty five minutes. We can make it if we **hurry**. *(He pulls out onto the dark road.)* How do you know the Carvers?

SAMANTHA. Friends of friends is all.

ELI. How are they?

SAMANTHA. I don't really know them.

ELI. Mrs. Carver sounded funny on the phone.

SAMANTHA. She's distracted. She got sick and then she gave it to the six-year-old.

ELI. Ben.

SAMANTHA. Right. So there's a lot of sneezing and coughing and vomiting and Ben's technique for covering his mouth is sort of a megaphone.

ELI. I've seen that.

SAMANTHA. Yeah. And they don't want the baby to catch it, so— It just doesn't seem like a great time for an extra body to be hanging around.

ELI. What are you going to Bloomington for?

SAMANTHA. Home Depot for a shower curtain. And then just some unfinished business. How about you?

ELI. I'm picking up a trumpet from my friend Mason—
(*He is a distractable driver.*)

SAMANTHA/MALE NARRATOR (*simultaneously*).
Watch the road!

ELI. Sorry! (*Beat.*) They warned you, right?

SAMANTHA. About what?

ELI. I've only been driving three and a half weeks.

SAMANTHA. No. Nobody mentioned that.

ELI. This is only my sixth—well, sort of my seventh solo trip.

SAMANTHA. Is that right?

ELI. Yeah. Hang on...this is the turn I always miss. (*He makes the turn.*) There. All set.

NARRATOR (*spoken and maybe holding a sign*). Winding road.

ELI. Hope you don't get carsick.

SAMANTHA. Not usually, no.

ELI. If you do, just feel free to close your eyes, if that helps.

SAMANTHA. Thank you. You're a nice boy.

ELI. And you're a nice elderly person. (*Which amuses SAMANTHA, as was the intent.*)

SAMANTHA. Twenty-eight, thank you very much. Should I have said nice young man?

ELI. It doesn't matter.

SAMANTHA (*beat*). You'll get there soon enough.

ELI (*focused on the road*). Where?

SAMANTHA. You know...manhood. Not being a boy.

ELI. Oh.

SAMANTHA. Just in case—if I had offended you by saying boy.

ELI. Oh. No, I didn't take it that way.

SAMANTHA. Good, 'cause you know, you've still got some growing to do, and your voice will change...

ELI. My voice did change.

SAMANTHA. It'll change even more. (*A long moment.*)

Did you know the boy?

ELI. Which—oh. No, he was from the public school. I go to St. Pius.

SAMANTHA. You're Catholic?

ELI. I try.

SAMANTHA. What does that mean?

ELI. Just, you know, I try.

SAMANTHA. The paper says the parents are still holding out hope.

ELI. Yeah.

SAMANTHA. They shouldn't. He's dead.

ELI. How do you know?

SAMANTHA. He was an honor student. Honor students don't run away. They fall into wells. Or they trust people they shouldn't.

ELI. Meaning what?

SAMANTHA. Someone offered him a ride, probably.

ELI. Why would someone do that?

SAMANTHA. Don't know. You'd have to ask him.

ELI. Justin?

SAMANTHA. No. The man who killed him.

ELI. How do you know it was a man?

SAMANTHA. It's always a man.

(This just sits there. Finally ELI changes the subject.)

ELI. What do you do for a job?

SAMANTHA. I'm an actuary.

ELI. I don't know what that is.

SAMANTHA. An actuary is the person who sets insurance rates. Like car insurance rates, for example.

ELI. That's a whole profession?

SAMANTHA. Oh yes.

ELI. You should see my insurance! It's crazy high!

SAMANTHA. Yes, well, that's what the statistics tell us.

The average sixteen-year-old boy is crazy and—

MALE NARRATOR. Hi.

ELI. Not me.

SAMANTHA. No. It's just an average.

ELI. So it's just all about math?

SAMANTHA. Pretty much, yeah. Although I could tell you some horror stories.

ELI *(beat)*. OK.

SAMANTHA. What?

ELI. Give me some horror stories.

SAMANTHA. I don't want to unsettle you.

ELI. You won't. I like roller coasters and, I guess you'd call 'em, slasher movies.

SAMANTHA. Me too.

ELI. Really?

SAMANTHA. Yeah. I love them.

ELI. You do not.

SAMANTHA. Are you surprised because I'm female, or because I'm ancient?

ELI. Both. (*Pause. The snow:*) Wow. It's coming down even—

NARRATOR. —harder now. Visibility getting worse. The flakes bigger and faster, hitting the windshield at different angles as the road twists. The occasional ghost of wind clipping the final leaves from the branches.

(*The car drifts again.*)

SAMANTHA (*mouths*)/MALE NARRATOR. **Watch the road!**

ELI. What?

SAMANTHA. You know what? That was cute, once—

ELI. I wasn't trying to be cute—

SAMANTHA. You need to be careful!

ELI. I wasn't even near the edge!

SAMANTHA. Should I drive?

ELI. *No.*

SAMANTHA. If it happens again, I'm going to insist.

ELI. No you are not. (*A sullen moment.*) I've got a car horror story.

SAMANTHA. Uh-huh.

ELI. Doesn't that surprise you?

SAMANTHA. No. Everyone has one.

ELI. Not like mine.

SAMANTHA. Well, let's hear it.

ELI. It's something that happened about...eleven years ago.

It was the front page of our paper for a month at least. They kept learning new stuff. And there were these numbers that kept going up. Five people confirmed dead. Eleven, thirteen, and it just kept—I mean it went all the way up to thirty-eight. Or forty, depending on

how you counted. (*Beat.*) It was this story about a bridge that had washed out on a...let's say a foggy night. There was some reason drivers couldn't see very well. Way down below, on the river, a boat—a ferry—had smashed into one of the, uh, the pylons. It knocked out a whole section of the bridge. But it was snowing or fogging so hard the cars couldn't see it in time. And so they just kept plunging off the bridge. One after another. And no one could stop it because by the time you knew it was happening, you were thirty seconds from being dead.

911 NARRATOR A. 911, what is your emergency?

NARRATOR @. Help, I'm— (*coughing, panicking as (s)he drowns*) I'm in the canyon—

911 NARRATOR A. Sir (*Ma'am*), I'm having trouble—

NARRATOR @. There's a—I'm not sure what's—I think—

911 NARRATOR A. Sir? Sir, (*Ma'am? Ma'am,*) are you still there?

ELI. For three and a half hours, people just vanished.

NARRATOR \$. You have reached the Schmidt residence, no one is here to take your call, but leave a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we can!

NARRATOR. Beeeep!

NARRATOR \$. Hey sweetheart, listen, I'm—I'll probably be home soon but just in case, I wanted—I just wanted to let you know, that I really really really— (*Silence.*)

ELI. Twenty-six cars. Thirty-eight people. But they only ever found thirty-one bodies. There was—believe it or not there was a man driving his wife to give birth. So they argued about the count.

SAMANTHA. Awful.

ELI. Yeah. Three people had time to make phone calls.

The third phone call came from this boy: Hayden Lane Silver. That was his name.

911 NARRATOR B. 911, what is your emergency?

ELI. But he couldn't remember it. He was so scared he couldn't think of his own name.

911 NARRATOR B. Hello, are you there?

HAYDEN NARRATOR. I can't—I don't—I don't know what's happening!

911 NARRATOR B. What's your name, son? Talk to me.

ELI. The call goes on for nineteen minutes and six seconds.

(Just the sound of HAYDEN hyperventilating, or maybe sobbing, or maybe drowning.)

ELI *(cont'd)*. In the tape it sounds like he's, you know, standing somewhere. Watching it. Praying it would—

HAYDEN NARRATOR. Stop! It keeps happening!

911 NARRATOR B. What keeps happening?

HAYDEN NARRATOR. Oh no! Here comes another one!

911 NARRATOR B. Another what?

HAYDEN NARRATOR. I can't stop it! It's gonna go over—

911 NARRATOR B. Son, you have to guide me here. Where are you? *(Beat.)* Are you there?

ELI. Seventy-one seconds of silence on his end. *(S)*he has to get creative.

911 NARRATOR B. Hey, do you have brothers and sisters? *(Beat.)* Superbowl's coming up. Do you watch any football?

ELI. Then, at twelve minutes and forty-five seconds.

911 NARRATOR B. Do you believe in God?