

Night Comes Early

A Comedy in Two Acts

By Burton Bumgarner

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DEDICATION

For Cathy

with apologies to Emlyn Williams

STORY OF THE PLAY

The director of the Moon Lake Community Theater, Missy Bailey, has dreamed about directing a production of a 1930s psychological melodrama called “Night Comes Early.” As a teenager she saw a professional production of the play and it had a lasting impact. Now that the opportunity has come, she encounters overwhelming obstacles: cast members who don’t know their lines, who drop out at the last minute, who have psychological issues, and workmen who can’t finish building the set. No one is ready on opening night, but the show must go on, even without enough actors to fill the roles. Actors constantly switch costumes and roles and the workmen continue to work on the set – during the performance. It’s an absolute mess, but the audience seems to be growing as the show continues, with viral videos fueling an internet sensation. Far from a melodrama, “Night Comes Early” is a fast-paced farce that shows the anxiety of a director attempting to mount a production of a play that is way beyond the capabilities of her cast and crew.

Winner of the 2015 Robert J. Pickering Award
for Playwriting Excellence
Branch County Community Theater
Coldwater, Michigan

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 5 w.)

MISSY BAILEY: Director of a community theater production, early 50s.

AMANDA BAILEY: Professional actress, Missy's daughter, early 30s.

PETE VANDERHORST: Local sheriff, actor in the play, early 30s.

COOKIE HARRINGTON: Retired schoolteacher, actress in the play, early 60s.

BETTY RAYMORE: Lutheran pastor's wife, actress in the play, mid 30s.

HARRY BULLARD: Undertaker, thinks he's a great actor, early 30s.

DAN: A workman, mid 30s.

LYNN: Dan's assistant, mid 30s.

Characters in "Night Comes Early" by E.M. Williams

Setting: Yorkshire, 1930s

Miss Bradley: an old maid (*Cookie*)

Inspector Belize: a policeman (*Pete, Missy*)

Eleanor: a younger old maid (*Amanda, Lynn*)

Miss Tascome: the housekeeper (*Betty, Missy, Lynn*)

Herbert Lawrence: a young man in love with Eleanor (*Missy, Pete*)

Nurse Debby: a nurse caring for Miss Bradley (*Missy, Pete, Betty*)

Terrence: a psychotic killer (*Harry, Dan*)

Character Note: Harry Bullard drinks alcohol. If your community objects to this, feel free to change his drinking habit to coffee or smoothies.

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SETTING

The Moon Lake Community Theater, Moon Lake, Michigan.
The present.

Act I: The Rehearsals

Scene 1: Thursday afternoon

Scene 2: Thursday evening

Scene 3: Monday evening

Act II: The Performance

Scene 1: An hour before curtain

Scene 2: The curtain speech

Scene 3: "Night Comes Early," Act 1

Scene 4: "Night Comes Early," Act 2

Scene 5: "Night Comes Early," Act 3

Scene 6: Epilogue

COSTUMING NOTES

During Act I the actors wear updated clothes. Pete wears a sheriff's uniform. During Scene 3 the actors designate their characters in "Night Comes Early" with accessories, which are quickly changed as the actors change roles. These accessories are also used in Act II.

Inspector Belize: 1930s trench coat and hat

Miss Tascome: an apron and maid's cap

Herbert Lawrence: cardigan sweater, pipe

Nurse Debby: nurse's cap and cape, medical bag

Terrence: porkpie hat, scarf

Dan and Lynn: work overalls, flannel shirts

For Act II the actors are in costumes.

Cookie (*Miss Bradley*): 1930s old lady's dress

Amanda (*Eleanor*): 1930s unstylish dress, pearls

Betty (*Miss Tascome*): maid's uniform

Pete (*Inspector Belize*): trousers and dress shirt

Missy (*Herbert*): trousers and dress shirt

Harry (*Terrence*): a hospital gown and slippers

Dan and Lynn: still wear workmen's clothes

ACT I: The Rehearsals
Scene 1: Thursday Afternoon

(The stage of the Moon Lake Community Theater with the incomplete set of the upcoming production of "Night Comes Early." Upstage is a partially painted wall that is the backdrop for the play. A fireplace has been drawn on the wall. A hook in the wall holds a fire poker. A space in the wall has been cut for a picture window. Two doorways, one left and one right, have been cut but no doors have been added. Bookshelves with a few odd books are upstage left. An old chair, end tables, sofa and other furniture and accessories indicate a Victorian room. A wheelchair is upstage. A tool box, an extra script and Missy's purse are on an end table. A coat rack is downstage left. A woman's winter coat is hanging on the rack. If a curtain speech is given it should be delivered at this point, with occasional interruptions from Dan and Lynn. DAN removes a heavy winter coat and hangs it on the coat rack. LYNN doesn't wear a coat. Dan nails a piece of molding over the left doorway. The molding is too short. He attaches it anyway. Lynn nails another piece of molding on the right doorway. The molding isn't straight. Dan attaches premade window panes to the picture window. He uses a cordless drill. Lynn continues to attach ill-fitting molding. They hammer, drill, use a backstage chop saw and make a lot of noise. They work for a minute or so before MISSY enters right talking on her phone. As she enters the house LIGHTS go down. Lynn goes backstage. SFX: Intermittent sounds of a chop saw. Lynn returns. Dan and Lynn continue to work making Missy's conversation difficult.)

MISSY: *(On phone.)* You said I could have any material I wanted, and I want the forest green for the draperies! ... No, I don't want free draperies for my house! It's for the set! *(To DAN and LYNN.)* Stop making that racket! *(THEY ignore her. On phone.)* It's for the community theater! People are supposed to donate services to the theater! It's called community spirit! *(To DAN and LYNN.)* STOP IT!

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MISSY: *(Cont'd. On phone. Shouting above the noise.)*
COMMUNITY SPIRIT! ... I SAID COMMUNITY SPIRIT!
(Suddenly the noise stops.) WHY DON'T YOU LISTEN!
(Freezes.) Oops. *(LYNN exits right.)* Hello? Louise? Are
you still there? *(LYNN enters with a power saw. To Lynn.)*
Don't you dare use that thing while I'm on the phone!

*(LYNN shrugs, places the saw on the floor near the table,
sees Missy's purse, reaches inside, takes the wallet, hides it
in a pocket in her overalls, and exits through the right
doorway. DAN continues using tools and making noise.)*

MISSY: *(Cont'd. On phone.)* It's noisy here! The crew is
working on the set! ... The set at the community theater! I
want the forest green material for a set of drapes for the
set! ... No, I don't want a free set of drapes for my house!
Are you even listening to me? ... Hello? ... Louise? She
hung up. *(To DAN.)* You can't do that while I'm on the
phone!

DAN: Do what?

MISSY: Make all that racket! It sounds like eighth grade
shop class in here!

DAN: Why don't you go outside?

MISSY: It's fifteen degrees and it's snowing! *(Crosses to her
purse and rummages around.)* Where are those Roloids?
Where is my wallet? I remember putting it in here this
morning. It has my credit cards, my driver's license. Did it
fall out in the parking lot? *(DAN looks from the purse to
right doorway where LYNN exited. MISSY looks at Dan.)* I
expected this set to be finished last week. *(Continues
rummaging around in her purse.)*

DAN: We couldn't come last week. We had a paying job.
(DAN exits right unnoticed by MISSY.)

MISSY: The Moon Lake Community Theater pays you!

*(DAN enters right dragging LYNN. She holds the drill like a
gun.)*

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DAN: *(Sarcastic.)* In complimentary tickets! *(Holds out his hand and LYNN gives him the wallet. He quickly crosses to the table, holds the wallet behind his back and grins.)*

MISSY: Well, that's payment! In Chicago or New York tickets like that would be worth a fortune.

DAN: This is Moon Lake, Michigan. You can't give those tickets away.

(LYNN crosses to the table, points the drill at MISSY and grins maniacally. Missy stares in surprise at Lynn. DAN returns the wallet to the purse, unseen by Missy.)

DAN: *(Cont'd.)* Ma'am, we don't mind helping you out. Especially since it counts as community service to our parole officer. But when you hire us you've got to adjust to C.V.T.

MISSY: What is C.V.T.?

LYNN: Con Victs Time!

DAN: Speaking of which, it's time for our break.

MISSY: I have a rehearsal in two hours! The set isn't finished! You can't take a break! *(DAN and LYNN cross left.)* Where are you going? *(LYNN exits left.)* I don't want to know why she was in prison, do I?

DAN: No, ma'am. You sure don't.

MISSY: Then I won't ask.

DAN: I'd better go try and keep her out of jail.

(DAN puts on his coat and exits right. SFX: Phone rings. MISSY answers.)

MISSY: *(On phone.)* Hello? ... Lucy? I hope you aren't planning to miss another rehearsal. We open next week, and you've missed three rehearsals already. Now, I know you probably weren't aware that you'd come down with appendicitis, but this has really set us back. I keep telling you, just because you know your lines doesn't mean you know the play. We can't do a play like "Night Comes Early" unless we work together—

End of Freeview

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