

ALMOST, MAINE

BY JOHN CARLANI

★ Revised Edition

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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ALMOST, MAINE
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ALMOST, MAINE was developed by
The Cape Cod Theatre Project.

Professional Premiere Production:
Portland Stage Company,
Anita Stewart, Artistic Director,
Tami Ramaker, Managing Director.

Originally produced in New York by
Jack Thomas/Bulldog Theatrical and Bruce Payne.

SPECIAL NOTE ON MUSIC

A CD with cue sheet of the original music composed by Julian Fleisher is available through the Play Service for \$35.00, plus shipping. The nonprofessional fee for the use of this music is \$20.00 per performance.

*for Northern Maine
and the people who live there*

ALMOST, MAINE was produced by Jack Thomas/Bulldog Theatrical and Bruce Payne at the Daryl Roth Theatre, in New York City, opening on January 12, 2006. It was directed by Gabriel Barre; the set design was by James Youmans; the costume design was by Pamela Scofield; the lighting design was by Jeff Croiter; the incidental music was by Julian Fleisher; and the production stage manager was Karyn Meek. The cast was as follows:

PETE, STEVE, LENDALL, RANDY, MAN Todd Cerveris
GINETTE, GLORY,
WAITRESS, GAYLE, HOPE Finnerty Steeves
EAST, JIMMY, CHAD, PHIL, DAVE Justin Hagan
SANDRINE, MARVALYN, MARCI, RHONDA Miriam Shor

ALMOST, MAINE received its world premiere production at the Portland Stage Company (Anita Stewart, Artistic Director; Tami Ramaker, Managing Director) in Portland, Maine on October 29, 2004. It was directed by Gabriel Barre; the set design was by James Youmans; the costume design was by Pamela Scofield; the lighting design was by Tim Hunter; the incidental music was by Julian Fleisher; and the production stage manager was Myles C. Hatch. The cast was as follows:

PETE, MAN, LENDALL, RANDY, MAN Larry Nathanson
GINETTE, GLORY, GAYLE, HOPE Wendy Stetson
EAST, STEVE, CHAD, PHIL, DAVE Justin Hagan
WOMAN, MARVALYN, MARCI, RHONDA Ibi Janko

ALMOST, MAINE was developed at the Cape Cod Theatre Project (Andy Polk, Artistic Director) in 2002.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

On the text:

Please read and consider the stage directions carefully. They are a part of the play and many are crucial to telling the story.

On punctuation:

Almost, Maine employs a lot of very specific overlapping dialogue. You'll often see this symbol: //. It will appear inside a particular character's line. It simply means that the next character to speak should begin his/her line where the // appears in the speech of the character who is currently speaking. Sometimes this "railroad tracks" method is hard to work out on the written page, so you will also see this symbol: >. It will appear mid-sentence at the end of a line that is not a complete thought. It simply means that the character speaking should drive through to the end of the thought, which will be continued in his/her character's next line(s).

On place:

Almost, Maine is not a coastal town. It is nowhere near the ocean. And it doesn't exist. It is a mythical composite of several northern Maine towns. Were it to exist, Almost would be located in the remote heart of Aroostook (say, "uh-ROO-stick") County, the sparsely populated, northernmost county in Maine. It would occupy unorganized territory that is officially designated as Township Thirteen, Range Seven, or T13-R7. T13-R7 is some seventy-five miles northwest of the northern terminus of Interstate 95; some two hundred miles northwest of the ocean (at its closest); some three hundred miles north of Portland, ME; and some four hundred miles north of Boston, MA. It is far away from things. (See the map at the back of this volume.)

Winters in Almost, Maine are long, cold, and snowy. It often feels like winter up there from October to May. The area's average January temperature is nine degrees Fahrenheit; average annual snowfall is 115 inches. Winters can also be pretty bleak, because the days are short (less than nine hours at the winter solstice), and the town is in a rolling, empty land of wide open space and big sky.

Potato farms dominate to the east; the expansive North Maine Woods are to the west. *National Geographic* once printed something to this effect: "They call Montana 'Big Sky Country.' Well ... 'they' haven't seen Northern Maine."

On the northern lights:

The northern lights are brilliant, ribbon-like, other-worldly displays of light. Northern Mainers are fortunate: They live just inside the southernmost tip of a ring defining the area in which the northern lights regularly appear. Growing up, I remember being treated to a northern lights show at least once a year.

The northern lights occur when atoms become "excited." During solar storms, electrons are sent streaming towards the earth. As these electrons enter the earth's atmosphere, they strike and excite atoms, ionizing them — charging them by knocking out an electron. When this happens to enough atoms, the brilliant light display that is the aurora borealis hovers and streaks across the sky. When the aurora fades, it's because the affected atoms have returned to their grounded state. *Almost, Maine* is a play about people who are normally very grounded, but who have become very excited by love ... and other extraordinary occurrences.

On time:

The plot of each scene in *Almost, Maine* climaxes with some sort of "magical moment." I have this notion that the magical moments in all of the scenes are happening at exactly the same time — as the clock strikes nine — and that the northern lights and these magical moments are giving rise to one another. At first, I thought it might be neat to have the northern lights appear as each magical moment occurs. But I didn't want to dilute the climax of each scene or muddle the impact of the magical moments with fancy northern lights displays. So I thought it might be better to revisit the northern lights in the transitions between each scene of the play. These "revisitings" will be denoted as "transitional auroras" in the script and will be suggested throughout. They might help audiences understand that each scene of *Almost, Maine* is taking place at the same time, and that this play is all about one moment in time — what happens to people in a heartbeat.

On the people:

The people of Almost, Maine are not simpletons. They are not hicks or rednecks. They are not quaint, quirky eccentrics. They don't wear funny clothes and funny hats. They don't have funny Maine accents. They are not "Down Easters." They are not fishermen or lobstermen. They don't wear galoshes and rain hats. They don't say, "Ayuh."

The people of Almost, Maine are ordinary people. They work hard for a living. They are extremely dignified. They are honest and true. They are not cynical. They are not sarcastic. They are not glib. But this does not mean that they're dumb. They're very smart. They just take time to wonder about things. They speak simply, honestly, truly, and from the heart. They are never precious about what they say or do.

On presenting *Almost, Maine*:

Please keep in mind that "cute" will kill this play. *Almost, Maine* is inherently pretty sweet. There is no need to sentimentalize the material. Just ... let it be what it is — a play about real people who are really, truly, honestly dealing with the toughest thing there is to deal with in life: love.

If you are involved in a production of *Almost, Maine*, please refer to the notes section in the back of this volume.

CASTING NOTES

Almost, Maine is a play for four actors. In my mind, these actors should be in their late twenties/into their thirties. However, I have seen the play done beautifully by four actors who were in their forties.

Almost, Maine is also a play for as many as nineteen actors.

The actor who plays the MAN in “Story of Hope” should be short or thin.

Program Note: If in your program or playbill you plan to include a table of contents in which you list each scene, the characters in each scene, and the actors playing each character, please list the waitress from “Sad and Glad” as WAITRESS; and please list the man in “Story of Hope” as MAN. Please do not list SUZETTE from “Story of Hope” at all.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

PROLOGUE

ACT ONE

Scene 1: HER HEART

Scene 2: SAD AND GLAD

Scene 3: THIS HURTS

Scene 4: GETTING IT BACK

INTERLOGUE

ACT TWO

Scene 5: THEY FELL

Scene 6: WHERE IT WENT

Scene 7: STORY OF HOPE

Scene 8: SEEING THE THING

EPILOGUE

CHARACTERS

ALMOST, MAINE can be played by as few as four and as many as nineteen actors.

PROLOGUE

PETE and GINETTE, who have been dating for a little while.

HER HEART

EAST, a repairman, and GLORY, a hiker.

SAD AND GLAD

JIMMY, a heating and cooling guy; SANDRINE, his ex-girlfriend; a salty WAITRESS.

THIS HURTS

MARVALYN, a woman who is very good at protecting herself, and STEVE, an open, kind fellow whose brother protects him.

GETTING IT BACK

GAYLE and LENDALL, longtime girlfriend and boyfriend.

INTERLOGUE

PETE, from the "Prologue."

THEY FELL

RANDY and CHAD, two "County boys."

WHERE IT WENT

PHIL, a working man, and his hardworking wife, MARCI.

STORY OF HOPE

HOPE, who has traveled the world, and a MAN, who has not.

SEEING THE THING

RHONDA, a tough woman, and DAVE, the not-so-tough man who loves her.

EPILOGUE

PETE and GINETTE, from the "Prologue."

PLACE

Various locales in Almost, Maine, a small town in northern Maine that doesn't quite exist.

TIME

The present. Everything takes place at nine o'clock on a cold, clear, moonless, slightly surreal Friday night in the middle of the deepest part of a northern Maine winter.

ALMOST, MAINE

PROLOGUE

Music. (Julian Fleisher's original score is highly recommended.) It is a cold Friday night in the middle of winter in a small, mythical town in northern Maine called Almost, Maine. A field of stars — a clear, cold, moonless northern night sky — serves as the backdrop for the entire play. Lights up on Pete and Ginette sitting on a bench in Pete's yard, looking at the stars. They are not sitting close to each other at all. Pete is sitting on the stage right end of the bench; Ginette, on the stage left end of the bench. Music fades. Long beat of Pete and Ginette looking at the stars. Ginette keeps stealing glances at Pete.

GINETTE. Pete, I — ... *(Beat. She's about to say, "I love you.")*

PETE. What?

GINETTE. *(She can't quite do it.)* I just — am having a nice time, Pete.

PETE. I'm glad, Ginette.

GINETTE. I always do with you.

PETE. I'm glad. *(Pete and Ginette enjoy this moment together. There's nothing else to say, so ... back to the sky.)*

GINETTE. *(Still can't say what she really wants to say.)* And the stars are just — ! I didn't know you knew all that stuff! // After all this time, I didn't know you knew all that!

PETE. Well, it's not — ... It's just stuff my dad taught me ... *(Beat. There's nothing else to say, so ... back to the stars. Beat. Ginette turns to Pete.)*

GINETTE. Pete — ...

PETE. *(Turning to Ginette.)* Yeah?

GINETTE. I love you. *(Beat. Pete just stares at Ginette. Beat. Pete looks away from Ginette. Beat. And does not respond. Beat. Ginette*

takes in Pete's reaction; deflates; then looks away from him, trying to figure out what has happened. We now have two very uncomfortable people. Pete is dealing with what Ginette has just said to him; Ginette is dealing with Pete's response — or lack thereof — to what she has just said. Big ... long ... pause. Finally, there's nothing else for Pete to say but the truth, which is:)

PETE. I ... love you, too.

GINETTE. Oh!!! (*Huge relief! Pete and Ginette feel JOY! Ginette shivers — a happy kind of shiver.*)

PETE. Oh, are you cold? // Wanna go inside?

GINETTE. No, no. No. I just wanna sit. Like this. Close. (*Pete and Ginette shouldn't be close to each other at all — but for them, it's close.*) I feel so close to you tonight. It's nice to be close to you, Pete. (*She gets closer to him. Beat.*) It's safe. (*She gets closer to him again. Beat.*) I like being close. Like this. I mean, I can think of other ... ways ... of being close to you (*I.e., sex, and they enjoy this sweetly, truly — Pete probably can't believe she brought this up, but he's probably very happy that she did!*) but that's not — ... I like this right now. This kind of close. Right next to you. (*She gets even closer to him; leans right up against him. Beat.*) You know, right now, I think I'm about as close to you as I can possibly be. (*She is very content.*)

PETE. (*Beat. Honestly discovering.*) Well ... not really.

GINETTE. What?

PETE. (*He is simply and truly figuring this out.*) Not really. I mean, if you think about it in a different way, you're not really close to me at all. You're really actually about as far away from me as you can possibly be. I mean, if you think about it, technically — if you're assuming the world is round, like a ball, (*Gathering snow to make a snowball for use as a visual. This works pretty well when little drifts of snow are attached to the bench, with the snowball resting among the drifts.*) like a snowball, the farthest away you can be from somebody is if you're sitting right next to them. See, if I'm here (*Points out a place on the snowball that represents him.*), and you're here (*Points out a place on the snowball that represents her, and it's right next to him — practically the same place he just pointed to.*), then ... (*Pete now demonstrates that if you go around the world the OTHER way — all the way around the world the OTHER way, equatorially [not pole to pole] — that he and Ginette are actually as far away from each other as they can possibly be. Little beat.*) ... that's far.

GINETTE. (*Takes this in. What on earth does he mean?!*) Yeah. (*Beat. Disheartened, Ginette moves away from Pete — all the way to*

the other end of the bench. She doesn't feel like being "close" anymore.)
PETE. *(Takes this in: His "interesting thought" seems to have moved the evening's proceedings in a direction he didn't intend. Then, trying to save the evening, hopeful:)* But ... now you're closer. *(Because she actually is closer, the way he just described it.)*

GINETTE. *(Puzzled.)* Yeah. *(Perhaps hurt, she gets up and starts to leave. What else is there to do? After she takes barely a step or two, Pete stops her with:)*

PETE. And closer ... *(Ginette stops. She turns and looks at Pete, then turns back and starts to leave, but, as she takes another step away from him, Pete again interrupts her step with:)* And closer ... *(Ginette stops again. She turns and looks at Pete, then turns back and starts to leave again, but, as she does so, Pete stops her with:)* And closer ... *(Ginette stops again; looks at Pete again; turns ... and takes another step ... and another and another and another and another. With each step she takes, Pete says, "... and closer and closer and closer and closer ... "* When she is just about to exit, Ginette stops. She is trying to figure out what's going on, what Pete is saying. She looks at Pete; she looks off left; looks at Pete again; looks off left again; and then leaves, taking step after step. With every single step she takes, Pete calls to her, telling her, with great hope, that she's "... closer and closer and closer and closer ... " until, eventually, Ginette is gone, exiting stage left, with Pete still calling, "... and closer," with every single step she takes. Unfortunately, with every step she takes, Ginette is getting farther and farther away from Pete. This is not necessarily what Pete intended, and his "closer's" trail off. Music. Lights fade on a sad, confused, helpless Pete. He looks at his snowball. What has he done? And we begin ...

ACT ONE

with Scene One, which is entitled ...

HER HEART

Music fades. The lights fade up on a woman standing in the front yard of an old farmhouse in Almost, Maine. She is clutching a small brown paper grocery bag to her chest. She is looking up at the sky. A porch light comes on. We hear a screen door open and slam as a man enters. He watches the woman for a while. He is wearing a big warm coat over plaid pajamas, and slippers or untied boots.

MAN. Hello.

WOMAN. *(To him.)* Hello. *(Resumes looking to the sky.)*

MAN. I thought I saw someone. *(Little beat.)* I was about to go to bed. I saw you from my window ... *(Beat.)* Can I — ? ... Is there something I can do for you?

WOMAN. *(To him.)* Oh, no. I'm just here to see the northern lights. *(Back to the sky.)*

MAN. Okay. Okay. It's just — it's awful late and you're in my yard ...

WOMAN. Oh, I hope you don't mind! I'll only be here tonight. I'll see them tonight. The northern lights. And then I'll be gone. I hope you don't mind —

MAN. *(Looking out.)* Is that your tent? *(The tent should be seen by East and Glory — not by the audience.)*

WOMAN. Yes.

MAN. You've pitched a tent ... >

WOMAN. So I have a place to sleep, >

MAN. in my yard ...

WOMAN. after I see them, I hope you don't mind.

MAN. Well, it's not that I —

WOMAN. Do you mind?