

DARK RAPTURE

*An American
Theater Noir*

Eric Overmyer

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DARK RAPTURE

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NATIVE SPEECH (1984)
ON THE VERGE (1986)
IN PERPETUITY THROUGHOUT
THE UNIVERSE (1989)
IN A PIG'S VALISE (1989)
MI VIDA LOCA (1991)
DON QUIXOTE DE LA JOLLA (1993)
THE HELIOTROPE BOUQUET BY SCOTT JOPLIN
AND LOUIS CHAUVIN (1993)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Overmyer is the recipient of grants and fellowships from the McKnight Foundation, the Le Comte Du Nouy Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the NEA. He was an Associate Artist at Center Stage, Baltimore from 1984 to 1991, a Visiting Professor of Playwriting at Yale School of Drama, an Associate Artist at the Yale Rep, 1991-2, and Mentor for the Mark Taper Playwriting Workshop, 1992. He has also taught playwriting at the Playwrights Horizons/NYU School.

ON THE VERGE has been performed extensively throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, and the UK, and has been translated into French and Norwegian, and performed in those languages, in Paris and Oslo. IN PERPETUITY THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE has been translated into Québécois by the prominent Québécois playwright Rene-Daniel DuBois, and read in Montreal at the CEAD. THE HELIOTROPE BOUQUET... was nominated for an Outer Critics Circle Award.

for Ellen McElduff

*You never know what's out there,
lurchin' in the dark rapture.*
Essene R

Straight ahead and strive for tone.
Benny Powell

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

DARK RAPTURE was commissioned by The Empty Space Theater in Seattle, Kurt Beattie, Artistic Director; Melissa Hines, Managing Director. The first performance was on 6 May 1992, with the following cast and creative contributors:

RAYPeter Silbert
BABCOCK/NIZAM David Mong
JULIA Katie Forgette
LEXINGTON/SCONES David Pichette
VEGAS/MATHIS/SCONESRobert Wright
TONY/DANNY/LOUNGE SINGER Rex McDowell
RON/WAITER Chris Shanahan
RENEE/WAITRESS Jessica Marlowe
MAX Sally Smythe
Director Kurt Beattie
Design/set Peggy McDonald
Costumes Paul Chi-ming Louey
Lights Michael Wellborn
Sound David Pascal
Production stage manager Becky Barnett

The author wishes to thank Kurt Beattie and Bob Wright for their support, encouragement, and powers of persuasion, without which DARK RAPTURE would not have been written.

The play will be included in Otis Guernsey's BEST PLAYS OF 1992.

This production was chosen as one of the three best productions outside New York City during the 1992 season by the American Theater Critics Association. A revised version of DARK RAPTURE was presented by New York Stage and Film Company, Producing Directors Mark Linn-Baker, Max Mayer, and Leslie Urdang, at The Powerhouse Theater at Vassar, Poughkeepsie NY (Executive Director, Dixie Sheridan; Producing Director, Beth Fargis-Lancaster). The first performance was on 15 July 1992, with the following cast and creative contributors:

RAY David Strathairn
BABCOCK/NIZAM Dan Moran
JULIA Frances McDormand
LEXINGTON/MATHIS Jon Tenney
VEGAS/BARTENDER Larry Joshua
TONY/DANNY Joseph Siravo
RON/WAITER/SCONES/LOUNGE
SINGER Bruce MacVittie
RENEE/WAITRESS Marissa Chibas
MAX Ellen McElduff
Director Max Mayer
Design/set Andy Jackness
Costumes Candice Donnelly
Lights Don Holder
Sound Jeremy Grody
Production stage manager Elise-Ann Konstantin

The author wishes to thank Max Mayer and Leslie Urdang for the NYS&F production, where the version of the play published here took shape under the most congenial of circumstances.

CHARACTERS

RAY
BABCOCK
JULIA
LEXINGTON
VEGAS
TONY
RON
RENEE
MAX (MARGARET)
NIZAM
MATHIS
SCONES
DANNY
LOUNGE SINGER
WAITER (*Cabo*)
BARTENDER (*Seattle*)
WAITRESS (*Key West*)

The play requires six men and three women. RAY, JULIA and MAX should not be doubled. The other actors may be doubled in a number of ways. The actor playing BABCOCK could also play NIZAM. The actor playing LEXINGTON could play MATHIS or SCONES. The actor playing VEGAS could play BARTENDER (*Seattle*), and SCONES or MATHIS. The actor playing TONY could play DANNY and LOUNGE SINGER. The actor playing RON could play LOUNGE SINGER, SCONES or MATHIS and WAITER (*Cabo*). The actress playing RENEE should also play WAITRESS (*Key West*).

Act One

Scene One

(Slide: Northern California. A hillside.)

(Night. A great fire in the distance. Smoke. Gusting reddish light. Sirens. Howling wind. Explosions.)

(RAY appears. He's exhilarated, soaked in sweat and smeared with soot, grinning as he tries to catch his breath.)

(BABCOCK appears out of the darkness. RAY senses his presence, turns, sees him, and nods.)

RAY: Quite a night.

BABCOCK: Fuckin' A. Nothin' spookier 'n a night fire, man. Makes you feel so all alone. I remember. One time. Big Island. Lava flow. Big orange tongues a molten magma whatever creepin' down the hillside like some kinda hellacious glacier. Like some kinda red-hot tectonic taffy. Eerie fuckin' thing to be comin' at ya outa the fuckin' dark, I'm tellin' ya. Fry an egg on that air. That's how hot it was. Softboil one on the palm a your hand. Melt cars. Asphalt like butter. Houses'd just pop. Bang. Like paper bags. Like that.

(He cups his hands and slaps them together, making a popping sound.)

BABCOCK: Kablooe. Spontaneous combust. From the sheer fuckin' heat. Kablam. What can you do but grab the cat, count the kids, and say a prayer to St. Jude the lava runs outa geothermal juice 'fore it dessicates you 'n yours like so much delicatessen jerky. Just sit back 'n

watch it comin' toward you. Like sheer fuckin' inevitability. Lurchin' outa the dark rapture.

(Pause. RAY looks at him, curious, then looks away. A series of explosions in the distance.)

BABCOCK: See what I mean? Poppin' those fancy houses. Like so many lightbulbs on blacktop.

RAY: Eucalyptus.

BABCOCK: Eucalyptus what? Trees?

RAY: Those explosions. Eucalyptus. The resins. Flammable.

BABCOCK: No shit. Eucalyptus trees. This is some night fire. Never seen nothin' like this. Whoosh.

RAY: I have.

BABCOCK: Bullshit. I mean. Hard to believe. All hell breakin' loose up there 'n flyin' around like pure fuckin' insanity. Full-fledged firestorm. Half the goddamn city's up in flames.

RAY: Cambodia.

BABCOCK: Night fire?

RAY: As a matter of fact.

BABCOCK: I been Cambodia. Interesting place.

(More explosions)

BABCOCK: Fuck me.

RAY: Exciting, isn't it?

BABCOCK: Well, yeah. One word for it. Outa the ordinary.

RAY: I mean, this is what we live for. Catastrophe. Chaos.

BABCOCK: I know what you mean.

RAY: Out of our control. This is what we really want. Deep down. This is where we get our stories. Surviving

catastrophe. What do you think love is? What do you think romance is all about?

BABCOCK: I always wondered.

RAY: Ongoing twenty-four hour we never close home-made natural disaster. I mean, you can't always count on the occasional earthquake to come along just when you need a jolt of pure adrenaline to jump start your heart. What I'm saying is, we have a deep-seated need to manufacture our own inclement weather.

BABCOCK: Hey. Into every life. A little rain must fall. Am I right?

RAY: Right.

BABCOCK: I was up north in Duckburg when Mt. St. Helen's shot her wad. Never seen nothin' like that. A blizzard of dry grey ash. Fallin' and fallin', all night long. You never heard such a hush. Absolute silence. Seemed like the end of the world to me.

(Pause. BABCOCK watches the fire rage.)

BABCOCK: Don't know what it is. Cataclysmic natural disasters just seem to follow me around.

RAY: Used to set the jungle on fire all the time. Almost couldn't help it. No big deal.

BABCOCK: Well, I guess natural catastrophes are pretty interesting. If you survive 'em. You got a house up there?

(RAY looks up the hill into the dark.)

RAY: So far. Looks like.

BABCOCK: Which one?

(RAY points.)

BABCOCK: What the fuck you doin' down here, shootin' the shit with me?

RAY: Came down to take a look. I wanted to get some distance. Get a vista. This. This is—spectacular.

BABCOCK: Never know. Could get lucky. Wind might change. Could rain. Sometimes the fire jumps. Passes over for no particular reason, moves on to someone else. Like the Angel of Death. Could come through unscathed. Never know. On the other hand. Better grab the family snaps. Take what you need 'n leave the rest.

RAY: I'll do that.

BABCOCK: Quite a night. Fuckin' A.

RAY: Actually, the world seems very peaceful to me, tonight. Quiet.

(BABCOCK extends his hand.)

BABCOCK: Name's Babcock.

(RAY hesitates a moment, then shakes BABCOCK's hand.)

RAY: Pleased to meet you.

BABCOCK: Good luck up there.

RAY: Thanks.

(RAY leaves. BABCOCK watches him go up the hill towards the fire and disappear into the night.)

BABCOCK: Crazy fuck. Whoosh.

(BABCOCK disappears.)

Scene Two

(Slide: Cabo San Lucas. A hotel room.)

(Morning)

(JULIA, half-naked on the edge of the bed. Drinks from a bottle of tequila. DANNY lies on the bed beside her, eyes closed, motionless.)

JULIA: Cabo. Tequila. White light. Blue and white light. Blue tiles, white curtains. Blue sky, blue sea. Hot white light. Scraps of white cotton clothing scattered across a blue bed. Straw flowers. Salt. Blue agave. Breeze.

(She drinks. Holds out the bottle. Without opening his eyes or otherwise stirring, DANNY reaches up with one hand, finds the bottle, takes it, drinks.)

JULIA: I thought you were dead.

DANNY: Hmmmmm. Not yet. Couple more days of this.

JULIA: Think of something blue and white.

DANNY: You're drunk.

JULIA: Drinking all day. Drinking before dark. Drinking at dawn. This is a whole other world. This is a whole other way of life. I love this. I can see the attraction. I haven't done this since I was a kid. College. San Francisco. Used to hang out at this little laundromat on Potrero Hill. Get a bottle of gin and watch the dryer go round.

DANNY: Some fun.

JULIA: Some fun. It was, you know. It really was. Gimme.

(She holds out her hand. He gives her the bottle. She drinks.)

JULIA: It's gonna be hot today.

DANNY: It's hot everyday. That's what makes it Mexico.

JULIA: I'm starting to melt. Finally. Stress. Toxins. Melting away. I've been waiting for this. Heat and tequila. Doin' the trick.

(She kisses him.)

JULIA: And sex. Mustn't forget sex.

DANNY: No, no. I wouldn't.

(They kiss.)

JULIA: You could help me. Help me melt.

DANNY: Okay. Do my best. Give it a shot.

(They kiss.)

JULIA: It's gonna be hot. It's gonna be moist.

DANNY: Sticky. Hot and sticky.

JULIA: Juicy. Juicy, not sticky. We're gonna get wet. Very very very wet.

(They kiss.)

JULIA: We're gonna sweat. A lot. We're gonna slip 'n slide. We're gonna be damp all over.

DANNY: Promise?

JULIA: Cross my heart, hope to die.

(They kiss.)

DANNY: Julia.

JULIA: Danny.

(She raises the bottle, looks at the worm.)

JULIA: Dibs on the worm.

DANNY: All yours, baby.

JULIA: Oh, shit. We're outa salt. Oh, what, oh, what, oh what are we gonna do? Wait. Hold everything. I have an idea.

(She leans over. Licks up his breastbone, licks the hollow of his neck. Smiles. Licks her lips.)

JULIA: Salty.

(She drinks.)

JULIA: Ah. Not too shabby. Not too shabby at all.

(He leans over. Licks up her breastbone. Licks the hollow of her neck.)

JULIA: Ooo. Ah.

(He licks the front of her neck. She closes her eyes, clutches his hair. He licks around the base of her neck, licks the back of her neck, behind her ears.)

JULIA: Oh my god. Oh fuck.

(He stops, pulls back, takes the bottle, licks his lips, drinks.)

JULIA: Salty enough for you?

DANNY: Not nearly.

JULIA: I think you know what to do about that, cowboy.

DANNY: I think I do.

(He takes a big swig, but doesn't swallow. They kiss. He opens his mouth. Tequila runs into her mouth, overflows, runs down her neck. They laugh. They fall back on the bed. They kiss.)

Scene Three

(Slide: Northern California. The fire site.)

(Morning. Two men in suits, VEGAS and LEXINGTON, look over the charred landscape of ash and charcoal.)

LEXINGTON: X marks the spot.

VEGAS: Hard to tell.

LEXINGTON: There's the bend in the road. There's the ridge. Over there's where the big white Victorian was.

VEGAS: Sure?

LEXINGTON: Positive.

VEGAS: Kinda hard to get your bearings. In the absence of what was.

LEXINGTON: The white Victorian. Which was next to the craftsman bungalow. Which was next to the newish split-level with the leaky skylights.

VEGAS: How do you know they were leaky?

LEXINGTON: You ever heard a skylights don't leak? Can't be done. The limits of human ingenuity. We cannot keep skylights from leaking. We cannot cure the common cold. And we cannot make a good-tasting spermicidal jelly.

VEGAS: I grew up New York. You know? Always buildin' it up 'n tearin' it down. Once somethin' was gone I could never remember what it was before it wasn't. And once somethin' else went up in its place, forget about it. Walk by one day, everything's fine, like always, walk by the next day, hey, shit, it's gone, this wasn't here yesterday, what did this used to be, remember? Shit. I could never remember.

LEXINGTON: This is their house. The Gaines residence. Ray and Julia's. Where it was. Take my word for it.

VEGAS: We know where Julia is. So, where's Ray?

LEXINGTON: That's one question.

VEGAS: Think he's up here?

LEXINGTON: Possible. They're still digging 'em out. Bits and pieces.

VEGAS: Man, earthquake, flood, fire. The actuarials in this area are gettin' positively apocalyptic. What's next? Famine? I'm thinkin' about movin' somewhere safe.

LEXINGTON: Oh yeah? Somewhere safe? Where would that be?

(Pause. VEGAS shrugs.)

VEGAS: I'll let you know.

LEXINGTON: Radio says body count's twenty-eight. So far. Another fifty-three unaccounted for. Missing.

VEGAS: Including Ray.

LEXINGTON: Including Ray. Figure most a the so-called missing are just outa town.

VEGAS: Business.

LEXINGTON: Business. Yeah. But they're all on their way back home by now. Caught the late clips on CNN, holy cow, there goes the life's savings, the whole enchilada, up in flames, browned out in their bermudas, tossed 'n turned all night, grabbed the first flight out bright and early, throwin' back the bloody Marys and poppin' Prozac, already fillin' out claim forms, cryin' the blues over their BMW's. Couple of 'em are still stuck abroad somewhere, tryin' to get back from Paris. Prague. Constantinople. And some of 'em. Some of 'em are still blissfully unawares as to what's transpired to the old neighborhood. Yuppie scum. Fucked seven ways from Sunday and don't even know it yet. Took off for a long weekend, a little r 'n r, a little illicit extramarital hanky panky. Bahamas. Rosarita Beach.

VEGAS: Cabo San Lucas.

LEXINGTON: Cabo San Lucas. Come home tan, laid, relaxed, got their lies and alibis all lined up like so many ducks, bang bang bang, are they in for a shock.

VEGAS: Could post-facto ruin your whole vacation. In retrospect. Cast a pall.

LEXINGTON: Doesn't do anything for my disposition. So maybe Julia is just tearin' off a piece on the side. Gets back from a little extramarital fuckin' around, finds the house the husband the Mercedes, up in smoke. Let's hope she didn't lose anything didn't belong to her.

VEGAS: We know Ray didn't go to Cabo.

LEXINGTON: That we know.

VEGAS: Babcock had an extended conversation with him.

(BABCOCK *appears.*)

LEXINGTON: Where? Here, at the house?

BABCOCK: Down there on the flat.

LEXINGTON: Fuck was he doin' down there?

BABCOCK: Who knows? Admirin' the view.

LEXINGTON: Sure it was him?

BABCOCK: Fit the description.

LEXINGTON: So you swap lies, trade recipes. Then.

BABCOCK: Then he goes back up the hill, see if the fire's gonna do his house. Guess it did, huh? He went in. He came back out. Carryin' a coupla suitcases.

LEXINGTON: Ah ha.

BABCOCK: Puts 'em down. Goes back in. Then this whole side a the hill goes up. Whoosh. Then I don't see him no more. Then I don't see nothin' no more, on account a the smoke. Then I go home. Call you guys, tell you to come up, maybe we got a problem.

LEXINGTON: So what'd you talk about? You and Ray?

BABCOCK: Natural disasters. Catastrophe theory. Chaos. Cambodia.

LEXINGTON: Cambodia.

BABCOCK: Cambodia. Jungle fires versus conflagrations in a semiwooded urban setting.

(LEXINGTON *sighs, turns to* VEGAS.)

LEXINGTON: So Ray could be up here. Somewhere. Amongst the rubble. Last seen.

VEGAS: Crispy critter.

LEXINGTON: It's possible.

VEGAS: Likely, even.

LEXINGTON: Awful convenient.

VEGAS: He didn't know.

LEXINGTON: Opportunity. Window of.

VEGAS: He wasn't in on it. Assuming there's something to be in on.

LEXINGTON: You know how many people go missing every year? Never come back from that fifteen-minute jaunt around the corner? Go to the market for a quart a milk and vanish into thin? Take the main chance and disappear? Walk away and don't look back?

VEGAS: I dunno. How many?

LEXINGTON: Many. I dunno. A lot. I read. A million.

VEGAS: A million a year?

LEXINGTON: Yeah. Something like that. A million. Roughly. More or less.

VEGAS: I'd say less. I mean, a million a year. Pretty soon that'd add up to nobody left to mind the fuckin' store.

LEXINGTON: Factor in babies.

VEGAS: Factor in dead people.

LEXINGTON: Okay, a lot. Less than a million. Go missing. Take off. Change their names.

BABCOCK: Guys dodgin' child support.

LEXINGTON: Not just. Not only.

VEGAS: I been tempted. Start over.

LEXINGTON: Yeah, sure. Who hasn't? A clean slate. Which takes how long you figure before it gets completely fucked up again like your old life?

VEGAS: Not long.

LEXINGTON: Not long indeed.

VEGAS: Because, like the man said, wherever you go, there you are.

LEXINGTON: Right. So we wait a few days, see if they find Ray Gaines amongst the rubble. They don't, we wait for him to fuck up his brand-new last best chance.

VEGAS: Which he would be bound to do.

LEXINGTON: I feel certain of it.

VEGAS: He didn't know. He had no idea this was his main chance. The door swings open. Hallelujah. He didn't know.

LEXINGTON: Maybe he suspected. Maybe the hairs on the back a his neck stood up.

VEGAS: That happen to you?

LEXINGTON: Yeah. Happen to you?

VEGAS: Yeah. Definitely. Alla time.

LEXINGTON: Babcock. Happen to you?

BABCOCK: Never.

LEXINGTON: How come you're still alive?

BABCOCK: Just lucky, I guess.

LEXINGTON: What about the merry maybe widow?

VEGAS: Julia? Maybe.

LEXINGTON: Maybe she'll come back from Cabo.

VEGAS: If she didn't, that would be a big big clue.

LEXINGTON: Maybe at this moment, the hairs on the back of her neck are standing up.

VEGAS: I wouldn't be surprised. What I hear, everything else was.

(They laugh.)

LEXINGTON: Wonder if Ray knew about that? His wife and Danny. The stuntman.

VEGAS: Hey. Modern marriage.

LEXINGTON: Babcock. Ever been to Cabo?

BABCOCK: Baja? Sure. Tuna fishing.

LEXINGTON: Bring me back a can.

(BABCOCK nods, leaves.)

VEGAS: Cabo. Wonder she's still there.

LEXINGTON: See how she takes the news when she gets back.

VEGAS: If she gets back.

LEXINGTON: Like you say. That would be a big big clue.

(It starts to rain.)

VEGAS: Startin' to rain. Shit.

LEXINGTON: Let's get the hell outa here before the whole hillside slides into the Bay.

VEGAS: Life's little mysteries.

(They go. The sound of the rain intensifies.)

Scene Four

(Slide: Los Angeles. A used car lot.)

(Night. Vapor lights. Wet pavement gleams. Plastic pennants. Two young men, TONY and RON, stand smoking cigarettes. A middle-aged salesman, NIZAM, approaches them, all smiles.)