



# PRELUDE TO A KISS

BY **CRAIG LUCAS**



DRAMATISTS  
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PRELUDE TO A KISS  
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Prelude to a Kiss *is dedicated to my mother and father,  
Charles and Eleanore Lucas.*

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

To provide a fluidity of motion and to stress the imaginary leap required to make sense of the story, *Prelude* was originally staged with a minimum of scenery — a chair and lamp to indicate Rita's apartment, a free-standing bar for The Tin Market, a pair of chaise lounges for Jamaica — allowing the lighting to do the bulk of the work in transforming the space. We also used a great deal of underscoring with source music and sound effects (surf, traffic, popular songs, marimba bands in Jamaica), again to indicate place and create a kind of magic. Peter often changed clothes in front of our eyes, and the scenery came to him on tracks, gliding quietly. Upstage, a permanent green wall, as if in a garden, suggested that things were more than they might seem; in that wall was a large window looking out on a changing sky — night stars, distorted sunsets for Jamaica — and a twisted vine climbed up alongside the window frame. If lit from the front, the sky behind the window disappeared and a greenish, painted sky of clouds made the window once again part of the wall itself.

I would like to thank all of my collaborators in the various productions and readings of the play — the director, dramaturgs, designers, and actors. In addition, I am grateful to the Guggenheim Foundation for their generous support during rewrites, and to Kip Gould for providing enhancement money at Circle Rep.

PRELUDE TO A KISS was commissioned by South Coast Repertory, in Costa Mesa, California, where it received its world premiere on January 15, 1988. It was directed by Norman René; the set design was by Loy Arcenas; the costume design was by Walker Hicklin; the lighting design was by Peter Maradudin; the sound design was by Serge Ossorguine; the dramaturgy was by John Glore; and the stage manager was Julie Haber. The cast was as follows:

\*GINNY, AUNT DOROTHY ..... Roberta Farkas  
PETER ..... Mark Arnott  
TAYLOR ..... Michael Canavan  
RITA ..... Lisa Zane  
\*NANCY, \*FAMILY FRIEND ..... Anni Long  
TOM ..... Art Koustik  
MRS. BOYLE ..... Teri Ralston  
DR. BOYLE ..... Hal Landon, Jr.  
MINISTER ..... John-David Keller  
\*FAMILY FRIEND'S HUSBAND ..... Don Took  
OLD MAN ..... Frank Hamilton  
LEAH ..... Mary Anne McGarry  
ENSEMBLE ..... Lisa Black, Cynthia Blaise, Edgar  
W. Chambers, Patrick Massoth, Roberta Ornellas, Paul J. Read,  
Catherine Rowe

(\*Roles cut from present version.)

A revised version of PRELUDE TO A KISS received its Off-Broadway premiere at Circle Repertory Company on March 14, 1990. It was directed by Norman René; the set design was by Loy Arcenas; the costume design was by Walker Hicklin; the lighting design was by Debra J. Kletter; the sound design was by Scott Lehrer; the hair and wig design was by Bobby H. Grayson; and the stage manager was M. A. Howard. The cast was as follows:

PETER ..... Alec Baldwin  
 TAYLOR ..... John Dossett  
 RITA ..... Mary-Louise Parker  
 TOM, JAMAICAN WAITER ..... L. Peter Callender  
 MRS. BOYLE ..... Debra Monk  
 DR. BOYLE ..... Larry Bryggman  
 MINISTER ..... Craig Bockhorn  
 AUNT DOROTHY, LEAH ..... Joyce Reehling  
 UNCLE FRED ..... Michael Warren Powell  
 OLD MAN ..... Barnard Hughes  
 ENSEMBLE ..... Kimberly Dudwitt, Pete Tyler

PRELUDE TO A KISS then moved to Broadway (Christopher Gould, Suzanne Golden, and Dodger Productions, producers), opening at the Helen Hayes Theater on May 1, 1990. The creative contributors remained the same, with the addition of James Harker as production stage manager. The cast remained the same, with the following changes:

PETER ..... Timothy Hutton  
 ENSEMBLE ..... Brian Cousins

**CHARACTERS**  
*(in order of speaking)*

PETER

TAYLOR

RITA

TOM

MRS. BOYLE

DR. BOYLE

MINISTER

AUNT DOROTHY

UNCLE FRED

OLD MAN

JAMAICAN WAITER

LEAH

PARTY GUESTS, BARFLIES,  
WEDDING GUESTS, VACATIONERS

Then the King's daughter began to weep and was afraid of the cold frog, whom nothing would satisfy but he must sleep in her pretty clean bed.

—Brothers Grimm, *The Frog Prince*

Death destroys a man, but the idea of death is what saves him.

—E.M. Forster, *Howards End*



# PRELUDE TO A KISS

## ACT ONE

*Music. We hear a recorded vocalist as the lights go down: "If you hear a song in blue/Like a flower crying for the dew/That was my heart serenading you/My prelude to a kiss."*

*A crowded party. Peter stands apart, then approaches Taylor.*

PETER. I'm splitting ... Hey, Tay?

TAYLOR. Hey, Pete, did you meet Rita?

PETER. No. Hi.

RITA. Hi.

TAYLOR. (*Overlapping.*) Rita, Peter, Peter, Rita.

PETER. Actually, I ...

TAYLOR. (*Overlapping.*) What's everybody drinking? Reet? Can I fill you up there?

RITA. Oh, I'll have another Dewar's, thanks.

TAYLOR. Pete?

PETER. No, nothing, thank —

TAYLOR. Don't worry, I've got it taken care of. You two just relax. One Dewar's, one beer ... (*He moves off. Pause.*)

PETER. How do you know the Sokols?

RITA. I don't. I mean, except from the hall.

PETER. Oh, you're a neighbor.

RITA. I couldn't sleep.

PETER. Oh, really? Why? ... How long have you lived here?

RITA. I haven't slept since I was fourteen. A year and a half. (*Beat.*)

PETER. Did you say you hadn't slept since you were fourteen?

RITA. Pretty much.

PETER. You look great!

RITA. Thank you.

PETER. Considering. Rita what?

RITA. Boyle.

PETER. Peter Hoskins.

RITA. Hoskins?

PETER. As in Hoskins disease?

RITA. Oh, Hodgkins.

PETER. No, no, it was just a ... nonhumorous ... flail.

RITA. What? (*He shakes his head.*) I like your shirt! (*Taylor returns with drinks.*)

TAYLOR. Dewar's, madame?

RITA. Thank you.

TAYLOR. No beer, sorry.

PETER. Wine's fine. Thanks ... Rita has insomnia.

TAYLOR. Oh yeah? Listen, I've got to pee, I'm sorry, excuse me.

Forgive me ... (*He is gone again.*)

PETER. What do you do when you're not NOT sleeping?

RITA. Oh, I usually, you know ... write in my journal or — Oh, for a living, you mean? I'm a bartender.

PETER. Oh. Where?

RITA. (*Overlapping.*) Yeah. At the Tin Market.

PETER. Oh, I know where that is. One for Pete.

RITA. Yeah.

PETER. I guess it's a good place for an insomniac to work. You work Saturdays? (*She nods.*) Well, you must make good money. Well, so you hate it, I'm sorry, I can't help that. What are your aspirations, in that case?

RITA. I'm like a graphic designer.

PETER. Oh, great.

RITA. I studied at Parsons.

PETER. This is good.

RITA. What do you do?

PETER. I take little tiny, transparent photographs of scientific articles which are rolled on film like microfilm only smaller and transfer them to digital. You'd like it. It's really interesting.

RITA. What are your aspirations in that case?

PETER. I should have some, shouldn't I? No, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, uh, can't think of the answer, I'm sorry.

RITA. That's okay!

PETER. So why can't you sleep? You know what's good? I forget

what it's called, it's an herb.

RITA. I tried it.

PETER. It didn't work?

RITA. I can't remember what it's called either. My memory is terrible!

PETER. Maybe that's why you can't sleep. You forget how tired you are. Well ... If you ever need any help getting to sleep. (*Beat.*)

Sorry. (*Beat.*) It was nice talking to you.

RITA. You, too.

PETER. Get some sleep.

RITA. I'll try. (*Peter addresses the audience.*)

PETER. I stood outside for a while, just listening to the silence. Then I tried to figure out which window was hers and what her life might be like and why she couldn't sleep. Like that. (*Beat.*) The spell was cast. (*The Tin Market.*) Hi.

RITA. Oh, hi.

PETER. Is this all right?

RITA. No, I'm sorry, you can never come in here ... What's new?

PETER. Since yesterday? Well, let's see, so much has happened. You look great.

RITA. What'll you drink?

PETER. Do you have Molson? (*She nods.*) ... So, did you get some sleep?

RITA. Eventually. (*She sets down his Molson.*)

PETER. Thank you.

RITA. You?

PETER. Sleep? Oh, I don't have any trouble. But ... let's see, I read *The White Hotel* today.

RITA. Oh.

PETER. That was pretty much it.

RITA. Yeah.

PETER. You?

RITA. Oh, I slept, mostly ... How was *The White Hotel*?

PETER. Did you read it?

RITA. No, but I've read some of the case histories it's based on.

PETER. You have? Freud's? Case histories? You've read Freud.

RITA. Have you?

PETER. No, but ... This book?

RITA. Uh-huh?

PETER. Starts with this very high-falutin' sexual dream thing, you

know?

RITA. Yeah, I've heard everybody beats off when they read it. *(Beat.)*

PETER. Uh-huh.

RITA. I'm sorry.

PETER. You heard that?

RITA. Go on.

PETER. It's very depressing, the book.

RITA. Uh-huh.

PETER. This lovely, very neurotic woman goes into therapy with Freud himself —

RITA. Right.

PETER. And he sort of cures her so that she can go on to live for a few years before being killed by the Nazis in a lime pit. Happy. Happy stuff.

RITA. So why were you in Europe for ten years?

PETER. How did you know I was in Europe?

RITA. Word gets around.

PETER. You asked Taylor about me? You were asking around about me? Let's get married.

RITA. Okay.

PETER. I just went, you know.

RITA. He said there was a story and you would have to tell me.

PETER. He did? ... Okay, this is the story and I'm not making this up.

RITA. Okay.

PETER. And it's not as sad as it sounds.

RITA. Shoot.

PETER. My parents?

RITA. Uh-huh?

PETER. Separated when I was four. And I went to live with my grandparents, who are unfortunately deceased now. I'm going to make this as brief as possible.

RITA. Take your time.

PETER. And —

RITA. We can go up to my place if you want. When you're done.

PETER. And-everything-worked-out-great-for-everybody-it-was-amazing.

RITA. No, go on.

PETER. Were you serious about that?

RITA. I'm off in about seven minutes. Your parents.

PETER. My parents. I'm four years old. I go to live with my grandparents. My grandfather had to go into a nursing home when I was nine, then my grandmother had to go when I was eleven; they were both sick, so I go to live with my mother who by this time is remarried to Hank.

RITA. Uh-huh.

PETER. Very unhappy person, ridicules me in front of the other two children they have created from their unsavory loins, so I go to live with my father, who is also remarried, *three* other children, Sophie, the new wife, hates me even more than Hank.

RITA. This is like Dickens.

PETER. The only nice thing Sophie ever did for me was make the same food twice when I had made the mistake of saying I liked it. Usually she would stop cooking whatever it was I said I liked.

RITA. What was it?

PETER. What I liked? Spaetzles?

RITA. Oh, god.

PETER. You've had spaetzles?

RITA. Oh, sure.

PETER. You like them?

RITA. I love them.

PETER. You do?

RITA. Uh-huh. Anyway.

PETER. You love spaetzles. Anyway, everyone is unhappy now.

RITA. Uh-huh.

PETER. Sophie really can't stand the sight of me, because I remind her that my father was married to someone else and ...

RITA. Right.

PETER. And my father does not seem too fond of me, either. I don't know if he ever was, but so one night I say I'm going to go to the movies and instead I go to Europe.

RITA. What movie?

PETER. *The Wild Bunch*, I think, why?

RITA. Did you call them first?

PETER. Not until I got there.

RITA. Europe?

PETER. And I called collect.

RITA. That is ...

PETER. Yeah.

RITA. Good for you.

# PRELUDE TO A KISS

by Craig Lucas

9M, 5W (doubling, flexible casting)

At Peter and Rita's wedding, a mysterious old man insists on kissing the bride. While honeymooning, Peter gradually realizes that the woman by his side is not his wife. The wedding kiss caused Rita's soul and the old man's to change places. Peter must track down the old man and free his young love's spirit trapped in an aging and diseased body before it's too late.

*"... a play that propels the audience through hairpin emotional turns, some soaring heavenward and others plummeting toward earth, until one is deposited at the final curtain in a winded and teary yet exhilarating state of disorientation ... PRELUDE TO A KISS takes a most familiar genre, romantic comedy, in directions that are idiosyncratic and challenging."*

—The New York Times

*"Like many a fairy tale, this isn't a 'what you see is what you get' happy-ending story. Like the brothers Grimm, Lucas knows that what you see in such stories embodies the unseen darker fears that haunt us from childhood on — in this case the fear of aging and its accompanying losses and the ultimate fear of death ... Lucas' smartly written and solidly structured script holds up very well indeed ... PRELUDE TO A KISS is Lucas at his lightest and brightest. A rare combination of laughter, romance and throat-tightening substance."*

—CurtainUp

## Also by Craig Lucas

MISSING PERSONS

RECKLESS

THIS THING OF DARKNESS (Schulner)

THREE POSTCARDS (Carnelia)

ISBN 978-0-8222-2432-7



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