



# THE AWAKE

BY KEN URBAN



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

THE AWAKE  
Copyright © 2014, Ken Urban

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of THE AWAKE is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission for which must be secured from the Author's agent in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for THE AWAKE are controlled exclusively by DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., and paying the requisite fee.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Abrams Artists Agency, 275 Seventh Avenue, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10001. Attn: Max Grossman.

**SPECIAL NOTE**

Anyone receiving permission to produce THE AWAKE is required to give credit to the Author(s) as sole and exclusive Author(s) of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears, including printed or digital materials for advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. Please see your production license for font size and typeface requirements.

Be advised that there may be additional credits required in all programs and promotional material. Such language will be listed under the "Additional Billing" section of production licenses. It is the licensee's responsibility to ensure any and all required billing is included in the requisite places, per the terms of the license.

**SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS AND RECORDINGS**

For performances of copyrighted songs, arrangements or recordings mentioned in these Plays, the permission of the copyright owner(s) must be obtained. Other songs, arrangements or recordings may be substituted provided permission from the copyright owner(s) of such songs, arrangements or recordings is obtained; or songs, arrangements or recordings in the public domain may be substituted.

*This play is for Matthew (as always).*

THE AWAKE premiered at 59E59 Theatres (Elysabeth Kleinhaus, Artistic Director; Peter Tear, Executive Producer) in New York City, in a co-production with kef productions (Adam Fitzgerald, Artistic Director; Lori Prince, Producing Director), on August 22, 2013. It was directed by Adam Fitzgerald; the set design was by David L. Arsenault; the lighting design was by Travis McHale; the sound design was by Christian Frederickson; the costume design was by Lisa Zinni; the projection design was by Brad Peterson; and the stage manager was Jessa Nicole Pollack. The cast was as follows:

MALCOLM .....Andy Phelan  
GABRIELLE..... Lori Prince  
NATE ..... Maulik Pancholy  
THE ENSEMBLE..... Jeff Biehl, Dee Nelson, Jocelyn Kuritsky  
CELESTE..... Miranda Jackel

THE AWAKE was developed at Primary Stages, New York, 2012 (directed by Seth Sklar-Heyn); Donmar Warehouse, London, 2011 (directed by Seth Sklar-Heyn); Portland Stage Company, Portland, Maine, 2011 (directed by Melia Bensussen); and Theatre @ Boston Court, Pasadena, California, 2010 (directed by Jessica Kubzansky).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Ken would like to thank directors Adam Fitzgerald, Seth Sklar-Heyn, Melia Bensussen, and Jessica Kubzansky, as well as all the actors who have worked on this play. Their hard work and belief in this play is imprinted on these pages.

Ken would also like to thank the MacDowell Colony for time and support during the writing of this play.

## CHARACTERS

MALCOLM — a young man on hiatus, white, mid-20s.

GABRIELLE — a woman on the run, white, 30s – early 40s.

NATE — a man hunted, with a face etched by fear. Middle-Eastern, 30s.

### THE ENSEMBLE:

A male actor in his 30s–40s, who plays:

THE FIGURE — face unseen.

THE DIRECTOR — Eastern-European.

THE HUSBAND

MALE COWORKER

ROBERT

EASTERN-EUROPEAN ACTOR

A female actor in her 50s, who plays:

THE MOTHER

THE PRINCIPAL

FEMALE COWORKER

EASTERN-EUROPEAN ACTOR

A female actor in her late 20s, who plays:

THE RESCUE WORKER

THE DOCTOR

THE DAUGHTER

AWKWARD COWORKER

EASTERN-EUROPEAN ACTOR

and

A young girl, 10–12 years old, who plays CELESTE.

## **PLACE**

A small New England town, not too far from  
the Canadian border.

America. Both Real and Imaginary.

## **TIME**

Present day.

## SCRIPT NOTES

A “shift” indicates a change in location and time for the characters. The script also annotates places where sound is key to a moment or scene.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The play should be staged simply. I see it as a “radio play for the stage.”

In the first New York production, the play was performed on a rectangular playing area of 20' x 8'. The cast was onstage for the majority of the performance. The only set pieces were four chairs. No props were used; costumes were simple. There was an extensive soundscape alongside projections. We learned during rehearsal that simple was often the most powerful way to tell the story.

For the first production, a child actress played the role of Celeste in the final dinner scene during the third movement of the play. We felt that seeing an actual child in that role helped tell Gabrielle’s story in a powerful way. Casting considerations might make that difficult for future productions. If the young female ensemble member continues to play the daughter Celeste during that final scene, it is important that she be convincing as a young girl of age 11 or 12.

The voices of Nate’s parents heard on the phone call in Part Two could be provided by actors outside of the company or by the male and older female chorus members. In either case, it should be a sound cue rather than done live.

The score for the melody of Gabrielle’s song is included at the end of the script. You can listen to a recording of Gabrielle’s song “All My Days” here: [www.kenurban.org/music](http://www.kenurban.org/music)

The play should be performed without an intermission.



*Tired and unhappy, you think of houses  
... It is time to shake yourself! and break this  
Banal dream ...*

— Delmore Schwartz

*Whoever cannot seek  
the unforeseen sees nothing,  
for the known way is an impasse.*

— Heraclitus

# THE AWAKE

## ONE: VOYAGE

MALCOLM. Water on the windshield, a flake  
Then another  
I take the key out of the ignition and  
Nothing.  
Sit.

I notice the cold. More flakes on the windshield. I look out. Almost a foot of snow on the ground already.  
The driveway of my parents' house. Far from a highway or major road. My parents' house.  
Funny, I still say "parents."  
Time to go inside and —  
(*Shift.*)

NATE. Answer all his questions. In this room, at the police station where he's brought me. Showed up at home, asked me to come with him. Across from the table from me, he sits. Where you from? Think of my mum and dad. I call them Mum and Dad. 'Cause I'm Canadian. This man is not. Asks again, Where are you from? The same questions. Again and again. Keep thinking of Mum and dad. The look in their eyes when he came to the door. Wonder what they must be thinking. Waiting for me at home. Catch sight of myself in the one-sided mirror. For the first time, see myself as he sees me. I see me as he sees me. His eyes tell me he's decided what I am. And in that instant. Know what's coming. A wave of sickness starts in my stomach and I —  
(*Shift.*)

GABRIELLE. (*No accent.*) Eyes still open. Can't sleep. Been a week since the news broke, and I had to ask, Is it true what they're saying? Are you part of that? In the days since, I accuse my every reflection with the same judgment: Tanya, you spent a life with

someone and never knew, no, never let yourself *know* what your husband does.

Staring at the ceiling, lying on my back. Enough. Slide out of the sheets, hoping Robert won't stir. But he does.

Half-asleep, he murmurs

HUSBAND. Tanya, it's late, come back to bed.

GABRIELLE. Ignore him. Stumble downstairs. Stare at the TV, will do anything to forget, I watch and watch, some foreign film with the sound off, and I

NATE and GABRIELLE. Close my eyes

And imagine I'm somewhere else.

*(Shift.)*

NATE. Open my eyes. Now I'm standing in front of a room full of kids at desks.

GABRIELLE. Open my eyes. Now I'm in the movie.

*(Shift.)*

DIRECTOR. *(In an Eastern-European accent of undeterminable origin.)* Action.

GABRIELLE. *(Now in an Eastern-European accent of undeterminable origin that she [mostly] maintains until the end of the play.)* I wear foam headpiece, powder-blue and with triangles around the crown, and this headpiece means I am Statue of Liberty. When I put it on, I am Statue of Liberty. Is good role. Being star of action movie. *(No accent.)* Keep going. *(Accent returns.)* I play, I play many roles. In my. Career. This one. Oh, this one. Better than child prostitute. Always child prostitute they want me to play. Or domestic, movies about home life. Bleh. In this movie picture, my fellow actors throw things at me like cups of piss. But it isn't really piss. It means to represent their feelings toward America, toward me, which I now represent.

I am actress, Gabrielle, yes!

*(Shift.)*

NATE. I'm standing in front of a room full of kids at desks. Far away from that room at the police station. No, this place, I know. School.

I'm dressed, at least. It's not one of those dreams. No, I got away.

I hand out the exams. A foreign language exam in a foreign language I can't speak. I crack a lot of jokes. One of the students laughs. Calls me Mister Edward. I suddenly feel beloved by these students, even though I'm not their usual teacher, just a sub. As any high school teacher will tell you, it's not an easy thing to do. Be beloved when you're, ah, an interloper, an outsider. No, I belong.

Then they start asking me questions about conjugation, verbs and prepositions, and everything that comes out of my mouth is jibberish. One of the students sprouts antlers and I feel something behind me, turn around and there's someone there —

*(Shift.)*

GABRIELLE. On the movie set, my fellow actors, they say things like:

EASTERN-EUROPEAN ACTORS. *(Overlapping.)* America, you hypocrite

America, you torturer of men

America

GABRIELLE. There are many variations on theme, and it never does not amaze me the expressions of hatred to America and the Americans that my fellow actors conjure spontaneous-like in front of camera.

EASTERN-EUROPEAN ACTORS. *(Overlapping.)*

America, the fat vampire butcher coward

America, this haberdasher of hellacious undoing

America, the evil

America

*(Shift.)*

GABRIELLE. *(No accent.)* Where is she? *(Accent returns.)*

I'm not from here. That is for sure. This is not my country. My country's not even on a map anymore. Poof. A small place, small people, so boring, bleh. A pencil marking rubbed out, no longer on any world map.

Gabrielle has no home. I just exist. This is fine for me. Because they pay me. Is exciting, being actress, being paid money, yes, is good thing.

*(Shift.)*

MALCOLM. I am sitting at the kitchen table.

MOTHER. Want something else?

MALCOLM. No, thanks, Mom.

MOTHER. Never get home in this.

MALCOLM. Should be fine.

Main roads will be clear.

MOTHER. Remember Judy?

Your second-grade teacher.

Anyway. She asked about you.

She came into the office the other day. Was looking for work.

(*Faux-whisper.*) Divorce.

Coming to dinner on Sunday?

MALCOLM. Sure.

MOTHER. You should stay here tonight.

MALCOLM. The roads'll be fine.

MOTHER. There's clean sheets on your old bed.

MALCOLM. I work early.

MOTHER. Anything new at the store?

MALCOLM. Fine. Slow.

MOTHER. Who's buying books? It's a wonder he can stay open.  
He still paying you the same?

MALCOLM. It's fine.

MOTHER. After all that school.

MALCOLM. Mom.

MOTHER. Just saying, Malcolm.

MALCOLM. Not easy to find a job here. Besides it gives me time.  
I've been writing again. Working on a new story about a flooded  
world. Maybe I could read some of it —

MOTHER. Could work with me. Agysill is always hiring people  
for the phones.

MALCOLM. How are you feeling? The other day you said —

MOTHER. I'm OK. Still headache'y a bit. Nothing serious though.

MALCOLM. Still? You said it was bad enough that you got sick to  
your stomach. Go to the doctor.

MOTHER. I'm fine. (*Silence. Silence. Silence.*)

*Cisza leczy.*<sup>1</sup>

Your grandmother used to say that.

Whenever folks stopped speaking at dinner.

MALCOLM. What's it mean?

MOTHER. *Cisza leczy.*

Silence is healing.

I should've taught you the language.

You never understood the language.

(*Shift.*)

NATE. Turn around. A figure. In a hoodie. Can't see his face. Turn  
back to my students, silent faces, then turn back, and the figure's  
gone. Face front, they're all gone. Stand alone in the classroom. No  
no no no I'm safe here. I'm their teacher. I'm in control.

Walk through the halls of the school, faster now, trying to find my

1 Definitely Polish. Pronounced "tshEE-sha LEH-tschy."

next classroom. Something's wrong. From the corner of my eye, I see a student pointing at me, his eyes vanish, lips turn grimace, features melt away.

I start to sweat. Feel it trickle down my forehead.

I ask the teachers if they have my exams, if they know where my classroom is. They stare, and in their eyes I see myself reflected back.

I turn and there is the door. I can leave. Escape.

Deep breath

In and out

And

Push the door

But before

Feel a hand grab my arm —

FIGURE. Can you come with me, please?

*(Shift.)*

*(The sound of the mother's labored breathing from upstairs.)*

MALCOLM. I don't move

From upstairs

I can hear her

Shallow breath

A wheeze

A fight for air

A sound I know is not right

Mom?

Should run up those stairs

Still I sit at the kitchen table

Can't move

Can't move.

*(Shift.)*

GABRIELLE. Today on set, my big scene.

The Statue of Liberty, kidnapped, now standing trial. Lady Liberty, blue foam crown cocked on her head, while lead actor, who is also director — oh, yes, it is one of *those* kind of movie pictures — while director and lead actor yells at me for my crimes against the world.

And on cue I cry. That's what I'm supposed to do. I cry and all forgive Lady Liberty.

I am good movie actress. I can do that. 'Course I can cry on cue.

Use the memory. Remember sad thing. And then. Tears. Simple.

And then all will be forgiven.

It is time

# THE AWAKE

by Ken Urban

3M, 3W, 1 child (doubling)

A mysterious corporation connects the lives of three strangers. Faced with lives they no longer recognize, this trio — a devoted son, an Eastern-European actress, and a Canadian man on the run — take shelter in dreams. But a series of chance encounters force these strangers to face the truth.

*“Ken Urban’s words are poetry. Voices and story lines converge and diverge like an elaborately mixed recording. The dialogue is full of stylized harmonies and dissonances; plots and characters operate in counterpoint. It is a structure that brings to mind Walter Pater’s famous dictum that all art aspires toward the condition of music, a fusion of form and subject matter.”*

—**The New York Times**

*“[An] engaging tapestry of stories ... [T]he descriptive, hallucinatory monologues require the audience to color in the details of scenes occurring in a character’s mind. Both script and production are quickly paced, uncoiling artfully as delusions and daydreams evaporate to make way for the truth. The fantasies resolve into emotional realities that, as in all our lives, must ultimately be borne rather than escaped.”*

—**The Village Voice**

*“THE AWAKE is a gripping thriller that leaves its audience with the unsettling question; what if we can’t tell the difference between reality and a dream?”*

—**Show Business Weekly**

**Also by Ken Urban**

THE CORRESPONDENT

THE HAPPY SAD

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF ESKIMOS

ISBN 978-0-8222-3088-5



**DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.**

9 780822 230885