

THE REVISIONIST

BY JESSE EISENBERG



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THE REVISIONIST was originally produced by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater (David Van Asselt, Artistic Director; Brian Long, Managing Director), at the Cherry Lane Theatre, opening on February 28, 2013. The production was directed by Kip Fagan; the set design was by John McDermott; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Matt Frey; the sound design was by Bart Fasbender; and the production manager was Eugenia Furneaux. The cast was as follows:

DAVID Jesse Eisenberg
MARIA Vanessa Redgrave
ZENON Dan Oreskes

CHARACTERS

DAVID

MARIA

ZENON

NOTE

Please note that the italicized lines of dialogue are spoken in Polish.
An appendix of the Polish translations is included in this volume.

THE REVISIONIST

Scene 1

A television is on, playing CNN International.

CNN. Long saddled with its image as one of Asia's poorest nations, Vietnam's economy in the last decade has come along in leaps and bounds. Foreign investors' eyes are lighting up at the prospect of grabbing a piece of the action now that Vietnam has been voted into the World Trade Organization. *(A loud buzzer is sounded. The television continues. The buzzer rings again. A lamp comes on, dimly lighting: a three-room cramped apartment in Szczecin, Poland, a large, run-down city on the Baltic Sea. A living room and small bedroom flank a narrow kitchen. The kitchen table is set for two. There are framed photographs on every surface and wall. Maria jumps off the couch and switches on a light. She frantically moves to her apartment's intercom, pressing it—buzz. She fixes herself at a small mirror and lights a candle on the table. There is a knock at the door and she swings it open.)*

MARIA. I never wanted to die so much! *(David stands at the door, offstage.)*

DAVID. Hello, Maria.

MARIA. You had me that my heart was in my mouth!

DAVID. It's nice to see you. Thank you. In advance.

MARIA. I was going to stick my head in the oven, but it take so long to heat, I change my mind. You three hours late!

DAVID. Yeah, sorry, my plane was delayed. I didn't have your telephone number. Can I please come inside?

MARIA. I give you my phone number so you should have it. *(Maria rushes to a small notepad in the kitchen as David enters holding a suitcase and shouldering a book bag. He is dressed sloppily, a hoodie obscuring his face.)*

DAVID. Well I don't need it now, I don't need it anymore. I'm here, Maria.

MARIA. Still, I give you. Maybe for the emergency. *(She scribbles her number and thrusts it at him.)* You can read this?

DAVID. Sure, it's legible.

MARIA. You could use in America too, you know.

DAVID. That's fine.

MARIA. Now you look at me.

DAVID. Yeah, my bags are kind of heavy—

MARIA. Stand straight up, your back. Look at me.

DAVID. I have a laptop in here— *(Maria gently pulls back his hoodie and holds his shoulders.)*

MARIA. You look like him. Your grandfather. Is like a picture.

DAVID. *(Squirming away.)* I'd like to put my bags down now.

MARIA. Of course, you put in your room.

DAVID. Okay, thank you.

MARIA. *(Leading him into the bedroom.)* Did you think you would not have your own room?

DAVID. I didn't consider it.

MARIA. You probably think we all live in a small hut in Poland.

DAVID. No, I guess I kind of thought I would have a room.

MARIA. Well it's a terrible tiny room. But you put your bags down. You talk to me about something. I want to know your trip, your family, your work—

DAVID. *(Dryly.)* It's all very exciting.

MARIA. But first I shut the television off. I was watching American television. CNN. *(She raises the volume on the television to impress David.)*

DAVID. Yes, I can hear it.

MARIA. *(Shuts the TV off.)* I must be sorry, David. My English is sometimes like cows.

DAVID. Excuse me?

MARIA. I speak English like a cow. Is very hard language. No one speak to me—no one speak to me Polish also—but I learn quick. They tell me knife. I read ka-nife. I don't understand, is stupid. My fault also—I don't know. Are you hungry? What you eat?

DAVID. I ate a little bit on the plane.

MARIA. Sha, on the plane! What you want?

DAVID. Nothing, really, I'm fine. Just a little tired.

MARIA. I make you dinner. I make you a special dinner. *(Suddenly)*

jubilant.) That you come to visit me, David. I am so happy you come to me!

DAVID. Thank you. I'm happy I'm going to finish my book. (*Maria stares at him, taken aback.*) What I mean is—I don't mean to be—I'm just kind of swamped at the moment and it's on my mind. Sorry. I've been overwhelmed. But I'm happy to see you too. And to be here. Maria.

MARIA. (*Considers him.*) This is a good thing you do. To have the blood back in the house! This is good thing, David. (*Maria enters the kitchen and pulls out a cooked chicken from the oven. She takes out a small bag of parsley and begins sprinkling it over the chicken. In a mirror image, David, in his room, searches through his suitcase and pulls out a long sock. He takes a hollowed-out jar of Hellmann's mayonnaise from the sock and then removes from the jar a bag, which contains some marijuana, a little pipe and a lighter. He sprinkles some weed in his pipe. In the kitchen, Maria puts the chicken into the microwave, powering it on. David, in his bedroom, tries to open the window to smoke, but the handle is too high. He climbs on the windowsill to reach the window but it is stuck shut. He rattles the handle but it won't budge as—*) Ah! I forget. David! David! I forget! I have present for you— (*David hops off the sill just as Maria enters his room, carrying a composition notebook.*) To write your book.

DAVID. Oh. That's very thoughtful.

MARIA. I buy it from the post office. You will use it to write the book?

DAVID. I don't know. I really just write on the computer.

MARIA. I think the paper is maybe better.

DAVID. Maybe.

MARIA. And no one want to steal paper from you.

DAVID. That's true. Computers can be a risky investment.

MARIA. So we agree. What did you get for me?

DAVID. I didn't know we were doing gifts. (*Pause; she waits.*) Okay. I got you— (*Hesitates, pulls a bottle from his suitcase.*) Some vodka. Some Polish vodka. It's very famous, I think. And very tasty, Polish vodka.

MARIA. But I live in Poland.

DAVID. You do.

MARIA. So why you get me Polish vodka?

DAVID. (*For his own amusement.*) To further celebrate your heritage.

MARIA. Hmm. I think this is more a present for you. But thank you.

DAVID. I'm glad you like it.

MARIA. I don't drink too much. Who do I drink with? Jerzy, he drink every night—not vodka always, beer, nalevka—but when he die, I stop drinking. No one should drink vodka if they are alone. Beer, is okay you drink alone, but vodka is a drink that is sad with no one. But you drink with me, David. Will be nice.

DAVID. I look forward to that. So I think I'm going to change clothes, if that's all right.

MARIA. Of course is all right. (*She stares at him, waiting for something—*)

DAVID. Great. I think I'll do that now.

MARIA. Is a good time, I think. (*Maria exits the room. David takes out his weed and pipe and jumps on the windowsill, reaching for the handle, just as Maria turns back around, reentering—*) I forget I should ask you— (*Seeing him on the sill.*) What you doing?

DAVID. Um, I was just trying to get some air. Is that not okay?

MARIA. If you want, is okay. But is expensive for me. Cold air come in the flat, the heat go up, the bill go up.

DAVID. Right, sorry. I didn't know what the, what your utility plan was here. (*Jumps down.*) What did you want to ask me?

MARIA. Yes. How long you should stay here?

DAVID. I actually wanted to ask you about that. You know why I'm here, right?

MARIA. I know what your grandfather tell me.

DAVID. What was that?

MARIA. You want to write a book, I think.

DAVID. Yes. Sort of. I have to revise a book.

MARIA. What is this?

DAVID. I have to revise my book—to change what I've already written. It's not relevant to you, but I'm not just, like, starting something, I have a career. I was actually supposed to hand it in six weeks ago—

MARIA. Six weeks you stay here?

DAVID. No. No. My book was due six weeks ago so I don't have that much time. That's why I came here. I needed a drastic change of scenery. I need to buckle down, focus. So I was thinking of staying here for about a week.

MARIA. A week? Your grandfather tell me you maybe stay longer.

DAVID. No, I think a week should be fine. I imagine that's all I need.

MARIA. All you need.

DAVID. Anyway, I didn't want to bother you.

MARIA. Is no bother to me. I want you should stay here forever!

DAVID. Well, obviously, I can't do that. I'm a bit inflexible at the moment.

MARIA. So when you leave me? You need to buy ticket for plane.

DAVID. (*Pulls out his ticket.*) I have a return ticket. It's for next Wednesday.

MARIA. You give me. I put on refrigerator, we should not forget it.

DAVID. I'm not going to forget.

MARIA. (*Reaching for it.*) Still, you give me.

DAVID. (*Holding it away from her.*) This is absurd. This is really not necessary. (*Beat; he gives it to her.*) But thank you. (*Maria reads the ticket as she walks to the kitchen to place it under a magnet on the fridge.*)

MARIA. You leave Wednesday at nine-thirty.

DAVID. Yeah, I guess so.

MARIA. So you maybe take taxi at six o'clock.

DAVID. Okay, sure. I don't really know.

MARIA. Which mean you miss dinner on Wednesday night.

DAVID. I'm sure I'll be fine. I'll probably just eat on the plane.

MARIA. This is the only place you eat food. (*Pointed.*) You miss dinner on Wednesday. (*She enters the bedroom and lifts a framed picture of David.*) Do you know this person?

DAVID. Where did you get that?

MARIA. I look at it every day before you come here. I speak to you. I say "Good morning David." I practice my English with you. You tell me knife. You learn Polish.

DAVID. How did you get it?

MARIA. Your grandfather send me. He call me every Sunday. My only cousin who call me. He is very special, your grandfather.

DAVID. Sure.

MARIA. You are different I think. (*David takes the picture from Maria.*)

DAVID. I think I look stupid.

MARIA. Sha, you are young. Bad teeth is normal for kids. And fat too, but you not.

DAVID. Thank you.

MARIA. And look at the eyes.

DAVID. What about them?

MARIA. Now look at my eyes.

DAVID. Where?

THE REVISIONIST

by Jesse Eisenberg

2M, 1W

David arrives in Poland with a crippling case of writer's block and a desire to be left alone. His seventy-five-year-old second cousin Maria welcomes him with a fervent need to connect with her distant American family. As their tenuous relationship develops, she reveals details about her complicated post-war past that test their ideas of what it means to be a family.

"... a rewarding account of cultural collision that yields unexpected reflections on the centrality of family in our lives—whether we idealize them or take them for granted."
—**The Hollywood Reporter**

"... a nimble play... a potent consideration of the nature of family. ... THE REVISIONIST proves [Eisenberg] to be an imaginative playwright who's not afraid to ask his audience to work. [THE REVISIONIST] keeps us guessing about this mismatched pair, and what isn't said is as important as what is revealed."
—**Backstage**

"... begins marvelously, ferociously, with elements you've seen before (a language barrier, a generation gap) reinvigorated with new energy, [and is] transformed into crisscrossing streamers of near-miss dialogue and asymmetric intent."
—**New York Magazine**

"... well-written, emotionally wrenching ..."
—**Variety**

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