



# THE DUNES

BY CRAIG POSPISIL



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*For Alix,  
with all my love*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

A number of years ago, I was taking a train from Amagansett, in the area of Long Island known as the Hamptons, back to New York. The train had been passing through a wooded area, when it abruptly came out into a large open field. I knew the field must've been used for farming years ago, but now it was being filled with enormous houses on small plots of land, just a stone's throw apart. "It's like *The Cherry Orchard*," I thought. And with that I had the idea for a new play.

Originally my thought was to write an updated version of Anton Chekhov's play, resetting it to East Hampton and contemporizing the dialogue. But as soon as I started to reread the various translations of *The Cherry Orchard*, I realized that wasn't the way to go about it. First of all, the original has far too many characters for most theater companies to be able to afford today, and secondly, even if you updated the language and the references, the characters would still very much remain products of the end of the nineteenth century, rather than being people of the early twenty-first century.

So as I began to work on *The Dunes* I used Chekhov's play as an inspiration, a jumping-off point for something new, rather than writing a straightforward adaptation. The end product is a play that has some of the underlying elements of *The Cherry Orchard*, but I believe it is a very different and original work as well, and very much about the lives we live now.

I want to thank a number of people who helped in the play's development: Jamie Richards and the Ensemble Studio Theatre Summer Conference, Pat McLaughlin, Murray Chase and the Venice Theatre, Bill Taylor and Theatre Conspiracy, Alix Steel, Lee Brock and the Barrow Group, Michael Horn and the Michael Chekhov Theatre, Michael LaPolla, Dominic Cuskern and the Gallery Players, Scott Alan Smith and the Road Theatre Company, and Bruce Miller.

*Craig Pospisil*  
*New York City*  
*October 2012*

THE DUNES was produced by the Gallery Players (Heather Siobhan Curran, Artistic Director; Dominic Cuskern and Lisa Hryckowian, Producers) in Brooklyn, New York, on June 2, 2011. It was directed by Michael LaPolla; the set design was by Yoon Young Choi; the lighting design was by Scott Andrew Cally; the sound design was by Jack Kennedy; the original music was by Gianluca Renzithe; the casting director was Joan D’Incecco, CSA; and the stage manager was Rebecca Stoll. The cast was as follows:

VANESSA . . . . . Lauren Klemp  
JEREMY . . . . . Nicolas Marti  
ANNE . . . . . Amanda A. Lederer  
GARRET . . . . . Matthew Ellis Murphy  
LAURA . . . . . Karin de la Penha  
TROY . . . . . Jason Ralph

THE DUNES won Theatre Conspiracy’s 2007 New Play Contest and was produced by Theatre Conspiracy (Bill Taylor, Artistic Director) in Fort Myers, Florida in April and May of that year. It was directed by Mike Breen, and the cast was as follows:

VANESSA . . . . . Laurie Genet Preston  
JEREMY . . . . . Marcus Kiehl  
ANNE . . . . . Madison Mitchell  
GARRET . . . . . Jim Yarnes  
LAURA . . . . . Lauren Drexler  
TROY . . . . . Jordan Wilson

THE DUNES was first workshopped at the Venice Theatre (Murray Chase, Artistic Director) in Venice, Florida, in March and April 2006. It was directed by Leanne Hanson, and the cast was as follows:

VANESSA . . . . . Laurie Colton Farrar  
JEREMY . . . . . James Hutchison III  
ANNE . . . . . Shannon Kelsey Strischek  
GARRET . . . . . David Boza  
LAURA . . . . . Lori Chase  
TROY . . . . . Nidal Zarour

## **CHARACTERS**

LAURA ROBERTSON — late 40s, a well-known actress.

VANESSA — 29, Laura's stepdaughter, a teacher.

JEREMY — 30, Vanessa's fiancé, works on Wall Street.

ANNE — 18, Laura's daughter, starting college in the fall.

GARRET ROBERSON — early 50s, Laura's brother, a literary agent.

TROY — 20, Anne's boyfriend, a local, plays in a rock band.

## **TIME**

Memorial Day through the end of August, the present.

## SETTING

The set depicts the living room and patio of a beach house along the ocean in East Hampton, New York. The stage is divided between the living room of the house on one side, and an open patio on the other. A wall runs roughly down the center of the stage separating the two spaces. The wall should be suggested, rather than actually present, so as not to block any sight lines from the audience. If it were there, this wall would hold a large picture window looking out on the patio and beyond.

The upstage wall of the living room is taken up by built-in shelves. The shelves hold books, some awards, vases or *objet d'art*, a nice stereo, etc. A staircase rises in an upstage corner, heading up to bedrooms on the second floor. There is a wet bar built under the staircase, jutting out into the room, and downstage a hallway leads to the kitchen and other rooms on the first floor. A comfortable chair or two, a couch, side tables, etc., dot the room. A cordless telephone and answering machine sit on top of a counter.

The door to the patio is located in the upstage part of the suggested center wall. Slate tiles line the floor of the patio. Scrub pine trees grow along the back of the patio. There is a break in these trees upstage, and a path leads to the driveway. Another path leads off from the downstage corner to the sandy dunes to the beach and ocean. Two wooden patio lounge chairs sit on the patio facing the audience.

*“And there ain’t nothing like regret  
to remind you you’re alive.”*

—*Sheryl Crow*  
*“The Difficult Kind”*



# THE DUNES

## Scene 1

*It is late on the Friday night of Memorial Day weekend. Vanessa, 29, enters from the kitchen with a plate of fruit and cheese, which she puts out. She looks around, tidies or adjusts something on one of the bookshelves, then checks her watch.*

*She crosses to a small bar and takes out the makings for Bloody Marys and begins making a pitcher. Headlights shine through the shrubs and up the path. Vanessa runs to the door to meet Jeremy, 30ish, as he appears on the patio, carrying a small bouquet of slightly wilted flowers.*

VANESSA. Yay! Finally!

JEREMY. Yes, finally. These are for you. They looked better six hours ago when I got them.

VANESSA. Aw, thanks. I looked better six hours ago too. The house was a total mess. I just finished cleaning and getting everything set. *(She takes the flowers and kisses him. When they break apart, she does a goofy wiggle of a dance.)* This is my “I got champagne to toast with when we tell them” dance. Are you excited?

JEREMY. Absolutely. Can I collapse now? *(She goes to find a vase for the flowers.)*

VANESSA. I saw the fire on TV. The drive must’ve been terrible. They said there’s over three hundred acres burning.

JEREMY. Yeah, the L.I.E. was totally shut down, one huge, I-don’t-know-how-many-miles-long parking lot. It was so bad it became comical. Thousands of New Yorkers stuck in their cars and pissed off because the police wouldn’t let them drive through the middle of a forest fire.

VANESSA. "You don't understand, officer. I have dinner reservations at Nick and Toni's tonight!"

JEREMY. Pretty much.

VANESSA. How was the interview?

JEREMY. It was okay. He didn't have any real leads, but it was a good meeting.

VANESSA. So, nothing at JP Morgan?

JEREMY. No. They may even have more layoffs.

VANESSA. Did he have any ideas?

JEREMY. "Think outside the box."

VANESSA. Meaning?

JEREMY. Meaning Paul likes to hear himself talk. I mean, he's brilliant, but he thinks really highly of himself. He went into this whole lecture on shorting stocks, and I'm smiling and nodding, thinking, "Yeah, I know how it works."

VANESSA. I hope you took notes. That will be on the quiz.

JEREMY. Damn, I should've paid more attention. Then after that he pours us a couple drinks and starts complaining about the taxes on his place in Southampton, and how much his trophy wife spends on her bikini waxes.

VANESSA. He didn't really say "trophy wife," did he?

JEREMY. No, but there were pictures of two women on his desk, and I'm pretty sure the older one was his daughter.

VANESSA. So dead end?

JEREMY. Maybe not. He invited me to play tennis with him, the wife and some guy from Goldman Sachs tomorrow morning.

VANESSA. Oh, okay, well, that's something. Put up a good fight, but let him win. And stay away from the trophy wife.

JEREMY. Ah, you're no fun. *(They share a brief smile or laugh, but then Jeremy lapses into silence.)*

VANESSA. Don't worry. We're okay. And we're saving money since I moved in.

JEREMY. Yeah, but we can't live on your salary alone. My severance'll carry us through, what, August? September? Then what?

VANESSA. So we've got three months to figure something out. I'll get you on my health insurance at school. It'll be okay.

JEREMY. Yeah, I guess. *(Looking around.)* So ... where is everyone?

VANESSA. Not here yet.

JEREMY. I thought they took the four-twenty train.

VANESSA. The fire stopped the trains too.

JEREMY. For six hours? They should've waited and come with me.

VANESSA. Oh, Laura loves taking the train.

JEREMY. Trapped with all her — Oh, hey! There was a train in East Hampton when I went through. Damn. I bet that was them.

VANESSA. Maybe not. Garret said they'd call when they got close.

JEREMY. No, I think the fire must've knocked out the cell towers or something. I kept trying to call you from the road. And it's crazy in town. All of Manhattan is arriving at once. *(Vanessa picks up the phone and dials.)*

VANESSA. No signal. We better get to the station.

JEREMY. Please don't make me get back in the car. Twenty-seven is bumper to bumper from Southampton to here and probably all the way to Montauk. They could walk here in the time it'd take us to drive. I bet they're already in a taxi.

VANESSA. How are they supposed to get a cab if all of New York is arriving at the same time?

JEREMY. I don't think your stepmother will have a problem.

VANESSA. What's that supposed to mean?

JEREMY. You know exactly what it means. *(A set of headlights flash through the shrubs, and a car engine is heard idling for a moment before shutting off. Car doors open and close.)*

VANESSA. Oh, they're here! Does everything look okay?

JEREMY. It's perfect, baby. *(Jeremy gives Vanessa a kiss as Anne, 18, and her uncle, Garret, early 50s, enter onto the patio, carrying luggage. Vanessa hurries out to them.)*

VANESSA. Anne!

ANNE. Hey V! *(Anne drops her bags as she hugs Vanessa tightly.)*

VANESSA. How was the trip?

ANNE. Don't ask.

JEREMY. Hi, Garret.

GARRET. Ah, you beat us here. *(Garret and Jeremy shake hands. Jeremy takes Garret and Anne's bags inside.)*

JEREMY. Yeah, but I'll bet you were a lot more comfortable on the train than you'd've been in my car.

GARRET. Well, we did have alcohol on the train, but they ran out after we'd been stopped for two hours, which was tragic.

VANESSA. Do I smell smoke on your clothes?

ANNE. Yeah, when we stopped at Westhampton all the trees on one side of the tracks were still smoldering. The smell was pretty strong.

VANESSA. So, how did you guys get here?

ANNE. We saw this director at the station — [*picking up his kids...*]

GARRET. (*Overlapping.*) “This director?” It was only Steven Hunter.

ANNE. Yeah, I know who it was. Anyway, he’s getting his kids, and Mom goes over and totally guilts him into driving out of his way to bring us here.

JEREMY. (*To Vanessa.*) I told you she wouldn’t have a problem.

GARRET. (*Spotting the pitcher.*) Is this what I think it is?

VANESSA. Yep, a fresh pitcher of Bloody Marys. You want one?

GARRET. Absolutely. But I’ll start with just a glass. (*Vanessa goes to a bar and pours Garret a small drink.*)

JEREMY. Oh, me too.

VANESSA. Why don’t you make yourself useful and get Laura’s bags.

GARRET. Yes, someone should save Hunter. Laura’s talking his ear off.

JEREMY. All right, I’m on it. (*Jeremy goes out, crossing the patio and down the path.*)

VANESSA. Here you go.

GARRET. Bless you, my child. (*He takes a sip.*) Mmm! Perfect. (*He drinks it in one long swig and hands it back to Vanessa.*) Why, thank you. I’d love another. I’ll be right back. I have to change out of these smoky clothes. (*Garret takes his bag and strolls up the stairs to the bedrooms.*)

VANESSA. Oh, you must’ve had a great trip.

ANNE. You have no idea. Mom was this mega diva all the way out, holding court, signing autographs and — oh! Get this! One woman asks her to sign the People magazine with Jeff’s “Laura threw me out” story on the cover.

VANESSA. Was she pissed?

ANNE. Please. She just smiled. “You bet your ass I threw him out.” And Uncle Garret was just as bad. When the smell got really bad, he says to the conductor, “I thought this was a no smoking car.” I tried to drown them out, but my iPod died.

VANESSA. Well, you’re safe now.

ANNE. No, I’m not. I’m gonna be stuck out here with Mom all summer. You’ve got to let me stay at your place in New York.

VANESSA. That might be tough.

ANNE. Oh, come on, you won’t even know I’m there. You spend half your time at Jeremy’s.

VANESSA. I spend all my time at Jeremy’s. Because I just moved

in with him. We're engaged. (*Vanessa holds out her left hand, showing Anne her ring, and does her wiggly, goofy dance again.*)

ANNE. Oh my God!

VANESSA. Shhh! I want to surprise your mom.

ANNE. How did he ask?

VANESSA. He took me up to the top of Rockefeller Center, got down on one knee in front of a couple dozen tourists, who took pictures of us while I cried, the whole bit.

ANNE. Oh, I love it! Have you set a date?

VANESSA. Not yet, but I'll make sure it happens at a time that you can break out of your ivory tower.

ANNE. Oh, shut up. I picked Yale mainly to put as much distance as possible between me and Mom.

VANESSA. I'm sorry you got stuck in the middle of everything with her and Jeff.

ANNE. Whatever, I'm fine. All I have to do is get through this summer. After that she can do whatever she wants.

VANESSA. Yeah, can she? Do we have any idea how much money Jeff blew on that stupid movie?

ANNE. You think she tells me? I'm just happy the money she and my dad put away for my college was separate from the rest of it.

VANESSA. Good. I'm glad Jeff couldn't get his hands on it.

ANNE. She's gotta be doing okay, though. I mean, she still goes to her trainer, and we flew first class. Plus she had that auction.

VANESSA. What auction?

ANNE. Aw, crap. She said she told you.

VANESSA. No.

ANNE. She sold some stuff when we moved to the smaller place in the Hills. (*Jeremy appears on the patio, struggling with several large bags. Vanessa sees him and opens the door to help.*)

LAURA. (*Offstage.*) Bye-bye, Steven. Thank you. You're an angel. We'll see you for lunch next week!

JEREMY. Did she pack everything she owns?

ANNE. That's not even close. (*Laura Robertson, late 40s, floats into view and across the patio. She enters and throws her arms open wide and gives Vanessa a big hug.*)

LAURA. Vanessa!

VANESSA. Welcome home, Laura.

LAURA. Oh, it's so good to be here! What a trip, you would not believe! First all the packing and the red-eye from Los Angeles. At

# THE DUNES

by Craig Pospisil

3M, 3W

THE DUNES follows the downward spiral of fading actress Laura Robertson and her family — stepdaughter Vanessa, daughter Anne and brother Garret. Laura, who's become better known for her Hollywood lifestyle and turbulent relationships than for her acting, returns to her family home in East Hampton, New York, to lick her wounds after her current marriage has fallen apart. The practical Vanessa and her fiancé, Jeremy, push Laura to get her life and career back on track, but her debts and inability to face reality and make painful decisions mean they may lose things that are far more valuable than a beach house. Inspired by Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, this is a contemporary take on a timeless drama.

*"A winner ... thanks to playwright Craig Pospisil's smart and funny dialogue ... It's a reminder how timeless theater can be."* —**The News-Press**

*"A serious, understated drama that left wide emotional voids that should move any viewer. Written by award-winning playwright Craig Pospisil, THE DUNES ... is a fine production."* —**Florida Weekly**

*"... written by accomplished playwright Craig Pospisil ... the play shows his gift for dialogue that fits the characters he creates, all with a craft that made the play worth watching. I urge you to go see THE DUNES. You will be viewing the work of a young playwright about whom, someday, you will say, 'I saw him when.'"* —**The Sanibel-Captiva Islander**

## Also by Craig Pospisil

LIFE IS SHORT  
MONTHS ON END  
SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

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