



THE CALL

BY TANYA BARFIELD



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
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THE CALL
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Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, and Primary Stages produced the World Premiere of THE CALL Off-Broadway in 2013.

THE CALL received its world premiere in a co-production by Playwrights Horizons (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director; Carol Fishman, General Manager) and Primary Stages (Andrew Leynse, Artistic Director; Casey Childs, Executive Producer; Elliot Fox, Managing Director) at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater in New York City, on April 14, 2013. It was directed by Leigh Silverman; the set design was by Rachel Hauck; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Matt Frey; the sound design was by Jill BC DuBoff; the production stage manager was Vanessa Coakley; and the assistant stage manager was Colleen M. Sherry. The cast was as follows:

ANNIE Kerry Butler
PETER Kelly AuCoin
REBECCA.....Eisa Davis
DREA Crystal A. Dickinson
ALEMU Russell G. Jones

CHARACTERS

ANNIE, white female, late 30s/early 40s

PETER, her husband, white male, 40s

REBECCA, black female, late 30s/early 40s

DREA, her partner, black female, mid-late 30s

ALEMU, black male, early 40s

PLACE

A metropolitan area.

TIME

The present.

NOTES

A note about dialogue: other than where indicated, there should be no pauses in speech.

/ indicates that the next character should begin speaking immediately at the point marked.

— indicates an interruption in dialogue or thought.

Words appearing in brackets [] are displayed for clarity, but they are not spoken.

The story Alemu tells is based on an Ethiopian folktale, *The Lion's Whisker*.

THE CALL

ACT ONE

1

A dinner party at Annie and Peter's house. Rebecca has just begun a story. An effervescent mood.

ANNIE. So, there you are, Cradle of Mankind ...

REBECCA. So there we are. It's sunset, all the other Land Rovers've left but we've stayed longer because the Australian claims to work for *National Geographic* — and of course he's a *complete* amateur —

DREA. (*Part of the story.*) / I'm sick.

REBECCA. But, oh *no*, the Midwesterners believe him and feel *special* like they're going to be featured in *National Geographic*. And then the jeep breaks down.

ANNIE. The jeep breaks down?

DREA. I'm back at the tent.

ANNIE. You're at the tent. (*To Rebecca.*) The jeep, the jeep / breaks down.

REBECCA. Breaks down.

ANNIE. The Midwesterners —

REBECCA. The French woman rolling her eyes at the Midwesterners: "You *stupid* Americans."

DREA. Everywhere we go, that's what people say, that's the refrain, right.

REBECCA. "You stupid Americans." /

DREA. Not like we don't spend money.

REBECCA. So, the radio's dead. Our guide's trying to figure out — I'm thinking, *how* is this even possible?

ANNIE. But, wait, where were the animals?

REBECCA. That's the whole point. They're right there! We've got zebras on our left and a pack of lionesses with *cubs* on our right. Mentally I'm telling the lions to go for the zebra, they're herbivores, they'll taste better. We wait and wait for another jeep to drive by which doesn't happen. We're stuck. Night's falling. Twilight is about a millisecond. There are *no* more jeeps, *no* more tourists, *no* cell phones, *no* walkie-talkies; we're stuck in the Animal Kingdom. At this point the Midwesterners are completely freaking out, as is our African guide, but the Aussie's having the *time of his life* and before we know it, he's climbing *out* of the cab onto the hood to take a close-up.

ANNIE. / No, no, no ...

PETER. / No way.

REBECCA. I'm thinking, Dude, zoom lens, I'll buy you one. Our guide, Robert, is beyond incredulous. "Sir, sir, please, no, sir. Lions, sir, babies." /

DREA. We could've have gone to the beach. That's what people do on their honeymoon, they go —

PETER. / What?

ANNIE. Honeymoon?

REBECCA. We're hitched.

PETER. That's great /

ANNIE. When? You never said.

REBECCA. We didn't want — no big deal.

ANNIE. You got *married*, no big deal?

DREA. It was more political —

ANNIE. I call it a big deal.

PETER. Yeah /

REBECCA. *I* thought we should have registered.

ANNIE. You can still. You have a year after the wedding. Gifts, that's half the advantage to being married besides taxes.

PETER. There's no real tax advant —

DREA. There's about five thousand / tax advantages —

PETER. Married filing jointly, no kids, / my accountant —

ANNIE. (*To Peter.*) We should tell them /

PETER. We said dessert /

ANNIE. But —

PETER. We said —

ANNIE. (*To Rebecca and Drea.*) We said dessert; but we have to tell you /

REBECCA. Yeah?

ANNIE. (*To Peter.*) You tell.

PETER. Okay, we. Well, we ...

ANNIE. (*To Rebecca.*) Oh, wait wait wait, finish your story. (*To Peter.*) She should finish her story.

REBECCA. No, what?

ANNIE. So, there you are, you could've been at the beach, / fancy hotel, relax, *swim*.

REBECCA. Are you gonna tell us?

ANNIE. Yes! But, I really want to hear the story, and Peter and I agreed we'd say at dessert.

REBECCA. Okay, so. We could've been swimming. Drea's got diarrhea.

ANNIE. At the tent.

REBECCA. I'm wishing I was back there, / food poisoning, no problem.

DREA. You are *so* not wishing. / (*To Annie.*) She gets scared.

REBECCA. I'm there on the floor of a *crater*, thinking, we're *prey*. That's how it works. (*To Drea.*) You laugh, but if —

DREA. Baby, that's what I love about you.

REBECCA. What?

DREA. You're so dramatic.

REBECCA. Look, no healthy person actually thinks *they're* going to die. We operate under the belief system that bad things, like *death*, happen to other people, the unfortunate ones.

ANNIE. I know! Barbara — she writes that whole book on optimism, and six months later she has to have a bilateral mastectomy.

PETER. That's not what she means.

ANNIE. She means bad things happen to other people, that's what she means.

PETER. She means *death*, that's what she means. Death happens to other people.

REBECCA. That's what I mean.

DREA. Remember, this is Africa, cars break down all the time.

REBECCA. Yes, but there're lionesses and *cubs*.

DREA. Drama.

ANNIE. No, no, this is good. (*Gesturing for Rebecca to continue.*) Please.

REBECCA. The lions see the Australian on the hood, they get up, snap their tails, before you know it, they're circling the jeep.

ANNIE. / Oh my God, oh my God, no.

PETER. No ... /

REBECCA. Robert says —

DREA. Robert, it's pronounced Ro-ber-t, long o.

REBECCA. Ro-ber-t's going, "Mister, sir, mister." The Australian, what's his name?

DREA. Manuel.

REBECCA. Manuel freezes. Now me, I'm very happy with the Walt Disney version of Africa.

ANNIE. (*To Drea.*) You know, Rebecca's a recovering vegetarian.

DREA. / I know.

REBECCA. I don't need to watch a tourist mangled /

ANNIE. / Ew, ew, no.

REBECCA. *Finally*, Manuel scuttles on hands and knees up the windshield. But, he *drops* his camera.

PETER. / He drops —

REBECCA. So, he's reaching for / the camera —

ANNIE. This isn't real!

REBECCA. I swear. One of the lions is now on the *hood*, Manuel jumps back in the cab; everyone's screaming. The French woman's totally lost her cool; she's blabbering away in French.

DREA. Then another jeep comes, they climb in, everyone's fine. (*Beat.*)

ANNIE. What happened to the lions?

DREA. They lost interest.

PETER. / But —

ANNIE. Wait — the lion was on the hood?

REBECCA. Terrifying.

DREA. But she got off.

REBECCA. *Drea* slept through the whole thing. All the other people at camp were waiting with bated breath, but Drea —

DREA. Excuse me, I was sick. (*Beat.*)

ANNIE. Did you guys *like* Africa?

REBECCA. / Oh my God, yes.

DREA. It was amazing.

ANNIE. (*Annie sees that no one has touched their food.*) Eat, eat.

REBECCA. Looks delicious.

ANNIE. Mango coulis. I remember mango is Drea's favorite.

REBECCA. It is?

DREA. / Yeah.

PETER. As Americans, we think we're the top of the food chain —
ANNIE. / Oh, no, cold fish.
PETER. — And no matter what —
ANNIE. I'll stick it in the broiler.
PETER. — Whenever we need it we can wave our little passports,
and our embassy'll swoop down in a helicopter and save us. (*Annie
begins collecting the plates.*)
DREA. (*To Rebecca.*) Like when you and David were there — that
didn't happen, right?
PETER. When what?
DREA. Her brother. No one swooped down. (*Peter gets up to help
Annie with the plates.*)
ANNIE. (*Lingering.*) No, no, sit.
DREA. How'd you meet David?
PETER. Back in college. He was grad school. He rented me a
room off-campus.
REBECCA. You should've seen the molding / in that place.
DREA. (*To Peter.*) You and David went to Africa to volunteer and
that's where David got malaria ... / right?
REBECCA. Right. And then back home, he got pneumonia /
DREA. / Right.
REBECCA. His system was compromised by malaria; being treat-
ed in a bush hospital didn't help.
DREA. Horrible.
PETER. More wine, anyone? (*Annie brings the plates into the kitch-
en. Peter pours more wine.*)
DREA. Y'all go way back.
PETER. / We do.
REBECCA. Mmm. (*Annie returns.*)
ANNIE. You know, I've been researching: global poverty —
PETER. Who researches global poverty? /
ANNIE. If there's a drought in — say, a place like —
PETER. / Somalia.
ANNIE. Ethiopia — I read, a decade of drought followed by a *flood*—
PETER. Or with a dictator in, say, the Sudan —
DREA. / Or Zimbabwe —
PETER. It cripples the economy. Then that's what you've got: /
poverty.
ANNIE. Wait, but what I'm saying is: if there's only *one* road in an
entire *province*, how's the country s'posed / to function?

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by Tanya Barfield

2M, 3W

Annie and Peter decide to adopt, setting their sights on a child from Africa. But, when they receive surprising news from the adoption agency, their marriage is put to the test, secrets of the past are exposed, and this couple approaching mid-life is left with an unexpected choice. Politically charged, funny, and tack-sharp, THE CALL is a startling portrait of cultural divide, casting global issues into the heart of an American home.

“Thoughtful and engrossing. Written in smart, natural and often sparkling dialogue.”

—**The New York Times**

“Touching and intelligent.”

—**HuffingtonPost.com**

“THE CALL tackles the complex issues that accompany adoption across cultures, tearing open the insulated middle-class home to the world’s challenging realities ... it is a worthwhile play that forces discussion on numerous topics that might not be touched on otherwise. And what’s smarter — none of the debates have black and white conclusions, leaving the topics open to discussion and giving the audience a lot to think about. But one thing is clear: we are all a part of the same world, so the world’s problems are our own. And while white Americans, African Americans, and Africans are all divided by cultural differences, here we all are, in the same small Manhattan apartment.”

—**Show Business Weekly**

Also by Tanya Barfield
BLUE DOOR

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