



# HOPE AND GRAVITY

BY MICHAEL  
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DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



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HOPE AND GRAVITY was originally produced by City Theatre Company (Tracy Brigden, Artistic Director; Mark R. Power, Managing Director) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from May 3–23, 2014. It was directed by Tracy Brigden; the scenic design was by Anne Mundell; the costume design was by Robert C. T. Steele; the lighting design was by Andrew David Ostrowski; the original music was by Eric Shmelonis; the sound design was by Joe Pino; the dramaturg was Carlyn Aquiline; the production stage manager was Patti Kelly. The cast was as follows:

MARTY/DOUGLAS ..... John Felch  
PETER/HAL ..... Daniel Krell  
TANYA/NAN ..... Rebecca Harris  
STEVE ..... Federico Rodriguez  
JILL/BARB ..... Jill Abramson

HOPE AND GRAVITY was developed at Geva Theatre Center, Rochester, New York.

HOPE AND GRAVITY was originally workshopped and developed in the 2013 Pacific Playwrights Festival at South Coast Repertory.

“Self Help” (formerly “Truth Decay”) was originally produced by Theatre Exile (Joe Canuso, Producing Artistic Director) as part of the Philly Originals Festival, February 2007.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HOPE AND GRAVITY was forged and refined through readings, developmental workshops, and productions at over a dozen different theatres, so I owe a particular debt of gratitude to:

White Pine Productions: Benjamin Lloyd and casts (two readings).

Theatre Exile: Deborah Block, Joe Canuso, Brenna Geffers, and cast.

Arden Theatre Company: Terry Nolen, Ed Sobel, Rebecca Wright, Matt Pfeiffer, and cast.

Philadelphia Theatre Company: Sara Garonzik, Jackie Goldfinger, Carrie Chapter, Aaron Posner, and cast.

Geva Theatre: Mark Cuddy, Jenni Werner, and cast.

Aspen Theatre Festival: Don Mackay, David Ledingham, Tom Dugdale, and cast.

North Street Theatre: Terry Bliss, and cast.

Capital Repertory Theatre: Maggie Cahill, Margaret Hall, and cast.

South Coast Repertory: Marc Masterson, Martin Benson, David Emmes, John Glore, Kelly Miller, Jessica Kubzansky, Aaron Posner, and casts (two).

City Theatre Company: Tracy Brigden, Carlyn Aquiline, and casts (two).

Creede Repertory Theatre: Jessica Jackson, Sarna Lapine, and cast.

Circle Theatre: Rose Pearson, Harry Parker, and cast.

1812 Productions: Jennifer Childs and cast.

I am additionally grateful for the professional expertise of Martin Freedman, MD, and Andrew Cohen, DDS, as well as the dramaturgical acumen of Megan Bellwoar, Cary Mazer, and Harriet Power.

## **CHARACTERS**

*The play's nine roles may be performed either by nine actors or by five, with the following doubling:*

ACTOR 1

*(man, 40s–50s)*

MARTY, DOUGLAS

ACTOR 2

*(man, late 30s–early 40s)*

PETER, HAL

ACTOR 3

*(woman, 40s)*

TANYA, NAN

ACTOR 4

*(man, 20s)*

STEVE

ACTOR 5

*(woman, 20s)*

JILL, BARB

*Please consider all racial/ethnic combinations in casting.*

## **TIME**

Now. And then. (Not necessarily in that order.)

## **SETTING**

In and around an American city.

## SCENES

### ACT ONE

6. Out of Order
2. Immaculate Conception
4. Possibility
5. Scout's Honor
8. Spring Remembrance

### ACT TWO

7. Self-Help
1. The Big Picture
9. Small World
3. Leap of Faith

*Act One runs about 55 minutes; Act Two, 45 minutes.*

## NOTES

*A Beat.* is shorter than a *Pause*. *Long pause.* is longer. *Silence.*, longest.

When one character begins speaking before another has finished, the beginning of the overlap is indicated by a slash ( / ). (Thus, an actor with a slash in her or his line should continue speaking without interruption, as it is merely a cue for the next speaker.)

A dash (—) indicates where one speaker is cut off by the next.

An ellipsis (...) indicates where a speaker trails off, or searches for a word, and not an interruption.

When lines end with commas or semicolons, there is no actual overlap; the following character's line is merely inserting a thought that momentarily delays the original speaker's intention, interrupting two halves of the same thought.

A word or phrase spoken in conjunction with air quotes is bracketed by asterisks (e.g., \*creative types\*); air quotes should otherwise not be used.

For Aaron Posner,  
who reminded me about this amazing poem  
(They get stuck in there.):

*“About suffering they were never wrong,  
The Old Masters...”*

—W. H. Auden  
“Musée des Beaux Arts”

# HOPE AND GRAVITY

## ACT ONE

### 6. Out of Order

*Lights rise on Jill and Steve, both in their 20s, both bearing messenger bags. Steve holds a pair of stapled pages in front of him, which he reads intently.*

JILL. I don't know where it came from, it just...bubbled up. Like some, I don't know, underground stream or something. Like in the Bible, in the desert? When these streams just, out of nowhere—wait, is that what I'm thinking of?

*She looks over at Steve, who ignores her. Pause.*

Anyway, it's probably crap.

STEVE. Shh.

*Pause. Steve flips to the second page. Beat.*

JILL. God, I hate this elevator...

*Beat.*

Every time I wait for it, I can feel my life *draining* away...

STEVE. (*Looking up.*) Will you shut up?

*Jill backs off. Steve reads on. Long pause.*

JILL. I heard somewhere that, over the course of a lifetime, the average person spends a total of *three years* waiting for elevators. Which, I don't know about you, but I find absolutely...

*Beat.*

Wait—that can't be right...

*She does the math in her head. Finishing the poem, Steve*



*lowers the pages, overwhelmed. Beat.*

Well?

*He flips the first sheet back and stares at the pages in his hands.*

Is it crap?

STEVE. No, it's...great.

JILL. Say what you really think.

STEVE. It's perfect, Jill. You wrote this last night?

JILL. Most of it.

STEVE. In the *laundry room*?

JILL. You said you and Blacktooth Barb needed space.

*Steve shakes his head in disbelief.*

Besides, my load wasn't done, so I figured I might as well write a poem.

STEVE. *How do you do this?*

JILL. What.

STEVE. Knock them out like this. In the middle of a rinse cycle.

JILL. Wait till Douglas has his way with it; it'll be covered in red, like always.

*She takes the pages back. Noting his silence:*

You finish yours?

STEVE. What do you think.

JILL. *Again?*

STEVE. I know...

JILL. That's like, what, three weeks in a row?

STEVE. I don't know what's happening.

JILL. You used to be the pacer...

STEVE. Yeah...

JILL. ...each week, while the rest of us limped along—and *brilliant* stuff. Even Douglas, who we both know doesn't lavish praise / on—

STEVE. *I just couldn't finish it, all right?*

JILL. All right.

*Pause.*

What's it about?

STEVE. Icarus.

JILL. That's cool. What's it called?

STEVE. "Icarus."

*Beat.*

JILL. Okay...

*Beat.*

How much have you written?

STEVE. The title. (*Off her look.*) Look, it's hard, okay?

JILL. We all get stuck sometimes;

STEVE. (*Indicating her pages as evidence.*) Not you!

JILL. even Douglas—he said so himself.

STEVE. It's just— Every time I sit down to write, I can't help thinking about graduation...

JILL. That's three months away...

STEVE. And after that, this huge *abyss*...

JILL. (*Trying to calm him.*) Hey.

STEVE. Meanwhile, you read these *masterpieces*, like...I don't know, "Dover Beach," or, or "Musée des Beaux Arts," or...or...

JILL. "Spring Remembrance"...

STEVE. "*Spring Remembrance*"! And then you stare at your empty page, your...pathetically empty page, and it's like, I don't know, like it's *mocking* you or something—like every poet from Homer on down is *daring* you to step into the ring. And all you've got is a lame-ass title and a buttload of student loans.

*Beat.*

JILL. I don't know what to say.

STEVE. Yeah, well, obviously neither do I.

*Steve moves away. Jill looks at him, then down at the elevator button. Beat.*

JILL. You did push the down button, didn't you?

*Beat.*

\* Pronounced "MOO-zay day BO-ZAR."

STEVE. I thought you pushed it.

*Jill exhales heavily, then pushes the button several times.  
Long pause.*

JILL. You hear about the accident?

STEVE. What accident.

JILL. Elevator crashed last night, across town.

STEVE. Get out.

JILL. Nine stories, no brakes—boom.

STEVE. Anybody hurt?

JILL. Two people were killed.

STEVE. Holy shit.

JILL. I know.

*Steve considers this for several seconds, then:*

STEVE. Want to walk down?

JILL. Six flights? No?

STEVE. It'll take us two seconds.

JILL. The staircase always smells like pee.

*Steve just looks at her.*

It does; you just don't notice because your nasal receptors are, like, dead.

*Steve surrenders, checking his phone for the time.*

STEVE. We're gonna be late...

*Pause.*

JILL. Speaking of odors, what was that you cooked for Blacktooth Barb last night?

STEVE. Will you stop saying that?

JILL. What.

STEVE. You know what.

JILL. "Blacktooth Barb"?

STEVE. She's really self-conscious.

*Beat.*

JILL. How about "Graytooth Barb"?

STEVE. How about you don't say her name at all?

JILL. Fine. How was *Your Girlfriend's* birthday?

STEVE. It wasn't.

*Beat.*

JILL. Wasn't what.

STEVE. I got the date wrong; her birthday's today.

JILL. Well...at least you weren't late again.

STEVE. And she's not my girlfriend anymore.

JILL. You *broke up*?!

STEVE. She's my fiancée now.

JILL. Oh.

STEVE. You don't sound too excited.

JILL. I'm not the one who should sound excited. You're the one who's going to have to look at her every time she smiles...

*Steve glares.*

I didn't say "Blacktooth Barb" oops yes I did.

*Steve just shakes his head. Peter enters, wearing a stylish black blazer and dark sunglasses atop his head, and wheeling a small black suitcase.*

Well...congratulations.

STEVE. Thanks.

JILL. You give her a ring?

STEVE. What do you think? We wouldn't be very engaged if I didn't give her a ring.

*Peter looks at the elevator button.*

PETER. Did somebody push the down button?

STEVE. Yeah, sometimes the light doesn't...

PETER. Right.

*They wait together. Pause.*

STEVE. She wants me to go into advertising.

JILL. Yeah, well, Barb would.

STEVE. Says those big firms always need \*creative types.\*

# HOPE AND GRAVITY

by Michael Hollinger

3 men, 2 women (doubling)

When an elevator falls in a major city, nine lives intersect in surprising ways, both comic and tragic—through love and sex, poetry and dentistry; in offices, homes, and hotel rooms. Jill longs for Steve, who's engaged to Barb, who hooks up with Peter, who's already having an affair with Nan, who's married to Marty, who subscribes to *Elevator World*. Meanwhile, nine stories off the ground, Douglas meets Tanya—who's hoping to get pregnant with Hal—and a little miracle changes hands. By turns hilarious and profound, HOPE AND GRAVITY traces the barely perceivable threads that connect us all.

*"...brilliantly structured and hilariously written..."*

—Fort Worth Star-Telegram

*"A satisfying, crowd-pleasing puzzle play, with nine scenes in two acts, but not in chronological order."*

—Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

*"Some of the scenes are laugh-out-loud funny; others are tenderly poignant."*

—Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

*"There's a thrill in chasing this plot—it's always tantalizingly ahead of you—and finally nailing it. The thrill extends to witnessing five actors, some in dual roles, as they lay out this story that happens in the past, or sometimes in the future, yet also in the present."*

—WHYY Philadelphia

*"[It's] Michael Hollinger at his best: witty banter, well-turned phrases, and genuine characters make us laugh; then something unexpectedly wonderful and mysterious lifts us to a new level. Gravity tugs us downward but hope allows us to soar, as HOPE AND GRAVITY shows."*

—BroadStreetReview.com

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OPUS

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and others

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ISBN 978-0-8222-3728-0



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