



ON THAT DAY IN AMSTERDAM

BY CLARENCE COO



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ON THAT DAY IN AMSTERDAM received its world premiere at Primary Stages (Andrew Leynse, Artistic Director; Shane D. Hudson, Executive Director; Casey Childs, Founder) in association with Ted Snowdon, at 59E59 Theaters, New York City, in August 2022. It was directed by Zi Alikhan, the movement direction was by Jesse Kovarsky, the scenic design was by Jason Sherwood, the costume design was by Lux Haac, the lighting design was by Cha See, the sound design was by Fan Zhang, the projection design was by Nicholas Hussong, and the production stage manager was Jakob W. Plummer. The cast was as follows:

REMBRANDT Brandon Mendez Homer
SAMMY Waseem Alzer
SAMMY (temporary replacement) Ahmad Maksoud
KEVIN Glenn Morizio
ANNE Elizabeth Ramos
VINCENT Jonathan Raviv

ON THAT DAY IN AMSTERDAM was developed, in part, at the 2019 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab.

ON THAT DAY IN AMSTERDAM was developed with the support of New York Stage and Film & Vassar's Powerhouse Season, summer 2018.

CHARACTERS

The Two Young Men

KEVIN—early 20s, Filipino American

SAMMY—early 20s, Syrian

The Narrators

REMBRANDT—the Romantic One

VINCENT—the Perfectionist One

ANNE—the Empathetic One

The narrators should be played by actors of color, as if they could be members of the current global refugee/migrant population.

SETTING

Amsterdam, 2015

ON THAT DAY IN AMSTERDAM

We are in a houseboat in Amsterdam, on a January dawn.

In a bed are two young men: Sammy and Kevin. They are looking at each other.

Anne, Vincent, and Rembrandt enter.

They are different personality aspects of a writer creating a story.

They are unseen by the two men.

ANNE. On that day in Amsterdam, two young men were in a bed and looked at each other in the morning light.

REMBRANDT. One of them was thinking about the present moment.

VINCENT. And the other was not.

While the two young men are looking at each other in silence, Rembrandt speaks for Sammy and Vincent speaks for Kevin.

REMBRANDT/SAMMY. Stay! I really like looking at you.

VINCENT/KEVIN. Oh god. Please don't say that.

REMBRANDT/SAMMY. I like looking at your eyes. Your nose. Your lips.

VINCENT/KEVIN. Please stop.

REMBRANDT/SAMMY. Your shoulders.

VINCENT/KEVIN. I don't need to hear about all my body parts.

REMBRANDT/SAMMY. I like all of you.

And then, as if granted a magical power, the two young men are able to speak for themselves.

KEVIN. I need to go.

SAMMY. Why?

KEVIN. (*Getting dressed.*) I have a flight.

SAMMY. When?

KEVIN. Later this morning. I'm sorry.

SAMMY. You can't stay a little longer?

KEVIN. The flight is at eleven. I need to go.

SAMMY. Everything about you is amazing.

ANNE. One year from now, one of these two young men will *try* to write a book.

REMBRANDT. —will *begin* to write a book.

VINCENT. —will write a book.

REMBRANDT. And the other will not.

Pause.

VINCENT. One year from now.

REMBRANDT. With the clarity of time.

ANNE. With the benefit of hindsight.

VINCENT. With the wisdom of maturity.

REMBRANDT. Which comes with one year.

ANNE. A book about that day in Amsterdam.

Pause.

SAMMY. I'm going to remember you forever.

KEVIN. (*Looking out a window.*) Oh, look. It's snowing!

REMBRANDT. On that day, the snow was falling softly in Amsterdam.

VINCENT. On that day, the snow was falling *heavily* in Amsterdam.

ANNE. In Amsterdam, the snow fell.

REMBRANDT. Softly.

VINCENT. *Heavily.*

ANNE. Onto a houseboat.

REMBRANDT. On the Herengracht Canal.

VINCENT. Was it the Prinsengracht Canal?

ANNE. On one of the hundreds of canals that wind their way through the watery city.

The first snowfall of the year.

REMBRANDT. On that day, two young men were in a bed.

VINCENT. One was looking at the other.

ANNE. While the other was looking out the window.

VINCENT. Kevin. Kevin was the one looking out the window.

REMBRANDT. And Sammy was the one looking at Kevin.

SAMMY. I need to tell you something.

I've never been with a guy before.

KEVIN. Last night was your first time?

SAMMY. I've never been with anyone before.

KEVIN. How is that possible?

REMBRANDT. Kevin thought about last night.

VINCENT. Oh, last night!

ANNE. The evening stroll to the Red Light District.

REMBRANDT. The club full of young men.

VINCENT. The throbbing music, the flashing lights, the young men.

ANNE. Among them he saw this particular young man.

REMBRANDT. With whom he exchanged hungry looks.

VINCENT. Or were they awkward looks?

ANNE. At the very least, they gave each other curious looks.

REMBRANDT. Then a smile,

VINCENT. Or was it a wink?

ANNE. When Kevin knew they should approach each other.

REMBRANDT. But after the brush on the shoulder—

VINCENT. A brush on the cheek?

REMBRANDT. Did Kevin make the first move?

VINCENT. Or was it the other young man?

REMBRANDT. There was a furious search for a private place.

VINCENT. Kevin had gone on his phone to find one.

ANNE. That's how they had come to the houseboat.

VINCENT. That was last night.

ANNE. Last night, when the looks and gestures expressed everything. Kevin kept thinking about last night.

VINCENT. How much easier it was last night.

REMBRANDT. How much better it was last night.

ANNE. Than the present moment.

KEVIN. (*Abruptly.*) Last night, you didn't talk as much. That was kind of nice.

I didn't know you spoke so much English.

But that's good, so you'll understand me perfectly when I tell you:

The first time isn't special. Trust me. You won't remember it.

SAMMY. Do you want to get breakfast?

KEVIN. With you?

SAMMY. Yes. That's what people do in the morning.

KEVIN. I told you. I have a flight at eleven.

What time is it?

VINCENT. Sammy checked the time on his phone.

SAMMY. Eight forty-five.

KEVIN. I should go.

I have to catch a train to the airport. Who knows how often they run?

And I've never been to this airport. The security lines?

I can't find my phone.

Sorry. I can't do breakfast.

Where's my phone?

ANNE. They heard a buzzing noise.

REMBRANDT. Which Sammy followed. He found Kevin's phone under the sheets.

SAMMY. Here it is. You set a reminder for your flight. It's at three in the afternoon.

Not eleven.

ANNE. Sammy passed the phone on to Kevin.

KEVIN. In the afternoon?

Sorry, I have a terrible memory.

SAMMY. You can stay a little longer.

REMBRANDT. Kevin's phone buzzed again.

KEVIN. It's a message from the airline.

My flight's delayed because of the snow.

Now it's leaving at night. At ten.

SAMMY. That's great news! I'm leaving tonight too.

KEVIN. That's not great news. I have a connection in London. So that's going to be even later.

I'm going to miss the first day of the semester.

SAMMY. I'm sorry.

But now you have time. For breakfast.

ANNE. One year from that day, when Kevin starts to write his book, he will stumble on this question:

REMBRANDT. Why did he agree to have breakfast with Sammy?

VINCENT. Were Sammy's words that convincing?

ANNE. Sammy's English wasn't very good.

REMBRANDT. In his book Kevin will have to fill in the missing words that Sammy didn't say.

VINCENT. To make sense of the story of that day.

ANNE. What did Sammy say then to make Kevin agree to breakfast?

REMBRANDT. Maybe something that made Kevin feel bad about being unkind.

VINCENT. Maybe something that made Kevin curious to learn more about Sammy.

ANNE. Or maybe Kevin was simply hungry.

REMBRANDT. Kevin will have to go deep in his memory to remember the truth.

ANNE. Which was as simple as this—at that moment, he wasn't able to leave the houseboat. There was a knock at the door.

Anne becomes Greetje the landlady and enters their space.

ANNE/GREETJE. You can't leave just yet. Breakfast is ready!

REMBRANDT. At that moment, the landlady walked into the room—

VINCENT. Grey-haired, red-nosed, carrying a tray of cheese and bread.

ANNE/GREETJE. I'm sorry. Did I interrupt something? Don't worry. I've seen it all. This is Amsterdam.

KEVIN. (*Like, who are you?*) Hello...

ANNE/GREETJE. I'm Greetje. (*Pronounced like "KHRAY-tyuh," with a phlegmy initial sound.*) This is my boat.

KEVIN. Oh.

ANNE/GREETJE. You booked so late last night, I didn't have time to say hello. I was drifting off to bed.

KEVIN. Sorry.

ANNE/GREETJE. My room's just on the other side of the door so your noise kept me up most of the night. It sounded wonderful though.

SAMMY. Thank you.

KEVIN. Can you say your name again?

ANNE/GREETJE. Greetje.

KEVIN. (*Mishearing.*) Rachel?

ANNE/GREETJE. Greetje.

KEVIN. (*Mishearing again.*) Horatia?

SAMMY. (*Nailing it.*) Greetje.

ANNE/GREETJE. Exactly!

Dutch names are difficult for foreigners. But he got it.

KEVIN. How do you spell that?

ANNE/GREETJE. (*Saying the letters in Dutch.*) G-R-E-E-T-J-E. Greetje.

KEVIN. (*Still not getting it.*) Of course.

SAMMY. (*Teacher's pet.*) Greetje.

ANNE/GREETJE. Very good!

KEVIN. You are good!

SAMMY. I'm Sammy.

KEVIN. I'm Kevin.

ANNE/GREETJE. Nice to meet you both.

What are your plans for today?

KEVIN. Plans?

ANNE/GREETJE. It's the first snowfall of the year. It's beautiful outside. If you like snow.

I hate the snow.

KEVIN. We didn't have any plans.

SAMMY. We were hoping you'd suggest some.

KEVIN. We were?

ANNE/GREETJE. What are you into?

SAMMY. What's there to see?

ANNE/GREETJE. The normal tourist places: the Anne Frank House, the *Van Gogh* Museum— (*Pronounces "Van Gogh" the Dutch way.*)

KEVIN. The "what" museum?

ANNE/GREETJE. (*Pronouncing it the same way.*) *Van Gogh.*

KEVIN. Sorry. I have no idea what you're saying.

SAMMY. She means (*Pronouncing it the way an American would.*) "Van Gogh."

ANNE/GREETJE. (*To Kevin.*) Oh. You're an American. Yes. The (*Pronouncing it the American way.*) "Van Gogh" Museum.

And then there's the Rembrandt House. And of course, the most important of them all, the national museum of the Dutch people, the Rijksmuseum.

KEVIN. That's a lot of places.

But to be honest, I hate going where tourists go.

ANNE/GREETJE. You're not a tourist?

KEVIN. No.

I'm a traveler.

ANNE/GREETJE. What's the difference?

KEVIN. Well, if you have to ask—

ANNE/GREETJE. I do.

KEVIN. Tourists go where people tell them to go.

Travelers go their own way.

SAMMY. But I want to see those places.

KEVIN. Which ones?

VINCENT. The Van Gogh Museum?

REMBRANDT. The Rembrandt House?

ANNE. The Anne Frank House?

SAMMY. And the most important—

ANNE, VINCENT, and REMBRANDT. The Rijksmuseum?

SAMMY. All of them.

KEVIN. All of them?

SAMMY. Why not?

KEVIN. I only have one day.

I have a flight that leaves tonight.

ANNE/GREETJE. Of course it's impossible to see all of Amsterdam in one day.

But people end up seeing what they need to see.

Both the tourists and the travellers.

The old and the young.

The solo adventurers and the couples in love.

KEVIN. That's very inclusive.

REMBRANDT. In the middle of breakfast, Sammy's phone rang. It was his brother.

SAMMY. Sorry, I have to take this.

Vincent becomes Sammy's brother.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. Sammy?

SAMMY. Oh hey—

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. I called you five times last night. Why didn't you pick up? You get my messages?

SAMMY. I didn't check my phone.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. Why do you have a phone if you don't use it?

SAMMY. I was busy. Calm down.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. The guy with the truck. He's waiting for you to call so he can tell you where to meet him.

You have to call him now.

SAMMY. I know.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. Then why haven't you?

ANNE/GREETJE. So Kevin...

Your credit card doesn't work. It was declined.

Do you have another card?

KEVIN. It's my only card.

It's actually my mom's card. I mean, it's mine. But she pays the bill.

ANNE/GREETJE. That's nice of her.

KEVIN. It's for school expenses. Like food and books.

ANNE/GREETJE. I see.

KEVIN. Not for a trip to Europe.

So she figured it out. Finally.

ANNE/GREETJE. She doesn't know you're here?

KEVIN. Now she does.

ANNE/GREETJE. Will you be paying in cash? That will be three hundred Euros.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. He needs to know you're still going tonight. You're still going, right?

SAMMY. Of course I'm still going. I'm just in the middle of something.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. What's more important? There's nothing for you in Amsterdam. You need to come to England.

It's better here. There's work.

You have to call the guy.

SAMMY. He's not leaving until late tonight. I'll call him later.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. Sammy—

SAMMY. I'm hanging up.

VINCENT/SAMMY'S BROTHER. Sammy!

KEVIN. Three hundred Euros?

Can I pay you when I get home? I only have two hundred in cash.

I'm sorry.

ANNE/GREETJE. I could call the police.

KEVIN. Is that necessary?

I don't want to go to jail.

Especially Dutch jail. I don't know what that's like.

ANNE/GREETJE. It's not necessary that I call the police. It's just a possibility.

I get it. You're young. You're adventurous. You're a traveler.

It's fine. I won't call the police.

KEVIN. It's fine. What do you mean?

ANNE/GREETJE. There's no need to pay.

Enjoy your last day in Amsterdam.

KEVIN. Thank you!

ANNE/GREETJE. Just remember.

KEVIN. Just remember what?

ANNE/GREETJE. That's it. Just remember.

Every single detail. Every single thing you see and hear and smell and feel today.

You don't want to forget anything.

You only have one day.

Kevin finds himself in the future.

REMBRANDT. Two years from that day, Kevin will watch this on the news:

VINCENT. The bodies of two young men wearing wet suits washed up on beaches five hundred miles apart in the Netherlands and in Norway.

ANNE. Their identities were unknown. But the wet suits were the same brand. And came from the same sporting goods store in Northern France.

REMBRANDT. A journalist wanted to know who they were. And so conducted interviews at the refugee camp near the tunnel to England.

VINCENT. He learned the men in wet suits were Shadi Omar Kataf and Mouaz Al Balkhi. They had both come from Syria.

ANNE. Mouaz Al Balkhi, twenty-two, had lived with his middle-class family in Damascus and studied to become an electrical engineer.

REMBRANDT. As the civil war intensified, he decided to flee with his family into Jordan.

VINCENT. His father had problems finding work and Mouaz could not study.

ANNE. Unsuccessful, he headed toward his uncle in England—via Algeria, Libya, Italy, and France.

REMBRANDT. After twelve failed attempts to cross the English Channel inside trucks, his friend Shadi convinced him to try desperate measures. They both put on wet suits and walked into the sea.

VINCENT. The currents were too strong. They didn't know.

ANNE. Kevin will watch this on the news two years from that day in Amsterdam.

REMBRANDT. Kevin will ask himself if this was Sammy.

ANNE. It couldn't have been Sammy.

REMBRANDT. Swim across the English Channel? Sammy would never be that foolish.

VINCENT. And Sammy never mentioned he wanted to be an electrical engineer.

REMBRANDT. Since Kevin never asked him what he studied.

ANNE. And two years from that day, Kevin will still be writing his book.

Kevin is now back in that day, outside the houseboat. Sammy is standing there. Kevin is wearing a coat appropriate for the weather. Sammy is not.

REMBRANDT. On that day in Amsterdam, Kevin stepped out of the houseboat.

ANNE. Sammy stood on the sidewalk, under the snow, looking like he had a lot to say.

SAMMY. You finally came outside.

KEVIN. You're still here.

SAMMY. I waited for you.

KEVIN. You didn't have to.

VINCENT. Kevin was ready to say goodbye.

KEVIN. Goodbye.

SAMMY. Goodbye?

KEVIN. Also, thank you. Thank you for last night.

SAMMY. Didn't you want to spend the day together?

Go to all those museums? See art? That's what we were talking about with the old lady?

KEVIN. To be funny.

SAMMY. To be funny?

KEVIN. She thought we were a couple.

SAMMY. That's funny?

KEVIN. I thought so.

We got to have breakfast together.

That's what you wanted, right?

So have a nice day.

ANNE. And Kevin walked away.

REMBRANDT. Then Kevin stopped.

VINCENT. He saw Sammy standing still in the same spot, under-dressed for the weather.

ANNE. And for a while, neither of them moved a single step.

REMBRANDT. Then Sammy took out his phone. And took a photo. Of Kevin.

ANNE. And neither of them moved a single step.

VINCENT. Then Sammy started taking pictures of the snow.

ANNE. Of the houses.

REMBRANDT. Of the canals.

VINCENT. Of the bicycles.

ANNE. All covered in snow.

KEVIN. Did you take a picture of me?

SAMMY. I did.

KEVIN. I hate getting my picture taken.

Why did you do that?

SAMMY. To remember you.

KEVIN. Standing in the snow?

SAMMY. I want to remember the snow.

KEVIN. Let me guess. This is the first time you've ever seen snow?

SAMMY. I've seen snow many times.

I just like how it makes everything quiet. Like everything's at peace.

KEVIN. Aren't you cold?

SAMMY. It's quiet.

I forgot what that's like.

VINCENT. Kevin wondered if Sammy was cold.

For the first time that day, Kevin wondered what was going on in Sammy's mind.

How could he not be cold?

ANNE. No. He wasn't cold.

REMBRANDT. Or was Sammy at peace?

VINCENT. A peace he hadn't felt in a long time?

REMBRANDT. And then—

ANNE. A few feet away, in the water—

VINCENT. A white streak.

Kevin turned. And watched as a lone swan alighted from the canal.

REMBRANDT. Sammy saw it too.

ANNE. The two young men watched the white bird, magnificent, soar into the snowy heavens.

REMBRANDT. Rembrandt van Rijn once saw a lone swan arise from that same spot one snowy winter.

ANNE. Anne Frank once saw a lone swan arise from that same spot one snowy winter.

VINCENT. Vincent van Gogh once saw a lone swan arise from that same spot one snowy winter.

REMBRANDT. And Sammy pointed his phone at the swan, and took a photo.

VINCENT. And the swan was gone.

ANNE. It was beautiful.

REMBRANDT. And the two young men looked at the photo on the phone.

KEVIN. Wow.

That's a great photo.

SAMMY. Thanks.

KEVIN. The way it's framed. The colors. How you captured the wings like that. Wow.

ANNE. It was a great photo.

REMBRANDT. It was beautiful.

VINCENT. It was perfect.

ANNE. They kept looking at the photo on the phone.

REMBRANDT. Until Kevin returned to his earlier thought.

KEVIN. Aren't you cold?

SAMMY. No.

KEVIN. You need a coat.

SAMMY. There's not much I can do about that.

KEVIN. You can get one.

SAMMY. I'm just going to get a coat? Like right now?

KEVIN. Yes, you can go to a store and get one.

SAMMY. I don't have any money on me.

KEVIN. You don't have any money?

Sammy shakes his head.

I can buy you a coat.

SAMMY. No.

I don't need your pity.

KEVIN. I'm not giving you pity.

I'm just getting you a coat.

Look. I know you're cold. So—why don't we start walking?

Maybe we'll find a coat. Somewhere. Like, on the ground.

SAMMY. Okay.

ANNE. The two young men walked along the Prinsengracht Canal.

VINCENT. Where there was no coat to be found.

ANNE. The two young men walked along the Herengracht Canal.

VINCENT. There were no coats there either.

ANNE. The two young men walked along the Keizersgracht Canal.

REMBRANDT. And there was a clothing shop.

KEVIN. You know what? *I* need to buy a new coat.

I hate mine. The stitching is coming apart and the color's faded.

SAMMY. What are you talking about? That's a great coat.

KEVIN. I'm tired of it.

I'm buying a new coat.

VINCENT. And using some of the Euros he had left, Kevin bought himself the cheapest coat in the store.

REMBRANDT. And gave his old one to Sammy.

KEVIN. You can have this one.

SAMMY. I can't take that.

KEVIN. I don't need it anymore. You just said it's a great coat.

SAMMY. I did?

KEVIN. You did.

SAMMY. Are you sure?

KEVIN. I hate that coat so much.

ANNE. And Sammy took the coat.

SAMMY. Thank you.

REMBRANDT. And they stepped back outside.

SAMMY. Now you look cold.

KEVIN. I'm fine.

So are you good?

The play doesn't end here...

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