

Edward Albee's

AT HOME AT THE ZOO

A PLAY

- 1) Homelife
- 2) The Zoo Story

“An essential and heartening experience . . . If HOMELIFE is an openhanded slap, THE ZOO STORY is a gut punch with a closed fist. Edward Albee is a voice unparalleled in American theater.”

—Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*

“I’ve been to
the zoo.”

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How *The Zoo Story* Became a Two-Act Play

How did *The Zoo Story* become a two-act play? It's really very simple: it always had been; I just hadn't told myself. When I wrote *The Zoo Story* in 1958 it was my first play, so to speak. Oh, I'd made a few attempts—including an embarrassing two-act play in rhymed couplets—but nothing pleased me. No, I must be fair—it was junk, all of it.

The Zoo Story seemed to me to be a much better piece—in fact, the first I felt had any individuality and merit. It would seem I was right. It has gone on to have—at this writing—49 years of frequent performance and general acceptance.

And ... I thought it was fine, though it nagged me just a bit that it seemed to be not quite a two-character play—Jerry being so much longer a role—but more a one-and-a-half-character one. But the play “worked,” so why worry?

Six years ago, however, I said to myself, “There's a first act here somewhere which will flesh out Peter fully and make the subsequent balance better.”

Almost before I knew it, *Homelife* fell from my mind to the page ... *intact*. There was the Peter I had always known—a full three-dimensional person and—wow!—here was Ann, his wife, whom I must have imagined deep down, forty-some years ago, but hadn't brought to consciousness.

So ... here it is—the entire play as I'm sure I must have conceived it all that time past. Enjoy.

—EDWARD ALBEE
New York City, 2007

AT HOME AT THE ZOO received its world premiere by Hartford Stage Company (Michael Wilson, Artistic Director; Chris Baker, Associate Artistic Director; James D. Ireland, Managing Director) opening on June 6, 2004. It was directed by Pam MacKinnon; the set design was by Jeff Cowie; the costume design was by Jess Goldstein; the lighting design was by Howell Binkley; the assistant director was Kanthe Tabor; the assistant lighting designer was Rob White; the production stage manager was Carmelita Becnel; the assistant stage manager was Melissa Spengler; and the production manager was Deb Vandergrift. The cast was as follows:

ANN Johanna Day
PETER Frank Wood
JERRY Frederick Weller

AT HOME AT THE ZOO was produced by Second Stage Theatre (Carole Rothman, Artistic Director; Ellen Richard, Executive Director; Christopher Burney, Associate Artistic Director) in New York City, opening on November 11, 2007. It was directed by Pam MacKinnon; the set design was by Neel Patel; the costume design was by Theresa Squire; the lighting design was by Kevin Adams; the assistant set designer was Lara Fabian; the assistant costume designer was Jessica Wegener; the production stage manager was C.A. Clark; the stage manager was Annette Verga-Lagier; and the production manager was Jeff Wild. The cast was as follows:

ANN Johanna Day
PETER Bill Pullman
JERRY Dallas Roberts

ACT ONE—HOMELIFE

CHARACTERS

PETER: 45. Bland; not heavy; pleasant, if uninteresting looking. Tidy; circumspect. Wears glasses to read.

ANN: 38; his wife. Tall, a bit angular; pleasant-looking, unexceptional.

PLACE

Their living room; New York City, East Side, Seventies. Pleasant; a little Danish-modernish, maybe. Exit to the apartment off hallway stage-right. Exit to kitchen off hallway stage-left-ish.

TIME

One P.M. A Sunday.

ACT TWO—THE ZOO STORY

CHARACTERS

PETER: As above.

JERRY: Late thirties; not poorly dressed, but carelessly. What was once a trim and lightly muscular body has begun to go to fat; and while he is no longer handsome, it is evident that he once was. His fall from physical grace should not suggest debauchery; he has, to come closest to it, a greyness and weariness.

PLACE

Central Park, New York City. There are two park benches. Behind them: foliage, trees, sky.

TIME

Later that same Sunday.

ACT ONE

HOMELIFE

PETER *alone, reading, a book, a textbook probably. He is absorbed; turns a page, frowns, turns back, rereads something, turns forward again. Repeats this.* ANN *comes in from the hall to the kitchen, a towel in her hand. No rush. Intention non-evident. She comes up behind PETER—not too close. He does not notice her.*

ANN

We should talk.

(Waits; no reply; turns, exits whence.)

PETER

(After she goes—recognizing he had heard her.)

What? We should—what?

(Louder.)

We should what?!

ANN *(Offstage.)*

What?

(Reentering.)

We should *what?*

PETER

We should *what?*

ANN

Oh.

(Slight pause.)

We should talk.

(Wipes her hands with the towel.)

PETER *(Indicates book.)*

I was reading. I'm sorry.

ANN *(Bemused.)*

It happens so often.

PETER *(A little defensive.)*

Sorry.

ANN

No; that's not what I meant.

PETER (*Confused.*)

What!

ANN

You read so ... you get so involved—reading—more all the time.

PETER (*Smiles.*)

“Deepening concentration.” Deepened concentration. Work.

ANN (*Recalling.*)

Once I talked to you for ... it seemed *minutes* ... about—oh, what?—the fireplace, I think, and you didn't hear a word. You were reading.

PETER (*A little unhappy.*)

The ears turn off—out, rather.

(*Tiny pause.*)

The fireplace? Really?

ANN

The andirons.

PETER

What was wrong? With *them*—with the andirons.

ANN (*Shrugs; stays standing.*)

Nothing really. I was wondering if I should clean them; if I should wash them.

PETER (*Book down.*)

Why?

ANN

What.

PETER

Why you should wash them.

ANN

Well, I'd noticed the fire'd made them all grey and sort of matte, and I wondered if we liked that.

PETER

Had we? Liked that?

ANN (*Moving to something.*)

I don't know; we never had the conversation; you never heard me; we never talked about it.

PETER (*Brow furrows a little.*)

What did you do—about the andirons?

ANN

I scrubbed them.

PETER (*Tiny pause.*)

Ah.

ANN

And then they got all matte again—all grey.

PETER

(*Reaches for her hand.*)

I'm sorry; I get so ...

ANN (*Nice.*)

It doesn't matter.

PETER

... involved. I guess it goes faster that way. What are you doing with the towel?

ANN

(*Looks at it; realizes something.*)

Oh!

(*Exits.*)

PETER

(*Not realizing she's gone; indicates book.*)

When it's very important and very boring—like this—well, you've seen me go into like a trance? That way I don't get to think "this is so boring I can't do it." It's important. It's probably the most important boring book we've ever done.

(*Thinks.*)

Well ... *maybe*. It's hard to tell; there are so many—so important, so boring.

(*Sees she's gone.*)

Where *are* you? *Ann*?

ANN

(*Reemerges, without towel.*)

That was close.

PETER

What was?

ANN

Hard-boiled spinach.

PETER

Really? Can you *do* that?

ANN (*Shakes her head.*)

We'll never know. "If you're going to cook, stay with the stove"—at least in the same room.

PETER

Or microwave.

ANN

I've decided I don't *like* microwaves. It's hard to get in there and ... stir around; you have to *try* what you're doing.

PETER

Can't you ... stop the thing and open it up and ...

ANN

Yes, of course you can, but it seems like cheating.

PETER

Why do we have two of them?

ANN (*Sudden, bright laugh.*)

We have two of everything.

PETER (*Pause.*)

We do?

ANN

One for the kids.

PETER

Do *they* use the microwave?

ANN (*Laughs.*)

Where do you *live*? Have you never *been* in the kitchen?

PETER (*False deliberation.*)

Uh ... twice as I remember.

ANN

Of *course* they use the microwave—all the time.

PETER

I guess I'm the only one who doesn't.

ANN

Well, I doubt the cats do, though they *are bright*.

PETER (*Wistful.*)

I want a dog.

ANN (*Fact.*)

No you don't.

PETER (*Fact.*)

No I don't.

ANN

What's the book?

PETER (*A kind of litany.*)

It's the most boring book we've ever published.

ANN (*Delighted.*)

Really! What an advertising gimmick ... "the most boring book we've ever published and you know our reputation!"

PETER

... *and* probably the most important.

ANN (*An echo.*)

... "*and* probably the most important."

PETER

As textbooks go it'll most likely make us rich—the company, anyway.

ANN

What's it about?

PETER (*Shaking his head.*)

You really don't want to know.

ANN (*Smiles; persists.*)

What's it *about*?

PETER (*Looks.*)

About seven hundred pages. I can barely *lift* it much less read it, but I do have to read it, so ...
(*Shrugs.*)

ANN

~~Before I married you my mother said to me, “Why ever would you want to marry a man publish textbooks?”~~

PETER (*Smiles.*)

She did not.

ANN

Well, she could have, and maybe she did. “Why ever would you want to marry a man publish textbooks?” “Gee, Ma, *I* don’t know—seems like fun.”

PETER

I thought your family liked me.

ANN

They *do*. “He’s a good, solid man,” Dad said. I’ve told you this. “None of this ... fly-by-night fiction stuff.”

PETER (*Laughs.*)

“Fly-by-night.” What does that *mean*? Bats? And how does it relate to fiction?

ANN

I made it up. He never said it. Look it up.

PETER

What?

ANN

Fly-by-night.

PETER

Hmmm. Maybe I will.

ANN

Or have one of your researchers do it. Is it really that boring? “The most boring etc.?”

PETER (*Thinks; concludes.*)

Yes; except maybe Trollope’s *Autobiography*—*which* we didn’t publish, naturally.

ANN

I never read it.

PETER

Very few have ... all the way through. I tried: it kept falling out of my hands.

(*Reconsiders.*)

Well ... slipping.

ANN (*Pats him.*)

This is your party thing; this Trollope thing; you do this at parties.

PETER (*Genuine.*)

I do?!

ANN

Lots.

PETER

I didn't *know!*

ANN

Doesn't matter. Makes you look smart and funny, which you are *anyway.*

PETER (*Embarrassed.*)

I'm *sorry.*

ANN

It's a *good* one! Keep it; it's a keeper.

PETER (*A little sarcastic.*)

Thanks!

(Moving on.)

Anyway, next time you have trouble falling asleep—*try* it.

(Lifts the book.)

Or this.

ANN

Thanks.

(Ironic.)

If I ever have trouble sleeping.

PETER (*Pause.*)

Hm? What?

ANN

If I ever have trouble sleeping—she said ironically.

PETER (*Slight pause.*)

I see you, leaving bed—before dawn—when you think I'm asleep.

ANN

Do you?

PETER

Yes. Why?

ANN

Don't you ever worry? You don't say "Why can't you sleep? Where are you going? What is it you want?"

PETER

You come *back*; I assume you're ... about your business.

ANN (*Small smile.*)

My nighttime business. My pre-dawn business.

PETER

I'm *sorry*; perhaps ...

ANN (*Not accusatory.*)

For all *you* know I could go out in my nightdress, down in the elevator, out the door, down Seventy-fourth Street, to the corner; stand there; scream.

PETER (*Reasonable.*)

You could: yes; but you wouldn't.

ANN

... or *get* there, strip off completely, lie down, spread my legs to the night—the pre-dawn.

(*Pause.*)

No, I *wouldn't*, *would* I.

PETER (*Smiles.*)

No; you wouldn't.

ANN

Some night, get up; follow me. You've never done it? Followed me?

PETER

No.

ANN

All these years?

PETER

No; it's something people do—get up.

ANN

Who are all these people? People you've slept with?

PETER

No! It's what people *do*. Where do you go?

ANN

~~Some night, get up; follow me. To the kitchen, usually; a cup of tea.~~

(Dreamy.)

One night I sat for an hour ... and I thought about having my breasts cut off.

PETER

Where!?

ANN

In the kitchen.

PETER *(Puts book down; laughs.)*

You didn't!

ANN

No? Over twenty percent of us get breast cancer, and over fifty percent of those of us do die of it. What better way to avoid it if you're young enough.

PETER

Are you?

ANN

I don't *know*. Probably. Probably *not*.

PETER *(A little hurt.)*

You would *tell* me, wouldn't you?

ANN

What?

PETER

If you were thinking of it ... seriously.

ANN *(You imbecile!)*

No! I'd go to some clinic where they do that sort of thing on the fly—or the fly-by-night—and I'd go in and I'd say "Hello, I'd like to have my breasts cut off, please, prophylactic, and all, and don't tell my hubby."

PETER *(A little embarrassed.)*

Do you think there *are* women do that?

ANN *(Very matter of fact.)*

There are women do anything.

PETER

Everything?

ANN

Either; both.

PETER

You were really *thinking* of doing that?

ANN

I was thinking about thinking about it—about what it would be like to think about it, about doing it.

PETER

Ah.

ANN

Once you hear of an idea you never know where it will lodge itself, when it will move from something learned to something ... *considerable*, something you *might* think about, which is not far from *being* thought about, if you wanted to, or *needed* to.

PETER (*A sad truth.*)

We all die of *something*.

ANN

Sooner or later.

PETER

Yes, but ...

ANN

Yes, but! Oh, you *do* love pedantry so ... dying of *not* doing something can be carelessness!

PETER (*Appalled.*)

Having your breasts cut off can be called *care*?!

ANN (*Thinks about it.*)

An extreme case; yes.

PETER

Only a crazy person.

ANN

Then there are lots of loonies around.

PETER

No one.

ANN (*Slowly; articulated.*)

Ma ... ny.

PETER

Only a crazy person.

ANN (*Shrugs.*)

Have it your way.

(*Laughs; a sudden remembering.*)

I remember the night I thought about thinking about it. My mother had called me that day and told me she's decided to have an affair with somebody.

PETER

(*Not displeased; maybe just happy to be on another subject.*)

She *did*?! Who?!

ANN

I don't know—somebody.

PETER

Yes, but you said ...

ANN

I said she told me—why are we moving this conversation away from me, by the way, away from something that concerns *me*?—that she'd decided to have an affair with somebody.

PETER

Yes!

ANN

And of course I asked *who*—who are you going to have this affair *with*?

PETER

Of course.

ANN

Not necessarily. I might not have wanted to pry—or to know.

PETER

Yes, that's possible.

ANN

But I *did*: I *did* want to pry or know ... and so I did.

PETER (*Shy.*)

Pry?

ANN

Ask. Who are you going to have an affair *with*, I said—casual-like. Hm?

PETER

And ...?

ANN

And she said she didn't know; she hadn't decided, or maybe she hadn't met the person.

PETER

The man.

ANN

Not *necessarily*. All she knew was that she'd decided to have an affair with somebody. She didn't know *who*.

PETER

It just seemed like a good idea?!

ANN

Yes; or so she thought. "Does it seem like a good idea?" I asked her. "I assume it does." "Well, not necessarily," she said. "It might be something *bad* I want—of course for reasons I haven't figured out yet." "You get more complex with age," I told her. "Like cheese," she smiled. I think. "Something *bad* might be a good idea in that case," I said. "Yes," she said. "Isn't life odd?"

PETER

Like hacking off your breasts.

ANN

Having them hacked off.

PETER

Yes; sorry.

ANN

We're back on *that*, are we?

PETER

Well, it's—did her telling you lead you to your breast thing, in some weird, convoluted female way? Her telling you about wanting to have an affair lead you to contemplating having your ...?

ANN

"Weird, convoluted female way?" Who *are* you?

PETER

Sorry. *Did* it?

ANN

What, lead me to contemplating it? No, I don't think so. Though maybe. Maybe if I had no breasts the likelihood of having an affair—if I were planning to have one—would be ... well, I was going to be diminished.

PETER

Why not! Why *not* say diminished?

ANN

Well; probably; yes, though there *are* people around ...

PETER

... who like that sort of thing?—lack of thing, of something?

(*Feels his own.*)

“Breastlessness?!”

ANN (*Chuckles.*)

There are people like everything—anything.

(*Peter chuckles, too.*)

PETER

Symmetry! God, I love symmetry.

(*Serious.*)

Are you ... planning something?

ANN

You mean beyond dinner? Beyond feeding the cats—and the rest of the menagerie?

PETER

Yes.

ANN

Beyond *thinking* about thinking about something?

PETER

Yes.

ANN (*Shrugs.*)

Oh, *I* don't know. Like what? Like having an affair—like mother like daughter? I hope not. I hope I'm not thinking about that.

PETER (*Shy.*)

Me, too.

ANN

You, too, what? You hope *I'm* not, or you hope *you're* not?

PETER (*Sad smile.*)

Either; both.

ANN (*Straight.*)

Me, too.

(Pause.)

The nights *are* strange—you asleep; I *look* at you—unconscious, lost to the world, as they say.

PETER (*Smiles.*)

Temporarily.

ANN

Ah, well. I look at you—deep asleep, not dreaming.

(*Suddenly more enthusiastic.*)

Did you know that when you sleep you're paralyzed? In *deep* sleep, I mean, not the dreaming, but *deep* sleep, your body is entirely paralyzed, except for the automatic stuff?, the breathing?, the heart? Just a fraction of one ear, so you can hear doom sneaking up, I guess—and something else, I can't remember what. You're entirely paralyzed?

PETER (*Fact.*)

Yes; I knew that.

ANN (*Surprised; disappointed.*)

You *did*?!

PETER

Yes; we published that book on sleep. Keep up.

ANN

Damn!

PETER

Sort of a sleeper.

(*Nudge.*)

Joke?

ANN

Damn. What? Yes: joke.

PETER

What's the other thing? The other part? I don't remember.

ANN

What?

PETER

A part of one toe?

ANN

A fraction of *something*.

PETER

What? *Come on.*

ANN

I don't remember. Keep up! Your *dick*, probably.

PETER

Hunh! I doubt it.

ANN

No mind of its own? No automatic ... whatever?

PETER

I think ...

(Stops.)

ANN *(Engaged.)*

What! You think what!

PETER *(Pause; shakes his head.)*

No.

ANN *(Pleased; teasing.)*

Come on!

PETER

No, now.

ANN

I won't tell anyone.

PETER

Well ... I think my circumcision is going away.

(ANN: long, slow facial response; giggles ending in guffaws. PETER rises, moves to leave the room.)

All right! All right!

ANN *(Coming down from it.)*

No, now! Wait!

(He pauses.)

Wait. You think ... what?

(Giggles again.)

You think your circumcision is doing *what*?

(Chuckles.)

PETER

It's not *funny!*

ANN (*Sober face.*)

No; of course not.
(*Guffaws.*)

PETER (*Shutting down.*)

All right! That's it!

ANN (*A hand out.*)

No, no: I'm sorry.

PETER (*A silence, then very objective.*)

I think my circumcision is ... going away.
(*Sits.*)

ANN

My goodness!
(*Stifles laugh.*)

PETER

Please?

ANN

Sorry.

PETER

You may not have noticed.

ANN

Well, no; certainly if I had I would have noticed—that I *had*.

PETER

It's just that ... when I ... take it out to pee—my penis?

ANN (*Holding on.*)

Yes; I gathered.

PETER

... the foreskin looks to be ... coming over the ridge of the, you know. The glans ... just a little.

ANN (*No comment.*)

My goodness.

PETER

And when I'm sitting on the bed—when I'm naked?—I look down and it looks even more so, more the glans seems covered.

ANN (*No comment.*)

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