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THE ZOO STORY

by Edward Albee

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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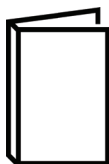
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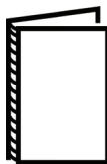


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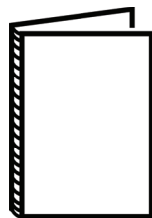
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THE ZOO STORY

First presented by Richard Barr, H B Lutz and Harry Joe Brown Jr, under the auspices of Theatre 1960, at the Provincetown Playhouse in New York City on 14th January 1960, with the following cast:

PETER

William Daniels

JERRY

George Maharis

Directed by Milton Kattselas

Set and Lighting by William Ritman

First UK production was at The Arts Theatre, London, on 25th August 1960, with the following cast:

PETER

Peter Sallis

JERRY

Kenneth Haigh

Directed by Henry Kaplan

CHARACTERS

PETER, early 40s

JERRY, late 30s

The action of the play takes place in Central Park, New York,
on a Sunday afternoon in summer

Time: the present

Central Park, New York, on a Sunday afternoon in summer.

There are two park benches, one left centre and one right centre facing the audience.

Behind them: foliage, trees, sky.

When the curtain rises, PETER is seated on the bench right centre, reading a book. He is in his early forties, neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely. He wears tweeds, smokes a pipe and has horn-rimmed glasses. Although he is moving into middle-age, his dress and his manner would suggest a man younger. He stops reading, cleans his glasses then resumes reading.

JERRY enters left and crosses to centre. He is in his late thirties, not poorly dressed, but carelessly. What was once a trim and lightly muscled 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 great weariness.

JERRY I've been to the Zoo.

PETER *does not notice.*

I said, "I've been to the Zoo". (*Loudly*) Mister, I've been to the Zoo.

PETER (*looking up*) Hm? What? I'm sorry, were you talking to me?

JERRY I went to the Zoo, and then I walked until I came here. Have I been walking north?

PETER (*puzzled*) North? Why—I—I think so. Let me see...

JERRY (*pointing out front*) Is that Fifth Avenue?

PETER Why yes; yes, it is.

JERRY And what is that cross street there; that one, to the right?

PETER That? Oh, that's Seventy-fourth Street.

JERRY And the Zoo is around Sixty-fifth Street; so, I've been walking north.

PETER (*anxious to get back to his reading*) Yes; it would seem so.

JERRY Good old north.

PETER (*lightly; by reflex*) Ha, ha!

JERRY (*after a slight pause*) But not due north.

PETER I—well, no, not due north; but we—call it north. It's northerly.

JERRY *watches as PETER, anxious to dismiss him, prepares his pipe.*

JERRY Well, boy; *you're* not going to get lung cancer, are you?

PETER *looks up, a little annoyed, then smiles.*

PETER No, sir. Not from this.

JERRY No, sir. What you'll probably get is cancer of the mouth, and then you'll have to wear one of those things Freud wore after they took one whole side of his jaw away. What do they call those things?

PETER (*uncomfortably*) A prosthesis? (*He lights his pipe*)

JERRY The very thing! A prosthesis. You're an educated man, aren't you? Are you a doctor?

PETER Oh, no; no. I read about it somewhere; *Time* magazine, I think. (*He turns to his book*)

JERRY Well, *Time* magazine isn't for blockheads.

PETER (*looking up*) No, I suppose not.

JERRY (*after a pause*) Boy, I'm glad that's Fifth Avenue there.

PETER (*vaguely*) Yes.

JERRY I don't like the west side of the park much.

PETER Oh? (*Slightly wary, but interested*) Why?

JERRY (*off-handedly*) I don't know.

PETER Oh. (*He returns to his book*)

JERRY *stands for a few seconds, looking at PETER, who finally looks up again, puzzled.*

JERRY Do you mind if we talk?

PETER (*obviously minding*) Why—no, no.

JERRY Yes, you do; you do.

PETER *smiles, puts his book down, taps out his pipe and puts it in his pocket.*

PETER No, really; I don't mind.

JERRY Yes, you do.

PETER (*finally decided*) No; I don't mind at all, really.

JERRY It's—it's a nice day.

PETER *stares unnecessarily at the sky.*

PETER Yes. Yes, it is; lovely.

JERRY I've been to the Zoo.

PETER Yes, I think you said so—didn't you?

JERRY I bet you've got TV, haven't you?

PETER Why, yes, we have two; one for the children.

JERRY You're married!

PETER (*with pleased emphasis*) Why, certainly.

JERRY It isn't a law, for God's sake.

PETER No—no, of course not.

JERRY And you have a wife.

PETER (*bewildered by the seeming lack of communication*) Yes.

JERRY And you have children.

PETER Yes; two.

JERRY Boys?

PETER No, girls—both girls.

JERRY But you wanted boys.

PETER Well—naturally, every man wants a son, but...

JERRY (*lightly mocking*) But that's the way the cookie crumbles?

PETER (*annoyed*) I wasn't going to say that.

JERRY And you're not going to have any more kids, are you?

PETER (*a bit distantly*) No. No more. (*Then back, and irksome*)
Why did you say that? How would you know about that?

JERRY The way you cross your legs, perhaps; something in the voice. Or maybe I'm just guessing. Is it your wife?

PETER (*furiously*) That's none of your business! (*He pauses*)
Do you understand?

JERRY *nods.*

(*quietly*) Well, you're right. We'll have no more children.

JERRY (*softly*) That is the way the cookie crumbles.

PETER (*forgiving*) Yes—I guess so.

JERRY Do you mind if I ask you questions?

PETER Oh, not really.

JERRY I'll tell you why I do it; I don't talk to many people—
except to say like: "Give me a beer," or "Where's the john?"

or “What time does the picture go on?” or “Keep your hands to yourself, buddy”. You know—things like that.

PETER I must say I don’t...

JERRY But every once in a while I like to talk to somebody, really *talk*; like to get to know somebody, know all about him.

PETER (*lightly laughing; still a little uncomfortable*) And am I the guinea-pig for today?

JERRY On a sun-drenched Sunday afternoon—like this? Who better than a nice married man with two daughters and—uh—a dog?

PETER *shakes his head.*

No? Two dogs.

PETER *shakes his head.*

Hm! No dogs?

PETER *shakes his head, sadly.*

Oh, that’s a shame. But you look like an animal man. Cats?

PETER *nods ruefully.*

Cats! But, that can’t be your idea. No, sir. Your wife and daughters?

PETER *nods.*

Is there anything else I should know?

PETER *has to clear his throat.*

PETER There are—there are two parakeets. One—one for each of my daughters.

JERRY Birds.

PETER My daughters keep them in a cage in their bedroom.

JERRY Do they carry disease? The birds.

PETER I don't believe so.

JERRY That's too bad. If they did you could set them loose in the house and the cats could eat them and die, maybe.

PETER *looks blank for a moment, then laughs.*

And what else? What do you do to support your enormous household?

PETER I—uh—I have an executive position with a—a small publishing house. We—uh—we publish textbooks.

JERRY That sounds nice; very nice. What do you make?

PETER *(still cheerful)* Now, look here...

JERRY Oh, come on.

PETER Well, I make around two hundred thousand a year, but I don't carry more than forty dollars at any one time—in case you're a—a hold-up man—ha, ha, ha.

JERRY *(ignoring the above)* Where do you live?

PETER *is reluctant to say.*

Oh, look; I'm not going to rob you, and I'm not going to kidnap your parakeets, your cats, or your daughters.

PETER *(too loudly)* I live between Lexington and Third Avenue, on Seventy-fourth Street.

JERRY That wasn't so hard, was it?

PETER I didn't mean to seem—uh—it's that you don't really carry on a conversation; you just ask questions. And I'm—I'm normally—uh—reticent. Why do you just stand there?

JERRY Say, what's the dividing line between upper-middle-middle- class and lower-upper-middle-class?

PETER My dear fellow, I...

JERRY Don't "My dear fellow" me.

PETER (*unhappily*) Was I patronizing? I believe I was; I'm sorry. But, you see, your question about the classes bewildered me.

JERRY And when you're bewildered you become patronizing?

PETER I—I don't express myself too well sometimes. (*He attempts a joke on himself*) I'm in publishing, not writing.

JERRY (*amused; but not at the humour*) So be it. The truth is: I was being patronizing.

PETER Oh, now; you needn't say that.

It is at this point that JERRY may begin to move about the stage with slowly increasing determination and authority, but pacing himself, so that the subsequent long speech about the dog comes at the high point of the arc.

JERRY All right. Who are your favourite writers? Baudelaire and Stephen King?

PETER (*warily*) Well, I like a great many writers; I have a considerable—catholicity of taste, if I may say so. Those two men are fine, each in his way. (*Warming up*) Baudelaire, of course—uh—is by far the finer of the two, but Stephen King has a place—in our—uh—national...

JERRY Skip it!

PETER I... Sorry.

JERRY Do you know what I did before I went to the Zoo today? I walked all the way up Fifth Avenue from Washington Square; all the way.

PETER Oh; you live in the Village? (*This seems to enlighten him*)

JERRY No, I don't. I took the subway down to the Village so I could walk all the way up Fifth Avenue to the Zoo. It's one of those things a person has to do; sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly.

PETER (*almost pouting*) Oh, I thought you lived in the Village.

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