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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

Acting Edition

How The Light Gets In

by E. M. Lewis

SAMUEL FRENCH

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How The Light Gets In was developed at Boston Court Pasadena in its New Play Festival and at Chatauqua Theater Company. The play had its world premiere at Boston Court Pasadena in 2019 with Jessica Kubzansky as Artistic Director. The production was directed by Emilie Pascale Beck, Scenic Designer Tesshi Nakagawa, Costume Designer Ann Closs-Farley, Lighting Designer Sarah Resch, Sound Designer Jack Arky, Properties Designer Jenny Smith Cohn & Jess Soto, Assistant Director Dyoni Isom, Casting Director Julia Flores, Production Stage Manager Trixie Eunhae Hong. The cast was as follows:

GRACE WHEELER . . . . . Amy Sloan
HARUKI SAKAMOTO . . . . . Ryun Yu
KAT LANE . . . . . Chelsea Kurtz
TOMMY Z . . . . . Dieterich Gray

How The Light Gets In received the 2020 Harold and Mimi Steinberg New Play Award from the American Theater Critics Association.

CHARACTERS

GRACE WHEELER – (F/46) – A travel writer who has never been anywhere. She volunteers as a docent at the Japanese Garden (but she isn't Japanese).

HARUKI SAKAMOTO – (M/52) – An architect who specializes in creating buildings set in natural spaces. Japanese.

KAT LANE – (F/17) – A young runaway. She wears lots of layers of clothes that obscure her gender. Hollow-eyed and wary.

TOMMY Z – (M/39) – A tattoo artist. Rough and dangerous-looking at first glance, but big-hearted. Has a special gift of seeing a person clearly, and drawing just the right thing on their skin.

SETTING

A clean, open space that will become all the locations in the play – a hospital, Grace's house, a tattoo parlor, a highway overpass.

A wooden bench, set under the graceful drape of a weeping willow tree's branches in the Japanese Garden, is the only thing that stays in the space throughout.

Light and sound will carry us everywhere we need to go.

TIME

Present day.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The actors playing Kat and Tommy Z will also play a variety of other characters, as indicated.

(When the lights come up, **GRACE**, **HARUKI**, **TOMMY Z** *and* **KAT** *are all on stage.)*

*(***KAT** *and* **TOMMY** *look out at the audience for a moment.* **KAT** *turns to* **TOMMY**, *who gives her an encouraging look. She takes a deep breath.)*

KAT. Once upon a time...

TOMMY Z. Once upon a time? Really?

KAT. All my favorite stories start that way! Stories about handsome princes and fairy godmothers and dragons and witches and wolves.

TOMMY Z. This isn't a fairy tale.

KAT. This is a story about a girl who is lost in the woods, and the people who find her.

*(***TOMMY** *shakes his head, unconvinced. Then he offers a completely new beginning, with a classic comic book flair.)*

TOMMY Z. In a dark time, in a dark place, when the world has fallen into death and chaos, we meet a superhero who has lost his powers.

*(***KAT** *shakes her head, no.)*

KAT. This isn't a story about death and chaos!

TOMMY Z. Are you sure?

KAT. *(Determined.)* This is a love story.

TOMMY Z. A love story?!

*(**KAT** looks out at the audience for a moment, including them.)*

KAT. This is a story about Grace Wheeler, a travel writer who has never been anywhere.

TOMMY Z. And Haruki Sakamoto, a famous architect who can't figure out how to design a simple tea house.

(The light shifts, and suddenly, we are in the Japanese Garden.)

*(**KAT** looks around, appreciating the lush, green peacefulness for a moment.)*

KAT. The story begins here. In the Japanese Garden. Where Grace volunteers as a docent.

*(**KAT** and **TOMMY** give way as **GRACE** steps forward, into her docent self, speaking to the audience, as if they're all on the tour she's been leading.)*

GRACE. Watch your step! The natural stone pathways can be dangerous, if you're not careful.

(Beat.)

Everything here was made to help the visitor slow down, and pay attention. Your reward is the beauty you see in every corner, from the Raked Garden and the Small Koi Bridge to the Moss Temple and the Ishidoro, or Old Stone Lantern.

*(**GRACE** steps to one side.)*

That brings us to the end of our tour! Thank you for joining us here at the Japanese Garden. Don't forget to visit the gift shop before you go!

(Beat.)

One last look! And then | Step gently into the loud | and perilous world.

*(**KAT** moves over toward the weeping willow tree as she says...)*

KAT. On a rainy Thursday, just after she's given a tour of the garden, Grace's cell phone buzzes in her pocket.

*(**KAT** ducks beneath the fronds of the weeping willow tree in the garden, and disappears from sight.)*

TOMMY Z. Bzzz... bzzz... bzzz...

*(**GRACE**'s face changes instantly, as wary now as she was friendly a moment ago.)*

(She's been waiting for this call.)

*(**GRACE** takes the phone out of her pocket, and then hits accept, and puts the phone to her ear.)*

GRACE. Hello...

(She listens.)

Hi. Yes, I've been... I've been waiting for your call.

(She listens. And there is suddenly a terrible stillness about her.)

Okay.

(Pause.)

Okay.

(Pause.)

Okay.

(She listens.)

Okay.

(Pause.)

What happens now?

(She listens, nodding occasionally.)

(Behind **GRACE**, *the dangling branches of the weeping willow tree part as* **KAT** *looks out at her.)*

Okay. Nine o'clock Tuesday.

(**GRACE** *ends the call.)*

(A moment.)

(Then she sits down hard on the bench behind her, like her strings have been cut. Her face is blank.)

*(***KAT** *peers out from the willow tree branches, looking at* **GRACE**... *then steps out from her hiding place, and finds her voice.)*

KAT. Are you okay?

*(***GRACE** *turns and looks up at* **KAT**.*)*

Because you don't look okay.

(A long moment.)

Did someone tell you something bad?

(A moment.)

(Then **GRACE** *nods.)*

I'm sorry.

*(***GRACE** *musters up a smile.)*

GRACE. Thank you.

(Pause.)

I'm okay.

KAT. Okay.

(A long moment.)

You're my favorite talker, of all the talkers.

GRACE. I am?

(Beat; gently.)

We're called 'docents.'

KAT. You have a really pretty way of saying things.

GRACE. Thank you.

KAT. "Step gently into…"

GRACE. The loud and perilous world.

(A moment.)

That's a haiku.

KAT. What's a haiku?

GRACE. It's a kind of poem that –

(Beat.)

Where did you come from?

(After a reluctant moment, **KAT** *points at the weeping willow tree.)*

That's a tree.

*(***KAT** *nods.)*

You were hiding under the tree?

*(***KAT** *nods.)*

For how long?

KAT. Two months.

GRACE. Two months?!

(Beat.)

You've been living here, under the weeping willow tree for two months?

KAT. Is that what you call it?

GRACE. Yes. That's what we call it. Because the branches…

*(***GRACE** *ruffles her fingers through the air, and we hear the sound of water – perhaps from a rain stick – gently falling.)*

KAT. Don't tell anybody.

*(***GRACE** *nods.)*

GRACE. Two months?

KAT. Not steady. Just sometimes. When I can.

(Beat.)

They fixed the fence, so I had to figure out another way in.

GRACE. Now how do you get in?

KAT. I climb down the rocks from the park, over by the waterfall.

*(***TOMMY Z** *gestures toward* **KAT** *and* **GRACE.***)*

TOMMY Z. Grace doesn't tell anyone that Kat is living under the weeping willow tree.

KAT. Which Kat appreciates.

TOMMY Z. She brings Kat homemade soup in little Tupperware containers.

KAT. Which Kat also appreciates.

TOMMY Z. They sit on the bench, in the garden, and talk about things.

*(***GRACE** *makes room for* **KAT** *on the bench. She pulls two little Tupperware containers of homemade soup out of her bag, and offers one to* **KAT***, who opens it immediately and begins to eat.* **GRACE** *sets hers on the bench beside her.)*

GRACE. Do you have a family?

*(***KAT** *doesn't answer.)*

Should I not have asked that?

KAT. It's okay.

(But she still doesn't answer.)

GRACE. Do you go to school?

KAT. No.

GRACE. Why not?

*(***KAT** *doesn't answer.)*

How long have you been on your own?

KAT. A while.

(Pause.)

I don't want to talk about me anymore.

*(***GRACE** *nods.)*

Why are you here?

GRACE. The director of the Garden hired me to write their new marketing brochure. They had this sweet little lady who didn't know anything about marketing, who

had been doing all their marketing. And she was there at my meeting with the director, glaring at me through her little glasses.

(Beat.)

She'd proposed this ridiculous line for their promotional materials.

SWEET LITTLE LADY. *(Voiced by* **TOMMY Z.***)* You'll find what you need at the Japanese Garden.

GRACE. Who would write that? I'd never write that.

(Beat.)

But that night… that night I woke up, in the middle of the night, I woke up, and thought… "What if it's true?!"

(Beat.)

I signed up to be a docent the next day.

TOMMY Z. The two of them talk about all sorts of things. But it takes a while before Grace tells Kat what that phone call was about. Even though she can't think about anything else. And can't sleep at night.

(Beat.)

It's really hard to tell people really true things.

*(***KAT** *nods.)*

*(***GRACE** *stands up, and steps away from the bench.)*

*(***KAT** *continues to sit there, listening.)*

(Listening.)

GRACE. Ever since the… since the doctor told me the results of the biopsy… I've had the urge to touch my breast. Cradle it in my hand. Before they…

(Pause.)

This is really hard.

(Pause.)

It hurts a little. Ever since the biopsy. You know what a biopsy is? How they do it?

*(***KAT** *shakes her head, no.)*

They make you lie down on a table and they put your breast in a vise and squeeze it, then they use a long needle to –

*(***GRACE** *makes a violent drilling motion with her hands, which is accompanied by the sound of a jackhammer.)*

– take samples from the area where they think there's something wrong. Then they put in a titanium clip, to mark the place, so they can find it again later, if they need to. A tiny titanium clip.

(A moment.)

I'm scaring you.

*(***KAT** *shakes her head, no, even though* **GRACE** *IS scaring her.)*

*(***GRACE** *unbuttons the two top buttons of her blouse, and looks down at herself.)*

It looks perfect. Except for the little scab where the biopsy needle went in. It looks perfectly perfect. Not super model perfect. Regular person perfect.

(Pause.)

If I was in a terrible accident and was all bloody and mangled by the side of the road and they scooped me up and took me to the hospital and were trying to sew

me back together, that would be one thing. It would all be so fast, and I wouldn't have any choice. They would be saving me.

(Beat.)

It's hard to look at my own perfect breast, regular person perfect breast, and imagine letting them take a knife to it and think of that as saving me.

*(***KAT** *nods.)*

TOMMY Z. Grace didn't really tell Kat all that. She's a little girl.

KAT. A young woman.

TOMMY Z. Really young.

(Beat.)

What she really says is –

GRACE. That phone call? That I got?

(Beat.)

Was me finding out that I have breast cancer.

*(***KAT** *nods.)*

TOMMY Z. It takes much longer for Kat to tell Grace why she's living under the weeping willow tree in the Japanese Garden.

KAT. When I turned eleven… I can't tell you what happened, what happened, what happened and then kept happening until – It was Thursday. I was supposed to be at school, but I wasn't at school. I was home alone, but I wasn't alone. I can't tell you who was there, I can't tell you anything, don't ask me to tell you, I can't ever go back…

TOMMY Z. Kat didn't really tell Grace all that. What she says is –

KAT. Home isn't safe.

*(***GRACE** *nods.)*

(To **TOMMY.***)*

It's really hard to tell people really true things.

*(***TOMMY Z** *nods.)*

(The light shifts, and suddenly we're in **TOMMY Z***'s tattoo parlor.)*

*(***TOMMY Z** *gestures toward* **KAT.***)*

TOMMY Z. She showed up at my door one day like a little… well… cat. The scared-ness and the hunger warring with each other. Months after I met her at the hospital. She just stood there in the doorway, looking at me. And I didn't move. And she said…

KAT. You told me I could come here.

TOMMY Z. And I said, "Yes." And then she disappeared.

(A moment.)

She came back four days later, and said…

KAT. You gave me your address and said you'd help me if I came here.

TOMMY Z. And I said, "Yes." And then she disappeared.

(A moment.)

She came back five days later and said…

KAT. I like your wall.

TOMMY Z. Thank you.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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