Acting Edition

Bike America

by Mike Lew

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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Winner of the 2012 Alliance/Kendeda National Graduate Playwriting Competition, ***BIKE AMERICA*** was originally produced by Alliance Theatre, Susan V. Booth, Artistic Director in Atlanta, GA on February 6, 2013. The performance was directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel, with sets by Andrew Boyce, costumes by Melissa Schlachtmeyer, lighting by Matthew Richards, and sound by Kendall Simpson. The Production Stage Manager was R. Lamar Williams. The cast was as follows:

PENNY . . . . . Jessica DiGiovanni
RORIE/MARILYN/LAURALIE . . . . . Je Nie Fleming
TIM BILLY. . . . . Brandon Hirsch
TODD . . . . . Matt Nitchie
MAN WITH THE VAN/GENE/STUART/CARLO . . . . . Maurice Ralston
ANNABEL/PATTY/MOM . . . . . Marilyn Torres
RYAN . . . . . Tom White

BIKE AMERICA received its New York premiere by Ma-Yi Theater Company, Ralph B. Peña, Artistic Director, Jorge Z. Ortoll, Executive Director on October 1, 2013. The performance was directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel, with sets by Andrew Boyce, costumes by Melissa Schlachtmeyer and Amy Pedigo-Otto, lighting by Matthew Richards, and sound by Jill BC Du Boff. The Production Stage Manager was David S. Cohen. The cast was as follows:

PENNY . . . . . Jessica DiGiovanni
RORIE/MARILYN/LAURALIE . . . . . Melanie Nicholls-King
TIM BILLY. . . . . Landon G. Woodson
TODD . . . . . Vandit Bhatt
MAN WITH THE VAN/GENE/STUART/CARLO . . . . . .David Shih
ANNABEL/PATTY/MOM . . . . . Marilyn Torres
RYAN . . . . . Tom White

The play received workshops/readings from the Kennedy Center/NNPN, the Lark Play Development Center, The Playwrights Foundation, The Juilliard School, Ma-Yi Writers Lab, and Ensemble Studio Theatre/Youngblood.

CHARACTERS

The cast of 7 actors (3F, 4M) plays the following characters:

PENNY (F, 20s, any ethnicity) – our heroine

TODD (M, 20s, any ethnicity) – her clingy long–distance boyfriend

RYAN (M, 30s, any ethnicity)– a crunchy granola biking instructor

TIM BILLY (M, 20s, Black) – a cross-country bicyclist

ANNABEL (F, 30-40s, Asian or Hispanic) – a cross-country bicyclist/ Rorie's wife

PATTY – a Brooklyn artisanal cheese maker

MOM – Todd's mom, an Allentown she-bear

RORIE (F, 30s-40s, Black) – a cross-country bicyclist/Annabel's wife

MARILYN – a Connecticut homeowner

LAURALIE – a Kentucky bartender

MAN WITH THE VAN (M, 40s, any ethnicity) – a grizzled shamanistic porter

GENE – a Brooklyn artisanal cheese maker

STUART – an Ohio YMCA director

CARLO – an Arizona county clerk

SETTING

Time: 2014. Place: America.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Set: You'll need some stationary bikes. Or you could also use half-bikes with the backs cut off and do bike puppetry. It'd be nice to have a big map upstage with the route marked on it and city markers that light up as they progress down the route. It'd also be nice to have video projections of the road. Ahhhh… it'd be nice…

Historical Note

Rorie has a line in the Arizona clerk's office (Scene 19) that references the number of marriage licenses they've attained thus far on the trip. During production, we've had to update that number as more and more states have legalized same-sex marriage. As of publication, the number of licenses they would have attained over this particular route totals seven (MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, NM). To contemporize the play, feel free to update the number if the legal landscape continues to change. Or in the event of national legalization, consider the play "frozen" in the year just beforehand.

1. Prelude

(Darkness. The sound of bicycle wheels clacking. Ding ding! A pool of light. **PENNY** *is center stage on a stationary bike, one foot on a pedal and one foot on the floor.)*

PENNY. Hi, I'm Penny. I'm a *fuckup*! I'm a lady adventurer. I'm, uh, I'm figuring out my shit.

(She starts to bike.) Right now I'm nearing the end of my cross-country bike trip, passing down Arizona's spine to the small of California's back. I've only lived in Boston, and I've never seen the Pacific, and I'd hoped that between these two points there could be some other life.

It's 2 AM, and the air's cold and dry, and I'm biking down the highway alone. Because – yknow – what can I say? I'm a fuckup.

In a few seconds some shithead truck driver will drift to sleep and his rig will drift to the shoulder and my bike will drift under his front right tire and that'll be the end of my ride.

But back up the road, up past Flagstaff and Austin and Memphis, up past the highways, and back up and back up and out, I'm at the gym in Boston training for the journey that'll cost me my life.

2. Boston, MA

(Lights shift abruptly and we're at the gym in Boston. **PENNY***'s working out on the stationary bike.* **TODD** *enters.)*

TODD. Penny I think we should talk.

PENNY. Not now Todd. I'm biking.

TODD. But this level of biking is nuts. I feel like I barely see you. It's like all you do these days is go to classes, go to the gym, go to classes, go to the gym. What about me time? This gym stuff is tearing our fabric.

PENNY. Shut up.

TODD. No I will not shut up. This health kick has been frickin' interminable! You've been at it for three or four *days*.

PENNY. So what?

TODD. So it's making me *nuts*. What are you, training for a triathlon, Penny?

PENNY. *(She stops.)* I signed up for the Bike America tour. It's a three-month bike tour *for cancer*.

TODD. You WHAT? *(She goes.)* What do you mean you're biking for cancer? What about us?

PENNY. What us?

TODD. Don't say "What us." We *have something*. I am your boyfriend.

PENNY. No Todd. We talked about this.

TODD. Yeah but –

PENNY. I told you I'm not looking for a relationship.

TODD. Yeah but that was ages ago. I took your silent assent for consent. I thought after grad school we'd maybe move in together, maybe someday we'd walk down the aisle…

PENNY. Whoa buddy we're not even boyfriend and girlfriend.

TODD. Of course I'm your boyfriend. My toothbrush is on your sink. We visited my mom that one time. You're even wearing my shirt!

PENNY. Could we maybe not do this right now? I'm really not into labels.

TODD. Oh God, you're so emotionally distant. I have to have you!

PENNY. Come on Todd, I'm biking!

TODD. Oh and I love how you're biking for *cancer*. That way if I complain I'm an asshole. Take me with you.

PENNY. No.

TODD. Oh I see what this is. Is this because I'm physically weak?

PENNY. No, Todd.

TODD. Yes it is. You're acting out because I'm a noodle.

PENNY. It's not because you're a noodle –

TODD. So you *admit* I'm a noodle!

PENNY. I just need some time to sort some things out for myself.

TODD. Why? What do you think you'll find out in California?

PENNY. Fuckin' *fish tacos* Todd – the endpoint is so not the point. I'm 27 and I'm still in grad school. At 27 my mom had a kid and a house. My grandma had three kids and functional alcoholism.

TODD. I'm not following.

PENNY. Everyone gets to go on a journey like this to see what's out there and see what they're made of. This is my turn.

TODD. For *three months*? That's too long, Penny! When were you gonna tell me?

PENNY. Tomorrow?

TODD. Oh sure, "tomorrow," it's always "tomorrow." And when does this bike tour start?

PENNY. Tomorrow.

TODD. You WHAT?!

(Quick scene change. The gym falls away and **TODD** *falls back and other bikers come onstage on stationary bikes. They are biking America.)*

RYAN. That's good guys, keep up the pace. Look at that. We're almost outside of Boston.

PENNY. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck…

RYAN. This first couple days are the worst. You may have been training but nothing prepares you for biking 6 hours a day. Especially if the only training you've done is on a stationary bike at the gym.

(collective laugh)

PENNY. Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck…

RYAN. That shit will NOT prepare you.

(The **MAN WITH THE VAN** *pulls up beside them.)*

Hey everybody it's the Man with the Van! Say hi.

ALL. Hi!

MAN WITH THE VAN. Hey how many miles to the gallon you get on those things?

(Beep beep!)

RYAN. The Man with the Van's going to drive ahead with our gear. Say goodbye to your stuff.

ALL. Bye!

MAN WITH THE VAN. Eat my exhaust, stinky bitches!

*(***MAN WITH THE VAN** *exits.* **PENNY** *wobbles, nearly falls, and recovers.)*

PENNY. Oh shit.

TIM BILLY. You doing all right?

PENNY. Yep!

TIM BILLY. You didn't train enough, did you? How long you been training?

PENNY. 4 days!

TIM BILLY. 4 days?! Shit, why didn't you train more?

PENNY. Shut up.

TIM BILLY. But you knew this was coming.

PENNY. No I didn't. I signed up for this trip 5 days ago.

TIM BILLY. Oh shit so you just decided to bike cross country on a whim. Like – what am I doing next Friday? Think I'll bike 4,000 miles.

PENNY. I'm a fuckup.

TIM BILLY. Of course not. Well kind of. So why'd you sign up so last minute?

PENNY. For cancer.

TIM BILLY. Well yeah for cancer but…

PENNY. But what?

TIM BILLY. I'm so sorry – do you know someone with cancer? Because…

PENNY. No. I don't know. FUCK so hurty – why.

RYAN. Bus coming up on your right. *(HONK HONK! WHOOOOOOSH!)* Hell yeah!

TIM BILLY. I'm Tim Billy by the way. Welcome to the ride!

PENNY. Tim Billy. The fuck kind of name is that?!

TIM BILLY. Uhm. The one my parents gave me?

PENNY. Sorry – the biking. So cranky. I'm Penny.

TIM BILLY. "Penny. Hello." See? This is how you greet somebody when they tell you your name. Not "What the fuck kind of name is that."

PENNY. Mine's better.

TIM BILLY. Ok and I'm going to push on ahead.

PENNY. This is – HRRR! – This is all part of the plan, Tim Billy. I believe that extreme physical duress can lead to an even greater epiphany.

TIM BILLY. *Epiphany*! Like what?

PENNY. Like my ass is on FIRE.

TIM BILLY. Hang in there. It gets easier.

PENNY. *(hopeful)* Yeah? Yeah you think my ass'll adjust to this seat?

TIM BILLY. Oh, the *bike seat*? No, you've got 4,000 miles of that. *(Lights down on him laughing.)*

PENNY. Thanks, Tim Billy! Thanks for reminding me we've got 4,000 miles of this shit!

(Lights up on **ANNABEL** *and* **RORIE.***)*

ANNABEL. Left left left left left!

PENNY. Ahhhh!

ANNABEL. Did I startle you? Sorry.

PENNY. You should warn people.

RORIE. She did. She said, "Left."

PENNY. Ohhhh got it.

ANNABEL. I'm Annabel. On your left. This is my wife Rorie.

RORIE. Hey.

ANNABEL. You doin' ok, hon?

PENNY. I'm fine. I'm fucking invincible.

ANNABEL. We can call the Man with the Van.

PENNY. Don't need him.

ANNABEL. Well if you do, he's not just there to carry our stuff.

RORIE. Yeah he's also trolling for poop-outs.

ANNABEL. Rorie.

RORIE. What? I know how to spot me a poop-out.

PENNY. I'm not a poop-out.

RORIE. Shit, you poopin' out now.

PENNY. I *am* pooping out now.

ANNABEL. Hon, you can't be pooping out. We're only like 6 miles in.

PENNY. Fuck. Why did I do this? Why?

RORIE. Tell you why we did it…

ANNABEL. We're getting married!

PENNY. Congratulations.

ANNABEL. We're actually already married.

PENNY. Oh.

RORIE. In Massachusetts. But we're getting remarried in every state that we hit on this trip.

PENNY. Isn't that… illegal?

ANNABEL. Nope. As long as you're marrying the same person, you can get remarried in every state. Oh. But then there's the whole gay marriage thing. Which is, largely, illegal.

RORIE. That's why we're hitting city halls in each state. I want to make 'em say no to my face.

RYAN. Ok we're coming up on the bridge. Watch the trucks. Everyone call out the make and model of their bike.

RORIE. Bianchi Infinito Athena!

TIM BILLY. Cannondale Supersix 3 Ultegra!

ANNABEL. Raleigh Revenio 2.0!

RYAN. Raleigh Revenio 4.0, fuckaaaas!

ALL BUT PENNY. Ooooooh.

PENNY. *(pause)* Huffy I picked up at Target!

(They all turn and look back.)

Is that a good one?

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