Acting Edition

California

by Trish Harnetiaux

SAMUEL FRENCH

ISBN 978-0-573-71175-6

www.concordtheatricals.com
www.concordtheatricals.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

United States and Canada
info@concordtheatricals.com
1-866-979-0447

United Kingdom and Europe
licensing@concordtheatricals.co.uk
020-7054-7298

Each title is subject to availability from Concord Theatricals Corp., depending upon country of performance. Please be aware that *CALIFORNIA* may not be licensed by Concord Theatricals Corp. in your territory. Professional and amateur producers should contact the nearest Concord Theatricals Corp. office or licensing partner to verify availability.

This work is published by Samuel French, an imprint of Concord Theatricals Corp.

CALIFORNIA was first produced by Clubbed Thumb (Maria Striar, Artistic Director and Founder; Michael Bulger, Producing Director) at The Wild Project in New York City on May 20, 2022. The production was directed by Will Davis, with set design by dots, costume design by Mel Ng, lighting design by Oona Curley, and sound design by Leah Gelpe. The production stage manager was Diane Healy. The cast was as follows:

MOM . . . . . Annie Henk
DAD . . . . . Pete Simpson
ROB . . . . . Jordan Bellows
TUCKER . . . . . Ethan Dubin
LIZZIE . . . . . Mallory Portnoy

CHARACTERS

MOM – 40s or 50s or not
DAD – 40s or 50s or not
ROB – 16 or not
TUCKER – 14 or not
LIZZIE – 13 or not

PARTS

ONE
In the Driveway

TWO
The Ridenhour Game

THREE
"Stranded and Alone"

FOUR
California

FIVE
A Problem with Time and Space

NOTE

The entire play happens in the car.
Basically.
You'll see.

NOTE ON RADIO PLAY

A fully produced audio file of the radio play in Part Three is included with a license to produce *California*. This recording is optional.

An Epilogue

LIZZIE. Later,

and I mean years later,

even today, there's still a lot of uncertainty about exactly what went down.

For sure I had the most questions.

Maybe my brother Tucker?

It wasn't…Rob.

I don't blame my dad.

Though I'm pretty sure my mom does.

But since no one can find the tape,

which would have been proof,

it's impossible to know.

The one record is gone –

we'll have to recreate.

Door to door, from Spokane, Washington, to Huntington Beach, California, was over thirteen hundred miles. My dad was confident we could drive it in one shot. No stopping. It was important to leave early evening because it was summer, and the car had no air conditioning. Much cooler to drive in the dark. It would be roughly twenty hours straight, and a terrible idea.

We'd head west then turn south.

Eventually cross the Columbia River and continue through Eastern Oregon.

No one had told me about Eastern Oregon.

That it was not at all like Western Oregon.

It is flat, dry, strange.

I'm getting ahead of myself. We were near the Tri-Cities by the Hanford Nuclear Plant the first time death gets mentioned. No one tells you there will be a day when you realize you don't have much time left together…

Was this my day? Near Hanford, where once they accomplished the impossible?

It makes sense it was. But science *hadn't caught up yet.*

See, splitting the atom wasn't the miracle,

it was putting it back together.

Proving matter can exist in two places at once.

What if a story can split, just like the atom?

Does everyone live forever?

ONE

In the Driveway

**

(Distance driven: 0 miles.)

(Time spent in car: 4 minutes.)

(First landmark: Ritzville, Washington.)

**

(The car is onstage, always.)

LIZZIE. *(To audience.)* Still in the driveway.

(Beat.)

Sitting in the middle of the backseat is me.

Lizzie, thirteen. A terrible age that's frankly embarrassing to revisit.

She, I, hold a tape recorder.

*(**LIZZIE** makes sure she is alone and hits play. It's a recording of her secretly singing something like the hit song from The Police, "Every Breath You Take."* * She likes it. She fast forwards a little and hits play to hear herself singing. She hits stop. Glances around, no sign of her brothers yet. She ejects the tape, flips it over, closes the cover and hits record.)*

---

* A license to produce *California* does not include a performance license for "Every Breath You Take." The publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact ASCAP or BMI to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. If a license or permission is unattainable for "Every Breath You Take," the licensee may not use the song in *California*. For further information, please see the Music and Third-Party Materials Use Note on page iii.

(She spends some time recording herself saying "I love you" a few different ways. She rewinds the tape and plays it back. Each time the recording says "I love you" she responds "I love you" back. This goes on until –)

*(***TUCKER** *gets in the car holding a book, the title visible,* The Oregon Trail. *A collage of brutally beaten and sliced body parts and wagon wheels on the cover. It's more violent than it should be. Or, actually, exactly as violent as it should be.)*

TUCKER. Tucker, fourteen-almost-fifteen, sits to her right.

Tucker knows better than to sit directly behind the driver.

Which will be his father.

*(***ROB** *gets in the car, he wears eyeliner.)*

ROB. Rob, seventeen, sits to her left.

Many advantages come from sitting directly behind our father, the driver.

Most importantly: it's easier to avoid rearview mirror eye contact.

LIZZIE. Distance driven:

zero miles.

TUCKER. Time spent in car:

four minutes.

ROB. First landmark:

Ritzville, Washington.

61.7 miles away.

Don't let the name / fool you.

LIZZIE. There is nothing remarkable about Ritzville.

Unless you count Spikes.

The home of remarkable Huckleberry / milkshakes.

ROB & TUCKER. We never get to stop in Ritzville.

(A shift.)

(They negotiate space, legs and arms finding their own places, definitely not wanting to touch one another even a tiny bit because of how gross that would be.)

(For sure no one is, or has real plans to be, buckled up.)

ROB. I could give three fucks about California.

LIZZIE. Grandpa and Grandma live there.

ROB. No shit.

Who cares, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. *They have cancer, Rob.*

/ Dad cares.

TUCKER. *(Quieter.)* I'm sure Mom cares too.

ROB. You have no idea what I'm talking about.

It's not *about* Grandma and Grandpa.

(Beat.)

It's about having a voice

and it's about being heard.

Trust me. I'm *much older than you* / Lizzie.

LIZZIE. You don't think I'd rather be going to the Poconos?

*(***ROB** *is fucking disgusted by her.)*

ROB. You have no idea *what* Poconos are –

LIZZIE. Ah, I do.

ROB. Or *where* Poconos are –

TUCKER. Sure she / does.

LIZZIE. New York *State.*

ROB. Tucker, run inside and grab Lizzie a trophy from my / trophy shelf.

TUCKER. You don't have a / trophy shelf.

(Each time **LIZZIE** *says "Rob,"* **TUCKER** *quietly echoes with a "Rob.")*

LIZZIE. Originally inhabited by the Iroquois, Rob.

Poconos have rolling hills and lakes and wildlife, Rob.

A long-ago destination for honeymooners, Rob.

Currently vacation home after vacation home, Rob.

Roadside ice cream, Rob.

(Beat.)

Should I go / on, Rob?

ROB. Did you say something?

*(***LIZZIE** *looks out the back window... No parents yet.)*

(She lame-attempts to strap on her seatbelt, nope, won't buckle – whatever.)

What are you looking for?

Why do you need so / much approval?

LIZZIE. Let's play The Ridenhour Game.

TUCKER. Not 'til Ritzville.

(Holds up his book.)

An entire family's about to be slaughtered.

LIZZIE. *Lucky family.*

(During the car trip, **TUCKER** *will occasionally gasp at the horrors in his book. Mostly, he keeps his increasing uncomfortableness to himself because – even though he finds the adventurous-but-oft-doomed-family stories of early pioneers frightening – he feels exhilarated imagining he's in their place, fighting for self-survival and boldly disappearing into the unknown.)*

ROB. We only play to five.

LIZZIE. Six.

ROB. Five.

LIZZIE. Fine.

TUCKER. Double points for first name / last name.

LIZZIE. Yes.

TUCKER. Gene Ridenhour.

ROB. We know it's *Gene*, Tucker.

LIZZIE. Triple points if he mentions *college.*

ROB. When we hit five.

/ Game over.

TUCKER. Automatic win if he says *Gene Ridenhour* and *college* in the / same sentence.

LIZZIE. If I win,

If I win

If I win

If I win?

LIZZIE. I'm not sitting in the middle anymore.

ROB. Lame.

If I win,

neither of you

eat in the car.

TUCKER. Are you suggesting we starve?

ROB. *(Sniffs air.)* I'm suggesting it already smells like / Spam in here.

TUCKER. If I win…

LIZZIE. *(Concerned.)* Or…Doritos…

TUCKER. If I win Rob is silent through the entire state of Oregon.

LIZZIE. Good one.

Oregon's a pretty / BIG state.

TUCKER. Enormous.

ROB. *You two don't know about Oregon.*

TUCKER. Why do you think we don't know about geography? *We know the states*, Rob.

Stop insinuating that we have no, no knowledge of this very country in which we live.

ROB. Stop being / formal.

TUCKER. *It's* offensive.

You're offensive. / *Rob.*

LIZZIE. *Offensive.*

*(***ROB** *shrugs like it's his job. To the horror of* **ROB** *and* **TUCKER**, **LIZZIE** *opens a can of Coke.*[*]*)*

---

[*] A license to produce *California* does not include a license to publicly display any branded logos or trademarked images. Licensees must acquire rights for any logos and/or images or create their own.

TUCKER. Woah, woah, woah –

Easy on the liquids / *traveler.*

ROB. Are you trying to get us killed?

LIZZIE. What.

TUCKER. No *beverages* Lizzie.

ROB. Dad is NOT pulling over so you can / piss.

TUCKER. Use the facilities.

LIZZIE. I won't –

ROB. Ah, that's not how biology works.

LIZZIE. You got like a D in bee-ology Rob,

forgive me if I don't look /

to you for my bee-ology answers.

TUCKER. Lizzie, we haven't even left?

We have a hundred thousand miles to traverse

and you inexplicably have opened a *beverage* / while we are still *in the driveway.*

LIZZIE. Why are you saying "beverage" –

ROB. Your brother's right.

TUCKER. This is, is / mind blowing.

LIZZIE. Worry about yourselves.

TUCKER. There is *zero* chance we're stopping.

ROB. Zero chance.

TUCKER. Literally I just said that.

ROB. No stopping at all.

TUCKER. What reality are you in?

LIZZIE. *(To* **TUCKER***.)* Don't be such a nervous kid.

ROB. Reality's a construct.

(Ugh, **LIZZIE** *doesn't know where to set her Coke can now...)*

(Eventually, gently, **TUCKER** *can't help himself and helpfully takes it from her.)*

(Hmm. He just holds it.)

LIZZIE. Where are they?

ROB. What, scared?

LIZZIE. Why would I be scared?

TUCKER. Dad lost the map / or something.

LIZZIE. We don't need a map.

ROB. Our parents are Fossils.

LIZZIE. Washington.

Oregon.

California.

TUCKER. Have a little respect for Cartographers.

It's a special / skill?

ROB. Speaking of special.

Tucker, got some bad news for you, buddy.

TUCKER. *(Ignoring.)* Should we honk?

ROB. I was in Mom's room,

like in her closet looking through stuff,

and found all these old *newspaper clippings.*

(Beat. Ugh, **TUCKER** *bites –)*

TUCKER. So.

ROB. SO, they were like old. *Really old.*

So, I looked at them closer...and up near the top...was the *date.*

The date of the clipping.

TUCKER. Okay?

ROB. So – cheep, cheep, cheep – I do a little math and.

(Beat. Ugh, **TUCKER** *bites –)*

TUCKER. WHAT.

LIZZIE. You're pretty boring, Rob.

ROB. The date of the newspaper is exactly nine months before *your* birthday.

Your actual date of birth.

The day you came…out.
Of Mom.

And you know what?

LIZZIE.
Ewww – no one came out of Mom.

LIZZIE. Or like, you're gross.

TUCKER. *No?*

ROB. The clippings were all about an explosion at an old aluminum plant in the valley.

Working with aluminum can be very, very dangerous, not everyone survives.

Especially when there's an explosion as big as this one.

TUCKER. Are you a metals expert / now?

ROB. There were fatalities.

One of the fatalities?

*(***LIZZIE** *gives tiny gasp.)*

A dude named TUCKER.

TUCKER. *What are you saying.*

*(***TUCKER** *starts to breathe hard.)*

ROB. I'm saying your REAL dad is most likely this dead aluminum plant worker named Tucker, dipshit. Not, say, our – *(His and* **LIZZIE***'s.)* dad. Like we all thought.

(Beat.)

The name, *your name* – "Tucker" – was circled in creaky old red ink

and the paper was worn real thin. *Paper-thin.*

Probably from Mom's old tears or something.

(Beat.)

Sorry you had to find out like this.

*(***TUCKER** *is breathing harder.)*

Pull it together, bro.

TUCKER. One day, Rob –

*(***LIZZIE** *hands* **TUCKER** *his inhaler from the seat pocket.)*

ROB. You sound like an asthma kid.

TUCKER.
They're going to:
Put. You. Away.

LIZZIE.
He IS an asthma kid.

*(***TUCKER** *inhales deeply but turns so* **ROB** *can't watch.)*

ROB. Yikes.

I bet Dad doesn't even know.

*(***TUCKER** *concentrates his rage on Lizzie's Coke can.)*

(He opens the door and chucks it hard...)

(But it doesn't hit anything.)

(Only disappears.)

(Which is weird.)

(They all, privately, clock it.)

(Whatever.)

*(***LIZZIE** *leans forward and lays on the horn.)*

***

(A shift.)

(A later **TUCKER***, still holding the book.)*

TUCKER. As previously mentioned, I was *fourteen almost fifteen* and this trip was during – a *certain period* of schooling where they hit us *hard* with western expansion and life's terrible, irresponsibly documented inevitabilities *and* possibilities. I was there for it. I desperately wanted to freeze on a mountain pass. To watch my family starve to death. Unable to save them. Paralyzed by excitement and horror. I spent a fair amount of time privately selecting the best – and worst – ways to hypothetically self-perish.

(Whispers.) Dysentery.

(Excited.) I was concerned *and* relieved that eventually we all meet the same fate.

Comforted only by the understanding that, hell, I could change a fucking *wagon wheel* if I had to.

Lizzie and I have been comparing notes for decades. When I think about our drive to California, there's something about the actual Act of Driving that contributed to the split. Cutting through time and space. There's a world where none of this would have

happened if we'd been on, say, a *Prairie Schooner*… but…then there wouldn't have been a radio. It was the radio, not the car, that was the catalyst.

None of us even liked our car…station wagon.

I'll tell you what we did like: our California grandparents, the ones we were going to see, had a vintage, ice blue Chevy van that everyone called The Blue Van Motel. *What??* Legendary. Sensational. Windowless.

It'll come up later…

(Beat.)

Looking back, I will say this: *I'm the middle child.*

Even though I just talked a big game, like just now, a moment ago? The whole "everyone's dead, let's perish with honor" thing? I didn't *actually* want anything bad to happen.

(Indicates himself.)

Softie. I'm a family guy. Everyone loves my wife – including me. I'd do anything for my kids.

I sit on numerous non-profit boards, change jobs every decade because I care about professional advancement and like my steak medium rare. I can ski well enough to actually go skiing, loved *Wicked* on Broadway and – hey – what are you doing in December, because Christmas is at *my* house.

I have a lot of heart.

Which is why it is so fucked up that I was the first to die.

TWO

The Ridenhour Game

**

(Distance driven: 160 miles.)

(Time spent in car: 2 hours 34 minutes.)

(Next landmark: Hanford Nuclear Power Plant, Washington State.)

**

LIZZIE. Distance driven: a hundred and sixty miles.

Time spent in car: two hours, thirty-four minutes.

Next landmark: Hanford Nuclear Power Plant, Washington State.

(A shift.)

*(***DAD** *drives, reflecting on his entire life.)*

*(***MOM** *sits shotgun engrossed in the huge map.)*

*(***KIDS** *in the backseat, already super bored.)*

*(Oh god… **DAD** is sniffling.)*

*(***MOM** *rubs his back and smiles in the mirror back at the kids.)*

MOM. Love you guys.

ROB. Dad, are you fucking crying?

MOM. Rob! /

Language.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.concordtheatricals.com

www.concordtheatricals.co.uk

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and anything theater-related, follow us on our social media channels.

@ConcordShows and **@ConcordUKShows** on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

concord
theatricals