Acting Edition

Little Bear Ridge Road

by Samuel D. Hunter

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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LITTLE BEAR RIDGE ROAD was originally commissioned and first produced by the Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Glenn Davis and Audrey Francis, Artistic Directors; Brooke Flanagan, Executive Director) in Chicago, Illinois. The production opened on June 23, 2024. The production was directed by Joe Mantello, with dramaturgy by John Baker, set design by Scott Pask, costume design by Jessica Pabst, lighting design by Heather Gilbert, sound design by Mikhail Fiksel, and stage management by Laura D. Glenn and Jaclynn Joslin. The cast was as follows:

SARAH . . . . . Laurie Metcalf
ETHAN . . . . . Micah Stock
JAMES/KENNY . . . . . John Drea
VICKIE/PAULETTE . . . . . Meighan Gerachis
Understudies . . . . . Chad Bay, Mara Casey, Mary Beth Fisher, Evan Mulrooney

LITTLE BEAR RIDGE ROAD was subsequently produced on Broadway by Scott Rudin and Barry Diller. The production opened on October 30th, 2025, with the same creative team. The stage management team was William Joseph Barnes and Lisa Buxbaum. The cast was the same with the following changes:

Understudies . . . . . Jack Ball, Mary Beth Fisher, Stephanie Roth Haberle, Aubie Merrylees,

CHARACTERS

SARAH – Sixties, female.

ETHAN – Early to mid-thirties, male.

JAMES – Late twenties or early thirties, male.

PAULETTE – Forties or fifties, female.

KENNY – Male, voice only. Can be played by the actor playing **JAMES**.

VICKIE – Female, voice only. Can be played by the actor playing **PAULETTE**.

SETTING

A couch in a void.

Somewhere on the outskirts of Troy, Idaho.

TIME

Various points from 2020 through 2022.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Dialogue written in *italics* is emphatic, deliberate. Dialogue in ALL CAPS is impulsive, explosive. Dialogue in [brackets] is implied, not spoken.

A "/" indicates an overlap in dialogue. Whenever a "/" appears, the following line of dialogue should begin.

Ellipses (...) indicate when a character is trailing off; dashes (–) indicate where a character is being cut off, either by another character or themselves.

A Note on the Television

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PART ONE: 2020

Scene One

*(**SARAH**, wearing rubber cleaning gloves and holding a remote, stands with **ETHAN**, who wears a face mask. He keeps his distance. A TV drones in the background.)*

(Silence apart from the low murmur of the TV.)

(Suddenly:)

SARAH. / You really –

ETHAN. So you –

SARAH. / Sorry –

ETHAN. Sorry, you go.

SARAH. No, I just –. I was just saying you look – skinny.

ETHAN. Okay.

SARAH. You used to be kinda chunky.

ETHAN. Yep.

(Pause.)

SARAH. Are you [okay] –? You were just kinda – staring into the sky out there –

ETHAN. Oh it's –. I'm fine, I've just been in Seattle for so long, I realized it's been a while since I've seen like – stars.

SARAH. Ah. Yeah, well, we got a good view up here. Thought once about buying a telescope but, you know. Then I'd own a *telescope*.

(Short pause.)

But you sure you're okay then?

ETHAN. I'm fine, Sarah.

(Pause.)

SARAH. Drive okay?

ETHAN. Oh, fine, / it's –

SARAH. You shoulda started earlier. It's almost eleven.

ETHAN. Am I keeping you up?

SARAH. Absolutely. I'm usually in bed by eight. I was doing chores to stay awake.

(Pause.)

Here, gimme a minute, I was in the middle of –.

*(***SARAH** *exits briefly.* **ETHAN** *looks around the room. We hear the clattering of dishes in the sink offstage.)*

(Offstage.) Are you hungry?

ETHAN. Uh –

SARAH. *(Offstage.)* Hopefully not. I don't have food really, I need to do a grocery trip to Moscow.

ETHAN. You don't go to the store in Troy?

SARAH. *(Offstage.)* That thing closed a few years back, Troy has definitely seen better days.

ETHAN. You have to drive all the way to *Moscow* for groceries?

SARAH. *(Offstage.)* It's barely half an hour, it's not that bad.

ETHAN. I didn't realize you had moved all the way out here.

*(***SARAH** *reenters, wiping her hands with a dishcloth.)*

SARAH. Just – suits me better. Not being around – people.

(Pause.)

So do you, uh. You know how long you're gonna be in town?

ETHAN. Hopefully not long. A few weeks? I guess I don't really know how long it takes to, like, put a house on the market and sell it –

SARAH. Oh I can handle selling your dad's house if you want. I sold my house in Moscow six years ago.

ETHAN. No, I can do it –

SARAH. Really, Ethan, I can take care of it, you don't have to stick around / here –

ETHAN. I can handle it, thanks.

(Pause.)

SARAH. I'm, uh. Sorry about your dad.

ETHAN. Sorry about your brother.

(Short pause.)

Anyway, do you have the – ...?

(Short pause.)

SARAH. Oh, right. Gimme a sec.

*(***SARAH** *exits.* **ETHAN** *stands awkwardly.)*

(Offstage.) That car of yours has seen better days.

ETHAN. It's fine.

SARAH. *(Offstage.)* You wanna use my truck while you're here?

ETHAN. The one outside? That thing is enormous.

*(***SARAH** *reenters with a folder.)*

SARAH. Yeah it's a lot of fun. Last week I hit a deer, barely even felt it. You wanna use it?

ETHAN. I'm okay.

(She hands the folder to **ETHAN**.*)*

I'm surprised he even kept the deed. Did you have to go looking in the house for it?

SARAH. Oh I've had it for years now.

ETHAN. You –? Why?

SARAH. He wasn't exactly organized, I took care of this kind of stuff for him.

ETHAN. So you were – in touch with him?

SARAH. Only so much as I could stand it.

ETHAN. I get it. Believe me. I hadn't talked to him since like… I mean, it'd been years.

SARAH. *Years?*

ETHAN. Yeah. You didn't know that?

SARAH. I knew you guys weren't on good terms, but I didn't think it was *years*.

ETHAN. He called me three or four years ago asking for forty bucks. When I didn't give it to him, he called me a faggot, so. That was that.

(Pause.)

SARAH. You know that was the drugs talking.

ETHAN. It was also him talking.

(Pause. **ETHAN***'s eyes drift to the TV.)*

What's this?

SARAH. Oh it's one of those reality things. I've seen every episode, it's so stupid.

(Pointing.)

That one? She's my favorite. Dumb as a brick.

(Pause. They watch for a moment.)

ETHAN. We don't need to do a funeral, right?

(Pause. **SARAH** *looks at him.)*

SARAH. Oh. Well –

ETHAN. I mean we'd probably have to do it virtually which is lame, and who would even come? We're the only family he has.

SARAH. Oh that can't be right.

ETHAN. Seriously, I checked. We're the last two Fernsbys.

SARAH. What do you mean you checked?

ETHAN. When the lockdown started, I got into one of those ancestry websites. Traced our family all the way back to the seventeenth century.

SARAH. Why the hell would you do a thing like that?

ETHAN. I don't know. The world seems so awful now, it was just helpful to remind myself that history is long.

SARAH. Well. I always hated the last name Fernsby, anyway. What kind of name is that? I got so much grief in school for it.

ETHAN. Me too. The gay kid named "Fernsby," I was kind of a walking target.

*(**ETHAN** looks at **SARAH**. Pause.)*

ETHAN. Oh, I...

SARAH. Hm?

ETHAN. I just... I didn't – know if you don't want me talking about that.

SARAH. Your childhood?

ETHAN. No, being gay.

SARAH. Why?

ETHAN. Oh I guess – I always thought you were religious.

SARAH. Where the hell did you get that idea? I'm an atheist.

ETHAN. Oh. Really?

SARAH. Always have been. The idea of an afterlife?

*(**SARAH** makes a face. Short pause.)*

All this time you've thought I had an issue with you being *gay*? That's the most interesting thing about you.

ETHAN. Thanks.

(Pause.)

Alright, well, I'm keeping you up, I better –

SARAH. Where are you planning to stay? Do you still have friends in town, or –?

ETHAN. I'll – figure it out.

(Pause.)

SARAH. You wanna beer?

ETHAN. Uh –

*(**SARAH** exits before **ETHAN** can respond. **ETHAN** takes a breath, checking the time on his phone.)*

So you're –? You're still at Saint Joe's, in Lewiston?

SARAH. *(Offstage.)* Holding on for dear life. They're doing everything they can to get rid of me.

ETHAN. Why?

*(**SARAH** reenters with a couple cans of beer and hands one to **ETHAN**.)*

SARAH. They sold the hospital to this for-profit company and everything has gone to shit. And I'm not exactly quiet about it. They keep reducing my shifts without telling me, as if I won't notice. I feel like I'm at war.

(Short pause.)

ETHAN. Was Dad at your hospital when he –?

SARAH. Uh – no. He was at Gritman, in Moscow.

ETHAN. Did you visit him?

SARAH. They still aren't allowing visitors, so I couldn't –.

*(**SARAH** looks away. Pause.)*

ETHAN. Sorry, I didn't mean / to –

SARAH. It's fine, I just –. I feel bad, I hadn't seen him in a while.

(Pause.)

He – was hard to be around. He didn't really know what was going on most of the time. He never got diagnosed but I could tell he was drifting in and out of psychosis. Toward the end I'd just mail him a check every month and ignore his calls.

ETHAN. You were giving him money?

SARAH. Well it'd been a while since he had a job, last time he had full-time work was at the paper mill when you were a / kid –

ETHAN. You realize he was just using the money for meth, / right?

SARAH. I don't know what he was using it for. Look, Ethan, I don't know how much your dad told you, but I tried to get him into rehab quite a few times over the years and / I –

ETHAN. I think I'm gonna take off. Thanks for the beer.

*(***ETHAN** *hands her the can.* **SARAH** *takes it.)*

(Before **ETHAN** *can leave:)*

SARAH. Ethan, are you planning on sleeping in your car?

(Pause.)

I'm trying not to pry but it sure as hell looks like you've got just about everything you own in there –

ETHAN. I'm fine.

SARAH. And even though it's April the nights are getting below freezing still, / so I –

ETHAN. I'll get a hotel.

SARAH. For *weeks*? You got money for a hotel for *weeks*?

(Pause. **ETHAN** *doesn't respond.)*

I have a pullout in the extra bedroom. You're gonna have to clear it off first.

ETHAN. Sarah, I'm really fine –

SARAH. I can't say I'm set up for having a guest, but we'll manage. You'll have to be patient with me, I haven't shared space with anyone since Tony and I split.

*(**SARAH** exits briefly.)*

(Pause.)

(Offstage.) You need a top sheet?!

*(Silence. **ETHAN** wavers.)*

(Offstage.) You need a top sheet?!

ETHAN. No.

SARAH. *(Offstage.)* Good because I don't have one.

*(**SARAH** reenters with a blanket, gives it to **ETHAN**.)*

Bathroom's right next to your room, on the left. There should be clean towels in the cabinet. Also, I usually go to work around five, I get up around four-thirty. I'm not quiet.

(Pointing to his face mask.)

You might as well take that thing off if we're gonna be sleeping in the same house.

*(Short pause. **ETHAN** tentatively takes off his mask. **SARAH** studies his face for a second.)*

Huh.

ETHAN. What?

(Short pause.)

SARAH. No, just –. There you are.

*(Pause. **ETHAN** starts making his way to the bedroom.)*

Ethan?

*(**ETHAN** looks at her. **SARAH** hesitates.)*

SARAH. Sleep well.

*(***ETHAN** *leaves.* **SARAH** *watches him go.)*

Scene Two

(A few days later, midafternoon.)

*(***ETHAN***, disheveled, is sitting on the couch watching TV.)*

(After a moment, **SARAH***, with a spring jacket on, enters, having just come from work. She is mid-conversation on the phone.* **ETHAN** *doesn't acknowledge her.)*

SARAH. *(As she enters.)* I'm not saying you did this, I realize that you were just told, but who the hell else am I supposed to shout at? I'm just supposed to accept that I'm only getting three shifts next week and I'm not supposed to say anything about it?

*(***SARAH** *listens, glances at the TV.)*

(To **ETHAN***.)* I watched this last night. The first episode.

*(***ETHAN** *glances at her.)*

ETHAN. Did you like it?

*(***SARAH** *makes a gesture like "not really.")*

SARAH. *(On the phone.)* Well then let me talk to Andy about it! Get him on the phone!

(Pause.)

Well then call him at home, I need an answer! I'll wait to hear from you. Thanks a bunch!

*(***SARAH** *hangs up.)*

(Re the TV.) Yeah, it's okay. I saw you watching this yesterday and thought I'd give it a try. Couldn't make any damn sense of it. Why does TV now have to be so *complicated*?

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