The Cry of Crows

A One Act Play

By

JAMES LEE BRAY

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PIONEER DRAMA SERVICE, INC.
Denver, Colorado
THE CRY OF CROWS

by

JAMES LEE BRAY

Original Production. November 20, 1960

William and Mary Theatre
The College of William and Mary

Howard Scammon
Director

Russell T. Hastings
Designer

Albert Haak
Technical Director

Original Cast

Kyle ............................................................ Scott Glenn
She ............................................................. Emily Vawter
He ............................................................... Erik Howell
Mrs. Graham .............................................. Mary Virginia Reed
Mrs. Thayer ................................................. Marcia Huffman
Mother ......................................................... Jeanne Raab
Preacher ....................................................... John Reese
CAST

Kyle Masters
Anna Perkins
Johnny Fowler

Mrs. Graham
Mrs. Thayer
Mrs. Perkins

Preacher Thompson

SCENE

Any time and any place

The curtain comes up on a bare stage. We are aware of several figures - people - on stage. Very slowly a light comes up on one of these, a young man. He is handsome and dressed very simply - dark slacks, brown shoes, and a pullover grey sweater over a white shirt. He stands in a spotlight just a bit downstage of STAGE RIGHT. The play begins.

KYLE: (LOOKING RIGHT OUT INTO THE AUDIENCE) Hello, My name is Kyle - Kyle Masters. Just call me Kyle. Last name doesn't matter too much. (WAIVING ONE HAND IN A SWEEPING MOTION) This is my town - a river town. My father was a river man. He worked this river all his life and none of you have ever heard of him. Matter of fact, you haven't heard of this town, either. It's a nice enough town. (MOVING A BIT CLOSER TO THE APRON OF THE STAGE) Nothing really big ever happened in the place. I mean no presidents ever came from here, no battles fought, nothing big ever happened here. Other river towns catch more fish and sell more. (SOMETHING PENSIVE) You know, I can't think of one thing that this town is noted for other than being my town. (GIVES A SHORT LAUGH) I suppose that's not much, is it? But things happen here just like they do in every town, no matter how big or how small. Wherever you have people you have something happening - whether in New York or in a small town like this.
What I really came out here to tell you about was a girl in this town. Her name's Anna Perkins and her father's a river man too. She wanted you to hear her side of the story and I told her I would tell all of you. (SMILES) I'll do the best I can. (SCRATCHES HIS HEAD FOR A BRIEF MOMENT) You know, I've always found that everything big starts out small. I mean - well - that's not too profound a statement. What I want to say is that it isn't just things that grow - like kittens to cats, puppies to dogs, or children to men and women. Ideas are that way too. Take the American Revolution, or the Red Cross. They started out small like kittens. Lots of times we get to thinking that big things were always big, when if we just thought about it a minute or so - they weren't. And not all things that grow are good, either -- like rattlesnakes and poison and things. It only follows that not all ideas that grow are good, either - take those of Marx or Hitler or Stalin - and I think you'll see what I mean. (TAKES A FEW STEPS STAGE RIGHT) Anna knows what I'm trying to say. Her story started out small too. She had simply walked to the courthouse park with a boy - nothing more.

(Light goes down slowly on KYLE on STAGE RIGHT. He exits off STAGE RIGHT as the lights come up on CENTER STAGE where a boy and girl stand side by side. She is pretty. He is ordinary. Her dress is simple. His is the dress of a laborer - dungarees and a work shirt. She is looking far to STAGE LEFT. He is looking at her.)

ANNA: You can see just about the whole town from here, Johnny. Did you know that? Look over there -- there's Putnam's Ice Cream Parlor and Steadman's Ice House. And look, Johnny -- look where the river bends just there -- it's Mr. Fuller's seafood packing company just as pretty as can be. (SMILING) Why, you can almost see the sparkle of the trout scales from here, honest you can. Just look for yourself.

JOHNNY: It's pretty enough, but so are you, Anna.

ANNA: (SLOWLY TURNS TO HIM) Why, you paid me a compliment, Johnny Fowler. Thank you. (SHE LAUGHS)

JOHNNY: I mean it. You're just about the prettiest girl in this town. Everybody will tell you that.
ANNA: (OBVIOUSLY PLEASED) You're teasing me, Johnny.

JOHNNY: No, I ain't. Most everybody will tell you the same thing. Why, I heard ole' Doc Scorby say that you were the prettiest gal in the county and that's a fact. I swear I heard him say it.

ANNA: Well, that's sure nice, coming from Doctor Scorby.

JOHNNY: I'd say ole' Doc knew what he was talking about for sure.

ANNA: Thank you, sir.

JOHNNY: Look a-there - (POINTS TO STAGE RIGHT) - there goes Mizz Cone. She's looking over here like we were up to something or another. Yessir, Mizz Cone is going to bump into one of them trees if she doesn't look where she's going. (GIVES A SILLY GIGGLE)

ANNA: (WAVING IN THE DIRECTION OF MRS. CONE) Oh, she is all right. She's just not sure who we are, that's all. (CALLS) Hello, Mrs. Cone! (WAVES AGAIN) Fine, thank you.......Yes, ma'am, it certainly is a nice day. (TURNS TO JOHNNY, ALMOST AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT) She's a real nice person.

JOHNNY: (QUIETLY) Yeah. Good thing she didn't catch us at anything, though.

ANNA: (FROWNS) Now what do you mean by that?

JOHNNY: (SMILING) You know.......

ANNA: No, I'm afraid I don't know. Listen here, just because we were in the same high school class, it doesn't give you any right to get smart.

JOHNNY: I didn't mean anything, Anna. Come on, now, don't get all fussed up over nothing. You'll spoil it.

ANNA: Spoil what?

JOHNNY: An invite.

ANNA: Invite?
JOHNNY: Yessirree. I asked you up here so as I could invite you to the dance over in Harleyville this Saturday night.

ANNA: (SOMewhat MORE MELLOw) Well, that's nice, but you know I can't.

JOHNNY: Can't or won't.

ANNA: (STEPS SOMEWHAT AWAY FROM HIM) You know I'm going steady with a boy now. It wouldn't be proper.

JOHNNY: Same one?

ANNA: The same. (SHE SMILES) Almost two whole years now.

JOHNNY: Somebody said you two broke up.

ANNA: Well, we certainly have not. I don't know where they got that idea.

JOHNNY: Well, that's what I heard in town, I swear. Folks even said it was probably a good thing too. Said you and him were gettin' close on to danger courtin'!

ANNA: (PEEVED) Well, I've never heard.....

JOHNNY: So I sez to myself, long as she ain't courtin' him no more, maybe I can grab a pretty thing for myself. Yessirree, that's what I said. (LOOKS AT HER AND SMILES)

ANNA: I think you had better do some more thinking, Johnny Fowler. Only reason I walked up here with you was because it's broad day and we were in school together -- and all that. It appears like I was wrong. I guess I shouldn't have come if that's what was filling your mind.

JOHNNY: You'd be surprised at what's fillin' my mind about you, honey.

ANNA: I've heard enough. I think I'd better go now.

JOHNNY: (REACHES OUT AND GRABS HER BY THE ELBOW) Now just lookyhere -- the mighty little gal has gone and worked herself up. Don't give me none of that talk. I know you came up here with me 'cause you knew exactly what I was a'thinking. And you liked it, didn't you? (HE TAKES HER BY THE ARM)
ANNA: Let go my arm!

JOHNNY: Man, I like 'em when they get a little vinegar in them!

ANNA: Let go, you're hurting me. Besides, there's Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Thayer. Let go before they see us.

JOHNNY: You worried about those ole biddies? Well, I'm not. Let's just give them something they can really wag their tongues about -- come on, give us a little kiss, sweetie. I'd like to kiss a going-steady girl.

(He brings her to him as she struggles to get out of his grasp without drawing attention to it too much. She does not want the two women to see her like this. He kisses her - a quick kiss that misses its mark and lands on her UPSTAGE cheek. Having accomplished the tease, he lets her go. She is angry.)

ANNA: You're dirty! (THERE IS A SLIGHT PAUSE. HE GRINS, WITH BOTH HANDS ON HIS HIPS, ELBOWS OUT. SHE BRINGS BACK HER HAND AND SLAPS HIM HARD, TURNS, AND WALKS OUT OF THE LIGHT AND OFFSTAGE.)

JOHNNY: (CALLING AFTER ANNA) Awwwww, come on, baby, they don't mind. Ain't nobody gonna tell on us. (WITH A LAUGH AND A WAVE) Take care of yourself, baby!

(The lights come down slowly on the grinning JOHNNY and he EXITS as another spotlight comes up on two women interestedly looking toward CENTER STAGE. Their spotlight is the same as the one KYLE used. Both women are in simple dresses, wear hats, and carry handbags. Both are middle-aged women.)

MRS. GRAHAM: Mrs. Thayer, I swear but it looks like she's up there with somebody else.

MRS. THAYER: Can't be. Just can't be. Everyone says she's such a nice girl.

MRS. GRAHAM: Look for yourself. It's her, all right. And I recognize that boy now. Forget his name just off but he lives down by the Harleyville road. Now ain't that something?

MRS. THAYER: Sure seems to be a powerful lot of talking between them, don't it?
MRS. GRAHAM: It does indeed, Mrs. Thayer.

MRS. THAYER: And all along everyone talking about what a fine and pretty thing she is. Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.

MRS. GRAHAM: Still water runs deep. (NUDGES MRS. THAYER WITH AN ELBOW). If you know what I mean?

MRS. THAYER: I know what you mean. Lawd, I think they're going to kiss right here in full view. (GETTING EXCITED).......Lord a'mighty, look there, Mrs. Graham, they are! (IN A SHARP WHISPER) Don't you reckon - - don't you reckon they see us?

MRS. GRAHAM: I suppose not, else they wouldn't be - - lookout, she's cracked him across the face. Shhhhhhhhhhh, he's saying something.

MRS. THAYER: What's he saying?

MRS. GRAHAM: Shhhhhhhhhhhhh! (SHE BENDS HER EAR IN THAT DIRECTION)

MRS. THAYER: Well?

MRS. GRAHAM: Huh?

MRS. THAYER: What did he say?

MRS. GRAHAM: Couldn't hear it all, just the important part. (LOOKS TO EITHER SIDE BEFORE SHE CONTINUES) Said something about a baby!

MRS. THAYER: You don't mean......

MRS. GRAHAM: That's what he said - - said "take care of the baby"! I heard it as plain as day.

MRS. THAYER: Hard to believe.

MRS. GRAHAM: (LOOKING OUT NOW) There she goes now, and he's just standing there a-grinning.

MRS. THAYER: Well, I guess so.

MRS. GRAHAM: Lord, you never know what you're liable to run across walking these days.

MRS. THAYER: Well, this one sure takes the cake.
MRS. GRAHAM: Mrs. Thayer, I think we'd best forget what we heard and what we saw.

MRS. THAYER: Lord, that would sure cause a stir in this town, wouldn't it?

MRS. GRAHAM: I don't know about you, but I'm going to forget I saw a thing.

MRS. THAYER: So am I.

MRS. GRAHAM: If it gets out, it won't be me who told it, I can tell you that.

MRS. THAYER: And it sure won't be me. Leave well enough alone, I always say.

MRS. GRAHAM: Come on, let's move on. Glory, but I'm glad I don't have to raise a girl...

(They move out of the spotlight and EXIT OFFSTAGE RIGHT. The spot dims and goes out as another comes up on a woman sitting in a chair under spot at STAGE LEFT. The woman is knitting. She is an older woman with the lines of many years about her face. ANNA stands beside her.)

MRS. PERKINS: You going to church?

ANNA: Yes, ma'am, I thought I would. Aren't you?

MRS. PERKINS: No, not this day.

ANNA: You aren't feeling well?

MRS. PERKINS: Feeling fine.

ANNA: (LAUGHING) Then why aren't you going?

MRS. PERKINS: I expect you would know about that, wouldn't you?

ANNA: No, ma'am, I don't know.

MRS. PERKINS: Well, you can't keep it forever, that's for sure. Sooner or later everyone will see for themselves.

ANNA: See what, Mama?

MRS. PERKINS: See what there is to see, that's all.

End of Script Sample
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