



WHITE GUY ON THE BUS

BY BRUCE GRAHAM



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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For Stephanie

WHITE GUY ON THE BUS was originally produced by Northlight Theatre (BJ Jones, Artistic Director; Timothy J. Evans, Executive Director), Chicago, Illinois, in January 2015. It was directed by BJ Jones; the set design was by John Culbert; the costume design was by Rachel Laritz; the lighting design was by J.R. Lederle; the sound design was by Andrew D. Hansen; the dramaturg was Kristin Leahey; and the production stage manager was Rita Vreeland. The cast was as follows:

RAY Francis Guinan
ROZ Mary Beth Fisher
CHRISTOPHER Jordan Brown
MOLLY Amanda Drinkall
SHATIQUE Patrese D. McClain

WHITE GUY ON THE BUS was produced by Passage Theatre Company (June Ballinger, Artistic Director; Damion A. Parran, Managing Director), Trenton, New Jersey, in May 2016. It was directed by Michelle Tattenbaum; the set design was by Jeffrey Van Velsor; the costume design was by Robin I. Shane; the lighting design was by Paul Kilsdonk; the sound design was by Karin Graybash; and the production stage manager was Kristin Pfeifer. The cast was as follows:

RAY Greg Wood
ROZ Susan Riley Stevens
CHRISTOPHER Nate Washburn
MOLLY Laura Chaneski
SHATIQUE Danielle Lenee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With thanks to Tim Evans at Northlight, Susan Atkinson at Bristol Riverside Theatre, June Ballinger at Passage Theatre, Chip Walton at Curious Theatre Company, and Bud Martin at Delaware Theatre Company.

Special thanks to BJ Jones, who had the guts to direct the world premiere.

CHARACTERS

RAY

ROZ

CHRISTOPHER

MOLLY

SHATIQUE

PLACE

Philadelphia. A house on the Main Line, an apartment in North Philly, a bus...etc.

TIME

The present.

Man has demonstrated that he is master of everything—except his own nature.

—Henry Miller

WHITE GUY ON THE BUS

ACT ONE

Nothing is meant to be totally realistic. We will shift from an upscale home to a small apartment to a bus...etc.

We will also shift in time.

This story is from Ray's POV. Therefore he is always onstage. Sometimes he is on the fringe of a scene as if observing but he is always there.

In the dark, stock market results appear, moving by swiftly in different patterns. We hear "business news." First one show, then another, until it begins to overlap.

In the middle of this stands Ray. 50s, expensively dressed. Expert tailoring hides the beginning of a paunch.

He lets the business stuff wash over him. He looks half-interested—maybe a little bored. The business news fades and we hear the roar of a bus.

Ray looks over as lights rise, rather dimly, on the bus.

In the shadows we see a young black woman. She wears scrubs. It's night and she looks idly out the window as various lights from the traffic flash across her. She's coming home from a long day. She looks exhausted.

Bus sounds and lights fade.

RAY. I'm a "numbers man."

Lights rise on Ray's patio, overlooking his expansive lawn on

Philadelphia's Main Line. It is dusk.

That's what he said.

Roz appears. 50s, pretty, stylishly dressed.

ROZ. Who?

RAY. Glen.

ROZ. Glen's an idiot. Zip.

She turns her back to him so he can zip her up.

RAY. He's showing around a new client. "Ray here's the numbers man."

ROZ. "Head" numbers man, did he say that?

RAY. It was implied—

ROZ. Owns-the-store numbers man.

RAY. He meant it as a—

ROZ. Could-fire-my-ass-in-a-heartbeat numbers man?

RAY. Don't start.

ROZ. Glen's an idiot—

RAY. He meant it as a compliment.

ROZ. Then why do you look so depressed?

A beat.

RAY. I had this out-of-body experience the other day.

ROZ. Okay.

RAY. I was in a meeting, the kind I've done a million times before, and suddenly I realized I was in the back of the room watching myself. Listening to myself. And you know something? I was bored.

ROZ. *(Laughing.)* Ray—

RAY. I'm serious. I was listening to myself and I was sooo...boring.

ROZ. *(She's heard this before.)* You are not boring.

RAY. What I do is boring.

ROZ. How do I look?

RAY. Wonderful. You always look wonderful.

ROZ. I feel fat.

RAY. You're not fat.

ROZ. And you're not boring.

She kisses him.

RAY. Let's sell this house.

ROZ. ("Not again.") Oh, God...

RAY. Let's sell everything.

ROZ. Have you been reading Thoreau again?

RAY. I'm serious.

ROZ. You think you're serious.

RAY. Everything. God. Just...why not?

ROZ. Jobs.

RAY. I ran the numbers. It's what I do, remember? We're set for life, Roz. A very long comfortable life. We could—I don't know...

ROZ. What would we do Ray?

RAY. Why do we have to "do" anything?

ROZ. I like what I do—

RAY. How much longer?

ROZ. Till they carry me out.

Silence. She observes him a moment, concerned, but says nothing.

RAY. Gauguin was a numbers man, you know. Eleven years as a stock-broker and then one day he said the hell with it and took off to paint.

ROZ. You're going to Polynesia. That what you're trying to tell me?

RAY. Gauguin wanted to get away from, quote: "everything that is artificial and conventional." Like this neighborhood.

ROZ. Ray, you can't paint.

He laughs but she detects a note of sadness behind it.

(Gently.) What is it?

RAY. Nothing.

ROZ. You just seem...

Studying him.

Are we okay?

RAY. God, yes. You're about the only thing that is okay.

ROZ. Something happen at work?

RAY. Nothing ever happens at work. Market goes up, we make money. Market goes down—make a few adjustments—we make money. You know, you read about those disgruntled workers—get fired, come back with a machine gun. Least it would liven things up.

ROZ. Another one today. Down south someplace. Insurance company. Fourteen people.

RAY. I probably heard about it and— (*Indicates “right over my head.”*) It’s not even news anymore.

ROZ. So what happened at work?

RAY. Nothing.

ROZ. Ray, please—

RAY. No—it’s just...you know...Whitney

ROZ. Thought you liked her.

RAY. She’s good. She’s very good...

ROZ. But?

RAY. Whitney is out for Whitney. To a certain point that’s good—you want aggressive people but—you know, couple clients complained. Second offense, so I had to ream her out at the meeting.

A beat.

I got angry.

ROZ. How angry?

RAY. Too angry.

ROZ. Oh, God...

RAY. Been a long time since...I lost it, you know?

ROZ. (*Touching his neck.*) That vein bulging?

RAY. Probably.

ROZ. What’d she do?

RAY. She doesn’t grasp the idea that there’s a bigger picture. You don’t sell a client on what’s “hot” for a couple days. She’s got to understand it’s about...trust. Growth. It’s about the big picture—

ROZ. I know.

RAY. These kids we’re getting now. I don’t know—like they all

watched *Wall Street* and—believed Michael Douglas or something. If that's what they want, go somewhere else.

Thinks a moment.

She thought she got away with it, that's what really pissed me off. If she'd owned up—taken responsibility—who knows, I might've let her slide.

ROZ. Document everything.

RAY. I know—

ROZ. Every meeting with her. Have a witness.

RAY. I know—

ROZ. Keep your office door open at all times—

RAY. I don't want to fire her—

ROZ. Cover your ass, Ray—

RAY. Paper profits. That's all they're interested in. There's more than that.

ROZ. (*Teasing.*) I know. The big picture.

RAY. See? Repeating myself. I am boring.

A beat.

ROZ. We should go. Told them seven.

He kisses her.

RAY. I'm very proud of you.

ROZ. I'm not gonna win.

RAY. Wish I could be there.

ROZ. You're in Toronto—

RAY. I could cancel—

ROZ. I'm not going to win. And I don't want to be humiliated in front of you.

RAY. It's not humiliating—

ROZ. It would be if you were there. I can't help it, okay? (*Kissing him.*) I'm always trying to impress you.

RAY. You do pretty good.

ROZ. "Pretty well." Adverb.

WHITE GUY ON THE BUS

by Bruce Graham

2M, 3W

Week after week, a wealthy white businessman rides the same bus, befriending a single black mom. As they get to know one another, their pasts unfold and tensions rise, igniting a disturbing and crucial exploration of race.

"...entertaining and thoughtful...Everyone who sees WHITE GUY ON THE BUS will probably recognize the hard truths about racism that drive this story—and, sadly, so much of American life today."

—**The New York Times**

"[WHITE GUY ON THE BUS] is a play with guts. ...this unusually frank drama has been gnawing away at me these last 24 hours. ...I see so many plays that want to blurt out some of the things that these characters say but don't have the nerve. This one goes for the jugular."

—**Chicago Tribune**

"WHITE GUY ON THE BUS obviously concerns race, but so much more...the play is not an issue-driven debate; instead, this is a powerful story about characters struggling with titanic decisions and negotiating desperately to save themselves. As in his other plays, Graham has a delicious way of penning realistic-sounding talk that seems to meander, but actually articulates important themes and ideas entertainingly and without preachiness."

—**BroadStreetReview.com**

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ISBN 978-0-8222-3618-4



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