

The Stranger

By Maggie Goscinski

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Est. Running Time: 15mins.

Characters:

SARAH HASKELL COLLEY	Eighteen to thirty years old. Mother to Charles.
AMOS COLLEY	A little older than Sarah. Her husband.
SOLDIER ONE	Sixteen to thirty. Male.
SOLDIER TWO	Sixteen to thirty. Male.
BOY	Six to ten. The younger the more startling.
PRIEST	Any age. Male.
DEATH	Any age, any gender.
PALLBEARERS	Any age. Male.

Setting:

Fall of 1862 in Gray, Maine in the midst of the American Civil War. All scenes take place outside, either on the front porch of the Colley family home or in the family burial plot graveyard. The setting should be fairly minimal and ambiguous.

History:

Gray Maine's Stranger

During the U.S. Civil War, Lt. Charles H. Colley of Gray was mortally wounded at the Battle of Cedar Mountain. His body was sent home for burial. However, when the casket arrived home, it contained the body of an unknown soldier in a gray Confederate uniform. Unable to correct the mistake, and believing that the young man's family would want him to have a proper burial, the soldier was laid to rest in the town cemetery, and a group of local townswomen arranged to have a stone placed on his grave.

The people of Gray could have sent the Stranger away. They had reason to. The small town of Gray sent proportionally more sons to the Civil War than any other town in Maine. More than 178 Union soldiers are buried the Gray Village Cemetery. But touchingly, there is also one Confederate, the Unknown Soldier, brought into the heart of the town in the midst of that terrible war. The people of Gray always remember the grave of the Stranger on Memorial Day with a Confederate flag.

Reprinted from "[The Stranger in a Gray, Maine Cemetery](#)" by Dick Eastman of Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter.

**** 'The Stranger' written by Maggie Goscinski is inspired by, but not intended to be a true historical representation of the events of Gray, Maine's 'Stranger'. Artistic liberties have been widely used and readers are encouraged to consult a different source for more factual information.***

Act One, Scene One

SARAH sits in a rocking chair on the front porch of her family home.

SARAH:

It wasn't for me to decide.

But if it were, we would've spent our summer, fall, winter, and spring, working on the farm. Pulling up potatoes and raking blueberries. We would've built that new storehouse and he would've met someone at a dance who felt new, and Amos would have talked to him about what girls like and he wouldn't be finding out about life all alone, and he would exist on more than paper, and I wouldn't always be wondering where my son has gone. But it isn't for me to decide.

Blackout.

The setting is the same as before, but now SARAH stands and watches as the SOLDIERS enter. She addresses the audience, but does not speak directly to them.

SARAH:

I can smell death from here. And I've smelled him before, but death smells different when he smells like your son, and death smells different when they say:

SOLIER:

Mrs. Colley, may we come inside?

SARAH:

And death smells different when they say:

SOLDIER:

Ma'am, if you please, take a seat.

SARAH:

And death smells different when they say:

SOLDIER:

Mrs. Colley, your son is dead.

BLACKOUT

SARAH sits and rocks in her chair, staring at the sea. AMOS enters.

AMOS:

I know what you're thinking.

SARAH:

That's not hard.

AMOS:

You were right.

SARAH:

I wish it felt better to hear you say that. I feel cheated out of a rare admission of credit due.

AMOS:

But it doesn't matter.

SARAH:

No. It doesn't matter.

They didn't even ask. They didn't tell us why, they didn't explain.

AMOS:

It wasn't up to us.

SARAH:

All the decisions were made before we even got thought of.

AMOS:

We didn't have a choice.

SARAH:

Everyone has a choice.

AMOS:

We've been over this...

SARAH:

We knew this would happen-

AMOS:

We did not!

SARAH:

We knew that he was walking out of this door for the last time and we didn't do anything! We just smiled and waved and offered hugs that couldn't protect him and words that were just air-

AMOS:

Stop!

SARAH:

We didn't protect him! We didn't protect him! We were supposed to protect him...

AMOS:

I know. (*A beat.*) He was happy. When he was here.

SARAH:

Do you think he knew? What is was all for?

AMOS:

Do you think anyone did?

SARAH:

He's all alone. (*A beat.*) We have to bring him home.

AMOS:

They said as soon as he was found they'd bring him straight-

SARAH:

I'm tired of empty promises. Do something, send someone. Bring my baby back to me Amos.

AMOS:

I'll try.

SARAH:

Don't try-

AMOS:

We're on the same side, you and I, remember? My promises aren't empty. He's my baby boy too. I'll try.

SARAH:

We were supposed to protect him...

BLACKOUT

SARAH: (SONG, REVELATION 21:4)

HE WILL WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES
AND DEATH SHALL BE NO MORE,
NEITHER SHALL THERE BE MOURNING,
NOR CRYING, NOR PAIN ANYMORE,
FOR THE FORMER THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY.

Lights up and SARAH walks as part of a funeral procession with her husband and PALLBEARERS carrying a simple pine coffin. DEATH follows with a scythe.

SARAH:

When the world is ugly and your thoughts are tarnished and there's no one to blame but the apathetic all - who wields the shovel and picks up the first mass of dirt?

BOY picks up the shovel and begins to dig.

PRIEST:

Heavenly Father, we are gathered here today-

SARAH:

Too unsightly. Grief has no feeling, grief has nothing to touch, nothing to see. Death is real. Bodies, blood, marred faces.... Open it up.

ALL look.

Open it.

PRIEST:

You are grieving, and when we grieve, we sometimes-

SARAH:

Open it! I have to see him.

AMOS:

My dear, they said he wasn't- he's not himself. Let's remember him the way he was. Not how he is now.

PRIEST:

In times of sorrow, we can find peace-

SARAH:

Please. I have to see him. Once more. Please.

AMOS:

As you wish.

The PALLBEARERS open the coffin. Within is the preserved, clean body of a Confederate Soldier.

SARAH:

It isn't him.

AMOS:

It isn't him.

PRIEST:

How can it not be him?

SARAH:

It isn't. It isn't him.

AMOS:

A Confederate! He was Union.... How could they?

SARAH:

It isn't him...

AMOS:

A Confederate?!

PRIEST:

I'll take care of this- (*PALLBEARERS slam the coffin closed and begin to take it away.*) You don't need to worry anymore. Take him! We'll take care of-

SARAH:

Where is he going?

PRIEST:

Don't worry, I'm so sorry Mrs.-

SARAH:

Where will he go? (*No one answers.*) Who is he?

AMOS:

Sarah-

SARAH:

He can't just go anywhere. He's so far from home. He belongs to someone.

AMOS: (*After a beat.*)

He'll stay.

PRIEST:

You're sure?

Coffin is placed, BOY picks up shovel and begins to place dirt on the coffin.

PRIEST:

Heavenly Father, we are gathered here today....

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT

The stage is cleared except for a small milking stool. Enters in darkness and stands behind the stool. DEATH follows and watches from behind.

SARAH:

There is some darkness here and if I am truthful, it seems it stretches into infinity and hangs about my head, thicker than fog.

I do not understand why people do the things they do, or why everyone else seems to care so little, but I do know that the exhaustion of everything which is felt will not ease. And I do know I long for rest.

She stands on the stool and as she speaks DEATH approaches her slowly, finally wielding his scythe and bringing it to her neck. She does not notice.

I cannot stay here where we can murder so long as there is some cause and where Mamas lose their babies to foolish wars. They say we are victorious. But what did it cost?

DEATH slices her throat and as her body goes limp and the first drops of blood appear, the lights cut quickly to black.

The lights rise on the stage as it was before, but DEATH is gone and so is the blood. She is hanging from a noose and her body like a puppet limply drapes its toes across the milk stool. We watch this scene for a long moment until the lights fade again.

The lights come up on two headstones now, 'Stranger' and 'Sarah Haskell Colley'. We see this a shorter moment and then the lights fade again.

Lights up on the same scene, but AMOS now sits in a rocking chair next to his wife's headstone. His head is bowed and his hands are tightly clasped as he mutters what we assume may be a prayer. The lights fade to black.

END