

# MORNING IN AMERICA

A Phantasmagoric Tragedy in Three Acts  
Concerning Nine Decades in the Life  
of the Family of Lawrence Bardwell  
and the Contentious Ownership  
and Eventual Destruction of Majekisgad Camps

written by  
Ethan Warren

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Lawrence – our protagonist, ranging from childhood to old age  
Malsum – who plays Jacob (plus guitarist, and the first marine)  
Mateguas – who plays Ian and Mark (plus the second marine)  
Medawisla – who plays Curtis and Edgar (plus a young boy)  
Bootup – who plays Bill and Frankie (plus Pierre and a teacher, and a Viet Cong soldier)  
Tolba – who plays John and Howard  
Moskwas – who plays Al, Toby, and Willie (plus German Soldier)  
Bemola – who plays Olivia and Rachel (plus Buckshot, Lawrence’s wife, and first weird girl)  
Wuchowsen – who plays Kim and Stephanie (plus prostitute, and second weird girl)  
Pukwudgies – who plays Gloria, Nancy, and Danielle (plus weird woman)

**STAGING NOTE:** This play makes use of Brechtian distancing effects to allow for constantly shifting settings and double casting. Thus, a minimalist stage design is likely most effective. Rear-projections might work, as well as set design to evoke a dense, dark pine forest, though a bare stage would also be appropriate. The one necessary element is some version of a lae that allows for actors to wade up to knee height. A water feature is certainly not necessary or appropriate, something as simple as a blue cloth could suffice, but the playwright leaves that in the capable hands of the set designers. Notes on set elements and props are at the top of each act, though set elements should be minimal and impressionistic so as to be multipurpose and efficiently moved.

**CASTING NOTE:** As each actor is required to play roles of varying ages, there are no strict age requirements for actors. Issues of Native American race and heritage come into play, though the actors playing these roles must each also portray several white characters. This is a sticky issue, and it seems to the playwright that it might be best if actors of any ethnicity could portray the roles. A totally multicultural cast would seem to be the best way of forcing the audience to discount actors’ skin color in their portrayal of the characters.

**COSTUMING NOTE:** Each cast member should wear the same basic outfit—perhaps a white T-shirt and blue jeans—and a costume rack onstage should feature one signature item that can be adopted to indicate which persona s/he is now slipping into. It should be distinctive enough that we have no trouble realizing whom we’re now watching. When cast members narrate, they should wear their basic, unadorned outfit.

**LIGHTING/SOUND DESIGN NOTE:** A wealth of lighting and sound design will be important in evoking the various settings, with sound being particularly important when characters are in crowded spaces but actors are alone onstage.

## OVERTURE

### Madness in Great Ones

*(We hear water lapping on the shore of the lake, and a loon's call.*

*Malsum walks onstage, addressing the audience in warm, welcoming tones.)*

#### MALSUM

You've waited all year.

*(As Malsum speaks, the other cast members join him one by one, scattered across the stage, beaming into the audience as they welcome us to their world.)*

#### PUKWUDGIES

You've braved the traffic.

#### BOOTUP

Now climb onboard the Majekisgad Steamer and leave the stress and worries behind.

#### BEMOLA

Cruise to the far side of the horizon, where everything is open, wild, and free.

#### MEDAWISLA

Where the nearest living thing is a tall pine and a bashful moose.

#### BEMOLA

Where the water is clean and the air is pure.

#### BOOTUP

You're heading for Majekisgad Camps in Western Maine.

#### PUKWUDGIES

Come and get it.

#### MALSUM

It's yours.

#### TOLBA

Fly-fishing's the thing at Majekisgad, and anglers come back year after year to hook our trout and salmon.

#### WUCHOWSEN

And they bring their families, too, for a chance to get away from it all, paddle a canoe, see a moose, a loon, or just lay in a hammock watching the world go by.

PUKWUDGIES

Our camp is the only structure on five-mile-long Majekisgad Lake, so we serve you a taste of old-fashioned hospitality with a side of peace and quiet.

MEDAWISLA

We'll take care of everything, so you have nothing to worry about except whether to swim -

WUCHOWSEN

- hike -

PUKWUDGIES

- explore -

TOLBA

- or just plain relax.

MATEGUSAS

Our crack team of guides will teach you how to read a river -

TOLBA

- the difference between pools and pocket water -

MOSKVAS

- between the roll cast and the double haul, and, well -

MATEGUSAS

- how to look pretty good doing it.

BEMOLA

The dining room is more than a place to eat. It's a gathering spot to share tales of adventure, laughter, and a little good cheer.

PUKWUDGIES

When it comes time to roost, our twelve rustic –

*(Pukwudies' and Wuchowesen's speech begins to overlap and bleed into each other in a disconcerting way.)*

WUCHOWSEN

- cabins come equipped with all the -

PUKWUDGIES

- most modern amenities, and a full -

WUCHOWSEN

- housekeeping service, in case the cubs -

PUKWUDGIES

- get -

*(Beat.)*

WUCHOWSEN

- a tad rowdy.

MALSUM

Yup, there's a whole wide wilderness out there, and all kinds of ways to explore. So catch the next train to Stratford, Maine, and hop onboard the Majekisgad Steamer, the only way to enjoy the great outdoors...

ALL

*(overlapping, not quite in sync with each other, but happy)*

The way life should be.

*(The cast freezes and stares, smiling peacefully, into the audience. Lawrence wanders onstage, confused and disoriented. He walks among the cast, speaking to them, but they ignore him, seemingly unaware he's there. He mumbles, his mind gone.)*

LAWRENCE

I didn't. Wish I had. Wish I hadn't. I didn't. I would have, but I could have, and I wish I hadn't, but I didn't. You can't say I didn't. I did, when I did. Wish I did. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

*(The rest of the cast just smiles at the audience, serene.)*

*Blackout.)*

## ACT ONE

### It Might As Well Rain Until September

NOTE: In this act, any set and prop elements introduced are discretely cleared when noted, leaving a constant clean slate for the action. As will be revealed in Acts Two and Three, this won't last.

*(Lights up on a stage clear but for Malsum.)*

#### MALSUM

In the late spring of his 70th year, Lawrence Bardwell asked his business manager and lifelong friend, Ian Chamberlain, to meet him in the dining room of Majekisgad Camps, the hunting and fishing camp his family had run since the late 1950s.

*(Lawrence (Older – in his early 70s) and Mateguas (Older Ian) enter with chairs. They place them down in the area that will be designated the camp's dining room. Lawrence (Older) and Mateguas (Older Ian) sit across from each other. The year is 2016, Lawrence is broken and distant, Mateguas (Older Ian) a bit more vital and present. There's a comfort between them, but something's been lost. They begin to talk inaudibly as Malsum continues to fill us in.)*

#### MALSUM

Lawrence told Ian that he planned to retire from day-to-day operations at the camp. He was tired, he told his friend, and it was time to pass the camp to the next generation.

*(Malsum steps aside to watch as we begin to hear Lawrence (Older) and Mateguas (Older Ian) speak.)*

LAWRENCE (Older)

- head back to Devon.

MATEGUAS (Older Ian)

Why?

LAWRENCE (Older)

We were happy there.

MATEGUAS (Older Ian)

Were we?

*(The men continue talking, unheard by us.)*

MALSUM

Decades earlier, the two men had lived in the small southern city of Devon, Maine, while Ian studied at Terrence College and Lawrence worked as a projectionist at the local cinema.

MATEGUAS (Older Ian)

- traumatic. Painful.

*(Lawrence (Older) looks away, unable to agree or disagree.*

*Beat.)*

MATEGUAS (Older Ian)

When will you leave?

LAWRENCE (Older)

Soon.

MATEGUAS (Older Ian)

You'll stay the summer, though.

LAWRENCE (Older)

No. Best to move on. New blood.

MALSUM

Ian knew Lawrence wore rose-colored glasses. But his friend had never been one to take advice willingly.

*(Mateguas and Lawrence stand and exit, leaving their chairs. Lights shift and we hear sounds of men drinking and smoking, laughing at bawdy jokes. Malsum moves into the dining room area, becoming Jacob in 1964, and begins circulating, smiling and laughing with unseen guests.*

*Pukwudgies (Gloria) enters the dining room, wiping her hands. She sees Malsum (Jacob) and smiles.*

*Lawrence walks onstage with a backpack and two suitcases. He's a teenager now, and not overly happy to be here.*

*Bemola enters from the opposite wing and addresses the audience.)*

## BEMOLA

Lawrence graduated from the Burbage School in 1964, just under one year after his father, Edgar, drowned in Majekisgad Lake. There had been a total solar eclipse the day Lawrence's father died, just before dinnertime. All day, guests at the camp had reported birds flying erratically, sightings of raccoons, opossums, and other nocturnal animals, and even flowers folding their petals. On the day he died, Lawrence's father had been fifty-five years old.

*(Pukwudgies (Gloria) looks up and sees Lawrence, and rushes to him. The dining room sounds quiet as she goes to Lawrence, smiling. Lawrence doesn't recognize her.)*

PUKWUDGIES (Gloria)

Lawrence. Sweetie.

*(Lawrence recognizes her, but he's wary. She opens her arms for a hug, and he puts down his suitcases and accepts.)*

PUKWUDGIES (Gloria)

It's so good to SEE you! Let's get you something to eat, huh?

LAWRENCE

Can I sleep in number 13 this summer?

*(Pukwudgies (Gloria) is taken aback by this request.)*

PUKWUDGIES (Gloria)

Let's get you some lunch.

*(Pukwudgies (Gloria) and Lawrence go back into the dining room. Malsum (Jacob) is buttering up a guest. Lawrence is palpably uncomfortable as Pukwudgies (Gloria) brings him over. Malsum (Jacob) sees them, and tries to be friendly, but he's ill at ease around the boy.)*

PUKWUDGIES (Gloria)

Look who I found.

*(Malsum (Jacob) extends a hand to Lawrence.)*

MALSUM (Jacob)

Lawrence. Glad to see you. Sorry we couldn't make it to the graduation.

*(Lawrence shakes Malsum (Jacob)'s hand.)*

LAWRENCE

Hi.

PUKWUDGIES (Gloria)

*(under her breath)*

Jacob.

LAWRENCE

*(irritated)*

I know.

PUKWUDGIES (Gloria)

I'll go see what we've got in the fridge. I think there's some nice fried chicken left over.

*(Lawrence ignores her, and she goes. Malsum (Jacob) looks Lawrence over for an uncomfortable beat, and then turns back to the guests.)*

BEMOLA

The previous summer, Lawrence's mother, Gloria, had begun a public affair with Jacob, her husband's best friend. Lawrence's father had moved out of the lodge to allow them to be together. Jacob and Edgar had been canoeing when Edgar fell in the lake and drowned. And so Jacob had been the last to see Lawrence's father alive, and Lawrence had never said goodbye.

*(Bemola exits as Pukwudgies (Gloria) returns with a sandwich for Lawrence. She brings it to him and he takes it.)*

LAWRENCE

Can I eat it down in number 13?

PUKWUDGIES (Gloria)

You really want to sleep down there by yourself? It's still a mess.

*(Lawrence looks around.)*

LAWRENCE

It smells in here.

*(He picks up his suitcases, awkwardly holding them and the sandwich, and leaves. Pukwudgies (Gloria) and Malsum (Jacob) watch him go. Pukwudgies (Gloria) is visibly*

*upset by her son's affect. Malsum (Jacob)  
takes her hand.*

*After sharing a moment with him,  
Pukwudgies steps forward and begins to  
address the audience.)*

#### PUKWUDGIES

Jacob and Edgar met in 1926 at the Home for Friendless Boys in Portland, Maine. They were both orphans, and loners, Edgar by choice, Jacob because he'd never known any other way. It was Edgar who first talked to Jacob, late that summer on the boat they took to visit what was then called Perrault's Camps.

*(Malsum shifts into his Child Jacob persona.  
We hear the sound of the Majekisgad  
Steamer trundling across the lake and  
docking.*

*Medawisla (Child Edgar) enters to join  
Malsum (Child Jacob) They're both 10, and  
they look around. Malsum (Child Jacob) is  
awed, Medawisla (Child Edgar) merely  
impressed. Medawisla (Child Edgar) turns  
to Malsum (Child Jacob) and offers his  
hand.)*

MEDAWISLA (Child Edgar)

Don't think we've been formally introduced. I'm Johnny Torrio.

MALSUM (Child Jacob)

You're Edgar.

MEDAWISLA (Child Edgar)

They just say that 'cause nobody knows the real me. I'm Johnny the Fox, terror of Illinois. So who are you?

MALSUM (Child Jacob)

I'm Jacob.

MEDAWISLA (Child Edgar)

But who are you really?

MALSUM (Child Jacob)

Just Jacob, I guess.

MEDAWISLA (Child Edgar)

You must be something else, too. Maybe you're Babe Ruth. He's the greatest ballplayer who'll ever live, and a ballplayer's a real man. Are you a real man?

MALSUM (Child Jacob)

Some day, maybe.

MEDAWISLA (Child Edgar)

So I guess you're a Babe Ruth sort of man. How does it feel to be the greatest man alive?

MALSUM (Child Jacob)

I think I feel the same.

*(From the opposite wing, Bootup (Pierre) enters. He's in his late 40s, but young at heart, and he grins at the boys.)*

PUKWUDGIES

Every year, Pierre Perrault invited a group of twenty-five boys from the orphanage to spend the last weekend of the season at his camp.

*(Bootup (Pierre) demonstrates fly-casting for the boys – Medawisla (Child Edgar) mimics awkwardly, but Malsum (Child Jacob) does it perfectly.)*

PUKWUDGIES

Jacob, whose mother had died before he was born—or so he believed to be true—had never been so happy in his entire life.

*(The lights shift to evening, and Malsum (Child Jacob), Medawisla (Child Edgar), and Bootup (Pierre) sit around a campfire. Bootup (Pierre) sits on a stump, provided by Pukwudgies, and addresses both the two boys, and other unseen young boys.)*

BOOTUP (Pierre)

- so I bring the little trout home with me and I put him in a rain barrel out back of the kitchen, and he swam back and forth a bit. And next thing I did was I bored a hole in that barrel and I stopped it with a plug, and then each mornin' I'd pull that plug and let a little water escape. Then every once in a while I'd take him out of the barrel, just for a little while so he could sit on the grass in the early mornin'. After a bit I got so I could take him on a walk with me through the woods, him flappin' along behind me. And every day I'd let a little water out of his barrel. Pretty soon there wasn't enough for an ant to drink. But then one day I had to go see about some things down by the lake, and that little fish came flappin' after me onto the dock, comin' at such a rate, and all at once he got himself tripped over his fins, and he went right over the side of the dock, fell right in the water. And that was all there was. He'd lived out of water so long he'd forgot how to swim. Poor soul drowned.

*(Bootup (Pierre) takes a thoughtful beat, and then stands up and goes, bringing his “stump” with him. Medawisla (Child Edgar) stands, happy, but Malsum (Child Jacob) sits on the stage, dazed with joy.)*

#### PUKWUDGIES

When they got back to the Home for Friendless Boys, they talked about building their own camp some day, a place where orphans could live all summer long.

*(Medawisla (Child Edgar) gives Malsum (Child Jacob) his hand and helps him up.)*

#### PUKWUDGIES

It was Edgar who found the shack in the woods –

*(Medawisla (Child Edgar) leads Malsum (Child Jacob), who has his eyes shut. He drops Malsum (Child Jacob)’s hand, and Malsum (Child Jacob) opens his eyes and looks around, thrilled. Medawisla (Child Edgar) grabs two brooms and hands one to Malsum (Child Jacob). They start sweeping.)*

#### PUKWUDGIES

- which they named Torrio’s Camp. They spent that fall there, and they brought younger boys there on fishing expeditions. It was in those days that Jacob started thinking of Edgar as his brother.

*(Malsum (Child Jacob) turns to Medawisla (Child Edgar) and smiles. Medawisla (Child Edgar) grins back. Malsum (Child Jacob) turns away and occupies himself bringing set items and props onstage to populate their camp, decorating it with great care.)*

#### PUKWUDGIES

But it wasn’t long before Edgar ruined the place for Jacob.

*(Bemola (young girl) enters and takes Medawisla (Child Edgar)’s hand. They talk closely as Malsum (Child Jacob) keeps busy, and then, as Malsum (Child Jacob) turns back, Medawisla (Child Edgar) steals a kiss from Wuchowson (young girl). Malsum (Child Jacob) shouts in anger and hurt, and Wuchowson (young girl) races away. Medawisla (Child Edgar) looks after her,*