

Beets

A Full-Length Play

by
Rick Padden

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STORY OF THE PLAY

At the height of WWII with a frantic need to produce food, yet faced with a critical shortage of labor, American farmers were compelled to accept help in their fields from prisoners of war. While farmers' sons fought men just like them in trenches and tanks in Europe, the presence of these POWs in rural America led to plenty of emotional conflict at home. Isabelle Hunt knows her husband Fred needs help with their beet crop, so he grudgingly allows German POWs from a camp nearby to work the family's fields. Fred is furious over the food and privileges the POWs get, especially while the Hunts' injured son is a POW overseas and may be starving to death. When their lovely 17-year-old daughter Anna meets the handsome and intelligent German soldier Dieter, there is mutual attraction -- and plenty of wrath from Fred. This is the story of small-town humanity, the simplicity of rural life, the conflicts from economic desperation, and unrequited love. There is conflict for some, acceptance by others, and adjustments for all.

Historical Note

There were over 400,000 German POWs brought to the States during the war – held in 511 camps in all but two of the continental states. The play inevitably explores treatment of POWs, an issue, sadly, all too often in the news even today.

HISTORY

The world premiere of "Beets" took place at the Rialto Theater in Loveland, Colorado, on May 22, 2009, was produced by the Loveland Community Theatre company and was directed by Kathleen Gruman and Lesley Jones. The original cast and crew are as follows:

Fred	Paul Jones
Isabelle (Is)	Mari Adams
Jim	Larry Westrum
Anna	Amanda Van Orden
Bobby	Jesse Yarbrough
Dieter	Dale Li
Franz	Lang Johnson
Karl	Brad Redford
Johnny	Mark Orłowski
Producer	Martha Palmer
Set Design	Terry Palmer
Technical Director/Lighting Design	Terry Palmer
Graphic Design	Grafik Nature Designs for Moon Theatre Co.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(7 m, 2 w)

FRED HUNT: 45, a farmer.

ISABELLE HUNT: 39, Fred's wife.

ANNA HUNT: 17, Fred and Isabelle's daughter.

JIM: 45-55, Fred's friend.

JOHNNY: 19, a U.S. Army guard.

BOBBY: 15-17, a local farm boy who transports POWs.

DIETER MUEHLER: 23, handsome and intelligent German
POW.

KARL: 18, German POW.

FRANZ: 18, German POW.

PRODUCTION NOTES

"Sweet Annina" lyrics were written by Rick Padden to the public domain music of Philip Paul Bliss (1838-1876) entitled "Baby's Sweet Sleep," published in 1871.

Bach music is from the opening to Cantata #156 (Bach's Arioso) and is in the public domain.

The hand-raising at the mention of the name Bob must not resemble the Hitler salute. It should be done with the arm bent at the elbow from the waist (fingers loose), NOT extended out and up at an angle as in the Hitler salute.

COSTUMES

Prisoners at Camp 202 wore dark blue denim jackets, with the letters "PW" stenciled in white on the back, as well as a "P" on one sleeve and a "W" on the other. They are believed to have been merchant marine surplus uniforms.

*See props at the end of the script.

SETTING

1944 – 1945 the back porch of a Berthoud, Colorado farmhouse and POW Camp 202.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: June, 1944 midday, the back porch.

Scene 2: Mid-July, morning, the back porch.

Scene 3: July, evening, the back porch.

Scene 4: In a tent at Camp 202, later that day.

Scene 5: September, late afternoon, the back porch.

Scene 6: October, noon, back porch.

ACT II

Scene 1: Early November, early afternoon, back porch.

Scene 2: December, mid-morning, back porch.

Scene 3: January, 1945, afternoon, back porch and Camp 202.

Scene 4: February, morning, back porch.

Scene 5: April, late afternoon, back porch.

Scene 6: Late April, late afternoon, back porch.

Scene 7: May, late afternoon, back porch.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: June, 1944. The back porch. FRED sits in a rocker reading a newspaper. ISABELLE enters, carrying a tray with a pitcher of lemonade and glasses. She pours him a glass, and he takes a sip.)

FRED: Where'd you get sugar, Isabelle?

ISABELLE: Just enjoy it.

FRED: Sure, just enjoy it. I haven't had lemonade like this in two years. *(HE takes another sip and lets out a long sigh.)* Good though, very good. What'd I pay for it?

ISABELLE: *(SHE begins sweeping the porch for distraction.)* Breakfast, a few breakfasts.

FRED: You bartered my ham?

ISABELLE: No, your ham is safe in the smokehouse.

FRED: The eggs?

ISABELLE: There will be more eggs.

FRED: But I can't eat my ham without my eggs.

ISABELLE: And you can't have good lemonade and eat eggs every morning too. And once that ham is gone, there won't be any more. Get used to it.

FRED: *(HE holds the glass up and looks at it; holds it to his nose and then to his cheek.)* Dang, it hits the spot.

ISABELLE: Of course, it does. You've been working hard. You've earned it.

FRED: Who hasn't?

ISABELLE: Eighteen hours a day though, Fred?

FRED: The weeds don't take time off. The field will need to be thinned and hoed soon.

ISABELLE: You're thinning too. You look like a straw man.

FRED: I'll look like a dead man if we don't make this harvest.

ISABELLE: Don't kid.

FRED: I'm not kidding. There's other ways to die in this world than fighting Nazis.

ISABELLE: Fred ...

FRED: If this war goes on much longer there won't be many of us left alive back home to fight for. We'll all starve.

ISABELLE: We're not starving.

FRED: No, but nobody's getting fat on coupon books either.

ISABELLE: And people ARE starving in Europe.

FRED: Yeah, Isabelle, they are. And we'll send them everything we have until we're the ones wasting away.

ISABELLE: *(SHE sits, pours herself a glass of lemonade and drinks.)* Don't be bitter.

FRED: Bitter? Me? My son is off somewhere in Europe stuffed in a sweatbox of a tank in the crosshairs of some Nazi who'd like nothing more than to barbecue him alive, and I'm not supposed to be bitter?

ISABELLE: It will end soon, Fred.

FRED: My sugar beets are needy, and I've only got Berthoud high school kids to help again this year.

ISABELLE: They're strong workers.

FRED: Yeah, when you can get them to work. They're goofing off half the time. Those young bucks have one thing on their minds, and it isn't beets.

ISABELLE: It's a war, Fred. There are sacrifices.

FRED: I know, I know all that but I'm gettin' sick of it. And cripes Is, there's only 80 some kids in the whole school and only a handful that know what work is. At least that monster Rommel is gone. That'll show them Nazis who's boss.

ISABELLE: Fred ...

(JIM approaches the rear of the house.)

ISABELLE: *(Cont'd.)* Hello, Jim.

JIM: Afternoon, Isabelle, Fred.

ISABELLE: Hi, Jim. *(SHE exits.)*

FRED: Jim! Doggone it, c'mon and sit down. Want some lemonade?

(HE gives HIM Isabelle's glass, wiping its rim with his handkerchief.)

JIM: Yeah, thanks.

FRED: Good to see you.

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JIM: (*HE sips.*) There's dang sugar in it!

FRED: Yep, just enjoy it and don't ask questions.

JIM: Where'd you get sugar?

FRED: Sacrifice, Jim, sacrifice. Forget it. Hey, I thought you were pullin' out – goin' back to Kansas.

JIM: I was, but not now.

FRED: Oh? What's changed? I thought you'd had enough.

JIM: We got help comin', Fred, just in time. Men, growed men for the fields.

FRED: Yeah sure. All the grown men are off to war or in the factories, you know that. There's nothing left but kids to help in the fields.

JIM: You mean you ain't heard?

FRED: Heard what?

JIM: The sugar beet growers are going after some help.

FRED: Well, good. We can always use more braceros if we can get them.

JIM: Fred, no. I mean Germans. German POWs.

FRED: Krauts?

JIM: Hey, watch it.

FRED: Okay, Jerrys.

JIM: C'mon, Fred, knock it off. You know my grandparents were German. Volga Germans – from Russia.

FRED: Congratulations.

JIM: You know about the POW camp in Greeley, don't you?

FRED: Of course, Camp 202. There's going to be lots of German prisoners held over there. So?

JIM: Well, they can work, Fred.

FRED: What?

JIM: Why not? They're talkin' about using them for the harvest. There could be thousands.

FRED: Nazis, here?

JIM: It's part of a plan to relieve the local agricultural burden, Fred. Common sense.

FRED: Part of a plan to relieve the local agricultural burden? What kinda bullpucky is that, Jim? You sound like a dang pamphlet.

JIM: Alright ...

FRED: They really want to put Nazis in our fields?

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JIM: Yep.

FRED: I got a shotgun that'll take three at a time.

JIM: Now, Fred ...

FRED: Ain't no Nazi gonna set foot on my land, no way no how.

JIM: Think man -- free labor, or almost free, and growed men -- ones who can take orders.

FRED: No.

JIM: It's smart, Fred. They gotta do somethin' with them, don't they? Why not put them to work in the fields?

FRED: Because I don't want them.

JIM: They tried it over east in last year's harvest with a few Italian prisoners. Down in Longmont too. You didn't hear about that? It wasn't so bad I heard.

FRED: No, I didn't hear it. My land is what I pay attention to.

JIM: Maybe the Italians were a little lazy, but it wasn't so bad, they say. Work got done. And these are Germans we're talkin' about now.

FRED: Not all of us around here have German ancestors, Jim. And why wasn't this in the Berthoud Bulletin?

JIM: You think the newspaper's gonna write about Germans helpin' the local farmers in the fields?

FRED: Why not?

JIM: It's on the hush. The rules say no talkin' to reporters at all.

FRED: Censored?

JIM: I wouldn't know about that.

FRED: So, you like this idea?

JIM: Why not? We're lookin' at a record crop, and it doesn't mean a thing if we can't get the beets out of the ground.

FRED: They'd contaminate the damn beets.

JIM: They're just boys, Fred. Just boys from another country, just like Jake.

FRED: You leave Jake out of this. *(HE gets up and goes to the screen door.)* Where's Anna? Is? Is! Where's Anna?

(ISABELLE comes to the door.)

ISABELLE: She walked to town – went to the post office.
What are you getting all in a fuss about now?

FRED: *(To JIM.)* They're not getting near my daughter, Jim.
No way no how!

ISABELLE: What are you talking about, Fred? *(SHE goes back inside.)*

JIM: There's rules, Fred, and armed guards. They'll be picked up in the morning at the Greeley camp, work in the fields all day and then be trucked back.

FRED: Perfect.

(ISABELLE enters with a basket of laundry, goes to the clothesline, and begins hanging clothes.)

JIM: Combat vets will be guarding them the whole time. It was all explained in the letter the Army sent us. You got the letter, didn't you? It's simple.

FRED: I don't know. Maybe I threw it out.

ISABELLE: What's going on, Fred? What's all the fuss?

FRED: Simple my ass, Jim. *(To ISABELLE.)* There's German prisoners coming over to Greeley and they wanna let them loose in our fields!

JIM: Not loose and not just Greeley, Fred. They're gonna be in Trinidad and down south at Camp Carson- cripes, all over the state. I hear they're settin' up branches in Johnstown, Eaton, Windsor and down to Longmont and Niwot. And they got a building behind the sugar mill up in Loveland ready for temporary quarters during the harvest.

FRED: Great.

JIM: We're taking Europe back in leaps and bounds – and lots of prisoners.

FRED: Let the Brits have 'em.

JIM: They're outta room. Begging for help from us.

FRED: Well, don't let them loose in my fields. Find something else for them to do for cripes sake.

JIM: Not loose, Fred, dangit, under guard, like I said. And you have to apply if you wanna use 'em.

(FRED stands and leans over JIM.)

FRED: There's no way I'm going to ASK for their help.

(JIM stands and THEY are face-to-face.)

ISABELLE: Now hold on you two. Maybe it's not such a bad idea, Fred. You're gonna kill yourself out there. We need the help.

FRED: Not that bad we don't.

(ANNA comes through the screen door carrying a letter.)

ANNA: We got a letter from Jake, Ma!

ISABELLE: Oh? Well, sit down and let us see it.

ANNA: He's okay, Pops. He's fine. But he got injured. Here.
(Handing the letter to FRED.) Hi, Jim. Don't worry about the first part, Pops. It's just war talk. That's not our Jake. He'll be fine though, don't you think?

FRED: Slow down and let me read.

ISABELLE: Read it out loud, Pa.

JIM: I should get going.

ISABELLE: *(Walking HIM to the screen door.)* I'll talk to him, Jim. Thanks for stopping by.

JIM: Will you be sending it in?

ISABELLE: To the Bulletin? Of course. Everybody's sharing their letters.

JIM: I'll read it there then. So long. *(HE exits.)*

FRED: So long, Jim.

(All THREE sit down as he reads the letter aloud.)

ANNA: There's no postmark, Pa.

FRED: It's V-mail, Anna. They photograph the letters, send the film home and print them out on photo paper. Let me read. *"I finally got out of the hospital and am back with the gang again – happy days again with the fellows. I am ready to give those Krauts some more lead. What a pleasure it is to shoot and knock out the Jerry."*

FRED: *(Cont'd.) My tank crew and I have several Jerry tanks to our credit and we're going to get some more of 'em yet.*"
It's what he has to do, Anna. It's war.

ANNA: Yes, but ... never mind.

FRED: *(Continues reading.) "Well Dad and Mother and Anna, I received the Purple Heart for being wounded in action, and also received the Silver Star for gallantry. Don't worry about my injury. I'm still the same man I was before I was wounded."*

ISABELLE: What does he mean by that?

FRED: I don't know what he means.

ISABELLE: You don't think ...

FRED: No, not that.

ANNA: Oh Pops, do you think he lost a leg or an arm?

FRED: No, no, not that bad. They'd send him home if it was that bad.

ANNA: I wish they'd send him home. He's done enough already. Hasn't he?

FRED: Shush. *(HE continues reading.) "You people back home don't realize what we boys go through over here. You think we have good places to sleep and are getting plenty of rest – all kinds of drinks and shows. I know how things are back home, but you don't realize the things that go on over here. (ISABELLE and ANNA are fighting back tears.) "So you people who have boys overseas ..."* I think he knows all the letters get printed in the paper ... *"just stop and think things over. I realize you see a show once in a while of the boys over here in action, but you just get to see the best of things. It's pretty tough to see your buddy get killed right beside you. It happens every day."*

(ANNA is crying.)

FRED: *(Cont'd.) Well, war's no fun. (Turns to ANNA.) Anna? Anna, he's okay. If it was bad, they'd send him home.*

ANNA: Then it should have been worse! *(SHE runs to the door.)* At least if he'd lost a leg, he'd be home! At least he'd be alive. I wish he was hurt bad!

ISABELLE: Anna!

ANNA: No! Now they'll send him back out in another stupid tank. They'll keep putting him back in stupid tanks until the stupid Krauts kill him!

ISABELLE: Anna ...

(ANNA storms into the house.)

End of Scene

Scene 2

(AT RISE: It's morning in mid-July. ISABELLE and ANNA stand at the end of the porch, peering out toward the fields. Their pose is identical, with arms folded, eyes squinting.)

ANNA: This is too strange. I can't believe this is happening. Pops is really going along with it.

ISABELLE: Let's just say I helped him get along with it.

ANNA: It was your idea?

ISABELLE: Anna, we have no choice.

ANNA: Ma!

ISABELLE: *(Hands on hips.)* We have no choice, Anna! Your pa can't thin those rows by himself. His knees won't take it anymore. Sometimes ...

ANNA: No! No times! *(Now she has her hands on her hips.)* These are Germans, Ma. They want to kill Jake. They probably want to kill us too. They're animals.

ISABELLE: Anna, they're just boys. Just like the boys you know at Berthoud High School. And the war's over for them.

ANNA: It's not over for me! Not until Jake comes home.

ISABELLE: There, look. Here comes the truck.

(THEY fold their arms again, looking outward. SFX: a truck can be heard pulling up.)

ISABELLE: *(Cont'd.)* See? They're just boys getting down from a truck. Just going to work in a field, that's all. Looking at them from here, they could even be from Berthoud. Good-looking boys too.

ANNA: How can you say that?

ISABELLE: Because I know a good-looking boy when I see one.

ANNA: How will Pops tell them what to do?

ISABELLE: Jim told me that about a fourth of them speak English. And each group has one man, an officer, who's supposed to make sure they work. He speaks both languages.

ANNA: Look at Pops. He's way back away from the Krauts.

ISABELLE: Your pa hates this, Anna. Try not to talk about it too much around him.

ANNA: I hate it too. Krauts in our field! I can't believe it.

ISABELLE: And don't call them Krauts. You know there's lots of Volga Germans around here, and they're just regular people. Here comes the Lindegrein boy. You be nice to him.

ANNA: You mean Bob? *(SHE raises her hand, laughing.)*

ISABELLE: Now don't start with that hand thing.

(THEY walk to the clothesline; Anna picks up an empty basket and they take clothes off the line.)

ANNA: Who started that anyway?

ISABELLE: I'm not sure – maybe Jake – but at some point, we all started doing it, with every mention of the name "Bob." *(ANNA'S hand goes up.)* Stop that!

ANNA: Why do we do it though?

ISABELLE: I don't know. Just something funny about the name Bob *(Hands up.)* I guess. It always makes us smile.

(BOBBY runs up to the porch.)

BOBBY: Did you see that? Did you? I drove 'em here. I drove a dozen prisoners, sitting on plank benches in the back of the old truck.

ISABELLE: We saw, Bobby.

BOBBY: And let me tell you, I bounced 'em along good too.
All the way from Greeley.

ISABELLE: Shame on you, Bobby.

BOBBY: And please don't call me Bobby anymore, Mrs.
Hunt, okay?

ISABELLE: Sure.

BOBBY: I left with the truck at 5 a.m. with a sergeant next to
me carryin' a carbine. Fine rifle too. His name's Johnny,
and he ain't foolin' around, let me tell you. He's ready to
pop one of them guys first chance he gets. Just lookin' for
an excuse.

ISABELLE: Nobody's gonna get "popped" around here,
Bobby. We do not pop people in Berthoud, Colorado.

*(SHE takes the basket of clothes to a chair and the two
WOMEN sit, folding clothes while they talk with BOBBY.)*

BOBBY: Sorry, ma'am, but there's a war goin' on. And I'd
sure appreciate it if you'd call me Bob.

(The two WOMEN raise their right hands at the name Bob.)

ISABELLE: Not in Berthoud, Bob. *(THEIR hands go up
again.)* There's no war goin' on here.

BOBBY: No, ma'am, sorry, ma'am. But look at that will you?
They have to do what we tell 'em to do.

ISABELLE: Bob, sit down. *(Hands up.)*

BOBBY: Sorry, ma'am, but I gotta go pick up another load
for Dad's place. I'll be back at 5:30 to pick 'em up though.
(HE starts to leave.)

ANNA: Bob, wait. *(Hands up.)* What's it like over there, at
the camp I mean.

BOBBY: *(With emphasis.)* What are you two doing with your
hands?

ISABELLE: Never mind.

ANNA: Just answer the question. What's it like?

BOBBY: Oh, it's great! Barbed wire fences, guard towers,
the whole shebang!

BOBBY: *(Cont'd.)* They got 'em in barracks and tents and there's gotta be like 200 of 'em by now. Johnny says there's gonna be more, lots more.

ISABELLE: What are they eating? Are they taking care of them?

BOBBY: Sorry ma'am, but who cares? They asked for it.

ISABELLE: Answer my question, Bobby.

BOBBY: I don't know what they eat over there, but each one has a little brown paper lunch bag when I pick 'em up. Johnny said they each get a hunk of bread and a piece of sausage to take with 'em to the farms.

ANNA: Oh?

BOBBY: That's more than I'd give 'em.

ISABELLE: Fred is waving at you, Bob. *(Hands up.)* You'd better go.

BOBBY: So long, Mrs. Hunt. See ya, Anna. Oh, and don't go near 'em, Anna, never. Girls aren't allowed in the fields when they're out there. Army regulations.

ANNA: Well, Pops needs a lunch too.

BOBBY: Ask me or one of the guards to get it to him. You stay away, Anna. These are dangerous killers. You just leave them to me, okay?

ISABELLE: They're just boys, Bob. *(Hands go up.)* Like you. Now git.

(The TWO look at each other and laugh when HE'S gone. They turn back to the fields, arms folded again, staring outward.)

ISABELLE: *(Cont'd.)* They look well fed.

ANNA: Well, they do look ... Mother! Did you see that? He waved at me – that dark-haired one. How dare he! *(SHE turns away in disbelief.)*

ISABELLE: Now Anna, don't get in a fuss.

ANNA: Oh! You watch them if you like but I'm going inside. I'm going to practice my Bach.

End of Freeview

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