

EPONINE

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT

By **T. James Belich**

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SYNOPSIS: All Eponine ever wanted was someone to talk to, someone who might remember her when she's gone. A chance encounter in New York's Central Park brings her together with a stranger who, although from a vastly different world, finds himself drawn to this strange but lovable street urchin. What begins as a moment of kindness becomes a life-changing encounter, and for Eponine, it's just in time.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 MALE, 1 FEMALE)

EPONINE (f)A homeless woman in her late teens.
(204 lines)

MARIUS (m)A middle-class man in his early 20s.
(203 lines)

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Eponine was first performed was first performed by the Loose Ends, Ltd. Little Theatre Company in Auburn, New York on September 17th, 18th, and 19th, 2004. It was directed by Mark Bruzee with the following cast:

EPONINESue Krigbaum

MARIUSJim Byrne

Eponine has since been performed by Crystal Cavalier Productions in Cebu City, the Philippines in February of 2007.

Eponine has also been performed by the Inspiration Theatre Company in Kingsport, TN in August of 2009

AT RISE:

Central Park, New York City. It is a mid-afternoon at the end of December. Despite the time of year, there is no snow and the sun is shining. For winter, it is a warm day. This is a solitary part of the park, and only one person is present, a girl in her late teens who sits on a park bench. Her name is EPONINE. Her clothes indicate her current economic status: none. She sits as if she is waiting for someone. Soon a young man enters, in his early 20s, walking through the park. He pays little attention to EPONINE, as she is just one more person that he happens to be passing by. His name is MARIUS. His clothes indicate an average, middle-class citizen. As he walks by, EPONINE watches him. Shortly after he passes her, she speaks.

EPONINE: Hi.

MARIUS stops, turns to EPONINE, and smiles.

MARIUS: Hi there.

He turns to resume his walk.

EPONINE: I haven't seen you here before.

MARIUS turns back to EPONINE and smiles again.

MARIUS: That's because I've never been here before.

EPONINE: You don't come to the park much?

MARIUS: I don't come to New York much.

EPONINE: Ah! You don't live here.

MARIUS: No, I'm only visiting.

EPONINE: From where?

MARIUS: Minnesota.

EPONINE: That's a long way just for a visit.

MARIUS: Yes, it is.

EPONINE: A long way to take a walk in the park.

MARIUS: I suppose, but I've never been to this park before.

EPONINE: Then that's why I've never seen you here.

MARIUS: *(With faint amusement.)* Yes.

Slight pause, and then MARIUS turns to leave.

EPONINE: Where are you going?

MARIUS: That way.

EPONINE: No, I mean where are you going to?

MARIUS: Nowhere in particular. I just like to walk.

EPONINE: To somewhere you've never been?

MARIUS: Yes.

EPONINE: Then why are you still walking? You're already there.

MARIUS: Already where?

EPONINE: Where you're going.

MARIUS: *(Confused.)* But I'm not going anywhere.

EPONINE: You're going somewhere you haven't been, right?

MARIUS: Yes...

EPONINE: Well, you're already there. You said you've never been here before.

MARIUS thinks about this for a moment, not sure how to respond.

EPONINE: It's a nice place to be and a nice day to be here. Well, aren't you going to sit down? You might as well, you're not going anywhere.

MARIUS: If you say so. *(He sits next to EPONINE.)*

EPONINE: Much better. Not many people walk this way, and most that do never stay. They always have somewhere to go. You're the first person I've met that was coming here. And didn't know it. *(MARIUS laughs and shakes his head.)* I've made you laugh, that's good.

MARIUS: You're an interesting individual, I'll say that.

EPONINE: Thanks, not many people take the time to notice that. Of course, most people don't take the time to notice anything about me.

Pause.

MARIUS: It's very quiet here.

EPONINE: Yes. I get all the time I want to think here. No one bothers me.

MARIUS: How often do you come here?

EPONINE: Every day. I don't walk much anymore. I used to, but now I just sit here. That's enough now. (*Distantly.*) Someday I won't sit here anymore, and no one will remember that I ever did. No one will know this place. (*Pause, then abruptly.*) Why?

MARIUS: Why what?

EPONINE: Why did you stay?

MARIUS: Why did you want me to stay?

EPONINE: I asked you first.

MARIUS: So?

EPONINE: That means you have to answer first.

MARIUS: Says who?

EPONINE: Says me, and it's my bench. You have to follow my rules.

MARIUS: And if I don't? (*EPONINE pushes MARIUS off the bench.*) What was that for?

EPONINE: That's what happens when you don't follow the rules of my bench. I answered one of your questions, so now it's your turn. (*MARIUS gets up and is about to sit back down when EPONINE slides over to take his place.*) I'm listening.

MARIUS: You don't give up, do you?

EPONINE: No.

Slight pause.

MARIUS: All right. I stayed because you wanted me to, and because you looked like you had a very good reason for wanting me to stay.

EPONINE: Really? (*She does not know what to say, but it is clear this was not the answer she was expecting.*)

MARIUS: Yes. May I?

EPONINE nods. MARIUS sits. Pause.

EPONINE: I do. I do have a reason for wanting you to stay. A very important one.

MARIUS: What is it?

EPONINE: I can't tell you yet, but I will before you go. If you stay long enough. *(Breaking the mood.)* My turn again. What's your name?

MARIUS: My name? I'm Marius.

EPONINE begins to laugh.

EPONINE: Marius? *(She continues laughing.)*

MARIUS: Yes. What's so funny? *(EPONINE can't stop laughing.)* What's so funny about my name being Marius?

EPONINE: *(Still laughing.)* I'm sorry, it's just that... *(Her laughter turns into a fit of coughing.)*

MARIUS: Are you all right?

EPONINE nods, still coughing. When the coughing stops, she speaks.

EPONINE: I'm fine.

MARIUS: Are you sure?

EPONINE: Yes, don't worry about me. I'm sorry for laughing at your name, but I couldn't help it. Ask me why.

MARIUS: Why?

EPONINE: Because my name's Eponine.

EPONINE starts laughing again, and this time MARIUS joins in. Again, EPONINE's laughter ends up turning into coughing. MARIUS looks concerned.

MARIUS: Are you sure you're all right?

EPONINE *nods.*

EPONINE: It's nothing, just a cough. (*Back in the game.*) I have another question.

MARIUS: Don't I get to ask anything?

EPONINE: You just did. You asked why I was laughing. That counts.

MARIUS: You don't play fair.

EPONINE: Yes I do. I just play by my rules. (*With a smile.*) So, Monsieur Marius, is there a Cosette?

MARIUS: A what? Oh, no, no one... (*A moment where it appears MARIUS might say something else.*) No, no one at all.

EPONINE: I'm sorry.

MARIUS: It's not your fault.

EPONINE: I know, but I'm sorry.

MARIUS: Thank you.

EPONINE: Do you wish there was? (*Pause.*) I'm sorry, I shouldn't...

MARIUS: No, it's all right. Why do you ask?

EPONINE: I just... (*She stops and reconsiders what she was going to say.*) Just curious. (*To change the subject.*) After all, don't you think it's funny that our names just happen to be Eponine and Marius? A coincidence, I mean?

MARIUS: Not really. I don't believe in coincidences.

EPONINE: (*Surprised.*) You don't? I thought everyone did.

MARIUS: Not everyone.

EPONINE: So you don't think it's strange?

MARIUS: Maybe, but that doesn't make it a coincidence.

EPONINE: You're a very strange person, Monsieur Marius.

MARIUS: I could say the same about you. Why do keep calling me Monsieur?

EPONINE: It just seemed to go with Marius. It's what she calls him, you know. (*Concerned.*) You don't like it?

MARIUS: Oh, no, it's not that, I don't mind at all. It just seemed unusual, that's all.

EPONINE: Can I call you Monsieur?

MARIUS: If you'd like.

EPONINE: (*Pleased.*) Thanks, I would.

MARIUS: You're welcome. Now I think it's my turn, although with you I can't be quite sure.

EPONINE: You're right about that. What's your question?

MARIUS: Do you always sit here alone?

EPONINE: Yes.

MARIUS: Why?

EPONINE: Who would sit with me? I don't know anyone, Monsieur.

MARIUS: No one at all? (*EPONINE shakes her head.*) I'm sorry, I didn't know. I thought...

EPONINE: You know a lot of people, don't you? (*MARIUS nods.*) That must be nice. I don't. I just watch them all go by.

MARIUS: Here? But it's so quiet. There can't be that many people that walk by.

EPONINE: No, but enough. It's not like I have anywhere else to go.

MARIUS: There must be places in the park with more people.

EPONINE: There are people all over the city, but that doesn't make me any less alone.

MARIUS: No, I suppose not.

EPONINE: Besides, being in a crowd always makes me feel more alone. They're filled with people I don't know who remind me that I'm alone because I know I'm not with any of them. There aren't so many reminders here.

MARIUS: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be another reminder.

EPONINE: But you're not! Don't think that. I'm glad you came by and very glad that you stayed. I could use your company. I don't get much. Did you come here alone?

MARIUS: To New York? No, I came with three friends of mine.

EPONINE: Where are they?

MARIUS: At a movie.

EPONINE: Don't you have movies in Minnesota?

MARIUS: Of course.

EPONINE: And they came all the way to New York just to see one?

MARIUS: Yes.

EPONINE: You have strange friends.

MARIUS: Yes, I do.

EPONINE: Are they good friends?

MARIUS: Always.

EPONINE: You're lucky. *(Pause. She coughs slightly.)* You're alone too, aren't you?

MARIUS: What do you mean?

EPONINE: It's something we have in common, I think. You were walking alone, just like I was sitting alone. Why didn't you go with your friends?

MARIUS: I needed to walk, that's all.

EPONINE: Do you always walk alone?

MARIUS: Not always, but often.

EPONINE: You must not like crowds either then, to come walking though this part of the park. You won't ever find any here. Why did you come here?

MARIUS: I wanted to go someplace quiet, to think. I don't mind crowds, usually, but today didn't seem like the day for them. I felt there was something more important that I needed to do.

EPONINE: *(Distantly.)* You're right about that. The thing I don't like about crowds is that there's too many people around at once. I hardly ever see more than a few people walk by here at the same time. And they're usually in less of a hurry than people are out there, in the city. Here you get more time to see the faces as they go by.

MARIUS: I never thought of it like that before.

EPONINE: I have a lot of time to think about things like that. Most of the time no one walks by. *(A pause as MARIUS looks at EPONINE very intently.)* What?

MARIUS: I can't tell if being alone so much makes you happy or sad.

EPONINE: Maybe it makes me both. It doesn't really matter.

MARIUS: Of course it does. It should, at least. It should matter to you.

EPONINE: It doesn't. And if it did, what could I do about it? I just told you why I don't like crowds. But I don't want to be completely alone because then I'd be forgotten. That's the last thing I want to happen. So I sit here, in-between, alive but not really living. Somewhere between life and death. Most of the time I'm not happy or sad, I just am. (*Looking MARIUS in the face.*) But I'm happy right now.

MARIUS: I'm glad.

EPONINE: Are you happy when you're alone?

MARIUS: Not when I don't want to be.

EPONINE: But you must have wanted to be to come here. I didn't mean to ruin that by talking to you. You can go, if you want to. I'm sorry if I bothered you, Monsieur Marius.

MARIUS: You didn't.

EPONINE: Are you sure?

MARIUS: Yes. I don't think I realized that I didn't want to be alone until you spoke to me.

EPONINE: Do you mean that?

MARIUS: Of course.

EPONINE: Thanks.

MARIUS: You're welcome.

EPONINE: Maybe you were in-between too. Are you now?

MARIUS: No.

EPONINE: Good.

MARIUS: What did you mean about being between life and death?

EPONINE: When you came by did you see me?

MARIUS: Well, yes, you were the only other person here. I noticed you as I walked by.

EPONINE: No! I didn't ask if you noticed me. Did you see me? Did you really, really see me?

MARIUS: I'm not sure what you mean.

EPONINE: You must walk by dozens of people every day, but how many of them do you really see? How many people do you remember for more than a moment after you notice them?

MARIUS: Not many, I suppose.

EPONINE: I don't think anyone does. I think most people notice others, but I don't think they actually see the people in the crowds. They don't take the time to remember any of the faces. They forget them, all of them. Did you see me?

Pause.

MARIUS: No.

EPONINE: No one ever does. I sit here every day as people walk by, but no one ever sees me. I'm not alive to any of them. I don't even exist for them. But I see them. I don't know anything about any of them, but I see them and they're alive to me. Until I talked to you, it didn't matter to you whether I was alive or dead. I didn't matter to you. You would have forgotten me in a moment. But I saw you and you became alive. *(Silence.)* Don't you have anything to say to that, Monsieur Marius?

MARIUS: What is there to say?

EPONINE: Nothing, so I'm glad you didn't try.

MARIUS: You're alive to me now.

EPONINE: I know, and I'm glad. I don't become alive to a lot of people.

MARIUS: Why not? I'm not the first person who's walked by here. You can't tell me that no one else has ever stayed to talk with you.

EPONINE: No, I can't, but none of them stayed very long. And do you know why? Because they never wanted to talk to me in the first place. They just wanted to get where they were going. No one has time for a girl who just sits on a bench all day. I may sit here every day, but I don't get to talk to people everyday. At least no more than saying, "Hi."

MARIUS: I...

EPONINE shakes her head.

EPONINE: No, there's nothing you need to say about that either.

MARIUS: I didn't know.

EPONINE smiles.

EPONINE: I know, and that's what made me happy. You didn't know, but you stayed anyway. Not out of pity or politeness, but because you not only let me become alive to you but stay alive. I was dead to those who wouldn't stay. Sometimes I think it's better to stay in-between, then at least you've got a chance to become alive in someone's eyes. That's why I don't usually say anything. I'm too afraid they'll forget.

MARIUS: They will forget if you don't take the chance.

EPONINE: I know, but...

MARIUS: And there's always a chance they will remember.

EPONINE: Not much.

MARIUS: But some.

EPONINE: Yes, some. Enough to hope for when fear doesn't get in the way. It happened today. I was waiting, you know, waiting to find someone I could talk to, really talk to. I've been waiting a long time. I'm glad you finally came.

MARIUS: So am I. *(Pause.)* You stopped me to talk, but to be honest I can't think of much to say.

EPONINE: That's all right. I have most of the questions anyway. I just wanted to talk. There's so much I've been waiting to say.

MARIUS: Why me? If you're so afraid everyone will forget you then why take the chance with me? I could have been just like everyone else.

EPONINE: But you're not like everyone else.

MARIUS: But how did you know?

EPONINE: I just did. I don't know how. *(She examines MARIUS' face closely.)* Something in your look gave it away. I've sat here for a long time waiting for someone with that look to pass by. I knew I'd recognize it when I saw it. I've tried to talk to people who had a look a lot like yours, but it was never quite right. I knew it wasn't, but I thought it was close enough to at least try. I've learned that something that's almost right, but not quite, is usually the most wrong. Remember that.

MARIUS: I will.

EPONINE: Good! That's a start. You're definitely the right one, Monsieur. I'm glad you finally came. It's taken you a long time to get here.

MARIUS: I'm sorry for that. It won't happen again.

EPONINE: *(As a thought strikes her.)* No, it won't, because there won't be an again, will there? You'll go and... *(She cannot finish.)*

MARIUS: I can't stay forever, but there's time enough.

EPONINE: I hope you're right. *(To herself.)* I don't need that much anyway. *(Slight pause.)* I almost forgot our game, Monsieur. Whose turn is it?

MARIUS: I don't remember.

EPONINE: Then it must be mine. And there's something I'd really like to know. You'll answer, won't you?

MARIUS: Yes. That's the way the game is played, isn't it?

EPONINE: Yes, it is, and this question is very important to me. I said that when I saw your face, I knew you'd stay. Something in it told me you would. But I want to know exactly why you stayed when so many others have just walked by. I need to know.

MARIUS: Something in your face told me you needed me to stay. I saw the shadow of something that I can't quite describe, something between joy and sorrow, something in-between. I knew I had to stay.

EPONINE: But why?

MARIUS: Because you needed me to stay, and because for some reason deep inside, I needed to stay. Something told me that if I didn't, something very important would be left undone.

EPONINE: Yes, it would. Thank you, Monsieur. That's what I wanted to know. You're right. I do need you to stay, and you'll know why before you have to leave. Is that why you answer all my questions? I haven't let you ask many in return, have I?

MARIUS: No, but I don't mind. And as you pointed out, it's your bench.

EPONINE: It's yours too now. You can share it with me.

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