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The Brothers Paranormal

By

PRINCE GOMOLVILAS

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“*The Brothers Paranormal* received its world premiere in a production by Pan Asian Repertory Theatre (Tisa Chang, Artistic Producing Director) in New York City.”

“*The Brothers Paranormal* was developed at the Bay Area Playwrights Festival (San Francisco), Center Theatre Group (Los Angeles), East West Players (Los Angeles), Geva Theatre Center (Rochester, NY), La Jolla Playhouse (San Diego), Pan Asian Repertory Theatre (New York City), Pork Filled Productions (Seattle), Theatre Diaspora (Portland) and Theatre Mu (Minneapolis).”

The Brothers Paranormal was originally produced by Pan Asian Repertory Theatre (Tisa Chang, Artistic Producing Director) at the Beckett Theatre in New York City. It opened May 1, 2019.

CAST:

JAI.....Natsuko Hirano
MAX Vin Kridakorn
DELIA..... Dawn L. Troupe
VISARUTRoy Vongtama
TASANEE.....Emily Kuroda
FELIXBrian D. Coats

PRODUCTION:

Director Jeff Liu
Costume Designer..... Hyun Sook Kim
Lighting Designer Victor En Yu Tan
Set Designer Sheryl Liu
Sound Designer..... Ian Wehrle
Special Effects..... Steve Cuiffo
Stage ManagerKristine Schlachter

The Brothers Paranormal

CHARACTERS

JAI (w): Late teens or early 20s; Thai.

MAX (m): 25; Thai American; born in the U.S.

DELIA (w): 50s; African American; born in the U.S.; her name is pronounced “DEE-LEE-UH.”

VISARUT (m): 39; Thai American; born in Thailand; immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 13; speaks with a Thai accent; Max’s brother; his name is pronounced “VIS-UH-ROODT.”

TASANEE (w): 60; Thai American; born in Thailand; immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 33; speaks with a Thai accent; Max and Visarut’s mother; her name is pronounced “DTAH-SAH-NEE.”

FELIX (m): 50s; African American; born in the U.S.; Delia’s husband.

PLACE: Somewhere in the Midwestern United States.

TIME: Sometime around 2007.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Some lines of dialogue are in Thai and are written in the script phonetically. Translations are provided in brackets for the benefit of the director, actors and production team. The translations are NOT meant to be spoken or projected onstage.

Authentic accents are appreciated. However, clarity of the text is always more important than authenticity of accents, especially when important information needs to be conveyed or when punchlines need to be delivered.

Theaters with a limited budget may modify some of the “special effects” in the play to be cost effective, as long as the substitute effects have the *same emotional impact* as the original effects as written.

SPOILER ALERT: In order to maintain the play’s secrets until they are meant to be revealed, it is very important to exactly follow the stage directions in ACT I, Scene 3. In the same spirit, ACT I, Scene 4 must be blocked in such a way (i.e., placement of actors, where actors are looking, etc.) that everyone receives equal “weight.”

Producing theatres may contact the playwright through his website at www.princegomovilas.com for further clarification, options for special effects that have proven effective, cultural information and general advice.

The Brothers Paranormal

ACT I

SCENE 1

(The stage is black. A low-pitched drone can be heard throughout the scene. A few beats. A high-pitched sound, perhaps produced by a musical instrument, materializes at the same time that a light shines on one small part of the stage—illuminating nothing. The high-pitched sound and light cut out, leaving the stage black. A few beats. The high-pitched sound materializes again at the same time that a light shines on another small part of the stage—again, illuminating nothing. The high-pitched sound and light cut out, leaving the stage black. A few beats. The high-pitched sound, now much louder and more unnerving, materializes again at the same time that a light shines on an unexpected part of the stage—or perhaps out in the house somewhere even—illuminating a terrifying figure: JAI, who has long hair and is dead-looking, your classic Asian horror ghost. A tableau. Then, the high-pitched sound, light and drone cut out, leaving the stage black and quiet.)

SCENE 2

(A home office. MAX and DELIA are mid-meeting. DELIA sits, purse on her lap.)

MAX. True story. I'm twelve years old. Living in Thailand. My parents send me to a boarding school a hundred miles away from home, way out in the, you know, not on maps,

this place. First day there, kids already don't like me. I'm new, I'm small: of course. So they think it'd be funny to tell me scary stories. Freak me out. Set the tone for the rest of the year. And it's not hard. I mean, you should've seen the place. Like something out of a movie. Old. Falling apart. Creepy as hell. A boy died there, they said. Suicide. Drowned himself in the swimming pool. So: I bury myself under my blanket every night. Piss my bed at one point because I'm too scared to go to the bathroom after dark.

I do manage to make one friend. A nice boy. But kind of an outcast. Nobody really talks to him or plays with him or even acknowledges his existence. But I get along with him. We talk. Play. Hang out. Kid stuff. You know.

But then, later on, I come to understand why nobody *talks* to this boy. Why nobody seems to even *see* this boy. And this realization would haunt me for the rest of my life.

I find out that this boy, this friend of mine—

DELIA (*freaking out*). No.

MAX. Yes. This boy, the only person kind enough to—

DELIA. No.

MAX. Yes. This boy, the one I had grown so close to—

DELIA. No.

MAX. Yes. He. He was the boy—

DELIA. Don't say it.

MAX. I have to say it.

DELIA. You don't have to do—

MAX. I have to say it, Delia. He was the boy. He was the boy who drowned and died in the swimming pool two years before.

DELIA. Jesus Lord.

(*DELIA gets up abruptly.*)

MAX. You see, unbeknownst to me, I had befriended a ghost.

DELIA. Why you gotta do that? Why you—

MAX. Listen—

DELIA. Why you gotta scare the hell outta me like that?

Comin' at me with “boy drowned in the pool” and shit.

MAX. I'm just trying to—

DELIA. I haven't been able to, I haven't gotten a good night's sleep in six months. *Six months*. Prayers don't help, so I come to you because—

MAX. The point I'm—

DELIA. On your website? In the FAQs? You say: you talk about how your primary job is to *debunk*. To find a *rational explanation* for.

MAX. Well, you see—

DELIA. You said most of the time paranormal activity can be explained away. The house is settling, or the pipes are making noise, or the flu medicine you took is making you see things. But proving ghosts is a—

MAX. Yes, you're—

DELIA. It's supposed to be a last resort.

MAX. You're absolutely—

DELIA. So how does this, how does an intake interview, how does my first point of contact with you, turn into scary-ass ghost stories, turn into campfire tales and shit?

MAX. Debunking, yes, you're right. That's our first task. But as much as I like to do that, it's also my responsibility—when the situation *warrants* it—to prepare people. For the truth.

DELIA. The truth?

MAX. Look. *Your* story is not an uncommon one, OK? Strange sensations, weird sounds, shadowy figures at night: this is textbook. And you're right—most of the time, it's nothing *supernatural*. Like you said, it can be any number of things, just not *ghosts*. But what sets *you* apart is what I can see in your eyes. It's the look of someone who has witnessed something that cannot *be* debunked. And, sure, we can humor each other. We can go through the motions, schedule a preliminary walkthrough, show up at your apartment, and do one of our free initial home consultations—but we both know that'll be a complete waste of time. I'm saying, since you and I know this is real, Delia, let's not delay this any longer and give it more time to get worse ... I mean, after you left New Orleans—what?—three years ago—?

DELIA. Katrina was two years ago.

MAX. When you fled New Orleans two years ago, you didn't move *back*. Because another hurricane, another flood, could hit anytime, right? You didn't feel safe anymore. That's the point of living *here*. A landlocked state in the middle of the country. It's *comforting*—am I right? But now that sense of safety is being threatened by some paranormal nonsense. Listen. You were already forced out of your home two years ago, and I have a duty to make sure you're not forced out of another home, another city, another state. And unlike the weather, *this* is something that can be controlled. So let's go straight to a full-blown investigation. Let us bring every last piece of equipment we have and come prepared to solve your problem, so that you can finally—*finally*—go to sleep. *Yes?*

(Pause. DELIA sits. Pause.)

DELIA. Yes.

(MAX opens a desk drawer. Pulls out a rectangular contraption. Sets it on top of the desk.)

DELIA *(cont'd)*. What is that? One of those electromagnetic field readers?

MAX. No ... It's a credit card processing machine.

(Pause, as DELIA considers this. She retrieves a credit card from her purse. She reluctantly hands it to MAX. He presses a few buttons on the machine and swipes the card. The machine beeps.)

SCENE 3

(A kitchen. MAX sits at the table, eating soup. VISARUT is standing nearby.)

VISARUT. "I had befriended a ghost"?

MAX. Wait a minute.

VISARUT. That is very—

MAX. You were listening in? How?

VISARUT. That is very "used-car salesman."

MAX. Were you, were you hiding? Where were you hiding?

VISARUT. So slimy.

MAX. That's an invasion of privacy.

VISARUT. This company belongs to both of us, so I get to be a part of how things are run.

MAX. Look, when we started this—

VISARUT. I am not a silent partner.

MAX. When we launched this thing, you agreed—yes, you did—you agreed that *you* would be in charge of the actual investigations, handle all the technical stuff, and *I* would

manage the business end—the money, the marketing, the clients. I don't mess with *your* end of things, so I would expect you to not mess with *mine*.

VISARUT. But to tell her that story—

MAX. We just made our first sale in six months, thanks to me.

And all I had to do was tell a story from my childhood and—

VISARUT. That is the point, Max—it is *not* a story from your childhood!

MAX. Oh. Did I say “my” childhood? I meant—

VISARUT. You do not even have the imagination to make something up. You took the plot of a horror movie and pretended that it happened to *you*.

MAX. I changed a few details—

VISARUT. You lied to her. What if she or her husband had seen that movie? What if they knew you were lying? They could ruin us. They could call the Better Business Bureau. Or give us a bad review on Yelp.

MAX. They haven't seen it. It's an obscure movie from Thailand.

VISARUT. And *I* am the one that showed you that movie in the first place, by the way—*you* are the one who hates reading subtitles.

MAX. Easy for you to say because *you* don't have to read subtitles on Thai movies, which is pretty much all you watch. Let's go see a bunch of Romanian films and see how you feel after that.

VISARUT. Would not hurt you to get a little more culture.

MAX. I get plenty of culture. I watch PBS.

VISARUT. More of your *own* culture.

MAX. When'd you turn into such a broken record?

VISARUT. If Mom knew about the way you—

MAX. Mom doesn't know, and Mom doesn't care.

VISARUT. How could you—

MAX. Look, the bottom line? This here, this dynamic? This works.

VISARUT. This is driving me crazy.

MAX. Every Mulder needs a Scully.

VISARUT. Please—

MAX. Every science experiment needs a control group.

VISARUT. How do you—

MAX. Every *you* needs to be reminded that in six month's time we have found *nothing*. No evidence of anything paranormal whatsoever. You knew this business was smoke and mirrors when we started it—

VISARUT. No.

MAX. And *I'm* the only one who's savvy enough to try to run things accordingly. So we can pay our bills. Catch up on the mortgage. You of all people know the consequences of not being able to keep your shit together!

VISARUT. Oh. We are going there now?

MAX. You brought me here, bro.

VISARUT. After everything I have done for you?

MAX. Oh, my God, what is this? Did we walk into a Thai soap opera?

VISARUT. After all—

MAX. After you pulled what you pulled last year, how could you even try to make me feel guilty about—what?—"the sacrifices you've made"?

VISARUT. If it was not for me—

MAX. I know.

VISARUT. You would not have your fancy... (*A conscious joke.*) ... M.B.S.

MAX. *M.B.A.* And I'm grateful. I am. But that doesn't make what you've put me through OK. Trying to get the family out of the dumps and back on track. *I'm* the one holding us all together. And that's the truth. Is that the truth?

VISARUT. Max—

MAX. *Is that the truth?!*

(Pause.)

VISARUT. Yes.

(VISARUT sits down, crosses his arms, looks straight ahead and keeps his eyes there until indicated. TASANEE enters.)

TASANEE. What you two arguing about now?

MAX. This is not an argument.

VISARUT. I did not say this was an argument.

TASANEE. Loud enough to wake the dead.

MAX. I was merely educating Visarut.

VISARUT. Huh?

TASANEE *(to MAX)*. Good luck. *(TO VISARUT.)* You so stubborn.

VISARUT. Do not talk to me like I am a child.

MAX *(to TASANEE)*. Do you want some soup?

TASANEE. No appetite.

VISARUT. I am done talking.

TASANEE *(to VISARUT)*. You. Always silent treatment.

MAX. Yup.

TASANEE *(to MAX)*. Max. He older than you.

MAX. Way older. Waaaaay older.

VISARUT. What?

TASANEE (*to MAX*). You know you have to treat your older brother with respect. Thai way. I know you think you fancy American because you born here. But get up. Go look in mirror. And think again. Thai way. Show me.

(Pause. MAX gets up. Puts some soup in a bowl. Grabs a spoon. Places the bowl and spoon on the table.)

MAX (*to VISARUT*). Vee. Eat.

TASANEE. Good boys.

(TASANEE exits. VISARUT stares at the soup.)

MAX. Listen. I don't think you know how dire the situation is. We need cash flow, man, or this business gets buried. This house gets taken away. And then what?

I just landed us our first paid investigation. Paid. This woman *wants* us to check out her place. She *needs* our help. Who cares if it's not real? If it makes her feel better, then it's worth her money.

I'm just asking you to let me do it my way for a little while. See if we can light a fire under this business.

(Pause.)

VISARUT. OK.

MAX. OK. Let me do most of the talking. Let me be the people person. You handle all the technical stuff. You understand it better than I do anyway. You think it's real anyway.

VISARUT. It *is* real.

MAX. Sure, Vee. I want it as much as you do. Then we'd be rich. But until then, you know what they say: "fake it until you make it." Agreed?

(VISARUT nods. Does not eat.)

MAX *(cont'd)*. You gonna eat that?

VISARUT. Not hungry right now.

MAX. Well then.

(MAX grabs VISARUT's bowl. MAX eats.)

SCENE 4

(DELIA and FELIX's living room. MAX and VISARUT are sitting on the couch. FELIX is standing by the record player, holding an album cover. DELIA is nearby.)

FELIX. Ella Fitzgerald?

MAX. Not really familiar with her stuff.

FELIX. What?!

MAX. I know.

VISARUT. Me neither.

FELIX. “The First Lady of Song,” man.

DELIA. “The Queen of Scat.”

FELIX. “Lady Ella.”

DELIA. The first black woman to win a—

FELIX. Hey, I hate to be *that* guy.

DELIA. Oh, here we go.

MAX. What guy?

FELIX. You know: “Kids today.”

VISARUT. Ha.

FELIX. But seriously, kids today, no interest in history. Where stuff came from.

MAX. I think I have a healthy curiosity about the past.

VISARUT. You do not.