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Dramatic Publishing

PENNY CANDY

A comedy
by
D.W. GREGORY



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(PENNY CANDY)

ISBN: 1-58342-303-6

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Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

Penny Candy was originally produced as part of the Speak Out on Stage Program at Imagination Stage, Bethesda, Md., March 17-19, 2005. Dawn L. Naser directed with the following cast:

Christopher Carothers Neely Cole
Rebecca Shaw Lindy Cole, his sister
Jessie Brown Mary Lee Eustis
Joyce Gendler Betty Eustis, her sister
Sophie Rosenthal Sara Eustis, their sister
Daniel Keaton Richard Miller
Rhianna Nissen Claire Miller, his sister
Grace Zapol Regina Miller, their sister
Celia Gendler Emily Abbott

The sets were by Tyler Whitmore, lighting by Jason Arnold, costumes by Kimberley Cruce, sound by Paul Simon, props by Lindsay Miller.

Produced by the Education Department at Imagination Stage. David Markey, director of theatre education; Richard Bradbury, coordinating producer.

Bonnie Fogel, Imagination Stage founder and executive director. Janet Stanford, artistic director.

PENNY CANDY

A Full-length Play
For 2m., 7w., expandable

CHARACTERS:

NEELY COLE	16
LINDY COLE	13, his sister
MARY LEE EUSTIS	17
BETTY EUSTIS	12, her sister
SARA EUSTIS	15, their sister
RICHARD MILLER	13
CLAIRE MILLER	14, his sister
REGINA MILLER	17, their sister
EMILY ABBOTT	17

Emily and Regina are both in love with Aidan, Neely's older brother, who is in the army. Claire and Sara compete for attention from Neely, who is infatuated with Emily.

TIME: September 1952 to April 1953.

PLACE: Fayette County, a rural area of western Pennsylvania.

The style of the play is cinematic—transitions should be choreographed, preferably to music, and the settings and locations established through sounds, lights, costumes. What furnishings are used should be minimal—and hand props should be kept to a minimum as well.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES:

SCENE ONE: Along the railroad tracks, early September 1952.

SCENE TWO: Outside the factory gate, that same afternoon.

SCENE THREE: The Abbott house, two weeks later.

SCENE FOUR: The county fairgrounds, a month later.

SCENE FIVE: The Miller household, a few days later.

SCENE SIX: The Abbott house, a week later.

SCENE SEVEN: A transition scene—December to February.

SCENE EIGHT: A church social hall, February 1953.

SCENE NINE: Along the railroad tracks, April 1953.

PENNY CANDY

SCENE ONE

Sound of a train whistle, distant. Lights rise on a lonely road, outside a factory town in western Pennsylvania. Early September 1952. LINDY and CLAIRE have been walking home from school, but they are stopped. CLAIRE is staring at LINDY, who is eating candy.

CLAIRE. He was carrying her books?

LINDY. Yep.

CLAIRE. All of her schoolbooks?

LINDY. Uh-huh.

CLAIRE. Did she ask him to? Or did he offer?

LINDY. I think he offered.

CLAIRE. Damn that Neely! Damn him!

(Enter RICHARD dragging a stick in the dirt.)

RICHARD. Hey, Lindy—you got a penny?

LINDY. No. Sorry, Richard.

RICHARD. Claire? You got a penny?

CLAIRE. If I had a penny, I sure wouldn't give it to you!

RICHARD. What's eating you?

LINDY. Neely's carrying Sara's books.

RICHARD *(knowingly)*. Oooh! Neely and Sara sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G!

CLAIRE. Shut up.

RICHARD. First comes love, then comes marriage—then comes Neely WITH A BABY CARRIAGE!

CLAIRE (*hitting him with her books*). I said SHUT UP!

RICHARD. Ouch!

CLAIRE. For your information, Richard, I don't give a hoot in hell what Neely Cole thinks or whose books he carries!

RICHARD. You're gonna get in trouble for saying "hell."

CLAIRE (*in his face*). Hell, hell, hell, hell, hell, hell, HELL!

LINDY (*focusing on her candy*). I get a whippin' when I say "hell."

CLAIRE. You get a whipping just for walkin' in the door, Lindy.

LINDY (*confused*). No, I don't.

RICHARD. Claire—if I help you get even with Neely—will you give me a penny?

CLAIRE. What do you want with a penny, Richard?

RICHARD. Stick it on the railroad tracks. Train comes by and flattens it out. Like a pancake.

CLAIRE. That's a stupid waste of a penny.

RICHARD. It's a good-luck charm. You wish on it.

LINDY. What do you wish for?

RICHARD. Whatever you want. I'd wish for straight A's in math. Claire could wish that Neely walks home with her tomorrow. (*CLAIRE starts to chase RICHARD, he scurries away.*)

CLAIRE (*to LINDY*). Sara Eustis is my best friend. How could she do this to me? She knows I like Neely! (*A worried glance at RICHARD, then back to LINDY.*) But don't you say anything to him, Richard. And you neither, Lindy.

LINDY. I won't say nothin'. Me and Neely don't hardly talk. He says I'm annoying.

RICHARD. Claire. If you give me a penny. I can fix it so Neely stops liking Sara altogether.

CLAIRE. How? Make a wish on your lucky penny?

RICHARD. I'll just tell him her father's a communist.

CLAIRE. Sara's father isn't no communist.

RICHARD. He's in the union.

LINDY. What's a communist?

CLAIRE. That don't make him a communist, Richard.

LINDY. What's a communist?

CLAIRE. A troublemaker. *(To RICHARD.)* For your information, Richard. The union people did not start the strike. The company started the strike when it didn't give no raises out.

RICHARD. But the union people are the ones who asked for the raise. So that means they started it.

CLAIRE. Richard. You are such a jerk!

RICHARD. Just give me a penny, Claire. Please. Please, Claire. *(Whining.)* Pleeeeease?

CLAIRE. Then will you shut up? *(He draws a finger across his mouth as if he is closing a zipper. Glaring at him, CLAIRE reaches into her pocket and tosses a penny into the dirt.)* First thing I'm gonna wish for on your magic penny—is some new relatives. *(Exit CLAIRE.)*

LINDY. Boy. She's in an awful bad mood.

(RICHARD picks up the penny and tosses it up and catches it.)

RICHARD. Claire's always in a bad mood.

(Sound of the train whistle. RICHARD and LINDY exit in the direction of the train. Light shift and scene changes to:)

SCENE TWO

Outside the factory gate. BETTY stands on a wall or a bench and looks into the factory yard. MARY LEE is with her.

MARY LEE. Betty! You see Daddy? *(BETTY looks at MARY LEE and signals "no.")* Men with signs? *(BETTY scratches in a notebook and shows the notes to MARY LEE.)* Nobody's here at all? There's gotta be. *(MARY LEE gets up on the wall and peers into the factory yard.)* You think they settled?

(Enter SARA, REGINA and NEELY. SARA is studying a letter. NEELY trails the GIRLS; he has SARA's books balanced on his head. He carries his own books under his arm.)

MARY LEE. Sara! Come here!

SARA. In a minute, Mary Lee. Regina's got another letter from Aidan.

MARY LEE. Another one? How many is that now, Regina?

REGINA. Three last month. Two this month.

MARY LEE. What do you know? Hey, Neely—you hear from your brother yet?

NEELY. Not me.

MARY LEE. He's written Regina five times since he left.

NEELY. And what am I supposed to do about it?

SARA. Aidan writes beautiful letters. Like poetry!

REGINA. Aidan has the soul of an artist. (*NEELY snickers.*)

SARA. Neely! Stop that.

NEELY. If Aidan is writing you poetry, he probably swiped it out of some book.

REGINA. That's an awful thing to say about your own brother! (*NEELY snickers and SARA punches his arm.*)

SARA. Neely Cole—you stop that! (*NEELY laughs harder. SARA swats him again and they spar playfully.*) Neely!

MARY LEE (*to REGINA*). So what's Aidan say, Regina? He get to Seoul yet?

REGINA (*looking over the letter*). He's got to finish basic first. Then he goes to Japan.

MARY LEE. Not Korea?

REGINA. Korea eventually. He's not sure exactly when.

NEELY. But don't worry, Mary Lee. He'll be shooting Chinks before too long.

MARY LEE. You mean Chinese?

NEELY. Yeah. Reds. That's what I mean.

MARY LEE. Then say Chinese, Neely.

NEELY (*makes a face at her. Mocking*). Say Chinese, Neely. (*Mispronouncing.*) Chi-nee. Chi-NEE! (*SARA giggles and gives NEELY a string of licorice from her coat pocket.*)

MARY LEE. Where'd you get that licorice?

SARA. Five and dime.

NEELY. Where else?

MARY LEE. Sara! You cheater! Did you keep the money you made at the Abbotts last week?

SARA. I'm not a cheater!

REGINA. It's her money, Mary Lee.

MARY LEE. It's our money. We agreed! Everything we make we give to Mom!

NEELY. It's two-cents worth of candy, Mary Lee. Don't make a federal case out of it.

MARY LEE. Me and Betty didn't keep any of our share. Why should you keep yours?

SARA. I kept a dime—big deal! I'm entitled to something, if I have to spend all Saturday afternoon cleaning up that crappy house.

MARY LEE. Mrs. Abbott is doing us a good turn, Sara.

SARA. Scrubbin' toilets while that snooty Emily Anne just sits there? That's not my idea of a good turn.

REGINA. Is Emily always there when you clean?

MARY LEE. Sometimes.

SARA. All the time! While we're mopping the floors, she's in the parlor playing the piano. Or sitting around reading a magazine. And giving me dirty looks out of the corner of her eye. Like she's worried I'm gonna miss a spot. You think she could lift a finger once in a while.

MARY LEE. Yes, and if Emily did the cleaning, they wouldn't need us, would they?

SARA. There you go, Mary Lee—that's the smartest thing you've said all day.

MARY LEE. Oh shut it, Sara. (*To BETTY.*) Come on, Betty. It's getting late. Mom's gonna wonder where we are.

SARA. Aren't we getting a ride from Daddy?

MARY LEE. You see him around here anywhere?

SARA. He's down on the line.

MARY LEE. There is no line, Sara. I've been trying to tell you. If you weren't so selfish, you'd hear what other

people had to say once in a while. (*MARY LEE herds BETTY off.*)

SARA. Sure there's a line. They've been down here every day. (*As she looks.*) That's weird. I don't see anybody at the gate.

(*NEELY and REGINA go to the fence as well.*)

REGINA. Maybe they settled it—and everybody is back to work.

NEELY. There aren't enough cars in the lot.

SARA. That building looks funny. Like they turned out all the lights or something.

REGINA. It does look dark.

SARA. I'm goin' home. I gotta find out what's goin' on. (*SARA hurries off.*)

REGINA. I'll come with you, Sara. (*Stepping down.*) Isn't it wonderful, Neely? It looks like they settled the strike! (*Exit REGINA. NEELY looks back over the fence.*)

NEELY. Looks like they did somethin'. (*Lights down on NEELY.*)

SCENE THREE

The front porch of the Abbott home. A few weeks later. In the house, EMILY plays piano. Something sedate and proper. If she sings along, she sings off-key. MARY LEE and SARA are finishing up the day's housework as EMILY appears with a plate of cookies and a magazine.

EMILY. My mother left an envelope for you. Do you want it now?

MARY LEE. Okay.

EMILY (*puts an envelope on a bench*). I'm sorry about your father, Mary Lee. His job, I mean.

MARY LEE. Thanks.

SARA. We're not sorry. (*She takes the envelope and opens it.*) So we don't need you to be sorry for us.

MARY LEE. Sara!

SARA. Your mother made a mistake with the pay. There's an extra dollar in the envelope.

EMILY. I don't think it's a mistake. My mother knows how to add.

SARA (*slaps a dollar down on the table*). You can tell her we're not a charity case.

MARY LEE. Sara! That's rude.

SARA (*hands the envelope to MARY LEE*). Then you pick it up. I'm going home. (*As she goes.*) And by the way this is my last week. You can tell your mother I've got a new job at the Buick dealership. Working in the business office. Twenty hours a week, no toilets to clean. (*SARA exits.*)

MARY LEE. Sorry about that. Sara's been touchy lately. You know. Since the shutdown.

EMILY. That's all right, Mary Lee. I've learned not to pay too much attention to Sara. (*EMILY casually opens a magazine.*) So what is your father going to do for work now, Mary Lee? Do you know?

MARY LEE. No.

EMILY. I hear there are jobs over in Brownsville.

MARY LEE. He's already been down there looking.

EMILY. It's too bad they decided to close down the plant, but I guess I can understand why. My father says you can't run a factory if people don't want to work in it.

MARY LEE. They want to work. They just need more money.

(BETTY appears with a mop.)

MARY LEE. You finished upstairs, Betty? *(BETTY nods, writes in her notebook.)* I guess we're done then. *(BETTY shows the notebook. Looking at the notebook:)* Those flowers in your room upstairs...they're wilting. Should we throw them out?

EMILY. No, that's okay. I want to save them. *(Exit BETTY with mop.)* Doesn't she ever talk?

MARY LEE. She stutters. People make fun of her, so she never says anything much.

EMILY. Why don't you take her to a doctor?

MARY LEE. A doctor can't do anything. Besides. My dad says if we don't make a fuss about it, then some day she'll surprise us.

EMILY. I guess that makes sense. *(Motioning to the cookies.)* Want one?

MARY LEE. Thanks. *(A beat as MARY LEE takes a cookie.)*

EMILY. You can sit down if you want. *(MARY LEE takes a seat. A brief, awkward pause.)*

MARY LEE. Those flowers you got. Were they for your birthday?

EMILY. No. They're from a friend. He just said he was thinking of me.

MARY LEE. How nice!

EMILY (*pleased with herself*). I know. (*More seriously.*)

But Daddy would have a fit if he saw them. So I'd really appreciate it if you didn't mention it.

MARY LEE. Okay.

EMILY. The boy who sent them—Daddy doesn't think he's right for me. He's so different from anyone else I know...kind of simple, I guess, but surprising. (*A deep breath.*) Daddy doesn't know I'm seeing him.

MARY LEE. A secret romance!

EMILY. Mary Lee, please! You have to promise—please promise! You won't say anything about this to anybody.

MARY LEE. Not a word, Emily.

EMILY. I don't know what Daddy would do if he found out. He told me I had to forget about him. And if I did—he would forget about me. But he hasn't forgotten me, Mary Lee. And I can't forget him! I think about him all the time!

MARY LEE. Oh my!

EMILY. Sometimes when I close my eyes, I can feel his cheek brushing my face...

MARY LEE. Oh my!

EMILY. ...and our lips coming together...

MARY LEE. Oh my!

EMILY. The way they did the very first time he kissed me.

MARY LEE. Oh *my!*

(*Enter BETTY.*)

MARY LEE. I've got to go now. But don't worry. I won't tell a soul.

EMILY. Will you be back next week?

MARY LEE. Definitely.

(Enter NEELY with flowers. BETTY sees him, MARY LEE does not at first. Seeing her, NEELY conceals the flowers in his jacket, and MARY LEE turns to go.)

MARY LEE. Neely!

NEELY. Mary Lee!

MARY LEE. What are you doing here?

NEELY. Um... Uh... I just happened to be... I'm...um...
on my way to the um...the...to the...uh, I'm going
down there.

EMILY *(quickly)*. If you're looking for Sara, I think she
went that way.

MARY LEE *(indicating a different direction)*. No, I think
she went that way.

NEELY. Well. I guess I'll just go this way... *(He starts
very slowly to leave.)*

MARY LEE *(with an eye on NEELY)*. See you next week,
Emily.

*(She and BETTY leave. Once they are gone, NEELY pro-
duces the flowers as if to present them to EMILY, who
marches to him and yanks them out of his hand.)*

EMILY. You could have timed this better, Neely!

NEELY. I didn't know they were still here.

EMILY. Now what do you suppose Mary Lee thinks?

NEELY. Who cares what she thinks!

EMILY. What if she figures things out! *(Looking at the
flowers.)* Isn't there a card this time?

NEELY. This goes with it. *(Hands her a letter.)*

EMILY. Oh! Another letter! Oh, thank goodness! *(As she
tears into the letter, NEELY helps himself to a cookie.)*

EMILY softens as she reads.) Oh! Oh, the dear! *(She kisses the letter and holds it to her heart.)* Oh, Neely! Neely! It's so beautiful! Like—

NEELY. Like poetry.

EMILY. Yes! Every time I start to doubt Aidan—he sends me something so wonderful. *(A beat.)* You're a very devoted brother, Neely, to do this for us.

NEELY. It's just a letter.

EMILY. It's not just a letter! It's my heart and soul. If I couldn't keep in touch with Aidan this way—I don't know what I'd do. I think I'd die!

NEELY. You wouldn't die. At least...not right away. So. What's he say?

EMILY. I can't let you read it, Neely.

NEELY. I don't need to read it. I just meant—is there any news?

EMILY *(looking at the letter)*. He's going to be transferred out soon. So he's definitely going over. But other than that, no details. What do you hear from him?

NEELY. Aidan never writes to me. All I get is stuff that's meant for you.

EMILY. Does Aidan write to your mother?

NEELY. Once in a while.

EMILY. Neely. Does he ever...mention me...?

NEELY. Nope.

EMILY. How about that other girl?

NEELY. Regina? Nah.

EMILY. Neely. Do you think Aidan knows...that I know about her?

NEELY. I dunno.

EMILY. Does she know that I know?

NEELY. I dunno what she knows.

EMILY. Oh, Neely. I don't know if I can take much more of this. Truly. I have to find out what's going on! I have to know!

NEELY. Maybe you should just ask him about it.

EMILY. You mean an ultimatum?... Make demands?

NEELY. Well he is—you know—yanking you all over the place. Sort of. A little.

EMILY. I don't believe Aidan would really do that. Not on purpose. It has to be a misunderstanding. Don't you think?

NEELY. You haven't read his letters to Regina.

EMILY. Have you?

NEELY. Well, no.

EMILY. Then how do you know she's telling the truth? How do you know she's getting letters at all? Maybe she's just making it all up. To get attention!

NEELY. I saw her reading one of them.

EMILY. Were there hearts on it?

NEELY. I don't know about hearts. That don't sound like Aidan. (*EMILY proudly holds out the letter, pointing to the top of the page.*) Hearts. Wow. That's a hell of a lot of hearts.

EMILY. Ever since you told me about Regina and Aidan, all I can do is think about her...getting letters from him!

NEELY. Love sure stinks, don't it?

EMILY. It's awful.

NEELY. Well if it's any consolation. He's not sending her flowers.

EMILY. Neely. (*She grabs his shirt.*) You've got to get me one of those letters.

NEELY. Whose—Regina's? I can't do that.

EMILY. I have to see what he's saying to her, Neely. I have to know.

NEELY. How'm I gonna get one of her letters?

EMILY. Can't you have Sara get it for you? You said she's friends with Regina.

NEELY. Why would Sara do that?

EMILY. You don't know, do you? What lengths a woman will go to for the man of her heart?