

*Acting Edition*

# Primary Trust

by Eboni Booth

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-71097-1

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*PRIMARY TRUST* was originally produced in New York City by Roundabout Theatre Company at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre/Laura Pels Theatre on May 25th, 2023. The performance was directed by Knud Adams, with set design by Marsha Ginsberg, costume design by Qween Jean, lighting design by Isabella Byrd, sound design by Mikhaal Sulaiman, hair and wig design by Nikiya Matthis, and original music by Luke Wygodny. The Production Stage Managers were Rachel Bauder and David Sugarman. The cast was as follows:

**KENNETH** ..... William Jackson Harper  
**BERT** ..... Eric Berryman  
**CORRINA/WALLY'S WAITER/BANK CUSTOMERS** .... April Matthis  
**CLAY/SAM/LE POUSSELET BARTENDER** ..... Jay O. Sanders  
**MUSICIAN** ..... Luke Wygodny

*PRIMARY TRUST* was developed at the 2021 Ojai Playwrights Conference: Robert Egan, Artistic Director/Producer.

*PRIMARY TRUST* was developed by Victory Gardens Theater (Ken-Matt Martin, Artistic Director; Roxanna Conner, Acting Managing Director), Chicago, Illinois, as part of IGNITE CHICAGO Festival of New Plays 2021.

## CHARACTERS

**KENNETH** – male, Black, late 30s

**BERT** – male, Black, late 30s–40s

**CORRINA/WALLY’S WAITER/BANK CUSTOMERS** – female, Black,  
30s–40s

**CLAY/SAM/LE POUSSELET BARTENDER** – male, any race, 50s–60s

## SETTING

Cranberry, New York, a medium-sized suburb of Rochester.

## TIME

Before smartphones.

## NOTES ON TEXT

A “ / ” indicates overlapping text.

If the “ / ” appears at the start of the line, the following line should start at the same time.

{\*} indicates the passage of time.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

While working on *Primary Trust*, we made a few discoveries. I hope that anyone working on a new production will feel free to interpret the script in a way that best serves vision and budget, so truly, none of this is prescriptive.

For the {\*}, we used a basic service bell – the kind you might see on the front desk of a hotel. The bell was rung by the wonderful Luke Wygodny, who was also our musician/Man in the Hawaiian shirt. Luke composed beautiful original music for the production (available for licensing!) in addition to playing some of the standard, easy listening songs you might hear at Wally's.

A live musician became an integral part of our production, with the Musician emerging as a fifth character, but it might not be a possibility for every production moving forward. Please interpret as best suits your work.

Additionally, the mechanism of the {\*} is up for grabs. We used a bell, but it could be a different sound cue, perhaps a lighting shift. Again, whatever feels right for your approach.

*For my sister, Hope*





*(As the lights dim, **KENNETH** walks onto the stage.)*

*(He thinks for a moment and then addresses the audience.)*

**KENNETH.** This is what happened.

*(A moment. He thinks.)*

{\*}

This is –

I'd like to tell you –

{\*}

This is the story of how if you had asked me six months ago if I was lonely, I would have said –

{\*}

*(A moment. He thinks.)*

This is the story of a friendship. Of how I got a new job. A story of love and balance and time. And the smallest of chances.

My name is Kenneth. I'm thirty-eight years old and I live in Cranberry, New York, a suburb about forty miles east of Rochester.

*(The lights rise on Cranberry, New York.)*

We have our own post office, a church, two banks, and a wine shop just opened across from the train station.

**KENNETH.** Down past Main Street, just along the river's edge, is a supermarket, a bowling alley, and my favorite place on earth – Wally's.

*(The lights rise on Wally's.)*

*(A man in a Hawaiian shirt plays an easy-listening standard on a Casio keyboard just beyond the salad bar.)\**

Wally's is an old tiki restaurant with carpeting, and there's always a man in a Hawaiian shirt playing the keyboard next to the salad bar. Most nights of the week you can find me at a table sipping on a mai tai. Fifteen years from now, most of that land will be cleared and covered in pavement and new condominiums, but for right now, it feels like some version of home.

{\*}

**(WALLY'S WAITER enters.)**

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's, New York's oldest tiki hut and home to the Ooga Booga Prime Rib Platter, coming with your choice of mac and cheese, coleslaw or hush puppies. My name is Miriam and I'll be your waitress this evening. Can I start you off with something to drink? Don't forget that every hour is happy hour at Wally's, but on Hoo-Ray Thursdays, we have two-for-one mai tais.

{\*}

**KENNETH.** Here in Cranberry (population: 15,000) our town motto is: "Welcome Friend, You're Right on Time!"

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It's printed on the library cards and the municipal sign just off the interstate. Cranberry is mostly white, but there are some Black people. There's also a sizable Cambodian population on the other side of the river. Most of the time everyone treats me fine, although there was that one night out at the dairy farm where –

*(A moment.)*

But that's another story.

{\*}

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's.

**KENNETH.** I don't know how my mother ended up in Cranberry. She was originally from the Bronx and moved here all alone right before I was born. She worked at Mutual Loan Bank and died when I was ten years old. One day I'll ask what made her move so far from home. I hope that I get to see her again – if not in this lifetime, then the next.

Not that I'm much of a religious person. I don't really believe in God or heaven or hell, but I do believe in friends, and Bert is the best friend around.

*(BERT enters.)*

Say hi, Bert.

**BERT.** Hello.

**KENNETH.** *(To the audience.)* Remember those delicious mai tais I was talking about? Well, I drink those with Bert.

**BERT.** We love mai tais.

**KENNETH.** Most nights of the week – after I get done with work – Bert and I meet in front of the post office and walk over to Wally's and spend the whole night laughing and talking and being best friends.

{\*}

(**KENNETH** and **BERT** sit at a table at Wally's.)

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's. My name is Paul. Today is Coconut Tuesday. We have two-for-one mai tais and three dollar Reggae shrimp.

**KENNETH.** I'll have a mai tai.

{\*}

One more.

{\*}

Another round.

{\*}

One more, por favor, and an order of those fancy shrimp.

{\*}

**BERT.** We're getting the whole downstairs renovated.

**KENNETH.** Wow.

**BERT.** The design is – they call it “open concept.” You can see right from the kitchen through the dining room into the living room to the front door. And we ordered bar stools for the counter.

**KENNETH.** Hey, that's great.

**BERT.** They say they can have it finished by December. We'll see. Contractors.

**KENNETH.** I bet a Christmas tree is going to look really good in there.

{\*}

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's. My name is Betty.

{\*}

**BERT.** Did you wash your hands?

**KENNETH.** Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't.

**BERT.** What?

**KENNETH.** I have dry skin.

**BERT.** So carry lotion. I get the travel-sized ones at the pharmacy. Just keep it in your pocket.

**KENNETH.** Technically we don't need to wash our hands as much as we do.

**BERT.** No, I think we do.

**KENNETH.** Our culture is germ-obsessed. I'm developing antibodies doing it this way.

{\*}

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's.

**KENNETH.** Is that twenty percent?

**BERT.** I think so.

**KENNETH.** Because it doesn't look like twenty percent.

**BERT.** I double the tax.

**KENNETH.** You don't know how to tip?

**BERT.** I doubled the tax!

{\*}

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's, proud sponsor of Cranberry, New York's Independence Day Jubilee! Happy Fork of July! Tonight's special is the Red, White, and Blue Vegetable Stew! My name is Carla!

(**KENNETH** and **BERT** *sip their mai tais.*)

*(They listen to the music.)\**

*(They continue to drink.)*

{\*}

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's.

{\*}

**KENNETH.** Where'd my knife go?

**BERT.** I didn't take it.

**KENNETH.** It was just right there.

**BERT.** I didn't take it.

{\*}

*(KENNETH and BERT are laughing.)*

That is the dumbest movie –

**KENNETH.** I love it.

**BERT.** When he climbs out of the space ship and yells –

**KENNETH.** “Microwave oven!”

*(They can't stop laughing.)*

**BERT.** I can't, man. Please.

**KENNETH.** And then he goes to the little girl on the farm –

**BERT.** I know!

**KENNETH.** – and is like: “Three dollars. Fifty cents.”

**BERT.** Kenneth.

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**KENNETH.** “You want a blueberry?”

{\*}

There’s something you should know about Bert.

About me and Bert.

{\*}

**WALLY’S WAITER.** I’m sorry, I don’t think I can – serve you anymore.

The bartender, he’s saying –

**KENNETH.** Okay.

All right.

**WALLY’S WAITER.** He thinks you’ve had enough to drink.

**KENNETH.** Uh-huh.

*(A moment.)*

That’s all right.

**WALLY’S WAITER.** But maybe tomorrow? When you come back? Have a full meal. All those mai tais on an empty stomach –

{\*}

**KENNETH.** *(To the audience.)* There’s something you should know about Bert.

He’s – imaginary.

{\*}

**BERT.** *(To the audience.)* I’m imaginary.

{\*}

**KENNETH.** *(To the audience.)* He’s imaginary.

Not imaginary in the way that you’re thinking.

**KENNETH.** More like –

Exists only in my head.

**BERT.** Right.

**KENNETH.** But that doesn't make him any less real. He has arms and legs. A face, a heart – a good heart.

**BERT.** I have a wife.

**KENNETH.** And two daughters.

**BERT.** I like to read.

**KENNETH.** He can drive stick shift.

**BERT.** I'm allergic to peanuts.

**KENNETH.** So you see, Bert is real, but just –

**BERT.** Not everyone can see me.

**KENNETH.** Not everyone can see him.

No one can see him. Except me.

He doesn't really exist outside of my head.

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's. Can I get you something to drink?

**KENNETH.** Two mai tais, please.

{\*}

*(To the audience.)* The truth is that Bert might not be real to anyone else, but he's the realest thing I know, and I don't worry much if people don't understand.

For the most part I'm lucky. I went to an orphanage after my mom died and everyone there was pretty okay with it. But after the orphanage, there were a few foster homes where –

*(A moment.)*



And it was hard to explain about Bert and so –

*(A moment.)*

But that's another story.

**BERT.** Ken?

*(KENNETH looks at BERT.)*

**KENNETH.** Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah.

*(KENNETH looks at the audience.)*

Right now the person I spend the most time with (other than Bert) is Sam.

*(SAM enters.)*

He owns the used bookstore at the south end of Main Street and I've been working with him for twenty years.

*(The lights rise on Yellowed Pages, the used bookstore at the end of Main Street.)*

*(SAM is older and has a hard time getting around.)*

When I turned eighteen, I had to get a job, and the social workers helped me find this one. Sam smokes two packs of cigarettes every day, and he sometimes yells "goddamn it" at the customers, but he gives me a twenty-five-cent raise every six months, and even though I don't take him up on it, he and his wife Lulu invite me over for Thanksgiving dinner every year.

**SAM.** You don't like turkey?

**KENNETH.** I do like turkey, Sam, but I think I'm going to watch some TV this year and take it easy.

**SAM.** Take it easy, my ass. You're going to drink at Wally's and talk to yourself all night. This fucking guy. Ach. What do I care? As long as you don't steal from me, you can talk to whatever voices you want.

**KENNETH.** *(To the audience.)* And that's where our story begins.

Me and my friend, me and my job, me and my favorite restaurant, in this town, life as usual.

Everything had been the same for almost twenty years.

And then one autumn day, Sam stopped me as I was closing up the shop.

It was the first night after daylight savings, I remember. The sun had set around four o'clock and Main Street was covered in broken leaves.

**SAM.** Hey kid! Before you go, sit down.

*(SAM lights a cigarette.)*

*(KENNETH sits down.)*

So listen –

Is your friend here?

**KENNETH.** *(Looking at BERT.)* No.

**SAM.** All right, look, Kenny, you do a lot for me.

**KENNETH.** Thanks, Sam.

**SAM.** The store wouldn't be what it is if I didn't have you to help me with the bookkeeping and the organizing and the – well, hell, all of it.

**KENNETH.** Uh-huh.

**SAM.** But.

Okay.

Okay okay, listen, my ticker is bad. They say – I mean you know how these doctors are, but they say I'm about two packs away from a coffin. I gotta get surgery.

**KENNETH.** Sam.

**SAM.** Yeah yeah, such is life, but the shit of it is –  
I'm selling the shop.

Me and Lulu are moving to Arizona.

*(A moment.)*

**KENNETH.** Okay.

**SAM.** It's the only way I can afford to get the surgery and stay alive and keep living this shitty life.

**KENNETH.** What's in Arizona?

**SAM.** Lulu's sister. She's a real piece of work, loves video poker.

But she's got a pool.

And they say sunshine all the time.

*(A moment.)*

So.

**KENNETH.** What's going to happen to the store?

**SAM.** I'm giving in. Cashing out. These developers been on my ass, wanting to turn it into a gym with a juice bar.

**KENNETH.** Wow.

**SAM.** I don't want to leave you stranded, kid, but life sucks and –

**KENNETH.** Yeah.

**SAM.** Two weeks before I close up shop for good.

**KENNETH.** Two weeks?

**SAM.** I should've told you sooner.

Lulu yelled at me every day. I told her you'd be fine,  
but –

I should have told you.

Had a fucking knot in my stomach the whole time  
knowing but not saying.

*(SAM hands KENNETH an envelope from his desk.)*

That's three months. It'll help get you through until  
you find something else.

**KENNETH.** I've never found something else on my own.

**SAM.** You'll land on your feet. Just don't take your friend  
to interviews and you'll be fine.

**KENNETH.** Are you sad?

**SAM.** About what?

**KENNETH.** Losing the store?

**SAM.** Ach.

I lost my keys last night, we lost the cat last Christmas,  
the Knicks lose the playoffs every goddamn year.

Soon I'll lose my mind and every memory of this place.

Sky is blue, what you gonna do?

**KENNETH.** I've known you for twenty years.

**SAM.** Yeah.

*(He smokes.)*

Time.

*(A moment.)*

Don't you spend all that cash on mai tais, you hear me?

**KENNETH.** I won't.

**SAM.** And go ahead and take –

I'll pack up a box real nice for you.

**KENNETH.** That's okay.

**SAM.** Whatever you want, Ken.

**KENNETH.** I'm all right.

But thank you.

**SAM.** Well.

Shit.

Okay.

Maybe we'll have you over for dinner before we head out.

{\*}

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's, New York's oldest tiki hut and home to the Ice Man Shrimp Cocktail Platter, served with our very own house-made horseradish relish (Whoo, that's a mouthful, isn't it?) My name is Ramona. Don't forget that every hour is –

{\*}

**BERT.** Oh man.

**KENNETH.** I know.

I'm fine.

**BERT.** Just breathe.

**KENNETH.** I am.

**BERT.** Ken.

**KENNETH.** I'm trying.

**BERT.** Want me to count?

**KENNETH.** I don't – need –

**BERT.** Okay.

*(A moment.)*

**KENNETH.** Sorry.

Yes, please.

**BERT.** Ten, nine, eight –

Breathe.

That's right.

Seven, six – there you go – five, four, / three, two, one.

**KENNETH.** Three, two, one.

*(A moment.)*

**BERT.** Do you –

**KENNETH.** No.

*(A moment.)*

**BERT.** Could you try – what about a different retail job?

**KENNETH.** Like where?

**BERT.** *(Thinking.)* Like – we could try for another bookshop.  
There's one at the mall.

Or there's the menswear store on Pine Street? I'd buy a suit from you.

**KENNETH.** I don't know.

**BERT.** There's the Jukebox Jamboree.

**KENNETH.** I'd need a car to get out there.

**BERT.** What about Big Billie's? I think they have some really good employee perks – pension. Free nachos.

**KENNETH.** I'm not good with kids.

**BERT.** The gym?

**KENNETH.** Rocco's? Ruff House?

**BERT.** Okay, no.

**KENNETH.** Don't worry about it.

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Here you go.

{\*}

**KENNETH.** I think the weather is better in Arizona.

**BERT.** I've never been.

*(A moment.)*

**KENNETH.** They say sunshine all the time.

**BERT.** Could you go back to the social services center? See if they might be able to help you?

**KENNETH.** It closed.

**BERT.** What? No.

**KENNETH.** Five years ago. Budget cuts. It was all over the news.

{\*}

**BERT.** Let's call a cab.

**KENNETH.** No! I'm fine, silly. I can walk home!

Tell me something, Bert.

Tell me about you.

**BERT.** I think it's time to call it a night.

**KENNETH.** No no no, we're always talking about me. I want to know you. I want to help you. What's going on at home?

**BERT.** It's good. Home is good.

**KENNETH.** How is it being married?

Do you touch her and see God?

Not that I'm much of a religious person. I don't really believe in God or heaven or hell, but I do believe in friends.

She's your best friend, right?

**BERT.** You're my best friend, Ken. And that's why I'm calling you a cab.

**WALLY'S WAITER.** Welcome to Wally's.

{\*}

Welcome to Wally's.

{\*}

Welcome to Wally's.

{\*}

Welcome to Wally's.

{\*}

Welcome to Wally's.

{\*}

Welcome to Wally's.

{\*}

Welcome to Wally's. Can I get you something to drink?

**KENNETH.** Oh – sorry. No.

**CORRINA.** You're okay. You don't have to apologize. I just wanted to make sure you didn't need anything.



**KENNETH.** Yeah no sorry, I'm okay. Or – not sorry. / I'm –

**CORRINA.** It's all right. I'm a chronic apologizer, too. When someone bumps into me, I'm like, "No, I'm sorry! Don't hate me. I'm sorry!"

**KENNETH.** Haha. I do that, too.

**CORRINA.** Well, good.

It's nice to know I'm not alone.

*(She starts to leave the table.)*

**KENNETH.** You know – maybe I'll take one more mai tai. Is it still happy hour?

**CORRINA.** It ended five minutes ago. But I think I can sneak one in.

**KENNETH.** Well, thank you.

Thank you very much.

**CORRINA.** You're very welcome.

**KENNETH.** You're new, right? I haven't seen you before.

**CORRINA.** I just started a month ago. I'm Corrina.

**KENNETH.** *(Mispronouncing.)* Corrina?

**CORRINA.** *(Pronouncing correctly.)* Corrina.

**KENNETH.** I'm Kenneth.

How's it going so far?

**CORRINA.** Everyone's really – you know, new jobs can be so hard and kind of shitty, pardon my French, but everyone here has been really nice. The staff and the regulars –

**KENNETH.** I'm a regular!

**CORRINA.** I know! I've heard.

**KENNETH.** Been coming to happy hour for a long, long time.

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