PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

On the text:

Please read and consider the stage directions carefully. They are a part of the play and many are crucial to telling the story.

On punctuation:

Almost, Maine employs a lot of very specific overlapping dialogue. You'll often see this symbol: //. It will appear inside a particular character's line. It simply means that the next character to speak should begin his/her line where the // appears in the speech of the character who is currently speaking. Sometimes this "railroad tracks" method is hard to work out on the written page, so you will also see this symbol: >. It will appear mid-sentence at the end of a line that is not a complete thought. It simply means that the character speaking should drive through to the end of the thought, which will be continued in his/her character's next line(s).

On place:

Almost, Maine is not a coastal town. It is nowhere near the ocean. And it doesn't exist. It is a mythical composite of several northern Maine towns. Were it to exist, Almost would be located in the remote heart of Aroostook (say, "uh-ROO-stick") County, the sparsely populated, northernmost county in Maine. It would occupy unorganized territory that is officially designated as Township Thirteen, Range Seven, or T13-R7. T13-R7 is some seventy-five miles northwest of the northern terminus of Interstate 95; some two hundred miles northwest of the ocean (at its closest); some three hundred miles north of Portland, ME; and some four hundred miles north of Boston, MA. It is far away from things. (See the map at the back of this volume.)

Winters in Almost, Maine are long, cold, and snowy. It often feels like winter up there from October to May. The area's average January temperature is nine degrees Fahrenheit; average annual snowfall is 115 inches. Winters can also be pretty bleak, because the days are short (less than nine hours at the winter solstice), and the town is in a rolling, empty land of wide open space and big sky.

Potato farms dominate to the east; the expansive North Maine Woods are to the west. *National Geographic* once printed something to this effect: "They call Montana 'Big Sky Country.' Well … 'they' haven't seen Northern Maine."

On the northern lights:

The northern lights are brilliant, ribbon-like, other-worldly displays of light. Northern Mainers are fortunate: They live just inside the southernmost tip of a ring defining the area in which the northern lights regularly appear. Growing up, I remember being treated to a northern lights show at least once a year.

The northern lights occur when atoms become "excited." During solar storms, electrons are sent streaming towards the earth. As these electrons enter the earth's atmosphere, they strike and excite atoms, ionizing them — charging them by knocking out an electron. When this happens to enough atoms, the brilliant light display that is the aurora borealis hovers and streaks across the sky. When the aurora fades, it's because the affected atoms have returned to their grounded state..*Almost, Maine* is a play about people who are normally very grounded, but who have become very excited by love … and other extraordinary occurrences.

On time:

The plot of each scene in *Almost, Maine* climaxes with some sort of "magical moment." I have this notion that the magical moments in all of the scenes are happening at exactly the same time — as the clock strikes nine — and that the northern lights and these magical moments are giving rise to one another. At first, I thought it might be neat to have the northern lights appear as each magical moment occurs. But I didn't want to dilute the climax of each scene or muddle the impact of the magical moments with fancy northern lights displays. So I thought it might be better to revisit the northern lights in the transitions between each scene of the play. These "revisitings" will be denoted as "transitional auroras" in the script and will be suggested throughout. They might help audiences understand that each scene of *Almost, Maine* is taking place at the same time, and that this play is all about one moment in time — what happens to people in a heartbeat.

On the people:

The people of Almost, Maine are not simpletons. They are not hicks or rednecks. They are not quaint, quirky eccentrics. They don't wear funny clothes and funny hats. They don't have funny Maine accents. They are not "Down Easters." They are not fishermen or lobstermen. They don't wear galoshes and rain hats. They don't say, "Ayuh."

The people of Almost, Maine are ordinary people. They work hard for a living. They are extremely dignified. They are honest and true. They are not cynical. They are not sarcastic. They are not glib. But this does not mean that they're dumb. They're very smart. They just take time to wonder about things. They speak simply, honestly, truly, and from the heart. They are never precious about what they say or do.

On presenting *Almost, Maine*:

Please keep in mind that "cute" will kill this play. *Almost, Maine* is inherently pretty sweet. There is no need to sentimentalize the material. Just … let it be what it is — a play about real people who are really, truly, honestly dealing with the toughest thing there is to deal with in life: love.

If you are involved in a production of *Almost, Maine*, please refer to the notes section in the back of this volume.

ern lights, I've felt like they're alive. They *move*. And they are soundless — but when they appear, it feels like there's a humming in the air. This humming is sensed more than heard. Light and some sort of subtle sound might work to help capture the mystery/enhance the creation of the northern lights.

On costumes:

The people of Almost, Maine don't wear funny clothes and funny hats. Keep the clothes simple and functional. Functional winter clothes ... are actually quite funny.

On music:

Interstitial music will play a big part in *Almost, Maine*. Julian Fleisher's music is available, and was written for the play, so I *strongly* encourage its use! If you do use other music, try not to use music with lyrics. I think instrumental folk music is the way to go — stuff that features more guitar, hammer dulcimer, harmonica, fiddle, etc. Music with lyrics tends to provide an analysis of what has just happened — and I really want the stories to speak for themselves. Let the scenes be the songs.

NOTES FOR ACTORS

On punctuation:

I've addressed the // and > symbols in the "Notes" section at the beginning of this volume. I just wanted to remind you that the overlaps are very specific and difficult. Please figure them out — accurately! Please remember that > just means GO! And don't stop for the other character's line! Drive through to the end of the sentence or thought! Because pace is key to this play; keeping your lines of thought active is key to this play; and noting when the characters are actually listening to each other is key to this play. Often you'll be playing people who *aren't* listening to each other. Explore that — the non-listening that happens when people are thinking, or are too busy talking. I think the big epiphanies come when

people actually listen to and hear each other — and I think epiphanies are rather rare.

Some other punctuation notes:

Sometimes you'll see commas after exclamation points or question marks:

RHONDA: Hey-hey-hey!, okay, okay!!

This is simply to encourage pace and keep things moving. Push through to the landing place — which is, in this case, the double exclamation point.

Sometimes you'll see lines in brackets like these [ ]. They shouldn't be spoken. They're just guides.

A dash (—) at the end of a line means that the next speaker cuts off the current speaker.

A dash followed by a period (—.) or a dash followed by an ellipsis (— ...) at the end of a line means that the person speaking cuts him/herself off with thought. The next character to speak *does not* do the cutting off.

An ellipsis (...) at the end of a line means that the thought trails off.

A dash followed by a period (—.) or a dash followed by an ellipsis (— ...) inside a line means that the person speaking cuts him/herself off with thought before moving on.

On language:

Please honor the beats — the quiet moments — in *Almost, Maine*. And make sure they are full and electric. This play must never feel ... slow. There's a buoyancy to the material. A lightness. And I think it's in the language. Find where the words come tumbling out of the characters' mouths. Find where the words don't come so easy — where the quiet moments are. Much is "said" in those quiet moments. The

play must continue to move forward inside those quiet moments.

Please note that the characters from out of town (Glory and Hope) talk more, and faster, than the people of Almost — they have most of the play's monologues. They use words to cover, to protect themselves, to push people away.

On dialect:

Northern Mainers don't really have a distinctive dialect, though r's are pretty pronounced. Words like "sorry" or "forest" or "tomorrow" are pronounced "SORE-ee," "FORE-est," and "to-MORE-ow." The "or" sound is the key. That's about all I'd do with dialect — because the Maine dialect most people know of is a coastal thing, and Almost, Maine is a couple hundred miles from the ocean. It's not "Down East," so please don't do "Down East" Maine. Please. It's not who these people are. Do not think "lobstah" or "A-yuh." Just talk. And hit your r's a little harder than you normally might.

On the "Prologue," "Interlogue," and "Epilogue:"

Please follow the stage directions very closely at the end of the "Prologue," and in the "Interlogue" and "Epilogue." They are your "lines."

On the ironing board hits in "This Hurts" (Scene Four):

The ironing board hits should be as real as can be, as surprising as can be, and as simple as can be. Marvalyn should always "operate" the ironing board with both hands. The key to hitting Steve is in the pivot. Marvalyn should choose a point upon which to pivot as she simply turns to go and put the ironing board away. The momentum of her turn will generate enough speed to make for a pretty great wallop of Steve. Steve might want to see if there's any way to let a hand take the brunt of/amplify each hit.

On characterization:

Your job as an actor in these plays is to tell the stories. You're a storyteller. Don't worry too much about being a chameleon. Don't create caricatures. Sure, you want to create distinct characters — but trust the stories to do a lot of that work for you. Tell the stories, and allow the characters to come to life. This doesn't mean be lazy. It doesn't mean don't be outrageous. It doesn't mean don't be creative. It doesn't mean do nothing or be boring. It just means ... construct truthfully!

And, finally (and this is in the previous notes section, but I can't stress its importance enough), the people of Almost, Maine are not simpletons. They are not hicks or rednecks (though Randy and Chad and Rhonda come pretty close). They are not quaint, quirky eccentrics. They don't wear funny clothes and funny hats. They don't have funny Maine accents. They are not "Down Easters." They are not fishermen or lobstermen. They don't wear galoshes and rain hats. They don't say, "Ayuh."

The people of Almost, Maine are ordinary people. (It's their *situations* that are odd and extraordinary.) They work hard for a living. They are extremely dignified. They are honest and true. They are not cynical. They are not sarcastic. They are not glib. But this does not mean that they're dumb. They're very smart. They just take time to wonder about things. What makes these people so special is their guilelessness. We see them think and figure things out. When they speak, they do so simply, honestly, truly, and from the heart. They are never precious about what they say or do.

Please keep in mind that "cute" will kill this play. *Almost, Maine* is inherently pretty sweet. There is no need to sentimentalize the material. Just ... let it be what it is — a play about real people who are really, truly, honestly dealing with the toughest thing there is to deal with in life: love.

My advice: Don't forget how much the people of *Almost, Maine* are hurting. Honor the ache, play the pain (keep most

of it covered), and don't forget that *Almost, Maine* is a comedy. Sadness and pain are the funniest things in the world.

Things you should know about Maine and Almost, Maine:

Maine is the easternmost and northeasternmost state in the United States.

Maine has 611 miles of international border with Canada, more than any other state except Alaska and Michigan.

Maine is the only state in the country that's attached to only one other state.

Maine is about the same size as the rest of the New England states combined, with a total area of about 35,400 square miles. The other New England states (Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island) have a total area of about 36,600 square miles. Although it comprises almost half of New England's total land area, Maine contains only 9% of the region's population.

With 1.3 million residents, Maine is the most sparsely populated state east of the Mississippi River. It has 40 people per square mile. (Consider this: Vermont — *Vermont* — has 65 people per square mile; Massachusetts has 810; New Jersey: 1,100.)

Maine's largest city is Portland, pop. 65,000. (Consider this: Greenwich, CT has 61,000 residents.) Only Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming have smaller "largest cities."

Maine's unorganized territories make up more than half of the state's total land area.

Maine is more forested than any other state in the country. It is 90% woods.

Maine has more moose per square mile than any other state.

Maine contains the northern terminus of the Appalachian

Trail: Mt. Katahdin in Central Maine.

Almost, Maine would be located 120 miles north of Mt. Katahdin, in the heart of Aroostook County. Aroostook is the largest county east of the Mississippi River, with a land area of 6,700 square miles. It is almost as big as Massachusetts, whose total land area is 7,800 square miles, and it isn't that much smaller than New Hampshire or Vermont, which are about 9,000 square miles each. Aroostook County is considerably larger than Connecticut (4,800 sq. mi.) and Rhode Island (1,045 sq. mi.) put together.

Aroostook County's population is about 72,000, making it one of the most sparsely populated counties east of the Mississippi. (Connecticut and Rhode Island's combined population is 4.5 *million*.) Aroostook has about 11 people per square mile, making it about as densely populated as the Dakotas.

Population: probably about 300.
Median annual household income: probably about $25,000.
Hours of daylight in mid-January: about 9.
Average January temperature: 9 degrees Fahrenheit.
Average annual snowfall: 115 inches. (Appropriate, then, that — as of this printing — one of Maine's Senators is Olympia Snowe. Senator Snowe. For real.)

Thank you for reading. Thank you for doing my play. Thanks for believing in a place like Almost, Maine!

—John Cariani