



COUNTING ALL THE STARS

By Paul Antokolsky

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Counting All the Stars

A Ten-Minute Play

by Paul Antokolsky

(Radio or Podcast Version)

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Counting All the Stars

SYNOPSIS

This off-beat play, set in a world somewhat different from our own, presents a chance encounter between two former school acquaintances who are now living rather marginalized lives. Bates has a passion for astronomy and Colby is a struggling inventor.

Bates tells Colby that, although no one knows how many stars there are, Bates is dedicated to finding out -- the only way that people in their backward civilization know of -- by visually counting them one by one! Colby is skeptical, but offers a recent invention to see if it's any help: a kind of magnifying glass.

Aiming it at the sky for the first time, they are shocked to see that it reveals far more stars than either ever imagined could exist! Bates realizes this life's mission may now be impossible to complete. As they both come to grips with this unsettling situation, they experience unfamiliar depths of feeling, and an unexpected bond is formed between them.

CHARACTERS

(2 either, total of 2.)

BATES The star counter. Thoughtful, earnest, gentle.

COLBY An inventor. Insecure. Impulsive when excited.

Setting: Outside in an open place. It is a dark, clear night.

At Rise: BATES is alone, as COLBY approaches.

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COLBY

Hey, Bates. Haven't seen *you* in a while.

BATES

(With pleased surprise.)

Now there's a voice from the past. How are you?

COLBY

Oh, about the same, I guess.

BATES

Are you still inventing things down in your basement?

COLBY

Well, I have moved a few times since we went to school together, but...yes.

BATES

You know, I remember – I guess we must have been in the fifth grade – you made a wagon with rubber bands that made it move on its own, and you brought it into school.

COLBY

(Flattered, flustered.)

You remember that? Well, it was a bit more than rubber bands -- and I *have* done a few things since then, too -- although nothing that's really paid off yet. (With a dubious tone of voice.) So, what are *you* up to out here in the middle of the night?

BATES

I come here because it's the darkest spot I could find.

COLBY

You're not a mugger are you?

BATES

(Delighted by the absurdity of the question. Then thrilled.)

No, luckily for you. But just look up. Look at all these stars.

COLBY

(Condescendingly.)

Nice. So, you're waiting for the mother ship to come back and take you away.

BATES

No, I don't think that sort of thing really happens very much. (Quite proud, but trying to sound matter-of-fact.) Actually, I'm counting them.

COLBY

Counting what?

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BATES

The stars, Colby. The Stars!

COLBY

Really? Not all of them.

BATES

Of course, all of them. Otherwise, what would be the point?

COLBY

Now that's a pretty good question. What *is* the point?

BATES

At the very least, to know how many stars there are, don't you think?

COLBY

(Disapprovingly.)

I guess so.

BATES

Come on, don't *you* get excited when you find out something new? Why, you can never tell what it will lead to, and if it's something that's really new, something that no one else already knows – what could be better than that?

COLBY

But somebody must know how many stars there are. I mean, they've been there forever.

BATES

Yes, you'd think so, wouldn't you? But I've checked all of the books and newspapers, and I found a few vague estimates, every one of them completely different because no one really knows. (Deflated.) And, nowadays, it seems that no one even cares.

COLBY

Maybe there's something to be learned from that, hmm?

BATES

Oh, really? And do you let the indifference of others decide which ideas you'll look into?

COLBY

Of course not. Not usually.

BATES

I wasn't clever like you and some of the others, but I still wanted to do something important. And you can't always tell which things will be important ahead of time, so

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BATES (Cont'd.)

you just have to pick something big, and go do it. The only reason we don't know how many stars there are is because no one's ever made the effort to find out.

COLBY

Until now.

BATES

Yes!

COLBY

(Unenthusiastically.)

Quite a project, I'll give you that. But doesn't it get boring? I mean, you're counting..."837 stars, 838 stars – "

BATES

Actually, I've found that caring about the goal makes the process quite bearable, sometimes even enjoyable, and I just keep moving ahead.

COLBY

I bet you get a stiff neck.

BATES

From time to time.

COLBY

(Facetiously.)

Maybe you should try it lying down with a nice pillow under your head.

BATES

Or, if you *really* wanted to be helpful, you could help me count.

COLBY

Me? I'm no astronomer.

BATES

None of us are anything until we try, now are we? (Brief pause.) What do you say?

COLBY

I don't know. (Giving in some.) How do you do it?

BATES

Well, there aren't any short cuts, I'm afraid. I just look up, point my finger, and start counting. I keep a set of charts so I know the parts of the sky I've already done, and every