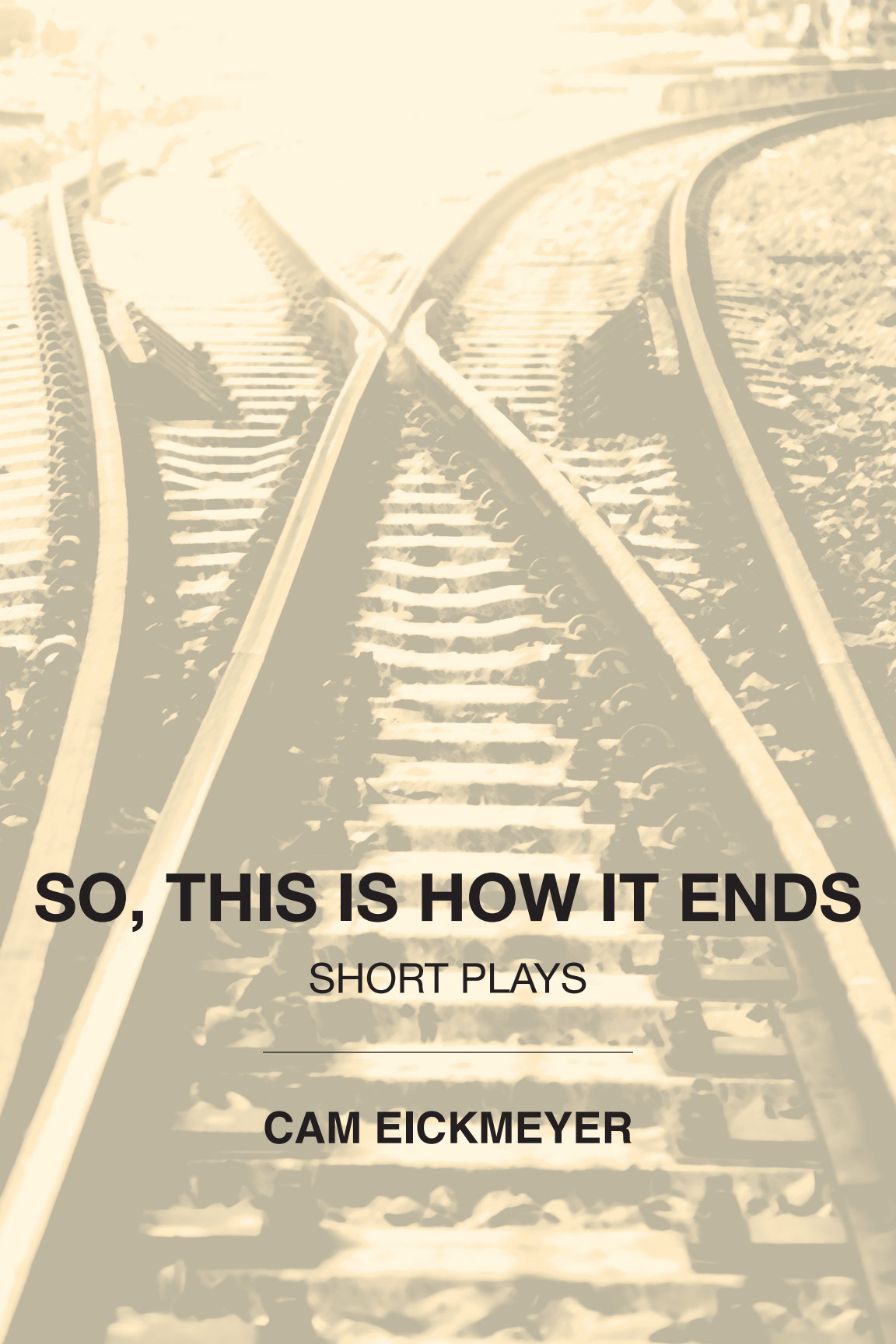




SO, THIS IS HOW IT ENDS

SHORT PLAYS

CAM EICKMEYER

SO, THIS IS HOW IT ENDS

SHORT PLAYS BY CAMERON EICKMEYER

So, This Is How It Ends – Short Plays by Cam Eickmeyer
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Cam Eickmeyer

<http://www.cameickmeyer.com>

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I was in high school when I first encountered the Trolley Problem, the famous thought experiment in which a stick figure sweats over a decision to send a trolley to kill five people or one.

I understood the puzzle to be a logical dilemma, but mostly found myself captivated by the fates of the stick figures. I remember empathizing with the person at the switch, but also the people tied to the tracks and the passengers on the train. There was no clear path to “Right” or away from “Wrong”. All that was assured was an end to the question, “what should you do?” I’ve never decided what I would do or want someone else to do. The quandary, however, embedded itself deep into my mind.

My writing has often explored difficult decisions and the endings that come from those perilous choices. I fall in love with characters who are faced with decisions, or those living in the aftermath, and others who are questioning the endings that will result from those choices. There are many endings to explore in these plays. Relationships, innocence, political movements, lives and even the planet itself hang in the balance.

Thank you to my family and friends who support my passion. They no doubt heard early versions of all of these stories and their encouragement, criticism and support has made all of my writing possible.

Thank you to Tess for editing this book and designing the cover. Above all other decisions I have made, I place my decision to love this woman and build a life with her.

Thank you to Steve, my longtime friend and unflinching feedback partner who beat the early drafts into something that could stand. I keep your voice in my head and am a better writer for it.

STAY CALM AND PANIC

Performed at Millbo Art Theatre - The Lost Years Festival, March 2025

SYNOPSIS: Two friends try to navigate the pandemic but that pesky CDC Agent keeps getting in the way.

CAST OF CHARACTERS: Can be any gender.

FRIEND 1 - Nervous about the pandemic.

FRIEND 2 - A bit on the “it’s 5G” train when it comes to the pandemic

AGENT - Wears a CDC hat and a secret service style earpiece. Is supremely confident they know the TRUTH.

TIME: COVID-19 Pandemic era. Content spans the run of the pandemic so no specific date is relevant.

SETTING: City street.

STAY CALM AND PANIC

Friend 1 anxiously searches for someone they are meeting. They fidget to put on a mask that has complicated straps.

FRIEND 1. So this is goes over my mouth and ... No, that doesn't work. THIS part goes on my eyes ... Nope.

(Friend 2 enters and waves. They awkwardly fist bump then consider a hug, smile at each other then embrace)

FRIEND 2. How have you been?

FRIEND 1. OK I guess?

FRIEND 2. *(Notices the mask.)* What's with the mask?

FRIEND 1. It's this Coronavirus in China. It has me spooked.

FRIEND 2. I heard about that on Facebook. I don't think we need to panic though. The President said it's like one person in China.

AGENT. *(Enters with force.)* That's right. It's not in America. Nothing to worry about. *(Puts hand to ear to listen to an update.)*

FRIEND 2. See? It's nothing to worry about

AGENT. Actually it's spreading beyond China now.

FRIEND 1. Oh my god.

FRIEND 2. Wait, but not to the US, right?

AGENT. Yes. Nothing to- *(Hand to ear, another update coming in.)*

AGENT. It's here. Oh my god.

FRIEND 2. But not in Colorado, right?

AGENT. It's in Colorado. *(Listens to more updates. Eyes widen with the incoming information.)*

FRIEND 1. I'm freaking out.

FRIEND 2. Relax. It's only like the super sick and old people who need to worry. Stay calm and...

AGENT. *(Shouting)* PANIC!!!!!!

(Everyone runs around the stage in fear while the Agent barks out orders)

AGENT. Buy hand sanitizer!

(Friends panic buy on their phones as they run around. Friend 1 drops the mask in the process.)

FRIEND 1. Check.

AGENT. Buy disinfectant spray.

FRIEND 2. They're all out at Costco!

AGENT. Buy canned goods you will never end up eating!

FRIEND 1. I just Door Dashed a pallet of pickled asparagus.

AGENT. *(Agent suddenly stops and listens to another update.)*

Oh. My. God.

(All stop and stare. The worst news is imminent)

FRIEND 1. What? Just tell me? Are we all gonna die?

AGENT. Worse ... We're running out of toilet paper.

ALL. PANIC!!!!

(They run around more panic buying. Amazon boxes slide onto the stage as they order.)

AGENT. Buy soap.

FRIEND 2. Done.

AGENT. Buy sourdough starter.

FRIEND 1. I don't know what that is.

AGENT. Doesn't matter. Buy it!

FRIEND 1. Done.

AGENT. Buy alcohol wipes.

FRIEND 2. For our hands?

AGENT. For the groceries and boxes. The Rona could be anywhere!

(A tub of wipes sails onto the stage. Friend 1 catches it and looks to Agent for what to do next)

AGENT. PANIC CLEAN!!!

(Friend 1 passes out wipes and they begin wiping all the boxes. After a beat, Friend 2 stops and notices the mask on the ground.)

FRIEND 2. Wait, should we be wearing masks?

AGENT. *(Agent listens to headset.)* Negative. It's all about hand washing and wiping down your Bananas.

FRIEND 1. Well that's a relief. We can still hang out with each other?

AGENT. Sure. No need to- *(Another alert coming in.)* PANIC!!!!
(All run around panic buying.)

AGENT. Buy masks!

FRIEND 1. They're sold out!

AGENT. PANIC!!!

FRIEND 2. *(Tries to calm things down.)* Wait. You guys, it's gonna be ok.

FRIEND 1. How can you say that?

FRIEND 2. It's not as bad as you think and there's an easy cure.

(Friend 1 goes to hug Friend 2 in gratitude)

AGENT. NO HUGGING!

(They jump apart.)

FRIEND 2. I'm serious. There's a cure.

FRIEND 1. A vaccine?

FRIEND 2. *(Retracts in disgust.)* You know I don't believe in vaccines.

FRIEND 1. So what is it then?

FRIEND 2. We just inject bleach and...

AGENT. NO no no no. You would die. You can't believe any of these random internet cures. Only trust verified government resources.

FRIEND 2. The president said we should do it.

AGENT. *(Jaw drops. They consult their earpiece.)* Don't do what the president says.

FRIEND 2. What about drinking fish tank cleaner?

AGENT. Ugh. He said that too?

FRIEND 2. Yes. Also if I rub some horse paste on my...

AGENT. DO. NOT. LISTEN. TO THE PRESIDENT!

FRIEND 1. I miss my mom. I haven't seen her in months. Can I go visit her?

AGENT. *(Consults earpiece.)* Yes. Of course. Provided you both test negative and quarantine for 14 days prior to visiting.

FRIEND 1. Great. Where can I get a test?

AGENT. You can't.

FRIEND 1. Why not?

AGENT. The president gave them to Putin.

FRIEND 1. For the love of-
 FRIEND 2. When can we just get back to normal?
 FRIEND 1. Never, probably.
 AGENT. Never.
 FRIEND 1. See?
 FRIEND 2. I don't consent! This is tyranny! My rights are trampled!
 AGENT. What rights exactly?
 FRIEND 2. My right to get drunk at a theme park and vomit on a child!!!
 AGENT. The constitution still protects that sacred right, citizen.
 FRIEND 1. I heard there's a vaccine. There's hope again!
 FRIEND 2. Don't get the jab! It's a government plot to control your Mind.

(With each conspiracy, Agent grows more exasperated)

FRIEND 1. Come on. You don't really believe that.
 FRIEND 2. It will make you infertile.
 FRIEND 1. Where did you read that?
 FRIEND 2. Facebook. So you know it's real.
 AGENT. Please stick to real experts.
 FRIEND 2. The President said it's going to disappear like a miracle.
 AGENT. For fuck's sake.
 FRIEND 1. I got the vaccine. I feel safer.
 FRIEND 2. *(While coughing.)* I didn't. I feel sick.
 AGENT. We'll send you cash every month to help.
 FRIEND 2. I feel better now!
 FRIEND 1. This is great, what should I buy?
 AGENT. Anything. Just spend it ASAP.
 FRIEND 1. Ooo, these boots are awesome.
 FRIEND 2. Check out my new don't tread on me tattoo!
 FRIEND 1. I booked a Hawaii vacation!
 FRIEND 2. I'm going to DC with my friends on January 6!
 AGENT. Your government thanks you for your dedication to health, your patience and, mostly, your spending.

(More Amazon boxes slide onto stage.)

FRIEND 1. New shirts!

FRIEND 2. New shoes!

(Agent presses hand to ear.)

FRIEND 1. Oh, I love those on you.

AGENT. WAIT!!! Stop spending.

(Friends look confused.)

FRIEND 1. Why?

AGENT. *(Agent listens to earpiece then GASPS.)* Inflation.

(Beat.)

ALL. PANIC!!!!!!

THE END

UPS AND DOWNS

Performed at Springs Ensemble Theatre - Arnie's Love Mix, March 2025

SYNOPSIS: Cheating spouse breaks the news to their partner on a roller coaster. Smile for the camera!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SPOUSE 1: Any gender or age. The more awkward of the two. Looking for a buffer between their feelings and the hard conversation to come.

SPOUSE 2: Any gender or age. Blissfully unaware of the bad news to come ... Or are they?

RIDE ANNOUNCER: Any gender. Voice/recorded

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: A roller coaster car.

PRODUCTION NOTE: Ideally uses the sound of a roller coaster car ascending for the big drops and rolling around the track, but not required.

UPS AND DOWNS

Two chairs on an empty stage. Spouse 1 and Spouse 2 enter from the same stage side and sit down. Alternatively, it can be done without chairs. They mimic buckling in over the shoulder roller coaster harnesses. They prepare for the ride of their lives.

(Spouse 1 and 2 take a simultaneous deep breath. They laugh at the synchronicity)

SPOUSE 1. I don't know if I'm more scared or nervous about this.

SPOUSE 2. Oh stop it. It'll be fun.

SPOUSE 1. I'm not so sure.

SPOUSE 2. You're always saying that and it's always fine.

RIDE ANNOUNCER. Hold on to your hats folks. Karma Caverns is the wildest ride in the west. Keep your hands in and hooooooooold on! It's gonna be a bumpy ride.

(Spouse 1 and Spouse 2 share a glance. Spouse 1 looks genuinely scared.)

SPOUSE 2. Oh come on you big scaredy cat.

SPOUSE 1. I know I know. My brother always says that too.

SPOUSE 2. Well, he's a smart, handsome guy. You should listen to him.

(The roller coaster begins to move. Clicking and clacking its way up the big hill. Spouse 1 starts to hyperventilate. Spouse 2 enjoys the vista.)

SPOUSE 2. Wow, this is some view.

SPOUSE 1. Yeah, um, listen I brought you here today because I have something to tell you.

SPOUSE 2. To the amusement park?

SPOUSE 1. No, to this ride.

SPOUSE 2. What? Why?

(Clicking slows as they crest the hill.)

SPOUSE 1. I've been unemployed for a/yeeeeeeeeeaaaaar

(The car flies down the big hill as they share looks and shouts of bewilderment and fear.)

SPOUSE 2. Ahhhhhhh!

(They rock and roll side to side as the coaster runs. It slows and starts climbing another hill with a steady clicking.)

SPOUSE 2. Where has our money been coming from?

SPOUSE 1. Credit cards.

SPOUSE 2. Cards as in plural? What about the cash?

SPOUSE 1. Cash advances.

SPOUSE 2. In this economy?

SPOUSE 1. And that's not all.

SPOUSE 2. There's more?

(Clicking slows as the ride nears another drop.)

SPOUSE 1. I've been cheating on YOUUUUUUUUU!

SPOUSE 2. Oh my GOOOOahhhhhhhhhh!

(Ride rocks them back and forth in unison through loops. They scream throughout. Spouse 2 tries to smack at Spouse 1.)

(Ride slows again for one more climb. Click, click click.)

SPOUSE 2. You bastard. You better be joking. I swear.

SPOUSE 1. I knew you'd be mad.

SPOUSE 2. Mad? What else am I supposed to be?

SPOUSE 1. I was hoping for like emotionless and nonconfrontational?

SPOUSE 2. You're lucky I'm strapped in.

SPOUSE 1. Exactly.

SPOUSE 2. The ride's going to end though. What's your plan then?

SPOUSE 1. My side of the car releases two seconds before yours.

(Coaster crests the hill)

SPOUSE 2. So that's why you've been running again.

SPOUSE 1. Well, that and my new girlfriend likes me skinny-
yyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!

SPOUSE 2. AHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

(More screams as they loop the loops of their relationship. The car slows and begins the last climb, ready for the biggest drop.)

SPOUSE 2. I can't believe you are having this conversation with me on a roller coaster.

SPOUSE 1. Seemed fitting.

SPOUSE 2. Do you love her, your, ugh, girlfriend?

SPOUSE 1. I don't know. It's possible I just wanted to shake things up with us.

SPOUSE 2. I know I signed up for better or worse, but I wasn't expecting this exactly.

SPOUSE 1. Me either. I'm sorry, the cheating just sort of happened, like the floor fell out from under me.

SPOUSE 2. It's ok. I know the feeling.

(Beat as Spouse 1 digests that comment. Click, click ... Click as the coaster stops climbing and approaches the big drop.)

RIDE ANNOUNCER. *(voice over)* Don't forget to smile for the camera on the way down Karma Cavern.

SPOUSE 1. Wait. What do you mean you know the feeling?

SPOUSE 2. I've been sleeping with your brother since last
WEEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!

SPOUSE 1. AAAAAAAHHHH!!!

(More screams, some tears. All the emotions. Midway down a FLASH of light from the camera. As the ride ends they look at each other awkwardly.)

SPOUSE 1. Want to ride again?

SPOUSE 2. Sure, why not? We have a lot to talk about.

THE END

EXIT POLL

Performed at Millbo Art Theatre - Vote! Short Play Festival, October 2022

SYNOPSIS: Three reporters desperate for an election day scoop, post up outside a voting location willing to do anything, yes, absolutely anything, to predict the outcome of the votes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS: Genders can be changed as needed.

ACE DONALDSON: An arrogant TV newsman in his early 50s. He thinks he's better than Walter Cronkite, but looks like a young Bobby Sherman, completely unaware his younger contemporaries have no idea who either person is.

KATHRYN KATIES: A woman in her 20s eager to break her first big story via her own social media channels and influencer dreams. She's always carrying three phones so she can stream on all the platforms at once.

BOOM POWERS: A man in his late 20s with a blog, an algorithm, oversized wearable technology and a dream. He's wearing tech gloves, goggles, hell, anything that might be remotely expensive and useless.

VOTER 1: An 18-year-old first time voter, smart and eager to contribute to society.

PIZZA DELIVERY DRIVER: Any age, just doing their job

VOTER 2: A 70s+ man with all the time in the world to stop and chat, whether you like it or not

POLL WORKER: A 50s woman pouring herself into democracy, but

running on empty.

TIME: Present

SETTING: Outside a voting location where news crews for live coverage and exit polls with voters.

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EXIT POLL

A line of voters wait to enter the polling station. In front of them, facing the audience as if we are the camera lens, Ace, Kathryn and Boom are prepping for their respective live coverage hits. They fuss with their hair, fidget with their devices and microphones and practice their “news” faces.

(Ace, Kathryn and Boom warm up, their voices overlapping in round)

ACE. Check, check, one, two.

KATHRYN. Three, one, two, buckle my shoe.

BOOM. Pimple popping puss powder.

ACE. Momma made me milk.

KATHRYN. I caught a kissing cousin.

BOOM. Split spit spurt sport.

(The voters in line steal awkward glances at the intrepid reporters. Kathryn, Ace and Boom step forward to do their live report.)

KATHRYN. *(Rotating through her devices as she says the app names.)* Hello Colorado Springs I’m Kathryn Katies coming to you live on TikTok, Insta, Flippa, TwistaPop and Facebook. I’m here at polling station seven. Where ... *(She looks like she is continuing to speak, but Ace picks up the dialogue.)*

ACE. Where we expect the line behind me to grow dramatically over the course of the day. As always I’m the ace up your sleeve Ace Donaldson with Channel Two News. We start with breaking news ... *(His voice fades but he continues to mime giving a report. Boom starts to speak.)*

BOOM. My algorithm predicts breaking news before it breaks into breaking news and is exclusive to my blog Hashtag Breaking News, where the news breaks. The algorithm predicts votes coming in from this precise location will be counted ... and help determine the winner.

(Back to Kathryn.)

KATHRYN. Some say that ten a.m. on election day is too early to

draw sweeping conclusions about a single vote, let alone the future of the country, but I'm here with the top ten reasons that is dead wrong. Number six will BLOW YOUR MIND.

(Back to Ace.)

ACE. I can tell you from years of experience that this is the most important election of our lives. That is until the next one and papa needs another daytime Emmy.

(Back to Boom.)

BOOM. No story is too small, no random data point too insignificant.

KATHRYN, ACE, BOOM. *(In unison.)* Coming up later, our first Exit Poll.

(Kathryn and Ace move to the side and consult their notepads. Ace scans the line of voters and counts with his hands. Poll Worker enters.)

POLL WORKER. Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for coming out to vote today. Please be patient with us, we were delayed this morning when Texas Senator Ted Cruz showed up for a photo op. As per Colorado Summer Tourism Policy we told him when summer is over Texans are required to go home.

(People in line applaud and look pleased. Boom motions to the audience as if to a cameraman.)

BOOM. Boom goes the dynamite everyone I have breaking news for you. As you can see we have one voter wearing a red shirt and two wearing blue. My algorithm says this means a huge 2-to-1 turnout advantage for the Democrats.

(Voter 1 joins the back of the line wearing red. Boom shakes his head in disbelief.)

BOOM. Dramatic shift in the turnout has moved things to 50/50. Wait, what's happening now?

(Voter 2 at front of line wearing blue moves forward off stage. Boom is stunned.)

BOOM. Breaking news that breaks the other breaking news. Voter turnout now shifts in favor of the Republicans!

VOTER 1. My shirt color doesn't say anything about how I'll vote.

BOOM. Its science buddy, catch up. Look here.

(Boom walks to Voter 1 gesturing in the air with both arms as if manipulating an object.)

BOOM. This chart shows the sale of red and blue shirts. This

map is your district. There's the high school, and this is the coffee shop where my wife told me she was having an affair. As you can clearly see.

VOTER 1. I don't see anything. What are you doing with your hands?

BOOM. Wait, you don't see the AI projection interactive map?

VOTER 1. Nope.

BOOM. *(Boom fiddles with his gadgets.)* Now?

VOTER 1. Nope.

BOOM. *(More fidgeting.)* Now?

VOTER 1. Nothing still.

BOOM. Oh come on! I paid extra for that!

(Boom steps to the side to troubleshoot his gadgets. Poll Worker enters with an important update.)

POLL WORKER. Excuse me, people. Those of you waiting in line please be sure you are here to vote. There's been some confusion and, quite frankly, giant weepy baby tears at the front of the line when someone realized this was not the line for the Gold Star Pies food truck.

(One of the people in line turns away in frustration.)

POLL WORKER. Seriously? You'd rather buy pie than participate in democracy?

(The voter shrugs and nods sheepishly.)

POLL WORKER. Get your ass back in line. Go get your pie later!

(The person returns to their spot in line, shamed to civic responsibility. Ace steps up for his live report.)

ACE. While other networks try to catch your eye with flash in the pan technology.

BOOM. *(Nearly crying.)* It's not flash in the pan.

ACE. I like to rely on good old fashioned journalism.

KATHRYN. Old is the operative word there.

ACE. A staple of a reporter's toolbox, man on the street interviews are the key to predicting election results, the direction of the country and hot stock tips.

(Voter 2 enters the stage with a big "I voted" sticker on his chest.)

ACE. Excuse me sir. Can you describe why you came out to

vote today?

VOTER 2. Sure thing young man.

(Ace smirks proudly at Boom and Kathryn, who roll their eyes.)

VOTER 2. It all started in 1943. My grandfather's best friend's daughter's sworn enemy volunteered at an election hall in Flagstaff, Arizona and -

ACE. I mean specifically today, sir. Do you feel a sense of duty to make your voice heard in this election?

VOTER 2. *(Steals Ace's microphone.)* I would say so. If you look out into the future there's gonna be a kid out there wondering why this election went one way or the other. I like to imagine that kid is my grandson's second grade teacher's step-nephew.

ACE. Oh for the love of god.

VOTER 2. I'd like to think the love of god guides me in the voting booth, thanks for asking.

ACE. How do I make you stop talking?

VOTER 2. I've got all the time in the world. I'm retired and basically just find places to vote. County elections, student councils, beauty contests, chili cookoffs ...

ACE. We need to go to commercial. Please stop talking now. *(Ace escapes to the side of the stage. Voter 2 continues mumbling as he exits.)*

POLL WORKER. Ladies and gentlemen, a quick announcement. Despite what is trending on Twitter, this polling location is NOT providing free donuts for Democrats or revolvers for Republicans. *(A voter starts to leave the line, but under Poll Worker's terrible glare they decide to stay.)*

POLL WORKER. Please just vote, take a sticker and leave. You don't have to go home but you can't stay here.

KATHRYN. *(Steps up for her live report.)* Many people are saying to many other people, some of whom have told me, that there might be a potential ballot scandal at this location.

(Pizza Delivery Driver enters balancing a stack of pizza boxes. Kathryn eyes him suspiciously.)

KATHRYN. Seems a little early in the day for a pizza delivery. Let's check it out. *(She walks toward the delivery driver.)* What's in those boxes. Is it ballots? Hanging chads? Sharpie pens?

PIZZA DELIVERY DRIVER. Um, just pizzas. I'm looking for someone named Jessica?

(Kathryn tries to open one of the boxes.)

PIZZA DELIVERY DRIVER. Lady, what's your problem?

KATHRYN. Finding the truth is my problem! Show me the goods you ballot stuffer! *(Kathryn topples the boxes over and pizzas spill out.)*

POLL WORKER. Oh man, there goes our lunch!

PIZZA DELIVERY DRIVER. There goes my tip.

KATHRYN. There goes my Pulitzer.

POLL WORKER. Actually at this point we're so hungry I'm gonna call five second rule.

PIZZA DELIVERY DRIVER. Seriously? There's definitely dog poop on the ground here.

POLL WORKER. I've been an election day volunteer for the last ten years, you think this will be the first time I've had to eat some shit? *(Poll worker and Pizza delivery driver scoop the pizzas back into the boxes and exit stage.)*

BOOM. Boom goes the dynamite folks, we're back live with the latest in election coverage technology. I'm standing next to a holograph projection of a George Washington impersonator who will now tell us exactly who the founding fathers would want to win the election. George are you there?

(Boom appears to eagerly listen, nodding and smiling, but no one else on stage can hear or see anything. Voter 1 returns to the stage with an "I Voted" sticker)

BOOM. Very interesting George. And who do you hope wins today?

(Poll Worker returns holding a paper plate and slice of pizza. Poll Worker nudges Voter 1.)

POLL WORKER. Is he ok?

VOTER 1. Maybe? I think he's talking to George Washington's ghost or something.

BOOM. It's not a ghost it's a hologram only the viewers at home can see!

(Voter 1 pulls out his phone and starts typing)

BOOM. While I have you here George, I'd love to get your thoughts on abortion, gun control, and the 2020 Bachelor finale.

VOTER 1. Your livestream has five viewers. Maybe that wasn't a wise investment?

ACE. One of those viewers is probably his mom.

BOOM. One of them is your mom Ace! And who cares if I sold my house to buy the equipment? Who cares if I converted my cash to Bitcoin just before the crash? It's the news baby and I'm gonna break it!
(*Awkward silence as everyone stares at Boom.*)

BOOM. (*Into microphone.*) Oh shut up George. No one cares about you either.

VOTER 1. Yo, why don't you three just vote instead of wasting your time out here? Like literally nothing you're doing here matters as much as people just voting.

POLL WORKER. Preach brother, preach!

VOTER 1. The whole system falls apart if you don't do this very basic thing. Just be informed and vote. Am I missing something?

KATHRYN, ACE, BOOM. (*In unison.*) I never vote.

(*The reporters all share a look.*)

KATHRYN, ACE, BOOM. (*In unison.*) Breaking news. Voter apathy at an all-time high! The latest exit polls are next.

THE END

WHILE WE STILL CAN

Performed at Millbo Art Theatre - Arts Uprise Festival, June 2025

SYNOPSIS: Neighbors in a small seaside community face an oncoming horrific storm.

CAST OF CHARACTERS: Unless noted, any gender or race

TITO - Hardworking and firmly optimistic. Believes the best in people and that the best days still lie ahead.

ORPHIA - Done fighting, sold stakes and is running away

BUCK - Male. Riding the storm out on a boat, says it won't be so bad

THERESA - Single mother. Not able to leave, trying to find hope

DONNI- Journalist excited to study the storm, the reaction to it and the aftermath

SETTING: Seaside community street in front of Tito's house. Boarded up windows and sandbags in front of the house if possible. At minimum, Tito should either hold or mime a hammer.

WHILE WE STILL CAN

TITO hammers the last nail into a piece of plywood to seal up a window. ORPHIA enters, carrying a suitcase or duffel. She notices Tito and stops to talk.

ORPHIA. Why are you bothering Tito?

TITO. *(Tito doesn't stop working.)* Have to get these up before the storm hits Orphia. You know how it goes.

ORPHIA. Yeah, but this one is going to be a direct hit. We don't have a levee since no one else seemed to vote for it. So I'll ask again, why are you bothering?

TITO. What choice do I have? *(Tito finishes driving a nail.)*

ORPHIA. You don't think the storm is gonna hit or something?

TITO. No. I am absolutely sure it will.

ORPHIA. Then run. Get out. Start over somewhere else. There will be nothing left when this is done.

TITO. *(Tito picks up another nail and sets it in the board.)*
I can't just leave. My family's been in this town, in THIS house for generations. *(Tito eyes Orphia's bags.)* Plus, I don't have a house in the Hamptons to run to.

ORPHIA. It's not about that and you know it. I tried just as hard as you. I worked my ass off for that levee, we've rebuilt parts of this town ten times over. We've nailed these same boards together before.

TITO. So what's different this time?

(As Orphia struggles to find the words, BUCK enters, carrying a red cooler over one shoulder and an open beer in his free hand)

ORPHIA. It's ... I don't know. The storm is just so much.

BUCK. Lovely morning eh? Perfect day for a boat.

TITO. I'd stay off the water today Buck. This storm is going to be bad.

BUCK. You always say that dude. And it's never as bad as you say. Last time you said it was gonna destroy the city and I rode that one

out like a baby in a bathtub.

ORPHIA. *(She whirls in anger.)* YOU rode it out, maybe, but not everyone was fine.

BUCK *(He laughs.)* We lost like what, a coffee shop and a playground? Chill, bitch.

ORPHIA. *(She gestures at Buck like speaking to a jury.)* This is why I'm leaving Tito. We don't have anything worth saving. I don't give a shit about boarding up shops when people like THIS don't care. That coffee shop was in the Rodriguez family for twenty years. That playground was in a neighborhood that washed away too.

BUCK. Maybe people shouldn't have been living in the valley in hurricane country.

(DONNI enters, notepad in hand, listening to the conversation and taking notes.)

ORPHIA. *(Losing patience.)* They didn't CHOOSE to live there. Your father bulldozed their homes fifty years ago and they settled in the only place they could.

BUCK. Oh, so it's my fault now? The storm, shit that happened before I was born. All of it is my fault. How convenient.

TITO. Please! Can we focus on THIS storm instead of the past? Grab a nail and a hammer.

BUCK. Fuck that. There's a boat and a beer with my name on it.

ORPHIA. Figures. You love to vote against the levee but won't lift a god damned finger to board up a window.

BUCK. I don't see a hammer in your hand either you smug asshole. Go back to New York and stay there.

(Orphia moves aggressively toward Buck. Tito steps between what is sure to become a fight. Donni interrupts to deescalate.)

DONNI. Excuse me, can I interrupt please? Just a few questions if you have a minute. I'm with the Star Network.

BUCK. I don't talk to fake news.

DONNI. Interesting. What makes you distrust the media and do you think that has made you more skeptical of this storm?

BUCK. *(He takes a long pull from his beer.)* Just look around you. It's pretty much still and sunny right now. This town always panics and they're always wrong. Worst case we get some waves and even then maybe they'll take out that eyesore boardwalk and condos. Win win for Everyone!

ORPHIA. They're apartments, not condos. Real families who would be on the street otherwise live there. Not that you'd care to meet a real neighbor.

BUCK. Good riddance then if they couldn't survive on their own two.

DONNI. Do you think these families are a burden somehow to your town?

ORPHIA. Why are you eating his bullshit? He voted against a levee that would have helped us stay safe. He is practically rooting for the storm. Look at him, he's heading to a party while the rest of the town is either boarding up or running away.

DONNI. It's always good to get both sides of the issue.

ORPHIA. Not when one side is a fascist!

BUCK. Oh, she called me a fascist. Everyone take a drink. *(He takes a dramatic swig of beer.)*

DONNI. That term is a loaded one, why do you think it applies here?

ORPHIA. I'm DONE. Sorry Tito. I'll miss you, but I'm not staying for this storm to hit.

(Orphia leaves. THERESA Enters.)

THERESA. Shoot. I wanted to ask her if I could have her basketball hoop. She packed everything else up and my boy would love it if they could claim that.

BUCK. She's gone baby. Go pick the bones on that dump.

THERESA. *(To the air, more than anyone in particular.)* I'd leave too if I had somewhere to go.

DONNI. You think this storm will be that bad?

THERESA. For me? Yeah, but what does it matter? I got a kid, I can't go nowhere anyways.

DONNI. I've picked up a lot of tension in town as this storm approaches. Do you think you have a true community to rely on? *(He looks at Tito.)*

THERESA. I mean, some of us do. Like Tito and them. It's all about what you can control right? Like if the water comes up to my windows, it's coming in no matter how hard I pray or whatever. *(She starts to tear up.)*

DONNI. Did you vote for the levee?

THERESA. I don't have time for that. I work two, three jobs at a

time.

DONNI. Do you feel guilty, like this was maybe your fault?

THERESA. The storm? How is this-

TITO. Just let her be OK? She's just trying to survive.

THERESA. Maybe she's right though. Maybe I could have done more.

TITO. No. Nothing was going to stop this. We've said for years the big one was coming and now it's here.

DONNI. Can I give you my card? I'll be riding out the storm in town and would love to find out how it's affecting you.

(They each take a card. Tito stares skeptically.)

TITO. What's it matter to you?

DONNI. It's fascinating, isn't it? I talked to a mechanic today who lives in his van and he can't afford to buy the parts he needs to leave. He's still here though fixing tires and radiators for free to help others leave.

TITO. Julio.

DONNI. Is that his name? I know I wrote it down, but sure. Sounds right.

THERESA. He ain't gonna survive in that van.

TITO. I'll have him come stay with me. What about you?

DONNI. Me?

(Tito ignores her)

TITO. Where are you and Oz staying?

DONNI. Oh.

(Donni keeps scribbling notes, Theresa looks around, her hands betraying the frayed nerves throughout her body.)

THERESA. I don't know, Oz can't really go nowhere right now.

DONNI. Why can't Oz go anywhere? Why are you not providing for Oz?

TITO. Bring him here. You can stay here too.

THERESA. *(She tears up.)* You don't have room for the whole town in there, Tito.

TITO. I'll find a way. Go get Oz and call Julio too while you still can.

(Theresa steps forward as if she wants to hug him, but Tito turns back

to the hammer and nails. Theresa exits. As Tito drives another nail in he notices Donni watching.)

TITO. You gonna help? Or just stand there?

DONNI. Stand here.

(Tito scoffs and pounds another nail.)

DONNI. I know that sounds callous, but it's how I stay objective.

TITO. Where you from?

DONNI. Right now I'm out of Chicago, but I grew up in the Bay.

TITO. *(He stops mid swing.)* So you know what we go through, but you'd rather stay objective?

DONNI. My job isn't to pound nails and fix cars. It's to tell your stories.

TITO. Did you write any stories about this storm?

DONNI. Of course.

TITO. You know what we could have used more than another story about how bad this storm was gonna be?

DONNI. Funding for a levee? I don't know. Tell me.

TITO. Someone to swing a fucking hammer instead of a pen.

DONNI. *(He shrugs.)* The pen is mightier than the hammer, some would say.

TITO. *(He gestures to the skyline.)* Tell that to the storm.

DONNI. So how do you fight it? If not the hammer or the pen what do you do?

TITO. *(He pauses mid swing again, then lowers the hammer.)* You ain't gonna find an answer to that. Anyone who says they know the truth with that is lying.

DONNI. What's your truth then?

TITO. Look, I can't run. I have nowhere else to go. I can't stand on the beach and try to fight either. It's coming no matter what. The only thing I can do is find people I love who love this community and tuck into the safest corners we can and hunker down.

DONNI. But that won't stop the storm. If it hits as hard as some are saying there won't be anything left here anyone will recognize.

(Theresa enters holding a sleeping toddler wrapped in a blanket.)

THERESA. Julio says he ain't leaving until the last car is fixed, but then he'll be down here. He says to keep the door open as long as you can.

TITO. *(He faces Donni again.)* I can't run, I can't stop the storm, but I can hold what ground is mine and fight for it until my last breath. While I still have blood in my heart I will hold on to what we have because it's bigger than buildings and schools and businesses. A storm can't last forever. *(He takes Theresa's hand.)* We can't forget what made this town worth saving. Cause those little pieces will still be here when it's all over. And the harder we fight to protect those little pieces, the more of them will still be there when the storm passes. And that's the shit, right there, that's the shit you can build on.

DONNI. While you still can, right?

TITO. God damned right. While we still can.

THE END

HEAVEN OR HELL

Performed at Talking Horse Productions - 2024 Original Monologue Contest

SYNOPSIS: Father hides in the bathroom from his child's question "Who goes to hell in Gaza right now?"

CAST OF CHARACTERS

DAD - Any age. Son is around 7 so likely in 30s or 40s

SETTING: Dad needs a minute to gather his thoughts and steps into a private space to process the question he just heard from his son.

TIME: Present day.

HEAVEN OR HELL

Dad closes a door. He looks stressed, almost panicked.

DAD. I just need a few minutes OK buddy? *(He listens for a response. Should show he hears one even if the audience does not.)*

DAD. The bathroom. I'm going to the bathroom. Just need a couple minutes. *(Listens again.)*

DAD. If I say I'm pooping does that mean I can have a few minutes? *(Listens, then shakes his head in the way every exhausted parent does a hundred times a day.)*

DAD. Everybody poops OK. It's not gross. Can I have just a bit of privacy? *(Listens and shows an acceptable response from the son. Dad looks at audience.)*

DAD. We bought the big house to have our family and I find myself most days looking forward to ten minutes alone in the half bathroom. Like a little prison cell, except I feel like I'm the one locking the world out instead of me in. *(Considers the context of shutting out his family and scrambles to save face.)*

DAD. Not that I need to escape from my family, mind you. I love them. All the stress, sleepless nights, messes, it's all good even when it's not, you know? I knew what I was signing up for and I wouldn't have it any other way. My son is seven, my daughter is three. They get along like peanut butter and jelly right up until they fight like cats and dogs. Handful of life those two. Again, I promise you I was ready for all that. I wasn't ready for what he just asked me though. *(He considers that he previously had been asked about pooping and scrambles again.)*

DAD. Not the poop part, sorry. Earlier, before I came in here to hide. I was watching the news on my phone and he overheard the anchor talking about the war in Gaza. He asked me who is fighting, which he's asked before. I can handle the basic outlines of the conflict, but then he asked me this. *(He pauses.)* He said 'Who goes to heaven and hell in Gaza right now?' *(Dad looks around as if hoping to find the*

answer somewhere in the air.)

DAD. How do I answer that? It's not so black and white, I tell him, but then he says good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell and I mean, that's sort of right I guess. Right? I tried to say there are soldiers who are fighting and regular people on both sides who just want to live their lives who are dying. I said maybe the innocent people who die go to heaven and he comes back with 'do the people in Israel and the people in Gaza both go to the same heaven?' (*Again, hoping for answers in the sky and finding none, he continues.*)

DAD. I said I don't know, they both believe different things, but it's complicated. He said which one is right? I said I don't know. He said do we believe what they believe in Israel or Gaza? I said that I don't. So he says do they all go to hell? I said, no, I don't think so. Then he comes in with the dagger. "What about the babies in Gaza? Where do they go?" (*Lost now, he tries to steady himself.*)

DAD. I keep my children safe from physical dangers, but how can I hold a candle to the abyss of darkness in our world. I can't just say "I don't know, it's complicated" all the time or he'll stop asking me. What do you think? Do I pick a side? Draw a line and teach him there's a right and a wrong, black and white? Or, do I say life is lived in the grays? (*He listens to the door again.*)

DAD. I know what I want to say. I want to say it doesn't matter where they go when they die. It matters how we treat each other here while we're alive. I want to draw that hard line around the living and say every life is precious, but then I know damn well people kill people and, yes, babies, every day to achieve a greater good. How can I look my babies in the eye and admit there are 'good guys' killing babies right now? (*He collect-s his thoughts again.*)

DAD. Who goes to heaven and hell in Gaza? (*He pauses again then answers, despondent.*)

DAD. I don't know. I just know it's hell there right now and I wish this world could give us all just a little break now and again.

THE END

BESIEGED

Performed at Theatred'Art - 2017

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RICHARD: 70s man, struggling with Alzheimer's and the rare moments of clarity that torture his descent into the disease. He's wearing a hospital gown, an ID bracelet and slippers.

WAYNE: 30s Black man, works at a Subway sandwich shop and is waiting for the bus. He's wearing a Subway employee shirt and visor.

WOMAN: 30s, pushing a baby stroller.

NURSE: 20s

ALBERT: 50s, Richard's son.

SCENE: Outdoor bus stop

TIME: Present day

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BESIEGED

Richard and Wayne sit on the bus stop bench waiting for their ride. Wayne is listening to music through earphones and minding his own business. Richard looks around confused for a moment, then addresses the audience.

RICHARD. I know why I'm here, but can't remember where I am. This bench looks like it's supposed to but nothing else seems right. This man's shirt says "Subway" but I know I'm not in a subway. He doesn't look like a subway driver, like the ones in New York. He doesn't have the right kind of hat. I don't know if I'm in New York. *(He waves to catch Wayne's attention. Wayne pulls an ear bud out.)*

RICHARD. Am I in New York?

WAYNE. Excuse me?

RICHARD. *(He points at Wayne's shirt.)* Are you a subway driver?

WAYNE. *(Confused, Wayne looks at his shirt.)* No man. I just work there. Do you mean bus driver? This is a bus stop.

RICHARD. When is the bus coming?

WAYNE. *(He starts to notice Richard's hospital gown and ID bracelet.)* Which one sir?

RICHARD. I take the 5:30 home from the city sometimes.

WAYNE. Sir, do you need some help? Are you from the hospital?

RICHARD. I was born in Boston.

WAYNE. Can I take a look at that wristband sir? Just want to see if it has your name on it.

RICHARD. This is the watch Nancy gave me for our wedding on January 10th 1945.

WAYNE. 'Richard Leddy' is that you?

RICHARD. Yes. That is me. I know where I am now but I don't remember why I'm here. It will come to me soon.

WAYNE. I'm Wayne. Nice to meet you.

(They shake hands. Richard notices the wristband, looks at his other wrist in confusion.)

RICHARD. My watch is missing. I always leave it at the office. Nancy will help me –

RICHARD. *(He startles and looks past Wayne with fear.)* It's here again. My cliff. It's coming for me again.

(Wayne turns around startled, but sees nothing. Richard pats him on the back to reassure him.)

RICHARD. Don't worry son, you can't see it. It's not your cliff.

(Sound of a bus approaching.)

RICHARD. Watch! It moves with the bus. The bus keeps it away. I need to get on this bus. I need to get home to Nancy and Albert. *(He starts to stand, but is very weak. Wayne tries to hold him back.)*

WAYNE. I don't think that's a good idea. Let's try to get you some help.

RICHARD. Get out of here nigger!

WAYNE. Look man, I don't know if you meant that or not, but I can't let you get on this bus. *(He waves the bus on and it pulls away. Richard sits down and calms, or at least fades away for a moment.)*

WAYNE. Sir, um, Mr. Leddy? I'm going to run real quick back up the parking lot here to the hospital OK? I'm going to get you some help. Will you stay here?

(Richard nods. Wayne exits. Alone, the anxiety starts to build once more. Richard addresses the audience again.)

RICHARD. Where else can I go? My cliff surrounds me. Besieged until it consumes me. Do you see my cliff? My end? It's all around me. Close to me for the first time since I hugged the side of a barn in France with the bullets singing around me. I remember it was just beyond the length of my arm as I curled to the wood and the earth. My world was small then. It fit me, my pack, gun and just enough barn and dirt to stop the bullets. I remember looking over the edge. It's quiet down there, over the edge. It's like Christopher Columbus in the fourth grade with the ships falling off the world. You have a cliff too, do you see it? No? You will one day. It marks the end of your world. Here, look. Mine is at the edge of the sidewalk. It's so close. *(He stands and steps to the edge of his cliff.)* It's so tall. I cannot see the bottom. It's quiet down there, but

sometimes at night, when my cliff surrounds my bed, I hear Nancy calling me. She sings lullabies she used to sing to Albert. I could never sing like her. *(He hums a few lines of Rockabye baby, ending with singing the words.)* And down will come baby ... I wonder what I would find if I stepped off? Would it hurt?

(WOMAN, 30s pushing a stroller enters stage left. Richard turns to her amazed. He speaks to the audience once more.)

RICHARD. Do you see her? Is she real? Is that my Nancy?

(Sound of baby crying, woman soothes child. Richard approaches.)

RICHARD. Nancy, my love. Let me take Albert so you can rest.

WOMAN. *(She backs away, shielding baby. Richard grabs for the baby.)* Get the hell away from me. Help, help, someone help!

(Wayne, a NURSE, and ALBERT enter and rush to pull Richard away from the woman, who exits. Commotion as they try to calm her and Richard down. Richard screams for Nancy and Albert.)

NURSE. Mr. Leddy, let's go back inside. We have to go.

RICHARD. Albert was here. Nancy, too.

ALBERT. Dad, I'm right here. I was just signing some paperwork. Let's go back inside.

RICHARD. Nancy?

ALBERT. Mom's gone dad. She's not with us anymore. Come on, let's go back inside.

WAYNE. Take it easy Mr. Leddy. Good luck
(Nurse, Albert steer Richard away)

RICHARD. My cliff, it follows me. It's coming. I cannot fight it anymore.

ALBERT. I know dad, I know. Keep walking, You're almost home.

THE END

GOOD BONES

Selected for BrooklynOne - Scream Scenes, October 2025

SYNOPSIS: An eager young architect tours the Chicago home of his first big client, HH Holmes, but finds evil hiding behind every wall.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

PAUL: 20s male. Naive and excited to land a job in the big city for his first project.

HERMAN: 30s male. Charming, but with a sinister undercurrent and a temper that lurks just under the surface

JULIA: 30s female. She's about to be Herman's first victim and desperate to warn Paul.

TIME: Chicago 1891

GOOD BONES

HERMAN enters, wiping his hands on a bloody rag. He's shaking with an angry, menacing rage, enters and paces, trying to settle his nerves. His face should melt from murderous rapture to calm and cool. At last he puts the rag into his pocket and stands up straight.

HERMAN. *(Calling offstage as if to closed door.)* Come in. It's open sir.

(PAUL enters carrying two rolled up set of blueprints under his arm and a satchel over his shoulder. He's wide eyed and eager.)

PAUL. Sorry if I disturbed you. I know I arrived a little early. I'm just excited for my first job.

HERMAN. It's quite alright. I was just busy for a moment. As you can see it's a big building so it took me a while to come to the door.

PAUL. Beautiful home sir. Good bones in here, as they say. A drugstore before, was it?

HERMAN. Yes, but I have much bigger plans than that.

PAUL. *(He starts to unfurl one of the blueprints.)* A hotel for the World's Fair right? Your letter had some mention of a hotel so I took a creative leap if you will for some-

HERMAN. *(He snatches the paper from Paul and rips it into shreds.)* I ASKED for a specific room with a specific doorway size and pipe fitting. NOTHING else. Did you design it or shall I ask you to leave?

PAUL. *(Taken aback.)* Sir, of course I did. Sorry sir. It's just the request mentioned the word hotel and-

HERMAN. Look no further than the words Mr. Ahern. The task in front of you and nothing more. Do you understand?

PAUL. Yes sir. Yes. Here it is.

(Paul hands Herman a smaller roll of paper. Herman unfurls it and inspects it with an approving gaze.)

HERMAN. Very good. You can procure the steel as well for the wall frame?

PAUL. I can, but you can afford that much steel sir?

HERMAN. *(He whirls at Paul but stops just short of attacking.)*
Question me again and you will see the door or worse.

PAUL. Yes sir. Sorry sir. I'm just excited for the work sir. My first job in Chicago sir. Forgive me.

HERMAN. *(He turns back to the plans.)* Will you do the construction yourself?

PAUL. I can do most of it sir. All except the ventilation pipe, which I placed along the wall as you requested. You see, I don't know where the pipe will go and so

HERMAN. Your work will end in this room.

PAUL. Yes sir. Is the pipe for water sir?
(Herman glares at Paul, who pivots to avoid the wrath)

PAUL. Just affects the fitting sir.

HERMAN. It's gas. For the, um, lighting.

PAUL. Oh, that low on the wall? Ok, that's fine. Yes, um it's fine absolutely sir. It can be done.

HERMAN. Do you have copies of this plan?

PAUL. No sir, I worked all night to finish and came right here. I can have two copies by the end of the week if you'd like.

HERMAN. No. One copy is fine.

PAUL. Fine sir. What do you say?

HERMAN. *(He admires the plan once more then rolls them back up.)* You're hired sir. You start now. I'm heading to my drawing room to review this further. You can take your measurements now.

PAUL. That's wonderful Mr Holmes. Wonderful. Yes, I can do that. It's just through here, yes?

HERMAN. Yes, I'll be back. And Paul? Don't go anywhere else in the building. It's a big place, but there's no where I won't be watching.

PAUL. Yes sir.

(Herman exits. Paul pulls a notebook and a measuring tape or rope from his satchel and begins taking measurements.)

(Unseen by Paul, Herman lurks into scene silently to watch, ideally hidden or obscured in some way such that the audience can still see his face.)

(Offstage: A child screams in terror. Paul startles, Herman seems excited, almost aroused, by this development)

PAUL. Hello? Is someone there? *(After no one responds, Paul makes another measurement. As he steps forward he notices a floor panel is loose [can be mimed].)*

PAUL. A loose board? Father says that's an extra charge for the project. *(Paul looks closer and sees something odd beneath the floorboard.)* What's this now? Left over piping? No, it's a lever of some sort. *(He reaches in and presses down. Nearby the sound of a metallic "click, click, click" and a door hinge creaking softly open. Paul continues to inspect the object.)*

(Herman grins in anticipation and struggles to not react.)

(JULIA enters opposite Herman's hiding place, terrified and sneaking forward cautiously. Her dress has blood down the front. She's bruised and her arms are red from rope bindings. She sees Paul and walks forward tentatively.)

JULIA. *(Whispering.)* Sir. Sir. Please help me.

PAUL. Madam, you startled me. Who are you?

JULIA. Shh, please sir. He'll hear you.

PAUL. Mr. Holmes madam?

JULIA. Shh, I beg you. You are not safe either. Help me please.

PAUL. *(Whispering.)* I don't know what you mean

JULIA. I'm a prisoner here.

PAUL. Prisoner? What?

JULIA. He has my daughter somewhere in here too. He kept me in, in- *(Fear grips Julia's face.)*

PAUL. Where did he keep you madam?

JULIA. He's watching us. He has to be. The door wouldn't have opened if he didn't want it to. We have to go now.

PAUL. The door? I fear I opened it. Look here, I found a lever and pulled and then you say a door opened.

JULIA. Oh heavens I hope that is it. You can't trust anything in here. Please sir, please help me.

PAUL. Why does he have a lever in the floor?

JULIA. It's a castle of horrors, sir. Hidden rooms, the smell of gas. Screams. Screams at all hours.

PAUL. Screams? I fear I heard one moments ago.

JULIA. Was it a child?

PAUL. I can't say, I-

JULIA. Was it a little girl? Please tell me. Tell me!

PAUL. Perhaps. I fear I don't know what to do. I'm paralyzed

JULIA. We need to find her.

(Herman sneaks offstage. His mask of composure fully dropped.)

PAUL. Find her? In a castle of hidden doors? Madam, we need the police.

JULIA. No. I can't leave her. Please.

PAUL. OK. Ok. I can try to help. He is in the drawing room. Do you know where that is?

JULIA. Yes. This used to be my home before he started making these changes. It's down the-

(Offstage: A child screams in pain.)

JULIA. Pearl! Pearl, my baby. Oh my god.

PAUL. That's her? She sounds in pain. What is this place?

JULIA. Have you any weapons?

PAUL. I have a pencil, nothing more.

JULIA. He has medicines that make you sleep. Gas that comes into rooms you cannot see until the world starts to melt.

PAUL. Gas? He wants a pipe for gas into this new room. Is that what I'm asked to design? A murder room? I want no part.

JULIA. Then we have to fight.

PAUL. How? No weapons. He could be sending gas in here now.

JULIA. Please sir. Think of something. We have to try. He won't stop. He won't ever stop killing.

PAUL. *(He pulls away in exasperation.)* Let me think madam. Please. ... He doesn't know you were loose. Right? We can use that. Go back to where you were held, but don't shut the door latch all the way. I will measure in here and when I say "this room could use a new coat of paint" you come in. When he looks to you I will attack and then we fight.

JULIA. We fight? With our hands

PAUL. Here. Take the pencil for yourself at least, but yes, we fight. For us, for your daughter. OK?

JULIA. OK. Room needs paint. Ok. I will be ready.

(Julia exits clutching the pencil. After she leaves we hear the soft closing of a hinge. Paul paces until he can steady himself from a terrified panic to a calmer state)

(Unseen by Paul, Herman enters holding the blueprints in one hand, but the paper has a smear of blood on it now. One hand stays behind his back hidden from view.)

HERMAN. Do you have what you need?

PAUL. *(He startles.)* Yes sir, um Mr Holmes. Yes, uh

HERMAN. What is the matter sir? You look pale as the snow.

PAUL. Nothing sir, I just need some air.

HERMAN. Indeed. Fresh air does wonders for a body.

PAUL. It's just that this room could use a new coat-

(Herman stomps his foot hard on the floor and in the distance we hear "click, click, click.")

HERMAN. What was that?

(Julia begins to scream. Paul stumbles backward, suddenly woozy. Herman pulls out an 1890s era gas mask and puts it over his face.)

PAUL. You can't. You won't get away with-

(Herman watches Paul collapse. Offstage Julia's screams fade and we hear her body hit the floor.)

HERMAN. Great work sir. Your design will be a wonderful addition to my castle.

(Herman exits briefly to collect an ax or cleaver. He approaches the unconscious Paul, still wearing the gas mask. Herman is fully returned to the shaking murderous rage and sizes up where to cut first.)

HERMAN. It's like they say. We need some more good bones for this house.

(Herman rears up to chop - LIGHTS OUT - CHOP! Or squishy thuds in the darkness as Herman pants.)

THE END

MERRY BIRTHDAY OF JULY

Podcast recorded by Broken Arts Entertainment - Loved Ones Season 2, 2025

SYNOPSIS: On the day a meteor is set to end life on Earth, a dad invents a holiday to distract his children from the horror. He learns they are more capable than he ever imagined to still find purpose in the face of death.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

DAD: Adult, can also be a mom, a widow who is fighting for dear life to keep their children safe

SON: Teenager, can also be a daughter, snarky and full of anger at the world and a parent with whom they can't connect.

DAUGHTER: Tween, can also be a son, smarter than their age and forced to grow up much faster than their peers. A people pleaser who just wants things to be OK.

TIME: Present Day

WRITER'S NOTE: Play can be performed with younger actors or for younger audiences by removing swear words. The only line that should be some form of expletive is Dad's line on page XXX.

SETTING: Family home, a plate of cupcakes and a deck of question cards on a small dining room table. Next to the table stand two oversized gift bags filled with boxes of gifts for the children. In the bags should be items listed or props that can represent: Switch console or box, whiskey bottle and pack of cigarettes, novel Infinite Jest

MERRY BIRTHDAY OF JULY

Family sits around the table, optional lit candles in three cupcakes. They sing a choppy rendition of Happy Birthday as they insert the name of the newly invented holiday.

ALL. Happy/Merry Birthday of July to you, Happy/Merry Biiiiirthday of July dear, dad/all of us, Merry/Happy Birthday of to you/ July to you.

DAUGHTER. *(She claps with glee and blows out her candle.)* Blow your candle out too daddy before the candle melts.

(Dad blows out the candle. Daughter giggles then turns to Son.)

DAUGHTER. Your turn now.

(Son defiantly ignores her.)

DAD. Hey, come on.

DAUGHTER. If you don't blow it out you won't get your wish.

(Son rolls his eyes. Dad reaches out and touches his arm gently.)

DAD. Please. For her.

(Son looks at his sister and softens. He blows out his candle to her delight.)

DAUGHTER. Yay, now we can all eat. This is the best day ever.

DAD. I'm glad you're happy sweetie.

DAUGHTER. *(She takes a bite of her cupcake and wipes frosting from her face.)* Daddy? Why can't my friends come to the Merry Birthday of July party?

DAD. I think they're all with their own families today.

DAUGHTER. Oh. Maybe they're also having Merry Birthday of July parties?

DAD. Sure. I bet they are.

(Son scoffs.)

DAD. Easy, son. Please.

(Son rolls eyes and pulls out his phone.)

DAUGHTER. Will there be fireworks daddy?

DAD. *(He winces.)* Maybe. I, um.

SON. There will definitely be some big booms.

DAD. Enough!

DAUGHTER. *(She ignores the bickering. She peeks at the bags of gifts.)* Do we get presents on Merry Birthday of July?

DAD. Absolutely. *(He pulls out a super sized gift bag. Daughter squeals.)* Dig in!

(While Daughter starts to pick through the bag, Dad notices Son buried in his phone. Now it's his turn to scoff.)

DAD. There's not going to be any service right now, why don't you put that away?

SON. Maybe satellite internet is still going?

DAD. So what if it is? What's most important is in this room. Everything on your phone might as well be fiction.

SON. *(He scoffs again.)* And making a fake holiday up on the fly is what, reality?

DAD. I'm trying.

SON. Yeah, I know. You say it all the time.

DAD. You know it's hard.

SON. I've heard the speech so many times can you just not? That can be my Happy Birthday in July.

DAUGHTER. Merry Birthday of July.

SON. Sure, whatever. That's my wish, OK?

DAUGHTER. There's a whole bag of gifts for you too. Open them!

SON. *(Son looks her over, measuring the excitement against the doom. He peers into the bag but can't muster the effort..)* I can't do this shit.

(Son storms off stage. Dad starts after him but returns to Daughter.)

DAD. Sorry baby. He'll be OK. It's just hard.

DAUGHTER. Since mom died, I know.

DAD. Mom? Oh no, sweetie, I meant the-

(Dad looks up toward the sky as daughter plows deeper into the gift bag.)

DAD. I mean since mom died. Yeah.

DAUGHTER. Oh my god! My own Switch? For real?

DAD. Absolutely. You gotta show up your brother right?

DAUGHTER. Can we play online against each other?

DAD. I don't think online, but maybe Bluetooth will still work.

DAUGHTER. I'm gonna go see if he wants to play right now.

(Daughter exits stage. Dad watches her leave and lets his breath out like the life has drained from him. To the empty room around him he speaks.)

DAD. I'm sorry. OK? I'm sorry I can't say the right words today, or every day since your mom died. *(He talks now to his wife.)* Honey, it should have been me. You'd have handled this all so much better. I'm sorry I can't be better.

(He starts to clean up the plates and leftover cupcakes then shrugs and leaves them on the table. He looks off stage toward where the kids left and starts to break down in tears.)

DAD. My love, I'm sorry. I couldn't keep them safe. That I couldn't keep you safe. I can't stop what's coming today any more than every other day since they were born. Remember when they were so small? At the start it was just holding their hands and smelling their head as they slept on my chest. My world in my arms. But they grew up and the world grew in. I thought I built a castle to protect them, but it was nothing in the end. I can't stop anything. I never could. First, we lost you and then they lost me. I broke in the worst places and nothing will ever come back together. I'm sorry I can't talk to them about what's coming today. I assume they know but it's just so much easier to pretend sometimes that everything is OK. Why do I bother? Nothing turned out OK. *(He pauses, the gravity of what he's about to say overwhelming him.)* Somedays I'm even sorry we brought them into this world. What right did we have to bring them here? Those perfect little souls brought here to- To ... I can't say it.

(Unseen to Dad, Son enters and listens.)

DAD. If I didn't meet you they'd never have had to watch you die. They wouldn't have to face this day or watch their dad -

(Dad sees son and scrambles to regain his composure.)

SON. See you what?

DAD. Nothing. Did you guys get the Switches connected? Switches? Is that the right plural?

SON. Stop dad. Finish your sentence.

(Daughter enters at a trot.)

DAUGHTER. Look daddy, I beat him on my first try.

(Dad looks at son and then to daughter.)

DAD. Son, I can't have this conversation here. Not right now.

SON. When dad? When, if not now? Not like we can have ittomorrow.

DAD. Stop! We can talk if we step outside.

(Son nods. Dad turns to daughter who pretends to be playing with her video game.)

DAD. We're just gonna step outside for some fresh air ok? We'll be back in soon.

DAUGHTER. OK daddy. I'll be fine.

(Dad and son exit the stage. Daughter waits for them to be gone then drops the toys. She collects her thoughts then speaks to the room.)

DAUGHTER. Mommy, I know what's going to happen today. I'm not a little girl anymore. I just don't want to let daddy down. He's trying so hard. Remember when I was little and he was so much fun? Like everything was a game with him. Cleaning the house, watering the garden, getting dressed for school. All of it was just so much fun. We laughed. We laughed so much our bellies hurt. Mommy, you used to say we were going to throw up we were laughing so hard. We don't laugh so much any more. He stopped singing us to sleep when you died momma. It's like a light turned off. Maybe he needs to talk to you like I do. It helps on days like this. *(She fidgets with her toys.)*

DAUGHTER Merry Birthday of July is the first time he's even been silly in as long as I can remember. And it's all too ... I remember when I first heard about the meteor. Jessica Swann started crying in the middle of class and Ms. Barnes tried to make her feel better but just started crying too. Watching a grownup cry like that was scarier than any movie I've seen. Her hair came out of place and her makeup was smearing like she was melting. Soon other kids were crying and then Mrs. Jenson came on the speakers and said we had an assembly. The teachers were all on stage crying and Mrs. Jenson said we were all going home and not coming back to the school again. Jimmy Sherman told me a meteor was gonna blow up the planet, but I didn't believe him. Then daddy picked me up and I asked him. That's when I knew. Cause he didn't answer me. He didn't even look at me in the viewer mirror. He said we should talk about something else. I wanted to cry, but I knew I couldn't cause it would make daddy hurt more. So I told him a funny story about Brenna Morgan spitting milk out of her nose. That made him

smile a little. That story didn't happen though, I just made it up to make him happy for a minute.

(Son enters alone. He looks upset.)

DAUGHTER. Where's daddy?

SON. He's setting up a god damned slip and slide. Better go check it out.

DAUGHTER. *(She doesn't look excited.)* I don't want to go swimming right now.

SON. I know. He's just gonna keep asking though. You know how he gets.

DAUGHTER. Yeah. I do.

(Son puts his arms around Daughter.)

SON. I love you. You're the rock of this family, you know that?

(Daughter hugs him back for a moment, but it's interrupted by dad entering stage. He's blowing up a beach ball.)

DAD. Who's ready to get soaked?

(Daughter snaps out of her moment with her brother and squeals with delight.)

DAUGHTER. Me daddy me!

DAD. Get your swimsuit on then. I got us all new squirt guns.

(Daughter skips off stage like a child on her way to Disneyland.)

DAUGHTER. Thank you daddy thank you! I'm gonna soak you.

(Dad follows her smiling.)

DAD. Not if I can get you first!

(Dad and daughter exit stage. Son pokes at his unopened presents. He smirks at something in the bag.)

SON. Seriously dad? *(He speaks to the room.)* Mom you're not gonna believe this. Of all the things to buy just before the lights go out, he picks out Infinite Jest. I'd be impressed at his ironic sense of humor if he had one. Remember that time you guys got into a fight when he bought a DVD set of video bloopers? He had YouTube there for free but spent like fifty bucks on a DVD set I don't think we ever watched. So he's the same guy you married, just less ... I don't know. It's like we're across a chasm from each other and whenever we try to walk on the bridge to get to him he cuts the ropes and we have to start again. You were the bridge mom. He says he's "trying" but I call it "Hiding".

(Son digs in the bag and pulls out a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey. He smirks again.)

SON. This is him “trying” to be the cool dad right at the finish line. If he’d ever asked me he’d know I don’t smoke and that I puked enough whiskey at prom last year to never touch the stuff again.

(Son opens the bottle but the smell makes him gag and he buries it back in the bag.)

SON. You would’ve known that about me. Best way I can explain is dad says “how are you doing? Good?” like he gives you the answer he wants to hear so you won’t actually say how you feel. You would say “You’re eyes look distant, tell me what’s going on in there.” You couldn’t help but connect. When you died, the connections just. you know.

(Son hears daughter giggling off stage.)

SON. Just now he told me he feels guilty for having kids because he knows he’s just made everything worse. I told him he doesn’t have a right to decide that for me. He doesn’t know that maybe it wasn’t all bad. Yeah I whine about it, but doesn’t everyone? I have good memories, I’ve had a good life.

(Son struggles at the verbalization of his approaching death.)

SON. Like, yeah it’s not his fault that there’s a meteor coming, but it’s also not my fault I was born.

(Dad enters, clothes splattered with water and a towel over his neck. He’s smiling, the weight of reality temporarily lifted after playing with his daughter.)

DAD. You missed out. Epic battle. Your sister is getting too good with the squirt cannon. We have to be more careful.

SON. Do we? You think there’s a lot of water fights in our future?

(Dad’s mood crashes to Earth.)

DAD. Fuck you.

(The curse word, obviously not one common from Dad, hangs adrift between them. Son is shocked more than hurt. Dad is mortified more than indignant.)

DAD. I’m sorry I said that, oh my god son, I should never have said that -

(Son starts to laugh.)

DAD. I’m ashamed.

SON. Stop dad, stop. It's OK.

DAD. No it's not OK. I said the F word to you. No, worse at you.

SON. At least it's what you felt.

(Dad looks anguished still. On the precipice of collapse.)

DAD. I'm sorry son, I know you want more from me I just-

SON. Dad, you have to stop trying so hard. Especially now.

DAD. I have to try. It's my job. That's the whole point, to try as hard as you can to give your kids a good life. To work every day to give them a chance for a better life.

(Dad looks to the sky, realizing this dream of a better life is quickly coming to an end.)

SON. Dad, can I tell you something real?

DAD. Sure son, always.

SON. The point was never to try to live, it was to live. Mom was always going to die, you were always going to die. We were always going to die, but that means we were always going to live as well. The sadness cannot take away the sound of mom's laugh, or the way you sang to us as we fell asleep. The meteor sure as hell can't take it either.

(Dad calms, then pulls his son in for a big bear hug.)

DAD. What did I do to deserve you?

SON. Nothing dad, that's the point.

(Daughter enters drying her hair with a towel to see them embracing and without a word joins them in a hug. The emotion becomes too much for Dad and he awkwardly breaks away.)

DAD. So, who wants some more cupcakes?

DAUGHTER. Me! Me!

(Son nods too and accepts the treat. As they eat something catches Daughter's attention on the cupcake.)

DAUGHTER. Remember how mom would eat all the frosting first and like none of the cake?

DAD. Yes! She somehow could get every morsel of frosting off without disturbing a single crumb.

SON. I tried so many times to copy her and just gave up, so that's why I just do this now.

(Son eats the whole top of the cupcake off in one bite. Son starts to laugh, daughter joins then dad too. Dad looks at his watch and his

mood shifts. It's nearly time. Daughter notices and grabs a box of cards on the table. She draws a card and giggles.)

DAUGHTER. Would you rather swim across a pool filled with sharks, or spiders?

(Dad doesn't answer, the dread is overwhelming. Daughter persists.)

DAUGHTER. Come on daddy. Question of the day. It's tradition on holidays.

SON. Spiders, no sharks. No

DAUGHTER. First answer only! I say spiders because I could squish them as I go and maybe not get bit.

(Dad still looks far away in thought.)

DAUGHTER. What about you daddy?

DAD. *(Whispers.)* I don't know baby.

DAUGHTER. You have to answer. It's the rules.

DAD. Sharks then, so the end would be quick.

SON. Lighten up dad. What's got you so down?

(Son and daughter giggle. Dad smirks. Son draws a card.)

SON. Would you rather eat the same meal for the rest of your life, or never eat the same meal twice? That's an easy one, same meal and it'd be mom's meatloaf.

DAUGHTER. Ooo, same here but I'd eat one of dad's hamburgers every day.

DAD. Same meal. I pick Merry Birthday of July cupcakes. Frosting and all. *(He draws a card.)* Would you rather live for one day or never have been born at all?

(Table grows quiet. Dad is the one to cheer up first this time.)

DAD. Too soon?

(They chuckle then a series of distant booms catches their attention. Dad walks down stage to mime closing curtains.)

DAD. We don't have to watch this part.

(Daughter stands and walks downstage to Dad's side.)

DAUGHTER. They're just fireworks daddy. I love fireworks and Mom did too.

(Dad freezes. The instinct to protect, to hide from the truth at war with his desire to let his children be free in the world.)

DAD. These fireworks might be scary though.

(Son joins them.)

SON. Dad, let go. It's ok. We can watch them together.
(Son takes Daughter's hand then holds out a hand to Dad. He hesitates, then opens the curtains and takes his son's hand.)

SON. Merry Birthday of July, Dad.

DAD. Thanks buddy. You too.
(A larger boom and flash of light fills the space.)

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cam Eickmeyer writes about technology, social justice, and ethical challenges. His work often explores the dark humor where those topics overlap. He's had stage plays produced and selected for festivals in Colorado, Florida, Missouri and New York as well as in radio play format and internationally in London. His fiction and poetry has appeared in various outlets, and he has optioned screenplays. Previously a journalist, he lives in Colorado and enjoys the outdoors with his family. He is a proud member of the Dramatist Guild since 2023.

Learn more at CamEickmeyer.com

