

BEYOND THE MASK:
A Devised Theatre piece

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Final draft - full script for filming

Present Day/Covid Era

INTRO MUSIC - fade OUT before scene up on Vlog Podcast

SCENE 1 - VLOG PODCAST WITH WRITER

Writer is talking directly into the camera

Writer: Hi everyone, it's me, Antonia Bloom, and welcome to my podcast, The Sticking Place. I have had quite a bit of email action since last week asking about when my next book, *Under the Cairn*, will FINALLY be released. I thought I'd tell you a little story about why it's been taking me so long. So, grab an adult beverage, or a mocktail, if that's your choice, and get cozy.

When the pandemic really began, and the shelter-in-place was implemented, I got furloughed and thought, naively, 'What should I do with this sudden, newfound time? I know! I'll use it to finish my long-suffering book! At first, I felt activated, and rarin' to go. I was inspired by all the famous writers I follow on Twitter who kept on bringing up great works produced during awful events in human history. So I figured I'd make like Hemingway and produce the next Great American Novel. Of course, as you can guess, it had to be a horror novel. I just naturally gravitate towards the scary, the supernatural, the mysterious. I fully believe that horror can be great literature, if done right. Why? Because we're all scared of something.

VO Maiden: That fear activates us,

VO Mother: influences us,

VO Crone: and has power over us.

Writer: My main character was a 40 year old divorced woman, childless and unemployed. Not exactly your typical heroine. I wanted this woman to be something that you didn't expect, that maybe you weren't sure was just the relatable heroine. I envisioned a female character that could embody the totality of the "female experience," all the shit women go through, and endure. I put her in a world so grim, intense, and scary, because I wanted to see how much she could take. What would happen to her?

MUSIC - IN

Writer gets into car for a drive to the cemetery

VO Writer: What's more, I wanted to explore the deep seated fears that women carry within themselves, especially during times of great duress and trauma. We were living in an actual horror story, with the emergence of a deadly virus sweeping the globe, and scaring the hell out of people. There was a lot of dark and terrible inspiration all around me - I just had to open a browser and read a headline to find something absolutely depressing and heinous going on in the world. I don't think I had had a good nights' sleep since 2016, free from fears that ranged from existential

VO Maiden: Where do we go after we die?

Writer: to biological

VO Mother: Am I running out of time to have a baby?

Writer: to superficial

VO Crone: Why won't that wrinkle above my lip line go away?

VO Writer: Now was the perfect time to take advantage of the hideous events transpiring across the globe and put them to good, and hopefully profitable, use.

MUSIC - OUT

Back in Vlog Podcast

Writer: So the time was ripe to finish this sucker. I practically frolicked to the computer like a maiden in some damn grecian fresco, sat down, and got to work. This verve did not last long, let me tell you. It seemed like all the creative types were being inspired to produce new works, launching themselves into the creative process with joy and enthusiasm. We were suddenly inundated with original songs, poems, bread making, plays, podcasts, and lots of cross-stitching. Though I tried, the frenzy to produce "art in the time of Covid" quickly wore me down. There was so much artistic noise, and not a lot of real, meaningful quality.

We see car arriving at the cemetery

VO Maiden: I had good ideas,

VO Mother: yes-this was my one true salvation.

VO Crone: And good taste.

MUSIC - IN

*Writer gets out of car and begins walking into cemetery.
We can see her feet and perhaps some gravestones, pathways and cross paths as she talks*

VO Writer: I knew I wanted to explore many different fears in my novel, but I needed an outside perspective to help fuel the story to a new and unexplored place, with original insight into the female psyche.

There were weeks where I didn't write at all. Time slipped by, my birthday came and went. I turned another year older, and gravity kept pulling me down, hunching me like a little old crone. What had previously been productive research sessions now turned into fits of me screaming obscenities at various sources of writing advice. I felt absolutely no motivation, and at times, I felt like that was probably for the best because my book would inevitably suck. I figured I'd tuck myself into a fetal position, suck my thumb, and hope for absolution. I was also haunted by an increasingly rampant case of insomnia, and waking up screaming at night. Nights would go by where I'd lie awake with a light on, and perhaps get one or two meagre hours of sleep. I became a creature

VO Mother: of sleeplessness

VO Crone: of dread

VO Maiden: of online shopping.

MUSIC - OUT

Back to Vlog Podcast

Writer: The daily news really didn't help my fragile mental state, neither did my husband losing our beloved business. It was too much. I was so angry, and yet so deeply depressed. I don't use the word depressed lightly, either. I don't like to talk about my mental health openly, it feels too vulnerable, but let's just say that at this point in the year 2020, I was a total wreck.

MUSIC - IN

*Visual of cemetery pathway
(MMC VO lines may be filmed so we see visual of MMC's at gravesite)*

VO Writer: The feeling of uncertainty loomed over the country like a plague.

VO Crone: It felt like the world might end at any second.

VO Maiden: I couldn't even begin to think of a "future,"

VO Mother: and that feeling numbed me to my core.

VO Writer: I am drawn to all things bleak, gory, and hair-raising. It's all about discovering

VO Maiden: why things go bad,

VO Mother: what happens to the people who are sucked into bad events,

VO Crone: and what fear does to you.

MUSIC - OUT

Back to Vlog Podcast

Writer: My story had all the usual horror elements of depraved, psychopathic characters, evil intentions, and tragic outcomes. My female protagonist just didn't have something I hadn't considered before:

VO Maiden: the twist, if you will.

VO Crone: The best stories have twists you don't see coming.

VO Mother: What I needed was an epiphany.

Writer: I needed a moment of sheer "AH-HAH!" I needed a muse, or muses. I needed that jolt of creative energy you only usually get when drunk. I found myself going on walks, appropriately masked, in the local graveyard-what better place to socially distance?- you know, to find inspiration, to hear my thoughts, and let them breathe.

MUSIC - IN

Writer at cemetery; looks into the camera, and takes off her mask before she speaks

Writer: What scares me may not scare you. But I'm willing to bet we are all scared of at least one thing in our lives.

Each MMC looks into the camera at the cemetery

Maiden: *(removing mask)* We are all scared

Mother: *(removing mask)* of at least one thing

Crone: *(removing mask)* in our lives

MUSIC - OUT

MUSIC - IN

*We see Writer walking in cemetery and stopping at a gravesite
(Could be visual of each of the MMC empty gravesites as these lines are heard)*

VO Writer: My book incorporates these fears as an exploration about what they ultimately do to you if left unchecked. It's like a character study in

VO Mother: extremely high pressure situations,

VO Maiden: and survivalism,

VO Crone: and fear.

Writer looks into the camera at the cemetery.

Writer: The thing is that, ultimately, what is evil, what we FEAR, is left to the reader to decide.

Writer decides to take a walk to clear her head. She comes upon a young woman at a gravesite, and stops a fair distance and listens.

SCENE 2 - THE MAIDEN

A young woman finishing an altar in front of a grave, the insides of her teenage backpack strewn on the ground... phone, water, journal etc. Finishes arranging an altar of stones, sage, water, candles.

Tries to light sage, struggles with lighter, burns herself.

MUSIC - OUT

Maiden: Oh shit.

Beat.

(spoken to herself) Just have a conversation.

Exhales, begins ritual. Reads from "Mind Breathes" by Allan Ginsberg

Far along in a distant land, I let go of my lover's outstretched hand, let go, let go, let gone, gone gone beyond.

Beat.

Clutches book like it was E, set down lighter and sage.

Oh my god, you were so beautiful. When you kissed me, it was like stars swirling around my head, blue cartoon birds flying. My knees were weak, my heart fluttered. It was like ocean bubbles burst in my body. My heart swam into my throat. If you actually loved me, you would've stayed here, in this world with me. This pandemic is a lonely carnival without you.

Beat .

Remember writing spoken word poetry to each other in the theater? It was like we were undressing each other's souls naked in the bathtub. C'mon, I improvised slam poetry for you! I proved myself! Remember running down the foggy San Francisco streets late at night, pasting our posters on the side of the flower shop? Remember when you slide your hand under my jacket on my lower back for the first time. Your eyes still dart secret glimpses at me from thin air. Touch me secretly.

Are you my forever? It is so magical with us! You helped me love life. Helped me feel alive and fertile and everything was coated in this magical now, now, now. Leapt out of bed in the morning, unconcerned that each day leads into nothingness, unconcerned that we cannot plan our lives. Let's live moment to moment, and each moment is full.

I am obsessed, I am possessed. Like staring at your face and I can't stop staring at your face. You and your perfect nose, perfect hands, that round face. Did you leave because of my nose, my long face, freckles and moles, and dark hair?

I skateboarded through Golden Gate Park just to watch you surf. Oh my god, that wetsuit. I know you were lost. You were just wandering in search of moments, I should've given you more of me. Love, I guess, happened for you all the time. I thought, this was my forever.

I opened my body to you. Time moves in fits and starts. It was like our one night in Versailles. This little glimpse of a life we started to create together. Our 7 years of friendship, culminating in one wild month. Our whole month, or our like 840 hours, like 4 weeks of being lovers. And like 89 thousand hours in the hospital waiting room waiting for you. Why the hell would you go to Ocean beach with the waves like that and a cracked board? I should've paid for you to fix it. Or gotten you help, or something. I would've come with you.

Now, I substitute the past for the future. You couldn't imagine the future, because you couldn't think about the results of your actions. I am obsessed with the events that delivered us to this moment because I can't run out of this lonely hole in my heart.

Please come back to your life! That fierce, hungry, fucking flame inside you. That feral thing inside that says NOW, NOW, NOW. That is your life. If you loved that, you would have done the right thing. I don't want someone else, I want you. And now I never get to see you again? And you abandon me? You didn't give me a real goodbye?

Well, now you're dead to me. You are such a selfish jerk. If you actually loved me, you would have stayed. You would've stayed.

I am reliving every single moment, 100 times of how we got here. 100 times. Each action, each cause, each effect. I'm paralyzed into inaction, lying in bed all day, wide awake, but afraid to put on clothes. Drinking coffee, waiting for your phone call. Curled up in a fetal position while the white fringe of my blanket is on fire. Pandemic outside ablaze.

Begins the ritual of release. Lights candle.

I know each memory. I release each memory. Blurred is the termination of the line that is time. You're gone now, so be gone, way way gone. You have no idea what you caused. The Great Sun rises in the East and a new light shines through the cracks in everything.

Lights sage.

Transition:

SONG BY THE MAIDEN

MUSIC - IN

WHISPERS GO HERE: Obsession...prove myself...moment to moment...I am obsessed.

Writer looks back and the maiden is gone.

Writer looks ahead and sees another woman seated on a bench near a grave holding daffodils. She stops a distance away and listens.

SCENE 3 - THE MOTHER

MUSIC - OUT

Mother: Hey Dad, How are ya?

Well, this is a very nice plot. Great view. I know, I haven't been here since you passed, and I'm sorry. It's been a busy year. It's been a really screwed up year, actually. Not sure if you heard the news about the "shit show pandemic" down here? I know it's not an excuse. But, guess what? I brought you some nice flowers. Daffodils. I know. Your favorite.

(places them on grave or sets them down on the bench)

Yeah, I know.... It's not Irish Whiskey. For FUCKS SAKE, Dad! I mean, come on. Do you think that's something you really need, right now?

How am I doing? Ohhh. I'm fine. Yeah... I'm good. I finally graduated from law school and

passed the bar in the midst of a pandemic. Great timing, huh? And last year feels like a blur, like a tsunami of changing diapers, and staying up all night hitting the books, while trying to hold the world together on my shoulders without collapsing while taking too many shots of vodka.... Then, to top it all off, my husband knocks at the door saying, “Hey, it's time for another baby!” “Your clock is ticking!” Well.. Fuck the ticking clock!!!

(Beat)

I sure miss ya, Dad. I miss our weekly breakfasts, sharing a cup of coffee over the New York Times, I miss your advice, and I never thought I would say this.... but I even miss you telling me to go to church and take holy communion!!

Fucking communion. I have to tell you this now, Dad. I hated communion. IT NEVER WASHED AWAY MY SINS... That's right... Remember? Since I wasn't a “real” Catholic; I had to suffer through the constantly hateful commentary of your PURE Irish Catholic family, especially when your nasty Aunt Nora would say, *(Irish accent)* “You know you're not allowed to take the blood of Christ, because you weren't officially “baptized.” I carry so much of that Catholic Guilt shit with me! And how come? I didn't choose to be a half-Catholic. It's like this badge of shame was posted on my head saying “HERE I AM! THE SINNER!!!!” Like most of my life it's haunted me. I mean, I don't exactly blame you. I know you yourself carried enough of that Catholic Guilt to last you a lifetime, but you still thought you were a great Dad. You gave us more than you ever had. You loved us in your own way I guess. At least, I know you think you did.... But, I have to tell you that to this day, I struggle with removing that mask of Catholic shame, and this damned pandemic has brought forward the worst of my fears.. It is as if this looming existential childhood nightmare is crushing me, and I can't run away from it this time.

(Beat)

Why?... Well.... Chris really wanted a baby and I..... I didn't, I, I didn't want another baby and I can't seem to forgive myself for not wanting it.. I wasn't ready for another child. I got pregnant because he wanted a baby, and honestly, I just wanted him to be happy.

I was five months along and I started bleeding... heavily, and I knew, the moment we arrived at the doctor's office - I knew. The doctor started looking for the heartbeat during the ultrasound; he of course reassured me that everything was fine, and I shouldn't worry. But, I knew. it was gone before he even started searching. Gone. dead, forgotten, not wanted.

The whole experience of the miscarriage was a fucking nightmare..They sent me home so they would have to time examine the ultrasounds. A day later, I was admitted to the hospital.I was told I would need a D and C. Clinical term. I went from being this pregnant woman to becoming a clinical diagnosis of “spontaneous abortion.” As I checked in, , the intake nurse took my paperwork and said, “SO, don't worry, this will be quick, they will just go in and suck everything out....SUCK everything OUT! Are they going to suck out the SHAME, the SIN, the PAIN, the FUCKING Agony! Or how about that Catholic GUILT? Were they going to suck that out, too? I never so badly in my life wanted to punch a nurse in the face.

Then I waited...I waited in the sterile white room between time and existence.. And I bled, bled

colors of red, crimson and black drops of unbelievable pain exited my body. I never knew that much blood that could actually exist within me. I held on to hope that this vessel of my body would empty all the remorse that was filled inside of me, and it would disappear, and vanish, completely. But it didn't.

After several hours, the nurse came back and said “We are almost ready for the procedure, sorry you have to wait so long. It shouldn't be too much longer, sweetie. The doctor is delivering another baby.” Delivering another baby. I bet that Mother wanted her child. I bet that Mother was ready. I found myself numb at that point. I realized how much I wanted to hold that little being inside of me. I kept searching in the drops of blood, thought I might hold and cradle it like I did with my first child, and tell it that I am sorry for everything that had happened, tell it I was proud of the little soul it had become... Whisper, “I love you” “You remind me of daffodils.”...

Then they came in, and just like that ... it was over. Clinically completed. Afterwards, it was as if my whole life slowed down, time was in slow motion. I couldn't think, I couldn't speak, I couldn't grasp onto the reality of what had just happened. All I could do was utter the words, “I'm so sorry.”

I miscarried. I lost a pregnancy. I lost a baby. I lost your grandson, Dad. And I couldn't even bury him next to you. I am sorry I wasn't ready for him, I am sorry it wasn't the right time, I am sorry I wasn't in the right fucking place in my life!!!

And all that Catholic guilt, shame, regret and pain? It was never sucked out.. it never disappeared. It still exists, It still very much exists in that deep vessel.

MUSIC - IN

WHISPERS GO HERE: Release...what scares me...salvation...deep vessel.

Writer looks back and the mother is gone.

WHISPERS GO HERE

SCENE 4 - THE CRONE

*Writer looks ahead and sees another woman standing at a mausoleum.
She stops a distance away and listens.*

MUSIC - OUT

Crone: Well, you sure picked a fine time to leave. It's not fair. This whole thing is not fair. Of course, that Zoom room was humongous. All those people. I mean, we've been lifelong friends, but I had no idea you had such a big family. It seemed like they came out of the woodwork! I gotta say: the pandemic has been good for a few things. I'm so glad I didn't have to be there “in person.” Don't think I could have handled it. All the feels. To be confronted with all

that love everyone had for you? It would have been so painful. No way.

I don't have what you had. I wish I could have done more for you. I wish that fucking vaccine was a few months ago. Covid grabbed you and choked the life right out of you so quickly there wasn't even time to think. Or be supportive. Or say goodbye. Who am I going to have that evening glass of wine with now?

What if that had been me instead of you? I've plugged along so hard all my life. Been a true self-sufficient hooper. Traveled, enjoyed the company of many but never found the one. You? 3 terrific kids. A spouse to die for. No, I didn't mean it that way. Don't take me so literally.

God, you were *that* person - the one everyone wanted to share with: when they got that promotion. Or their son got engaged. Or their grandma died. Hell, you couldn't even enjoy that world tour you talked about for years. A month away. And your poor mom; 90 years old and losing a child. At least she was there for you. At least you had a mom. Wow. I can't imagine.

But then again, I can't fathom what I would have been like if I'd had children. Why get trapped? I ran head first into singlehood, birth control and not getting tied down in any relationships. I knew if I wanted to fuck around, I'd have to make sure there weren't any consequences. Wow - I've been so lucky. I got some great breaks. In the right place at the right time. Steady work and I hoarded my finances. I mean, how many people can actually make a living as an actor?

Drive on with my brilliant career. Ha! Always the sage on the stage or the guide on the side, but never the vulnerable heart. If you don't share it, it can't get bruised like a ripe tomato, right? If you don't give it away, no one can break it, or just toss it like a lit cigarette out of the car window while speeding down the freeway. Or take it away and then smash it by leaving in the middle of the night with no warning and never coming back.

I still remember; I wasn't more than 3 years old. That night she left, my cherished doll, my Anabelle - the one with the ringlets, she was my favorite, my baby doll - and it was in her Studebaker. When she said goodbye to Dad, and not me, and then drove off, I saw Anabelle was in the back window of the car, and I screamed. Not for her, only for my baby doll. I never saw Anabelle again.

The heartfelt nurturing mother. What was that like? Never had one. Oh, I could play Marmie on stage, but don't give me Jo, Beth, Amy and Meg. I never wanted that. I didn't want to take care of anyone but myself. Only me. Did I ever offer anyone some life-changing advice that kept them from jumping off a cliff? That healed their broken heart? No way. And now? Karma is a bitch, isn't it.

Who will be there for me? I'm terrified. Dad's long gone. There's no cousins, no siblings. God, it's been an entire year since that last show I was in got canceled right before opening - just as

we went into lockdown - and I don't know if I'll ever get cast again. Roles for women my age are fewer and fewer and I'm aging out faster than lettuce rotting in a plastic bag. I haven't seen any of my friends in a year. Sometimes that's great; no need to make up an excuse to not meet over lunch. Or pretend I had an audition so I didn't have to listen to one more complaint about a husband gone awry.

But I yearn for human connection. I so want to stop the instacart driver and ask how her life is. But I can't. I'm so petrified about Covid. I've become a professional pandemic hermit. Maybe even an ogre. Theatre is such a distant memory. And I ain't getting any younger. Will I still be castable when this all is over? Will there be meaty roles for me?

I have all the finest things capitalism can buy. Except time. I can't get any more of that. Can't invest to increase my available time. Can't bank it. All the bitcoin in the world can't buy me any. I see my time slowly slipping away and it's almost like I'm drowning in quicksand. I reach out and I can't hold on to it, just like I couldn't hold onto Anabelle. And you're not here to throw me a rope to bring myself out of this muck that's starting to swallow me. I am unable to hit the pause button like we did when we were binging Netflix and needed to refill our wine glasses. If only I could. And isn't that ironic? Time. Yours has run out but it's all I've had this last year. Nothing but time.

MUSIC - IN

WHISPERS GO HERE: Terror...time...uncertainty...the termination of the line that is time.

Looks back and the crone is gone.

SCENE 5 - THE EPIPHANY/THE TWIST/THE OUTCOME

(CRESCENDO OF WHISPERS) Time slowly slipping away...story...vulnerable...prove myself...absolution...what scares me.

Visual of cemetery

VO Writer: In this place between time and existence, fears are ghosts, and lovers, and not getting to say goodbye. They're about not having enough, and having too much. They're death, and creation, and love itself. We **all** have fears. We all abide by them in some way.

Because our fears are deep and personal, some are never meant to be shared, and we store them away in our vulnerable hearts.

Visual of Maiden gravesite with stones

Some fears, I learned, are given more power if we speak them to life,

Visual of Crone gravesite with wine bottle

while others can be vanquished with the help of companions.

Visual of Mother gravesite with daffodils

Fears can be like secrets, spoken in confession to those no longer with us, in the hopes that acknowledging them will shake their hold on us.

Writer looks into camera at cemetery and says

Writer: And some never truly leave us, inhabiting our minds forever.

Writer puts mask back on and walks away

MUSIC - OUT

MUSIC - IN

Back to Vlog podcast:

Writer: I saw these women only once, and sometimes I wonder if they were even real. But their impact hit me like a train. What these women had gone through - loss, heartbreak, and isolation - women always carry on in the face of great adversity. That rawness, that fear of life, is more of a horror story than any blood and guts I could ever write.

Beat

This was the ‘Something I hadn’t considered before.’ The pandemic brought forward the worst of my fears, I didn’t know how much more I could personally take with the rage, the constant insomnia, and feelings of apathy about the future. I had been directionless, wandering in moments. I wanted to carry on, and not get dragged into the quicksand - even if it felt like an impossible task. So I lit that fierce flame inside of me and was finally able to dig deep and write again. I am curious about what the future holds. I want to take each moment as it comes, before it slips away. That must mean I have hope. Someday soon, we’ll all be able to release the reality that is this Covid Era - the wacko and scary and surreal universe we’re still dealing with. We will step out of this real life horror story, put it in the past, and move beyond the mask into our future.

Writer back to the vlog and video fade out during the following

This has been Antonia Bloom. Join me next time on The Sticking Place, when I’ll be discussing my new book *Under the Cairn* ...

OUTRO MUSIC - fades after 20-30 secs.

END OF PLAY

