

Life in the Plague Year

A Three Act Anthology Play (approximately 80 minutes)

by Gary A. Davis

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February 1, 2023

Act I

Black ICE

pages 4 - 31

SETTING

An interrogation room in an ICE facility located in California in early 2020.

CHARACTERS

- COMMANDER HAYES male, mid 50s, cold & cruel, commander in Enforcement and Removal Operations of ICE.
- DEPUTY SIMMONS female, 30s to 40s, works with Hayes as a translator, is new to translating and so not fluent
- MAGDALENA SPINOLA late 60s, early 70s, refugee from Guatemala seeking asylum, does not speak English.

Act II

Love in the Time of Coronavirus

pages 32 - 53

SETTING

A nursing home in late 2020 isolated from the world that is being ravaged by Coronavirus.

CHARACTERS

- RUTH An elderly nursing home resident, once a respected doctor and medical researcher now suffering from Alzheimer's, but is presently experiencing an extended period of lucidity.

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- BOB A friend to Ruth and fellow resident, he is in a wheelchair and is suffering the late stages of cancer. Bob has been many things in life, primarily a theater director.
- JOY A young black nurse well loved by the nursing home residents and a primary caretaker for Ruth and Bob. She is a widow with two children.

Act III

Ghost Light

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SETTING

A bare, dark stage with only a ghost light and a leftover prop umbrella [*see Prop Note 1*].

SYNOPSIS

In 2022 a crew returns to a theater that's been empty for two years because of the pandemic to prep the stage for reopening.

CHARACTERS

- KAY woman in her 50s or 60s, a stage manager
- AL man in his 60s or 70s, an actor
- RAUL younger man in his 20s or 30s, give or take, on the tech crew

Act I – Black ICE

SCENE OPENS

(As lights come up, Commander Hayes and Deputy Simmons are sitting across from each other at a table in an interrogation room. The room is empty and sterile. There are folders and papers, and a handheld radio on the table. Both are wearing jackets.)

HAYES

Congratulations, Simmons. Is this your first official interrogation as a translator?

SIMMONS

Yes, commander.

HAYES

You've been working towards this for a long time now. We're all proud of you.

SIMMONS

I'm a little nervous. I still have a lot to learn. I'm not nearly as fluent as I would like to be yet. I hope I don't mess up too badly.

(laughs)

HAYES

I'm not concerned. This is all pretty basic shit. A little heads up, Simmons. It'll be announced later today.

SIMMONS

What's that, commander?

HAYES

Lakers are playing a home game next week. The big man is treating the staff with loge tickets.

SIMMONS

Loge Seats! Holy shit! Can spouses come, too?

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HAYES

‘Fraid not. This is strictly on the books as a ‘team building’ exercise. So that means **you** have to be there, no passing your ticket off to hubby.

SIMMONS

Ha, ha! Like I’d pass that off! He’ll be so jealous!

HAYES

OK, Simmons, who’s our first alien today?

SIMMONS

(pulls out a folder and hands it to him)

Magdalena Spinola.

HAYES

Magdalene, named after the whore.

SIMMONS

(facially reacts, but otherwise ignores the comment)

She’s an elderly woman from Guatemala. Fled the country, fearing for her life, gangs, blah, blah, blah. You know ... the usual.

HAYES

Jesus! Why do we get so many Guatemalans!

SIMMONS

Well, between US backed dictators and being overrun with drug cartels it’s never been a very stable country.

HAYES

(after a long pause staring at her)

That was rhetorical. Do I look like I want a history lesson?

SIMMONS

Oh, sorry.

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HAYES

Anyone come with her?

SIMMONS

(pulls out a paper from the file)

Brought her 11 year old granddaughter with her.

HAYES

(looking at paper with photo)

Cute kid.

SIMMONS

Too cute apparently.

HAYES

Angelita.

*(mispronounces it as **ayn-jel-iy-ta**)*

SIMMONS

That's ahn-he-*lee*-ta.

HAYES

Like I give a shit. Angie it is. What's this? She has a different last name, Toledo.

(pronounces it like the city)

SIMMONS

Tole-

(Simmons starts to correct his pronunciation, but Hayes gives her the evil eye, so she backs down)

According to the file it's the married name of Magdalena's daughter.

HAYES

So where are the kid's parents?

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SIMMONS

Unknown.

HAYES

Earmark that. We need to find out. If the parents are still in Guatemala, we can send the kid back immediately without grandma's consent. Where is she now?

SIMMONS

Karnes Center, Texas. The report says she's being very helpful, taking care of the babies. Also keeps the younger children around to protect them from bullies. The report also says that her language skills are very poor and that she's likely developmentally disabled.

HAYES

A tread, huh?

SIMMONS

A what?

HAYES

What, you never heard 'tread' before? It means retard.

SIMMONS

I think I'll stick with developmentally disabled. Although it's strange, developmentally disabled kids usually don't have the leadership skills that this kid obviously has. I wonder if there's something else going on here. Anyway, yesterday I sent an email to the Karnes staff asking them to interview the kid. Find out about her parents. I'm hoping for a call sometime today to see what they found out.

HAYES

Good thinking. Hmmm, already starting her own gang. They don't waste time.

(Again, Simmons gives a visual reaction, but doesn't comment; Hayes is leafing through the file, finds photos)

Ah, Jesus! What the fuck is this?! Is this the same kid?

SIMMONS

(winces at the photos)

Yeah, it is. Human trafficking. Child prostitution and pornography is big down there. These were found on the internet.

HAYES

They're all fucking animals. They're not sending us their best, are they?

SIMMONS

Magdalena claims she grabbed the kid from the gangs and fled the country.

HAYES

Right. For all we know, she took the pictures herself. Are we even sure Magdalena is the kid's grandmother. She could be just another damn coyote.

SIMMONS

It's been confirmed. Magdalena is Angelita's grandmother.

HAYES

OK, look, here's the plan. We need to get her to sign the form relinquishing custody of the child. Promise her anything. But once she signs, grandma's on a plane back to Guatemala! Then if we find out mom and dad are still down there, the kid goes back, too.

(picks up the handheld radio)

OK, bring in the first one.

(Simmons goes to the door and brings in Magdalena, directs her to sit down at the table. She sits so she's facing the audience with Hayes and Simmons on either side of her.)

MAGDALENA

(shivering; hugs herself to keep warm)

Hace mucho frío aquí.

[It's so cold in here.]

SIMMONS

She says she's cold.

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HAYES

Yup. Ignore that.

SIMMONS

¿Eres Magdalena Spinola?

[Are you Magdalena Spinola?]

MAGDALENA

Sí.

SIMMONS

Soy el diputada Simmons. Este es el comandante Hayes.

[I'm Deputy Simmons. This is Commander Hayes.]

MAGDALENA

(hesitantly, almost begging)

Mi nieta, ¿donde esta mi nieta?

[My granddaughter, where is my granddaughter?]

SIMMONS

Ummm ... 'nieta' means granddaughter. She's asking about Angelita.

MAGDALENA

Sí, Sí! Angelita!

HAYES

Tell her we're asking the questions here!

SIMMONS

Un momento, por favor. Primero tenemos algunas preguntas.

[One moment, please. First we have some questions.]

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HAYES

Por favor? You don't need to say 'please,' Simmons. We're the ones in charge here. You need to let her know that in your voice, the way you talk to her. And don't look so surprised. You can't be on this job as long as me and not pick up at least a couple words.

SIMMONS

Uh, right, sorry. Excuse me, but something sounds a little off here.

HAYES

What do you mean?

SIMMONS

Don't get me wrong, her Spanish is fluent, certainly better than mine, but she seems to have a peculiar accent that I can't place. I've not heard it before.

HAYES

Accent?

SIMMONS

Like I said, she is fluent, but I'd be willing to bet Spanish is not her primary language.

HAYES

Holy shit! Are you saying she could be a Russian or maybe a Muslim?

SIMMONS

No, no, nothing like that. Probably just a regional dialect or something.

HAYES

Well, we'll keep it in mind, definitely look into that. But first thing's first. We need to find out about the parents.

SIMMONS

¿Dónde están los padres de Angelita?

[Where are Angelita's parents?]

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MAGDALENA

(pause, painful to say)

Mi hija y su esposo, ambos están ... muertos.

[My daughter and her husband, both are ... dead.]

HAYES

Well, that didn't sound good.

SIMMONS

No, she says they're dead.

HAYES

Her saying it doesn't make it true. Ask what happened.

SIMMONS

¿Qué les pasó? ¿Cómo murieron?

[What happened to them? How did they die?]

MAGDALENA

(again very painful and difficult to say)

¡Mi hija, mi hermosa hija, era una buena madre! Angelita fue secuestrada por las maras. ¡Le hicieron cosas terrible!

[My daughter, my beautiful daughter, she was a good mother! Angelita was kidnapped by the gangs, they did terrible things to her!]

SIMMONS

Her granddaughter was kidnapped by gangs – las maras - who did terrible things to her.

HAYES

Tell me about it!

(takes a picture from the file and pushes it towards Magdalena)

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MAGDALENA

(in tears)

¡Mi Angelita, no, no, no, no!

(clutches the picture to her breast)

HAYES

(grabbing the picture away from her)

She still hasn't told us what happened to the parents.

SIMMONS

¿Pero qué pasó con sus padres?

[But what happened to her parents?]

MAGDALENA

Su padre, que en paz descanse, fue tras ella. Trató de recuperarla. Pero lo atraparon, lo torturaron y lo mataron con un machete.

[Her father, may he rest in peace, went after her. He tried to get her back. But he was caught, tortured and killed with a machete.]

HAYES

Machete! Shit, I understood that!

MAGDALENA

(not able to contain the tears)

Luego hicieron lo mismo con mi hija.

[Then they did the same to my daughter.]

SIMMONS

(affected by what she's hearing)

When the father tried to get Angelita back, he was tortured and murdered. They did the same to her mother. Commander, I gotta tell you, I don't think she's making this up. It's killing her just telling this story.

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HAYES

(grudgingly)

You may be right. But if the parents were murdered trying to get their daughter back, how the hell did she get her?

SIMMONS

¿Cómo conseguiste alejar a Angelita de las maras?

[How did you get Angelita away from the gangs?]

MAGDALENA

Me la trajeron. No querían la molestia de cuidar de ella. Así que me dijeron que la cuidara hasta que vinieran a buscarla de nuevo.

(said in anger and hatred)

Pero nunca dejaría que esos cerdos volvieran a tocar a mi nieta, mi Angelita.

[They brought her to me. They didn't want the trouble of taking care of her. So they told me to care for her until they came to get her again. But I would never let those pigs touch my granddaughter again, my Angelita.]

SIMMONS

She says they couldn't be bothered to take care of Angelita, so they told Madgalena to take care of her till they came back for her. Magdalena fled with her before they could come back. Oh, and she says they're pigs.

HAYES

(mockingly)

Pigs! Well, that's a hell of a story. We'll see how much of that Angie confirms.

(takes out a form)

OK, time to get her to sign this release. Tell her if she wants Angie to stay here, she needs to release her to our custody.

SIMMONS

(hands her a pen and the form)

Si quieres que Angelita se quede en este país, tienes que firmar aquí.

[If you want Angelita to stay in this country, you need to sign here.]

MAGDALENA

(picks up the form and tries to read it)

¿Qué es esto? No puedo leerlo. ¿Esto es Inglés?

[What is this? I can't read it. Is this English?]

HAYES

Let me guess. The old bat can't read it. Tell her if she wants Angie to stay here, she's gotta sign.

SIMMONS

¿Quieres que Angelita se quede en América?

[Do you want Angelita to stay in America?]

MAGDALENA

¡Sí, sí!

SIMMONS

Entonces tienes que firmar estos papeles dándonos la custodia.

[Then you have to sign these papers giving us custody.]

MAGDALENA

¿Custodia? No lo entiendo. ¿Por qué necesitas la custodia? Yo me encargaré de ella. Cuidaré de ella. Ella es todo para mí.

[Custody? I don't understand. Why do you need custody? I will take care of her. I will look after her. She is everything to me.]

HAYES

Tell her she's a criminal. She's broken the law entering our country. She's on the next plane to Guatemala. But if she doesn't sign the papers, Angie's on that plane, too.

SIMMONS

Entrar sin permiso en nuestro país es un delito. Eres un criminal y puedes ser procesado.

[Breaking into our country is a crime. You are a criminal and can be prosecuted.]

MAGDALENA

¡No, no, no soy una criminal! Vinimos buscando asilo. ¡Seguí las reglas! Se lo ruego, déjeme ver a mi nieta. Déjeme hablar con ella. ¡Por favor!

[No, no, I'm not a criminal! We came seeking asylum. I followed the rules! I beg you, please let me see my granddaughter. Let me speak to her. Please!]

SIMMONS

She says they didn't break in. She says they followed the rules to seek asylum - asilo.

HAYES

Yeah, who gives a shit!

SIMMONS

But commander, if she followed the rules, if she applied for asylum, she's entitled to a hearing at least.

HAYES

She followed the rules? Here's her file. You read it. Did YOU see that in there anywhere?

(pause)

Well, did you?

SIMMONS

No. But that doesn't mean -

HAYES

No, that's exactly what it means! Christ, Simmons, you're going all soft on me! Look, I get it, I do! It's the kid. You see these pictures of this little angel –

MAGDALENA

Angelita.

HAYES

(viciously to Magdalena)

¡Cállate!

[Shut up!]

(back to Simmons)

You see these pictures and it's horrifying. You want to hold her and save her from the world. Believe me, I understand. I used to be that way myself. You want to be a mom to this kid. You want to rescue her. Fine, rescue her. But this old crow doesn't need to be any part of that. She's going back.

SIMMONS

But she's the only family this girl has! Without her

(points to Magdalena)

what will happen to her?

HAYES

She'll be fine. She'll start out in foster care until she's permanently adopted.

SIMMONS

Babies get adopted! Very young children get adopted. This girl is 11 years old, she's not likely to ever get adopted. She'll probably stay in foster care until she's 18.

HAYES

So what if she does? She'll get through it fine.

SIMMONS

(forcefully)

No she won't!

HAYES

How could you possibly know that?!

SIMMONS

(trying to hold it in, but can't contain the explosion)

BECAUSE I DIDN'T!!!

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HAYES

(pause, about to respond, but there's a sound from the radio on the table, he picks it up angrily)

What the hell is it?

(pause as he listens)

I'll be right there!

(puts the radio back on the table)

It's what we've been waiting for, a call from Karnes Center. I'm going to go take it. YOU stay HERE. If you know what's good for you, those papers will be signed by the time I get back. Afterwards you and I will have a loooong talk, Simmons. You understand me?

SIMMONS

Yes, sir.

(Hayes exits leaving the two of them alone, Simmons sits down at the table)

Well, there goes my job.

(looks at Magdalena)

Dije, ahí va mi trabajo.

[I said, there goes my job.]

MAGDALENA

(puts a hand on Simmon's hand)

Tal vez no sea el trabajo para ti.

[Maybe it's not the job for you.]

SIMMONS

I thought it was. Maybe it's not.

(long pause as Simmons looks at Magdalena still hugging herself to keep warm; then she stands up, takes off her jacket and puts it on her; Magdalena pulls it around her)

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MAGDALENA

Gracias.

(pause)

Mi Angelita, ¿dónde está?

[My Angelita, where is she?]

SIMMONS

Está...

(long pause)

está en un centro en Texas.

[She's ... she's in a facility in Texas.]

MAGDALENA

¡Texas! ¡Pero eso está a miles de kilómetros!

[Texas! But that's thousands of kilometers away!]

SIMMONS

Sí... Lo siento mucho.

[Yeah ... I'm so sorry.]

(long pause)

¿Puedo hacerte una pregunta?

[Can I ask you a question?]

MAGDALENA

Sí.

SIMMONS

God, this is such a trivial question. Perdóname, esto es tan trivial. Your accent ... Pero tu forma de hablar me parece extraña. Born, born, what's born – nació. ¿No nació usted en Guatemala?

[Forgive me, this is so trivial. But the way you speak seem strange to me. Were you not born in Guatemala?]

MAGDALENA

Sí, nací en Guatemala. Pero el español no es mi primera lengua. Hablo K'iche'.

[Yes, I was born in Guatemala. But Spanish is not my first language. I speak K'iche'.]

SIMMONS

K'iche'. ¿Qué es eso?

[K'iche'. What is that?]

MAGDALENA

Angelita y yo somos descendientes indígenas de los mayas.

[Angelita and I are indigenous descendants of the Mayas.]

SIMMONS

Mayans! K'iche' is one of the Mayan languages!

MAGDALENA

Sí. El k'iche' es una de las muchas lenguas mayas. Es la que hablamos en nuestra casa y pueblo.

[Yes. K'iche' is one of many Mayan languages. It's the one we speak in our home and village.]

SIMMONS

¿Angelita también lo habla?

[Angelita speaks it too?]

MAGDALENA

Sí, el K'iche' es su lengua materna.

[Yes, K'iche' is her mother tongue.]

SIMMONS

What about Spanish? Ummm ... ¿Angelita habla algo de español?

[Does Angelita speak Spanish at all?]

MAGDALENA

Muy poco. En nuestro pueblo no hay muchas oportunidades de hablarlo.

[Very little. In our village there's not much opportunity to speak it.]

SIMMONS

I'll be damned. She barely speaks Spanish because Spanish isn't her native language. The staff doesn't look into it because it's too much bother, so they just label her as developmentally disabled. But she's not, probably the opposite. Pero Angelita es una niña brillante, ¿no?

[But Angelita is a bright kid, isn't she.]

MAGDALENA

Sí, estoy muy orgullosa de ella.

[Yes, I'm so proud of her!]

SIMMONS

Yeah, you've reason to be proud. Angelita también es dura, ¿verdad?

[Angelita is tough, too, isn't she.]

(holds up a clenched fist meaning 'strong')

Me han dicho que en el centro protege a los niños más pequeños.

[I'm told that at the center she is protecting the younger children!]

MAGDALENA

Sí, esa es mi Angelita. Siempre ha cuidado de los niños más pequeños del barrio. Creo que de grande será una abogada que luchará por su pueblo.

[Yes, that's my Angelita. She's always looked after the younger children in the neighborhood. I think she'll grow up to be a lawyer fighting for her people.]

SIMMONS

Little Angelita growing up to be a lawyer – una abogada. That would be something!

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MAGDALENA

Y un día será una buena madre. Si pudiera vivir lo suficiente para conocer a sus hijos, moriría como una mujer feliz.

[And one day she'll be a good mother. If I could live long enough to know her children, I would die a happy woman.]

SIMMONS

(almost in tears)

That would be so wonderful. I hope that happens. I hope you do meet Angelita's children some day. I ... I could never have children myself. Ummm ... yo nunca podría tener hijos.

MAGDALENA

(grabs her hand and squeezes)

Lo siento mucho.

[I'm so sorry.]

SIMMONS

(suddenly with steely resolve)

¿Se presentaron realmente en la frontera como solicitantes de ASILO? Did you follow the rules... ¿Seguiste las reglas del ASILO?

[Did you really present yourself at the border as asylum seekers? Did you follow the rules for asylum?]

MAGDALENA

Sí, sí, ¡he seguido las reglas!

[Yes, yes, I followed the rules!]

SIMMONS

Damn it! You shouldn't be locked up here! Ummm ... ¡No deberías estar encerrada aquí!

MAGDALENA

Diputada Simmons, dígame sinceramente, ¿qué es este papel?

[Deputy Simmons, tell me truthfully, what is this paper?]

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(holds up the form)

SIMMONS

El comandante Hayes ... wants to send you back ... quiere enviarte de vuelta a Guatemala. Si firmas ese papel, no volverás a ver a Angelita. Nunca conocerás a sus hijos.

[Commander Hayes wants to send you back to Guatemala. If you sign that paper, you will never see Angelita again. You will never meet her children.]

MAGDALENA

(in tears)

¡Oh, Dios mío! ¿Qué puedo hacer? Si Angelita puede quedarse aquí, tal vez esté mejor sin mí.

(with sad resignation)

Tal vez debería firmar el papel.

[Oh, my God! What can I do? If Angelita can stay here, maybe she's better off without me. Maybe I should just sign the paper.]

SIMMONS

Don't say that! She needs you! Umm ... umm ... ¡Angelita te necesita más que nada!

[Angelita needs you more than anything!]

MAGDALENA

¿Pero qué puedo hacer?

[But what can I do?]

SIMMONS

(grabs the form)

¡Primero, never ... nunca, nunca firmes ese papel! El comandante Hayes se enfadará mucho. Ummm, threaten, threaten ... ¡Le amenazará! ¡Pero nunca debe firmar el papel! Deberías tener un abogado ... to fight for you ... que luche por ti.

[First, never, ever sign that paper! Commander Hayes will be very angry. He will threaten you! But you must NEVER sign the paper! You should have a lawyer to fight for you.]

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MAGDALENA

(with a smirk)

¡Si espero lo suficiente, Angelita puede ser mi abogada! ¡Entonces el Comandante Hayes estaría en verdaderos problemas!

[If I wait long enough, Angelita can be my lawyer! Then Commander Hayes would be in real trouble!]

SIMMONS

(they both laugh long and hard)

Oh God I wish I could see that! Little Angelita giving Hayes a thrashing in court! But you don't have that long. Pero... necesitas un abogado de verdad ahora mismo ... right now.

[But ... you need a real lawyer right now.]

MAGDALENA

¿Cómo puedo conseguir un abogado? Ni siquiera se me permite usar un teléfono.

[How can I get a lawyer? I'm not even allowed to use a phone.]

SIMMONS

(considers her next move very carefully)

I'll help. Yo te ayudaré. Cuando llegue a casa me pondré en contacto con Americans for Immigrant Justice y les hablaré de ti y de Angelita. Te proporcionarán un abogado gratis ... free.

[I'll help you. When I get home I'll contact Americans for Immigrant Justice and tell them about you and Angelita. They'll provide you a lawyer for free.]

MAGDALENA

¿Gratis?

[For free?]

SIMMONS

Sí, gratis. Pero debes recordar, nunca firmes el papel por más que se enoje. Y se enfadará mucho. ¡Te amenazará! It'll get worse before it gets better. ¡Se pondrá mucho peor antes de mejorar!

[Yes, for free. But you must remember, never sign the paper no matter how angry he gets. And he will get very angry. He will threaten you! It will get much worse before it gets better!]

MAGDALENA

Gracias. Muchas gracias por su ayuda... y por su honestidad.

[Thank you! Thank you so much for your help ... and for your honesty.]

HAYES

(reenters abruptly and grabs the form to put it back in the folder)

Well, we don't need this anymore. You're on the next plane, grandma!

SIMMONS

What? What are you talking about? What's going on?

HAYES

The note, the call. Apparently there's been an outbreak of this new coronavirus at Karnes.

MAGDALENA

¿Coronavirus?

(said with dread)

HAYES

Apparently she knows that word. The granddaughter caught it. They don't expect her to make it. She's got a few days at the most, maybe a little longer. So we don't need grandma to sign shit. Our work is done here.

(smiles, packs up all the paperwork to put in folder, Simmons is in shock)

Well, go ahead and tell her.

SIMMONS

I ... I can't. I can't do it.

(she is visibly shaken, also disturbed by Hayes' callousness)

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MAGDALENA

(sees something is wrong)

Pasó algo. ¿Qué es? ¿Qué es lo que está mal? Por favor, dímelo.

[Something has happened. What is it? What's wrong? Please tell me.]

HAYES

Don't go all soft and squishy on me, Simmons! Do your God damned job!

(Magdalena is still shaken, breathing rapidly; Simmons is frozen)

Oh, for Chris's sake. I don't need you for this. I know that much myself.

(Looks down at Magdalena, pulls out the note and shakes it at her)

Muerta! Esta muerta!

(said with relish, old woman breaks down)

SIMMONS

Why are you telling her that? She's not dead yet!

HAYES

What difference does it make? She's never gonna see her again.

SIMMONS

You sonofabitch! You enjoyed that!

HAYES

If it means less paperwork...

SIMMONS

No, it's more than the paperwork. You enjoyed her pain!

(turns to Magdalena)

No, no, no conoce el idioma. He didn't say it right. No lo ha dicho bien. Su nieta no está muerta... no está muerta. Pero... pero... está enferma... muy enferma.

(long pause)

Es el coronavirus.

[No, no, he doesn't know the language. He didn't say it right. Your granddaughter is not dead...not dead. But ... but ... she is sick ... very sick. It's coronavirus.]

MAGDALENA

(openly weeping)

¡Oh, Dios mío! ¡Virgen bendita, por favor, que esté con mi Angelita!

[Oh my God. Blessed virgin please be with my Angelita.]

SIMMONS

Ella... no se espera que dure mucho... unos días, un par de semanas como mucho.

[She ... she isn't expected to last long ... a few days, a couple weeks at most.]

HAYES

What are you telling her?

SIMMONS

The truth!

MAGDALENA

¡Oh, mi bebé!

(after gasps)

Por favor, déjame ir con ella. Déjame estar con ella. Déjame sostener su mano en sus últimas horas y consolarla. ¡Mi bebé, mi dulce niña!

[Oh my baby! Please let me go to her. Let me be with her. Let me hold her hand in her final hours and comfort her. My baby, my sweet child!]

SIMMONS

N-n-no puedes hacer eso. Te contagiarás el coronavirus. It'll kill you! ¡Te matará!

[You can't do that. You'll catch the coronavirus. It'll kill you!]

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MAGDALENA

La traje a América para salvarla de la violación y asesinato. En cambio, la he condenado a muerte. Ya estoy muerta. Por favor, te lo ruego, ¿no me harás este pequeño favor? Dios te bendecirá por ello.

[I brought her to America to save her from rape and murder. Instead I've condemned her to death. I'm already dead. Please, I beg of you, won't you do me this small kindness? God will bless you for it.]

HAYES

What's she going on about?

SIMMONS

She says she brought Angelita to America to save her life, but instead she's killed her. She wants to go to her granddaughter. She wants to hold her hand and care for her, comfort her as she's dying.

HAYES

What? But she would catch it, too!

SIMMONS

She knows that.

HAYES

But it'll probably kill her!

SIMMONS

She KNOWS that!

HAYES

I ... I can't authorize that. Jesus! How would that look?

SIMMONS

No, no lo permitirán.

[No, they won't let that happen.]

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(the old woman breaks down, tries to regain her composure. Stands up radiating dignity. Looking at Hayes drops Simmons jacket from her shoulders and begins to unbutton her blouse)

HAYES

What the hell's she doing? Christ, I'm not gonna fuck the old bat!

(Magdalena has exposed on her breast a very large crucifix made of gold and jewels. It is her last possession. She removes it and holds it out to him)

What the hell? Has she had this the entire time she's been here? How could we not find this? Ask her where she got it!

SIMMONS

Quiere saber de dónde has sacado esto.

[He wants to know where you got this.]

MAGDALENA

Ha estado en mi familia durante muchas generaciones.

[It's been in my family for many generations.]

SIMMONS

She says it's been handed down in her family for many generations.

HAYES

Christ, that could be hundreds of years old! I've never seen anything like it!

MAGDALENA

(holds it out to him again and in what little English she knows)

Take.

(He is transfixed and can't bring himself to touch it. She puts it on the table and pushes it towards him.)

HAYES

What?!

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SIMMONS

She wants you to take it. She's giving it to you if you'll send her to her granddaughter.

MAGDALENA

Es mi última posesión en el mundo. Es oro. Es Dios. ¿Qué es más importante para ti?

[It's my last possession in the world. It is gold. It is God. Which is more important to you?]

SIMMONS

She says it's her last possession. She says it's gold ... and it's God. And

(pause)

she asks which is more important to you?

HAYES

But I'd be sending you to your death.

SIMMONS

Dice que te estaría enviando a la muerte.

[He says he'd be sending you to your death.]

MAGDALENA

(looking at Hayes)

Le dije que ya estoy muerta. Te lo ruego. Por favor, concede esta bondad a una vieja muerta.

[I told her, I'm already dead. I beg you. Please grant this kindness to an old dead woman.]

SIMMONS

She says she's already dead and begs you grant this kindness to an old dead woman.

HAYES

(very long pause staring at the crucifix, eyes flit back and forth between Simmons, Magdalena and the crucifix)

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Put her on the next flight to Texas. You'll escort her. She'll be in your custody the entire time - in cuffs!

SIMMONS

I guess I won't make it to that Lakers game.

HAYES

No, you won't. And let me make this perfectly clear, if she doesn't make it to Karnes or if ANY word about THIS

(points to the crucifix)

gets out, you'll be in deeper shit than you can ever get out of, Simmons! And you WILL stay with her ... to the very end! Am I understood?

SIMMONS

Yes, Commander.

(as she escorts Magdalena out of the room)

Vamos a Angelita.

[We're going to Angelita.]

MAGDALENA

Gracias. ¡Muchas gracias!

[Thank you! Thank you so much!]

(to Hayes)

Eres un hombre enfadado. Rezo para que este símbolo de Dios lleve tu alma a la paz.

[You are an angry man. I pray this symbol from God will lead your soul to peace.]

SIMMONS

She said -

HAYES

LEAVE! NOW!

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(follows them to the door and locks it after they leave and leans against the door for a moment; crosses back to the table still transfixed by the crucifix; paces the room unable to take his eyes off of it but unable to touch it; stops in front of it, his breathing is labored; reaches out with great hesitation and fear finally touching it; breaks down in tears openly sobbing as he collapses to his knees; slowly brings the crucifix closer holding it to his cheek in an embrace, still weeping)

Forgive me!

(long pause)

Forgive me, Father! For I have sinned!

Fin

Act II – Love in the Time of Coronavirus

SCENE OPENS

(Ruth is sitting at a desk in a nursing home office. She washes her hands with hand sanitizer then opens up a laptop to make a video call. She is wearing a face mask and removes it for the call. She looks somewhat disheveled. Ruth's conversation is awkward and stilted. Although lucid, she is NOT 100% and sometimes has trouble finding the words she wants. But she is determined to find those words even when easier words will do. What might appear in the script as stuttering is actually her searching for the words. Words seem to flow easier for her when she's angry.)

RUTH

Hi, Deb. It's me. It's still me. I **know** me and I know **you**. I'm surprised how long it's lasting this time. It's happened before, but never more than a day. But it's been several days now. Sometimes it feels like maybe I'm back for good. But I know better. Eventually the ... um ... dementia will return. But I'm so grateful for this time. Grateful that I can say how much I love you and know who I'm saying that to.

(pause)

How's everyone doing? The kids, the grandkids, everyone still safe?

(pause for response)

It's not good. I tested negative today, but almost half of the residents and even the nurses and staff have it. So many of them are in ... are in ... re-respiratory distress and there are no ... v-ventilators to be had for love or money.

(pause)

It's a losing battle, but I'm going to see this through as long as I can – make sure they're at least comfortable.

(pause)

I can't account for this extended period of ... llllucidity. Why should it happen at just this time when my life's skills are so desperately needed? Maybe some intervention from God. The nurses

and staff seem to respect it and are looking to me for guidance. I do what I can ... while I can. I wish I were back in research working on this bastard.

There are so many things about this virus that don't make sense. The ... uh ... the ... oxygen depletion comes on so rapidly. The body is ... starving for oxygen. The patient should be gasping for air long before it gets to this point! Why aren't they? At that point the only thing left to do is ... is ... is intubation, but it's no guarantee of survival.

(pause)

Well we don't. There are no ventilators here, the hospitals can't spare them, so there's no ... um ... intubation. All we can do is make them comfortable.

(angry)

This place might as well be a goddamned petri dish. Nursing homes, veterans homes, prisons, any kind of assisted living facility, we're just an all you can eat buffet for this goddamned nightmare.

(Bob enters in a wheelchair, speaks in a raspy voice and occasionally coughs. Ruth sees the distressed look on his face.)

Bob ... is something wrong?

BOB

(removes his mask, but stays at a distance)

We lost Emil and Hang.

(pronounced 'Hahng')

RUTH

(this is crushing, devastating news)

Oh no, both of them?

BOB

I'm afraid so. The nurses had moved their beds together the other day. They passed away holding hands.

RUTH

(to Deb, Ruth is obviously grieved)

Bob says Hang and Emil have passed.

(pause)

We've lost so many I can't keep track, but this hits so close. Even at my worst they were such good friends to me.

(to Bob)

How are you holding up, Bob?

BOB

(avoiding the question)

Just took my test ... I'm good for another day at least. Is that Deb? Say hello for me.

RUTH

Bob says hello. "Hello Bob."

(she relays from Deb)

I'll call you again as soon as I can. Keep everyone safe for me. Give them my love.

(to Bob)

Did you want to call Carol?

BOB

(wheels his chair next to the desk, but still maintains social distance)

All the time. But I talked to her a moment ago. So I'm good for an hour at least.

(Ruth closes the laptop)

Honestly, I wish I could just stay with her till my curtain falls. That's what I hate so much about this Covid. We're at the end of our lives here. It's the time we most need our loved ones by our side. And we like to think that **that** time means something precious to them, too. But Covid is so cruel. Everybody's dying alone. Emil and Hang? I **envy** them so much – to 'shuffle off this mortal coil' ... together ... holding hands. I was told Emil passed first and Hang passed shortly after.

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RUTH

She probably couldn't bear to be without him.

BOB

Maybe, but I see it another way. Hang was the first to come down with this. She was showing symptoms a few days before Emil. I don't think she died because she couldn't be without him. I think she was holding on past her time, clinging to life to make sure Emil wasn't left alone. Once he was gone, her mission was complete and she left to be with him. One hand held his as her other hand held his face. They were so in love. Did you know that Emil had saved her life when he was stationed in Vietnam? He was her knight in shining armor. Protected her and fought like hell to bring her back to America. He risked a court martial by marrying her while still stationed there as it was the only way to get her out. He had to leave without her to be able to raise enough money and make arrangements to fly her here. Her family hated him and told her she would never see him again. But she never lost faith and he never stopped fighting. It took months, but they were together again. And then, once home, he had to fight the bigotry in his own family.

RUTH

Yes, I do remember.

BOB

He once told me that her name meant 'angel in the full moon.'

RUTH

So much meaning in one syllable. He certainly saw her that way.

BOB

My heart really breaks for the nurses and staff that have it. Emil and Hang had a full life. You and me, we're on our last curtain call anyway. But they're just kids. Do you know how Joy is doing?

RUTH

The nurses tell me she's not doing well. She still has a fighting chance, but she's not out of the woods yet.

BOB

Damnit, damnit. She shouldn't be here! She should be in the hospital, all of them! All the nurses and staff who have it should be in the hospital!

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RUTH

They should. But all the hospitals are over capacity. The ICUs don't have enough ventilators to treat all the Covid patients they have. It's ... it's like ... um ... triage, war time triage. The fact that we have some open beds at least gives them a place to stay. That'll protect their families. They would want that. I can't help thinking of the homeless who could end up dying in the streets.

BOB

It kills me that they can't be in a hospital because they're here with us.

(pause)

I want to go hold her hand.

RUTH

Joy?

BOB

Yes, Joy. I want to go hold her hand. I want her to know that someone cares. I don't want her to be alone.

RUTH

Bob, she's in isolation on the third floor. You can't go up there.

BOB

Why not?

RUTH

Bob, get serious! You'll be exposed.

BOB

Do you think I care? Jesus! My days are numbered anyway. The cancer will take me before the fucking Covid!

RUTH

Bob, everything above the second floor is in quarantine. If you go up, you can't come back down.

(pause)

I need you down **here**, Bob. I need your help. We all do.

(Bob realizes the truth of this, but is still upset about it)

I know you have a bond with Joy. She's such a sweet kid. She's made us all feel ... cared for. Her kids, too.

BOB

(with such fondness)

Oh, God, those crazy little kids.

(laughs tearfully)

I worry about them the most. Where are they right now?

RUTH

I think they're with Joy's mother. It's surprising she was able to have them here so often. I think most nursing homes wouldn't have allowed that.

BOB

They'd have had a riot on their hands if they'd tried to stop that! A cane or two up their asses for sure! Those two visited everyone here and they're everyone's grandchildren.

RUTH

Well, they're certainly yours! Your eyes always lit up when they came. I loved watching you act out stories for them ... singing show tunes.

(treading carefully)

Although I think you sometimes forgot the lyrics. I know some of those words weren't right.

BOB

(in mock offense)

I would never forget a Broadway song, NEVER! It's just that I'd be singing them a song ... well, teaching them really, because they'd love to sing with me ...

RUTH

Oh, yes, that was a sight!

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BOB

so there I was in the middle of a song and it would occur to me that the next verse was, well, a tad ... saucy!

RUTH

A saucy Broadway song? Shades of Sondheim, I can't imagine!

BOB

Yes, there are ... a few, more than a few. Soooo ... I made up a different lyric.

RUTH

What? On the spot?

BOB

Well ... yes. What else could I do? I didn't want Joy mad at me for corrupting her kids!

RUTH

(laughs)

Damn! I'm impressed.

(applauds)

BOB

(takes a bow)

Thank you!

RUTH

You know, I was in one of your shows once. It was a summer stock. I'd just graduated high school and had a couple months before I headed off to college and eventually medical school at Cornell. It was The Sound of Music. I played one of the nuns.

(sings)

“How do you solve a problem like Maria ...”

BOB

Yes, I remember.

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RUTH

No you don't!

BOB

(mock indignation)

I never forget a show. And it makes me so happy that you remember it, too. Now we can share it again ... for a little while at least.

RUTH

I remember what fun it was and how we were like a family if only for a short while.

BOB

Yes, a cast is always a family that comes together, then sadly falls apart.

RUTH

I often wonder what happened to them. Did any of them go on to fame and fortune?

BOB

Do you remember Rachel?

RUTH

Mmmmmm ...

BOB

She played Gretl.

RUTH

(musing)

Hmmmm, Gretl.

(gasps)

Gretl? You mean little Gretl? She must have been all of six years old at the time! So adorable!

TOGETHER

(singing)

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“The sun has gone to bed and so must I.”

(they laugh)

BOB

Five, actually! She later went on to have a pop singing career, released a couple albums. Then later moved on to script writing and producing in Hollywood!

RUTH

Imagine that! I’m so happy for her.

BOB

She was just five years old back then. Her world was a blank page and she writ large upon it.

(pause, Bob stares at nothing as he ponders)

Camila is five years old. Caden is eight. Their world is still in front of them. Most of their books are still blank. One of them could be president one day. One of them could be an astronaut. They’ve already lost a father.

(pause)

What if Joy doesn’t make it?

RUTH

Oh, Bob, don’t say that!

BOB

Oh God, Ruth, she’s on the fucking third floor! Who comes down from the third floor?

(Ruth has no answer)

I’m scared Ruth. I’m scared for those kids. They’re so young. Who’s going to help them write their story?

RUTH

(steely resolve)

She’ll do it ... she’ll do it. I know she will. If anyone can do it, she can. She’s strong ... feisty, too! Remember how Booker was? She kicked his ass ... put him on the straight and narrow!

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BOB

Booker? He seems nice enough. When did this happen?

RUTH

Oh, I guess it was before you came. Booker's OK now, but he didn't start out that way. He wasn't pleasant to be around. But Joy took him aside and gave him what for. I think Booker didn't have a good upbringing, abusive parents maybe, but apparently he had a soft spot for his grandmother. Joy hit him right in that soft spot. She told him his grandmother could end up in a nursing home some day, maybe even this one. And would he want himself as her caretaker? Would he want someone like him, someone like the man he was at that moment to take care of her? I think he went home in tears that day ... came back the next a better man.

BOB

What a story! I can't believe I never heard that. Ruth, I've been working on a couple projects ... just some silly little ideas to make people feel better, maybe go out with a bit more dignity.

RUTH

I'm all ears. Tell me about it.

BOB

I'd read that over in Africa during the last Ebola outbreak a medical worker noticed that patients were frightened by the medical personnel who were completely covered in protective gear ... hazmat suits, really. Couldn't see their faces. It was like they were aliens in space suits. The patients were frightened of the people who were trying to save them. So she took pictures of their smiling faces and put them on the suits. It made them seem much more ... human ... and caring. She found it eased some of the patients' stress. So I'm doing that here.

RUTH

That's brilliant. I can see the value in that. What's the other thing?

BOB

Ruth, I don't want them to die alone. I want them to have their families with them. So I made some calls. In the next day or two, there's going to be a delivery of laptops, about a hundred of them. Everyone who's sick will get one and they'll be able to video call their family and stay with them – not just five minutes before passing the laptop to the next patient. They won't be physically in the room with them, but they'll be there in more than just spirit.

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RUTH

That's wonderful! I'm simply amazed, Bob!

BOB

And, of course, I'm keeping one for myself ... so Carol and I can be together.

RUTH

How did you manage to pull that off?

BOB

(proclaiming with arm raised)

I'm a theater director, I can do anything! Well, almost anything. What I wouldn't give to go see a show one last time. Better yet to be in one or direct one ... to be part of that act of creation and share it with an audience ... one more time.

RUTH

Yes, that would be wonderful.

BOB

"But I have strut and fret my hour upon the stage and will be heard no more."

RUTH

Mac-

BOB

(cutting her off forcefully)

Ah, ah, ah – we don't say that name!

RUTH

Oh ... right. But technically we're not in a theater right now.

BOB

All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players ...

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RUTH

OK, OK, you've got me!

(they laugh)

BOB

Anyway, as for the laptops, I called in a few favors ... probably all of them actually. No sense holding on to them now.

(pause)

How are **you** holding up? If you don't mind my saying it, you're looking exhausted. You could use some rest. Maybe you should lie down ... take a nap.

RUTH

(long pause, it's difficult to say)

I ... I can't.

(pause)

I'm afraid.

(trembling, almost in tears)

I'm afraid if I go to sleep ... it won't be me who wakes up.

(pause)

There was a time not too long ago ... I woke up in the hospital. Didn't know how I got there. Two beautiful young girls were standing over me. For a moment I thought they were angels. They were talking to me and one said, "...we love you, Grandma."

(pause)

And

(painfully)

I didn't know who they were. So with my usual twisted sense of humor I answered, "I love me, too," and laughed. They were my granddaughters, Gail and Sara. They drove all the way from New York when they heard I was in the hospital. At that moment I was confused. They looked so familiar, but I couldn't remember who they were. Why did I have to make a joke? Why couldn't I just say, "I love you, too?" I regret that.

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BOB

(takes her hand)

I understand. I'm glad you're here.

RUTH

You know, I've only been awake ... been myself for a few days. I don't know how long it's been since that last happened. When did this all start?

BOB

It was several months ago. When it started the CDC and World Health Organization were trying to raise the red flag. But they were ignored. The argument went, "The flu is deadlier than this and you don't see that on the news every year." I can't remember how many people I heard spout that bullshit in the beginning. You sure don't hear it now.

RUTH

Not deadlier than the flu? There's no metric by which that statement is true. Not now, not ever! This has the potential to surpass the 1918 Spanish Flu in casualties. We're almost there now!

BOB

Sweet Jesus! I remember stories about that from my grandparents.

RUTH

I keep going over it in my head – the ... um ... um ... the rapid onset of ... oxygen deprivation. By the time the patient – the victim is showing signs, they're already in ... um ... significant distress with a poor prospect for survival.

BOB

Is it really that fast?

RUTH

Hold your breath.

BOB

What?

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RUTH

Humor me. Hold your breath. See how long you can do it.

BOB

Ok.

(holds his breath while Ruth counts, finally gasps)

RUTH

___ seconds, not bad. So what was happening towards the end there? What was your brain telling you?

BOB

(still gasping)

That I was running out of air!

RUTH

Actually no. Believe it or not, the brain doesn't measure oxygen in the bloodstream. It measure ... it measures ... um ... carbon dioxide. When CO2 starts building up the brain starts yelling at you to breathe! But if the lungs are still getting rid of the ... um ... CO2, but not taking in enough oxygen, then that early warning system has been ... turned off.

BOB

So it just happens all at once? Crash and burn?

RUTH

(struggles to find the words)

Not necessarily. The virus has an unusually long ... long ... um ...unusually long ... a-a-asymptomatic phase, up to 14 days, all during which the carrier is ... um ... contagious. The ... the ... the oxygen depletion could begin a day before ... um ... symptoms display or even several days. On-onset of ox-oxygen d-d-deprivation could occur at any time in this phase.

BOB

(sees her struggling, approaches and takes her hand. He has broken social distancing and Ruth is taken aback)

Ruth, it's OK. You don't need those words to talk to me. You're not Dr. Fauci.

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RUTH

(stands angrily)

I am, too! I am Dr. Fauci! I am!

(long pause, slowly)

I **was** ... Dr. Fauci. I was on that level. Hell, we went to school together, Cornell.

(calm now, jokes)

He probably copied one of my papers. And let me tell you, at NIH I never carried water for him!

BOB

I'm sorry, Ruth. Let me put it another way. **I'M** not Dr. Fauci. So you don't need to struggle for me.

RUTH

(very emotive)

It's not **for** you. It's for **me!** It's the part of me that was my life and I've lost it. But now I can see it again. It's there,

(points out)

right there. And if I just reach far enough, I can hold onto it ... if only for a moment. No, I'm not Dr. Fauci, I'm Charlie Gordon. And I won't remember to put flowers on Algernon's grave.

BOB

I understand.

RUTH

Do you?

BOB

Let me put it like this. You see me as I am. But if I could get up out of this chair, I wouldn't walk. I would dance! And no one could stop me!

RUTH

(smiles)

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Oh my, I guess you do understand.

BOB

So go ahead, Ruth. Dance for me!

RUTH

Ok, so we were talking about oxygen loss starting before the symptoms.

BOB

But without symptoms, there's no way of telling.

RUTH

And that's the problem. Right now we can't get ahead of the virus and the health care system is so stressed, so overwhelmed, we're stuck in a ... in a ... rrrreactive mode. We're in a ... um ... societal triage. Wait, have I already said that? Well anyway, there's your goddamned death panels!

BOB

Isn't there any way of predicting where the next hotspots will be?

RUTH

(long pause while in thought)

Shit.

(said matter of factly)

BOB

I guess it's not that easy.

RUTH

No. Shit. The answer to your question is 'shit.'

BOB

(a bit confused)

Shhhit?

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RUTH

Shit ... definitely shit.

BOB

Uhhh...

RUTH

With any type of infection, germ, virus, whathaveyou, some will exit the body through ... elimination.

BOB

(getting it)

Shit!

RUTH

Well, and piss, too. Shit and piss.

BOB

OK, soooo how exactly does that work in a practical sense?

RUTH

You set up testing in the ... community waste water systems. Once an increase in the Covid-19 virus shows itself in the waste water, it'll predict an ... an ... outbreak of symptoms within one to two weeks. If you know where it's going to show up and at what level, you can ... mmmmmartial resources to that area.

BOB

Holy ... uh ... shit! Have you told anyone this idea?

RUTH

I just thought of it. So ... you. I told you.

BOB

Aaaaah! I mean someone who'll know what to do with it!

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RUTH

Mmmmmm, there's an old research associate ... a friend, Dr. Li Chang. She's actually visited me here a couple times. She's at Johns Hopkins now. Maybe I can reach out to her. Although, honestly, I'd be surprised if this is news to her. Someone must have thought of this.

BOB

So what's next? If you know that some little town or big city is two weeks away from a major outbreak, what do you do?

RUTH

Mandate lockdowns, mobilize resources ... logistics, equipment, personnel, space ... massive testing. But even with all that you still don't know which of the infected will need the most care until they show up at the hospital at death's door. If only we could predict before that moment who's at risk.

(long pause)

Oh!

BOB

Ruth?

RUTH

No, no. That can't be right. It can't be that easy!

BOB

What! What are you talking about?

RUTH

A ... a ... damn it! ... a p-pulse ... ox-ox-oximeter...

BOB

Am I supposed to know what that is? Jesus, it sounds like some giant piece of equipment. It must cost a fortune. How the hell can that be easy?

RUTH

No, no.

(laughing excitedly)

It's not big at all. It's tiny, just a tiny little ... little ... thingamabob ... fits on the end of your finger. It measures your pulse and the oxygen levels in your bloodstream. You can buy them on-line for \$20 or \$30. They use them here all the time!

BOB

That finger pulse thingy? They've used that on me several times.

RUTH

On all of us! The p-p-pulse oximeter would clearly show the beginnings of ... oxygen ... depletion long before it becomes ... critical. It's not a vaccine ... not a cure. But from a treatment perspective ... um ... early detection could mean the difference between life and death. I should call Li! But, oh God, I'm tired ... I'm so tired.

BOB

Maybe you should take a short nap. I'll wake you in an hour or so. I promise.

RUTH

I can't. I can't go to sleep. I'm afraid.

BOB

OK, make your call. But maybe there's another call you should make first. Maybe you should call those granddaughters you mentioned.

RUTH

Oh, Bob. You're right. I so want to do that. Thank you ... thank you, Bob!

(Ruth runs her fingers through her hair to make herself presentable. Stage lights fade to black except for a spot on Bob.)

BOB

(wheels to a distance to give her some little bit of privacy)

Well if you're not going to take a nap, I hope you don't mind if I do. Don't let me sleep too long, Ruth.

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(Bob takes the blanket on his lap and pulls it up over his shoulders. He takes a moment to relax and closes his eyes taking several deep breaths. As he does, Joy walks in and kisses him on the forehead. He opens his eyes.)

Joy? Joy! You shouldn't be out of bed. Are you OK? How are you feeling?

JOY

Everything's OK now, Bob. But we need some help. Me and some of the other residents and staff are putting together a show. Know anyone who could help?

BOB

Well, let me think. Of course I'll help! Like you actually had to ask.

(He starts to wheel off following her. Joy turns back to him.)

JOY

Bob, you don't really need that.

(She takes his hand and he stands up)

BOB

(as they start to walk off)

What about Ruth? I know she'd love to help.

JOY

I think this call's pretty important to her. She'll be along when she's ready.

(As they walk off Bob does a little dance shuffle. Joy laughs and joins in. The spotlights follow the two of them leaving Ruth in the dark. The shuffle eventually becomes a spectacular dance number. After the finale, they laugh, hug and exit. Lights shift to a narrow spot on Ruth at her video chat.)

RUTH

I love you, Gail! Take care of those great-grandkids for me. You were the first, you know, the first to give me great-grandkids!

(pause)

I love you all so much. Bye now.

(ends call)

Thanks, Bob. I'm so happy I made that call.

(Spot widens and general lights come up. Bob is still in his wheelchair.)

Bob?

(no response)

Bob?!

(She rushes over, gently shakes his shoulder. After a pause puts her fingers on his neck to check his pulse, does not find it.)

Oh, Bob!

(In tears, puts her hands on his arm, kneels down and buries her head in his shoulder crying. After a moment she looks up again. Looks around unsure, confused, voice shows a frailty not there before)

Bob? Was I supposed to call someone? Bob, tell me, who am I supposed to call?

(shakes his arm)

Bob! Bob!

THE END

Note to choreographer and music director – the dance segment should not be too short. It should start simple and gradually build to a grand finale. It could be five minutes or longer. Have fun with it. Also, if casting will allow, add another older man and woman to the dance. The woman is Asian. Although never stated, the audience may rightly assume they are Emil and Hang. Their choreography should include a kiss at the end.

Note to lighting director – as the ‘shuffle’ becomes a dance extravaganza, some dazzling lighting can take place as long as it doesn’t reveal Ruth on her call. Some can go out into the audience so that after the number, when the lights go down, their eyes will need to readjust to the dark. The idea is that when a narrow spot comes up on Ruth, the audience will not see Bob return to his wheelchair and will not know he’s still there until the general lights come up.

Act III – Ghost Light

SCENE OPENS

(Kay and Raul enter and cross to the ghost light.)

KAY

Wow, this ghost light has been standing here for almost two years and the bulb still hasn't burned out! It's kept vigil all this time.

RAUL

Incredible! Two years and the bulb's still good.

KAY

That's literally what I just said. Why don't you go turn on some stage lights?

RAUL

(Raul looks around and sees an umbrella on the stage)

What's this?

KAY & RAUL

(together)

Looks like a prop from the last show.

KAY

(she laughs)

Jinx!

RAUL

(Raul picks it up by the handle and a sword slides out)

WOAH!!!! Oh, man! I gotta show this to Jack!

(Raul exits laughing taking the sword and umbrella with him)

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KAY

Put it away. And be careful with that!

(talks to the ghost light)

We've been gone for two years. Have you seen anything in all that time? Got any stories to tell?

(louder to the control booth)

You know, these things used to be called 'equity' lamps - probably because the Actors Equity Union required them for safety. There's a story that one time a burglar broke into a New York theater late at night. He was wandering around on a pitch black stage and fell into the orchestra pit breaking his leg ... after which, of course, he successfully sued the theater! Then, of course, there's always the superstition that ghost lights are here for the theater ghosts. But there's some debate as to whether they're meant to scare off ghosts or to appease them. Apparently some ghosts like to strut the boards themselves when theaters are closed.

(said as she 'struts the boards' in imitation)

Well, two years is plenty of time for strutting, so I hope they don't mind us coming back.

(looking around, then to herself)

What's taking him so long with those stage lights?

(Kay steps away from the ghost light and starts to exit when the stage lights come up and reveal Al wondering upstage. His clothing looks a little dated. Kay turns and sees him for the first time and lets out a quick shriek, then takes a breath and laughs at herself.)

Oh ... Jesus! You scared the shit out of me! I didn't know you were there.

(Al doesn't acknowledge or look at her.)

I'm Kay. I'm a stage manager. I don't believe I've met you before. You look like you're running lines in your head or something. What's your name?

(He still doesn't look at her or respond.)

I'm sorry, what exactly are you doing here? We're just now prepping the theater to open back up. You shouldn't be here.

(He continues to look around and he can clearly see she's there, but still does not respond.)

I'm sorry, but who are you?

(still no response; finally getting irritated she walks right up to him and gets in his face)

Hey, buddy! I'm talking to you. Who are you and what the hell are you doing here?

AL

(He is shocked and looks right at her with his mouth agape. He is definitely gobsmacked and looks around frantically to see if there's someone else on the stage she might be talking to.)

Uh...uh. Are you ... talking to me?!

KAY

There's nobody else on the stage. So yeah, I must be talking to you. If you don't explain yourself, I'm going to call the cops. You can't be here for a show. We haven't started rehearsing anything yet. So tell me who you are!

AL

(still somewhat flustered)

I'm ... I'm ... I'm Al.

KAY

Why are you here, Al? I've never seen you before. Are you new on the crew?

AL

Crew? Uh, no.

KAY

(after some reflection and with a little sympathy)

You're some homeless fellow aren't you? You wandered in off the streets. How did you get in? Was there a door unlocked?

AL

No ... no, the doors are all locked as far as I can tell.

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KAY

Have you been living here during the pandemic? The basement is pretty comfortable with all that stage furniture. And you look like you raided the costume shop with that get up. Jasen's gonna be pissed at you!

AL

I'm sorry, the what?

KAY

The costume shop. You look like you're wearing something from the costume shop.

AL

No, no. You said something about ... a pandemic?

KAY

OK, now you're just messing with me!

AL

Is THAT why the theater's been closed all this time? I couldn't understand it. It's been so ... BORING!

KAY

(her attitude softens somewhat as she suspects dementia and need for help)

You've been hiding here for the last two years?

AL

More like 60 I think.

KAY

Sixt - that's a little ...

(‘crazy’ is the next word, but she can't bring herself to say it)

Hold on a second.

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(Goes offstage and brings back a couple chairs. They sit down close to the ghost light and talk. Al seems to hesitate before sitting.)

Look, Al, I feel for you. I really do. Life is hard for someone in your situation. To tell the truth, it's not been much easier for the rest of us these past couple years. I wish I could let you stay here, but I can't. I'm afraid you'll have to leave.

AL

Oh, believe me I've tried ... a few times. It never works. I always end up back here.

KAY

And why is that?

AL

Because I'm a ghost.

KAY

(pause, then inadvertently bursts out laughing, but quickly stifles it)

I'm sorry. It sounded like you said you were a ghost.

AL

I did. And I am. You don't believe me?

KAY

(pause, not sure how to respond)

Of ... course I ... do?

(Of course she doesn't, but speaks with great sympathy for this poor crazy fellow.)

AL

I don't think you do. I'll prove it.

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(stands and crosses to the ghost light; passes his hand through the light and as he does so the ghost light and the stage lights simultaneously blink on and off [See technical note 1]; Kay looks around)

KAY

Oh, crap, the gremlins!

AL

(angry and very loud with echo [see technical note 2])

I AM NOT –

(pauses a moment while he regains his composure, voice back to normal)

I am not ... ‘a gremlin.’

(says the word with a touch of loathing)

I am a ghost. Ghosts come from people, and like people we come in a wide variety. But, by and large, gremlins ... are ASSHOLES!

(there are unnatural sounds from above; Al turns and calls out to the rafters shaking his fist)

YEAH, I SAID IT! YOU WANNA MAKE SOMETHING OF IT?

(sounds disappear)

Yeah, I didn't think so!

(back to Kay and composed)

So you'll understand if we ghosts are ... offended ... by the comparison.

KAY

(a bit stunned)

Your hand ... your voice ... Your hand went right through that light(!) ... Could you do that again?

(Al passes his hand through the ghost light again as it and the stage lights blink on and off; Kay and paces, starting to freak out)

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Oh my god! I'm talking to a ghost!

AL

I like to think that 'talking' is the operative word here. I'm enjoying this conversation ... and your company.

KAY

(very nervously)

So you don't want to scare me or hurt me?

AL

Oh heavens no! For a moment there you actually seemed to care about me. I really felt it. You're a sweet and caring person.

KAY

But I'm a stage manager.

AL

True, but you're not a gremlin.

KAY

So why are you here?

AL

Well, it could be any number of reasons that I don't understand. But I suppose that the most likely explanation is that this is where I died. In fact it was ... well, it was ...

(looks around the stage and points)

Oh, right there, right where you're standing.

(Kay jumps aside with a slight screech, Al looks at the spot)

Oh, don't worry ... stain's gone.

KAY

What happened? When did it happen?

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AL

Oh, it was decades ago. We were rehearsing for ... oh, I don't even remember which show it was. Oh, it was "Carousel." Anyway, I was always a bit of a practical joker. And knowing more than a few of my fellow cast were a bit superstitious I loudly proclaimed MAC-

KAY

(Kay quickly interrupts)

A – A – A – A! THE SCOT! We just say THE SCOT or THE SCOTTISH PLAY! Unless you're actually doing ... the Scottish play, then you're actually allowed to say ... the actual Scottish play title. I've no idea how that started, but I respect it!

AL

Superstitious, are we?

KAY

I'm literally standing here talking to a ghost! If I wasn't superstitious before, I sure as shit am now!

AL

(considers this)

Fair point.

KAY

So after ... invoking the Scot, what happened?

AL

A Klieg light fell on me.

KAY

Oh my God! Did it hurt?

AL

Nope. Snapped my neck.

(snaps his fingers and imitates a snapped neck with tongue sticking out)

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It was pretty instantaneous. Next thing I knew I was standing here looking down on myself and everyone gathered around me. But oddly they weren't looking at me. They were all looking up ... fearing a rain of Klieg lights, no doubt. Maybe they felt it was safer to be near me where the Klieg light had already fallen.

KAY

I think I heard about that. Great Caesar's Ghost! So there really is a ghost in the theater! I mean theater people are always talking about ghosts in the theater, but I don't know that anyone actually believes it ... except those that say it happened to them. And the rest of us tend to think they're making it up for a good story to tell. Meg and Tom swore up and down they ran into a ghost in the upstairs library.

AL

Well, when nothing's going on, that spot tends to be a favorite hangout ... or 'haunt,' if you will.

(Kay giggles as Al enjoys his own joke)

And when nothing else is going on, we like to read all the scripts up there. So yes, that story is likely true.

KAY

There's always talk about hearing bumps and footsteps and other noises. Some people try to explain it by saying that homeless people find their way into the theater and the noises are made by them. So that's not really true?

AL

Well, sometimes it's true. Sometimes a homeless person will find their way in to take refuge.

KAY

And that's OK with you? You don't ever scare them off?

AL

It depends on the situation. I mean if, for example, a homeless woman with her children took shelter, what are you going to do about that? Sometimes what you do is you keep an eye on the kids to make sure they don't get hurt. So, to be honest, at times they can be nice company.

(changes to a darker tone)

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On the other hand if someone came in and was really disrespectful to the theater ... damaging or stealing things, carrying on like that. Well, let's just say they get ... THE FULL ... TREATMENT!

KAY

(Kay's eyes open wide with a bit of apprehension)

The full treatment?

AL

(quickly)

Don't ask! You don't want to know. It's pretty horrific. Let's just say it's only used in emergencies. And those that get it don't come back! There's been an occasion or two where the 'full treatment' prevented the theater from burning to the ground! Damn junkies!

KAY

You mentioned keeping an eye on kids. I have to ask – some people have said they've seen small kids, like three or four years old, waving to people who aren't there. Is that - ?

AL

(Al nods)

Yeah. I can't really explain that. Some very young kids – not all of them, mind you, only a few – seem to see us. You don't want to scare a little child, but you don't want to be rude, either. So if they wave, you wave back. That's usually about as far as it goes.

KAY

Usually?

AL

Usually.

KAY

Now **some** people have said that they'll be here alone at night drinking coffee ... they hear some noise, put down their coffee and go check it out. When they come back, their coffee has been moved. But nobody else is in the theater.

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AL

(looking around with a bit of guilt on his face)

I confess. I absolutely llllove coffee. The aroma puts me in heaven. I adore it! So, yes, I have on occasion distracted ‘someone’ from their coffee. But the sad part is that I love the aroma so much, I forget that ghosts can’t drink. So in frustration I don’t always put it down in the same spot I picked it up from.

(shrugs his shoulders with raised hands as if to say, whadya gonna do?)

KAY

So I wasn’t crazy! You haven’t ever messed with my keys have you?

AL

No, that’s all on you, I’m afraid. That happened to all of us when we were alive. We remember the exasperation. So keys we leave alone. Socks, too.

KAY

What about the Native American? I’ve heard stories about a Native American ghost.

AL

He’s been known to stop by on occasion. He really likes the musicals. But otherwise he’s much happier haunting the park trails along the river. Since the theater is between the trail and the river, the theater is open territory for him. Apparently the Metroparks put up a statue of him carrying a canoe. Well, it’s doubtful that the statue is actually him. I mean he died a couple hundred or so years ago. But he likes to think it’s him and brags about it.

KAY

That’s incredible! What about ‘ghosting?’

AL

(confused)

Well, if I understand the modern definition of that term, when you die, you’re pretty much ‘ghosting’ everyone you’ve ever known.

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KAY

Ooops! Yeah, that is the current popular definition of ‘ghosting.’ No. What I mean is that on the tech crew we call it ‘ghosting’ when the power to a light is cut, but the light doesn’t go out.

AL

Oh, well then ‘ghosting’ is the right word for it. ‘Cause, yes, I’ve done that. I told you I was a practical joker! Boy, you are loaded with questions ... any more?

KAY

Oh, a thousand, I’m sure! So you’ve been alone here all these decades?

AL

Oh, no. There have been plenty of other ghosts here all these years. Believe me, the theater was **party central** for ghosts. We got to see all the shows. And after each show we sat around critiquing it. We laughed so hard I think sometimes people heard us.

KAY

Soooo ... after the shows you laugh at us behind our backs.

AL

Hmmm, that sounds so vicious the way you say it. It’s not mean spirited. Oh, I made a pun there. But no, we love you! If we laugh at you, it’s only in the same way you might laugh at a member of your own family, someone you love, when they do something silly. Critiquing is just a way to share the joy with each other. We even got to watch all the rehearsals. Sometimes we even messed with the staff to influence the play selection for the next season. But, just between you and me, sometimes the backstage drama was more entertaining than the show! Ha!

KAY

Really? Like what? Dish! Dish!

AL

There was that time in the show, “Memphis,” when Adam had a long kiss on stage with his leading lady, Brooke. Next thing you know Adam’s real life wife Mandy pops in the green room demanding that Adam take off his wedding ring! A bit harsh if you ask me! I mean it’s not like the kiss wasn’t in the script ... even if it was a bit long.

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KAY

(Kay laughs)

I remember that, but it wasn't what you're thinking. Adam's on-stage character wasn't married, so he shouldn't have been wearing his wedding ring on stage. That's why Mandy said that.

AL

Oh ... well, that makes sense. I always felt that seemed out of character for an otherwise delightful person. Oh, and then there was the time that the prince took to the stage after an "Into the Woods" performance and proposed to Cinderella – and still in costume! That was so romantic!

KAY

(Kay sighs)

That **was** beautiful!

(then suspiciously)

You didn't have any hand in that, did you?

AL

Oh, no! That was as real as real could be! They just didn't know the theater seats were filled with weeping ghosts who burst into applause when they kissed! It was the best show of the year! If it was on the ballot, we would have given it a Tony!

KAY

If you don't mind my asking, what's the most mischievous thing you've ever done in the theater?

AL

Me, personally? Well ...

(with a mixture of guilt and self satisfaction)

I really hate to admit it ... but ... I, uh ... I rigged the voting at one of the short play festivals.

(Kay stands up, shocked and a bit angry)

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KAY

What!?! You pushed a winning play out of the lead? But that's ... that's ... oooh, I'm so angry, I don't have words! I'm sorry, but that's terrible! Shame on you!

(walks away from him)

AL

No, no! I would never violate the integrity of the short "PLAYS!" That's ... that's sacrosanct! And the other ghosts would have been really pissed at me! But I ... I did that one time pick the common prop for the next season. Honestly I didn't know what the audience was thinking with some of their votes! The sock monkey was clearly the prop to go with.

KAY

Oh.

(pause as she reflects, then grudgingly)

OK, I admit it. The sock monkey was **clearly** the obvious choice that year.

AL

I have to say, to be honest, we all felt like we'd died and gone to heaven ... of course the 'died' part is pretty accurate.

KAY

(Kay looks around nervously)

So there's lots of ghosts here ... right now?

AL

(Al sighs)

No. There were, but not anymore. These past two years with the theater empty, one by one they all vanished. I'm the last.

RAUL

(Raul comes out on the stage then stops and stares)

What the hell?

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KAY

(awkwardly)

Oh, Raul. You're probably wondering what I'm doing here with two chairs...

(Raul picks up the chairs and exits without responding)

Well, that was weird.

AL

Uh oh!

KAY

Oh no! When I first talked to you, you didn't answer me. Is this the same situation? Oh my God! He's dead, too! What could've happened? Was it the sword in the umbrella? Did he fall on it? That's awful! He's so young! He had his whole life ahead of him! He had a girlfriend ... or at least he had his eye on someone he wanted to be his girlfriend.

AL

Oooh boy! Um ... I ... don't think that's the situation here, Kay.

KAY

Of course that's the situation. What else could it be?

AL

(long exhalation)

I ... I ... I ... I really think you're overlooking the obvious here, Kay. I mean it wasn't that I couldn't hear you when you first started talking to me. But when you've been a ghost as long as me, you're used to the living not addressing you ... EVER! So it didn't occur to me that I was the one you were talking to. If he had **just** died, it wouldn't have occurred to him that you weren't talking to him.

KAY

So what are you saying, Al?

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(still missing the obvious, Al give a facial expression that conveys “please don’t make me say it!” Kay returns a facial expression that conveys “what the hell does that mean?” Al gives a long, groaning exhalation.)

AL

Kay, how is it that you can see me?

KAY

(frozen for a long while, can’t bring herself to answer the question)

I ... I don’t know, Al.

(catching the hint and getting scared, starts to tear up)

Because I’m a really special and intuitive person?

AL

You are a really special and intuitive person, Kay. But that’s not why.

RAUL

(Raul comes back on stage, talks to the control booth)

As far as I can tell, everything is still working fine. I don’t know what that blinking was. Or, for that matter, how those chairs got on the stage. They weren’t there a few minutes ago. Must be the gremlins.

(This last remark gets Al’s hackles up, but given Kay’s emotional state, he lets it go.)

KAY

(desparately)

Raul?

RAUL

(He still does not respond to her. Raul sighs.)

I suppose it’s time to get dressed for the service. It’s hard to believe Kay’s not with us anymore. I’m really gonna miss her.

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(lights go out and he exits the stage, the ghost light is still on; Kay approaches and as she touches it, the light blinks. Al approaches her. She reaches out and finds she can touch him.)

KAY

I'm ...?

(Al nods his head, she starts to cry and they hug)

I remember now. I was in the hospital ... the pandemic. But if I died at the hospital, how did I get here?

AL

Because you're a stage manager. No matter where you are, your spirit is always here. You love this theater and it loves you, too.

KAY

It does?

AL

(Al nods)

Besides, no ghost wants to stay at the hospital!

(pause)

I know this is traumatic for you, Kay. Everything in your life has been turned upside down and here you are stuck with someone who is a stranger to you. But I would just like you to know that though I may be a stranger to you, you're no stranger to me. I've seen you stage manage so many plays. I've seen you design and set up lights.

(pause)

At this point I feel compelled to mention that not a single light **you** ever hung came loose and fell to the stage! That's something I really admire!

KAY

(Kay laughs)

I imagine so.

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AL

I saw you not so long ago on this very stage dancing, singing and acting. You loved it. I saw you as a child singing in the Christmas play. And I saw you as a young tot brought here by your parents when they were working on shows. Back then you were such a ... special ... and intuitive little girl.

(Al takes a few steps away from her, turns back to face her and smiles as he waves)

KAY

(Kay smiles and waves back; then suddenly gasps)

It was you! It was you, I remember it now! My parents were busy and I was feeling lonely and you smiled at me and waved – just like that! I walked over to you and said I was bored. You told me there were toys in the library upstairs. We went up and while I played with the toys you told me a story. I fell asleep on the couch.

AL

And I stayed and kept watch over you.

KAY

I woke up when my parents, my very frantic parents found me.

AL

Sorry if I got you in trouble.

KAY

I told them about you, but they said you were just a dream. But you weren't a dream!

(Al shakes his head 'no')

It's so good to finally meet you again.

(She walks up to him holding out her hand to shake his, then pulls him in for a big hug. The sound of a crowd gathering can be heard off stage. Kay turns to look and is surprised.)

Hoooooly shit! Is that Bob? And there's Scott, John and Earl! And Maggie! And Kitty and Sam!

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(several voices offstage call out, "Kay!" Kay runs offstage to greet them.)

AL

They've all come back!

(He goes to follow Kay, but stops before exiting; looks back at the ghost light. Walks back to it.)

Thanks for keeping me company old friend.

(Al blows the ghost light out like a candle leaving the stage black. We hear quick steps and suddenly the ghost light comes back on. Kay is on stage with Al and she is the one who turned it back on with a touch.)

KAY

Are you crazy? Safety first, Al! Safety first!

(They exit together.)

The End

Dedicated to Bob, Scott, John, Earl, Maggie, Kitty & Sam and so many more.

With special thanks to Jasen, Mandy, Adam, Brooke, Meg and Tom who gave permission to use their names.

And a special dedication to my wife, Sue, who had more ghost stories to share with me than anyone!

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Prop Note 1 – *[As is written in the script, this umbrella has a sword in it. This is not a hard to find object. There are loads of them available on the internet from very expensive models down to dirt cheap.]*

Technical note 1 – *[To create the illusion of Al's hand passing through the light, have the ghost light and stage lights simultaneously blink to create a strobe effect. If the illusion doesn't work, just have him touch the light.]*

Technical note 2 - *[Al's voice here is exceptionally loud with echo to give an impression of the supernatural. If the actors are mic'ed, turn the volume up on Al's mic for this phrase with loads of echo, if not mic'ed, pre-record this phrase and play it back at this point with lots of volume and echo. Al can either lip sync to the recording or speak with it, whichever gives the best effect.]*

Special Note to Producers and Directors – In general theaters are not allowed to make changes to a script. But there are some changes that I, as the author, will approve in advance. This script pays tribute to certain people who were the foundations of a theater local to me and who have since passed. So where Kay says

“Hoooooly shit! Is that Bob? And there's Scott, John and Earl! And Maggie! And Kitty and Sam!”

I give you permission (and even encourage you, actually) to change those names to reflect and pay tribute to the foundations of your own theater.

If you have a short play festival, feel free to use the name of your own festival. And if you have your own costume designer, then in Kay's line –

“Have you been living here during the pandemic? You look like you raided the costume shop with that get up. Jasen's gonna be pissed at you!”

you have permission to use your costume designer's name. Any other ideas you may have, please ask.

Gary Davis